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## Franco-Irish Connections in Space and Time: Peregrinations and Ruminations

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# Franco-Irish Connections in Space and Time

# Reimagining Ireland

Volume 28

Edited by Dr Eamon Maher  
Institute of Technology, Tallaght



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

Eamon Maher and  
Catherine Maignant (eds)

# Franco-Irish Connections in Space and Time

Peregrinations and Ruminations



PETER LANG

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## Introduction

When it comes to ‘reimagining’ Ireland, as the series in which this study is appearing purports to do, it is always useful to consider how the country is perceived by those ‘outside’ its borders. Equally, it can be instructive to reflect on how Ireland relates to other societies, or how it applies certain values acquired elsewhere to its own particular context. It is difficult to explain the significant impact Ireland has exerted, and continues to exert, around the globe. At times it seems as though our politicians and diplomats enjoy almost unlimited access to the most influential figures in countries like America, Great Britain, China and France. By examining Franco-Irish connections in space and time, and the especially close and longstanding friendship that exists between France and Ireland, it is possible to discover a lot about how Ireland has attained the enviable position it occupies on the world stage. While some of the gloss of our image was undoubtedly tarnished during the Celtic Tiger boom and bust, and the relationship with France strained by some strident talk from former President Sarkozy in relation to our generous corporation tax regime, nevertheless there is still a ‘special’ relationship between the two Celtic cousins, one that is based on mutual respect and appreciation.

Connections between France and Ireland go back to prehistoric times and they were well-established when Rome reigned supreme in most of Europe, with the exception of Ireland. In those remote times, Irish chieftains imported Gaulish wine, which they bartered against shepherd dogs, and they employed Gaulish mercenaries. There were so many Gauls around that the Gaelic word for foreigner, ‘*Gall*’, may be attributable to their presence in Ireland at that time. If we are to believe the *Leyden Glossary*, when the Empire collapsed and Gaul was devastated by barbarian invaders, all

learned men fled to Ireland and ‘wherever they betook themselves, brought about a very great increase of learning to the inhabitants of those regions.’<sup>1</sup>

In later centuries, however, Ireland in its turn became known across Europe as a beacon of learning and it attracted many students, including the Merovingian king in exile, Dagobert II, who studied at Clonmacnoise. Around the same time, Irish monks, driven by their missionary zeal, sailed to the continent. Columbanus, Fursa and his brothers, to mention the best known figures, brought Irish Christianity to Merovingian Gaul, whilst great scholars such as John Scotus Eriugena were employed by Carolingian emperors to teach the ruling elites.

France’s geographical and linguistic – if not political – association with Normandy ensured continued respect for the culture of the island in the Middle Ages. When Marie de France translated *De Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* into Old French towards the end of the twelfth century, she deliberately omitted the reference to the savagery of the Irish, which the English author of the text had emphasised. Her *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz* also contributed to popularising the idea of Purgatory as an otherworldly space, a major Irish contribution to the Christian dogma.

This volume does not cover the origins of Franco-Irish connections, but anchoring them in history is essential in order to understand their depth and wealth. Readers may be more familiar with later links from the seventeenth century onwards. In that perspective, since the conference which led to the publication of this book was organised in Lille, it is certainly noteworthy that Irish families resided in the city from the sixteenth century, that Irish regiments were quartered in the area and that an Irish college was founded in 1610 and remained in existence until the French Revolution. The students of this college were so poor that local authorities granted them the exclusive right to bury the dead in order to allow them to earn a little money. The *Hibernois* integrated so well into the local society that they became more native than the natives themselves and got involved in local political and religious affairs.

1 The English translation is from James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1993).

In an article on Franco-Irish relations, published in a Festschrift for Pierre Joannon, Garret FitzGerald explained how after the Williamite War which culminated in the crushing defeat of the Jacobite army at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, Irish émigrés were inclined to choose France as their preferred place of exile in Europe.<sup>2</sup> For its part, France tended to view Ireland as being of strategic military importance in its ongoing struggle with Britain. After the signing of the 'Entente Cordiale' between Britain and France in 1903, however, Irish Republicans, still anxious to break the link with the British Crown, focused their fund-raising and attempts to gain potential political support more on the United States than on France. Ireland's entry to the EEC (European Economic Community) in January 1973 would not have been possible without French support and FitzGerald points to the importance of General de Gaulle's stay in Ireland after he resigned as President in 1969 in raising Ireland's visibility and its tourism potential among French people. As Minister for Foreign Affairs in the 1970s, FitzGerald was conscious that his obvious commitment to the French language was greatly appreciated by the French government.<sup>3</sup> As Taoiseach, FitzGerald on one occasion found himself engaged in an interesting discussion with François Mitterrand about the Catholic intellectual tradition in France:

I speculated as to why there seemed to have been a gap between the period in the first half of the nineteenth century when leading Catholics played a prominent role in intellectual matters and the period in the twentieth century when my father's friends, Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson, were similarly influential. I later learned that this random conversation had helped to set up a good relationship between us.<sup>4</sup>

A knowledge of the language, history and culture of a country is a good basis for forming close bonds. Brian Fallon, in his 1998 study, *An Age of*

2 Garret FitzGerald, 'Irish French Relations, 1919–2009', in Jane Conroy (ed.), *Franco-Irish Connections. Essays, Memoirs and Poems in Honour of Pierre Joannon* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), pp. 82–94, p. 82.

3 FitzGerald, p. 90.

4 FitzGerald, p. 92. It is interesting that Charles Haughey also had a good personal relationship with Mitterrand.

*Innocence: Irish Culture 1930–1960*, dedicates a full chapter to ‘The French Connection’, which illustrates the importance he attached to the political, ideological and cultural links between Ireland and France. He mentions how France was viewed by many in Ireland as an alternative to English domination, but he also points out the deep-seated admiration among the Irish intelligentsia for French thought and culture. Viewed as the home of liberty, equality and fraternity, France also possessed other attractions in the minds of several Irish people:

The French were also the ‘civilised’ nation, supposedly adept in the arts of cookery, haute couture and erotic life ... But on a very different level, France was, or had been, a Catholic country with a lively, even aggressive Catholic intellectual wing, a long and illustrious succession of Catholic writers from the Middle Ages down to Claudel, a flourishing Neo-Thomist movement as exemplified by the philosopher Jacques Maritain, and at least the remnants of a deep-rooted peasant piety which drew thousands of ordinary, unintellectual Irish people to make pilgrimages to Lourdes.<sup>5</sup>

In light of these points of convergence, it is not altogether surprising that Irish priests, businessmen and diplomats throughout the centuries should have found many shared values and beliefs among the French, the most notable being a commitment to Republican ideals and a historical link to Catholicism. Clearly one should not exaggerate the closeness of the ties, either, as there are some obvious differences between the two countries. Ireland is a small island with a proud culture going back to Celtic times and the early Middle Ages, but it was conquered by its powerful neighbour and much of its former glory was forgotten. France later emerged as a large powerful country, which now has a celebrated history. Its influence extended well beyond the boundaries of Europe; its armies gained footholds in places as far removed as Canada, North America, the Caribbean, Africa, Egypt and Russia. French was the language of diplomacy par excellence and was spoken by the nobility and ruling classes in many countries. France’s writers and philosophers, culture and literature, food and drink have long been held in high regard. But being a colonial power also brings

5 Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998), p. 124.

with it a certain amount of baggage – witness the complicated relationship between Ireland and its closest neighbour, Great Britain. Ireland shares with Denmark the unique distinction of being the only country in Europe never to have been at war with France. Today, both Ireland and France are small countries in the global village and their partnership in the European Union may be a key to their future. In this new context their friendship has clearly endured.

But, more than a friend, France has long been a cultural icon for Irish people, a place of refuge in times of religious persecution, an asylum for writers like James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Joyce first travelled to Paris with the intention of studying medicine, and the French capital was, in his biographer Ellmann's view, 'Dublin's antithesis'.<sup>6</sup> When he took up residence there in 1920, the influence of Paris on Joyce's artistic development was noteworthy. He would meet Valéry, Claudel, Gide, Ezra Pound, Sylvia Beach (who would play such an important role in the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922), Valéry Larbaud, Ernest Hemingway and many others there during the 1920s. At this time, Paris was undoubtedly *the* meeting place, where writers and artists of all nationalities came to seek out inspiration and share ideas. Joyce internalised its unique customs, its sights and smells, as can be seen from the following passage from *Ulysses*:

Paris rawly waking, crude sunlight on her lemon streets. Moist piths of farls of bread, the froggreen wormwood, her matin incense, court the air. Belluomo rises from the bed of his wife's lover's wife, the kerchiefed housewife is astir, a saucer of acetic acid in her hands. In Rodot's Yvonne and Madeleine newmake their tumbled beauties, their mouths yellowed with the *pus* of *flan Breton*. Faces of Paris men go by, their wellpleased pleasers, curled conquistadores.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this passage containing some rather clichéd notions about Paris and its inhabitants, Joyce certainly knew that writers and intellectuals were cherished in France in a way that was unthinkable in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century.

6 Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 115.

7 Cited by Ellmann, p. 115.



This book seeks to trace the rich tapestry of interaction between France and Ireland, an interaction that can be seen at work in every chapter. Grace Neville and Jane Conroy open the volume with an exploration of the observations on Ireland made by the French travel writers Boullaye-le-Gouz and Coquebert de Montbret during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Neville's study interprets Boullaye-le-Gouz' work as an illuminating witness account by an outside eye of the political turmoil that marked the land onto which he had just stepped in the summer of 1644. Conroy considers how travellers and cultural historians shuttle back and forth along similar heuristic spirals, collecting, selecting, deciphering and representing the random elements available to them. She concludes that Coquebert de Montbret was one traveller whose observations of Ireland's 'present' in or around the years 1791–1793 contribute to our understanding of that Irish past and how it was once read by fellow Europeans. The two other chapters in this section, by Jeanne Lakatos and Mary Pierser, discuss how Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) drew inspiration from French philosophy, especially in relation to nationalism. Lakatos sees a strong correlation between the philosophies of Owenson and the French medieval writer and Cistercian monk, Alain de Lille, in their desire to enlighten aristocratic communities. Mary Pierser's chapter, a comparative study of Owenson and the composer Augusta Holmes, notes the fascinating intertwining of nationalism and music, and of independent, liberal thought and action, in the lives and artistic creations of these two strong women. Their travels to France and to Ireland are both actual and creative in Pierser's view.

The second section concentrates on the cultural and commercial exchanges between France and Ireland and opens with a revealing consideration of how the French Revolution, from being viewed as a template for the actions and ideological position of the United Irishmen, ultimately came to signify a lot more in the Irish context. Building on the ideas of the French philosophers Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière in particular, Eugene O'Brien argues that the 'real' of the French Revolution came in time to exert very different effects on the Irish and French public spheres. Brian Murphy's chapter considers the links between France's wine heritage and Ireland since the time of the migration of what are referred to colloquially as the 'Wine Geese' in the eighteenth century. Murphy argues

that the backstory of this migration could be successfully used as a means of enhancing the nature and authenticity of French wine among potential Irish consumers. Axel Klein, in the following chapter, follows the fortunes of the O'Kellys in nineteenth-century France and argues that there is no better example in the history of music of such a close integration of an Irish family into French music. This section concludes with Catherine Maignant's chapter which deals with the arrival in Ireland in May 1913 of two French women, Marguerite Mespoulet and Madeleine Mignon, armed with sophisticated photographic equipment whose intended purpose was to capture traditional Irish lifestyles that were deemed to be on the point of extinction. The banker Albert Kahn, who financed the trip, wanted to use these pictures in his *Archive of the Planet*, where he hoped to keep a record of all such disappearing cultures around the world. The first exhibition of the photographs in Ireland took place in 1981, on the initiative of the French Embassy and Alliance Française, and it elicited a huge public response. Ireland as seen through French eyes, or through a French lens, did not always appeal to native sensibilities, but the Kahn collection is nonetheless a very important social document.

The final section traces some literary links between France and Ireland. Lauren Clark considers the critical neglect of France and Ireland's Victorian foundling narratives from the standpoints of encroaching consumer culture and advertising. She takes Jules Verne's only Irish-based novel, *P'tit Bonhomme* (1893), and Hector Malot's *Sans Famille* (1878) to illustrate how the child characters in both novels are forced by circumstances to engage in bartering and hawking their wares in the burgeoning *fin de siècle* consumer capitals of Dublin and Paris. Benjamin Keatinge focuses on the international dimension of the poet Harry Clifton's oeuvre and in particular his 2007 collection, *Secular Eden: Paris Notebooks 1994–2004*, a remarkable engagement with French culture by an Irish poet who considers French civic urban space, secularism, intellectual traditions and historical experience as part of a late twentieth- and twenty-first-century 'borderlessness'. The Irish fiction writer John McGahern never made any secret of his admiration for French authors such as Flaubert, Proust and Camus, and Raymond Mullen charts the phenomenology of memory in McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun* with the aid of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*

*of Perception*. The collection closes with Eamon Maher's elucidation of the influence exerted by the Nobel Laureate François Mauriac on Irish writers, particularly as this pertains to their treatment of hypocrisy and Pharisaism. Looking at some allegedly 'Catholic' Irish novelists – Kate O'Brien, Brian Moore, John Broderick and John McGahern – Maher concludes that there is enough convergence for a comparative reading such as the one he proposes to be of benefit.

This book of essays covers a broad spectrum of shared interests or cross-fertilisation of ideas between France and Ireland. While far from exhaustive, it does at least point to some interesting avenues of research into what has been, is, and will continue to be a mutually advantageous friendship.

EAMON MAHER AND CATHERINE MAIGNANT

PART I

Travel Literature and Literary Connections  
Between France and Ireland



GRACE NEVILLE

## *Things Fall Apart* – Boullaye-le-Gouz, An Angevin Traveller to Ireland in 1644

In all of literature – or so it has often been said – there are just two basic plots: a man goes on a journey, a stranger comes to town. While the text that forms the basis of this chapter is not strictly speaking a work of literature but rather a naturalistic discourse, it nonetheless revolves around these twin themes: it tells the story of a man who went on a journey, of a stranger who came to town. The text in question, *Les Voyages et Observations du Sieur de La Boullaye le Gouz*, contains a purportedly factual account of a two-month stay in Ireland in 1644, by a self-styled *Voyageur Catholique*, the Angevin, François de la Boullaye-le-Gouz (1623–1668).<sup>1</sup> He arrived on Irish shores in early summer, 1644, and headed south from Dublin through Kilkenny and Limerick to Cork, before making his departure through Wexford. He was just twenty-one years old at the time.

Accounts of strangers arriving in Ireland are, of course, as old as recorded history, from Paladius and St Patrick through to Giraldus Cambrensis, via visits, invasions and landings, all the way down to our own day. From aeons before that, the origin myths preserved in folklore tell how the first settlers to arrive in Ireland purportedly landed in pre-historic times on the shores of South Kerry from their home in Spain. In the early modern period, with Europe on the cusp of colonising fervour, French commentators on Ireland range from armchair or deskbound travellers to people

1 François de la Boullaye-le-Gouz, *Les Voyages et observations du Sieur de la Boullaye le-Gouz* (Paris: Clousier, 1653 / Troyes: Oudot, 1657, new edition). Facsimiles of these editions can be consulted online at [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr). All page references in this chapter are to the 1657 edition.

like Boullaye-le-Gouz, observers who actually visited the country.<sup>2</sup> Their motives for travelling, insofar as they can be established, were, to say the least, mixed. To quote Joan-Pau Rubies: ‘the pilgrim was succeeded by the gentleman as traveller, and educational travel came to support a humanistic ideal of practical wisdom against the fading medieval paradigm of the journey to a sacred location.’<sup>3</sup>

Boullaye-le-Gouz is best known for his extensive accounts of his travels to the Orient. The title page of his *Voyages* sets out his vast ambition to describe nothing less than ‘les Religions, Gouvernemens, et situations des Estats et Royaumes d’Italie, Grece, Natolie, Syrie, Perse, Palestine, Karamenie, Kaldee, Assyrie, grand Mogol, Bijapour, Indes Orientales des Portugais, Arabie, Egypte, Hollande, grande Bretagne, Irlande, Dannemark, Pologne, Isles et autres lieux d’Europe, Asie et Affrique’. Their ethnographic content ensures that they are important and, indeed, nothing short of fascinating. The illustrations that adorn *Les Voyages* make this a rare and engrossing work. It would be tempting, therefore, in the Irish section, to highlight elements such as its ethnographic value, for instance his startling remarks that in Ireland, red-haired people are considered the most attractive, that Irish women have hanging breasts and that those amongst them who are freckled like a trout are deemed to be the most beautiful,<sup>4</sup> or his fleeting references to Irish clothing and to the lice-ridden Irish delousing themselves shamelessly in public.<sup>5</sup> Even at a stylistic level, the *Voyages* are of undeniable interest: witness the *Voyageur*’s use of aphorisms, for instance his contention that the Irish ‘*ayment les Espagnols comme leurs frères, les François comme leurs amis, les Italiens comme leurs alliez, les Allemands comme leurs parens, les Anglois et Escossois sont leurs ennemis irréconciliables*’ (‘[they]

2 See the excellent article by Jane Conroy, ‘Entre réel et imaginaire: les voyageurs français en Irlande, 1650–1850’, in *Entrelacs franco-irlandais: langue, mémoire, imaginaire*, edited by Paul Brennan and Michael O’Dea (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2004), pp. 45–64.

3 Joan-Pau Rubies, *Travellers and Cosmographers: Studies in the History of Early Modern Travel and Ethnology* (Ashgate: Abingdon, 2007), p. 25.

4 *Voyages*, p. 476.

5 *Voyages*, p. 478.

love the Spanish as their brothers, the French as their friends, the Italians as their allies, the Germans as their relatives, the English and the Scots as their sworn enemies’).<sup>6</sup> However, the focus of this chapter is elsewhere: it aims to present *Les Voyages* in a new light, as a heretofore neglected first-hand witness account of the chaos and conflict that marked Ireland in the 1640s. For what emerges from this narrative by our young traveller is his acute awareness of Ireland as a land in which things are in danger of falling apart – hence the title of this chapter which echoes a phrase reprinted by various writers from Yeats<sup>7</sup> to Chinua Achebe.<sup>8</sup> His text can be taken as an invaluable companion piece to the remarkable and much discussed archive of the 1641 depositions, the originals of which are in Trinity College Dublin and which have recently been made available electronically.<sup>9</sup> These depositions or witness statements are detailed first-hand accounts in words and images (woodcuts) of the violence inflicted on members of the planter or English community throughout Ireland in the early 1640s. They tell of men, women and children being dispossessed, tortured and massacred in a variety of gruesome ways. The witnesses and victims of this violence are named in these remarkable depositions, their words immortalised, their voices recorded, voices of ‘*le menu peuple*’ (‘the small, unimportant people’), those who are all too often ‘*les muets et les exclus de l’histoire traditionnelle*’ (‘those deprived of a voice and of space in traditional history’),<sup>10</sup> people – many of them women – who all too often slip unrecorded, unnamed and unseen ‘outside history’, to quote Eavan Boland’s powerful phrase.

A few words at the outset in order to contextualise Boullaye-le-Gouz. This ‘gentilhomme angevin’ as he described himself was born in 1623 and, coincidentally, studied in the same Jesuit college at la Flèche attended just one generation earlier by René Descartes. Ever understated, this

6 *Voyages*, p. 477.

7 W.B. Yeats, ‘The Second Coming’ in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1920).

8 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).

9 See 1641.tcd.ie.

10 Jean-Claude Schmitt, ‘L’Histoire des marginaux’, in *La Nouvelle Histoire*, edited by Jacques le Goff (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1978), p. 278.



'gentilhomme de petite fortune' ('a not particularly well-off gentleman') as his biographer, fellow Angevin, Gaston Moreau, saw him, '*ne cherche pas à étonner, à provoquer l'admiration*' ('[he] does not seek to astonish or to prompt admiration').<sup>11</sup> Boullaye-le-Gouz himself explains that he had never intended to publish this work: indeed, *pace* Montaigne, he says that his observations were private, recorded just for himself. However, contacts made through readings of his *Voyages* among circles of learned, well-connected friends, including especially a fellow Angevin, le Comte de Bautru, led to Boullaye-le-Gouz coming to the attention of Louis XIV: the King is said to have wanted to see him in his '*habit persan*' ('Persian garb') and to hear him read some of his work. It would appear that he presented the King with a copy of the section he had composed on Asia, his travels in Western Europe being added at a later date.

The *Voyageur* seems to have initially intended to leave his observations in manuscript form but was persuaded to publish them by Cardinal Capponi to whom he had given a copy during a visit to Rome in 1650 and to whom he dedicated the first edition of his work. His text, 540 pages long, was first published in Paris in 1653, with its success being attested by the publication of a second edition just four years later in 1657. While he was mentioned still into the eighteenth century, as one of his recent editors, the Normalien Jacques de MauSSION de Favières, has commented: '*la renommée de La Boullaye semble par la suite s'estomper un peu*' ('La Boullaye's fame seems to wane somewhat thereafter').<sup>12</sup> Travel writing has, of course, become fertile territory for scholarly investigation in recent years. Despite his far-reaching travels, however, Boullaye-le-Gouz has, to date, escaped extensive scholarly attention, overshadowed as he is by other travellers to the East such as his contemporary, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689).<sup>13</sup> It is striking that many of the more extensive studies on the *Voyageur* such

11 Gaston Moreau, *Le Gouz de la Boullaye, gentilhomme angevin, ambassadeur de Louis XIV. Sa vie, son oeuvre et sa famille* (Baugé: E. Cingla, 1956), p. 14.

12 *Les Voyages et Observations du Sieur de la Boullaye-le-Gouz, Gentilhomme angevin*, edited by Jacques de MauSSION de Favières (Paris: Editions Kime, 1994), p. 11.

13 See Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les Six Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier* (Paris: Clouzier, 1677), 3 volumes.

as the biography by an Angevin lawyer, Gaston Moreau, or the articles by Henri Louis Castonnet des Fosses, are published in or around his Angevin birthplace, suggesting local pride as much as anything else as a key factor in their genesis.<sup>14</sup> In any case, the scholarly value of such publications is limited: for instance, Castonnet des Fosses' articles are little more than paraphrased accounts of the *Voyageur's* travels.

A small number of articles focuses exclusively on Boullaye-le-Gouz,<sup>15</sup> for instance on the remarkable illustrations incorporated in his text.<sup>16</sup> More often, however, he merits mere fleeting references in narrower discussions for instance of points of philology: the term 'punch' is said to be derived from his use of the term 'bolle ponge'<sup>17</sup> which he describes as '*une bison dont les Anglois usent aux Indes*' (a drink of which the English partake in India).<sup>18</sup> His work surfaces briefly as supporting evidence for ethnographic observations.<sup>19</sup> for instance confirming the presence of caravans on the northern route across Turkey.<sup>20</sup> He warrants a posthumous mention in 1708 in the travel writings of French Huguenot explorer and naturalist, François Leguat.<sup>21</sup>

- 14 H.L. Castonnet des Fosses, 'La Boullaye le Gouz. Sa vie et ses voyages', in *La Revue de l'Anjou*, 1891.
- 15 See *inter alia* B. Naderzad, 'Louis XIV, La Boullaye et l'exotisme persan', in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 114:1236 (1972), pp. 29–38. On 16 January 2007 in the UCLA Latin American Institute, Prof. Sanjay Subrahmanyam gave a presentation entitled 'Between Ethnography and Realpolitik: Le Gouz de la Boullaye in Mughal India and Beyond'.
- 16 Michele Bernardini, 'The Illustrations of a MS of the Travel Account of François de la Boullaye le Gouz in the Library of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome', in *Muqarnas: Essays in Honour of J.M. Rogers*, 21 (2004), pp. 55–72.
- 17 Paul Barbier, 'Loan words from English in Eighteenth Century French', in *The Modern Language Review*, 16:3–4 (July–October 1921), p. 253.
- 18 See also for instance Etienne Combe, 'A note: Quafar: Khafara', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10:3 (1940), p. 790.
- 19 See for instance Bart Ooghe, 'The Rediscovery of Babylonia: European Travellers and the Development of Knowledge on Lower Mesopotamia, Sixteenth to Early Nineteenth Century', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3:17:3 (2007), p. 243.
- 20 David Winfield, 'The Northern Routes across Anatolia', in *Anatolian Studies* 27 (1977), pp. 162–163.
- 21 See Geoffroy Atkinson, 'A French Desert Island Novel of 1708', in *PMLA* 36:4 (December 1921), pp. 509–528.

To date, his Irish journey has attracted little attention. In 1837, Crofton Croker translated and published an abridged version of it which he dedicated to Disraeli.<sup>22</sup> For the most part, however, the *Voyageur's* Irish journey is corralled in the same kind of contexts as his journeys further afield: relegated to footnotes in scholarly journals. For instance, his version of an anecdote regarding a log swept ashore near Youghal reported to contain an image of the Virgin Mary is noted in wider studies of this motif.<sup>23</sup> For the most part, details from his travelogue are cited as evidence in arguments made in various archaeological or architectural studies.<sup>24</sup>

Boullaye-le-Gouz spent two months in Ireland, sixty-three days in all, from 15 May to 17 July 1644. Chronologically (though not in terms of its location within his overall *Voyages*, where it stretches from chapter XXIX starting on page 450 to chapter XXXVI, just over thirty pages further on), it comes towards the start of his journeys which were to take him from Ireland in the West through Europe to the East where, having been made '*ambassadeur de Sa Majesté vers les rois de Perse, des Indes et autres souverains*' (Ambassador in the service of His Majesty to the kings of Persia, India and other royal personages), he died in Isfahan, Persia, in

- 22 *The Tour of the French Traveller, M. de la Boullaye le Gouz in Ireland, A.D. 1644*, translated and edited by T. Crofton Croker (London: T. and W. Boone, 1837). The translation from French to English of this text may, in fact, be the work not of Crofton Croker himself but of his wife. It contains some errors; for instance, 'rade' is mistranslated as 'road'.
- 23 S. Hayman, 'The Miraculous Image and Shrine of the Madonna of Youghal', in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 1:2 (1854), p. 118; Urban G. Flanagan, 'Our Lady of Graces of Youghal', in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 1:55:181 (January–June 1950), pp. 1–2.
- 24 See *inter alia* C. Ua Danachair, 'Some Primitive Structures used as Dwellings', in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 75:4 (1945), pp. 204–212; F.H.A. Aalen, 'The Evolution the Traditional House in Western Ireland', in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 96:1 (1966), pp. 47–58; P. Robinson, 'Vernacular housing in Ulster in the Seventeenth Century', in *Ulster Folklife* 25 (1979), pp. 1–28; Rory Sherlock, 'The Evolution of the Tower-House as a Domestic Space', in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 111 (2011), pp. 115–140.

his mid-forties, in 1668. Maussion de Favières underlines the importance of the Irish journey in Boullaye-le-Gouz' overall travels:

*C'est avec l'Irlande que va commencer pour lui ce voyage aux horizons dont la passion ne le quitte plus, et qui, de cet Extrême Occident à l'Orient, par la Baltique et la mer Egée, les pentes du Caucause et les bords du Nil, les Etats du Grand Seigneur, du Sophi et du Grand Mogol, lui fera rencontrer le jour du destin dans la lointaine Ispahan.*

(For him, Ireland marks the start of this journey towards horizons that will never cease to fascinate him, and which from this extreme Westwardly point all the way to the Orient, passing through the Baltic and the Aegean Sea, the slopes of the Caucases and the banks of the Nile, the States of the Great Master, of the Sophi and of the Great Mogul, leads him to meet his destiny in faraway Isfahan.)<sup>25</sup>

It is tempting, therefore, to see his stopover in Ireland as some kind of test case, an opportunity for him literally and metaphorically to test the waters before embarking on more ambitious travels.

The Ireland into which he arrived was a country in turmoil, with wars and general unrest being played out against a background of wars and further wars. Indeed, the very titles of recent historical studies of this period give a flavour of the reality into which he was stepping. These include:

*Kingdoms in Crisis: Ireland in the 1640s*<sup>26</sup>  
*Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*<sup>27</sup>  
*Religious Violence against Settlers in Southern Ulster 1641–2*<sup>28</sup>  
*The Other Massacre: English Killings of the Irish 1641–2*<sup>29</sup>  
*An Upstart Earl: Richard Boyle*<sup>30</sup>

25 Jacques de Maussion de Favières, p. 35.

26 *Kingdoms in Crisis: Ireland in the 1640s*, edited by Micheal O Siochru (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001).

27 David Edwards, Padraig Lenihan and Clodagh Tait (eds), *The Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007).

28 Brian Mac Cuarta, in David Edwards *et al.*, pp. 154–175.

29 Kenneth Nicholls, in David Edwards *et al.*, pp. 176–191.

30 Nicholas Canny, *An Upstart Earl: Richard Boyle, 1566–1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

To say that the *lieu de mémoire* that is the 1641 Rebellion and the wider context into which it fits is still a contested site would be an understatement: visual representations of the 1641 massacres still feature in current Portadown Orange marches every summer.

Boullaye-le-Gouz' Irish journey is bookended by conflict. Death, especially unexpected death, is everywhere. Already, before the start of his Irish adventure, his companion, le Capitaine Giron, with whom he had set out for England in order to fight for Charles I against Cromwell, had been killed, leaving the young traveller apparently alone as he set sail for Ireland. In the first pages of his Irish account, again before ever reaching Irish shores, we see the vessel on which he was travelling being pursued by a large English Parliamentary gunship. He and his companions were terrified for their lives, in danger of becoming collateral damage in someone else's war as rumours spread about the lack of mercy shown to other travellers by these same Parliamentarians consumed by a desire to avenge what the Irish had, according to more rumours, done in slaughtering 145,000 Protestant settlers. Indeed, the role of rumour here and elsewhere throughout the *Voyages* is key in whipping up an atmosphere of constant fear, suspicion and apprehension. (One is reminded here, of course, of the compelling studies on the destabilising power of rumour in eighteenth-century Paris by Robert Darnton, and others.<sup>31</sup>) Even without blood-thirsty Parliamentarians, his initial journey is fraught with danger: the captain of the vessel which was to bring him to Ireland was drunk and consequently dangerous, responsible for his ship nearly smashing into the most dangerous sandbank off the Dublin coast (the motif of the drunken sea-captain is, of course, a *deus ex machina*, but that does not mean that he did not actually exist!). Drunken sea-captains and blood-thirsty sailors were not all he had to contend with, however: from the very start, everything, even nature itself, seems to be on some kind of semi-permanent war footing: the black birds he glimpses somewhere out over the Irish Sea – again before ever arriving in Ireland – remind him of a battalion; the fact that they are managing to

31 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Allen Lane, 1984).

fly against the wind is in some way a sign that he is now entering a zone somehow beyond human comprehension and therefore beyond human control. This 'twilight zone' atmosphere is heightened by his sighting of islands appearing and disappearing off the coast of Dublin. This scene is so vivid that he imagines that he can distinguish cattle and trees on them. A Dutch sailor on board explains that what he is really seeing is a collection of vapours, often misinterpreted in northern seas as islands inhabited by witches. In other words, he gives a scientific explanation while at the same time recording other, older interpretations of such phenomena. The duality of Boullaye-le-Gouz' own vision of the world comes to mind as superstition and folklore are given equal footing with signs, symbols, numbers and calculations. In any case, how can we know anything? What is it that we see? Any phenomenon can give rise to convincing though contradictory interpretations and explanations. Here is a world in which one is free to favour explanation (a) or, if preferred, its opposite, explanation (b). Our traveller's feelings of uncertainty and apprehension are intensified.

His departure two months later is equally fraught. The restrained tone maintained throughout this text is, for once, jettisoned in the conclusion where the now frantic young traveller states with some urgency that he now wants to leave this country, come what may. His sudden desperation to leave this war-torn island is evident in his gesture of falling to his knees to implore a sea-captain for permission to board his vessel in Wexford. To the captain's understandable fear of being found by Parliamentarians with a French passenger on board, Boullaye-le-Gouz answers that he does not mind just as long as he can get out of Ireland: '*il me dit si ie rencontre des François ie vous meneray en France, si des Biscains en Espagne, ie lui respondis que tout chemin m'estoit indifferent, pourueu que ie puisse sortir d'Irlande*' ('he told me that if he met any French people, he would conduct me to France and that if he met anyone from Biscay, he would take me to Spain. I answered him that I did not mind where he brought me as long as I could get out of Ireland').<sup>32</sup> When contrary winds abort his initial departure, he finds himself back on shore. His dismay that this apparently last chance of

32 *Voyages*, p. 479.

escape has faded and his mounting panic at the prospect of being trapped on a war-torn island are evident. Even after he succeeds at last in leaving the country, he is not out of danger: he and his companions are pursued by various ships, including a Parliamentary one which shoots at them. Finally, despite difficult tides, they manage to escape. Interestingly here as at the start of the Irish episode, rumour plays a role: referring again to the Parliamentarians' desire for revenge for the massacre by the Irish of English colonists, he states that he would rather be captured by Turks than by Parliamentarians, as the former would not kill them (but instead probably sell them as slaves): '*nous eussions mieux aymé tomber entre les mains des Turqs, que des Parlementaires, parce qu'aux uns nous estions assurez de la vie, et aux autres assurez de périr a cause du carnage que les Irois ont fait en leur pais des colonies Angloises*' ('we would have preferred to fall into Turkish rather than Parliamentary hands because the Turks would at least have allowed us to live, whereas with the Parliamentarians our death would have been certain on account of the carnage visited by the Irish on English colonies in Ireland').<sup>33</sup> Thus, the age-old stereotype of the marauding Turk enters his text as yet another *locus* of terror, intensifying his feelings of helplessness and despair.

Bookended between his fraught arrival and his near-miss of a departure, everything – at one level or another – seems to embody some kind of hostility: even the rain which he describes as extraordinary in its intensity drenches him and has him running for shelter – another typical rain-soaked Irish summer! The very landscape itself seems to have become a visual representation of the conflicts raging on its surface: on leaving the Pale, he discovers that the bridge linking it to the rest of the country has been destroyed by the Irish during the religious wars (presumably to prevent English spilling out from the Pale); he is left with no choice but to swim across the river with his clothes on his head. Such fleeting references suggest a very real break or fissure in the landscape between occupied and non-occupied zones, reflecting not different levels but merely different sources of danger.

33 *Voyages*, p. 480.

At an immediately visual level, the country he depicts is in a generalised state of high alert. The text bristles with fleeting references to wars, skirmishes and conflicts past and present. Space is measured in terms of warfare: a nunnery is – we are told – at a musket-shot from somewhere (*‘à une portée de mousquet de la ville’*).<sup>34</sup> The fortresses and castles he notices everywhere speak of tension, of communities under siege. Indeed, the first (and often the only) detail that catches his eye on arrival in a new town is the prominence there of a fortress or castle guarding it, hinting at the presence of unnamed enemies lurking not far off. Thus, Kinsale has English garrison; Youghal is strongly walled. The function of some such fortifications is underlined by historian Kenneth Nichols who notes that ‘terror inspired by the English forces around Dublin in 1642 led the local inhabitants to seek refuge in the many castles and fortified towns.’<sup>35</sup> Boullaye-le-Gouz’ depiction of an English garrison immured in the only building still standing in a razed village near Limerick suggests that the English may have been equally terrified of the locals.

No matter how protective, however, military architecture and thick walls frequently fail to ensure personal safety: his Irish travelogue is strewn with passing references to villages and countryside ruined by wars. Outside the Pale, life is particularly dangerous: he refers to a castle which once belonged to the Viceroy of Ireland and now belongs to his brother who lives back in Dublin. The imagination races as one succumbs to the temptation to fill in the gaps by surmising why the owner has found it necessary to move back to Dublin. Threats are everywhere: those unspecified are arguably the most terrifying (the unknown unknowns!). His fleeting references to the real victims of war, the ordinary civilians, are powerful and tell of the young man’s humanity: like tiny figures in some Flemish painting, these poor nameless creatures wander the roads selling buttermilk and a little oaten bread: *‘tout ce pays estoit ruiné, et ne s’y trouvoit personne que de pauvres mal-heureux qui vendoient sur les chemins du laict caillé, et un peu de pain*

34 *Voyages*, p. 472.

35 Kenneth Nicholls in David Edwards *et al.*, p. 186.



*d'avoine*' ('all this countryside was destroyed. The only people to be seen on the roads were poor unfortunates selling milk and some oat bread').<sup>36</sup>

Unsurprisingly in this situation, people try to draw their means of protection literally closer to themselves. Whenever possible, they protect themselves and their possessions not just with thick walls but with people, crowds of people. We read of a building guarded by forty English soldiers, and of the narrator being accompanied by a detachment of twenty Irish soldiers on his journey from Kilkenny to Cashel. Why such numbers? Just how great was the danger? There are no safe havens. Even in church, a zone which might have been thought safer than most, people are constantly and openly on a war footing. Boullaye-le-Gouz reports on a Sunday ceremony at St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, with the Viceroy leaving church protected by bodyguards and preceded by a company of footmen beating the drum and with match-locks ready for action. At one point, he has to submit to a security check and is ordered to surrender his sword if he wishes to proceed. In other words, from observing threats all around him, he too is now seen as a possible threat by someone else. To this enveloping armoury of walls and bodyguards, people add – if they can – guns and knives. Even closer to themselves, they wear these as an integral part of their overall apparel: we are told about how the Irish arm themselves and about how they behave in battle before we ever learn anything of their clothing, for instance: '*Les Irois portent une scquine ou dague à la Turque, laquelle ils dardent de quinze pas fort adroitement, et ont cet adavantage que s'ils sont Maistres du Camp après un combat il ne reste aucun enemy*' ('The Irish carry a knife or dagger in the Turkish manner. They can throw it with great skill to a distance of some fifteen feet, and have this much in their favour in that if they are masters of the camp after a fight, no enemy remains alive').<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly in this context, the *Voyageur* refuses to surrender his sword when asked to do so at a castle entrance, stating that he would rather not proceed with the visit of a castle than agree to be sword-less (and thus defenceless). By contrast, the passports with which our international traveller had armed himself turn

36 *Voyages*, p. 456.

37 *Voyages*, p. 476.

out to be woefully inadequate: pieces of paper provide no protection from being thrown into jail or mistaken for a spy, as he discovers to his cost.

The landscape he traverses overflows with tales of recent losses and conflicts both on land and sea: there is a passing reference to the Dominicans in Youghal who were persecuted by English settlers and to Spanish vessels that were lost chasing Parliamentarians in nearby Dungarvan harbour. Violence seen and violence reported fills here and elsewhere – one is tempted to say everywhere – as in the passing mention, without any further elucidation, of a former Viceroy of Ireland who was beheaded in London. When? Why?

Nearer to hand, even the personal relationships he establishes on his journey seem fraught, as if somehow soaking in the awfulness of the surrounding political scene. He falls into a theological argument with a bloodthirsty Spaniard whom he meets in Cashel. In this dialogue of the deaf, he attempts with much passion and even aggression to metaphorically obliterate his opponent and his arguments. He appears to want to catch him out, to humiliate and destroy him, their discussion resembling nothing as much as verbal jousting, a displacement – into the world of words – of the wars that have become all too normalised all around them.

His closest travelling companion, the Corkman Tom Neville, seems in one person to encapsulate all the woes he has witnessed from the outset of his journey. Neville sees the huge fortune he had amassed in well over a decade while living abroad in France, Spain and England wiped out when it is stolen by Parliamentarians. The little he manages to salvage is then stolen, not by the English, but by his own fellow country people, prostitutes in Limerick. In other words, far from being confined to one race or one gender, the enemy is everywhere. On arrival in Cork, he discovers another *monde à l'envers* situation when he learns that his father too has lost a considerable fortune, over £10,000 sterling, in the religious wars and has been forced to leave the country '*pour éviter la tyrannie des Protestans Anglicans*' ('to avoid the tyranny of the Anglican Protestants').<sup>38</sup> Worst of all, however, is his discovery on arriving at his family home that it has been confiscated and is

38 *Voyages*, p. 470.

now occupied by strangers who know nothing of him, people for whom he does not exist. He thus finds himself somehow obliterated from memory as no one – not even the current occupants of his family home – has any memory of him or of his father. Thus, on the doorstep of his family home into which he will never again be allowed to step, he discovers that he has become a stranger, an outsider, a man with no name.

Little wonder, then, in such a fraught atmosphere, that stress levels lead to a blurring of lines of demarcation between reality and unreality. Can the evidence of one's own eyes be relied upon? When is an island not an island? How can a good Christian be identified? Our *Voyageur Catholique* asserts that, despite appearances, the French are excellent Christians and that, for all their angelic airs, the Spanish frequently are not: '*les François semblent la plupart libertins, et sont tres-bons Chrestiens, et les Espagnols ont l'apparence d'Ange, et souvent l'intérieur au contraire*' ('the French appear particularly libertine but are very good Christians, whereas the Spanish look like angels but are often very different deep down').<sup>39</sup> In the war zone in which, wittingly or not, he finds himself, is anywhere safe? The difficulty of trying to decide whether to go forward or backwards emerges constantly in his text, both for himself and for others. The dilemma, as in so many war zones, is of trying to make a judgement call as to the least dangerous option, given that there is no real safe one.

Who is who? Whom can one trust? The answer is probably no one, certainly not the women of Limerick, who despite being Irish like himself, are as rapacious as the marauding, evicting English. The sea captain into whose charge he and his fellow travellers had initially entrusted themselves almost manages through his drunken incompetence to have them all drowned. The *Voyageur's* own identity is called constantly into question by people momentarily in a position of authority over him. Indeed, he often exudes quiet terror and vulnerability at having to deal with nervous, heavily armed people who are everywhere busy adding two and two and making five. On entering Kilkenny, he is mistaken for an English spy and arrested. He has a similar experience when entering Youghal where he is intercepted

39 *Voyages*, p. 459.

by twenty English soldiers and led forcibly to the captain overseeing the town. There, his passports from the King of England and the Viceroy of Ireland are not sufficient to save him from extensive questioning which finally, nonetheless, manages to convince those holding him that he is not, after all, a liar. In other words, the default setting appears to be that one is guilty until proven innocent. In one of the most telling incidents in his account, his interrogators confuse his name, Gouz, with the English surname, Goose, and conclude mistakenly that he is an English spy. Thus, his very life is momentarily put in danger by something as intimate and personal to him as his very name. Truly, his is a world in which nothing and no one is unfailingly benign. Everyone is a suspect now. Little wonder, then, in this potent mix of knowing and unknowing, that magic surfaces. In Dublin and Cork, the sick are cured in magic wells, or so he tells us. He does create some distance between himself and these folk beliefs by attributing them to locals and to women. He does not explain where *he* stands on them. It is nonetheless surely significant that despite his firmly held and trenchantly argued religious opinions our *Voyageur Catholique* does not mock or disparage such folk beliefs. After all, who is to know who is right: the local peasants steeped in pre-Christian lore or the theologically well versed *Voyageur Catholique*? Authority has been grievously undermined: there are no experts anymore.

There is no clear sense that our young *Voyageur* understands the causes of the conflict into which he stumbles but this somehow makes it no less real, rather all the more bewildering, a kind of walking nightmare, as it were. At least if he could understand it, this would give him some kind of control over it. Reading his account of his Irish journey is reminiscent of modern war reporting from chaos-stricken places where boundaries have melted, landmarks no longer exist, war-ravaged landscapes are moonlike, Beckettian, the rule of law has broken down and people are lost with no past or future, drifting, waiting for something definitive to happen that would put their lives back on track for better or for worse. The overall ambiance captured by Boullaye-le-Gouz is confirmed centuries later by contemporary historians. In his study of violence against settlers in 1640s Ireland, Brian Mac Cuarta tellingly refers to 'the collapse of structures of authority and control in the winter of 1641-2' and to the reigning 'chaotic

anti-colonial atmosphere.<sup>40</sup> To anyone who has read the *Voyages*, the comparison with Bosnia in Kenneth Nicholls' study of the 1641 rebellion comes as no surprise.<sup>41</sup>

Fraught as it was, his brief Irish sojourn, his first encounter with the Other, did not (surprisingly?) cure him of his wanderlust. Quite the opposite. The following two decades and more of the *Voyageur's* life were filled with journeys far away from the famed *douceur angevine* of his birthplace to locations both foreign and exotic, where, arguably, no one was at once more exotic or more integrated than he. He attracted the attention of contemporaries, for instance of le Père Alexandrie de Rhodes who was struck on meeting him in Shiraz by his Persian attire and by his hair which was braided *à la perse*.<sup>42</sup> In all this, however, he never searches out the limelight but rather blends chameleon-like into the décor. For what is striking, both in his writings and in contemporary accounts of him, is the way in which he steps back in order to place the spotlight not on himself but on what he is looking at. Jane Conroy has astutely noted his '*volonté de se défaire de son identité propre pour mieux cerner celle de l'étranger*' ('[his] desire to shed his own identity in order to better espouse that of the other').<sup>43</sup> In the early pages of the *Voyages*, standing as a kind of portal allowing entry into the text, we are confronted with a remarkable portrait of him in Eastern dress in which words as well as images highlight his self-fashioned, layered identity. Standing confidently between two globes each representing a different way of apprehending the world (one is covered with signs, symbols and scorpions, the other with maps and measurements), he peers at once at and around us, while underneath we read: '*Portrait du Sieur de la Boullaye-le Gouz en habit Levantin, connue en Asie, et Affrique sous le nom*

40 Brian Mac Cuarta in David Edwards *et al*, p. 169, p. 165.

41 Kenneth Nicholls in David Edwards *et al*, p. 188.

42 Alexandre de Rhodes, *Divers voyages de la Chine, et autres Royaumes de l'Orient. Avec le retour de l'Auteur en Europe, par la Perse et l'Armenie* (Paris: I. Journal) 1681. See also Arnold T. Wilson, 'History of the Mission of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in China and other Kingdoms of the East', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 4:1 (1926), pp. 47–57.

43 Conroy, p. 47.

*d'Ibrahim-Beg et, en Europe, sous celuy de Voyageur Catholique*. One can indeed understand how *le Roi Soleil* himself, driven by curiosity, demanded to see his Angevin subject bedecked in his full splendid Persian garb. Among the many merits of his Irish travelogue discussed here is the confirmation that, even as a novice traveller, years before he caught the attention of Louis XIV, his attitude is already one of openness, of empathy, of tolerance of people many of whom could in no way be classified as his soul mates. Thus, it could be argued that his identity as an early modern citizen of the world is already visible, albeit in embryonic form, in his brief but compelling and all too little-known Irish journey.

*pour mes amis de toujours, Cécile, Olivier et Maurice Fainsilber*



JANE CONROY

## Time and the Traveller: The Case of Coquebert de Montbret

At all times, we face the problem of how and to what extent we can retrieve the past, and to what purpose. We look backwards from our present but hope we are not prisoners of our past. Cultural historians, in particular, are conscious of the dissolution of experience, while they attempt to 'make sense' out of the random elements available. In that respect, we are in a similar situation to travellers in new territory, facing similar problems of selection, decipherment, preservation and presentation. Indeed, travellers were often cultural historians before the concept was fully formed; without really intending to become themselves historical sources, they were recorders of the present for the future. Late Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment French visitors to Ireland and to other developed countries were principally concerned with recording their immediate impressions, and analysing the 'état présent' of the country, rather than with delving into the past. There were exceptions. Among these was Charles-Étienne Coquebert de Montbret, who was in Ireland as '*agent de la marine et du commerce*' from late 1789 to 1792. His travel diaries allow us to see what entry points he sought into the mental world of the Irish, how he conceived of this work of interpretation from an outsider's viewpoint, how he accessed and read 'texts', in the largest sense of the word, including, for example, not just written or oral discourse but buildings, paintings, clothing, or the design of everyday items.<sup>1</sup> In particular, he gave considerable weight to

1 Charles-Étienne Coquebert de Montbret's papers relating to Ireland are found principally in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), the Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen and the Ministère des affaires étrangères. The *carnets de voyage* discussed here are in the BNF's Département des manuscrits, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises,



the past and its inscription in landscape, language and tradition. He can be viewed as a historian of culture, who also tried to grasp the diachronic dimension of the Irish 'case'. While he made earnest attempts to read and record everything he could about Ireland's past, the interest of his account of Ireland lies more in its reliance on very diverse oral informants, his own random observations, and the spontaneity and unrevised status of his manuscript (if we ignore the later notes inserted into it).

Our period has much easier access to memory than Coquebert had. We find ourselves in a 'bulle mémorielle', possibly heading towards a 'krach mémoriel',<sup>2</sup> so much so that, to many, the past can appear a burden to be rejected. It is therefore not immediately obvious how the depositions of time were remembered, retrieved and represented in a different period. In the 1790s or thereabouts for Coquebert, like other travellers, it was also not immediately obvious how to relate past and present. History's object and methods were being redrawn, while the 'study of man' with its stress on the present, was increasingly the great objective of travel, one that would eventually dethrone even the reconnoitring of potentially valuable territories (once Africa had been carved up and the 'Terre australe' colonised). This 'study of man' had always been a feature of travel, but now it was being turned into a properly constituted science, with a developed data-collection methodology. A key moment in this development was to come some seven or eight years after Coquebert's attempts to record Irish society, with the founding of the Société des observateurs de l'homme in 1799, and De Gérando's directions for observing 'les peuples sauvages' in the same year. At the end of the eighteenth century, historiography had begun to incorporate this redirection of attention towards social organisation and the new readings of the constructs of civilisations. There was a sense that the past could not be dealt with by the old methods, and also that each of the disciplines deserved its own history. It had become clear

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20098, 20099, and to a lesser extent, 20097. They are henceforward referred to as NAF 20097, NAF 20098 and NAF 20099. Translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated, and spellings have been normalised. An edition of the  *carnets*  is in preparation.

2 Emmanuel Hoog, *Mémoire année zéro* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), p. 6.

that culture itself was an object to historicise and that there was an acute need for contemporary observation to complement retrospective narrative.

In approaching a writer like Coquebert de Montbret from a cultural history viewpoint, there are several sets of questions to be kept in mind. Firstly, how do diachronic historiography and synchronic travel-writing relate to each other in a period of ‘romantic historicism’? As defined by Ann Rigney, such a period is one in which a historical culture is influenced by ‘a radicalised awareness of the alterity of the past and the historicity of experience [which] picked up on the Enlightenment interest in culture and eighteenth-century antiquarianism and fed into emergent nationalism with its “identity politics” and interest in folk-culture.’<sup>3</sup> Secondly, what level of historic awareness might a French traveller in Ireland display in the late eighteenth century and how would this find expression? More specifically, what textual presence does the past have in Coquebert’s *carnets* and what importance does he attribute to the very keen sense of history displayed by the Irish? Thirdly, we might consider how with the passage of time observations of contemporary life become historical, and how such writing, focused on the then-present, is itself *materia storica*, with attendant questions about what and how a traveller’s observations of Ireland’s ‘present’ at a past moment, but not intended to be historical, contribute to present understanding of that Irish past. Coquebert provides useful material for examining these questions for he is genuinely an emblematic traveller of his time, dealing with unresolved problems of methodology with all the means at his disposal.

It may seem odd to use the travel account as a place to take stock of historic awareness in the late eighteenth century. Travel accounts are generally expected to prioritise direct observation. In the confrontation between bookish data and experiential learning, and theory versus empiricism, it is assumed they are about the ‘there and now’ not the ‘there and then’. Otherwise why travel? The reluctant traveller could just remain at home, as so many earlier cosmographers did, compiling whatever had been said

3 Ann Rigney, *Imperfect histories: The elusive past and the legacy of romantic historicism* (Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), Introduction, p. 8.

on the chosen topic and smoothing out the contradictions. This is what another French traveller in Ireland, Duvergier de Hauranne, dismissively calls 'faire des livres avec des livres'.<sup>4</sup> From his satirical remarks in 1826–7 it can be seen that direct observation was still not the rule. Nonetheless, in the late eighteenth century, the developing discipline of geography, very much the domain of the traveller, was seen as one of the 'eyes' of history (the other was chronology).

### History, travel and truth: *ars historica, ars apodemica*

How useful and how accurate is Coquebert? Both history and travel accounts are concerned with truth claims: the tradition was to doubt travellers' tales because it was often impossible to check on them; and the debate about 'truthful' history is now a familiar one. Similar questions are

- 4 Duvergier de Hauranne is scathing about the non-travelling travel writers of his time: *'Je sais qu'avec de la patience et quinze ou vingt livres sur mon bureau, je pourrais rédiger mon voyage tout comme un autre. On emprunte à l'un sa partie historique, en remontant au-delà de César ; à l'autre ses descriptions pittoresques ; à un troisième ses réflexions politiques ; on y joigne quelques remarques fort neuves sur la longueur des dîners anglais et la commodité des trottoirs de Londres ; et avec un bon libraire, trois vignettes de Devéria, et six articles de journaux, on prend son rang parmi les observateurs d'un pays qu'à peine l'on a regardé. C'est ce qui s'appelle, je crois, faire des livres avec des livres ; occupation fort estimable, mais qui a peu d'attrait pour moi'* (I know that with patience and fifteen or twenty books on my desk, I could write my travel account like anyone else. From one you take your historical section, going back to Caesar and beyond, from another you get its picturesque descriptions, from a third its political remarks; to this you add some highly original observations about the length of English dinners and the convenience of the footpaths in London; and with the help of a good bookseller, three small illustrations by Devéria, and six newspaper articles, you take your place among the observers of a country at which you have scarcely glanced. I believe this is what is called making books from books, a highly estimable occupation, but one which holds little attraction for me). *Lettres sur les élections anglaises et sur la situation de l'Irlande* (Paris: Sautet, 1827), pp. 1–2.

asked about ‘truthful’ anthropology, ‘truthful’ statistics and other social sciences, all of which are part of the domain of the travel writer. Because of the short duration of their access to the other culture, can travel writers ever chronicle matters other than in their surface manifestations? Is travel ‘immoral’ in creating the illusion of truth and hiding its own aporias? Luigi Marfè, for one, has recorded doubt about this.<sup>5</sup>

How likely is it that an early-modern traveller, not specially trained in historiography and ethnography, could provide good observations? Most travellers in that period were inadvertent or accidental historians, indeed some were even inadvertent travellers, but that is not to say that they were naïve. There were two great discourses that shaped their approach: the *ars apodemica* and the *ars historica*. The first of these, the *ars apodemica*, offered advice about travel (in the period from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, after which the genre disappears). Apart from practical information such as choosing itineraries and inns, avoiding bandits, and learning languages, the *ars apodemica* laid out prescriptions for observation: what to observe, how to observe, how to handle the data. The *ars historica*, or theory of historiography, was found in manuals, reviews or prefaces in the same period of the sixteenth century and through to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The *ars apodemica* concerned itself mainly with how to capture synchronous phenomena. The *ars historica* was principally directed towards providing guidance in retrieving, interpreting and representing the past. But what was the level of crossover or reciprocal influence between these genres? For example, what place does any specific *ars historica* assign to the perception of synchronous phenomena, those which travellers most frequently recorded, and which make of travellers unwitting historians of culture? What weight does the *ars* attribute to symbolic rhetoric and what to ‘facts’? On the other hand, in any one *ars apodemica*, how important at any time, in any place, is the sense of history, both the traveller-observer’s own historic awareness and that of the people observed?

5 Luigi Marfè, *Oltre la ‘fine dei viaggi’: I resoconti dell’altrove nella letteratura contemporanea* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009).

One way of gauging this latter influence is to see how many questions related to the past appeared in questionnaires provided for the use of travellers. By the time Coquebert was travelling in Ireland, the questionnaires were probably the most influential type of apademic text. They were also, of course, used in other fields. Particularly for diplomats like Coquebert, official instructions about their mission frequently took the form of lists of questions. French bureaucracy in the 1790s became very attached to them; later on, Coquebert, as head of the Bureau de la statistique, would use questionnaires, and almost certainly develop his own. Elements of question lists are already built into his *carnets de voyage* and are found among his other papers preserved in the Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen. In the decade of Coquebert's stay in Ireland, there were three key question-based apademic texts that influenced how travellers elicited information: Leopold Berchtold's *Essay to Direct and Extend the Inquiries of Patriotic Travellers* (1789), which Coquebert had in his library; Volney's *Questions de statistique à l'usage des voyageurs* (1795), intended primarily for diplomats; and De Gérando's directions for observing 'les peuples sauvages', produced in 1799 for Baudin's expedition in *Le Géographe* (to Timor, Mauritius, Australia) and published in 1800. Berchtold and Volney provide lists of questions, while De Gérando's methodological recommendations are peppered with multiple questions on each broad area. These three works display varying levels of historical awareness. Berchtold offers this general advice regarding the importance of the past: 'Before the traveller inquires into the present state of important objects he should endeavour to get information respecting their beginning, their most memorable periods, and epochs, the causes of their increase or decrease, till the present moment, and to review the most authentic documents, and afterwards to form queries in such a manner as, that one may lead to the other, in order to curtail the inquiry.'<sup>6</sup> Yet although many of his thirty-seven sets of exhaustive questions begin with a brief inquiry about past practice, this

6 Leopold Berchtold, *Essay to Direct and Extend the Inquiries of Patriotic Travellers* (London: Printed for the author, 1789), vol. 1, Section III, 'On Information and the Means of Obtaining it', I, p. 35.

latter question is generally routine and perfunctory. As for Volney, whose work was intended to be a reduction of Berchtold's to manageable proportions, not one of his 135 questions relates to the past, and there is almost no impression that the people observed might conceivably have a sense of their own past. De Gérando's programme for anthropological enquiry was designed for unlettered, 'primitive' peoples (obviously not Ireland) and its interest lies in a systematic approach to 'fieldwork'. However, its strong emphasis on language, and its recognition of the importance of symbolic practices, imagination, ceremonies and oral tradition, all obviously hint at a conviction that the past can be partially retrieved even where written records do not exist. In this way, De Gérando gives new prominence to artefacts and orality, stressing tradition as a key to understanding:

The final and no doubt the most difficult object of the traveller's curiosity will be to penetrate the traditions of savage peoples. They will be questioned on their origin, on the migrations which they have undergone, on the invasions to which they have been subjected, on the important events that have taken place among them on the progress which they have been able to make in respect of industry or political force, on the institution of the customs current among them. It may be that only vague stories can be extracted from them; but a small number of facts can throw precious light on the mysterious history of these nations.<sup>7</sup>

## Reading Ireland's past

Charles-Étienne Coquebert (1755–1831) was a career diplomat who was thrown somewhat off course by the Revolution. Prior to his Dublin posting (1789–1792), he had spent nine years in Hamburg as consul to the Hanseatic League towns, and three years in Paris. After returning from Ireland in 1793, he managed to survive the 1790s by teaching rural economy, geology and

7 Joseph-Marie de Gérando, *The Observation of Savage Peoples*, translated and edited by F.C.T. Moore (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 100.

geography in the *École des Mines* and other institutions, becoming first editor of the *Journal des Mines* (1794–1800). Later roles included those of special envoy to London after the peace of Amiens, commissioner for Customs in the Rhineland, member of the small committee overseeing implementation of the metric system, the new ‘poids et mesures’; and he was for a time head of the Bureau de la Statistique. Although he mixed in scientific circles and wrote learned memoirs, he is principally known in France as a ‘grand commis d’état’, and that indeed is how he is described in the title of the fine biography of him by Isabelle Laboulais-Lesage.<sup>8</sup>

Coquebert was certainly altered by his travel experience. In his political attitude, he moved from a cautious stance concerning Ireland to espousing its cause against England. In November 1792, he travelled back to Paris to confer with the *Ministre de la Marine* on this matter. In December, he wrote:

*Si je me borne strictement à mes fonctions de consul, si j'évite de montrer une opinion sur les affaires intérieures et de me lier avec les chefs d'aucun parti, le gouvernement anglais sera maintenu dans une plus grande sécurité que si je me livre à ce que me dicte mon amour de la liberté en général et l'intérêt profond que m'inspire le brave et malheureux peuple d'Irlande.*

(If I limit myself strictly to my consular functions, if I avoid expressing any view in regard to internal affairs and do not associate with the leaders of any party, the English government will be maintained in greater security than if I follow the dictates of my love of liberty in general and the deep interest which the brave and misfortunate people of Ireland inspire in me.)<sup>9</sup>

He planned, but never published, a vast work on Europe. By the early 1800s, and particularly after returning from his mission to London in 1802–3, he was working on a *Géographie industrielle, commerciale et physique de l'Irlande* which was close to completion. Silvestre, one of his eulogists, refers to it as the *Géographie physique, industrielle et commerciale de l'Irlande* and

8 Isabelle Laboulais-Lesage, *Lectures et pratiques de l'espace: l'itinéraire de Coquebert de Montbret, savant et grand commis d'État, 1755–1831* (Paris: H. Champion, 1999).

9 Letter of 18 December 1792, quoted by I. Laboulais-Lesage, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

says it was 'l'un de ses travaux le plus complet, celui qu'il était le plus disposé à publier'.<sup>10</sup> However, he decided to extend this already voluminous draft and to compile a vast European *Dictionnaire*, taking in all the countries he had travelled in and observed. This was a disastrous decision, which paralysed him. Constant Leber attributes to modesty Coquebert's failure to ever consider his work ready for the public. One might equally well think that he was attempting to apply an encyclopedic system in a world where the epistemologies of the Encyclopedia era had given way to new and more specific approaches. The impression is of information overload without the means to cut through to the essential.<sup>11</sup>

Coquebert had an impressive library and he bequeathed many manuscripts to his son Eugène, some of them in Irish, together with 10,000 printed works to which Eugène added another 50,000. History was intended to figure in Coquebert's account of the Europe he knew. From his own catalogue, it is clear that history occupied the largest section with 2,894 titles, 501 on Europe and 1,963 on France.<sup>12</sup> In this section, it is clear that his main interest is in peoples rather than in rulers, and that what he is seeking is not mere description but more so explanation and analysis.<sup>13</sup> Historic awareness is unusually evident in Coquebert's approach to Ireland.

10 Augustin de Silvestre, *Notice biographique sur M.C.-E. Coquebert de Montbret* (Paris: chez Mme Huzard, 1832), p. 7.

11 Constant Leber confirms this impression: '*M. de Montbret a recherché, observé et recueilli les faits jusqu'à ses derniers moments. On eût dit qu'il n'était né que pour apprendre et conserver, comme un dépôt sacré, le trésor des connaissances qu'il avait acquises : c'était là l'erreur de sa modestie*' (M. de Montbret continued his research, making observations and gathering data to the end of his days. It seemed as though he had been born with the sole purpose of learning and preserving, like a sacred trust, the accumulated treasure of his learning: this was the error into which his modesty led him). *Notice biographique sur M. le baron Coquebert de Montbret* (Paris: G.-A. Dentu, 1839), p. 11.

12 I. Laboulais-Lesage, *op. cit.*, pp. 644–647. She notes that Coquebert included within 'Histoire' 1,140 titles not really belonging to history as understood in the eighteenth century, but rather to '*une histoire entendue comme enquête, une histoire pratiquée sur un mode expérimental*' (History understood as an enquiry, history practised in an experimental manner).

13 *Ibid.*, p. 664.



Most travellers took a much more superficial look at Irish history and oral tradition. A case in point is Coquebert's contemporary Pierre-Nicolas Chantreau, who visited the country in 1788. While not wholly unaware of the importance of usage and custom, Chantreau is still a proponent of the Cartesian tradition of historiography:

*Le philosophe, qui sait quel degré de crédit il faut donner à ces dires contradictoires [des historiens anglais et irlandais], s'en rapporte à l'observation, et laisse à l'Irlandais, comme aux autres hommes, le plaisir puéril de lire ses légendes, ses fables et ses poétiques fictions.*

(A philosopher, knowing what degree of credence one should give to these contradictory assertions [of English and Irish historians], relies on his own observations, and lets the Irish, like other people, enjoy the childish pleasure of reading their legends, fables, and poetical fictions.)<sup>14</sup>

Chantreau is content to rely on the so-called 'Protestant' versions of Irish history provided by Leland and Hume as his principal historical sources; moreover, for information on the 'gouvernement de l'Irlande, sa constitution et les mœurs de ses habitants, les amis de M. La Touche ont, à cet égard, rempli parfaitement nos vues'.<sup>15</sup> This is a dubious historical method when compared to the painstaking accumulation of histories and the many informants used by Coquebert de Montbret. This cavalier attitude is all the more surprising as Chantreau was the author of *De l'Importance de l'Étude de l'Histoire* (1802), an *ars historica* in which he stresses the need to evaluate the prejudices and competence of witnesses.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Chantreau's dismissal of Irish accounts of the past, Coquebert definitely belongs to the category of traveller identified by Luigi Marfè as 'erudite collector traveller'. This is a prevalent type in Coquebert's era, but it is

14 Pierre-Nicolas Chantreau, *Voyage dans les trois royaumes d'Angleterre, d'Ecosse et d'Irlande* (Paris: Briand, 1792), III. See pp. 128–221 for Ireland.

15 P.-N. Chantreau, *op. cit.* The La Touches' influence on 'tourisme' in the east of the country, and the weight of their opinion at this time is similarly evident in John Ferrar, *A View of [...] Dublin [and] A Tour to Bellevue* (Dublin: s.n., 1796).

16 Pierre-Nicolas Chantreau, *De l'importance de l'étude de l'histoire* (Paris: Deterville, An X (1802)).

also present in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Marfè includes Mario Praz, Claudio Magris, and the Catalan writer Terenci Moix in the category. For the erudite collector traveller, the past is never over, 'permane sottotraccia in compresenza con l'oggi' ('The substratum of the past forever coexists with the present').<sup>17</sup>

The first thing to note is that the diachronic and synchronic are visible 'à l'état brut' in a *carnet* or *brouillon* like Coquebert's. The unfinished condition of the manuscript means that two or more time perspectives often appear to come cutting through each other, and are interleaved. There are abrupt changes of topic but also of time-frame, reflecting how the perceptions of the traveller *in situ* are jumbled together. Why do these time-shifts occur? Within the traveller's immediate experience, particular elements send him back to inquire into the past, or to speculate about it. There are particular routes back in time, like the wormholes of science fiction travel. The following passage is typical of the alternating time layers that result from this mix of immediate impression and retrospective information. Here it is the sight of building which prompts Coquebert to make a connection that leaps back five centuries:

*Entre Athenry et Galway, sur un bras de mer est une tour ancienne du genre de celle de Dunsandle, mais très bien conservée et habitée, ainsi qu'une maison moderne qu'on y a jointe. C'est Oran-more, à M. Denis Blake. Il y a plus loin Oran-beg. Ce nom d'Oran que portent plusieurs endroits d'Irlande se retrouve en Afrique. Au-delà, on a de la hauteur une superbe vue de la Baie de Galway et des montagnes de Conamara qui la bordent à gauche. Cette route est fort belle depuis Athlone, et sans barrières. Les habitants ont de très belles dents quoiqu'ils mangent leurs patates brûlantes. Je remarquai à la porte d'un cabaret un large gâteau surmonté d'un bouquet. C'était un prix pour le meilleur danseur. Le couvent de Dominicains d'Athenry fondé en 1241 par Milon [Meyler] de Bermingham, en irlandais, Mac-horais [...].*

(Between Athenry and Galway, on an inlet of the sea, there is an ancient tower like the one at Dunsandle, but very well preserved and inhabited, as is the modern house which has been added to it. It is Oran-more, belonging to Mr Denis Blake. Further on lies Oran-beg. This name 'Oran' which is used of several places in Ireland, is also found in Africa. Beyond it, from the high ground one has a superb view of

17 L. Marfè, *op. cit.*

Galway Bay and the Conamara mountains which frame it to the left. From Athenry onwards the road is very fine and there are no tollgates. The inhabitants have very fine teeth, although they eat their potatoes red-hot. I noticed at the door of a cabaret a large cake with a bouquet of flowers on top. It was a prize for the best dancer. The Dominican friary in Athenry, founded in 1241 by Milon [Meyler] de Bermingham, in Irish Mac-horais [...]. (NAF 20098, 28v–29r)

In general, there are a number of conventional moments or site-types in travel literature which give rise to musings about time, or at least hint at the ever-present nature of the past. In Coquebert's *carnets*, the typical links to the past are philology and place-names (as just seen), geological observations, the fall of great families and loss of land, the decay of man-made structures, a poeticised vision of landscape, the fables and traditions of the Irish.

Linguistic speculation, particularly philology, provided Coquebert with a key means of connecting to the past. Thanks to his early education and personal experience, he was a skilled linguist, and in his travel journal he continually interrogates the Gaelic language, seeking in it clues to the originary language, a burning topic of the times and of great philosophical significance. He always concludes that it was the source of Latin, a not uncommon view at the time. For example, he is categorical in saying: 'Bro-chille d'où le latin brugilus, broilus. *En français*, breuil, broglio' (*Bro-chille* whence the Latin *brugilus*, *broilus*. In French, *breuil*, *broglio*) (NAF 20098, 9v). He attempted to learn the language and collected copies of early manuscripts. He is consequently very open to Irish claims to be an ancient and highly evolved civilisation.<sup>18</sup>

Geology, another interest of Coquebert's which was later to provide him with a living, had through the eighteenth century offered a dangerous glimpse of earliest time, of creation itself. Remarks on geological formations are everywhere in the *carnets*. Generally, Coquebert is more concerned with their effect on the agriculture and industry of a region, and their mining potential, than in speculating about geological time. Such

18 See also, below, Coquebert's engagement with Charles Vallancey's theories of Irish origins.

ideas are not absent, however, and on balance he was a Neptunian, rather than a Vulcanist.<sup>19</sup>

Patterns of past ownership, possession and loss of territory, are recurrent themes in Coquebert's *carnets*, echoing his written and oral sources, and the familiar land memory of the dispossessed Irish. Wherever he goes, he records local owners of the land, mostly Anglo-Irish, and then gives information about the earlier occupants. Regions are almost always identified by him as 'ancien territoire' of such and such a family. To this end, he scrutinises Irish place-names and local informants, as well as written sources such as Charles O'Connor or O'Flaherty's *Ogygia*. Coquebert notes another expression of the Irish concern with dispossession: the Irish are convinced that the Danes still hold deeds to the lands they once held in Ireland, much as today displaced Greek and Turkish Cypriots recite their claims concerning who holds their title deeds.<sup>20</sup> He relates stories about the fate of various families, many deriving from local historians such as Smith, but several were clearly recounted in social gatherings. Such a one, whose family once held sway over vast tracts, is a cab driver in Kerry; such another is the last of a family which has died out. His acceptance of Irish records of the past ownership is unusual in travel accounts of the period. It displays a growing sympathy for the Irish 'hantise des origines'. It may well reflect a French post-revolutionary sense of the impermanence of great estates. Despite their use of oral testimony, these passages, with their use of Irish written sources, are rarely very original. Much of their interest

19 For example, he disputes the volcanic origin of the Fair Head basalts (NAF 20099, 21r) though he argues against his own stance. Similarly he disagrees with the view held by people in County Wicklow that the mountains there are extinct volcanoes (NAF 20099, 58v, 76v), finds Knockmealdown not at all volcanic despite what people say (NAF 20099, 100r).

20 'Il passe pour comptant parmi les Irlandais que les Danois conservent la mémoire des terres que leurs familles ont possédée dans ce pays et les transmettent par contrat de mariage' (The Irish take it as gospel truth that the Danes retain a record of the lands their families once held in this country and pass it on in their marriage contracts) (NAF 20100, 66v–67r).

lies in this French traveller's deep engagement with naming and defining possession and displacement.

Ruins, the decay of man-made structures, are, in Coquebert's diaries as in so many travelogues of the time, a fourth trigger, endowed with both cultural and political meaning. French travellers were less inhibited in their response to these visible remnants of Ireland's history than were their English counterparts. William Williams has noted that 'Ireland's historic landscape had either too little or too much meaning for the British travel writers.' Irish ruins were for some 'at best picturesque objects [...]. For others, especially some of the Anglo-Irish writers, Ireland's antiquities raised problems of history and identity.' Ecclesiastic remains, the tangible remains of the dissolution of religious life, were also problematic. 'Neither the historical nor the religious landscape fitted neatly into the British sense of progress.'<sup>21</sup> Coquebert is not hampered by this unease, nor by any obscure sense of guilt. He is also reinforced in his readings by a distinctively French 'héritage ruiniste'. Diderot's sensibility,<sup>22</sup> as well as Volney's and later Chateaubriand's,<sup>23</sup> are likely influences here. For a French traveller in the 1790s, the Irish ruin is not just the habitual reminder of the fall of civilisations and the fragility of man; it has more immediate political resonances

21 William Williams, *Tourism, landscape and the Irish character: British travel writers in pre-Famine Ireland* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2008), pp. 50, 295.

22 Diderot was the first to use the expression 'poétique des ruines' in the *Salon de 1767*. On ruins in travel accounts, see, inter alia, Roland Le Huenen, 'Les ruines entre histoire et imaginaire', in Roland Le Huenen and Alain Guyot (eds), *L'Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem de Chateaubriand: L'invention du voyage romantique* (Paris: PUPS, 2006), p. 264.

23 In 1802, in a much quoted passage from *Le génie du christianisme* (III, 5), Chateaubriand expressed the prevalent Romantic sense of human affinity for these testimonials of the past: 'Tous les hommes ont un secret attrait pour les ruines. Ce sentiment tient à la fragilité de notre nature, à une conformité secrète entre ces monuments détruits et la fragilité de notre existence' (All men take a secret delight in beholding ruins. This sentiment arises from the frailty of our nature, and a secret conformity between these destroyed monuments and the caducity of our own existence). English version taken from *The genius of Christianity*, translated by Charles I. White (Baltimore: J. Murphy & Co, 1856), p. 466.

that are intimately connected with the themes of loss and memory after the French Revolution. In 1834, Michelet took this grim vision of a country which had been submerged by the flow of history just a bit further: Ireland in his vision cannot survive. As a trace of time, ruins are quite equivocal: they resurrect a moment in past time as the onlooker imagines their former glory and occupants; they also signify what will never be again, a vision of future ruination of what now appears to prosper and flourish. As Roland Le Huenen has pointed out, it is when ruins are reappropriated or recolonised, that there is a strong reminder of the fact that historic time is the time of men. There are examples of this in Coquebert.

Coquebert shares with other contemporaries a Gothic sensibility, which is triggered by ruins. In Athenry, for example, having contemplated the ruins of the Dominican friary, he provides his own translation of a long passage from a 'poème ersé', and notes admiringly the refinement of early Irish poetry: 'On trouve dans les pièces de vers de l'héroïsme, de l'honneur et des mœurs très raffinées en comparaison de ce que l'Europe était alors' (NAF 20098, 29v–30r). Following a reference to Charlotte Brookes' *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), and a quotation from Pope, with an evocation of a ruined castle, he is struck by a further ruin, an 'antique abbaye', complete with inscribed tombstone. This brings on yet another poetic reminiscence, this time from John Cunningham's 'An elegy on a pile of ruins'.<sup>24</sup>

Coquebert was a firm admirer of *Ossian*, and more generally of 'Erse' poetry. He was aware of the unhistorical character of Macpherson's poem but not of the degree of Macpherson's *supercherie*. As he crosses the landscape, he ties particular places into the heroic past as imagined by Macpherson, and links them into the literary memories he has built up through extensive reading of Irish scholars. For example, near Ballycastle he relates the part of Scotland which is visible from that viewpoint to its presence in 'les Poèmes ersés', and identifies landmarks on the Irish side with the lives of Ossianic heroes: 'Tura et la caverne où habitait Cuchullin, Selamath palais de Toscar, la bruyère de Lena, la montagne de Cromla,

24 John Cunningham, *Poems, chiefly Pastoral* (Newcastle: T. Slack, 1771).

toute la scène d'Ossian est sur la côte orientale d'Ulster.' (NAF 2009, 20r). Many of these references are stitched into the narrative in notes that were added at a later period, showing how after the traveller's return, the vision persists of an ancient poeticised landscape.

## Coquebert as cultural historian

In *La Carte postale*, Derrida asks:

*Que se passe-t-il quand des actes ou des performances (discours ou écriture, analyse ou description, etc.) font partie des objets qu'ils désignent ? Quand ils peuvent se donner en exemple de cela même dont ils parlent ou écrivent ? On n'y gagne certainement pas une transparence auto-réflexive, au contraire. Le compte n'est plus possible, ni le compte-rendu, et les bords de l'ensemble ne sont alors ni fermés ni ouverts. Leur trait se divise et des entrelacs ne se défont plus.*

(What happens when acts or performances (discourse or writing, analysis or description, etc.) are part of the objects they designate? When they can be given as examples of precisely that of which they speak or write? Certainly one does not gain an auto-reflexive transparency, on the contrary. A reckoning is no longer possible, nor is an account, and the borders of the set are then neither closed nor open. Their trait is divided, and the interlacings can no longer be undone.)<sup>25</sup>

The cultural historian, in the Greek sense of 'recorder of the present for posterity', is in an interestingly bifocal position. Derrida's notion of the blurred borders of the producer of a discourse which integrates the producer seems appropriate here. Another way of saying this is to note that the writer (historian or traveller) is both *homo scriptans* (the authoritative observer) and *homo scriptus* (the person observed): he or she researches, arranges and

25 Jacques Derrida, *La carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980). English version taken from Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 391.

presents data (according to the old plan of *inventio, dispositio, elocutio*) but is at the same time an object which (as here) may be researched, arranged, presented. The traveller of the Coquebert type looks back and uses past texts, he produces texts about the past and the present. He integrates past texts into his present text, which in turn becomes a text for exegesis and commentary, itself a historic text.

Coquebert's writing on Ireland is a tissue of texts, in both the literal and the extended cultural history sense, which are integrated randomly. In addition to the 'set texts', those full-scale printed works that prove Coquebert's erudition, the *carnets* contain transcriptions of ephemeral texts he collects along his way. One such is the 'Avertissement à l'entrée du Port de Dublin: "Take notice that nothing can lie with safety in the space between this wall end and the first perch as the ground is uneven and full of holes."' (NAF 20097, 2r). This particular record of signage illustrates well the haphazard assemblage of sources used by Coquebert. It is preceded by notes on two authoritative books: Whitehurst's theory of the earth and his mention of Irish volcanoes,<sup>26</sup> and Bullet's 1754 *Mémoires de la langue celtique*: it is immediately followed by notes on manufacturing and commercial activity in Belfast and other more frivolous or social information about the city, such as the possibility of taking dance lessons on the Parade. Elsewhere he records some graffiti found on the wall of an inn in Bray:

Sur le mur de l'auberge étaient ces vers:

'Where fools have scribbled, fools will scribble more

As dogs will piss where dogs have pissed before.' (NAF 20099, 58v)

At the other end of the spectrum is an almost sacred text, the record of the Huguenot presence in Cork. Coquebert was clearly moved to have held in his hands 'les registres de l'Église française [de Cork] de juin 1699', parts of which he transcribed. Following the disappearance of the originals in the late eighteenth century, his fragmented transcription offers the only

26 John Whitehurst, *An Inquiry into the Original State and Formation of the Earth*, 2nd edn (London: W. Bent, 1786).



access now available to their contents.<sup>27</sup> Other texts surface from time to time. There is a bill from the inn he stayed in in June 1790.<sup>28</sup> He is particularly attentive to *gazettes*, lists how many there are in each town, when they were founded or disappeared, and inserts a cutting into his *carnet*.<sup>29</sup> For cultural history, these ephemeral or vanished texts are of value, but even more so are the echoes of oral sources. Combined, they produce an impression of ventriloquism in the records kept by Coquebert.

Travellers, like historians, need credible living witnesses. One of the reasons why Arthur Young became a model (and Coquebert frequently mentions him) was his systematic practice of consulting high and low wherever he went. History had developed quite an elaborate way of weighing witnesses against each other, whenever confronted with ‘conflicting gazes’. There was what Uglow has called a sort of ‘witness calculus’<sup>30</sup> at work by this time. An example of the categorisation of witnesses according to their reliability is provided by the same Chantreau quoted above, who if weak on Irish history in his travelogue, is, in his manual on teaching historical method, eloquent on the *degrés de crédibilité* of different types of testimony.

Coquebert takes his information wherever he can get it. He reports the opinions of a wide range of clearly identified people, though he sometimes casts doubt on them. Among the informants upon whom he relies are: Richard Kirwan, the notable and eccentric chemist who he knew socially; Andrew Caldwell, his correspondent and informant on many things, from the mines at Cronebane and Ballymurtagh to poetry and political gossip; Mr Maiben, owner of a large bleach yard in Sligo; a Mr Kearney of Garretstown, Colonel Samuel Hayes, MP for Wicklow, and other improving landlords and proto-industrialists in the north of Ireland; Charles O’Connor, the antiquarian, one of the first Catholic historians of Ireland to assert, in a scientific way, the honorable past of the country prior to colonisation. A particular influence was Charles Vallancey, an

27 NAF 20099, 111r–113v.

28 ‘The Old Noted Inn at Newry-Bridge, within twenty-one miles of Dublin, and two of Wicklow, by Philip Coles.’ NAF 20099, 65r.

29 NAF 20099, 153r–153v.

30 Nathan Uglow, *op. cit.*

antiquarian much given to far-fetched etymologising to prove that the Irish were Phoenicians, and who was eventually viewed by many, even within the Royal Irish Academy, of which he was President, as being seriously misguided in his views. Nonetheless, in Coquebert's eyes he was a reliable, respectable informant, and all the more so because he was of French descent, his family being Huguenots. His dubious theories of the Phoenician origins of the Irish are not questioned by Coquebert who like many another French Enlightenment linguist, of the type very effectively mocked by Voltaire in his *Essai sur les mœurs, Avant-propos, Gaule barbare*, had a passion for discovering origins, especially for tracing relationships with the East through dubious etymologies. The fact that Vallancey was a military man who was busy organising the fortification of Spike Island during Coquebert's stay in Cork, was no deterrent to cordiality between them, although it was at a time when Coquebert was interesting himself in a possible French invasion and carefully noting gun emplacements,.

In addition to these distinguished voices, here are numerous unattributed echoes of conversations in the Coquebert documents and they come through like the murmur of voices in the background. These are unattributed quotations, but from their place in a sequence of remarks or from their context in the itinerary, it can be surmised that they reflect an individual or local opinion. When during his travels in the west he writes that if Ireland were not so entirely dominated by England, its principal ports would be on the western seaboard, Limerick and Galway being infinitely better suited to be the capital of Ireland than Dublin or even Cork, one can almost hear the merchant class of Galway grumbling about the decline in their trade and the preferential treatment of the eastern sea-board. Often he acknowledges that he is drawing on collective opinion. The views of these *anonymes* are signaled by 'à ce qu'on m'a dit', or 'on dit ici que', 'les gens pensent ...' etc. In those cases, it is clear *what* they think, but it is not apparent *who* they are. In other cases it is known *whom* he meets, but not *what* they tell him. Included here are such transitory figures as the people whose names he lists in Galway, calling them warmly 'mes amis', whose origins are in the merchant class but possibly fairly low in that group. In the formation of Coquebert's political opinions, the role of such encounters, and of the actual friendships which developed, can only be guessed

at. There are some unlikely sources, such as the young boy encountered on the shore in Sligo:

*Un garçon de 12 ans, fort intelligent, m'a montré 4 espèces de plantes marines dont on fait du kelp. Le commun se nomme fannagh, qui est comme une peau d'anguilles ; une longue feuille rougeâtre se nomme wrack ; un en fil nommé lliondach, lliionduch ; et enfin un en bâton nommé slat mara. [...] L'intelligence de cet enfant étonnante. Quel plaisir d'être assez riche pour lui donner de l'éducation.*

(A highly intelligent twelve-year-old boy showed me four types of seaweed from which kelp is made. The common one is called *fannagh*, and is like the skin of an eel; one with a long reddish leaf, called wrack; one long and thread-like called *lliondach*, *lliionduch*; and finally one like a rod, called *slat mara*. [...] Astonishing intelligence of this child. What a pleasure to be rich enough to give him an education.) (NAF 20098, 59v–60r)

Because of the fragmentary composition of the *carnets*, it is frequently difficult to say what is homodiegetic and what is heterodiegetic. As the narrative voice is discontinuous, it is not possible to know if Coquebert is echoing something he has read, or giving a personal opinion, or taking a note from one of his informants. The following passage illustrates this:

*La montagne de Knock Erin près de Lough Allen mesurée par M. Kirwan, 1700 pieds au-dessus du lac, qui est lui-même environ 300 pieds au-dessus de la mer, du moins Athlone est 274 pieds au-dessus de la baie de Dublin. L'histoire d'Irlande a toujours été écrite dans des vues et avec esprit de parti. Leland avait été flatté d'avoir un évêché et ayant été abusé il se préparait lorsqu'il mourut il y a 8 ou 9 ans, à se réfuter lui-même. Un M. Corry, médecin de Dublin, a donné un examen critique des histoires d'Irlande depuis 1641. Hume a été d'une fausseté horrible, surtout ce qu'il a écrit de l'Irlande ; il avait promis de le changer. Il ne l'a pas fait.*

(The mountain called Knock Erin near Lough Allen, measured by Mr Kirwan, 1700 feet above the level of the lake, which is itself 300 feet above sea-level, or at least Athlone is 274 feet above Dublin Bay. The history of Ireland has always been written with ulterior motives and in a partisan way. Leland had been led to believe he would be given a bishopric but, having been let down, he was about to refute his own work when he died eight or nine years ago. A Mr Corry, a medical doctor from Dublin, has produced a critical examination of the histories of Ireland since 1641. Hume was horribly false, especially in what he wrote about Ireland. He promised to change it. He did not do so.) (NAF 20097, 18v)

Here Richard Kirwan is clearly the source of the information on heights above sea level, but is he also the person who expresses a low opinion of Leland as a historiographer? Or does that come from Coquebert or from Corry's work on historians? Or from one of the people he met that day?

Throughout, the *carnets* are a composite of recorded conversations, local opinions and talking points (attributed or not) and of Coquebert's own views, and his random personal observations on what interested him (everything from folk practices, agricultural implements and proto-industrial machines through to botany, geology, antiquarian remains and sociolinguistics). His voice and the voices of his informants are audible in remarks about how taxation is driving linen manufacturing into the ground, how the government should clamp down on smugglers, how the last war was very profitable for traders. He integrates snippets of readings, collected texts, and practical information (the rates charged for removing kidney stones in Dublin, where to get a cab in Cork, inns to avoid, how to make perfume from violets), all augmented by later notes, mostly erudite in character, some reflective.

Given this variety of written and oral information, and the way Coquebert treats it, his travel diaries are a rich source for non-eventual or micro-history, and for cultural history. The political significance of his account of Ireland and his views regarding Irish autonomy have been noted.<sup>31</sup> Understandably, historians of the Irish economy have interested themselves in him for, as a quasi consul, this was his business: he was indefatigable in recording features of economic life, such as the price of linen in every area of production, its width and quality, the earnings of the weavers, and technical innovations, or levels of exports and imports, or potential trade opportunities. He has been less often noticed as an observer of cultural phenomena, which he attempted to understand in themselves and in the light of Ireland's past. The 'historicization of everyday life', although it

31 Most recently by Sylvie Kleinman, 'What did the French ever do for us? Or, some thoughts on French archives as realms of Irish memory', in Jane Conroy (ed.), *Franco-Irish Connections* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), pp. 171–184 (179–182).

largely developed in the nineteenth century,<sup>32</sup> had already begun in the late eighteenth century. Coquebert's folk-life observations are valuable records, and clearly he is one of the early exponents of a growing movement. As Peter Burke has written: 'By the year 1800 there was so much interest in folksongs and folktales that it seems reasonable to speak of the "discovery" of popular culture on the part of European intellectuals.'<sup>33</sup> Of course this enthusiasm did not grip quite everyone: where Coquebert was almost reverential in his attention to the traditions and legends of the Irish, his contemporary Chantreau, as has been seen, felt entitled to discount them entirely, failing to see any value in symbolic narrative.

Among the impressions that emerge from reading Coquebert, there are three that I would like to emphasise. One is the value of spontaneity and the peculiar charm of the *carnet*. The unfinished and unpolished manuscript, the observation without the judgment, can be more interesting today than the carefully arranged analyses and moral portraits of published works. For all its value as a testimony of observations, and indirectly of how a scholarly traveller would interpret another country c. 1840, Beaumont's *Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse*<sup>34</sup> lacks the immediacy and surprising detail of the non-systematised record provided by Coquebert, or indeed of the travel notes made by Beaumont's companion, Alexis de Tocqueville. This is precisely because Beaumont suppresses many humble specifics in order to attain that higher level of abstraction then prized by historians and others. Although cultural history existed as an idea and a practice, it was the element of travel observations which was most likely to be dispensed with in the published version of a journey. Coquebert's projected *Géographie industrielle, commerciale et physique de l'Irlande* might have been a dull affair, if he had published it.

A second and related remark concerns the displacement of the valuation now placed on the information found in travel accounts. The rise of

32 Mark Phillips, *Society and Sentiment* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), p. 320.

33 Peter Burke, *Varieties of cultural history* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 16.

34 Gustave de Beaumont d'Ascq, *L'Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse* (Paris: Ch. Gosselin, 1839).

the cultural historian has led to a new appreciation of what in academic circles was once seen as the weakness of travel narratives. The attraction of humble detail, and the echoes of many voices, are now recognised and appreciated, as they were by contemporary readers. One of the principle values of Coquebert's *carnets* lies here. Their observation of daily life and conversation is of lasting interest, and they permit access an eighteenth-century mind reading eighteenth-century Irish society at different class levels. This is where they genuinely act as a memorial of the forgotten. As Mario Paz, in writing of his own approach in his travel accounts, remarked: 'il passato rivive più nelle umili documentazioni che nelle grandiose' (The past is more effectively brought to life in humble documents than in grandiose ones).<sup>35</sup> Interest is evoked now by the description of what the game of 'horley' is like (and how lethally dangerous Coquebert considers it to be), how a rabbit warren is organised, how hens are kept in a burrow under the kitchen, how in over-crowded churches people call out in Irish 'Caith amach' so that those in front will throw holy water to those at the back, the kinds of sacks that people use to bring grain to the mill, local anxiety about the shifting dunes in Garretstown, the topic of the sermon in Youghal on the third Sunday in June 1790, the patent coffee-pot (coffee biggins) which a Sligo landowner is so proud to show off, the fact that on 25 July people visit cemeteries to strew flowers on the graves of their friends, that ossuaries in Irish ecclesiastical sites are not disordered and disrespectful as is often alleged but organised, that in Celbridge hats are made from wood shavings from lime trees, that Lord Altamont's Irish wolfhounds cost him £1,200–1,300 a year to feed. For example, interest is aroused in the wolfhounds not so much because of the dogs' impressive consumption, but because it was clearly a matter of local comment, and because of the reported effect they had on the local dogs. These were the items of information that Coquebert's informants thought interesting, or appropriate to discuss with a French traveller. This ventriloquism found in travellers' accounts is one of their most pleausurably disorientating features. The simple almost 'infra-ordinaire' experiences of Irish people

35 Mario Paz, *Il mondo che ho visto* (Milan: Biblioteca Adelphi, 1982), p. 15.

come through in Coquebert's *carnets*, in the random sequence in which they are encountered. Their voices are almost audible in reported speech and talking-points, opinion and counter-opinion which compose the text.

A third remark concerns the variable porosity of travellers. Some, like Chantreau, remain firmly closed to their new environment, retaining virtually intact their ideas and sense of self. Others are transformed by their access to another time-space. Travel experiences, especially those of the migrant, are like birth, dying and death, described by Otmar Ette as 'semantic compressions of life knowledge'.<sup>36</sup> Migration, such as Coquebert's extended postings in Hamburg and Ireland, can be traumatising experiences, entailing separation, alienation and problems of acculturation and marginalisation. However, they also contain immense creative potential, providing multiple perspectives on linguistic, social and historical realms of experience, most notably dispossession and displacement. Migration, of the kind experienced by diplomatic travellers, can facilitate cognitive and cultural processes generated within what Homi Bhabha has called 'the space in between', a created 'third space'. This position, poised between cultural spaces, appears in Coquebert's case, at least, to be accompanied by a strengthened awareness of time's many layers.

In sum, the study of man, the historicisation of culture, and personal displacement, all combined to shape Coquebert's reading of Ireland. His own erudition, his enthusiasm for the language and interest in the past, finally seduced him from a position of cautious distrust to one of full engagement with Irish mentalities.

36 Otmar Ette, *Literature on the move*, translated by Katharina Vester (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2003).

JEANNE LAKATOS

Sydney Owenson and Alain de Lille:  
Traversing Philosophical Terrains in *France* and  
*De Planctu Naturae*

In her travelogue, *France: 1829–1830*, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), celebrated Anglo-Irish writer of the nineteenth century, illustrates dualities associated with philosophical influences upon societal dictates. In his medieval allegory *De Planctu Naturae*, Alain de Lille, the twelfth-century French philosopher and Cistercian monk, writes of the conflict between the sensual and intellectual experience associated with human desire. A strong correlation between the philosophies of Owenson and de Lille indicates a shared objective, that of enlightening aristocratic communities. Through their placement of realistic iconic figures within realistic settings that are not the accepted reality with which their audiences commonly associate the iconic figures, both authors bring awareness of an element of culture that needs reform, for instance, in connection with the evolution of French democracy and its advocacy of human rights. While de Lille's text alludes to ancient philosophers and mythological characters, his rhetoric focuses on sensory perceptions within medieval French society and it is the members of the medieval French aristocracy and the powerful Catholic Church who are his audience. On the other hand, Owenson's nineteenth-century observations of the 'old and new France' transport the reader philosophically from France to Ireland to Great Britain as she attempts to unify and elevate her readers' consciousness in both the Irish and the British communities. Although centuries apart, in both instances these writers vacillate between their own humanist philosophical perceptions of society, and their observations of the intense relationship between human laws established by the aristocracy and laws of nature in the form of *lumen naturae*, or having an enlightened sense of self.



Living and learning within the boundaries of a strict social structure creates an opportunity for one element of society to control another. During the medieval period, instruction to this end takes place within the parameters of Catholicism. Thus, in order to explain paradoxes that exist within religious and political communities, writers of this era use elements that are familiar to their readers who are mostly aristocratic and closely aligned with the Church. However, the concepts of virtue and wisdom thrive when restrictions are lifted, liberating the mind to take risks as part of the process of understanding the significance of contradictions when they appear. Hence, Alain de Lille begins his tale in an iconic garden, a living paradox, where life is restricted, yet through a process of natural evolution, freedom resides. His feminine, spiritual character is the one who instructs the male, listing the many contradictions present in the natural environment:

Plurality returned to unity, diversity to identity, dissonance to harmony, discord to concord in peaceful agreement. But after the universal Maker had clothed all things with the forms for their natures, and had wedded them in marriage with portions suitable to them individually, then, ... there should to perishable things be given stability through instability, infinity through impermanence, eternity through [transience] ... continually woven together in unbroken reciprocation of birth ... that similar things stamped with the seal of clear conformity, be brought from their like along the lawful path of sure descent.<sup>1</sup>

This contradiction of purpose illustrates the frustration that society has with authority, for de Lille points out that these established contradictions lead only to humanity's *descent*. Here, the term may indicate a moral or ethical decay, or he could be using this term to indicate a certain bloodline as deficient. As Rosalyn Voaden points out, the mindset of the Middle Ages is biologically enclosing: 'there is a space within women which can be entered, a space where children are conceived, sheltered and nourished [and] ... in their use of this image ... on that space within, their sense of love

1 Alain de Lille, *De Planctu Naturae: The Complaint of Nature*, translated Douglas M. Moffat (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1908) Prose IV, p. 14.

being enclosed within, of union and creation occurring inside.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Church and the aristocracy of this period instil within the societal mindset a need for restraint in order to provide nurture, support, and control.

As de Lille educates his reading audience, he develops a pattern of lexical and semantic choices, transporting his readers through an exploration of this societal terrain. From a fertile medieval environment designed by social dictates, humanity's wisdom and virtue, classical feminine qualities rely on the presence of the masculine attributes of intellectual, carnal and spiritual prowess as a means of propagation. Even though the general medieval view of women limits them to procreation, the glorification of their purpose as the source of life provides an impetus for numerous symbolic representations of spiritual renewal. Thus, the metaphorical medieval garden in which de Lille's feminine spirit dwells, is seen to provide an intellectual authority in conjunction with that of masculine fortitude through which creative thought begins as a germ of an idea and moves on to form the development of revolutionary fervour. As Gregory Sadlek describes:

Love's labor, for Alain, is not agricultural labor but rather the labor of scribes and artisans, people who work with their hands but in cities, not in the fields. Although morally conservative with respect to the uses of sex, Alain's discourse is also ideologically progressive in that it consistently reflects changes in the ideology of labor and laborers evolving in the twelfth century.<sup>3</sup>

As Sadlek illustrates, it is through the interweaving of verdant setting with philosophical consciousness that Alain de Lille unfurls the petals of a flowering gender discussion, one that would continue through the centuries and be evident in enlightened writing of the nineteenth century, in texts by authors like Sydney Owenson.

- 2 Rosalyn Voaden, 'All Girls Together: Community, Gender and Vision at Helfta', *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, Diane Watt, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 83.
- 3 Gregory M. Sadlek, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love's Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), p. 261.

Desire and curiosity become the descendants of the union between masculine and feminine thought at a sensual, intellectual and spiritual level, and this is most obvious in the creative release of inter-textual and inter-sensual stimuli. For instance, when one reads Alain de Lille's and Owenson's works, immediately one is brought into the mind of the artist on a superficial level. All the while, through writers' lexical choices, varying plains of comprehension stimulate the reader on spiritual and intellectual levels that originate with the writers' and the readers' past experiences of the subject matter found. In Prose V, de Lille's heavenly muse employs grammatical rule as a metaphor with which to elucidate rules of human interaction for the main character:

The Dionean conjugation should not admit into its uniform use of transitive construction either a defective use, or the circuitry of reflexiveness, or the excess of double conjugation – it being rather contented with the direct course of single conjugation – nor should suffer by the eruption of any wandering influences to such degree that the active voice should become able by a usurping assumption to cross over into the passive, or the latter by an abandonment of its peculiar nature to turn into the active, or, retaining under the letters of the passive the nature of the active, to assume the law of the deponent.<sup>4</sup>

The muse addresses the 'art of Venus,' clarifying the variance between those rules contrived by God, gods and goddesses on the one hand, and by humanity on the other, thus demonstrating that perceptions of human interaction depend on the intellectual as well as physical and spiritual elements. Helen Cooney observes: 'Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* comprises an extensive discussion of the workings of natural law, together with a sustained inquiry into the cause of evil in the world.'<sup>5</sup> Since the word 'evil' was not a part of de Lille's medieval vocabulary, Cooney's reference illustrates a more modern interpretation of de Lille's work, presenting the apparently inconsistent possibility that humanity's complete experience of love may include a certain presence of ill will.

4 Alain de Lille, *Du Planctu Naturae*, Prose V, p. 16.

5 Helen Cooney, 'The Parlement of Foules: A Theodicy of Love' in *The Chaucer Review* (32.4, 1998), p. 340.

De Lille takes an authoritative position as an educator and spiritual leader, as he adheres to the precepts of the powerful medieval Catholic Church. Nonetheless, he takes the opportunity to illuminate the dichotomy associated with blind devotion and the innately catholic quality of human love. As Frederick Artz asserts:

Close to the heart of the Middle Ages was its love for allegory and symbolism. This had early come into Christian thought from Platonism and Stoicism, and, from the beginning, Christian writers and artists had always looked behind external reality to hunt the purposes of God's ways and will. God's universe was all of a piece, and the greater is always somehow reflected in the lesser. So all human experience is packed with meanings at various levels and one function of the writer, the artist, the teacher, and the preacher was to try to interpret the unknown from the known.<sup>6</sup>

Through the mystical process of an unconstrained dream, de Lille's human character communicates with allegorical creatures within the natural setting of a medieval garden. In this manner, he is able to create a fantasy of love and its connection with dimensions of human interaction, both negative and positive. William Burgwinkle points out that de Lille, a contemporary both of Matthew de Vendôme the French medieval poet and Geoffrey de Vinsauf the medieval grammarian, correlates the influence of these two writers to illustrate that 'men are ultimately responsible for their own behaviour, even when Nature has been negligent in the exercise of the divine plan.'<sup>7</sup> De Lille structures his precepts within this unstructured environment, emphasising the contradictions between religious doctrine and natural spontaneity of medieval human demeanour. His placement of character and apparition in this unusual setting is intended to enlighten his audience of the dichotomy between medieval secular and religious communities, conveying their human frailties as he demonstrates similarities in their behaviours. This configuration illustrates the three essential components of the theory of iconic realism:

- 6 Frederick B. Artz, *The Mind of the Middle Ages: AD 200–1500, An Historical Survey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 376.
- 7 William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 148.

1. The artist creates a realistic iconic figure within his/her work of art that represents an aspect of the culture within a specific community.
2. The artist situates this iconic figure within a realistic setting not accepted by the community as the typical setting in which the figure is generally situated.
3. The artist situates this iconic figure within this unusual setting to bring awareness of the need for cultural reform within the audience's community.

Utilised by writers, artists and musicians to instruct their audiences of an aspect of their culture which is in need of transformation, this semiotic theory creates the opportunity for significant interpretation.

In a similar fashion, Sydney Owenson can be seen as illustrating the theory of iconic realism within her novels and poetry. Owenson's romantic, graceful style of writing demonstrates iconic realism through the interaction of her characters as she seeks to awaken society to the effective conflict resolution that begins with the self. Moreover, her travelogues deal with perceptions that link political and societal concepts with literary works, which might be classified as contextual clues, ones defined by the combined interpretations of the reader and writer. A reading audience experiences the literary work, interprets its meaning, commits it to memory, and then moves on to either discuss it with another reader, who then repeats the interpretation process, or alters it slightly to reflect individual thought processes. The senses, then, are primary in receiving, retaining and delivering information with regard to any form of artistic expression. This becomes evident in the humanist writers, such as de Lille, and will later become apparent in Owenson's writing as well.

One aspect of the intellectual terrain of medieval and early modern humanists is the importance of debate. This exercise of logic and reason becomes a sport among educated men. Because of this vast interest in the human potential, the resultant evolution of a humanistic focus causes many people to trust their own instincts and to rely less on their faith. Society, in general, becomes concerned with potential in the human spirit, rather than the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, leads to a questioning of moral codes and ethics, to a discovery of what Jung would define as the 'anima' that

believes in 'the beautiful and the good.' Unfortunately, as he points out, 'It took more than a thousand years of Christian differentiation to make it clear that the good is not always the beautiful and the beautiful not necessarily good.'<sup>8</sup> Preceding that Jungian discernment by centuries, Alain de Lille uses the technique of iconic realism to illustrate that understanding oneself begins with comprehending the contradictions that exist within the confines of social parameters.

Owenson makes similar differentiations as she uses iconic realism to observe numerous cultural ramifications of political evolution. She is the iconic Irish traveller of an aristocratic kind, observing the reality of post-Revolutionary France. As a pacifist who nevertheless desires change, she calls into question the actions of this post-revolutionary period of 1830:

The forms of popular government cannot be observed without the tolerance of such open channels for the emission of individual sentiment, as must hasten political education ... In these forms, too, the people find a strong entrenchment; while to the spot they are embarrassing obstacles; and he cannot stir a step to extend his power, or to punish the sturdy opponent of his will, without crushing them to the earth.<sup>9</sup>

Owenson's observations address the political aristocracy through the process of linguistic discourse, that is, she uses her memoirs, poetry and tales to instruct, to warn Ireland of the political challenges which face France, and to recreate a particular moment in Ireland's history. Julia Kristeva describes this process:

History, as a succession is partitioned into experiences. Sketched out, it is replaced by atoms of flux, full of desires that are legible through their oral or object-related attachment. These atoms are present in their own time, but in a time that does not flow, a time that brings them or takes them away but does not bind them, does not empty them except to fill them up all the more.<sup>10</sup>

8 Carl Jung, *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, translated by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 29.

9 Sydney Owenson Morgan, *France: 1829–1830* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1830), p. 173. Any future references to this book will be cited as *Fr.*

10 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 107.

As her personal story is revealed is revealed through her travelogue, *France*, Owenson erases the constraints of time and brings her readers right into her own experience. The result is an understanding of, and a psychological link to, the reader. Writing, then, transcends elements of time and allows the reader to unite with the writer in a temporary alignment of mind. Aesthetic exchange of knowledge can be classified as *justification*. Imre Lakatos observes:

All brands of justificationist theories of knowledge, which acknowledge the senses as a source (whether as one source or *the* source) of knowledge are bound to contain a psychology of observation. Such psychologies specify the 'right', 'normal', 'healthy', 'unbiased', 'careful', or 'scientific', state of the senses or the rather the state of mind as a whole in which they observe truth as it is.<sup>11</sup>

Owenson justifies the knowledge gained through her travelling experience as she assimilates the thought processes with her memories, and she concludes with a personal interpretation of her feelings. She demonstrates that humanity needs some knowledge of a primary reasoning in order to make a logical assumption about advancing any self-righteous quest for a specified focus.

Throughout her travelogue, *France in 1829–1830*, Sydney Owenson configures lexical combinations of Irish, English and European colloquialisms, as she draws upon the historical and philosophical perceptions of Descartes, Locke, and Kant to transform her observations into political inquiry. She incorporates the German philosophical influences of Goethe, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, displaying an innovatory awareness of the cultural transformations that she encounters. Her nineteenth-century contemporary scientific approach to recognising human dignity resonates with the philosophy of Auguste Comte, and thereby reveals some of her personal experience with societal expectations. In placing Irish ideology at the centre of English culture at the onset of the rise of the Protestant Ascendancy, her feminine voice maintains a necessary fortitude, placing

11 Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, edited by John Worrall and Gregory Currie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 15.

Irish ideology at the centre of English culture at the onset of the rise of the Protestant Ascendancy while her challenge to the political stance of the United Kingdom in the early decades of the nineteenth century is evidence of her foresight. She observes:

Various sects of political economists, the two factions of romanticists and classicists in literature, the innumerable subdivisions of party in politics – royalists, Jesuits, republicans, constitutionalists, and doctrinaires – shew society to have been an epoch of transition, opinion in suspense, and the remaining modes of thought, upon all great questions, temporary and provisional. (*Fr*, 118)

Owenson's deployment of language reveals an awareness of the nature of Irish culture during this period of literary Romanticism. To enhance the authority and authenticity of her work, Owenson uses specific language variations that demonstrate the attribute of nonconformity: to bring awareness of the changes that have taken place within French culture, she refers to the two forms of 'imaginative philosophy' as 'theological and eclectic'. (*Fr*, 121) She proceeds to explain the cultural dilemma, and the consequential conflict of consciousness, between structured authority and physiological awareness. She refers to the continuing evolution brought about by philosophical discussion within the French government as a 'touchstone of truth, constantly necessary to prevent indifference, and to shake the ever-growing influence of authority.' (*Fr*, 127) Her observations of the evolving French philosophy reflect those of the Irish philosophy that she depicted in her 1807 book, *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland*:

To the whole great scale of civil society, and demonstrating the close-linked dependencies of its remotest parts, affords to the benevolence of the human heart, and the comprehension of the human understanding, a social system, gratifying to the feelings of the one, and ennobling to the faculties of the other.<sup>12</sup>

12 Sydney Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland* (London, Printed for Richard Phillips by T. Gillet, 1807), p. 33.



Clearly, Owenson is greatly concerned that organs of authority should understand the faculties that underlie the human condition and the rights of individuals to express themselves freely.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were empirical forces in Britain which attempted to limit any elevation of human consciousness, both within its own borders and in its colonial territories, particularly in Ireland and in colonial America. Owenson chooses to align her consciousness with those European philosophers who have observed the political upheavals in central Europe and Great Britain. The focus of Descartes on interconnection between mind, body and soul, precedes the understanding of Locke and Kant concerning humanity's need for awareness of a higher consciousness, and for human connection with natural elements. Goethe's influence examines the manner in which the complexities of life reflect scientific and natural laws. Hegel and Schopenhauer observe the spiritual consciousness connected with acquired intellect and represented by societal associations. Comte synthesises the alignment of science and order present in elevated consciousness through his careful analysis of scientific data available during the mid-nineteenth century. As Mike Gane refers to Comte's synthesis:

There are striking discontinuities of two types. The first is the creative formation of the theoretical organisation of the new science itself – the foundation of the object and domain, a decisive process of discovery which involves the overthrow of metaphysical ideas in this domain, Then second these revolutionary new ideas, which are also organised in a new metaphysical state as a long revolutionary transitional phase of western society, in which the French Revolution is just one important episode ... [Comte's] elaboration of scientific method was a search for a way to deal with and to analyse a very specific kind of theoretical complexity.<sup>13</sup>

Comtean data is collected in order to heighten the awareness of his audience to the increasing autonomy being established throughout Europe and the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His writing attempts to capture the scientific explanation for the international fervour that stimulates the desire for achieving individual personal

13 Mike Gane, *Auguste Comte* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 29–30.

potential, and spawns challenges to governmental restrictions on citizens' rights. Auguste Comte sees the individual possibility to create change and he supplies his readers with available scientific knowledge in order to prove that history unfolds through the positive works of individuals within their immediate surroundings, and that leads to constructive innovation.

Owenson, a contemporary of Comte, elucidates for her reading audience the historical relevance of fervent rhetorical expression as a tool towards establishment of some semblance of societal autonomy. This may be compared to Auguste Comte's presentation of his scientific observation of historical discourse:

If we contemplate the positive spirit in its relation to scientific conception, rather than the mode of procedure we shall find that this philosophy is distinguished from the theologico-metaphysical by its tendency to render relative the ideas which were at first absolute. This inevitable passage from the absolute to the relative is one of the most important philosophical results of each of the intellectual revolutions, which has carried on every kind of speculation from the theological or metaphysical to the scientific state.<sup>14</sup>

For Comte, rhetoric and personal experience combine to engender creative thought; the writer's choice of rhetoric conveys a particular experience to his audience and, by communicating fresh ideas, engenders inspiration in them. Comte further explains this evolution of revolutionary rhetoric:

Thus the natural history of humanity involves the history of the globe and all its conditions, physical, chemical, and everything else: while the philosophy of society can not even exist till the entire system of preceding sciences is formed, and the whole mass of historical information offered as material for its analysis. The function of Sociology is to derive from this mass of unconnected material information, which, by the principles of the biological theory of Man, may yield the laws of social life ... in order to transfer it from the concrete to the abstract.<sup>15</sup>

14 Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy* from translation of *Cours de philosophie positive* (New York: C. Blanchard, 1855), this edition translated by Harriet Martineau, AMS Press, 1974, p. 453.

15 Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy*, p. 543.

This collected material influences the consciousness of a community and it both derives from, and originates actions by the community members. Often, these actions take on characteristics that adversely affect certain members of the community. Educators utilise rhetoric to raise the consciousness of the community and thereby form the seeds of change. This can be seen to be achieved through the process of iconic realism. The educators' use of an iconic community features, but placed in a setting within the community that is uncommon for this figure. This can raise questions regarding some aspect of the culture which may need attention.

Like Comte, Owenson as educator places iconic figures in unique situations for her reading audience so as to impart a specific cultural lesson. This apparent literary incongruity is designed to focus readers' attention on whatever matter Owenson, the travelling educator, wishes to emphasise so as to alter their consciousness by placing iconic structures in unusual settings aims at jolting those readers into awareness of the possibility for change within themselves as individuals, and ultimately into realising that there could be alterations in those who currently represent them in government. Once the readers' consciousness has been altered, the effect filters into the community. The power, then, does lie with the pen, and much change in the mindset of a community occurs through, gentle, rhetorical persuasion of the enthusiastic members of a society. Within the framework of creative expression, writers such as Sydney Owenson have used their art to incorporate the human experience, tapping into consciousness on many levels, and through multiple sensory stimulation routes. Often, exploration of this link between consciousness and stimulation leads to discoveries that integrate science with philosophy, a form of integration historically repelled by the Catholic Church. In the judgement of William Grassie:

Comte proposed a theory of cultural history understood as staged developments in which religion would be replaced by science. Thus, science was seen as the rational and natural successor to religion. It was in this milieu that the social sciences arose in the nineteenth century, including the notion of the scientific study of religion.<sup>16</sup>

16 William Grassie in *Zygon* (volume 43, number 1, March 2008), p. 132.

This philosophical link provides a bridge from the enlightened minds of the eighteenth century to those searching for truth in the nineteenth century, and this facilitates growth in international expression of yearning for a voice for the common citizen, any potential universal revolution is, however, restrained by the fiscal and philosophical strength of the aristocracy.

Both Alain de Lille and Sydney Owenson transport their reading audiences to awareness of the need for cultural reform through using the technique of iconic realism as they traverse philosophical terrain, with the aims of advocating human rights, of stressing the need for self-knowledge, and of illustrating the struggle between logical mind and emotional sensitivities. De Lille's medieval protagonist receives advice from a strong, supernatural feminine personality in the course of definition of societal virtue as well as describing the inspirational human quality of wisdom:

For thou seest how men debase the original dignity of their natures ... and transgress humanity's privileged state ... and how, in following their own desires in the pursuit of lust, going to shipwreck in the whirlpools of intemperance, seething in the heat of avarice, flying upon the false wings of pride, giving way to bites of envy, gilding others with hypocrisy of flattery, they fall far from their natural and noble state.<sup>17</sup>

Six centuries later, this discussion of individual freedom and interpretation of law is continued by Sydney Owenson. She is an Irish traveller who travels as a member of the aristocracy and thus can draw from a variety of societal observations of a new France to illustrate the necessity for confidence to prevail within any nation that has been weakened by the ambitions of a select few.

Owenson observes that this restraint of freedom in her native Ireland parallels the restraints evident in the revolutionised France. So illustrated with the garden metaphor, the weeds of aristocracy encroach upon the fruitful potential of the garden's inhabitants, but with change comes possibilities, as Owenson describes:

17 Alain de Lille, *De Planctu Naturae*, Prose VIII, p. 26.

The Rue de Rivoli, with the beautiful gardens in which it opens, and the noble views it commands, from the Champs Elysées to the palace of the Tuileries, stands less a triumphal testimony of the victory its name recalls, than of the physical and moral advancement which a few years of self-government can impress on a nation. (*Fr*, 31)

This example illustrates how Owenson's literary contributions generate definitive and relevant philosophy of change through the careful utilisation of rhetoric and composition. As she explores the influence of French philosophy during her travels to France, she remarks:

With respect to the nature of truth, the greatest certitude we possess, concerns the reality of self, and the reality of our sensations; and next to that, if not perhaps in an equal degree, the reality of the external world. (*Fr*, 119)

Her thoughts echo those of the medieval writer, de Lille, in that they both explore the possibilities associated with sensory perceptions and human parameters. Within the spiritual context, de Lille establishes the concept of the universal union between body, mind and spirit:

The eternal Being has begotten and produced with the everlasting kiss of His spirit, and has given me an own sister. Not only the natural tie of blood binds her to me, but the connection of pure love links us also. And because of this, thine even judgment does not allow thy will to wander from the consideration of my will. For such a union in symmetry, nay, a symmetry in unity, harmonizes our minds in firm peace, that not only is that union clothed in the express image of union but even puts aside mere outward unity and tends towards the essence of identity.<sup>18</sup>

De Lille's focus here is on the qualities of humanity which elevate the collective consciousness to a place wherein eternal peace exists only when that unity is consciously permitted to exist uninhibited by external constraints. His revolutionary ideas embrace the individual spirit of all humanity, regardless of station in medieval human society.

In similar fashion, Owenson's nineteenth-century focus on human rights advocacy begins with understanding the human mind. Her interpretation of life experiences is based on historical responses to specific

18 Alain de Lille, *De Planctu Naturae*, Prose IX, p. 28.

stimuli. Subjection to adverse stimuli induces a feeling of constraint that limits perspective; consequently, opportunities cease to function as positive motivations for continued success. On the other hand, decisions that have contributed to betterment in the quality of existence can become focal points for active and varied participation in life. Owenson witnesses this in her observations of the 'new France' following the Revolution:

Facility of communication, safety, certainty, the mastery over space and time ... unimpeded by the superstition that once made the discovery of a truth the signal for persecution, and the happiness of the many subservient to the unrestricted power of the few ... How I longed, in the impetuosity of my Irish feelings, to fling a stone, and raise a cromlech on the spot, where impressions of such happy augury for the happiness of mankind were awakened! (*Fr*, 15)

As she records her observations of France, her words also describe the societal constraints that she witnesses in Ireland. She sees France making decisions based upon its recent collection of past experiences. The more positive are experiences collected by an individual or a specific community, in this case, the country of France or Ireland, the more likely it is that subsequent decisions will embrace calculated risk in pursuit of a potentially successful pattern.

In the writings of both Alain de Lille and Sydney Owenson, today's readers are exposed to many different societal concepts of justice, religion and social welfare, whether from the enlightenment era or through older philosophical expressions concerning virtue and wisdom. De Lille's technique can be viewed as reflecting the theory of iconic realism, as he uses a lush medieval garden to illustrate the possibilities associated with recognition of the frailties within the authority of any society, and dares to question his own authority as structured in medieval Catholicism. Likewise, philosophical thought from Descartes to Comte influences Owenson's writings, and it characterises her rhetorical choices as, with the elements of semiotic theory of iconic realism, she sets about creating revolutionary designs in the minds of her readers. In her national tales, narrative poetry, and in her travelogue, *France*, she provides strong support for the possibility of influencing nineteenth-century consciousness. Literary influences, representing a time span of seven centuries, or

the years between the writings of de Lille and Owenson, emanate from an enlightened consciousness that transcends the limitations of time. Knowledge gained from sharing this new awareness allows innovative thought to permeate communities with intellectual capabilities that eventually effect positive change.

## Close Connections: Nationalism and Artistic Expression in the *Opere* of Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan and Augusta Holmes

It is noteworthy that, despite the temporal, genre, and stylistic divides that exist between the compositions of Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan (1776?–1859) and Augusta Holmes (1847–1903),<sup>1</sup> these two creative and remarkable women employ kindred artistic approaches, ones that are calculatedly political and nationalistic, and also clearly feminist. At opposite ends of the nineteenth century, and with their home bases in Ireland and France, Owenson/Morgan and Holmes constitute models of independent, liberal thought and action. With confidence and determination, they assume prominent public profiles, weather virulent critical attack, and craft and disseminate their work. The impact of their personal Hiberno-French links is evident in the *œuvre* of each woman, as is their understanding of history, and the resultant interweaving of nationalism and inspiration evinces distinctive qualities, with some interesting similarities in the word and music messages aimed at disparate audiences.

The influences of French and France on Sydney Owenson were multiple and it is probable that they began with her attendance at Madame Terson's Huguenot school in Clontarf House on the outskirts of Dublin.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The date of Sydney Owenson's birth is disputed and several dates have been suggested. Sydney Owenson married in 1812 and henceforth was known as Lady Morgan; Augusta Holmes published some early compositions under the name of Hermann Zenta and later became known in France as Augusta Holmès, officially so when she took out French citizenship in the 1870s, after the Franco-Prussian war.
- 2 Lady Morgan mentions that all conversation was in French and she refers to discipline at the school as 'founded on that of St Cyr'. Lady Morgan, *Lady Morgan's*



As she opines in her memoirs, ‘the dispersion of the French Huguenots who, for reasons very assignable, settled in Ireland, was one of the greatest boons conferred by the misgovernment of other countries on our own’ (*Memoirs*, 106). If that judgment from her adult self relates to the presence in Ireland of ‘eminent preachers, eminent lawyers, and clever statesmen’ (*Memoirs*, 106), it was surely her ability to converse in French and to read French literature which would inflect her political understanding and preferences, and would lead her to France first as a novelistic backdrop, as a source of literary and national models, and later as the subject of one of her best-selling but most controversial books, *France*. In sum, Owenson’s initial voyages to France were in spirit and in theme, and only later, as Lady Morgan, were they undertaken in person.

In one of Sydney Owenson’s first publications, a four-volume novel, *The Novice of St. Dominick* (1805), several of what would be seen as her abiding interests and concerns are revealed.<sup>3</sup> The setting is in sixteenth-century France and, very early in the story, the novice hears a Provençal troubadour playing magical music on a harp (*Novice*, 6–10). This heroine, Imogen, is an early version of Owenson’s many other female characters, women who are portrayed as capable of analysis and action; disguised as a troubadour, Imogen escapes from enclosure in a convent and ultimately, although only in very protracted *bildungsroman* fashion, she achieves knowledge, position and happiness. In addition to depicting the power of music and the capability of a woman in this tale, Owenson foregrounds the value and virtue of the Provençal people whose culture and language were repressed in France, and thereby intimates similarly undervalued qualities in the subjugated Irish. Whilst Irish connections to France are numerous in her writing, it appears that three elements – music, feminine ability, and national cultures and self-determination – are central to her life and

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*Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries, and Correspondence* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., MDCCCLXII), pp. 103, 105, 106. All subsequent reference to this text will be to *Memoirs*.

- 3 Miss Owenson, *The Novice of Saint Dominick* (London: Richard Philips, 1806. <<http://www.archive.org/details/noviceofsaintdom04morg>>. Accessed 22 July 2011). All subsequent references to this text will be to *Novice*.

message, and they will appear and reappear many times, and in different circumstances, in her work.

The pursuit of national freedom for Ireland, and demanding respect for a rich Irish culture, underpin the construction of her 'national tales' and, forty years after the first appearance of the most famous 'national tale', she defines those writings as 'fictitious narrative, founded on national grievances, and borne out by historic fact'.<sup>4</sup> They include *The Wild Irish Girl: a national tale* (1806), and *O'Donnel: a national tale* (1814),<sup>5</sup> in which the protagonist serves in the French army, and *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys: a national tale* (1827),<sup>6</sup> which features a patriotic hero, a United Irishman who goes to France following the 1798 rising. That latter very successful text was immediately translated into French.<sup>7</sup> It is in her most celebrated publication, *The Wild Irish Girl: a national tale*, that music and nationalism are most prominently linked. In clear response to any and all depictions of the Irish and Ireland as inferior, the text foregrounds the riches of the culture in ancient Ireland and the nobility of its surviving families. Centre-stage in the novel is accorded to Glorvina, a heroine who plays the harp and dances Irish dances. These accomplishments too were those of Sydney Owenson who, by that time, was known as a harpist but who could also play the guitar and piano and had collaborated in a successful operetta, *The Whim of the Moment* (*Memoirs*, 316).<sup>8</sup>

4 Lady Morgan (1806), *The Wild Irish Girl: a national tale* (rev. edn, London: Henry Colburn, 1846), p. xxvi. This definition of national tales was not in the original 1806 edition but was given in a new Prefatory Address written by Morgan for the 1846 revised edition of *The Wild Irish Girl*. All subsequent references to this text will be to *WIG*.

5 Lady Morgan, *O'Donnel: a national tale* (London: H. Colburn, 1814).

6 Lady Morgan, *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys: a national tale* (London: Henry Colburn, 1827).

7 Lady Morgan, *Les O'Brien et les O'Flaherty, ou l'Irlande en 1793, histoire nationale* (Paris: C. Gosselin, 1828).

8 Reference to her collaboration with John Cooke on this operetta is actually part of an editorial comment rather than text written by Morgan. The Lord Lieutenant attended the opening night in 1807. The memoirs also make reference (*Memoirs*, vol. 1, 112) to her musical education with Tommaso Giordani whom Axel Klein identifies

Musical and national interests are also to the fore in *Twelve Original Hibernian Melodies*, published by Owenson in 1805.<sup>9</sup> In that volume, she provided words in English for the melodies, thus setting a model and a template for Thomas Moore, whose much more famous *Moore's Irish Melodies* would follow.<sup>10</sup> As she wrote, 'I really believe this country to have a music more original, more purely its own, more characteristic, and possessing more the soul of melody than any other country in Europe' (*Memoirs*, 265).<sup>11</sup> One example of her emphasis on the strong communicative power of music in varying circumstances is expressed by the character of the novice, Imogen: 'And her harp, whose tones she had taught to imitate the strains of her own awakened feelings, and speak to his heart the impassioned nature of her own' (*Novice*, vol. 4, 239). In a different genre, Owenson's aim of giving publicity and wide circulation to a positive image of Ireland, of valorising its musical treasury, and thereby justifying and promoting Ireland's right to independent existence, would continue with a marked French accent in *The Lay of an Irish Harp, or metrical fragments* (1807).<sup>12</sup> Her Prefatory Sketch to this book of poems has the following lines:

I believe the French language above any other abounds with those metrical trifles which, as the offspring of minds elegantly gay and intimately associated, have obtained the name of '*vers de société*,' and which frequently possess an exquisite finesse of thought, that does not exclude nature, and is most happily adapted to the delicate idiom of the language in which it flows. (*Lay*, viii)

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as a towering figure in music in Dublin before 1800, and composer of *L'eroe cinese*, the first *opera seria* performed in Ireland (Axel Klein, *Irish Classical Recordings: a discography of Irish Art Music* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 73). Giordani (1738–1806) is probably best remembered today for his aria 'Caro mio ben'. Cooke was also a student of Giordani.

- 9 Miss Owenson, *Twelve Original Hibernian Melodies, from the Works of the Ancient Irish Bards* (London: Preston, 1805).
- 10 The first volume of Moore's melodies appeared in 1808.
- 11 This statement was made in the course of a letter to Mrs Lefanu, 28 March 1806. The letter is reproduced in the memoirs.
- 12 Miss Owenson, *The Lay of an Irish Harp; or, Metrical Fragments* (London: Richard Philips, 1807. <<http://www.archive.org/details/noviceofsaintdomo4morg>>. Accessed 22 July 2011). Subsequent reference to this text will be to *Lay*.

She gives French titles to some of her poems, including *La rose flétrie* (trans. *The Faded Rose*), the second poem in the collection; several are preceded by quotations from Rousseau, Voltaire, Le Jeune and others. Anticipating criticism, Owenson admits ‘the *too frequent* admission of French quotations’ (*Lay*, x) but claims that ‘the *poetical badiers* of France came “*skipping rank and file*” to my aid, and illustrated MY (LESS felicitous) trifles by theirs, in a language which above every other is constructed: “D’*éterniser la bagatelle.*”’ (*Lay*, xi).<sup>13</sup>

It is not clear whether it was the author or publisher who was responsible for affixing the La Fontaine tag ‘Vrai papillon de Parnasse’ to the title page but, in any case, the French-flavoured poetic efforts reflect Morgan’s interest in France.<sup>14</sup> However, not far from the surface is the condition of Ireland, and especially its new inferior status since the Act of Union. The first poem in the collection is ‘The Irish Harp’ and it opens thus:

Why sleeps the harp of Erin’s pride?  
 Why with’ring droops its Shamrock wreath?  
 Why has that song of sweetness died  
 Which Erin’s harp alone can breathe? (*Lay*, 1)

The penultimate stanza in the same poem refers to ‘the ills that flow/ From dire oppression’s ruthless fang’ (*Lay*, 6), and the concluding line is ‘And *Erin go brach* he boldly sung.’ (*Lay*, 7). Its sympathies could not be clearer. In the poem ‘The Irish Jig,’ a footnote underlines Irish musical talents with a quotation from the esteemed eighteenth-century dance theorist,

13 Capital letters and italics are Owenson’s. Owenson uses the phrase ‘D’*éterniser la bagatelle*’ (trans. ‘to immortalise a mere trifle’) as an epigraph to her poem ‘The Musical Fly’ (*Lay*, 66), crediting the lines ‘De pouvoir sans nous ennuyer/Éterniser la bagatelle’ (trans. ‘to achieve, without tedium/ the immortalisation of a mere trifle’) to De Moustier.

14 In addition, it has been remarked that there were ‘innumerable French quotations in her novels in which France bore no relation to the subject, nor exerted any influence’ (Patrick Rafroidi, *Irish Literature in English, The Romantic Period 1789–1850, Vol. I* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980), p. 44).

Frenchman Jean-Georges Noverre (*Lay*, 140).<sup>15</sup> By adducing this expert opinion, Owenson seeks to further boost the status of Irish native talent and ability. Her poetry is not just illustrative of her personal patriotism: it is designed to stimulate and support that loyalty in others, it is again linked to music for the harp, and it embraces a wider world through its French references. Moreover, it is a public engagement by a woman with nationalism and with politics, an intervention accomplished within the ostensibly uncontroversial and apolitical framework of a book of poems.

The range and extent of Owenson/Morgan's focus on French society in the post-Napoleonic period is revealed in her travel book *France* (1817).<sup>16</sup> 'In 1816 all doors opened before Lady Morgan,'<sup>17</sup> but perhaps her approval of 'revolutionary' ideas was rather too apparent and hence the book drew severe criticism from supporters of the British government – the most lengthy and vitriolic assault being delivered by John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review*, wherein the political nature of condemnation was writ large, commencing with his comment on the book's title: 'it is appropriate to the volume which it introduces, for to falsehood it adds the other qualities of the work, – vagueness, bombast, and affectation.'<sup>18</sup> Croker was again on the attack in the *London Literary Gazette* in 1830 following publication of a revised view of France in *France in 1829–30*: 'the style is abominable, being no more English than a brindled cow or a Danish dog are white; all is overcharged; and we have to regret the foolish exposure of a naturally clever woman, eaten to the core with the most excessive vanity.'<sup>19</sup> The assortment of people with whom Morgan consorted

15 Noverre (1727–1810), acquaintance of Mozart, Frederick the Great, Voltaire, David Garrick and others, is still viewed as one of the fathers of ballet. On the Irish, Owenson quotes him as saying, 'such a natural and native taste for music as I have spoken of, is usually accompanied by, or includes in it, a similar one for dancing.' (*Lay*, 140).

16 Lady Morgan, *France* (London: H. Colburn, 1817).

17 Rafroidi, *Irish Literature in English*, p. 245.

18 John Wilson Croker, review of *France* in *Quarterly Review*, Vol. XVII of April–July 1817, Art XI (London: John Murray, 1817).

19 John Wilson Croker, review of *France in 1829–30* in *The London Literary Gazette & Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, and Sciences &c.*, no. 712 (London: Saturday 11 September 1830: 585–589), p. 589. The personal and political antipathy of John

in France is reflective of her strong musical, artistic, political and feminist interests. When first she went to gather material for the travel book, she was befriended by the Marquise de Villette who arranged that Morgan became a member of the Freemasons, a truly groundbreaking initiation.<sup>20</sup> Later, the Morgans were invited to stay with General La Fayette and his family at La Grange. Evening entertainment at the La Fayettees frequently consisted of the General's stories and those of Lady Morgan, and music by Carbonel.<sup>21</sup> The Dutch painter Ary Scheffer was also there and he painted a portrait of Lady Morgan.<sup>22</sup> The General's reputation as republican and liberal, as well as a distinguished military man who had participated in the final victory over the English in Virginia, would not have endeared him to the government in Dublin. It could be said that Morgan's 'travel' volume linked the social improvements in France to the Revolution, that it outlined the French class and gender structures, and that it suggested potential political parallels for Ireland. However, the book is also a record of her contacts with leading literary, scientific and political figures, especially in Paris in 1816–17. On her various visits between 1816 and 1829, she mentions encounters and soirées with Merimée, Beyle, Dumas, Tolstoy, Stendhal, Rossini, David and many others.<sup>23</sup> The style of her writing is

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Wilson Croker had commenced publicly with his scathing review of *Woman, or Ida of Athens* when it first appeared.

- 20 The Marquise was 'La Belle et Bonne' of Voltaire; the Adoptive Freemason Lodge at her residence in the Faubourg St. Germain was also called 'La Belle et Bonne'. *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry Vol. 1*, ed. Robert Ingham Clegg (New York: Masonic History Company, 1909; Kessinger, 1946, <<http://books.google.ie/books?id=IU5eE6wBeEC&dq=encyclopedia+of+freemasonry>>. Accessed 8 February 2011), p. 30.
- 21 Lady Morgan would undoubtedly have been interested in Joseph-François-Narcisse Carbonel (1773–1855) who had arranged music for the harp, one such work being Luigi Cherubini's 'Duo des deux Journées' for piano or harp in 1801.
- 22 He produced a portrait of General Lafayette at the same time. Scheffer's art was much admired in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century and his portrait of Charles Dickens (1856) is in the National Portrait Gallery, London.
- 23 Patrick Rafroidi judges that Morgan's writings on France 'rendered this country the notable service of freeing it from the ostracism to which Burke and the conservatives had condemned it' (*Irish Literature in English*, p. 44).

effusive and, to the modern reader, affected and excessively verbose – but hostile reception of the text by Tory Britain is indicative both of its contemporary daring and of its appeal for some Irish nationalists, and thence of its political sensitivity, given the perceived danger of French (and Irish) rebellions. It must also be remembered that Lady Morgan's sympathies were known for many years. As early as 1809, she had published *Woman, or Ida of Athens*, a novel set at the time of Turkey's subjugation of Greece; despite no explicit connection to Ireland's situation, the analogous position was patent, and the favourable presentation of Ida's involvement in efforts to free Greece could leave one in no doubt about the author's nationalist leanings, not to speak of her feminist ones.<sup>24</sup> Around the time *France in 1829–30* was published, it was reported that the Morgans' house at No. 35 Kildare Street<sup>25</sup> was under surveillance by government agents because it was considered a meeting place for liberal sympathisers with revolutionary politics. In the light of Morgan's writings and contacts, this was not surprising.<sup>26</sup> However, the danger posed by the situation was one of the factors that led the Morgans to leave Ireland in the 1830s.

Morgan's foregrounding of the ability of women, and of their engagement with their own national interests, was not confined to the three novels already mentioned. The difficulties of another small nation are mentioned in *The Missionary: an Indian Tale* (1811),<sup>27</sup> where there is reference to the plight of Portugal at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup>

24 Miss Owenson, *Woman, or Ida of Athens* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1809).

25 Now number 39, where a blue plaque on the building commemorates Lady Morgan and her time there.

26 Morgan's *Italy* (1821) seemed to present itself, to some extent, as a travel book but her political views were, once again, much in evidence. *Italy* was banned by the Austrian Emperor and the papal powers on account of the author's multiple references to oppression by those and other powers. Lady Morgan, *Italy* (London: H. Colburn, 1821. <[http://www.archive.org/stream/italymorgan03morgiala/italymorgan\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/italymorgan03morgiala/italymorgan_djvu.txt)>. Accessed 27 July 2011).

27 Miss Owenson, *The Missionary: an Indian Tale* (London: J.J. Stockdale, 1811).

28 This is far from being the main message of the novel but, given its minor relevance, the tangential mention is all the more important in terms of underlining the author's preoccupations.

Marguerite, the central character in *The Princess, or the Béguine* (1835)<sup>29</sup> takes very active part in working for her country, Belgium, at a crucial juncture in its history in the early 1830s. The intention and import of referring to the positions of Belgium and Portugal vis-à-vis their more powerful neighbours would seem to be an obvious invitation to discussion of the comparable situation of Ireland.<sup>30</sup> However, in her magnum opus, *Woman and her Master* (1840),<sup>31</sup> Morgan takes a direct historical route, rather than the novelistic one. No longer does she use the three-volume fictional approach to deliver a lesson that might be missed, no longer does she provide women in disguise or women on long learning curves as she sets out the case for the beneficial effects of political participation by women in their various countries. The cases she adduces range far and wide and start with biblical and ancient history, with examples including the successful rules of Deborah and of Nicaulis, Queen of Sheba, as recorded in scripture (*WHM*, 48; *WHM*, 74–76); the triumphs of Agrippina (*WHM*, 180–182) and Plotina (*WHM*, 214–216) in Rome and of Boadicea in Britain (*WHM*, 200–201), and of Helena, mother of Constantine (*WHM*, 301–304). Her argument might be summarised in the quotation (given in French!) from Plato's *de Republica*, and which she places as an initial epigraph to the work:

*Ce sexe, que nous bornons à des emplois obscurs et domestiques, ne serait-il destiné à des fonctions plus nobles et plus relevées ? N'a-t-il pas donné des exemples de courage, de sagesse, de progrès dans toutes les vertus et dans tous les arts ? [...] s'ensuit-il qu'ils doivent être inutile à la patrie ? Non, la nature ne dispense aucun talent pour le rendre stérile. (WHM, 1)*

29 Lady Morgan, *The Princess, or the Béguine* (London: Bentley, 1835).

30 I share the view of Raphael Ingelbien on Morgan's continuing involvement with the situation in Ireland after 1830. Raphael Ingelbien, 'Paradoxes of National Liberation: Lady Morgan, O'Connellism and the Belgian Revolution' in *Éire/Ireland*, Vol. 42, 3 & 4, Fómhar/Geimhreadh / Fall/Winter 2007 (pp. 104–125).

31 Lady Morgan, *Woman and Her Master* (Paris: A. & W. Galignani, 1840). Subsequent references to this text will be to *WHM*.



(Could not this sex, which we restrict to lowly and domestic tasks, be destined for more noble and elevated office? Have they not given proof of courage, wisdom, of being advanced in all virtues and arts? does it follow that they must be useless to the country? No, nature does not bestow a talent for it to be left unused.)

The projection and encouragement of nationalist or republican ambition, the representation of music as a particular badge of Irish identity, the obvious affinity with French literature and political example, the promotion of women's ability – these were what Sydney Owenson started to propagandise in a period not long after the French Revolution, and immediately following the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, and the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland. It was an era when the rhetoric of freedom was a common currency. However, despite the proximity in time of the famous Parisian salons, liberty for a woman was generally tightly circumscribed, her educational opportunities were limited, and the public discourse decreed a feminine role to be domestic. Yet, the young Sydney Owenson managed to breach many barriers so that she could embrace and work for causes in which she believed. It is arguable that, over and above her native abilities and ambition, two particular circumstances facilitated her: the death of her mother before Sydney reached her teenage years, and the involvement with her father who was an actor and who did not set bounds to what his daughter could achieve. Relative freedom from traditional role models, close association with a male parent, and exposure to the arts, all assisted in honing her talents and in engendering the self-belief that led to extraordinary success. It could hardly be coincidental that Augusta Holmes should experience similar early bereavement, grow up in an artistic milieu, perceive no limit to her possible attainments, and go on to major musical feats.

‘Ce météore dérangent’<sup>32</sup>

When she was born in Paris in 1847 (and thus about seventy years after the birth of Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan), it might not have been expected that the career of Augusta Holmes would be so interwoven with Franco-Irish connections, or that it would evince close links with nationalism, or even that there would be a career in any sphere other than genteel and cultured domesticity for Augusta Mary Ann Holmes. It would hardly have been anticipated that she would blaze a trail as a composer of music and libretti because, despite any hoped-for change over the course of the nineteenth century, the years of her lifetime still remained a period when women were firmly excluded from serious music and were consigned and confined to lighter offerings. Both the known facts and the multiple stories around her parentage and upbringing, however, combine to suggest an atypical childhood and education. Her father was a retired army man, Major Charles William Scott Dalkeith Holmes (possibly born in Youghal, Co Cork, or maybe in Dublin, or perhaps in Craven Street, London, and with connections to Co Tyrone and, more fancifully, to the O’Briens, kings of Ireland)<sup>33</sup> who moved to Paris; there he married Tryphina Shearer, a beautiful sixteen-year-old of Scottish descent. When Augusta was born twenty years later, her godfather was Alfred de Vigny who lived beside the Holmes family in Paris. It is possible that her godfather was also her father; Vigny continued to be closely involved with her life and her edu-

32 This ‘disturbing star’ description is given by music critic Gérard Géfen (who is also a biographer of Augusta Holmès) in the sleeve notes for *Augusta Holmès: Orchestral Works* (München: Marco Polo, 1994), p. 9.

33 Biographical details provided by several different sources do not accord. Even the account given by her son-in-law, Henri Barbusse, manages to err on the place of birth of Augusta. There is general agreement, however, that Holmes was not unhappy to have a number of conflicting or fanciful stories in circulation. Michèle Friang, *Augusta Holmès ou la gloire interdite: Une femme compositeur au XIX siècle* (Paris: Autrement, 2001), p. 21; Gérard Géfen, *Augusta Holmès, l’outrancière* (Paris: Belfond, 1988), pp. 53–55.

cation.<sup>34</sup> The artistic atmospheres to which Augusta was exposed from a very young age were certainly multiple: the combination of the poet Vigny, Augusta's mother who painted and published in prose and in verse,<sup>35</sup> and the major, a polyglot father with a library of 12,000 books,<sup>36</sup> together with the literary and artistic circles in which they mixed, furnished an eclectic cultural capital on which Augusta could and did draw. However inspiring

- 34 The physical resemblance of Augusta to Vigny was often remarked upon, as was the similarity of her daughters both to their father Catulle Mendès and to Vigny. A Renoir painting of their three daughters, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, is suggestive of the likenesses. Auguste Renoir, *The Daughters of Catulle Mendès* (1888), <<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110002470>>. Accessed 8 February 2011.
- 35 A report on the annual exhibition of painting and sculpture at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1837 mentions an exceptional self-portrait by Mrs Dalkeith Holmes 'which may fairly meet public inspection, and come off with honour' (*Freeman's Journal*, 26 May 1837, p. 3). Her article entitled 'French Literature: Henri Beyle (de Stendhal)' appeared in *The Dublin University Magazine* (Vol. XXII, October 1843, pp. 403–420). It was presumably that article which gave rise to the comment in a book by Marcel Moraud that 'En 1843, Mrs Dalkeith Holmes célèbre Stendhal' (Paul de Reul, review of Marcel Moraud, *Le Romantisme français en Angleterre, de 1814 à 1848* in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, Vol. 13, 3–4 (1934), pp. 799–803). Furthermore, she is identified as the author of *A Ride on horseback to Florence through France and Switzerland, Letters by a Lady* (London: John Murray, 1842) through her name, Mrs Dalkeith Holmes, being written in on the title page of the copy in Oxford University. However, the British Library catalogue gives the author's name as Augusta McGregor Holmes. Google Books have a sixty-three-page book by Augusta McGregor Holmes (sic) called *The Law of Rouen: a dramatic tale*, published by Mrs D. Holmes in 1837; the British Library catalogue adds the information that the book was privately printed but gives the author's name as Mrs Dalkeith Holmes. Augusta Holmes's own copy of that text appeared in the June 2008 catalogue of a French bookseller, priced at €450 (<[http://www.librairie-bertran-rouen.fr/V\\_Catal/catalogue\\_juin\\_2008.pdf](http://www.librairie-bertran-rouen.fr/V_Catal/catalogue_juin_2008.pdf)>. Accessed 8 February 2011).
- 36 Géfen, *Augusta Holmès*, p. 35. The major was also a Shakespeare enthusiast and an amateur artist. He had a model of Westminster Cathedral in their garden at Versailles, which he lit with candles at night (Friang, *Augusta Holmès ou la gloire interdite*, pp. 21, 24). A contemporary, Henrietta Corkran, remembered him as 'jolly old Captain Dalkeith Holmes ... reputed to be a great gossip with *la chronique scandaleuse* (trans. the latest scandals) at his fingers' ends' (Rollo Myers, 'Augusta Holmès: a Meteoric Career' in *The Musical Quarterly* 53.3 (July 1967), pp. 365–376).

were the literary influences, it would be in musical composition that she would make her name.

The unusually wide nature of her musical education provided Augusta Holmes with tools not commonly available to female students. Steered towards painting and drawing, she was prevented from studying music until her mother died; aged just eleven, she then embarked on piano, harmony, composition, orchestration and singing studies with the most prestigious musicians, amongst them Hyacinthe Closé, eminent clarinettist, and Guillot de Sainbris, her voice teacher, at whose house she met Charles Gounod, Ambroise Thomas, Camille Saint-Saëns, poets, novelists and painters. At the age of twelve, she conducted her own short composition for brass band in Versailles. That achievement speaks of self-belief, drive and ability, perhaps even of over-confidence at a very young age. However, it was those qualities that facilitated her self-fashioning (somewhat akin to that realised by Lady Morgan) and propelled her to ignore convention, to disregard the assumption of masculine pre-eminence in musical composition, to merit the admiration and encouragement of fellow composers and musicians like Wagner, Liszt, Franck, Saint-Saëns, Gounod and D'Indy, and to produce a significant opus of symphonies, lyric dramas, symphonic poems, orchestral and vocal works. Attracting large numbers of prestigious admirers in the fields of politics and painting, as well as music and poetry, can only have further bolstered her assurance even as it complicated her life.<sup>37</sup>

In her compositions, Augusta Holmes retained extensive control by writing the words of her songs, the libretti of her operas, choral works and symphonic odes, and she determined stage instructions. Although it might be considered a post-Wagnerian model (or a pre-Beckettian one), it permits additional understanding of the thinking behind some of her musical scores. The sentiments of her war song *Vengeance*, written during the siege of Paris while she worked as a nurse, are strongly nationalistic:

37 The list of those who were thoroughly smitten by Augusta is lengthy and, in addition to Catulle Mendès (father of their children), it includes poets, statesmen, musicians and painters. Notable amongst them were Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Camille Saint-Saëns, Émile Deschamps, Henri Régnauld, Henri Cazalis, George Clairin, Émile Ollivier, Frédéric Mistral, Hans Richter, Stéphane Mallarmé and César Franck.

*Pour tes champs ravagés/ Tes palais saccagés/ Tes drapeaux outragés/ Ô France !/ Pour les mères en deuil/ Pour les fils au cercueil/ Pour le sang sur le seuil/ Vengeance ! Vengeance ! Vengeance !*

(O France, For your devastated countryside, your ransacked halls, your insulted flags, for mourning mothers, for sons in their coffins, for blood on the doorstep, Vengeance! Vengeance! Vengeance!)

Although composed some years later, that same nationalistic emotion underpins *Lutèce*, her symphony for voice and orchestra (with recitative in verse) which depicts the battle of the Gauls against the Romans. Both compositions accept, and even encourage, bloody battle in the cause of freedom. That belief seems also to underlie the feelings and actions of Jason in Holmes's very successful *Les Argonautes* (1880) as he seeks to gain the Golden Fleece and so recover his kingdom. Clearly, and up to this point, the matters of national freedom, foreign oppression, uprising, and the heroic, are important ones for the composer who became a naturalised Frenchwoman in 1879<sup>38</sup> and from then wrote her name as Augusta Holmès, in solidarity with the country of her birth. Questions must be asked about someone who up to then had technically been a British citizen, but yet who was almost always described as Irish: to what extent did national identity impinge on her thinking, emerge in her compositions, and feature in her public profile and endeavours?

Perhaps one obvious answer is to be found in a symphonic poem entitled *Irlande*, published in 1882 at the height of the Land War, in the year following the arrest of Michael Davitt, the passing of the Coercion Acts at Westminster, and the arrest of Parnell who was on the way to attaining hero status. Moreover, *Irlande* was not her sole work in connection with Irish national events, nor was it an isolated 1880s intervention in the cause of smaller nations and their repression by adjacent powers. It was followed in 1883 by another symphonic poem, *Pologne* (a divided Poland was ruled by Prussia, Russia and Austria and the first two imposed German

38 In March 1879, according to Philip Hale (Philip Hale, ed., *Modern French Songs v.II* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1904), p. x). Or was it in 1873? (Géfen, *Augusta Holmès*, p. 123).

and Russian languages).<sup>39</sup> 1888 would see the public performance of her *Ludus pro Patria/ Patriotic Game* (named after and inspired by the paintings by Puvis de Chavannes). 1889 marks the apogée of her nationalistic, patriotic and republican involvement, when Holmès is *the* artistic initiator, composer, designer and producer of France's spectacular celebration of the Revolution's centenary with a cast of over 1,200 in her *Ode triomphale* in a specially built auditorium. Her politico-musical record did not end after two decades: *La chanson des gars d'Irlande* (1892) is replete with traitors, tyrants, revolt and victory; the backdrop for the opera *La Montagne noire* (1895) is that of the fight of the Montenegrins against Turkish oppression – and therein perhaps one might discern some shades of Sydney Owenson and *Ida of Athens*. The sympathies of la Holmès seem indisputable and the detail of their presentation in *Irlande* and *l'Ode triomphale* is fascinating and more than convincing in terms of her ability and drive.

### *L'Ode triomphale*<sup>40</sup>

Camille Saint-Saëns wrote of *l'Ode triomphale*: 'Il fallait plus qu'un homme pour chanter le centenaire ; à défaut d'un dieu impossible à rencontrer, la République française a trouvé ce qu'il lui fallait: une Muse!' (trans. Something more than an ordinary mortal was required to celebrate the centenary; in the absence of the impossible-to-find God, the French Republic found what was needed: a muse.) He praised Holmès for 'la sûreté de main, la puissance et la haute raison avec lesquelles l'auteur avait su discipliner

39 Unrest was in the air and the previous year was one when artists deployed some significant nationalistic 'weaponry': for example, the exhibition of a painting, 'The Prussian Homage' by Polish nationalist Jan Matejko, and the first public performance of Smetana's *Ma Vlast*.

40 The success of this composition and event led to an invitation from Florence to compose a cantata for celebrations of Dante and Beatrice the following year. That *Hymne à la Paix* was a tremendous triumph for Holmès.

ces formidables masses chorales, dompter cette mer orchestrale<sup>41</sup> (trans. her sure hand, the power and discernment with which the composer controlled the tremendous massed choirs and mastered the vast orchestra). Those ‘formidables masses chorales’ numbered 900 from twelve different choirs, while there were 300 in the orchestra. Some idea of the scale and grandeur of the production whose like was never achieved before or since, can be gleaned from the verbal description by Hugues Imbert:

*Voici qu'elle était la disposition de la scène : un amphithéâtre entouré de colonnes chargées de trophées auxquels s'entremêlent des palmiers et des lauriers énormes, des rampes établies à droite et à gauche enveloppant un autel de forme ancienne, dressé au centre de la scène. – Au milieu un large escalier conduisant à cet autel qui domine une plate-forme. Au dessus, un gigantesque drapeau tricolore, suspendu à des trophées d'armes, de fleurs, et de drapeaux ; autour, quatre trépièdes où brûlent des parfums. Enfin, derrière l'autel, une seconde plate-forme et, tout au fond de la scène, des montagnes lointaines avec leurs forêts et leurs cités (les Vosges). (Imbert, 146.)*

(The stage was laid out as follows: an amphitheatre surrounded by urn-bearing columns, interspersed with enormous palm trees and laurels; ramps were set to the right and left, wrapping around an altar of antique design which was erected at centre stage; in the middle, a grand staircase led to that altar which dominated the platform; above was an enormous tricolour flag, hung from weaponry and floral trophies and from flags. surrounding them were four incense burners on trivets. Finally, behind the altar was another platform and at the very back of the stage, distant mountains with forests and towns (the Vosges).)

The audience numbered 22,000 on 11 September 1889<sup>42</sup> and Holmès gave her services free.<sup>43</sup> Those crowds were sent home with her words for the final anthem ringing in their ears: ‘Gloire à toi, Liberté, Soleil de l’Univers’ (trans. Glory to you Liberty, Light of the World).

41 Hugues Imbert, *Nouveau Profils de Musiciens* (Paris: Librairies Fischbacher, 1892), p. 159.

42 Friang, *Augusta Holmès ou la gloire interdite*, p. 15.

43 Elaine Fine, ‘Augusta Holmes’, <<http://www.kith.org/jimmosk/misc.html#Holmes>>. Holmes donated the profits from the one performance that was not open to the public to flood victims in Antwerp.

*Irlande*, poème symphonique

*Irlande* is one of Holmès's most frequently played compositions. Much interest resides in its nationalistic intent and its musical innovation, but also in the subtle and skilful way in which Holmès intertwines Irish and French history and literature.<sup>44</sup> The origins of Irish national feeling and its musical expression would appear to have been instilled in the young Augusta Holmes by her father who, rather remarkably, was described by Cosima Wagner as 'the old Fenian'.<sup>45</sup> Holmes herself said that as a rather solitary child, she 'grew to love the oppressed and to hate the oppressor; and it would seem that those feelings are now inextinguishable in me for the dominating ideas in all my works are those of liberty and of fatherland.'<sup>46</sup> In *Irlande*, there are the subjugated people, the reminiscences of former times before oppression, and then the hope for future liberty through action that will be stimulated by music and verse. In terms of musical originality, *Irlande* has at least one ground-breaking facet: the score begins with a one-minute

44 The piece continued to enjoy popularity. A performance is on record at the first Feis Ceoil in Dublin in May 1897, and it was the music chosen to be played at the burial of César Franck.

45 Géfen, *Augusta Holmès*, p. 112. It is curious that the word 'Fenian' also occurs in connection with a Holmes grave in Imphrick church graveyard, south of Buttevant in Co. Cork. A testimony (given in 1919) by Mr. Langley Brasier-Creagh J.P. of Streamhill, Doneraile, Co. Cork records: 'At the time of "the Fenians", all the arms that were raided about the country were stored in the Holmes tomb in Imphrick churchyard, and in this way baffled the most strenuous efforts of the authorities to trace them' (<[http://www.corkpastandpresent.ie/places/northcork/grovewhitentotes/shinanaghtowoodville/gw4\\_206\\_221.pdf](http://www.corkpastandpresent.ie/places/northcork/grovewhitentotes/shinanaghtowoodville/gw4_206_221.pdf)>. Accessed July 2011).

46 'A Great Irishwoman', *Freeman's Journal*, 16 January 1886, p. 6. This article was written by George Moore although not signed. All subsequent references to this article will be to A Great Irishwoman. Recollecting his first visit to the Holmes house at Versailles, Villiers de l'Isle Adam mentions the 'hymnes irlandais que la jeune virtuose enleva de manière à évoquer en nos esprits de forestières visions de pins et de bruyères lointaines' (trans. the patriotic Irish songs performed brilliantly by the young virtuoso and which evoked for us forest-clad visions of fir trees and distant heathers). (Imbert, *Nouveau Profils de Musiciens*, p. 143).



long clarinet solo through which Holmes intends to depict the lament of a lonely shepherd for Ireland's days of former glory. Such a wind solo was unprecedented in orchestral composition, and the feature would not be repeated by any composer for a decade.<sup>47</sup> It can be postulated that it is the sounding of this clarinet which links the Irish and French nations, and does so through Alfred de Vigny, 'La Chanson de Roland' and Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*. In the light of Holmès's declared Irish sympathies, her closeness to Vigny and his poetry, and the wide circulation of Moore's melodies in France in the nineteenth century, there appears to be a strong case for these suggested relationships.

Alfred de Vigny's poem *Le Cor* opens with the line 'J'aime le son du Cor, le soir, au fond des bois' (trans. I love the sound of the horn in the evenings, deep in the woods) and in the final stanza that line mutates to 'Dieu! que le son du Cor est triste au fond des bois!' (trans. God! how sad is the sound of the horn deep in the woods). Vigny's evocation of *La Chanson de Roland*, and thence of the national importance of that tale, is suggested by Holmès in that plaintive clarinet solo and thereby she conjures up for her symphonic poem the centrality of heroism in the pursuit of national independence, the vicissitudes of national progress and history, the possibilities for Ireland in the future. The initial clarinet solo is not the only element in the symphonic poem which is reminiscent of this Vigny composition; two thirds of the way through the composition, there is a reminder yet again of 'le son du cor'. In support of the putative poetic and national connections, it is probably not coincidental that, in the same year, Ange Flégier published his song 'Le Cor', an adaptation of the Vigny poem; national stirrings were in the air, le cor was sounding in France.

*Irlande* has many other different ingredients and aspects, and in the space of its short fourteen minutes, it has beautiful long lyrical phrases, it has intimations and threats of war, and it has elements of what has been called the fashionable 'Irish Pastiches' that were popular toward the end of

47 As Elaine Fine has noted, Claude Debussy commences his *Après-midi d'un faune* (1892) with a thirty-second flute solo (Elaine Fine, 'Augusta Holmes,' <<http://www.kith.org/jimmosk/misc.html#Holmes>>).

the nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup> Not a pastiche however, but a noticeable echo, is the incorporation of a tune to which Thomas Moore put the words of 'Let Erin Remember', the opening lines of which are: 'Let Erin remember the days of old,/ Ere her faithless sons betray'd her; / When Malachi wore the collar of gold,/ Which he won from her proud invader, / When her kings, with standard of green unfurl'd, /Led the Red-Branch Knights to danger!'<sup>49</sup> The choice of that song, rather than any other of Moore's, would seem to be a definite response from Holmès to the problems of Parnell and Ireland in 1882. Its stirring martial air, woven into the symphonic poem, is intentionally inspirational and as Holmès phrased it: 'Sing ye wretched people your ancient song of triumph for the heroes of ancient Ireland are rising from their tombs to set their people free' ('A Great Irishwoman').

It is possible that Augusta Holmes physically travelled to Ireland on only one occasion but she found the memory of that visit to be 'ineffaceable'. Memory became dream, and dream gathered detail and life: 'scene after scene grew clearer, until the patriotism that has survived as generation followed generation to the grave, the roar of the Atlantic surges, and the many misted aspects of Ireland's mountains at length resolved themselves into verses and cadences' ('A Great Irishwoman'). She re-visited Irish images on numerous occasions, in 1880 with her libretto for a four-act opera *Norah Greena*, and with songs such as *La chanson des gars d'Irlande* at the height of the Land War of the 1880s, and *Le Noël d'Irlande* in 1890. As might be expected, vengeful bloodshed, hope of liberty, revolt and victory mix in *La chanson des gars d'Irlande*: 'Mais il viendra, le jour béni,/ Où l'esclave sera

48 I am indebted to Dr Una Hunt, musician and musicologist, for information on these pastiches and their prevalence; she also commented on the lush orchestration of *Irlande* and its suitability for film soundtrack. (personal communication: 10 May 2011). The quality of orchestration was an aspect also noted by Sir Henry Wood who once produced Augusta Holmes' symphonic poem *Irlande*, 'which was very fine and admirably orchestrated.' Quoted by W. George S. Whiting, 'Letter to the Editor' in *Gramophone* (November 1930), p. 58. In turn, Whiting was quoting the recollection of English composer Ethel Smyth in her article in *London Mercury* (October 1921).

49 In his *Irish Melodies vol. 2*, Moore put his own words 'Let Erin Remember' to a melody called 'The Red Fox' from the Holden collection. Moore's melodies were very well known in Paris in the nineteenth century.

le maître,/ OÙ les martyrs auront puni/ L'Étranger, le Tyran, le Traître !/  
Où c'est leur sang en criant "Hourrah"/ Nous boirons à l'Irlande' (trans.  
But the blessed day will come/ When slave will be master, When the mar-  
tyrs will have punished/The tyrant and the traitor! /Wherever their blood  
might be, shouting Hurrah, /We'll drink to Ireland).

Less anticipated might be the entwining of misery and hope in *Le Noël d'Irlande*, the text of which is supplied below:

Noël d'Irlande	An Irish Christmas
Rêvez, rêvez, Que le divin Noël vous apporte du pain	Dream, dream That holy Christmas will bring you bread
Rêvez, rêvez, Que sur la lande vous chauffez vos pieds nus aux flammes du sapin.	Dream, dream, That you may warm your bare feet at a wood fire on the moors
Rêvez, rêvez, Chanteurs d'Irlande Que les temps reviendront des Héros et des Rois.	Dream, dream, Those who sing Ireland That the time of heroes and kings will return.
Rêvez, rêvez, Que Dieu commande et qu'il vous rend La Harpe et le Trèfle, et la Croix.	Dream, dream That God will rule, and deliver to you The Harp, the Shamrock and the Cross.
Rêvez, rêvez, Martyrs d'Irlande Que le jour est venu de gloire et d'équité !	Dream, dream Irish Martyrs That the day of glory and equity has come
Rêvez et que le Noël vous rende La force des aïeux avec la Liberté.	Dream too that Christmas will give you The strength of your ancestors and Freedom.*

\* Augusta Holmes, ed., Philip Hale, *Modern French Songs v.II* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1904), pp. 49–52.

This is not one of Augusta Holmes's best-known musical works but the words, of course composed by her, are indicative of her continuing passionate involvement with Ireland. The text conveys the hunger and cold of a disheartened people and intimates that a fight requiring martyrs is envisaged. The underlying motivation is further reinforced by the multiple messages in the musical score: for instance, the piece is written in  $3/4$  time, thus suggesting a waltz, but yet it is marked 'Largo', and its beat structure is nearer to a dirge than a dance and therein is the warning that Christmas enjoyment is far from certain. The song has been described as one of hope,<sup>50</sup> possibly on account of the repetition of the lines 'Rêvez, rêvez' (trans. Dream, dream) but it may be more accurate to read this purported Christmas prayer as bitter-sweet, as an unmistakable and unapologetic accusation and a not-so-subtle cry for redress. Holmès's technical stressing and underpinning of her verbal meaning is meticulous: there is melodic and harmonic variation in each of the six stanzas for the 'Rêvez' calls; key words, especially 'gloire' and 'd'équité' (trans. glory, equity), are emphasised by their allocation to sustained notes.<sup>51</sup>

By all accounts, Augusta Holmes was a brilliant pianist, with a wonderful singing voice and style, and was a major force in French music especially from the 1880s, showing enormous personal ambition and courage in a narrow music world that did not want to make room for a woman composer. In relation to *La Montagne Noire* in 1895, one Parisian critic was blunt: 'Nous ne souhaitons pas ouvrir les portes de nos théâtres et de nos opéras à des femmes auteurs'<sup>52</sup> (trans. we do not wish to open the doors of our theatres and opera houses to women composers). Women soloists were acceptable, and especially so if they confined themselves to light music, drawing room pieces, and interpreting the work of others; otherwise, the opposition was overt, unambiguous, and strong. It took a resilient, gifted and determined person to pursue a successful creative career in the face of

50 Karen Jee-Hae McCann, *Cécile Chaminade: a composer at work* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2003), p. 47.

51 McCann, *Cécile Chaminade*, p. 48. I am indebted to Karen Jee-Hae McCann for this significant point concerning sustained notes.

52 Géfen, *Augusta Holmès*, p. 222.

such opposition and it is most probably that the political convictions of la Holmès fed into, and derived strength from, her musical talent and verse ability. Nationalism, and perhaps especially Irish nationalism, was extremely close to her heart and was insistently promoted by her in her compositions. With a surprising, if slight, reflection of Lady Morgan who had deployed the harp to such propagandist effect, a line in one of Holmès's last songs reads: 'Dans mon cœur est la Harpe d'Or' (trans. The golden harp is in my heart). With some resemblance to the actions of two Irish nationalists and feminists, Constance Markievicz and Maud Gonne, Holmès converted to Catholicism in 1901, taking the baptismal name of 'Patritia' in honour of her Irish ancestry.

At different ends of the nineteenth century, Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan and Augusta Holmès moved in prominent social and creative circles, they were more than adept at presenting images of themselves, they chose artistic expression in different genres, and had very dissimilar lifestyles. Similarly, both women were frequently attacked in life and almost forgotten after their deaths. They were exceptional in the very public positions they occupied in a century when it was extremely rare and difficult for women to do so. Although divided by decades, they are close in many of their Franco-Irish and liberal connections. Their nationalist impulses had much in common in that they were focused on Ireland, on France, and on other countries beyond those shores. Moreover, their engagement with history and culture, and their particular intertwining of political aims and nationalistic sympathy with words and music, distinguish and distance their artistic endeavours from what is often called musical nationalism.

PART II

Philosophical, Cultural and Commercial Exchanges  
in Space and Time



EUGENE O'BRIEN

## The Year(s) of the French: The French Revolution as a Spatio-Temporal Event

Intellectual and political connections between Ireland and France have been long-established at all levels of societal, linguistic and cultural interaction. In terms of historical specificity, the French Revolution has been seen as a template for the actions and ideological position of the United Irishmen, whose 1798 Rebellion owed a lot, in both form and substance, to the revolution that began in Paris on 14 July 1789. In this chapter, I will look at how the French Revolution travelled to Ireland, and also at how what I term the 'real' of the revolution has travelled through time to have very different effects on the Irish and French public spheres.

In a historical context, Theobald Wolfe Tone, the leader of the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland, said that his political position was influenced largely by the French Revolution, which, as he wrote later 'changed in an instant the politics of Ireland', dividing political thinkers from that moment into 'aristocrats and democrats'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the central socio-political influence of the French Revolution was the libertarian and emancipatory thrust of its informing secular Enlightenment ethic. Enlightenment theories of society and government, embodied in practice by the French Revolution, offered an example of how a seemingly stratified and hierarchical society could be completely changed according to the will of the people. They also offered an ethical demand that alterity, in the shape of the people, be protected by the force of law.

It was through the shaping of this will of the people that the United Irishmen sought to achieve their aims. Drawing again on the example of

1 William Theobald Wolfe Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, 2 vols, vol. 1 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1826), p. 43.



revolutionary France, the press would be a forum wherein conflicting ideas and ideologies would be debated and mediated in the light of the Kantian *credo* of the Enlightenment, *Sapere Aude*, 'have courage to use your own reason'.<sup>2</sup> That most of the sources of this Enlightenment knowledge came from locations outside Ireland further underpins the cosmopolitan impetus of the United Irishmen, and the French connection. To this end, pamphlets, which distilled the writings of Enlightenment thinkers, were distributed among the peasants of the north of Ireland, between 1795 and 1797, and these contained the writings of Godwin, Locke (especially his notion of the implied contract between ruler and ruled), and Paine, as well as those of Voltaire and De Volney.<sup>3</sup> The selection of writers distributed and read by the United Irishmen makes for an impressive list of liberal thinkers on social and political issues, and the Francophone origin of so many of these writers further underscores the point: Montesquieu, Schiller, Raynal, Condorcet, Rousseau, Diderot, Sieyès and de Montesquieu.

Print and reading were crucial to the disseminating of such ideas, and the logistics of this enterprise were impressive, with a whole print-based culture set up to broadcast the United Irishmen's agenda. Kevin Whelan cites at least fifty printers in Dublin, thirty-four Irish provincial presses and some forty newspapers in print,<sup>4</sup> all of whom were sympathetic to the United Irish cause. The United Irishmen's own paper, the *Northern Star*, a vehicle for the spread of Enlightenment and revolutionary ideals, at its peak sold some 4,200 copies per issue. It is reckoned that, due to collective reading of each copy by at least ten people, the effective readership was some 42,000.<sup>5</sup> Arthur O'Connor enunciated the power of the press to disseminate ideas which, in turn, created an educated social community, and the will for political change, when he asked what had overturned the despot-

2 Isaac Kramnick (ed.), *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 1.

3 Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760–1830*, Critical Conditions Series (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 63.

4 Whelan, *Tree of Liberty*, p. 63.

5 Whelan, *Tree of Liberty*, p. 66.

ism of France, and answered: 'the Press, by the writings of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Seyes [*sic*], Raynal, and Condorcet', and he went on to note that it was 'the Press and *The Northern Star*' that illumined 'Belfast, the Athens of Ireland'.<sup>6</sup>

So the ideas of the French Revolution were significant for the United Irishmen, but there was also the prospect of a more practical form of French aid, which arrived on 22 August 1798 in the shape of three French frigates (*Concorde*, *Médée*, and *Franchise*), which sailed into Killala Bay in north-west county Mayo. On board was 'a small French expeditionary force of, according to the embarkation docket, only 1,019 soldiers (80 officers and 939 soldiers) armed with 2,520 muskets, under the command of General Jean Joseph Amable Humbert'.<sup>7</sup> After an initial success, this force surrendered on 23 September after defeats at Ballinamuck on 8 September, and at Killala on 23 September. On 16 September, James Napper Tandy landed 'with 270 French troops on Rutland Island, off the west coast of county Donegal', but he just issued a proclamation and then sailed back to France. On 12 October, a more substantial French invasion force of 2,800 men under General Hardy, arrived in Donegal Bay in a fleet of ten ships commanded by Admiral Jean Baptise Françoise Bompard, but it was defeated by a British fleet under Sir John Warren, and it was after this battle that Wolfe Tone was captured aboard the flagship *Hoche* in Lough Swilly.<sup>8</sup>

While French aid resulted in a military failure, the importance of the French influence on Tone, and on Irish political thought, cannot be underestimated. Tone himself spent over two years living in revolutionary Paris and he met a significant number of important members of the French government. He tells us himself of the importance of the Revolution:

I do not look upon the French Revolution as a question subject to the ordinary calculation of politics; it is a thing which is to be; and, as all human experience has verified that the new doctrine ever finally subverts the old; as the Mosaic law subverted

6 Arthur O'Connor, *The Beauties of the Press* (Dublin: Press, 1800), p. 34.

7 Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), p. 6.

8 Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, p. 110.

idolatry; as Christianity subverted the Jewish dispensation; as the Reformation subverted Popery; so, I am firmly convinced, the doctrine of Republicanism will finally subvert that of Monarchy, and establish a system of just and rational liberty, on the ruins of the thrones of the despots of Europe.<sup>9</sup>

For Tone, the revolution is a paradigm-shift in terms of the way in which the societies of his time were structured, but it would be a mistake to locate this influence purely and simply in the historical past. As Slavoj Žižek notes, the 'real' effect of the French Revolution is not to be found in the 'immediate reality of the violent events in Paris, but in how this reality appeared to observers and in the hopes thus awakened in them'. He sees the account of what happened in Paris as belonging to the 'temporal dimension of empirical history; the sublime image that generated enthusiasm belongs to Eternity'.<sup>10</sup> And Walter Benjamin makes the parallel point that the true task of Marxist historiography, apropos the French Revolution, is 'to unearth the hidden potentialities (the utopian emancipatory potentials) which were betrayed in the actuality of revolution and in its final outcome (the rise of utilitarian market capitalism)'.<sup>11</sup>

It was at this level of thought that Francophone influence is to be found in the Irish political *imaginaire*. The whole purpose of the United Irishmen's efforts to educate the populace is underpinned by a belief in the ability of the thinking individual to improve his or her lot, and in the understanding of the equation, later to be codified by Michel Foucault, of power and knowledge. The selection of writers distributed and read by the United Irishmen reinforces the claim that their views on identity were necessarily pluralist – their aim was to broaden the notion of Irishness and to 'abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman, in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'.<sup>12</sup>

9 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p. 274.

10 Slavoj Žižek, *Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 15.

11 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Short circuits (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 78.

12 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p. 52.

In terms of the ethics of alterity, the United Irishmen were clearly engaged in a protreptic discourse wherein the other, be that other in the form of outside influences or of different secular and sacred ideological identities, was to be included in the creation of a new definition of Irishness. Ethically, the place of the other in United Irish epistemology was assured and constitutive of their project. The Bastille Day celebrations of 14 July 1791 in Belfast brought the confluence of French influences to a head, and the decision was taken by a number of Belfast reformers to form a political alliance to seek a representative reformed parliament. The only difficulty here lay in Presbyterian doubts about the ability of Catholics to overcome sectarian bigotry and obedience to Rome. It was with this in mind that Wolfe Tone wrote his pamphlet entitled *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*. This pamphlet was probably inspired by the success of Paine's *The Rights of Man*, which, by May 1791, had sold 10,000 copies of the three Dublin editions,<sup>13</sup> and by its attacks on religious intolerance. The main thrust of his argument was that the French Revolution should have demonstrated to all that Catholics were capable of making common cause with a secular movement which was essentially national in character. By referring to the French Legislative Assembly, where Catholics and Protestants sat together, Tone was able to promulgate his view that Catholic alterity must become part of the identity of the United Irish view of Ireland. He made the point that 'Popish bigotry', and obedience to the 'rusty and extinguished thunderbolts of the Vatican', was no more in France, and that by extension, they could be no more in Ireland as well. He went on to state that no serious measure of reform in Ireland could ever be obtained which would not 'comprehensively embrace Irishmen of all denominations'.<sup>14</sup>

For the United Irishmen, racial and religious criteria of identity were to be eschewed in favour of more legislative and political ones. In 1791, in Belfast, Tone spelled out the necessity of reform, and significantly, reiterated the idea that 'a cordial union among ALL THE PEOPLE OF Ireland'

13 Marianne Elliot, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 123.

14 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p. 351.

[*capitalisation original*] would be both a methodological and political necessity as well as a philosophical aim of their society. He went on to add that reform could only work if it was inclusive of 'Irishmen of every religious persuasion' [*italics original*].<sup>15</sup> For Tone, rights and duties were central to this new sense of Irishness: 'let every man, rich and poor, possess his rights by equal laws, and be obliged to perform the duties of a citizen.'<sup>16</sup> Despite the mythical euhemerism that Tone underwent at the hands of Patrick Pearse and later more religiously-oriented, salvific versions of republicans, Tone's movement was firmly centred on civil society. As Napper Tandy aphorised: 'the object of this institution [the United Irishmen] is to make a United Society of the Irish Nation; to make all Irishmen Citizens, all Citizens Irishmen.'<sup>17</sup> To underscore the secular nature of the movement, which hoped to unite the three religious divisions of Catholicism, Protestantism and Presbyterianism (Dissenters), Tone advocated that 'we would have no state religion, but let every sect pay their own clergy voluntarily.'<sup>18</sup>

The influence of French thinking is very clear here, and it is part of the intellectual capital of France that philosophy and critique have been central to their notion of society, and that such philosophical thinking is not located in the abstract but rather at the core of the French public sphere. Travelling spatially across Europe, these seeds would eventually fuel the movement that would give rise to an Irish republic in 1949, albeit a republic which was very different to that envisaged by Tone and Napper Tandy. Far from being a country in the secular image of France, the Irish constitution guaranteed the special position of the Catholic Church, and Irish health, education and social policies were shot-through with Catholic influence at overt and covert levels. I would argue that the reason for this is that the French Revolution in the Irish public sphere became hypertrophied in that it was seen as an episode from the past and nothing more. Tone was selected from the synchronic structure of the Revolution, and

15 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, pp. 367–368.

16 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, p. 297.

17 James Napper Tandy, *Northern Star*, 5 December 1791.

18 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, p. 151.

his narrative was reshaped by Pearse and later republicans into that of a salvific and messianistic figure who had an almost mythopoeic status. In what Alison O'Malley-Younger calls his soapbox oration, given at Tone's grave at Bodenstown in 1913,<sup>19</sup> Pearse made this connection overt by saying that he has 'come to one of the holiest places in Ireland; holier even than the place where St Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. He was the greatest of Irish Nationalists ... we have come to renew our adhesion to the faith of Tone: to express once more our full acceptance of the gospel of Irish Nationalism which he was first to formulate in worldly terms.'<sup>20</sup>

I have deliberately chosen the adjective 'messianistic' as opposed to 'messianic' to describe his position, as I am following the distinction made by Jacques Derrida in this regard. For Derrida, speaking at Villanova University in 1994, the messianic structure is 'a universal structure',<sup>21</sup> which is defined by waiting for the future, by addressing the other as other, and hence by refusing to base notions of the present and future on a lineal descent from a particular version of the past. He notes that the messianic structure is predicated on a promise, on an expectation that whatever is coming in the future 'has to do with justice'. What he terms the messianistic, on the other hand, is culturally and temporally limited and constrained to the 'determinate figures' of 'Jewish, Christian, or Islamic messianism.' He goes on:

As soon as you reduce the messianic structure to messianism then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences. Then you are accrediting one tradition among others, and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism.<sup>22</sup>

19 Alison O'Malley-Younger and John Strachan (eds), *Ireland at War and Peace* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2011), p. 3.

20 P.H. Pearse, *Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse*, 2 vols, vol. 1 (Dublin: Phoenix Publishing, 1917), p. 53.

21 Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 22.

22 Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 23.

Pearse's version of Tone, which is the hegemonic one in Irish history, consigns Tone and his influence to a specific time and place, and only aspects of Tone's thinking have been allowed to travel; with respect to the ideas and philosophies of the French revolution travelling to Ireland, Pearse's border security is particularly strong.

The result is that in the contemporary Irish public sphere, the revolutionary zeal which Tone embodied in his Franco-Irish alliance against the imperial designs by England has been sadly lacking in the period after the decline of the Celtic Tiger and the bailout by the *troika* of the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund. In a process of socialising private debt, and placing the onus of repayment on the people as opposed to the institutions, swingeing austerity measures have been brought in; measures which would have the French on the streets in demonstrations, but these have been quiescently accepted by the Irish people. The Irish public sphere has not reacted with anger or outrage at the lack of responsibility or of any form of process which sought accountability from the elite of politicians, bankers and developers. The debts of private banks, some 70 billion euro, have been socialised, and the Irish taxpayer will be paying for this for future generations. I think the reasons for this are precisely related to Derrida's distinction between the messianistic and the messianic. For Irish thinking, guided by the suasive rhetoric of Pearse, Tone's failed rising was a historical fact which has been attenuated narratively in order to fit a salvific republican teleology; for the French public sphere, the revolutionary zeal that saw General Humbert and Admiral Bompard sent to Ireland to help liberate the country from monarchy has remained intact. I would suggest that a messianic view of the French revolution is one that allows Žižek's sense of the real of that event, and Benjamin's utopian perspective, to become operative, not as historical fact but as a philosophical and ideological event, and I am using the term 'event' in a very specific sense, following the work of Alain Badiou. For writers like Badiou and Jacques Rancière, the French Revolution was more than just a happening which can be consigned to the past; rather, it was a paradigm shift whose effects can still be felt today. Temporally, the revolution is still a significant aspect of the French public sphere, as debates about its effect and its significance retain traction in French public discourse. It

is, I would argue, no accident that both of these cultural thinkers were seminaly involved in *les événements* in May 1968. As Kristin Ross notes, in her detailed study of these events: ‘May ’68’ constituted a pivotal if not a founding moment in their intellectual and political trajectories,<sup>23</sup> and I would further argue that ‘May ’68’ can be seen as an example of how temporally, aspects of the French Revolution have made the journey into the public sphere of France in a way that has been remarkably different from that of Ireland. So when Napper Tandy sailed back to France in 1798, he was returning to a country where the revolution was an event, and leaving a country where it was just a historical occurrence.

It is precisely this distinction that is at issue in Badiou’s discussion of François Furet’s *Interpreting the French Revolution*, which explains it as the outcome of the ‘complexity of the French situation in the late eighteenth century, depriving it of its universal scope.’<sup>24</sup> Furet looked for a ‘cooling off’ of the interpretations of the Revolution,<sup>25</sup> which for him meant a movement away from the utopian and emancipatory aspects of the narratives of the revolution. To do this, Furet needed to conceptualise the history of the Revolution by beginning ‘with a critique of the idea of revolution as experienced and perceived by its actors, and transmitted by their heirs, namely, the idea that it was a radical change and the origin of a new era.’<sup>26</sup> To endorse this view, Furet turned to Tocqueville’s *The Old Regime and the Revolution*,<sup>27</sup> whose main thesis was that the Revolution had brought nothing new to France. The Jacobins may have thought that they were creating a new society but they were actually completing the work of the

23 Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 7.

24 Peter Hallward, *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 176.

25 François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 10.

26 Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, p. 14.

27 Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Translated by Alan S. Kahan, 2 vols, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).



state consolidation of power begun with Richelieu.<sup>28</sup> This is the perspective that attenuates the force of the revolution and allows it to be narrated as just one more in a series of acts that are past and that achieved little in the way of change; it is a perspective which has been operative in the narration of 1798 in an Irish context. At the core of Furet's book is this claim that participants in the revolution had no real understanding of their actions. To rethink the French Revolution, according to Furet, one must first reject the Revolutionaries' perception of their action. One must deny that they knew what they were doing.<sup>29</sup>

For Badiou, on the other hand, the only way that one can truly understand the impact of the event of the revolution is to look for what he calls its 'truth', and for him, the point from which such a politics of truth can be thought which:

permits, even after the event, the seizure of its truth is that of its actors, and not its spectators. It is through Saint-Just and Robespierre that you enter into this singular truth unleashed by the French Revolution, and on the basis of which you form a knowledge, and not through Kant or François Furet.<sup>30</sup>

Badiou sees the truth of the French Revolution as an event. This term, which he uses in a specific way, involves a break with the usual, an act or performance which shatters the *habitus* of the norm, and which signifies something new which will reverberate through the socio-cultural sphere. As he puts it, for the process of 'a truth to begin, something must happen', and this happening must break with the normal 'situation of knowledge as such':

It is unpredictable, incalculable. It is beyond what is. I call it an event. A truth thus appears, in its newness, because an eventual supplement interrupts repetition. For example the appearance, with Aeschylus, of theatrical Tragedy; the irruption, with

28 Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), p. 106.

29 Deranty, *Rancière: Key Concepts*, p. 106.

30 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), p. 23.

Galileo, of mathematical physics; an amorous encounter which changes a whole life; the French Revolution of 1792.<sup>31</sup>

For Badiou, the event belongs to the undecidable, to a range of experience which has not yet been fully grasped; it is beyond the calculability of a given situation and it changes the present and the future, and crucially, it brings about a change in the human beings as subjects with whom it comes into contact: 'a subject is what fixes an undecidable event, because he or she takes the chance of deciding upon it.'<sup>32</sup> It is the people involved who identify and call into being the event as such, and this is also true of the French Revolution.

Thus Napper Tandy, as he sailed away from Donegal, on the *Anacréon*, having given an oration in English to a largely Irish-speaking population, did not call into being the event of the revolution, and his act became a fact of history and never attained the status of an event. The same could be said of Tone's invasion, because after his death, it was not his voice but the ventriloquised version of that voice as enunciated by Patrick Pearse that became operative in the historical present. For Badiou, this is precisely the difference between an event and something that is not an event. In *Being and Event*, he asks what is to be understood by the term 'French Revolution', and goes on to suggest that this term 'forms a one out of everything which makes up its site; that is, France between 1789 and, let's say, 1794', and goes on to mention different elements like the sans-culottes of the towns, the members of the Convention, the Jacobin clubs, the guillotine, the effects of the tribunal, the massacres, the English spies, the Vendéans, the theatre, and the *Marseillaise*. But he notes the danger of this approach which is that itemising the 'inventory of all the elements of the site' may be in danger of causing 'the one of the event being undone to the point of being no more than the forever infinite numbering of the gestures, things and words that co-existed with it.'<sup>33</sup> For Pearse, the revolution is just another signifier in

31 Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 62.

32 Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, p. 62.

33 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 180.

a broadly mythical and salvific story, as opposed to a truth-making event which would change all of the previous notions of social, political and cultural organisations; it is a link in the chain as opposed to a rupture in that chain. This is the type of interpretation that allows the eventual nature of the revolution to be attenuated, in a manner that was aphorised by Louis Antoine de Saint-Just in 1794, when he said 'the Revolution is frozen'.<sup>34</sup>

There is a connection to be made here between this notion of the event and the Lacanian real, as mentioned by Žižek earlier, when he spoke of the real of the revolution, and with Tone, who saw it as not subject to the ordinary calculation of politics but as 'a thing which is to be',<sup>35</sup> as something 'ontologically undecidable' which is more than just a name. The French Revolution is not one multiple among others, nor is it an accretion or aggregate of a number of acts. As Sam Gillespie observes, it is what unifies these disparate multiplicities under the banner of its occurrence; 'the event takes these elements and adds something more that exceeds direct presentation'.<sup>36</sup> But because this 'something more' is a break with the discourse, an irruption of truth, it cannot be clearly represented. This sense of the unrepresentable in the event is obliquely captured in some of the eventual narratives such as the description of how Fauquier-Tinville, on condemning Lavoisier, the creator of modern chemistry, to death, declared 'the Republic does not need scientists'. Badiou explains this in terms of the revolution as an event by abbreviating them to an imperative: 'the Republic does not need'. For him, eventual politics, 'when it exists, grounds its own principle regarding the real, and is thus in need of nothing, save itself'.<sup>37</sup> What happens is that a 'true revolution considers that it has itself created everything it needs, and we should respect this creative absolutism'.<sup>38</sup>

34 Badiou, *The Century*. Translated by Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 104.

35 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p. 274.

36 Sam Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2008), p. 111.

37 Badiou, *The Century*, p. 63.

38 Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 130.

For Badiou, events such as the revolution give rise to what he calls evental time, and the event proceeds to influence the future in a messianic way. So, while Irish students have been taught the Pearsean version of Wolfe Tone, French students are taught in terms of the maxim inscribed over the front door of every public school: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, as teachers attempt to understand the revolution, 'and what it entails, in the field of education. The French revolution is not yet closed. *Aux armes citoyens!* The revolution is not yet over'.<sup>39</sup> It is this sense of connectedness with the revolution as an event that makes it significant through evental time, and it provides a sense of fraternity between those who come after the revolution and those who were involved in it; for Badiou, the truth of the event is that of its participants: it should be sought for or listened to in the living words uttered by Robespierre or Saint-Just, rather than in the detached commentaries produced by Furet and the Thermidorian historians.<sup>40</sup> Badiou uses the term 'Thermidorian' to refer to that month in the French Revolutionary Calendar when power and initiative 'slipped from the hands of the radical vanguard and events started to take a regressive or increasingly counter-revolutionary turn'.<sup>41</sup> This period, covering mid-July to mid-August just after Robespierre's reign of terror, became a broader term for Badiou, signifying a distinctive form of subjectivity, one based on the cessation of a previous and also always possible revolutionary fervour: 'thus, the Thermidorian is not just any political conservative, but someone who is saying no to something he or she once encountered, to something he or she once was, or to something he or she once believed'.<sup>42</sup>

I certainly think there is a case to be made for seeing the Irish public sphere as Thermidorian in character, as after the main revolutions, there ensued periods of straitened economic, political, cultural and religious conservatism. The election of 2011, which saw the governing parties electorally

39 Oliver Feltham, *Alain Badiou: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 103.

40 Hallward, *Think Again*, p. 95.

41 Christopher Norris, *Badiou's Being and Event: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 156.

42 Ed Pluth, *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 2.

annihilated, has been termed a democratic revolution, with the advent of a new government which had a mandate for political and social reform. The two government parties were eviscerated, with Fianna Fáil dropping from seventy-eight seats to twenty, while the Green party lost all its TDs. However, this new government proceeded to implement the policies of the old Fianna Fáil one, and also to demonstrate an allegiance to elitism and conservatism by paying their own advisors above the pay-ceilings which they themselves had set, as well as refusing to aggressively investigate the financial irregularities that were causal factors in the financial crisis in Ireland. The voices of revolution from the opposition benches have assumed a distinctly Thermidorian tone once enconced in the government benches in Dáil Éireann, and one could well use the terms of Badiou to describe their attitudes: they wanted the end of the revolution, the reign of corruption, and suffrage for the wealthy alone.<sup>43</sup> There seems to be little evental time in the Irish public sphere and perhaps this is because, unlike France, where revolutionary ideals are still taught, and where the debate, among people like Furet, Badiou and Rancière, is about the significance and effect of the revolution, in Ireland, 1798 and 1916 have been taught more as historical actions and each revolution is seen as part of a grand narrative of postcolonial liberation. Indeed, neither of these has ever been termed a 'revolution' *per se*, but rather has been called a 'rising', and the nomenclature is significant in that a 'rising' seems almost organic and reactive as opposed to a revolution which has an ideology and an intellectual rationale to drive it. In France, the evental time of the revolution still influences the present and future in a messianic sense, whereas in Ireland, the risings are messianistic and seen as in the past.

An example of this ongoing evental influence can be seen in *les événements* of May 1968, events which can be seen to derive from the ideology of the French Revolution, and which was: 'something that arrives in excess, beyond all calculation, something that displaces people and places, that proposes an entirely new situation for thought.'<sup>44</sup> And I would suggest that

43 Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, p. 144.

44 Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p. 26.

the fact that this revolutionary activity has become known as ‘the events’ is no accident. It was something that shaped people’s lives and introduced elements of undecidability into the French public sphere, elements whose effects are still being felt today. Jacques Rancière has recounted that his Althusserian perspective began to crumble when faced with the mass revolt in which 9 million people, without the support of the Party or trade unions, went on strike across France.<sup>45</sup> For Rancière, one of the most important aspects of May ’68 was the overt change in subjective identity that was part of the event (and I am using this term deliberately in the sense indicated by Badiou). Rancière notes that on 25 May, Minister of the Interior Christian Fouchet referred to the rioters as *pègre* [riff-raff, scum, the underworld], ‘that crawls up out of the lower depths of Paris and that is truly enraged, that hides behind the students and fights with murderous madness’, and he went on to call on Paris to ‘vomit up the *pègre* that dishonors it’. This attempt to criminalise the protests was met by one of the action committees which included Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot, and Dionys Mascolo, who declared that ‘we are all rioters, we are all “*la pègre*”’.<sup>46</sup> Here, the evental nature of the protests is clear as new subjectivities are formed, and the systematic fissure between the workers and the students, between labour and the intellectual paradigm, is voluntarily broken down. This adoption of the signifier *la pègre* transforms its signified: what had been a term of disparagement has become an agent of transformation, one which inserted a chink into the very socio-political structure which used the term in the first place. By embracing the improper name, the name now stands in for a group that is ‘not sociologically identifiable’; the *pègre* becomes what Rancière would call an ‘impossible identification’ as ‘political subjects acting in the gap or interval between two identities, neither of which can be assumed’.<sup>47</sup>

45 Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 15.

46 Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, p. 108.

47 Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, p. 108.

One could see an important aspect of this event as the French students revolting against their own societal context, that of bourgeois knowledge. By so doing, they were similarly altering the meaning of the signifier 'student' which, up to then, had been umbilically associated with bourgeois knowledge. For Rancière, one of the core aims was 'to abolish the division of labour that separated intellectual from manual labour'. He tells of how intellectuals 'transformed themselves into manual labourers or professional revolutionaries. They decided to become proletarians (*se prolétarianiser*)',<sup>48</sup> and he goes on to see the French Revolution as a seminal force in the conception of communism, which he defines as 'the search for the promise of freedom and equality in the form of a sensory community of common intelligence that would supersede the boundaries separating the various worlds of common experience'. Finally, he locates the writing of the Communist manifesto in the interval between two political revolutions: 'the French Revolution of 1789 and the European revolutions of 1848'.<sup>49</sup> One of the major political legacies of May was to disrupt the boundaries thought to exist between manual and intellectual labour. Rancière's work of the 1970s should be understood as an attempt to hold open the possibilities created by the dislodgment of the representational mechanisms through which intellectuals attempted to guide political movements.<sup>50</sup>

But such is the evental nature of the French Revolution that this embrace of the proletarian subjectivity has its genesis in the trial of a revolutionary activist in 1832, and ultimately in the French Revolution's sense of equality and fraternity. In *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Rancière recounts an exemplary dialogue occasioned by the trial of the revolutionary Auguste Blanqui in 1832. Asked by the magistrate to give his profession, Blanqui simply replies: 'proletarian':

48 Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*. Translated by Emiliano Battista (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 121.

49 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 80.

50 Tanke, *Jacques Rancière*, p. 22.

The magistrate immediately objects to this response: 'That is not a profession'; thereby setting himself up for copping the accused's immediate response: 'It is the profession of thirty million Frenchmen who live off their labor and who are deprived of political rights.' The judge then agrees to have the court clerk list proletariat as a new 'profession'.<sup>51</sup>

Blanqui gives the word a different meaning: a profession is a profession of faith, a declaration of membership of a collective. For Rancière, this profession of proletariat should not be confused 'with a social group'. The name 'proletarian' is neither a set of properties, nor a class description. As he paradoxically explains they are the 'class of the uncounted that only exists in the very declaration in which they are counted as those of no account'; what this subjectivity enunciates is 'the simple counting of the uncounted, the difference between an inegalitarian distribution of social bodies and the equality of speaking beings'.<sup>52</sup> This is the real, the utopian core of the French Revolution, a core that can be traced from 1789 through 1832 to 1968 and beyond. A revolution that is driven by notions of inequality is an event and is also something which has the power to transform the conditions of many people living in the contemporary European public sphere.

I would contend that it is the depiction of this real of the revolution that is part of its eventual nature, and part of the way in which its effect was felt in Blanqui's responses and indeed in *les événements*. Just as Badiou took issue with the work of Furet in depicting the significance of the French Revolution, so too does Jacques Rancière take issue with the work of another historian, the Romantic Jules Michelet, whose work gave voice to the ordinary people as well as those who shaped events. Rancière, while enthusiastic about Michelet's mode of writing, is worried that by speaking about history in the present tense, he neutralises what Rancière calls 'the appearance of the past'.<sup>53</sup> By speaking in maxims, these grammatical bundles of truth, the historian is erasing the speech, the events and the irregularities and

51 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 37.

52 Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 38.

53 Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*. Translated by Hassan Melchy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 49.



singularities of the past. Michelet shows the paperwork of the poor, but in his paraphrases he papers over 'the democratic disturbance of speech.'<sup>54</sup> While impressed by Michelet's mastery of 'anonymous collective speech', which is supposedly in opposition to the dominant voices of the day, he takes issue with the fact that this speech is never actually given voice 'in its own terms', the speech is seen as a voiceless single voice which does not do justice to the change in subjective enunciation that we have seen to be part of the eventual nature of the revolution. While granting the 'poeticopolitical' effect of Michelet's work, he sees a problem in his presentation of the 'silent masses (as distinct from the noisy people)'.<sup>55</sup>

The presentation of the revolution as plural, as contentious, and as full of debate is at odds with the messianic story told by Pearse of how Tone is a type of Christ-like figure who has come to redeem his people. The doubts and many alliances set up by Tone among different members of the French governing and military classes; the plural influences of Enlightenment debate; the contentious nature of how best to set up a new social order; the concerns over the terror; the worries about attempting to fuse Catholic, Protestant and Presbyterian ideologies: these have all been subsumed into a type of what Rancière has termed the silent masses – here it is a silent plurality which has been subsumed into a messianic teleological narrative which talks of renewing our 'adhesion to the faith of Tone' and of expressing acceptance of 'the gospel of Irish nationalism' which he was the 'first to formulate in worthy terms'.<sup>56</sup> There is no sense of any debate or dispute here; Tone is part of the seamless, salvific gospel of Irish nationalism and is carried along in its narrative wake. His revolution, which had strong utopian dimensions that set out to transform the way Ireland was governed and organised, is made to look like a stepping stone in the path of Irish nationalism. Analogies can be seen between what Michelet does for the voices of the revolution and what Pearse does to the

54 Rancière, *The Names of History*, p. 90.

55 Peter Hallward, 'Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview with Jacques Rancière', in *ANGELAKI: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8: 2 (2003), pp. 191–211 (pp. 202–203).

56 Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 53–54.

voice of Tone; debate and disagreement and plurality are all attenuated into a single narrative which is seen to encompass all difference. Pearse's narrative could be seen as a Thermidorian reading of the revolutionary connections of Tone – for Pearse he is Irish and a nationalist and the influences of other philosophical events are not to be part of this narrative. I would suggest that this is a way of enunciating an event which will result in the event being attenuated into a fact of history, into a messianistic occurrence whose influence on the present is lessened considerably.

This is why Rancière is so focused on the mode of narration used by Michelet as he sees it as simplifying the debates that went on around the revolution. For him, the event of the revolution is precisely the series of transforming debates, discussions and altered notions of subjectivity that both create the revolution and are encouraged by the revolution. In this sense, he is close to Badiou's sense of the event of the revolution. For him, the voice of Olympe de Gouges, who famously argued that since women were qualified to mount the scaffold they were also qualified to mount the platform of the Assembly, was just as important as the more mainstream revolutionary voices, as she was redefining the subjectivity of women through the event of the revolution: 'on the scaffold everyone was equal; women were "as men"'. For Rancière, the universality of the death sentence underlined the 'self-evident distinction between political life and domestic life'. Women could therefore 'affirm their rights "as citizens"'.<sup>57</sup> It was through such debates about the roles of subjectivity in evental time that the real of the revolution has travelled temporally through the French public sphere. The narration of the revolutions in France and Ireland has been very different and it is this difference, I would contend, that has shaped the different trajectories of these revolutions in the two countries. In Ireland, revolution is seen as part of a teleology which achieved its aim with the removal of the British in 1922. Thereafter, any form of revolutionary fervour was displaced into orgies of commemoration and messianistic worship at the feet of the dead patriots. For Pearse, it is the grave of Wolfe Tone that has been the object and destination of the pilgrimage, and not

57 Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 57.

the ideas of Tone and the radical ideology and philosophy of the United Irishmen. Debate, discussion and any interrogation of the different philosophies had no part in this narration – in a gospel there can only be one messiah and he cannot be contradicted. The key difference between the ways in which the revolution travels is that in the Irish context, it is one step on a pre-ordained journey; it is interpreted as such and any dissonant aspects are not part of the narration; discussion and disagreement are repressed. Tone is made to fit the template that Pearse has set out and any aspects of his thought that do not fit this template are quietly elided. In Pearse's narrative, patriotism is 'at once a faith and a service'; it is a faith 'kindled flaming as if by the miraculous word of God; a faith which is of the same nature as religious faith.'<sup>58</sup> The singulars here are worth noting, as there is a single faith which is revealed by the single word of a single god; there is no room for debate or dissensus in this narrative of Tone. Rather than being the source of new ideas and a possible template for the future, Tone is seen as 'the greatest of Irish men' whose grave is now 'the holiest place in Ireland', as it must be 'that the holiest sod of a nation's soil is the sod where the greatest of her dead lies buried.'<sup>59</sup> For Pearse, it is Tone as dead historical fact, as opposed to Tone as an eventual transformer of how a society sees itself and organises itself and looks to the future that is of prime importance. All of his ideas and influences are placed in the service of a pre-existing notion of patriotism, a quality that is not defined, but which is seen as all-encompassing and which overwhelms any individual act or idea, and which demands service of its adherents: 'patriotism needs service as the condition of its authenticity, and it is not sufficient to say "I believe" unless one can say also "I serve".'<sup>60</sup>

In the French context, the revolution is an event, it is transformative and its legacy is still a site of some contestation. For Badiou, it is an event which has transformed its context and its aftermath and one which is still relevant today, and whose legacy is to be seen in the events of May 1968.

58 Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 65.

59 Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 54.

60 Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 65.

Rancière agrees and further sees its importance in setting forth an impossible identification between the people of France in terms of a transformed notion of subjectivity which the revolution enunciates. Oliver Davis terms this as ‘heterologic disidentification’, which involves the idea that political subjectivation always involves an ‘impossible identification’ with a different subject, or with otherness in general, the idea that subjectivation is never the straightforward assertion of identity. Thus in the Algerian war, for the French people the choice was to identify with the Algerian dead or with the French, or the notion of France, in whose name they had been killed. This was the impossible identification for Rancière, and one which categorises the post-evental politics of the French Revolution; it can be seen as a consequence of the fraternity and equality that served as transformative signifiers for the action of the people as they attempted to transform the structures of power in their country.<sup>61</sup>

Rancière sees this identification as embodied in the cries of the May ’68 demonstrators crying out: ‘We are all German Jews’. This phrase is a good example of the ‘heterological mode of political subjectification’ as a phrase which has been traditionally used to disenfranchise a community is adopted by a patently different community as a way of transforming the power-dynamics of a situation. This phrase, traditionally used to count out a minority is now transformed and turned into ‘the open subjectification of the uncounted, a name that could not possibly be confused with any real social group.’<sup>62</sup> Impossible identifications rely upon tactical, world-opening devices such as this. These declarations create subjectivities that are capable of lifting individuals out of their positions in the police order. Political names are at once poetic and polemical; they outline a shared world, and relate its inhabitants in a manner different from the one to which they are accustomed. Declarations such as ‘we are *la pègre*’, or ‘we are all German Jews’, create political subjects and redraw sensible parameters; it is a way of transforming the group by taking on new forms of subjectivity, and thus

61 Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière Key Contemporary Thinkers* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 87.

62 Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 126.

by inverting the existing value-system. I would contend that when Tone looks for 'a cordial union among ALL THE PEOPLE' of Ireland, and when he wishes to substitute 'the common name of Irishman' he is engaged in precisely this transformative process of impossible identification and of heterologic disidentification. There is a genuine transformative potential in his desire for an Ireland where religion is voluntary and is neither a help nor a hindrance to advancement. If such a project had been initiated, the history of the country would have been qualitatively different, as the religious and sectarian dimensions of Irish life would have been very different. Tone's concept of participant citizenship is also transformative, as he imbricates liberty with rights and duties to the common polis, with reform inclusive of '*Irishmen* of every religious persuasion', and with a rights-based notion of subjective identification: 'let every man, rich and poor, possess his rights by equal laws, and be obliged to perform the duties of a citizen.' Clearly his mode of organising a post-revolution Ireland was evental in that it would be transformative of the social sphere and his thinking had clearly gone beyond the 'Brits Out' mentality which has characterised so much of the Irish republican mind-set. I would suggest that Tone's republicanism was as radical and evental as that of the French Revolution, and that his thinking was radical at the level of transforming subjectivity in Ireland from the religious to the secular, as instanced by his use of the term 'sect' to delineate the different religious traditions in Ireland. However, this dimension of his thinking did not travel beyond his own time and instead of being seen as a messianic radical, he has become a messianistic totem of Irish republicanism whose grave, as opposed to whose ideas, has become the fetishised destination of pilgrimage.

As Rancière has tellingly put it, 'the same intelligence is at work in all the acts of the human mind'.<sup>63</sup> With this in mind, it would seem that this intelligence, if focused on the evental nature of revolutions and on a sense of the intellectual as someone who is capable of real-world change and engagement, needs to be applied to examining the evental nature of

63 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 16.

important revolutions in a culture, and to ensuring that revolutions like the French Revolution and *les événements* become templates for the cultural encoding of the emancipatory and egalitarian ideals implicit in, and I use the term deliberately, the attempted revolution of 1798. Only by seeing this as an event and by following through on this transformative potential of creating an egalitarian and secular state where religion is tolerated but is not a constituent of the public sphere, can the Irish public sphere ever come to terms with the possible reals of 1798 and 1916. In all of the contemporary debates on the role of religion in Ireland, I have not once seen any adverting to Tone's idea that in a Republican constitution there should be a 'declaration of perfect security and protection to the free exercise of all religions, without distinction or preference, and the perpetual abolition of all ascendancy, or connection, between church and state'.<sup>64</sup>

In the midst of the most severe financial crisis to threaten Ireland, and in the wake of a series of cataclysmic reports on clerical sexual abuse of children in care, there has been no discussion of Tone's ringing enunciation in 1796 that:

The unnatural union between church and state, which has degraded religion into an engine of policy, will be dissolved. Tythes, the pest of agriculture, will be abolished; the memory of religious dissensions will be lost, when no sect shall have an exclusive right to govern their fellow citizens. Each sect will maintain its own clergy, and no citizen will be disfranchised for worshipping God according to his conscience. To say all in one word, Ireland shall be independent. We shall be a nation, not a province; citizens, not slaves.<sup>65</sup>

These words, apposite in their own time, have a telling relevance in contemporary Ireland, where there is again a sense of slavery to an outside power and where the public sphere has not really confronted this but has repressed it. I think the connections with the eventual nature of Badiou's views on the revolution, and with Rancière's ideas on reclaiming a sense of subjectivity which is transformative, are crystal clear here, but these aspects of Tone's thought has not travelled temporally in the Irish public sphere.

64 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, p. 196.

65 Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, pp. 286–287.

As it stands, the Irish public sphere is inhabited by a Thermidorian ideology which is willing to commemorate the historical acts but not to take on and engage with the evental nature of those acts. Because it is in the real of these acts, in the events, that the possibility lies for a 'philosophic or theoretical commitment that would lay claim to real – as opposed to merely notional – world-transformative power'.<sup>66</sup>

66 Norris, *Badiou's Being and Event*, p. 154.

BRIAN MURPHY

*Appellation 'Éire' Contrôlée:*  
Historical Links between France's Wine Heritage  
and Ireland

The *Concise History of Ireland* suggests that what became known as the 'Flight of the Wild Geese' began following the signing of the Treaty of Limerick in 1691 and the end of the Williamite War.<sup>1</sup> This definition can be broadened to cover a wide range of Irishmen, usually of military background, who left Ireland's shores to find their fortunes in foreign lands, particularly France. It is from this term that Ted Murphy coins the phrase 'The Wine Geese'. The practice of young men leaving primarily agricultural backgrounds to act as mercenaries in foreign lands was not at all unusual in pre-industrial times,<sup>2</sup> but other more affluent groups also left Ireland as a consequence of the confiscation of their lands following military defeats by religiously-opposed armies which in turn led to a diminution of theirs and their children's prospects in their homeland. People of this class inevitably went to regions with which they had established trading links. Thus, many of those fleeing Ireland gravitated towards countries and businesses that were familiar to them through previous trading interactions. Bordeaux was one such city that had a long-established link with the thriving Irish port cities of both Galway and Cork and it is therefore no coincidence that many Irish emigrants from the nobility class from these cities chose

- 1 Seán Duffy, *The Concise History of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 2000), p. 121.
- 2 Renagh Holohan and Jeremy Williams, *The Irish Châteaux* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1999), p. 4.



to settle in and around Bordeaux, which ultimately became the spiritual home of Ireland's 'wine geese'.<sup>3</sup>

In his 2005 study, *A Kingdom of Wine*, Ted Murphy suggested that many people find it surprising that Ireland should have an association with wine stretching back over 2,000 years.<sup>4</sup> He cites Katherine Scherman who writes that:

In the early middle ages when classical scholarship in Europe had been buried beneath centuries of barbarism, Ireland was the seat of one of the most extraordinary literary, artistic, and scholarly flowerings the western world had ever seen; that radiant singular era between the fifth and the twelfth centuries when Ireland became the repository if not the saviour of classical western civilisation.<sup>5</sup>

With the decline of Rome in the fifth century, Ireland acted as a secure base and refuge for French scholars fleeing from the ensuing turmoil that befell Gaul. At times, the regions where these scholars settled became centres of learning from which in the seventh century a new Irish missionary movement emerged that would promote Christianity in Europe. Not only did such monastic sites act as repositories for art and literature, but, according to Murphy, they played a very important role in both preserving and propagating the art of wine-making in Europe. It is this historical association with the vine that allows Ireland to claim a strong connection with France and its wine to the present day. This chapter explores this connection. It examines the links between French wine heritage and Ireland. It also explores how these links might be exploited in an effort to enhance the attractiveness of the story of French wine and how Ireland's connection to the places associated with French wine might best be used to marketing advantage.

The cultural historian Marion Demossier claims that French wine consumption provides a window on to the changing nature of what it means to

3 Ted Murphy, *A Kingdom of Wine – A Celebration of Ireland's Wine Geese* (Cork: Onstream Publications Ltd., 2005), p. 35.

4 Murphy, *A Kingdom of Wine*, p. 17.

5 Murphy, *A Kingdom of Wine*, p. 20.

be French.<sup>6</sup> She uses Anthony D. Smith's definition of the nation, which is influenced by both the essentialist and the constructivist attitude to national identity. In Smith's definition, the nation consists of five attributes: historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a collective mass public culture, shared legal rights and duties and a single economy with territorial mobility for members. Demossier goes on to ask how all this applies to the consumption of wine as a reflection of cultural identity.<sup>7</sup> She suggests that wine presents two elements that reflect two traditional approaches to identity. On the one hand, it reflects a constructivist approach to national identity through its more political elements which might include the development of its appellation contrôlée systems. On the other hand, wine can reflect the more essentialist approach in recognising that wine is presented as the essence of the French Nation. Demossier uses the following quote from Thomas Wilson to help illustrate this idea:

Drinking [...] is a historical and contemporary process of identity formation contributing to its maintenance, reproduction and transformation [...] drinking is the stuff of everyday life, quotidian culture which at the end of the day may be as important to the lifeblood of the nation as are its origin myths, heroes and grand narratives.<sup>8</sup>

The author identifies five distinct dimensions of the nation: psychological, cultural, territorial, historical and political. One can suggest that wine has a strong affiliation with all five. Demossier offers us two examples of how wine can be linked to the psychological dimension of the French nation. The first (Figure 1) refers to the image of Nectar, created in 1922 by the wine retailing chain Nicolas.

6 Marion Demossier, *Wine Drinking Culture in France – A National Myth or a Modern Passion* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 18.

7 Demossier, *Wine Drinking Culture in France*, p. 20.

8 Demossier, *Wine Drinking Culture in France*, p. 21.

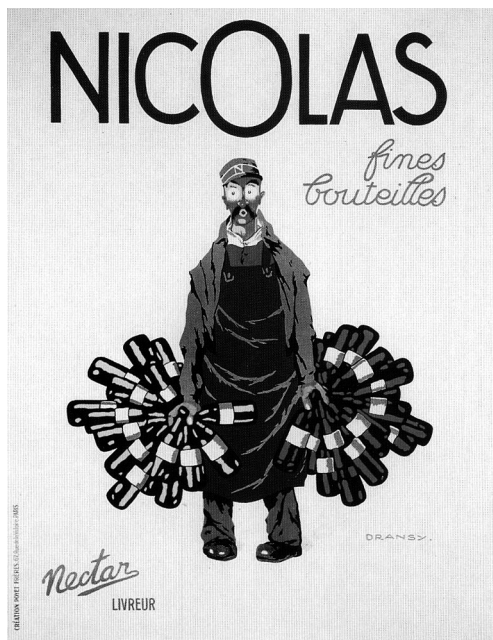


Figure 1  
Jules Osnard Dransy, *Nectar*.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 1 shows us an advertising image that helps portray the strong psychological association between the French nation and wine. This very iconic image shows a Parisian delivery man with a large moustache and big charming eyes with his arms full of bottles of wine. Nectar was supposedly modelled on a real Nicolas employee and created by the artist Dransy. According to Stephen Harp the image embodied the French wine delivery man. He often carried more than twelve bottles in each hand and he very much emphasised working-class France. Nicolas of the early 1900s was an upmarket French wine chain that offered a delivery service to its relatively wealthy clients and Nectar with his working class overalls, reddish face and

9 [Lithograph] 63½ × 45½in. (162 × 116cm.) as created for Nicolas Wines 1925. Available at: <[http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot\\_details.aspx?intObjectID=5491225](http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=5491225)>. Accessed 1 February 2012. Image courtesy of Christie's *Catalogue for Travel and Vintage Posters*.

nose, encouraged Nicolas customers to feel a certain sense of class superiority when observing the Nectar image, according to Harp.<sup>10</sup>

Demossier's second example of wine being portrayed in a way that very much reflects the psychological dimension of French identity (Figure 2) is from the French campaign that was set up by government to appeal to the population's national pride and encourage people to consume more wine in the national interest.



Figure 2 Leonetto Cappiello, *Buvez du vin et vivez joyeux.*<sup>11</sup>

10 Stephen L. Harp, 'Pushing Pneus', in *Historicizing Lifestyle – Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to the 1970s*, edited by David Bell and Joanne Hollows (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), p. 149.

11 [Poster], 1933. Lithographie éditée par le ministère de l'agriculture. Available at <<http://www.cepdivin.org/articles/tenaguilloo1.html>>. Accessed 1 February 2012. Image courtesy of cepdivin.org.

The image presented here shows a typical young French couple emerging from an outline map of France entirely made from bunches of grapes of different hues. The printed message on the image says '*Buvez du Vin et vivez joyeux*'. This campaign was organised by the French government in the 1930s, through the Comité de Propagande du Vin, a government organisation that actively encouraged people to increase their wine consumption. Both the image and indeed the campaign demonstrate the very important role played by wine production in French National Identity.<sup>12</sup> Sarah Howard cites François de Closets who further stresses how important wine consumption is to the French.

Whenever great wine crises erupt, no-one has the courage to say that the real problem is about the necessity to rip up a third of France's vineyards ... not at all, the problem always appears to come down to the fact that the French are bad citizens who shirk their national duty, which is to drink up the production of their vines.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of the Comité de Propagande du vin was to convince the internal population of France that wine was both a healthy and patriotic product.<sup>14</sup> In her conclusion, the author suggests that:

Wine propaganda demonstrated that wine was the glue that held France together; it was the lynchpin between town and country, between north and south, between contemporary France and its past. For these reasons, it was the duty of the French to drink away their wine surpluses and protect the nation's vines for future generations.<sup>15</sup>

Of the other five dimensions of the nation noted by Demossier, the easiest to relate to wine would obviously be the territorial, historical and political nature of the French wine product. There are many examples of this throughout French wine history. Events such as the Champagne Riots

12 Sarah Howard, 'Selling wine to the French: Official attempts to increase French Wine Consumption 1931–1936', *Food and Foodways*, 12, pp. 197–224 (2004) EBSCO [Online]. Available at <<http://o-ebscohost.com>>. Accessed 9 March 2011.

13 Howard, 'Selling wine to the French', p. 197.

14 Howard, 'Selling wine to the French', p. 201.

15 Howard, 'Selling wine to the French', p. 218.

of 1911,<sup>16</sup> the Southern Wine Revolt of 1907<sup>17</sup> and others all point to an agricultural product that is historically embedded in French identity and that is markedly controlled by politics both at a local and national level. The wine industry has developed a range of AOC laws controlled by government organisations such as the INAO (Institut National des Appellations d'Origine) that has its origins in the histories of geographical delimitation and the idea of *terroir*. The French concept of *terroir* is truly at the heart of French identity in that it acts as both a signifier of difference and a concept that is recognised in the wine world as typifying the French relationship with wine. People see French wine and *terroir* as being inextricably linked and yet it is *terroir* that provides the backbone of the territorialism that exists among individual French wine regions and even individual wines. *Terroir* refers to the impact different factors have on the final taste of the wine produced. This includes things like the soil, the climate, the vineyard aspect, the grape variety and the topography of the land. Some even include the skill of the vigneron and the traditional practices of the particular regions as part of *terroir*. In many people's eyes *terroir* is what makes one red wine from a particular grape variety taste differently to another red wine from the same grape variety. While many in the wine world differ in their assessment of the impact of *terroir*, few would argue with the fact that it is inherent in French attitudes to wine and forms an important part of the territorial aspect of French viticulture.

The final dimension of the French nation noted above was that of culture. Alcohol is at the cultural heart of many nations. It is consumed at times of celebration and times of sadness, sometimes to excess but more often in moderation. Though a wide variety of alcohol products are consumed,

16 For further details on the Champagne Riots 1911, cf. Brian Murphy, 'Using a 17th century Benedictine monk to convert myth into history in an effort to sell more fizz', in Sylvie Mikowski (ed.), *Histoire et mémoire en France et en Irlande/History and Memory in France and Ireland* (Reims: Épure, 2010), pp. 291–308.

17 For further details on the Southern Wine Revolt 1907, cf. Brian Murphy, 'The role of revolution and rioting in French wine's relationship with place', in Yann Bévant, Anne Goarzin and Grace Neville (eds), *France, Ireland and Rebellion* (Rennes: TIR, 2011), pp. 149–167.

many nations proclaim an association with and pride in particular types of drinks. We can identify an informal link between numerous cultures and what we may perceive to be their national drink. For example, according to Eugene O'Brien: 'Guinness has taken on an almost fetishistic association with Ireland' and it acts as a well-recognised 'synecdoche of Ireland'.<sup>18</sup> Whiskey will be forever associated with Scottish culture and vodka finds its original spiritual home in Eastern European communities. In *Drinking Cultures*, Thomas M. Wilson suggests that drinking is not just a practice associated with a particular culture but rather is itself cultural. It is 'an integral social, political and economic practice, a manifestation of the institutions, actions and values of a culture'.<sup>19</sup>

Because of its rich gastronomic history, France is associated with many types of alcohol from cider to cognac and armagnac but it is by far most culturally linked to wine. If one accepts Wilson's thesis that drinking is in itself cultural then France's national association with wine gives us a prime example of a product that reflects French culture at many different levels. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes refers to wine being a totem drink in France and notes how it thus corresponds to the milk of the Dutch cow or the tea ceremonially taken by the British royal family.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the essay entitled 'Wine and Milk', he explores French attitudes to wine. He offers an insight into how deeply wine has become embedded in French culture and suggests that 'society calls anyone who does not believe in wine by names such as sick, disabled or depraved: it does not comprehend him.' Though Barthes may be using extreme language here to emphasise his particular point, his thesis is clear. In more measured tones he describes wine as follows:

18 Eugene O'Brien, 'Kicking Bishop Brennan Up the Arse': *Negotiating Texts and Contexts in Contemporary Irish Studies* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 171.

19 Thomas M. Wilson, 'Drinking Cultures: Sites and Practices in the Production and Expression of Identity', in *Drinking Cultures*, edited by Thomas M. Wilson (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), p. 4.

20 Roland Barthes, *Vintage Barthes-Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 65.

It is an ornament in the slightest ceremonies of French daily life, from the snack (plonk and camembert) to the feast, from the conversation at the local café to the speech at the formal dinner ... There is no situation involving some physical constraint (temperature, hunger, boredom, compulsion, disorientation) which does not give rise to dreams of wine ... it can cover all aspects of space and time for the Frenchman.<sup>21</sup>

All of the examples above illustrate how wine as a unique product fulfils the demanding requirements of Marion Demoissier's five dimensions of nationhood. They support the notion that French identity is strongly associated with wine as a product. With such a strong identity, therefore, it is perhaps difficult to countenance the manner in which French wine may have been influenced by other cultures down through the centuries and it is in this regard that I would like to explore the influence that Irish emigrants have exerted on French wine. In a 1990 *Irish Times* article, Sandy O'Byrne tells us of the first meeting in 1963 between Hugh Lawton of Bordeaux and Ted Murphy that led to almost fifty years of investigation into the many links between Ireland and France in terms of wine.<sup>22</sup> In a recent radio series presented by Tomás Clancy, Murphy recounts that early meeting between himself and Lawton at Cork Railway station in 1963. When Murphy first identified himself, he realised that tears were streaming down Lawton's face because he (Lawton) was the first member of his family in 300 years to set foot in their original homestead.<sup>23</sup> According to O'Byrne, Hugh Lawton is the eleventh generation of the famous Bordeaux wine merchants who have been trading in France since 1739.

This initial meeting between Murphy and Lawton led to what really became a lifetime quest to seek out wine connections between Ireland and France over the centuries. This quest has led to at least three books on these connections: *The Irish Wines of Bordeaux* by T.P. Whelehan (1990); *The Irish Châteaux* by Renagh Holohan and Jeremy Williams (1989); and *The Kingdom of Wine – A Celebration of Ireland's Wine Geese* by Ted Murphy

21 Barthes, *Vintage Barthes*, p. 67.

22 Sandy O'Byrne, 'Wines of the Wild Geese', in *The Irish Times*, 20 October 1990, p. 37.

23 *The Wine Geese – The Gaelic League of Misery*, RTE Lyric FM, 17 April 2010. Available at <<http://www.rte.ie/lyricfm/features/1286828.html>>. Accessed 7 January 2011.



(2005). In addition there was a six-part television series produced for RTÉ by Cathal O'Shannon in 1991, which explored the history of the Irish people who departed for France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and settled around Bordeaux and Cognac where they established themselves in the wine trade.<sup>24</sup> In 1997 Ireland's first and only International Museum of Wine was opened at Desmond Castle in Kinsale Co. Cork where many of the Franco-Irish wine connections are explored and exhibited. More recently, Tomás Clancy presented a four-part documentary series entitled 'The Wine Geese' for RTE Lyric FM radio.<sup>25</sup>

In reality, there were in fact three waves of Wine Geese. The first were genuine Wild Geese who fought with King James at the Battle of Aughrim and the Battle of the Boyne and who fled and settled in France following their defeat. These included famous Bordeaux names such as John Lynch and Denis McCarthy. The second wave included wine families such as the Bartons, Kirwans and Phelans who settled in Bordeaux from Ireland in the mid-1700s and became major influences there. The final wave comprises those who 'moved in after the 1990s when owning your own vineyard became a fashion accessory.'<sup>26</sup> It would clearly be beyond the scope of this chapter to deal in any detail with a number of the Wine Geese. For that reason, I have decided to concentrate on a few key figures.

In a 2010 article entitled 'The Greening of the Grape', Tomás Clancy presents a poignant picture of a tall Celtic Cross in the heart of one of Bordeaux's most famous Châteaux. This cross marks the grave of Thomas Barton, who died tragically in 1990 and who was heir apparent to the Château Léoville-Barton estate. Such an image evokes a strong association between this world-renowned second growth Bordeaux Château and its Irish heritage. It offers us a glimpse of an association between French wine and Ireland that stretches back to the early 1800s. In the particular case of the Bartons, the connection with Ireland dates from the early 1700s

24 Brendan Glacken, 'Television Highlights', in *The Irish Times*, 11 January 1991, p. 21.

25 *The Wine Geese – The Gaelic League of Misery*, RTÉ Lyric FM, 17 April 2010.

26 Eoghan Corry, 'Take a gander at wines', in *The Sunday Times-Holiday World Magazine*, 23 January 2011, p. 6.

when, according to Clancy, the Bartons left Kildare and founded several very important Châteaux, including Château Léoville-Barton.<sup>27</sup> Whelehan provides significant detail on the origins of the Bartons in his book *The Irish Wines of Bordeaux*. His story begins with 'French Tom Barton' who was born near Enniskillen in 1695.<sup>28</sup> He was from a relatively privileged merchant background and settled in Bordeaux where he started his wine business in 1725 which still trades today under the title of Barton and Guestier. Whelehan follows the progress of French Tom who by 1747 had amassed a large fortune through his French wine exploits, in particular by sending wine from Bordeaux to Ireland which at one stage was importing more Bordeaux than both England and Scotland put together.<sup>29</sup> As the years passed the business was handed down through the generations and survived seismic events such as the French Revolution and France's wars with Russia, Prussia and Austria. All this time, strong associations between the Barton family and Ireland were maintained. French Tom purchased the Grove Estate in Tipperary where his only son William spent a large part of his life. Barton's grandson and heir to French Tom's estate was interned during the Revolution and following his release he took refuge in Ireland. This continued association with Ireland is confirmed by Tomás Clancy:

Despite their strong French connection every Barton male for the last 300 years has been sent home to Ireland to be educated. There is an Irish lilt to their accent even in their spoken French.<sup>30</sup>

The Barton estate was handed down through the generations and finally rested in the hands of its current owner, Anthony Barton. After 180 years it represents the longest period of single-family ownership of any property in Bordeaux.<sup>31</sup> The grave overlooked by the extraordinary

27 Tomás Clancy, 'The greening of the grape', in *The Sunday Business Post-Agenda Magazine*, 14 March 2010, pp. 12–13.

28 T.P. Whelehan, *The Irish Wines of Bordeaux* (Dublin: The Vine Press, 1990), p. 22.

29 Murphy, *A Kingdom of Wine*, p. 23.

30 Clancy, 'The greening of the grape'.

31 Chris Kissac (2011), *Wine Doctor*. Available at <<http://www.thewinedoctor.com/tastingsprofile/leovillebarton.shtml>>. Accessed 19 April 2011.

Celtic cross mentioned above marks the resting place of Anthony Barton's son who was himself a trained oenologist before he died in 1990 in a tragic car accident.

Other early academic connections between Ireland and French wine are also available. One of the first wine books published in English, *Observations Historical, Critical and Medical on the Wines of the Ancients*, was written by Sir Edward Barry from Cork and published in 1775. Barry particularly extols the value of wines from Champagne and Burgundy and interestingly suggests that, based on the knowledge of the time, Ireland itself might prove suitable as a wine-growing country.<sup>32</sup> Ted Murphy posits the view that 'this magnificent work was the first important book written in English on the history of wine'.<sup>33</sup> Hugh Johnson in *The Story of Wine* notes that several of Bordeaux's most famous brokers were Irish, including the celebrated wine broker Abraham Lawton from Cork, who operated 2,500 accounts in the 1740s.<sup>34</sup> Johnson also notes the importance of the aforementioned French Tom whose family he maintains is apparently still Franco-Irish after almost 300 years in Bordeaux. He refers to 'the Chartrons', a long list of foreign wine merchants in Bordeaux who get their name from the location of the Quai de Chatrons in Bordeaux. The Chatronnais list included names such as Johnson, Sullivan, Ferguson, MacCarthy and O'Brien, all names which suggest a strong link between the Bordeaux trade and Ireland.

It is important to recognise that Ireland's claim on even a small part of French history that is so linked to French identity and culture may not prove popular. T.P. Whelehan recounts a story involving Andie Mulligan travelling through Bordeaux with the former French Prime Minister:

Mulligan knows all too well just how popular, with the French as well as his own countrymen, is the idea that the Irish, land of saints and scholars, might have penetrated that most French of all territories, the world of wine, and should have done

32 E. Barry, *Observations Historical, Critical and Medical on the Wines of the Ancients* (London: T. Caddell, 1775), pp. 477–478.

33 Murphy, *A Kingdom of Wine*, p. 13.

34 Hugh Johnson, *The Story of Wine* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 1989), p. 254.

it where the very heart of quality and perfection beats out its heady measure, in the fields and on the slopes of Bordeaux.<sup>35</sup>

This idea may not appeal to the French wine community in general but, as we have mentioned, the connections are very real and in some cases pronounced. Though now owned by the Cazes family, Château Lynch Bages is one French wine close to its Irish roots. John Lynch of Galway fled Ireland for France following the decisive defeat of King James at the Battles of the Boyne and Aughrim. He based himself in Bordeaux and married Guillemette Constant in 1709 and later went on to take out French citizenship. One of his sons, Thomas, married into the well known Drouillard family who were the owners of the Bages Estate. When Pierre Drouillard died, the estate passed down to his daughter and therefore into the Lynch family where it remained for seventy-five years.<sup>36</sup>

The Kirwans are another family who maintained an important and long-lasting influence on Bordeaux wine. In the *Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France*,<sup>37</sup> Richard Hayes notes that the Kirwans were a Galway family who settled in Bordeaux in the early part of the 1700s. He points out that Mark Kirwan was a wine merchant there in 1739. Families such as the Kirwans maintained strong connections with other Irish settlers in France at the time through intermarriage with families like the MacCarthys and the O'Byrnes according to Hayes. They would also have maintained strong connections with family members back home in Ireland and Hayes notes that there are a number of letters held in the diocesan archives in Galway that show communication was maintained with relatives at home. Though no longer in the family, today Château Kirwan is classed as one of the sixty best Châteaux in Bordeaux.

35 Whelehan, *The Irish Wines of Bordeaux*, p. 1.

36 Chateau LynchBages.com. Available at <<http://www.lynchbages.com/en/the-history/as-time-goes-by/the-lynch-family>>. Accessed 22 April 2011.

37 Richard Hayes, 'Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France', in *Irish Quarterly Review*, 33 (129) (1944), pp. 68–80 (p. 68) JSTOR [Online]. Available at <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30100419>>. Accessed 20 April 2011.

The Wine Geese are not merely limited to a place in history: there are, in fact, numerous modern examples. Ted Murphy identifies Domaine des Anges in Côtes de Ventoux, which is owned by Gay McGuinness from Kilkenny, as one of the more important wines in the Southern Rhone. Its winemaker, Ciarán Rooney, is actually from Dublin. He stresses the importance of Château Vignelaure in Provence which is run by David O'Brien, son of the legendary Irish horse trainer Vincent O'Brien. Murphy also refers to the crucial role Belfast man Terry Cross has played in the revival of Château de La Ligne in the Entre-Deux-Mers as well as the involvement of former AIB chairman, Loughlin Quinn, in Château de Fieuzal, a Grand Cru Classé estate in Pessac-Leognan.

It is interesting to note that many of these modern wine geese appear to play down rather than embrace the Irish connection in both their promotional material and wine labelling. There are exceptions and one of the wine geese who is more synonymous with the expression of Irishness in his wine is the owner of Domaine Aonghusa, Pat Neville from Wexford. In a 2008 article Katherine Donnelly says of his vineyard location in the Languedoc that:

Sometimes, across the road, on a Sunday afternoon, the sonorous tones of Michael Ó Muirheartaigh resonate from the house of 'L'Irlandais' who, himself, played football for Wexford in the Seventies.<sup>38</sup>

Using the story of Ireland's association and influence in the French wine sector is one of the tools that branding experts might consider when developing sales of French wines into Irish markets. Matthew Healey in *What is Branding?* introduces the concept of story-telling as his second key component of modern branding. Healy suggests that customers tend to be attracted to emotional stories.<sup>39</sup> The potential for such emotional

38 Katherine Donnelly, 'A world from Wexford – an Irishman's passion for wine', in *The Irish Independent: Food and Drink*, 25 October 2008 [Online]. Available at <<http://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/food-drink/a-world-from-wexford--an-irishmans-passion-for-wine-1510184.html>>. Accessed 6 April 2011.

39 Matthew Healey, *What is Branding?* (Hove: RotoVision SA, 2008), p. 28.

connections between French wine and Ireland is obvious given our previous examples and is something that presents particular marketing opportunities. In an *Irish Times* article on 20 October 1990, Sandy O'Byrne, citing T.P. Whelehan, says:

The Irish connection by name or by association, by marriage or by liaison, by merchant, producer, négociant or grower, provides a rich and extensive story and penetrates to the heart of some of the greatest Bordeaux properties.<sup>40</sup>

It is the rich story of this association, mentioned above, that has the potential to be used by marketers to develop in consumers' minds an intimate relationship between French wines and their Irish identity. The use of such stories is not without precedent and there are examples in New World wine marketing strategies.

One recent example of how this might be done is the Chilean Santa Rita 120 campaign. Santa Rita's 120 wine range is named in commemoration of the 120 patriots who according to legend, led by Irishman Bernardo O'Higgins, took refuge in the cellars of Santa Rita following a long unsuccessful battle. Given protection by Dona Paula Jaraquemada, matriarch of the family, the 120 men were able to regain their strength, and therefore continue their fight for Chilean independence from the Spanish Crown.<sup>41</sup> This back story has been used by Grupa Claro, the large company who have owned the Santa Rita winery for almost thirty years, as a marketing tool which helps provide their wine range with authenticity in the eyes of the Irish consumer. Ireland, presumably because of its historical connection to the story and the fact that Chilean wines sell very well here, was chosen as the launch site for Santa Rita's global campaign entitled 'A tradition of honouring heroes.' There is undoubtedly a lot of truth to the legend and it is based on historical fact: however, it can be argued that the degree of

40 Sandy O'Byrne, 'Wines of the Wild Geese', in *The Irish Times*, 20 October 1990, p. 37.

41 Santa Rita.com (2010). Available at <<http://www.santarita.com/nuevo/OpenDocs/asp/=Doc111&argInstanciaId=111&argCarpetaId=24&argTreeNodosAbiertos=>>. Accessed 9 February 2010.

truth associated with the legend is immaterial. Santa Rita has chosen an historic association between Ireland and the Chile, created an attractive back story based on this association and used it to endow its product with emotional attributes beyond the physical attributes of the wine product itself that are particularly attractive to an Irish audience because of the Chilean-Irish connection.

By using this template, I would suggest there is tremendous potential for using the story of Franco-Irish wine connections discussed in this chapter as a starting point to enhance the nature and authenticity of French wine in the mind of their potential Irish consumers. The fact that wine companies are already using examples from history, either real or embellished, confirms there are real marketing possibilities here to use 'story' to help form a bond between the Irish consumer and French wine. Our Franco-Irish connections offer the French wine sector a fertile selection of associations that they might use. Some individual wineries may not feel they need such associations, perhaps because they already sell their full output or because they believe that the Irish market is too small. This may be true, but one should not underestimate the potential that exists when we consider the size of the Irish diaspora. There is also the likelihood that if an approach such as this worked within an Irish context, there is no reason why similar approaches in other key markets might not also work well. However, it's very important to note that a strategy such as this may not be suited to individual French operators. As is the case in other wine exporting countries, the sector somehow needs to find a way to operate in a coordinated national manner when attempting to enhance the relationship between their consumers and the overarching product that is 'French wine'. There may indeed be an argument to start thinking of French wine almost as a single brand in itself, rather than a collection of distinct regional wines, and realise that stories around the historical and modern connections that exist between Ireland and French wine offer the industry as a whole an opportunity to explore the potential benefits that such close relationships might bring.

AXEL KLEIN

## *Qualité d'Irlandais*: The O'Kelly Family in Nineteenth-Century French Musical Life

### Introduction

The cultural life of France has for a long time been an attraction to musical composers from Ireland. Especially during the nineteenth century, several Irish composers spent some time in France, particularly in Paris, for periods ranging from a few weeks to several years. Notable names include the Limerick-born pianist and composer George Alexander Osborne (1806–1893) who spent the years 1831 to 1844 in Paris and more short-term visitors like James Lynam Molloy (1839–1909), Hope Temple (actually Alice Maud Davis, 1859–1938), and Adela Maddison (1863–1929). Composers like Augusta Holmès (1848–1903) and Arthur Herve (1855–1922) were born in Paris of Irish families and, Holmès in particular, are shared names in both Irish and French musical history.<sup>1</sup>

But of all Irish musicians in France, the O'Kelly family is probably the least well-known today. Yet, from the viewpoint of Franco-Irish cultural relations, the most interesting musicians are the members of the O'Kelly family. And this is because there is probably no better example in the history of music of such a close integration of an Irish family into French music than that of the O'Kellys in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this chapter, I will trace the steps the O'Kellys took from immigration in the 1820s to their assimilation into the musical life – and in some cases

1 For an extended discussion of Irish musicians in nineteenth-century France see a paper I read at a musicological conference in Durham, England, in July 2010; see <<http://www.axelklein.de/academic-papers/>>.



the business world – of France in the course of three generations. I will also try to give an answer to the obvious question of why this family could fall into such total neglect today.

I have often devoted time to unearthing composers who I considered unjustly neglected. But I have rarely before been so attracted to a subject than with this family, and this is due to a number of circumstances. The first occurred a few years ago when I merely tried to establish the life-dates and work-list of Joseph O’Kelly for an article in the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Music in Ireland*.<sup>2</sup> I noticed some incoherent information, and in clarifying it, I noticed that there was another composer beside Joseph called O’Kelly. And in going deeper into it I discovered that there were in fact three brothers O’Kelly in French music, plus a second Joseph who was their father, and later generations which included two different Henri O’Kellys, among others. So I drew up a genealogical family tree<sup>3</sup> and began to disentangle the work-lists in the many cases where no first name appears in the catalogues of various music publishers and the articles and reviews of the contemporary press.

Another reason for my fascination is the fact that the music I found in antiquarian shops all over Europe is of a satisfying quality and would deserve to be played in public again. A third reason are the interesting traces of Irish heritage I found, which I will develop in more detail later in this article. And a fourth reason is that I have done most of this research from my computer in Germany, with just two research travels to Paris, one to Boulogne-sur-mer, and one to Dublin. This has been made possible with the help of digitised material from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the État Civil in Paris, and the archives of Pas-de-Calais. Without this progress in digitisation of the past four or five years my research would have been much more time-consuming.<sup>4</sup>

2 Barra Boydell, Harry White (eds), *Encyclopedia of Music in Ireland* (Dublin: UCD Press, forthcoming).

3 See <<http://www.axelklein.de/current-research/o-kelly-family-in-france/>>.

4 Particular thanks are also due to Isabelle Condette of the Archives Municipales in Boulogne-sur-mer who very kindly provided details of family history and other valuable items of interest.

## Origins of the O'Kelly family in France

The story of the O'Kellys in France begins with the emigration from Ireland of the Dublin-born musician Joseph Kelly – note: *not* O'Kelly – in about 1825. He established himself in Boulogne-sur-mer as a 'professeur de musique', which usually equals a piano teacher. Boulogne at this time was a major seaport for ships from and to England, with much-frequented ferry connections to Folkestone and London. For many years the town had a Hibernian Hotel and similar places which testify to the considerable influx of English-speaking people in the first half of the nineteenth century. My research has revealed many English and Irish names in family documents, from birth registries to graveyards.

In November 1826 Kelly married Marie Anne Désirée Duval, a young woman from the neighbouring town of Desvres, and then his first four sons were born in short succession: the composer and pianist Joseph in January 1828, the music publisher Auguste in July 1829, the business man Charles in November 1830, and the pianist and composer George in October 1831. A fifth son, Gustave Alfred, who did not become a musician, was born ten years later when the family had already moved to Paris.

Some time during the mid- to late 1830s the family must have moved to Paris. On 19 October 1838, Joseph gained French citizenship, and in the certificate of naturalisation<sup>5</sup> he was registered as living in Paris. Probably the family lived in Paris at least two years prior to that, as is indicated by the only known composition of his. In late 1835 or early 1836 the Paris firm of Tabareau published a piece of music called *Les Boulonaises – Contredanses pour le piano avec accompagnement de violon et de basse (ad lib)* by one 'J. Kelly' which is most likely his work – there were no other Kellys (or O'Kellys) active in France at this time. The title also refers to Kelly's initial place of residence in the country. Being in Paris at this time would have facilitated contacts with music publishers and with teachers for the advanced training of his sons.

5 Archives Nationales, file no. BB/11/420, numéro de dossier 578 X3.

Kelly lived in Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière in the ninth arrondissement<sup>6</sup> of Paris, a lively quarter close to Montmartre which boasted several small publishing houses, theatres, and was close to the Conservatoire, the Opéra Comique, and – after his time – the Garnier opera house. The street and its vicinity was to be the home for several members of the O’Kelly family for the next decades. He died somewhat prematurely, aged fifty-two, in October 1856. He never officially changed his name to O’Kelly as his sons did a few years later. But on his death certificate he is nevertheless called O’Kelly, and later his sons gave their father’s name as O’Kelly in all family-related official documents. And when Joseph junior succeeded in having an opera of his performed at the Opéra Comique in 1879 – certainly a moment of great significance for him – he dedicated it ‘À la mémoire de mon père, Joseph O’Kelly’.

The change of name from Kelly to O’Kelly is a step all brothers took simultaneously. And they went to do that to their hometown Boulogne-sur-mer in January 1859. The birth certificates of the four brothers who were born there have a little notice in a later hand which explains the change as a correction without giving further details. In fact, however, the family had already used the name considerably longer. The birth certificate of Gustave Alfred in Paris in 1841 would have been the earliest document, but it appears to have been lost. In the absence of that, the earliest confirmed use of ‘O’Kelly’ are Joseph O’Kelly’s first published compositions from 1847 onwards which all appear under the name of O’Kelly.

The change of name is a significant evidence of Irish identity. It could smooth relationships in French society where being English may have been a disadvantage. In a British-occupied Ireland the anglicisation of Irish names was a common practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It seems very likely that the Kellys had anglicised their name in Ireland. But in France, it was easier to build positive relationships as O’Kelly and thereby to distinguish oneself from the historic enemy.

6 At his time, before the restructuring of the Paris arrondissements in 1860, it was the third arrondissement.

## Joseph O'Kelly (1828–1885)

The best known member of the family was to be the first-born son, Joseph O'Kelly (1828–1885). If any of the O'Kellys appears in a musical dictionary<sup>7</sup> or other contemporary source it is he who is listed. Undoubtedly he received his first piano tuition from his father, but he quickly proceeded to study piano with the aforementioned George Alexander Osborne and with Osborne's teacher, the German-born Frédéric Kalkbrenner. He also studied composition with Fromental Halévy, composer of the famous opera 'La Juive', and with Victor Dourlen. Both were teachers at the Conservatoire, but there is no record of any Kelly or O'Kelly at the Conservatoire at this time so I presume these were private studies.

Joseph quickly established himself as a pianist and composer. His first published compositions are songs and piano pieces, published with several Paris publishing houses<sup>8</sup> from late 1847 when Joseph was only nineteen years of age. He is regularly mentioned in newspapers and musical periodicals from 1850, the first reference being to an opera of his that was intended for performance at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in the previous year but failed.<sup>9</sup> In the early years he frequently appeared as both pianist and composer, sometimes in a duet with his brother George,<sup>10</sup> and often with his own works. A contemporary review of such a recital which included his fantasia op. 6 on Schubert's song *La Truite* finds enthusiastic praise for Joseph, speaking of

7 The earliest such reference is in Arthur Pougin's 1880 revised edition of F.-J. Fétis's *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique, supplément et complément*, tome 2 (Paris, 1880).

8 His earliest publishers during 1847–50 were Bernard Latte, Alexandre Grus, Mme. Cendrier, E. Mayaud, Chabal and J. Meissonnier fils.

9 *La Presse*, 4 August 1850.

10 An example of an early performance in Boulogne-sur-mer is recorded in the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* in the section 'Chronique départementale' on 8 August 1852.

[...] le succès unanime du compositeur-pianiste, M. J. O'Kelly, qui a soulevé tous les bravos par sa fantaisie, la *Truite*, où ses doigts ont été si miraculeusement les traducteurs poétiques de sa gracieuse et entraînant mélodie. Rien de faux, de prétentieux, de psalmodique dans son jeu ; ce n'est plus là le pianiste lymphatique, l'eunuque de l'harmonie à l'eau de rose, c'est l'homme de talent qui simplement s'inspire de la vérité, sans emphase et sans contorsion.<sup>11</sup>

([...] the unanimous success of composer-pianist Monsieur J. O'Kelly who received all the bravos for his fantasy, the *Truite*, in which his fingers miraculously acted like poetic translators of his gracious and entrancing melody. There was nothing false, nothing pretentious, nothing psalmodic in his playing. There is no longer the lymphatic pianist, the eunuch of harmony in rose water, this is a man of talent who is simply inspired by the truth, without exaggerated emphasis and without contortion.)

Even Hector Berlioz, well-known for his critical remarks about contemporary musicians, in his own inimitable way finds modest praise for a small collection of six songs by O'Kelly, published as *Album de la Légion d'Honneur*, in an 1855 feuilletton of the *Journal des débats*:

*J'en reviens toujours à ma paraphrase d'un mot du grand comédien Potier : La musique est comme la justice, une bien belle chose ... quand elle est juste. Eh bien ! voici un petit recueil intitulé Album de la Légion-d'Honneur, contenant six mélodies dédiées à M<sup>me</sup> la baronne Daumesnil, surintendante de la maison de Saint-Denis, par M. J. Montini, auteur des paroles, et M. J. O'Kelly, auteur de la musique, et ce recueil contient de la musique juste. Il est clair que ces mélodies ont été écrites spécialement pour les élèves de la maison de Saint-Denis. Il fallait des chants simples, faciles, point trop passionnés ni échevelés, [...] Il s'agissait de trouver une poésie de seize ans, une musique de seize ans pour ces jeunes cantatrices de seize ans. MM. Montini et O'Kelly ont résolu le problème sans effort et même avec beaucoup de bonheur. Plusieurs morceaux de leur album charmeraient même des cantatrices de trente-deux ans.<sup>12</sup>*

(I keep returning to my paraphrase of the saying by the great comedian Potier: Music is like justice, a very beautiful thing ... when it is 'just'. Ah, well! along comes a little collection entitled *Album de la Légion d'Honneur*, containing six songs dedicated

- 11 *La Tintamarre*, 9 January 1853. O'Kelly's *Fantaisie brillante sur une mélodie (La Truite)* de F. Schubert op. 6 was published in 1852 by Richault.
- 12 *Journal des débats*, 17 April 1855, p. 3. This is available online at <<http://www.hberlioz.com/feuilletons/debats550417.htm>>. Accessed 31 August 2011.

to Madame la Baronesse Daumesnil, superintendant of the Saint Denis school, by Mr J. Montini, author of the words, and Mr J. O'Kelly, author of the music, and this collection does contain 'just' music. It is obvious that these songs were written especially for the pupils of Saint Denis. They would need to be simple songs, easy, not all too passionate or dishevelled, [...] It seems that you would have to find a sixteen year-old poem, sixteen year-old music for these sixteen year-old singers. Messrs Montini and O'Kelly have, effortlessly and even with a lot of good humour, solved the problem. Several pieces of the album would even charm thirty-two-year-old singers.)

Obviously, O'Kelly had intended for these songs to be sung by young ladies of limited technical ability and not by professional singers. And indeed many of his songs (and some of his piano music) aim at an audience composed of well-educated young people and for performance in one of the fashionable salons of the upper-class Paris society of his day. It is interesting in this regard to note Joseph's use of opus numbers. None of his songs (or song collections) receives the honour of an opus number, neither do some collections of piano music clearly intended for children or with an educational purpose. In comparison, most of his piano music do have opus numbers (which run to 66), and a look into the scores reveals a technical difficulty that could not be mastered by most teenagers. Thus it appears that most of O'Kelly's songs were written in an attempt to provide a living, while his artistic ambitions were fulfilled in his piano music and other large-scale scores. In fact, well-educated teenagers such as those of Saint Denis provided a considerable part of Joseph's income, and he enjoyed a good reputation as a teacher, both privately and, from at least the early 1860s, in a major role for the piano manufacturer Pleyel Wolff & Cie for which he also conducted a choir of fifty voices.

But O'Kelly did have ambitions beyond entertaining young ladies, and this included a life-long interest in opera. Some dictionaries which list Joseph O'Kelly mention three such works, but I identified eleven operas of his between 1849 and 1882.<sup>13</sup> It clearly shows that O'Kelly had a deep

13 The first was the one mentioned in fn. 9 (called *La chasse du roi*) of late 1849. This was followed by *Paraguassú: chronique bresilienne* (Paris, Théâtre Lyrique, 2 August 1855); *Stella* (Paris, salon performance, 1 March 1859); *L'arracheuse de dents* (Paris, Théâtre des Folies-Dramatiques, January 1869); *Ruse contre ruse* (1873, a school

interest in music theatre throughout his creative life and was fairly successful in getting his works performed.

The success of his operas was mixed. Only four of the works were published. One was published but did not receive a professional performance (*Ruse contre ruse*, 1873), six were performed but not published (*Stella*, 1859; *L'arracheuse de dents*, 1869; *Le mariage de Martine*, 1874; *Le lac de Glenaston*, 1876; *Les secondes noces de bourgmestre*, 1881; *Bibi-tapin*, 1882). While all except one were one-act light operas (or operettas), for the most ambitious work, a three-act opera on a Brazilian legend, *Paraguassú* of 1855, he was even promoted to 'Chevalier de l'Ordre Impérial de la Rose' by the Brazilian emperor Don Pédro II,<sup>14</sup> although the musical press of the time missed qualities such as 'un peu plus de couleur locale' ('a little more local colour').<sup>15</sup>

Incidentally, his largest public success in opera was the one that was the most criticised, *La Zingarella* of 1879, performed for four nights in the large Opéra Comique. 14 reviews appeared about this performance in the Paris press, six of which were negative, four positive and the others mixed, like that in *Le Ménestrel* which begins negatively:

*De la musique de la Zingarella, j'aurai peu de chose à dire, n'en ayant entendu que la dernière moitié, écrite par un musicien, cela est incontestable, mais sans relief suffisant pour la scène.*

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opera, probably performed in girls' boarding schools); *Le mariage de Martine* (Paris, 2 May 1874, no theatre mentioned in review); *Le lac de Glenaston* (Paris: Théâtre de Montmartre, March 1876); *La zingarella* (Paris, Opéra-Comique, 26 February 1879); *Les secondes noces de bourgmestre* (Brussels, Théâtre des Galeries Saint-Hubert, 21 October 1881); *La barbière improvisée* (Paris: Salle Herz, 10 December 1882, with other performances until 1884). An eleventh work may be by Joseph's brother George (my source doesn't mention a first name), but Joseph's authorship is more likely: *Bibi-tapin* (Châtel Guyon, 29 August 1882).

14 In 1859; see *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 9 October 1859, and *Le Ménestrel*, 30 October–5 November 1859.

15 *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 5 August 1855.

(About the music of la *Zingarella* I would have little to say, having only heard the second half, which is written by a musician, this is very clear, but without sufficient feeling for the stage.)

and ends positively:

*M. O'Kelly a écrit une musique aimable, sans prétention, qui dénote à la fois le savoir et le goût de l'artiste.*<sup>16</sup>

(Monsieur O'Kelly has written some lovely music, without pretention, which denotes both the knowledge and taste of the artist.)

Apart from operas Joseph also wrote three large cantatas for soloists, choir and orchestra, the first performed at Amiens in 1867,<sup>17</sup> the third at Versailles in 1878,<sup>18</sup> and the second in 1875 in Dublin. The Dublin cantata is a work called *La veille de la bataille* to words by the Viscount François Henry O'Neill de Tyrone (after Thomas Davis) and written for the occasion of the O'Connell Centenary. O'Neill de Tyrone had suggested the piece to the organising committee of the Centenary at some short notice (at the end of June 1875<sup>19</sup>), and as time did not seem to have been sufficient for a complete performance and the programme was altogether very long,<sup>20</sup> only selections of the work were presented (for tenor and bass soloists, mixed choir and orchestra). In fact, O'Kelly travelled to Dublin for the occasion, together with the Viscount O'Neill de Tyrone and John Patrick Leonard, a well-known Irishman who taught at the Collège Chaptal in Paris and was a secret supporter of the Fenian movement in Ireland. It is the only documented journey of O'Kelly to the land of his father's birth.

16 *Le Ménestrel*, 2. March 1879.

17 *Cantate pour le fête de S. M. l'Impératrice*, Amiens, Théâtre, 15 November 1867, unpublished.

18 *Justice et Charité, cantate religieuse*, Versailles, Chapelle du Château, 13 June 1878, unpublished.

19 *The Nation*, 26 June 1875, reports about the proposal.

20 *The Nation*, 14 August 1875, p. 13, ends the review thus: 'The concert, which commenced at half-past seven o'clock, was not over until eleven o'clock, but notwithstanding its unusual length every one appeared to enjoy it very much.'



There are some other but altogether few Irish references in his work, the largest being the 1876 comic opera *Le lac de Glenaston* (libretto after Adolphe d'Ennery's translation of Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn*).<sup>21</sup> In 1866 he wrote an arrangement of Thomas Moore's *Last Rose of Summer* in a series of light arrangements of popular melodies.<sup>22</sup> In 1873 he wrote a march for military band called *Mac-Mahon*, dedicated to the well-known Franco-Irish marshall.<sup>23</sup> In 1877 he published an *Air irlandais* op. 58 which is a set of variations on *The Wearing of the Green*.<sup>24</sup> This is remarkable for its selection, as it is none of the popular 'Irish Melodies' by Moore. The melody was only published in Dublin in 1841,<sup>25</sup> long after Joseph's father had left Ireland, so it was evidently not a melody transmitted within the family. This, and his journey to Ireland in 1875 in the company of Viscount O'Neill and J.P. Leonard, suggests that the O'Kellys (Joseph at least) appear to have moved within the Irish community in Paris which included several members actively interested in the cause of Irish self-determination. In fact, an article in *The Irish Times* once confirmed his presence among twenty-seven members of the 'ancien Irlandais' – Frenchmen of Irish descent – at one of their annual St Patrick's dinners at the Paris restaurant of Velour's.<sup>26</sup> In addition, some of Joseph's music bears dedications to members of this community such as O'Neill de Tyrone, or Count Théobald Walsh. At the same time, however, it should be noted that Joseph was equally proud of his French side. This shows, for example, in a vocal work called *Ne touchez pas à la France*, one of the earliest items in Auguste O'Kelly's publishing business, published shortly after the Franco-Prussian war in 1872.

Overall, I identified some 230 individual works by Joseph O'Kelly. Many were available in beautiful editions, and from the late 1850s quite a few of his pieces were published in Germany, Spain, Italy, and England as

21 Short review in *L'Orchestre*, March 1876, p. 58.

22 *La dernière rose*, part of *Les soirées enfantines*, 2me serie (Paris: Gambogi frères, 1866).

23 Published in a piano version with Choudens.

24 Paris: A. O'Kelly.

25 Aloys Fleischmann (ed.): *Sources of Irish Traditional Music c. 1600–1855* (New York: Garland, 1998), tune no. 6187.

26 'Paris Letter', in *The Irish Times*, 22 March 1877.

well. When Auguste O'Kelly began his publishing business in 1872, some but not all of his music was published with him. Auguste also re-published some of Joseph's earlier music.

Stylistically, O'Kelly's music up to about 1860 is heavily influenced by older models, such as Kalkbrenner whose music was already getting old-fashioned when O'Kelly studied with him. Berlioz and Chopin are clear models as well. There is a marked improvement I think in works like the early-1860s settings of poems by Victor Hugo, particularly his *Vieille chanson du jeune temps* of 1862, a real gem in its interplay between vocal line and motivic work on the piano. O'Kelly was a contemporary of César Franck and Edouard Lalo, who were a little older and Camille Saint-Saëns and Léo Délibes who were a little younger. Some of O'Kelly's songs and piano pieces since the 1860s certainly compare well with works by these composers.

Joseph received a number of public honours. In addition to the national order of merit from Brazil for his opera *Paraguassú* of 1855, mentioned above, and that of Portugal in 1865 for his arrangement of the Portuguese national anthem, he was elected to the *Légion d'Honneur* in 1881 together with two other musicians.

*Un troisième musicien est décoré, mais par la grande chancellerie, si ce n'est par le ministre des affaires étrangères, en sa qualité d'Irlandais, bien qu'ayant toujours habité la France. L'heureux décoré en question est M. Joseph O'Kelly, auteur d'un grand nombre d'estimables mélodies, de cantates, de pièces de piano et d'un petit opéra : la Zingarella [...]*

(A third musician was decorated, but by the Grande Chancellerie, and not by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with his Irish nationality, despite having always lived in France. The happy recipient in question is Mr O'Kelly, author of a large number of esteemed songs, cantatas, piano pieces and a short opera, la Zingarella [...])

Obviously, the author of this notice missed out on a number of other operas. But the interesting detail here is the somewhat unclear formulation about who recommended Joseph for the *Légion d'Honneur*, the Grande Chancellerie (for French citizens) or the ministry of foreign affairs (for foreigners), unclear also because the source appears to include a grammatical mistake or misprint. In fact, Joseph received the honour on

recommendation of the ministry of foreign affairs,<sup>27</sup> which means that he was not French although his father had become a naturalised Frenchman in 1838. In fact, even Joseph's children remained Irish, as will be seen below.

### Auguste O'Kelly (1829–1900)

The second son of the immigrant from Ireland was Auguste O'Kelly who is best known for his activities as music publisher in Paris. Little to nothing has come to light about his early life. The only public reference to him before 1872 is his registration as a member of the Association des Artistes Musiciens for four years from 1850. It can only be presumed that he spent the intervening years in Paris. When his son Gustave was born in October 1872 (from an unmarried relationship) he registered his profession as 'négociant', a dealer, probably in pianos. In May of that year, however, he had taken over a publishing business called 'Magasin de Musique du Conservatoire' at 11, rue du Faubourg Poissonnière by buying the modest catalogue of pieces published by his predecessor Émile Cellerin (active 1869–72). The business had previously become known under the name and directorship of 'Mme. Cendrier' (active 1841–59) which is why O'Kelly initially added 'ancienne maison Cendrier' to his company name.<sup>28</sup>

Within sixteen-and-a-half years, up until November 1888, he published almost 1,500 pieces of music, but what may sound as prolific is in fact a small business compared to most of his competitors. His catalogue consisted mainly of piano music and songs, but also included a few piano reductions of one-act operas, some chamber music, educational works and

27 The original document is lost, but my information is based on a letter I received from the Grande Chancellerie de la Légion d'Honneur, dated 24 May 2011.

28 All music publishers' details in this section are quoted from Anik Devriès and François Lesure: *Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français*, tome 2: *De 1820 à 1914* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1988).

a handful of orchestral scores. Sometimes he bought complete or partial catalogues of competitors who closed down. Thus, apart from Cellerin (which in turn included a number of works previously published by Mme. Cendrier and Saint-Hilaire), he acquired the catalogue of Fernand Schœn in 1877 (which included the immensely popular piano tutor by Adolphe Le Carpentier), the harmonium section of the catalogue of Aulagnier (1880), and selected works from Léon Escudier in 1882 (including the piano works by Louis Moreau Gottschalk).<sup>29</sup> Apart from the music he purchased by takeovers of other publishers he mainly published music by young French talents, for which he received a bronze medal at the *Exposition Universelle Internationale* in 1878.

There were times, apparently, when the business did not run so smoothly which is not surprising given the very large number of music publishers in France in the nineteenth century. An indicator for this is the amount of works published in a year which varies considerably. Thus he partnered for short periods of time with Rouget in Toulouse, Lissarrague in Versailles, and Naus in Paris, the latter for a few months during 1881 only, after which followed a year-long legal conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Probably, during most of these years he continued selling pianos using the brand of his publishing house. Most likely, he was not a piano *maker*, though, but merely sold and rented out pianos under his name. After he closed down in 1888, he worked as a librarian at the *École Française de Musique et de Déclamation*, retiring in 1892, and acted as secretary of the *Association des Artistes Musiciens*.

What happened to his catalogue after he closed down has two different perspectives. In 1886, the publisher Ernest Lacombe took rooms at the same address and used the name 'Au Magasin de Musique du Conservatoire' between 1886 and 1894 (which means that for three years two publishers used the same brand with the same address). Then he sold the business and the name to Ulysse Toussaint du Wast, who calls himself 'successeur de E. Lacombe' in 1895 and also 'ancienne maison O'Kelly' (which is not true

29 The last deal is detailed in *La musique populaire*, 16 March 1882, pp. 219–220.

30 See *L'art moderne*, 4 January 1885, p. 6.

for his music, see below). Du Wast moved the business to 35 rue Faubourg Poissonnière where it was acquired by Marcel Mercier in 1910. Mercier retained the name 'Au Magasin de Musique du Conservatoire' until 1924, when he retired. In 1930 he sold his business to Éditions Salabert which fused with Durand and Eschig in 1987 and became part of Universal Musical Publishing Group. This still exists today.

Auguste O'Kelly's actual business and catalogue, however, was sold to Albert Noël in December 1888. This included (some of) the music by Joseph and George O'Kelly. Two weeks after the deal, Noël founded a publishing partnership with Félix Mackar, and they traded as 'Mackar et Noël', republishing most of Auguste's catalogue. Their address was initially at 22 passage des Panoramas. When Mackar retired in June 1895, Noël continued alone. He changed addresses in 1907 to 24 boulevard des Capucines, in 1910 to 23 avenue de Messine, and in 1913 to 32 place Saint-Georges. It was actually bought by Stéphane Chapelier in 1910 who worked as artistic director for the publisher Marcel Combre. Combre again sold his entire repertoire to Billaudot in 1958. Billaudot still exists today, but O'Kelly's catalogue, with very few exceptions, was not reprinted after World War I.

### Charles Frédéric O'Kelly (1830–1897)

The third son, Charles Frédéric O'Kelly, became an important business man in Boulogne-sur-mer. He joined the company Blanzzy Poure et Cie. in 1852, a company founded in 1846 to import metal nibs ('plumes métalliques') from England. He was instrumental in transforming the company from an importing to a producing company after he became managing director in 1867. For decades, Blanzzy Poure was a household name in France for high-quality nibs, and O'Kelly had a key role in this success story. He was also known for his social responsibility, as the magazine *L'Illustration* pointed out in an obituary:

*M. O'Kelly [...] était un philanthrope, qui savait soulager, sans les humilier, les misères des ouvriers.*

(Mr O'Kelly was a philanthropist who knew how to relieve the suffering of workers without humiliating them.)

And he was also proposed for the Légion d'Honneur, as the obituary continues:

*Ses amis attendaient et réclamaient pour lui, depuis plusieurs années, la croix de la Légion d'honneur; cette récompense méritée allait enfin lui être accordée, quand la mort est venue couper court aux bonnes intentions tardives du gouvernement.*<sup>31</sup>

(His friends, on his behalf, were calling for and awaited for several years the cross of the Légion d'Honneur; this well-deserved reward was going to be awarded to him when his death cut short the belated good intentions of the government.)

There have been further members of the business world in Charles's line of the family, in particular his son Ernest Auguste O'Kelly (1871–1938), who was one of the first large-scale fruit and vegetable importers into France with offices in Marseille, London, and New York and trade connections from North American peach farms to Tasmanian apple growers.

## George O'Kelly (1831–1914)

The fourth son was the pianist and composer George O'Kelly. He always stood somewhat in Joseph's shadow, to the extent that George's works were confused with Joseph's. Nothing is known about his musical education, but it can be taken as a given that he received his first tuition

31 *L'illustration*, 30 October 1897, p. 356. About Charles see also Georges Poure: *À la mémoire de M. Charles-Frédéric O'Kelly, gérant de l'usine Blanzky Poure & Cie.* (Boulogne-sur-mer, 1897).

from his father, probably complemented by advanced studies with other teachers. His earliest public record is his membership of the Association des Artistes Musiciens, where he is listed in the annual membership lists for 1847 to 1852. From 1850 to 1852 he was employed as a pianist at the Théâtre Historique, the predecessor of the Théâtre Lyrique, on Boulevard du Temple. Afterwards he returned to Boulogne-sur-mer to teach piano for the next almost 30 years until around 1880 when he again moved to Paris.

At Boulogne, there are records of an orchestral overture performed in March 1858, a piano concerto (1871), and a choral cantata on the occasion of the laying of a foundation stone to the deep-sea harbour of Boulogne (1878). But his largest work was the one-act comic opera *Le lutin de Galway* with a plot based in eighteenth-century county Galway, performed in the theatre of his hometown on 12 September 1878, which has so far been wrongly attributed to his brother Joseph. The news of these performances travelled as far as Ireland:

It will be interesting to Irishmen to learn that the comic opera was founded on an Irish theme, and that the music of both the opera and the cantata was the production of a gentleman bearing the unmistakably Hibernian name of George O'Kelly.<sup>32</sup>

The story is a simple and funny one that bears no particular reference to Galway (or to Ireland, as it were). It is a comedy about local 'lads' interested in courting a girl named Cécilie who chooses her future husband only after she has secretly appeared in the town as a dwarf and confused most of the other characters. But George's music received unanimous praise, albeit his ensembles appear to have had some difficulties as the following excerpts from reviews in the local press suggest:

*Quant à la musique, elle nous a paru 'grandé', peut être même un peu trop pour le cadre.*<sup>33</sup>

(As far as the music is concerned, it seems to us to be 'grand', perhaps even too grand for its context.)

32 *The Nation*, 14 September 1878.

33 *La France du Nord*, 11 September 1878.

*Tous les chœurs, sans exception, sont largement traités. M. O'Kelly excelle dans ce genre de composition. [...] la musique dénote un artiste de race, un compositeur plein de science et de talent.*<sup>34</sup>

(All the choral numbers, without exception, are treated in a grand manner. Mr. O'Kelly excels in this kind of composition. [...] the music denotes a racy artist, a composer full of knowledge and talent.)

George published considerably less music than Joseph, but he evidently wrote some orchestral music, the scores of which appear to be lost. I also found records of twenty-five piano works and nineteen songs, some of the latter written to his own words. Most of his (very few) pieces published before the 1870s were published by established music publishers.<sup>35</sup> Auguste O'Kelly published about fifteen of his pieces during his own time of business (until 1888). Afterwards his music was mostly published in ladies magazines and educational journals such as the *Journal des Demoiselles* and the *Journal la Poupée Modèle*. He died in Asnières-sur-Seine near Paris in 1914, outliving all of his brothers, four sisters-in-law, nieces and one of his own sons. I may add here that George's line of the O'Kelly family is the only one still alive in France today.

## Henri O'Kelly (I) (1859–1938)

(Joseph Pierre) Henri O'Kelly was the second child (first son) of composer and pianist Joseph O'Kelly from his first marriage (1856) with Henriette Gobert. He studied piano at the Paris Conservatoire (1874–9) where he was a fellow student of Claude Debussy with whom he shared all academic distinctions. His teachers included Albert Lavignac (1874–75) and Georges Mathias (1876–79). In 1876, he won a first prize (1ère médaille)

34 *La Colonne*, 15 September 1878.

35 Including Alexandre Grus, Mme. Cendrier, and Saint-Hilaire.



at the Solfège class together with Debussy, and in 1879 the much coveted 'premier prix' for piano.

Henri was organist and 'Maître de chapelle' at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, place du Louvre, from 1881 to 1900, followed by a similar position at Saint Vincent de Paul until 1918. For a short time from around 1890, he also worked for Pleyel, Wolff & Cie. (like his father Joseph), but was probably not officially employed.

In later years he taught music at the École Rocroy, not far from Saint Vincent de Paul; he received the 'Palme académique' in 1901 and was 'Officier de l'Instruction Publique'. For some years he edited and recorded music for pianola rolls ('Pleyela') published by Pleyel, some of them together with Alexandre Angot. The Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE) has many of these rolls which they date as 'c. 1926' which is probably – at least for the first ones – fifteen to twenty years too late.<sup>36</sup> Henri was also a 'Chevalier de l'Ordre Papal de Saint-Grégoire le Grand', and in 1931 he became a 'Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur' – as his father fifty years previously suggested by the ministry for foreign affairs because of his Irish nationality, and awarded for his long services to French music. O'Kelly gave ambitious performances of large-scale religious choral music by composers such as Théodore Dubois, César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns, and others.

Henri, too, was a prolific composer, but the majority of his music is church music which has not been published. His only published compositions are a few songs and single pieces for piano and cello/piano duet dating from the 1890s. A contemporary review of French choral church music included Henri O'Kelly with the words:

*Compositeur de mérite, il a écrit un grand nombre de motets pour soli, chœurs, orgue et orchestre. Tu es Petrus (chœur à deux orgues), Pie Jesu, Ave Maria, etc., et une belle Méditation pour hautbois, cor, harpe et orgue.*<sup>37</sup>

36 A list of Henri O'Kelly's pianola recordings is available in Larry Sitsky: *The Classical Reproducing Piano Roll – A Catalogue-Index*. Vol. 1: *Composers*. Vol. 2: *Pianists* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990), pp. 1098–1102.

37 Félicien de Ménéil: 'Les Grandes Maitrises de Paris', in: *Musica*, January 1904, pp. 254–255.

(A composer of merit, he has written a large number of motets for soloists, choirs, organ and orchestra. *Tu es Petrus* (choir with two organs), *Pie Jesu*, *Ave Maria*, etc., and a nice *Médiation* for oboe, horn, harp, and organ.)

Henri died in 1938 in Cannes, but probably he did not live there, as he was buried in Paris on the Cimetière de Passy.

### Gustave O'Kelly (1872–1937)

Gustave (Ernest Jean) O'Kelly was the only child of Auguste O'Kelly, the music publisher and piano dealer, and Juliette Constance Patinier (1847–1874) to whom Auguste was not married. So far, nothing is known about his early life and education. He took over a piano manufacturing business in 1898 with an address at 93, rue Richelieu, Paris. The business had already been founded in 1830. From September 1901 to at least 1913 he shared this with a partner called Ferry, trading as 'G. O'Kelly & Ferry'. Advertisements for this business clarify that he also sold pianos by Erard, Gaveau and Pleyel. The shop must have been a large one because he advertised having 200 pianos in stock. It is not clear for how long exactly this business was active. A new proprietor is not recorded before 1922.

The name Gustave O'Kelly frequently appears in relation to the *Association des Artistes Musiciens* for which he acted in various committee functions for many years. The earliest record I found is an 1898 announcement in *Le Ménestrel* where he is listed as one of two archivists. Similar announcements can be found in musical periodicals and the daily press until 1936. His death is recorded by *Le Figaro* on Wednesday, 1 September 1937.

## Henri O’Kelly (II) (1881–1922)

Henri (Jean François) O’Kelly was the only son of Henri O’Kelly (I) and his wife Clotilde (née Vacher) – and the last musician in the family. Henri junior studied double-bass at the Paris Conservatoire with Joseph-Napoleon Viseur (1847–1902) during (at least) 1898–1900. During these three years he received annual prizes from the Conservatoire for his playing, although the jury appears to have laboured hard because the overall level of quality in the double bass class was not as high as in previous years, as a report about the 1900 competition among seven contestants shows:

*[...] accordant un premier prix à O’Kelly, bien qu’il fût assurément l’un des meilleurs du concours, ce qui ne veut pas énormément dire. Ce jeune homme a de bons doigts et un assez bon archet, de la netteté ; mais les traits sont courts, et le jeu est bien maigre et bien étriqué.*<sup>38</sup>

([...] according a first prize to O’Kelly, although he was certainly one of the best of the competition, this does not mean a lot. This young man has good fingers and a pretty good bow, for the neatness; but the lines are short, and the play is quite meagre and skimpy.)

After his studies he played for some years in the orchestra of the Opéra Comique. Quite an achievement was his membership in the prestigious Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. According to D. Kern Holoman,<sup>39</sup> Henri became an ‘aspirant’ for membership in 1913 and a member on 23 June 1914, but abstained due to illness from 1919, and resigned on 15 June 1920. Holoman writes, he ‘never served as Sociétaire’ due to his (unspecified) illness. Holoman, too, is my source for the year of Henri’s death (1922) which I have so far been unable to confirm. Henri was the editor of a series of short pieces and studies for bass clef instruments (such as double bass or

38 *Le Ménestrel*, 22 July 1900, p. 227.

39 Website called *The Société de Concerts du Conservatoire (1828–1967)*, see <<http://hector.ucdavis.edu/sdc/MainRoll/O.htm>>.

cello), published as *Polyorgane: 160 Pièces pour les 'Cles de fa'*.<sup>40</sup> Of these 160 pieces, fourteen are his own compositions, six are by his father, and seventeen by his mother.

## Afterword

Apart from the obvious confusion between the various O'Kellys which pervades the scant research on this family, why is even the most prominent member, Joseph O'Kelly, so forgotten today? I think it is a mixture of the fierce competition between the very large number of composers active in Paris at the time, and for stylistic reasons. On the one hand, Joseph was known enough to have enjoyed regular performances of almost everything he wrote. He had a circle of performers who obviously liked his music. He doesn't seem to have had any difficulty in finding publishers, and the reviews of published music and of performances were mostly positive. He was also acknowledged enough to be elected to the Légion d'Honneur.

But, on the other hand, competition wasn't only fierce because of the quantity of composers, but also in terms of stylistic development. Contrary to today, in the nineteenth century music was marked by a strong belief in progress in terms of style, harmony, and expression. Particularly during Joseph's lifetime, these shifts in style and public taste were so strong that, although his music had followers, it was not regarded as progressive. Also, he seems to have had problems with larger forms which can be deduced from a number of reviews of his operas. He obviously was a much better composer in the smaller forms of piano music and songs. By 1880, still in his lifetime, when he was included in an important French biographical dictionary, the influential writer Arthur Pougin sounded a kind of death-knell to him when he wrote:

40 Published in Paris: Édition M. Sénart & Cie., 1920, plate number 3848, a book of sixty-three pages.

[...] *il a publié [...] un assez grand nombre de compositions qui sont écrites non sans goût, mais dans une forme qui est loin de cadrer avec les idées larges, la libre allure et le souffle nouveau qui distinguent la jeune école française.*<sup>41</sup>

(... he published quite a large number of compositions which were written not without taste but in a form which is far from the broad ideas, the free atmosphere and the new breath which distinguishes the young French school.)

Today, as we are able to view both O’Kelly’s music and quotes like the above from an historical perspective – music which had its time and aesthetic assessments which had theirs – we are in a new position that may allow us to have a fresh look at the achievements of the O’Kellys. It will then be found that, although some of Joseph’s music is derivative and outmoded by the standards of their time, it is always tastefully written, melodious, and rewarding for both pianists and singers. I do see a stylistic development from the early 1860s which – with the exception of his operas – place him on an equal level with that of his better-known contemporaries. The fact that he adhered to his Irish nationality but lived in France all his life should make him interesting for both French and Irish musicians and audiences. But it is above all our enhanced understanding of the fugacity of style and taste that contributed to his early neglect and which enables us at the same time to form a fresh assessment today.<sup>42</sup>

41 See fn. 7.

42 This chapter is the first published result of my research into the O’Kelly family of musicians in France. It is a part of a book project with the working title *O’Kelly – An Irish Musical Family in 19th-Century France*, due to be completed in 2012. It contains full accounts of the life and music of all family members and including extensive literature reviews and a catalogue of their compositions. It will also feature a full catalogue of Auguste O’Kelly’s publishing business with dates and plate numbers (as available).

CATHERINE MAIGNANT

## Reimagining Ireland through Early Twentieth-Century French Eyes

In May 1913, two French ladies in their thirties, Marguerite Mespoulet and Madeleine Mignon, sailed to Ireland, carrying sophisticated photographic equipment. The mission that had been entrusted to them by banker and philanthropist Albert Kahn was to take pictures of the fast-disappearing Irish traditional lifestyles for his *Archive of the Planet*, a visual record of world cultures on the verge of disintegration in a changing world. A few weeks later, they returned to Paris with seventy-three autochromes, the first ever colour photographs of that type to have been taken in Ireland. Several exhibitions, press articles and two documentaries, one produced by the BBC and the other by RTE, have brought the Albert Kahn collection to the attention of the Irish public. As a result, the story of the two young non-professional photographers' Irish expedition is now well-known in Ireland. Reviewers of all kinds have lavished unanimous praise on the artistic qualities of the photographs, and the collection as a whole has received unqualified critical acclaim.

Yet on closer examination, the image of Ireland that was conveyed in France as a result of the photography expedition bears little resemblance to the original. Even if one takes into account Albert Kahn's specific agenda, it can be argued that the photographers primarily took pictures that corresponded to the image of Ireland they had formed in France. The remarkably interesting notebook which complements the photographs also documents the way educated middle-class French women reacted to the Irish realities they chose to investigate. This chapter will seek to analyse the nature and origin of the clichés which shaped their perceptions of Ireland and were used as a filter through which the country and its people were reinvented for the French public. The recent success of this collection in

Ireland itself will also be analysed as part of the re-mythification process which has arguably characterised late modern reimaginings of Ireland. When Albert Kahn launched his ambitious project, he sought to develop the knowledge of foreign habits and customs with a view to fostering world peace. Contemporary Ireland's perception of the French photographs of 1913 naturally bears witness to a radically different understanding of their value. It is also indicative of the way late modern Irish society is now viewing its past and the world of a hundred years ago, which, according to Grace Neville is 'so gone, so distant, so unimaginably past'.<sup>1</sup> Writing about 'Time and Place in Global Ireland', Michael Cronin reminds his readers that 'it is something of a philosophical and sociological truism (which does not make it any the less true) that our identity is defined through others'.<sup>2</sup> It is tempting to suggest that the 1913 French autochromes has contributed – however modestly – to the reinvention of this lost past for the benefit of new generations.

## Discovery and the process of distancing from the past

The Albert Kahn collection of photographs was first exhibited in Ireland on the initiative of the French Embassy and the Alliance Française, in 1981. Why then, and not before, can only be guessed at. Whatever the reason, it is significant that the event should have been organised at a time when the Arts Council had become aware of the necessity both to adapt its policy to the new European context and to promote the democratisation

- 1 Roy Esmonde, and Grace Neville, Documentary *Not Fade Away*, RTE 2004, final words.
- 2 Michael Cronin, 'Inside Out: Time and Place in Global Ireland', in Eamon Maher (ed.), *Cultural Perspectives on Globalisation and Ireland* (Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 17.

of culture.<sup>3</sup> The exhibition was successively shown in Dublin, Galway and Cork and it attracted the attention of the national and local press. *The Irish Independent* recommended it on grounds that it was worth reading ‘the intelligent, sympathetic and occasionally heartfelt comments appended by *Messieurs*<sup>4</sup> Mespoulet and Mignon.’<sup>5</sup> *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Press* and *The Connacht Sentinel*<sup>6</sup> were equally enthusiastic and equally blind to the fact that the photographers were women and not men. That the photographers should have been females did not dawn on the journalists of patriarchal Ireland. As a result, not only did they fail to comment on this most unusual pair, but the feminine if not feminist dimension of the collection and commentaries were lost on them. All articles offered a non-committal analysis of the aesthetic and documentary interest of the photographs. Unlike the French ladies, however, the last two newspapers overemphasised the political context of the expedition and suggested that the social effects of the Great Famine were still visible in the country in 1913. This clearly was not a central preoccupation of the travellers, even though they were obviously aware both of the Famine, and of the nationalist agenda.

None of the articles however questioned the unexpected itinerary chosen by the two women, or the fact that more than half of the collection was made up of photos of monuments and archaeological sites, which went against the spirit of the Archive of the Planet project. Quoting Mespoulet’s notebook,<sup>7</sup> *The Irish Press* journalist simply noted that they ‘appreciated the beauty of Ireland with its many places of historical and religious inter-

3 Alexandra Slaby, *L’Etat et la culture en Irlande* (Caen and Mont Saint Aignan: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, Presses universitaires de Caen, 2010), pp. 133–134.

4 My emphasis.

5 Exhibition at the Alliance Française, Kildare Street, Dublin. Untitled article, *Irish Independent*, 12 February 1981, p. 6; Pyle, Fergus, ‘French Eyes on Ireland in 1913’, *The Irish Times*, 11 February 1981, p. 8.

6 Exhibition at UCG Art Gallery. ‘Nation in Focus’, *Irish Press*, 3 July 1981, p. 9; ‘The Claddagh 70 years ago’, *Connacht Sentinel*, 14 July 1981, p. 5.

7 It seems that Marguerite Mespoulet was the author of the travel diary. She also took the photographs. Madeleine Mignon was probably no more than her assistant.



est, and were charmed by the people “who (...) possessed such a lively and ardent imagination which enabled them to create the most beautiful legends in Europe”. By contrast, it is quite striking that *The Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* hardly mentioned these photographs at all. Yet, as will be shown at a later stage in this chapter, it is meaningful that the two young graduates should have devoted so much of their energy tracking the remains of Ireland’s distant past.

After the initial travelling exhibition in 1981, the collection was again taken to Ireland on two occasions, to Drogheda in 1984, and to Dublin and Galway in 2007 and 2008. Only in 1989, did one commentator realise that Marguerite Mespoulet and Madeleine Mignon were females, in an *Irish Times* article about the publication in France of *Irlande 1913*, the first edition of the travel diary and photographs. Interestingly, the journalist added that the collection had ‘never been seen in Ireland’,<sup>8</sup> an indication of the limited impact of the 1981 event. As early as 1984 however, Judi Doherty had emphasised how little her contemporaries shared with their forebears as immortalised by the French visitors of 1913: ‘Perhaps what is so remarkable about the photographs is how much the people have changed and how little everything else has,’ she wrote. She went on to list what had survived and what had not and concluded: ‘the one thing the people of today do have in common with the people of the past is the weather which was bemoaned frequently by the photographers.’<sup>9</sup> Such an approach was to set the agenda for later comments, which systematically dissociated 1913 from the time of writing. Irish receptions of the collection may therefore arguably be understood as one symptom of the process of distancing which has characterised Ireland’s reconsiderations of its history since the 1980s and beyond.

The evolution of Irish attitudes towards photographic archives is significant in this respect. In her 1989 article, Lorna Siggins pointed to Ireland’s indifference towards its own collections and marvelled at the French commitment to popularising Albert Kahn’s work. In so doing, she endorsed

8 Lorna Siggins, ‘Portraits from a Lost landscape’, *The Irish Times*, 22 July 1989, p. 21.

9 Judi Doherty, ‘Rare Photographs on Exhibition’, *The Irish Times*, 27 April 1984, p. 7.

George Morrison's comment on 'the awareness of the humanities to be found in French culture and the pitiable inadequacy and irresponsibility of our Irish attitudes to our photographic heritage, whether still or motion picture'.<sup>10</sup> One can only note that if the documentary-maker rescued from oblivion old photographs and newsreels chronicling Ireland's fight for independence<sup>11</sup> in 1959 and 1961, using photograph collections to document people's traditional lifestyles was not yet on the agenda in the early 1980s.

Archives became openly central to the reconstruction of history as a result of the revolution in history writing initiated by T.W. Moody and R.D. Edwards. Scholarly history of the kind they promoted was to be a bulwark against myth. Their followers continued in their step to such an extent that it allowed Ronan Fanning to interpret the 'continuous compulsion to confront myth and mythology' as a major 'characteristic of modern Irish historiography'.<sup>12</sup> The archive-based revision of history was initially made complex by the fact that official records remained closed for a very long time and were then only gradually opened until the National Archive Act was passed 1986. The opening of archives is always a highly symbolical turning point since it somehow induces the passage from an age of faith to an age of evidence. However, one may discuss the nature and meaning of the historical truth which archives can reveal. Ricoeur suggests that history writing primarily results from questions and hypotheses that documents merely confirm. Archives are traces that historians manipulate and articulate into a meaningful presentation of past events,<sup>13</sup> hence allegations that the revisionist debate in Ireland may just as well be a 'state of the art' as

10 Siggins, 'Portraits from a Lost landscape'.

11 *Mise Éire*, 1959; *Saoirse*, 1961. In order to make these two documentaries about the Irish struggle for freedom, George Morrison edited old photographs and original newsreels.

12 Ronan Fanning, "'The Great Enchantment': Uses and Abuses of Modern Irish History' (1988), in Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), p. 146.

13 Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), pp. 209–226.

‘an ideological project’, to quote M.A.G. O’Tuathaigh’s assertion.<sup>14</sup> In all cases, archival work leads to distanciation.

As archives, photographs are in no way different from written documents and they may just as well be interpreted to serve the purpose of their analysts. First of all, as Bourdieu convincingly argues, it would be naïve to imagine that a photograph is an objective and realistic representation of life since it results from a process of selection. It is also based on the respect of conventions and ultimately proceeds from its author’s flawed perception of reality.<sup>15</sup> Besides, the viewer himself is never neutral and his understanding of photographic archives is connected with the world view of his day. This must be borne in mind when one examines the reception in Ireland of photographic collections, whether native or foreign. In the follow-up to the creation of the National Archives, Irish photograph collections were collated and made accessible to the public. As a consequence, when Gerard Moran reviewed a new exhibition of the Kahn collection at the recently-created National Photographic Archive in 2007, he was aware of the now well-known work of Irish photographers of the turn of the twentieth century and he recalled their contribution before proceeding to his flattering presentation of the French collection. He compares the nature of the French and Irish missions as well as the merits of the collections, which he examines with complete critical detachment – distance again.<sup>16</sup>

Within two decades, Ireland’s perception of its past had considerably evolved. The nationalist press of 1981 still seemed to take historical continuity for granted. By 2007, memories of 1913 had faded away and Ireland was ready to confront a period of its history which felt distant to the point of being foreign. In 1989, native collections of photographs were neglected. By 2007, a brand new building in trendy renovated Temple Bar

14 M.A.G. O’Tuathaigh, ‘Irish Historical “Revisionism”: State of the Art or Ideological Project’, in Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish History*, p. 306.

15 Pierre Bourdieu, *Un art moyen – Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1965), pp. 108–113.

16 Gerard Moran, ‘Before the Storm’, *Irish Arts Review*, Winter 2007, p. 102.

was devoted to the 630,000 photographs of the National Library collection.<sup>17</sup> Commenting on the planned creation of the National Photographic Archive in 1996, Michael D. Higgins, then Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, emphasised the fact that it would lead to 'greater public awareness of these valuable collections of the National Library of Ireland, many of which [had] been unseen to date'.<sup>18</sup> The cultural policy of the Irish government in the 1990s no doubt contributed to raising Irish people's interest in their heritage. But the institutionalisation of culture itself was the result of changes which were ultimately to induce a new approach to the Albert Kahn collection of photographs. The revision of Irish history, but also European integration, globalisation, economic success and the growing importance of the media altered Ireland's understanding of its own past beyond recognition.

### The assertion of contemporary identities and the re-mythification of the past

From the 1990s and throughout the Celtic Tiger era, Ireland underwent seismic changes. Its distinctiveness was eroded by the internationalisation process and the constant exposure to new models of behaviour. Little now remains of Irish identity as it was understood in the early years of the twentieth century. This particularly applies to Irish rural society, a central emblem of traditional Ireland as the French travellers understood it. In their eyes, the essence of the Ireland of yore could only be captured in the countryside. That is why, if we except Galway, they tended not to linger in

17 The National Photographic Archive (Meeting House Square, Dublin) opened in 1998.

18 Dáil Éireann – Volume 473 – 19 December 1996 – Written answers – National Photographic Archive, <<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1996/12/19/00097.asp>>. Accessed 27 February 2012.

cities and took no photographs of Dublin. The view that was most prevalent in French publications of the early twentieth century was that the most picturesque rural area was Connemara and that the essential characteristic of rural society in the west of the island was its extreme poverty. The photographs of Marguerite Mespoulet simply echoed those stereotypes. As she had predicted, this type of rural society is now long gone. Poverty in rural Ireland still exists, but its nature has radically changed. In *Poverty in Rural Ireland*, published in 1996, John Jackson and Trutz Haase argue that rural and urban Ireland are no longer fundamentally distinct societies.<sup>19</sup> As for poverty, it has changed in the context of the affluent society of the turn of the twenty-first century. There is also an international dimension to Irish rural poverty, which is ‘a spatial and social manifestation of the uneven process of global capitalist development.’<sup>20</sup> According to the editors of the volume, ‘both rural and urban are [now] subject to broad national and international developmental processes.’<sup>21</sup> Situations are so different that allegations of historical continuity are hardly credible. Yet, if people have no option but to see the past of their nation with new eyes, distance has a positive effect on self-esteem.

David Lynch, writing about the commemoration of the Great Famine by Celtic Tiger Ireland, noted that ‘affluence meant more when measured against the heartbreak and deprivation Ireland had once endured.’<sup>22</sup> He also quoted Terence Brown’s humorous comment that ‘The country had become rich enough to face how poor it had been.’<sup>23</sup> We may suggest that the same remarks apply to recent attitudes towards poverty as depicted in the Kahn photographs. In *Not Fade Away*, Grace Neville says that what strikes her most in the series of photographs is the poverty of the people. All commentators similarly underline the dismal poverty portrayed in the

19 Chris Curtin, Trutz Haase and Hilary Tovey (eds), *Poverty in Ireland: A Political Economy in Perspective* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 1996), 77.

20 Curtin, Haase and Tovey, *Poverty in Ireland*, p. 8.

21 Curtin, Haase and Tovey, *Poverty in Ireland*, p. 8.

22 David Lynch, *When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 112.

23 Lynch, *When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out*, p. 112.

collection. And yet comparatively few of the photographs, ten at most, document destitution in the West of Ireland. Besides, whether or not Marguerite Mespoulet's view was inspired by the myth of the noble savage as is suggested in the documentary, her view of extreme poverty was difficult to decipher. Indeed, on the one hand, she emotionally reacted to it as any middle-class Parisian would, but on the other hand she introduced a positive note. Just like Marie-Anne de Bovet, another French woman who visited Ireland in 1889, she comments that however apparently poor they may have been, these people looked happy and lived in relative comfort.<sup>24</sup> Yet experience of contemporary life makes such understanding of comfort difficult to grasp. In his blog, a Dublin visitor to the exhibition thus comments the autochrome of the girl in the red shawl (Figure 3): 'On closer inspection of the photograph, the life of hardship does show ... her hands and fingers are toughened and nails are grimy from hard manual work and indeed the same could be said of her bare feet. Her teeth look yellowy and in need of modern care.'<sup>25</sup> Marguerite Mespoulet underlined the filth in her diary but said no more. In this commentary, the superiority of today's Ireland comes through, even though empathy prevails, as it did in the French travellers' words.

But there is more to say. The world depicted appears uncannily other; the girl has 'rotten teeth',<sup>26</sup> she lived a hundred years ago and yet there is something about her that strikes the viewer as different. Talking about the girl in the red shawl, Grace Neville says that 'you have to almost pinch yourself before you realize that this was a young girl, it's not a painting, it's not artificial and it wasn't somehow touched up afterwards.'<sup>27</sup> Temporal, social and emotional distance paradoxically does not lead to complete

24 Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913* (Paris: Presses artistiques/Conseil des Hauts de Seine, 1989), 18; Marie-Anne de Bovet, in *Irlande 1889 – Trois mois en Irlande*, edited by Denis Ar Gwendal and Art Hughes (Releg-Kerhuon: Editions An Here, 1997), 262.

25 <<http://earthanduniverse.blogspot.com/2007/11/1913-rural-irelandstunning-colour.html>>. Accessed 28 February 2012.

26 'Archives of the Planet', *Temple Bar Magazine*, January 2008, <<http://object-lesson.blogspot.com/2008/02/archives-of-planet.html>>. Accessed 28 February 2012.

27 RTÉ documentary *Not Fade Away*.

estrangement as might be expected. Perhaps colours have something to do with it. The early twentieth century in colour does look like real life. A certain Clare, who posted a comment on the exhibition writes that she was ‘bowled over by (...) the “right-here” vividness of the autochromes.’<sup>28</sup> As for John of Dublin, he notes: ‘When we think of the rural Irish people in the early 1900s the images we have are invariably in black and white. To see the faces and garments of the local people in full colour gives a whole new dimension.’<sup>29</sup> Colour photographs were already known in Ireland at the time, but what makes this collection exceptional is the technical quality of the shots and the mesmerising freshness of colours. Colours somehow bring the past back to life.

The technical achievement needs to be underlined for other reasons. Fidelma Mullane, the guest curator of the 2007 exhibition at Galway city museum declared in a 1989 interview that technical innovation ‘profoundly influenced the direction of the project.’<sup>30</sup> It can also be understood as a symbol of what the photographers represented. The two French women actually embodied modernity. Even though they were not professional photographers, they were able to operate complex equipment. They also essentially travelled by train, the modern means of conveyance par excellence, and they needed the support of no man. Mespoulet and Mignon formed the only all-female team of Albert Kahn’s photographers and today’s commentators underline ‘the female perspective (...) in the photographing of women’<sup>31</sup> and the ‘proto-feminist’<sup>32</sup> nature of the French graduates’ approach. They were educated,<sup>33</sup> had an urban background and in the end

28 <<http://earthanduniverse.blogspot.com/2007/11/1913-rural-irelandstunning-colour.html>>.

29 <<http://earthanduniverse.blogspot.com/2007/11/1913-rural-irelandstunning-colour.html>>.

30 Siggins, ‘Portraits from a Lost Landscape’, p. 21.

31 Moran, ‘Before the Storm’, 104.

32 ‘Archives of the Planet’, *Temple Bar Magazine*.

33 They were laureates of the *agrégation*, a highly selective and prestigious competitive exam which qualifies young people to teach. Very few women took this exam in the early years of the twentieth century. M. Mespoulet and M. Mignon can therefore be considered to have been members of the French intellectual elite.

shared much with present day commentators. Fidelma Mullane, who is a geographer, insists that they embodied academic innovation as well since they were disciples of Jean Brunhes, one of the founding fathers of ‘human geography’. Their approach to their subject is familiar to us in many ways, as it is ‘based on the idea of milieu and genres de vie’ or on ‘the interaction between people and environment’<sup>34</sup> which has become common since then. Consequently it is easy to identify with the French photographers. Great admiration is generally expressed for these pioneers, particularly in *Not Fade Away*, the RTÉ documentary. We may therefore suggest that the extraordinary modernity of the project and its realisation have something to do with the popularity of the collection today.

We may add that the image that the French travellers gave of Ireland is radically different from that bequeathed by the nationalist ideology. True, what they depict is, broadly speaking, rural Ireland, but they took strikingly few photographs of rural life outside villages. Village activity in rural communities is portrayed, but little else. Besides, their representation of pastoral life is in no way idealised. We may add that, even though an *Irish Times* article of November 2007 notes that ‘They capture a people described by Yeats as adding “prayer to shivering prayer”’;<sup>35</sup> Catholicism is totally absent from the picture. Yet priests and religious ceremonies were a common feature of contemporary press photographs and postcards. Coming from secularised France, the photographer may have obliterated that central aspect of rural life in Ireland. As for nationalist activity, it is only mentioned in passing in the travel diary. Albert Kahn was not interested in establishing a visual record of political events. Documenting changes as such, or the causes of change, was precisely what he did not want. The two women had another mission and they adopted a different perspective. 1913 was an eventful year, but only the notebook alludes to home rule and the hope of people.

34 ‘Peaceful Pictures on the Eve of War’, *Irish Times*, 19 June 2007.

35 ‘Autochrome Photos of Irish Life in 1913 go on Display’, *Irish Times*, 15 November 2007, p. 3.





Figure 3 Girl in the Red Shawl (Beausoleil, *Ireland 1913*, p. 25).

The photographs themselves only document everyday life. *Temple Bar magazine* comments that ‘at a time when so many figurative images are imbued with colonial surveillance or a nationalistic recalcitrance, these are just pictures of people being themselves.’<sup>36</sup> As for the girl in the red shawl, she is not ‘a nationalist image of *Mná na hÉireann*, or some guardian of Ireland’s virtue.’<sup>37</sup> This may well be part of her appeal to contemporary Ireland, which has rejected the ideals of nationalist times. ‘Revisionists attributed much of what ailed Ireland to its stagnant blend of Catholicism and nationalism.’<sup>38</sup>

36 ‘Archives of the Planet’, *Temple Bar Magazine*.

37 ‘Archives of the Planet’, *Temple Bar Magazine*.

38 Lynch, *When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out*, p. 113.

Albert Kahn's Irish collection hides Catholic nationalist Ireland from view and suggests the existence of another more acceptable nation, whose daughters looked like 'any teenage girl'<sup>39</sup> or 'Leaving Cert student'<sup>40</sup> of the early twenty-first century. The *Temple Bar Magazine* also notes that she behaves as someone who dresses up for tourists,<sup>41</sup> which makes sense for the well-travelled younger generations. 'The shockingly modern technology'<sup>42</sup> of the autochrome makes the people in the photographs look so very much alive today that a new form of continuity can be imagined. 'We really are not so far separated from this type of Ireland and seeing colour photographs of the early 1900s brings this to mind even more,' blogger John concludes.<sup>43</sup>

In the midst of the present transmission crisis, the girl in the red shawl can even be reclaimed as a respectable ancestor. Her identity is disclosed in John's blog: her name was Mian Kelly, she was approximately fifteen in 1913 and she died in 1975. What's more, she is recognised by one of the anonymous commenters as his/her grandmother. 'Wow, Anon,' John exclaims, 'that's really interesting!'<sup>44</sup> That the girl should have a name and that she should be somebody's grandmother suddenly makes her more real and connects her with present day Ireland. She becomes a new, more positive, face of what the past might have been.

Contemporary Ireland has debunked the founding myths of the nation and new identities have emerged. New myths tinged with nostalgia have appeared in the process. In the RTE documentary, the collection of photographs is said to reflect 'a sense of urgency and nostalgia'. *Not Fade Away* itself appears much more nostalgic than the photographs or accompanying notes ever were. As for the admirers of Mian Kelly, we may argue that

39 'Archives of the Planet', *Temple Bar Magazine*.

40 <<http://earthanduniverse.blogspot.com/2007/11/1913-rural-irelandstunning-colour.html>>.

41 'Archives of the Planet', *Temple Bar Magazine*.

42 'Archives of the Planet', *Temple Bar Magazine*.

43 <<http://earthanduniverse.blogspot.com/2007/11/1913-rural-irelandstunning-colour.html>>.

44 'Anon' is short for 'anonymous'; <<http://earthanduniverse.blogspot.com/2007/11/1913-rural-irelandstunning-colour.html>>.

they use the photograph as the medium through which a new implicit mythical speech takes shape. According to Roland Barthes's analysis, any object may thus become the prey to the mythification process for a while, after which it is replaced by others.<sup>45</sup> Since 'a myth is a speech defined by its intention',<sup>46</sup> this object is then integrated in an ideological system of interpretation of reality. In an age of hybridised cultures and global reinventions of the local, it is therefore significant that the photographer should have been a foreigner.

Talking of 'the imaginary "Real" Ireland of the post-Hinde 1980s postcards', Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling write that 'the Real Ireland of the postcard is the Lacanian "Real": the void in the symbolic order of modern Ireland, into which the lover projects his own fantasy and through pursuing the fantasy of the Real, succeeds only in destroying the imagined thing he thought he loved.'<sup>47</sup> Without suggesting such a harsh appreciation of the success of the Albert Kahn Irish collection, we may all the same express doubts as to its legitimacy. Barthes says that myth is distorted into meaning;<sup>48</sup> Irish attitudes towards Marguerite Mespoulet's photographs are an apt illustration of this remark. From a French perspective, the two young graduates do not fully deserve the praise they have received in Ireland. Whether or not Albert Kahn found that the photographs fell short of his expectations is unknown. But evidence allows us to argue that the travellers' understanding of Ireland was more limited than is reported in Ireland, and that it was dictated by the prejudices of their day and age.

45 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), p. 194.

46 (My translation) ['Le mythe est une parole définie par son intention']. Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 209.

47 Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling, *Collision Cultures – Transformations in Everyday Life in Ireland* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2004), pp. 177–178.

48 Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 207.

## Ireland through French eyes

In 1913, the Irish situation was well known in France, as is evidenced by the regular publication of newspaper articles and books of all kinds. The political context and the expectation of changes certainly stand at the origin of the mission Marguerite Mespoulet and Madeleine Mignon were commissioned to engage in. The previous year, Albert Kahn had organised an expedition to Bosnia Herzegovina, torn apart by the Balkan Wars; the debate over Home Rule and the transformations which might ensue were sufficient justification to motivate the trip to Ireland. French historians were particularly interested in the Irish nationalist struggle and several books on the question had been published in the recent past, in particular *L'Irlande contemporaine et la question irlandaise* [*Contemporary Ireland and the Irish Question*] by Dubois (1907) and *L'Irlande et le Home Rule* [*Ireland and Home Rule*] by Maisonnier and Carpentier (1912). Since the early 1900s, the popular press had also regularly published articles on the question, some of them written by Irish nationalists, including Maud Gonne, who resided in Paris. The opinions expressed by these publications were generally supportive of Irish nationalism and they contributed to popularising the view that Celtic Ireland had for too long been suppressed under the cruel yoke of England, which was largely responsible for the rampant poverty. In the same way, the traditional friendship between France and Ireland was placed to the fore even though new friendly relations with England invited circumspection. Maisonnier and Lecarpentier thus rejoice at the prospect of Home Rule, which will reconcile France's 'old friends, the Irish, and the English, her new but loyal friends'.<sup>49</sup>

The views expressed by Marguerite Mespoulet in her travel diaries echo these positions. How much she knew of the detailed situation is impossible to establish, but her commentaries suggest that she was in fact aware of

49 (My translation) [*'ses vieux amis, les Irlandais, et les Anglais, ses amis nouveaux mais fidèles'*]. Louis Maisonnier and Georges Lecarpentier, *L'Irlande et le Home Rule* (Paris: Librairie des sciences sociales et politiques, 1912), p. 308.

what was taking place in the country. She mentions the impatience with which the people are expecting the enforcement of ‘the famous Home Rule,’<sup>50</sup> but she remains non-committal: ‘Whatever the results of the new law, it will at least have given a moment of happiness to millions of men.’<sup>51</sup> In the same way, as stated above, the two French women mirror the commonly accepted view relating to the extraordinary poverty and filth that one encountered in the West of Ireland. Black and white photographs of the kind she took had been published in the French press in recent years.

Concerning this particular point, if the notebook doesn’t allow the reader to know how much she had read about the contemporary history of the island, we may legitimately suspect she was aware of Marie-Anne de Bovet’s illustrated travel diary. It had initially been published in a newspaper, *Le tour du monde* [*Round the World*], in 1889, and then in book form two years later. A new edition of this work was published in Paris in 1908. Its readers cannot fail to be struck by the parallels between the two accounts of the West of Ireland. Marie-Anne de Bovet warmly recommends Claddagh which she presents as justifying the trip to Galway on the grounds that it is a preserve of traditional ways which have disappeared elsewhere. She also lists the scenes and characters she found particularly appealing in the West of Ireland, which are also exactly those Marguerite Mespoulet chose as subjects for her photographs: the fish market, boys in skirts, women wearing traditional costumes,<sup>52</sup> men smoking pipes. The similarities between the commentaries are also quite striking. In some cases the exact same words are used. Anyone wondering why the Parisians rushed to Claddagh immediately on arriving in Ireland for a short trip might find a convincing answer here.

50 (My translation) [‘Le célèbre Home Rule’]. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 70.

51 (My translation) [‘*Quels que soient les résultats de la nouvelle loi, elle aura au moins donné un instant de bonheur à plusieurs millions d’hommes*’]. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 70.

52 The traditional clothes which had been worn in 1889 had been abandoned by 1913, but the French women managed to procure the last surviving costume, had three different women wear it and took five photographs as a whole.

The two ladies might also have been aware of photographs or postcards which had been taken in the Claddagh. As early as the first years of the twentieth century coloured postcards of the Claddagh produced in Germany were sold in Dublin. Anne de Bovet notes in her diary that children had little respect for the sketches that her companion was drawing because photographers were frequent visitors to the village. No wonder then that Marguerite Mespoulet had no difficulty convincing villagers to pose for her, however shy<sup>53</sup> they may have been. The children of 1889 already made blasé commentaries among themselves: ‘They’re French (...), they are visiting the country and they are portraying people, boats and houses.’<sup>54</sup> The 1913 visitors did nothing else: they piled cliché upon cliché. Besides, despite all their kindness and empathy, they were not immune from condescension. The author of the *Temple Bar Magazine* article writes that there is no sign of ‘the typical Victorian or Edwardian attitude that these people who are happy to be poor and too simple-minded not to be’. It is difficult to agree with this interpretation after reading what Mespoulet (and Bovet) say about their living ‘quite happily – that is to say in relative comfort.’<sup>55</sup> It is also debatable that she is slightly condescending when she comments on how she cheated the shy women into posing and keeping quiet by telling stories and jokes.<sup>56</sup>

Marguerite Mespoulet did not treat the people she met as her equals. She behaved as a charitable outsider who felt for the natives she had come to study. After all she, the embodiment of modernity, was looking for vestiges of a crumbling world that was very far removed from her experience of reality. She was undoubtedly moved by the people she met, but her situation, the nature of her mission and her background all restricted the possibility of sincere warmth. She adopted the detached scientific

53 Both Bovet and Mespoulet use the adjective *farouche* in French.

54 (My translation) [‘Ce sont des Français, (...) ils visitent le pays et tirent le portrait des gens, des bateaux, des maisons’]. De Bovet, *Irlande 1889 – Trois mois en Irlande*, p. 259.

55 (My translation) [‘Assez heureusement – c’est à dire dans une aisance relative’]. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 18.

56 Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 32.

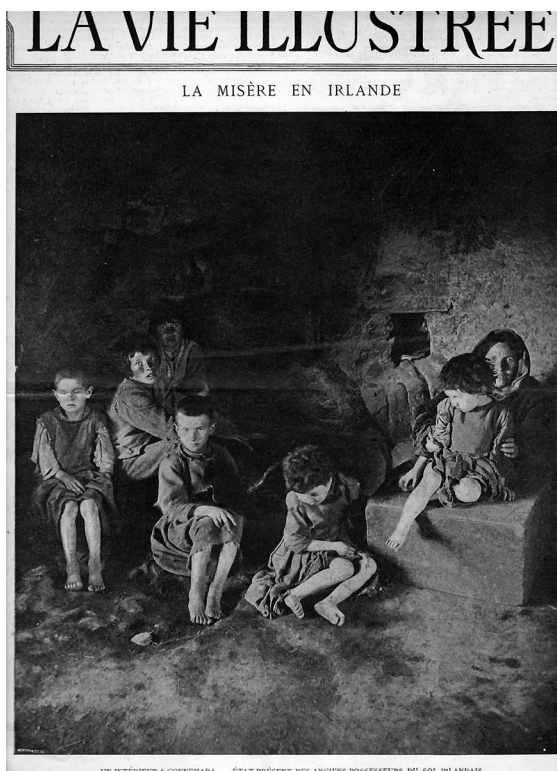


Figure 4 *La vie illustrée*, 28 November 1902.

approach of a professional photographer to try and ‘use space to capture time’,<sup>57</sup> as if a freeze-frame could freeze time and confer eternity on the instant the photographs were taken, as Régis Debray argues<sup>58</sup> Detachment is also palpable when she comments on the racial characteristics of her subjects. In 1840, Gustave de Beaumont had warned against the dangers

57 (My translation) [‘piéger le temps par l’espace’]. Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l’image* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 40.

58 Debray, *Vie et mort de l’image*, p. 54.

of such an approach,<sup>59</sup> but by the beginning of the twentieth century, applying the phrenological system to nations had become the norm. In 1911, a book entitled *Les races du monde* [*The Races of the World*] was published in Paris. It was illustrated by photographs which were supposed to document the physical characteristics distinguishing the various races. This work postulated the superiority of the white race but introduced subtle distinctions between varieties of whiteness. The Irish race is illustrated by the postcard of a spinner, reproduced in black and white from one of the Zürich photochromes shot in 1890. The appended commentary describes the Irish as enthusiastic, endowed with ‘vivid imagination’ and ‘quickness of mind’, but totally devoid of patience and determination.<sup>60</sup>

Marguerite Mespoulet’s remarks tended to confirm this analysis. She particularly stressed the imaginative side of this ‘race of dreamy artists’,<sup>61</sup> who tended to talk like poets<sup>62</sup> but underlined the impatience of the Claddagh women.<sup>63</sup> She went as far as to introduce a subtle hierarchy between people originating from different parts of the country: she found people from the Midlands less quick and friendly than their Connemara counterparts.<sup>64</sup> The notebook also records physical distinctions between different racial types. She commented on the matt complexion and dark eyes of a woman whom she saw as obviously descended from ‘Spanish settlers’<sup>65</sup> and she contrasted her appearance with that of blond-haired and fair-skinned true Irish Celts. She also compared the features of a long-faced, purple-eyed young man, the very type of ‘men of the Celtic race’,<sup>66</sup> with those of men from lower Brittany. In so doing, the French ladies contributed to the work that had

59 Gustave de Beaumont, *L’Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse*, Godeleine Carpentier (ed.) (Lille: CERIUL (1840) 1990), pp. 356 & ff.

60 (My translation) [*‘imagination vive’*], [*‘promptitude d’esprit’*]. *Les races humaines* (Paris: Hachette, 1911), p. 174.

61 (My translation) [*‘une race d’artistes rêveurs’*]. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 88.

62 Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 60.

63 Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 34.

64 Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 126.

65 (My translation) [*‘colons espagnols’*]. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 20.

66 (My translation) [*‘les hommes de la race celte’*]. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 44.



been assigned by Alophe to photographers as early as 1861. In his book entitled *Le passé, le présent et l'avenir de la photographie* [*The Past, Present and Future of Photography*], he encouraged photographers 'to portray the different types of the human race, including all anatomic varieties of the body, in all parts of the world'.<sup>67</sup> In his estimation, such was the mission assigned to all photographers, whose social function was to conquer the visible world and connect the local with the global by 'drawing up a new inventory of the real in the shape of (...) archives'.<sup>68</sup> Albert Kahn's project and his Irish project, must no doubt be understood with that ideal in mind.

The French ladies, who were looking for remnants of the eternal Celtic culture, strangely make no reference whatsoever to the Literary Renaissance or even the Gaelic language. Even though English presence is not in any way part of the picture, the language that was spoken is clearly English, even in Connemara, but they seem to pay no attention to this paradox. Yet, they were aware of contemporary realities – they mentioned emigration, the temperance movement and the work of the Congested District Board. They seem in fact to have approached the question from a different angle. They were interested in the genius, which they believed characterised the very *nature* of the Gaelic race, rather than in its modern *cultural* expression. They hungered for magic Ireland, where 'gods of the earth, the sea and the wind, where the spirits and the fairies still fared with the Saints of early Christian Ireland'.<sup>69</sup> Anyone familiar with early Irish literature will note how little Marguerite Mespoulet knew of Celtic Ireland. Yet Celtic studies were fashionable in France at the time: D'Arbois de Jubainville had published his *Cours de littérature celtique* [*Lessons in Celtic Literature*] in 1908, Dom Louis Gougau, his *Les chrétientés celtiques* [*Celtic Christianity*]

67 (My translation) ['représenter tous les types de la race humaine, avec toutes les variétés de l'anatomie du corps sous les diverses latitudes']. Quoted by André Rouillé, *La photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 122.

68 (My translation) ['en dressant un nouvel inventaire du réel sous forme (...) d'archives']. Rouillé, *La photographie*, p. 120.

69 (My translation) ['où les dieux de la terre, de la mer et du vent, où les esprits et les fées sont encore en la compagnie des Saints de la première époque chrétienne']. Beausoleil, *Ireland 1913*, p. 88.

in 1911, and the periodical *Revue celtique* [*Celtic Review*] was in its hey-day. Marguerite Mespoulet, who had an excellent command of the English language, could also have read recently published Irish material. Did she? It is unlikely.

The two women spent a lot of their time rushing from monument to monastic site, but the commentaries confirm how superficial their knowledge of Celtic and early Christian Ireland really was. It is striking in this respect to note that they were unable to distinguish between major sites such as Glendalough, Clonmacnoise, Monasterboice, and minor ones. For instance, they took great pains to travel as far as Roscam, that neither their driver nor local people could locate. Given that they only spent a couple of weeks in Ireland, the choice of that destination is puzzling for all but the readers of Murray's guidebook, whose latest edition by Cooke had been published in 1912.<sup>70</sup> The two photographs of Roscam show the round tower and holed stones that the guidebook describes. Pairing Murray's handbook and the travel diary is rewarding. Not only does the book recommend a visit to Roscam near Oranmore, but he also suggests the itineraries followed by the French graduates. Once in Athlone, it is advised to take the boat up Lough Ree and then visit Clonmacnoise, which can be reached by road.<sup>71</sup> On the way, Murray notes that the visitor will be able to see turf-cots.<sup>72</sup> M. Mespoulet took pictures of Lough Ree, Clonmacnoise, and a turf cot. In a similar way, the expedition to Drogheda, via Navan, Newgrange, the Boyne and Monasterboice exactly corresponds to itinerary 3 of the guidebook.<sup>73</sup> All in all, the Albert Kahn collection of archaeological sites illustrates what John Cooke presents as the three types of interesting vestiges: those of pagan Ireland, early Christian ruins and Anglo-Irish architecture.<sup>74</sup> The

70 The 1906 edition is accessible on the site of the Open Library. John Cooke, *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Ireland* (London: E. Stanford (1866), 7th edition 1906), <[http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24591180M/Handbook\\_for\\_travellers\\_in\\_Ireland](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24591180M/Handbook_for_travellers_in_Ireland)>, 245. Accessed 2 March 2012.

71 Cooke, *Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, pp. 227–228.

72 Cooke, *Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, p. 231.

73 Cooke, *Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, p. 52.

74 Cooke, *Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, p. 39.

political views expressed by John Cooke, who had an MA from Trinity College and wrote for English publisher Murray, could also have confirmed the French travellers' non-committal positions. Finally, Mespoulet goes as far as to borrow Cooke's quote from a *Journey to Connaught* by Thomas Molyneux,<sup>75</sup> of which she gives a very free translation.<sup>76</sup> As a whole forty-two out of seventy-three autochromes depict monuments, one may wonder how Albert Kahn's missionaries reconciled their inclination for tourism and their scientific mission.

The young ladies had clearly formed a very romantic view of Ireland before they ever visited the country. They took for granted historical continuity between Celtic times and the twentieth century and they were convinced that Celtic genius was an eternal trait of the race. They were also fascinated by the ruins which had appealed to all nineteenth-century French visitors to Ireland. The two works by Joseph Prévost, respectively published in 1845 and 1846, were already full of ruins.<sup>77</sup> In 1913, Marguerite Mespoulet and Madeleine Mignon perpetuated a long tradition. Just as Marie-Anne de Bovet, they also loved graveyards, which they described in lyrical terms. Graves feature on fourteen photographs and churchyards were the places where the travellers seemed to find the true spirit of Ireland:

This melancholy country expresses itself mainly in its graveyards where ruins collapse over graves; where nettles and weeds grow between closely spaced graves, those of the sixth century and those of the present century; where death has no companion but the changing sky and the running wind; yet where great softness prevails.<sup>78</sup>

75 Cooke, *Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, p. 246.

76 Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 54.

77 Joseph Prévost, *L'Irlande au XIXe siècle* (1845) and *Un tour d'Irlande* (1846). *L'Irlande au XIXe siècle* can be accessed at the following address: <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5664678c.r=joseph+prevost.langFR>>. Accessed 4 March 2012. *Un tour d'Irlande* (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, Elibron Classics (1846) 2001).

78 (My translation) [*'Ce pays de mélancolie parle surtout dans ses cimetières où des ruines s'écroulent sur des tombes, où entre les tombes serrées, celles du sixième siècle et celles de notre siècle, poussent drues les orties et les mauvaises herbes, où la mort n'a de*

All this was far removed from the ambition of Jean Brunhes and Albert Kahn. Less than one third of the autochromes corresponded to the recommended model. The spinners, the fringe maker, the jaunting car driver, the fishermen, the currachs, the turf cutter, the fishmongers, the cattle fair, the Claddagh houses – which were to be destroyed in 1937 – all fell into that category. These photographs do succeed in capturing the dignity and humanity of their subjects. But the French visitors' propensity to follow tourist tracks and their love of stereotypes are a disappointment.

All in all, the collection falls short of perfection: the mission was not fulfilled as it might have been and the Ireland that is portrayed does not correspond to the reality of the time. It is a photographic creation which looks real. Rouillé writes that 'an infinite series of invisible but operating images always come between the real and the picture, and they produce a new visual order'.<sup>79</sup> In the case of the Albert Kahn Irish collection, the effect of all distortions is a 'derealised'<sup>80</sup> French early twentieth-century view of Ireland. In those days, this perception supported a conformist world view, which documentary photograph – presented as an instrument of truth – aimed at legitimising and perpetuating. Raymond Boudon, quoting Husserl, reminds his readers that 'the intentionalities (...) which guide the eyes form a priori categories of perception'.<sup>81</sup> The photographs that were taken in Ireland for the Archive of the Planet are an illustration of this process, just as much as they confirm that 'words teach the eye'.<sup>82</sup>

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*compagnons que le ciel mouvant et le vent qui court, où pourtant plane une grande douceur*'. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 130.

- 79 (My translation) [*Entre le réel et l'image s'interpose toujours une série infinie d'autres images invisibles mais opérantes qui se constituent en ordre visuel*]. Rouillé, *La photographie*, p. 17.
- 80 Bourdieu talks about photographs derealising [*déréalisant*] their subjects. Bourdieu, *Un art moyen – Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, p. 295.
- 81 (My translation) [*Les intentionalités (...) qui dirigent le regard constituent des catégories a priori de la perception*]. Raymond Boudon, *L'idéologie ou l'origine des idées reçues* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), p. 106.
- 82 (My translation) [*Le regard s'éduque par les mots*]. Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image*, p. 69.

Today's Irish career of the collection bears witness to another form of manipulation in a different context. In the process, Marguerite Mespoulet and Madeleine Mignon's motivations and qualities have been embellished, and the flaws of the collection have been hushed up. Yet it doesn't seem that Ireland left a deep impression on the two young women. In her later career, Marguerite Mespoulet, who became an academic, never published anything relating to Ireland. She emigrated to New York and became professor of French literature at Columbia University, where she stayed until she retired. Her papers, which have been preserved by Barnard College<sup>83</sup> prove her primary interest for nineteenth- and twentieth-century French writers. Before her departure for the United States, however, she issued a report on British women's efforts during World War I,<sup>84</sup> a reminder of her feminist engagement and her interest in women's everyday life. Of this the reader does get a glimpse in her Irish travel diary. Perhaps she is at her most convincing when she comments on the plight of her Irish female contemporaries: the fringe maker who earns very little and can't work as much as she would like because of her seven 'kids';<sup>85</sup> or the spinners who gladly desert their spinning wheel for homespun fabric factories.<sup>86</sup> Women were her cause, but Ireland was merely the destination of a short mission. Nevertheless, her photographic creation has acquired a life of its own and has proved able to feed imaginary constructions in contemporary Ireland. At the two ends of the story, imagination has given birth to mythical Irelands. The contemporary reinvention of Mespoulet's Ireland strongly suggests that reimagining somehow involves remythifying.

83 'Marguerite Mespoulet papers', Columbia University Archival collections, <[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd\\_4079101/](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4079101/)>. Accessed 4 March 2012.

84 Marguerite Mespoulet and Esther Dumas, 'L'effort des femmes britanniques pendant la guerre' [The efforts of British Women during the War], 1918, <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5535215q>>. Accessed 4 March 2012.

85 (My translation) ['mioches']. Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 38.

86 Beausoleil, *Irlande 1913*, p. 58.

PART III

French Writers and Ireland:  
Kindred Spirits or Passing Ships in the Night?



LAUREN CLARK

## Children, ‘The Charity Myth’ and Victorian Consumer Culture: Jules Verne and Hector Malot’s Franco-Irish Foundlings

Two key theories pertaining to the institutionalising and education of Victorian Irish foundlings in the mid- to late nineteenth century have prevailed in works of recent social history. The first maintains that after 1831, the year which Samuel Bewley founded the Kildare Place Society, provision of education by a ‘socially upper-middle class National Board’<sup>1</sup> was a blatant attempt to control the Irish poor. This attempt at control conveniently coincided with a removal of the penal restrictions placed on Catholics in 1838. Secondly, in the Preface to her compendium *Guide to Dublin Charities* (1884), Rosa M. Barrett admitted that ‘with the exception of one or two general hospitals which have wards for children, there is no place to which a child suffering [...] can be sent’ in Dublin.<sup>2</sup> From French authors Jules Verne (1828–1905) and Hector Henri Malot (1830–1907) to Irish author May Laffan (1849–1916), fictional accounts of Irish foundlings, waifs and strays dating from the late 1860s onwards are curiously concordant on the matter of the inefficacies of foundlings generally, and post-poor law Dublin’s orphanages and charity institutions in particular. This has amounted to what some historians versed in child welfare have labelled a ‘charity myth’ in Ireland.<sup>3</sup> In this instance, monies would be systematically

1 Dierdre Raftery, ‘Colonizing the Mind: the Use of English writers in the Education of the Irish Poor, c. 1750–1850’, in Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (eds), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain* (Ashgate: Surrey, 2009), p. 160.

2 R.M. Barrett, *Guide to Dublin Charities* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1884).

3 Fuller commentary on this myth can be found in the introduction to Joseph Robins’ *The Lost Children, A Study of Charity Children in Ireland 1700–1900* (Dublin:



extricated from donors by the appeals of charity advertisements in Church publications and national press of all inclinations without being put to proper use. As cynical as it might seem, further evidence lies in fictional and personal accounts to suggest that the care offered to Irish foundlings in the late nineteenth century did not purport to match the financial gains recouped by successful advertising campaigns. Ireland's advertising and consumer culture thus arrives at a crossroads in terms of its affiliation to wealthy Catholic middle classes in the case of charity institutions.

An array of charities of diverse religious provenance emerged following the repeal of the Penal Laws and Catholic Emancipation from the 1830s onwards. Amongst these, the Sisters of Mercy, the Irish Sisters of Charity, Ladies of Charity and the predominantly Quaker Society of Friends, were some of the most widespread and enduring. Of the latter, Margaret Preston stresses that in mid-seventeenth-century England, the Society of Friends' founder George Fox 'expected members to reject political, social and gender hierarchy as well as the many trappings of the emerging consumer society.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when Voltaire composed his *Lettres Philosophiques* whilst travelling *outré manche* in the 1720s<sup>5</sup> he suggested that the stigmatisation of the Quaker sect in England was so severe and so lacking in parliamentary or religious recognition, that solace was sought for many in the realm of commerce. However by the nineteenth century, according to one observer, Dublin's Friends had embraced more materialistic aims and were upholding somewhat patriarchal approaches to the developing market economy. One Friend noted on a visit to Ireland that 'she was greatly surprised by the lavish style and dress of Irish Friends and the abundant entertainment.'<sup>6</sup> By then limiting admittance to the Society of Friends to women of con-

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Institute of Public Administration, 1987), pp. 1–9. See also Mary O'Rafferty and Eoin O'Sullivan, *Suffer the Little Children, The Inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1999), p. 54.

4 Margaret Preston, *Charitable Words: Women, Philanthropy and the Language of Charity in Nineteenth-Century Dublin* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 7.

5 Voltaire, *Lettres I–IV 'Sur les Quakers'*, in *Lettres Philosophiques* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), pp. 1–14.

6 Preston, *Charitable Words*, p. 109.

servative and middle class ilk, a new social stringency conflicted with the seemingly 'lavish' uses of monetary surplus that the charity brought in. In this sense, remedying the 'sin' of the Society of Friends' cache of (Catholic) poor children took a backseat in what would have otherwise been a socially and economically mobilising vehicle for the furtherance of child welfare. Quaker activity extended to the café and bakery business sectors with Bewley's Cafés and Jacob's Biscuits also constituting, as Preston notes, two of 'a number of very successful Quaker businesses'<sup>7</sup> which were popular in Ireland from the 1860s onwards.

In what way then did the Victorian Irish child relate to the underhand and unobserved Shylockry of Irish charities which were founded with their wellbeing in mind? It seems churlish to propose that consumer culture in Ireland grew as a result of blanket refusal of the benevolence of Irish child charity institutions. Such thinking negates the reciprocal roles children, whether Catholic and/or poor, played in developing an economic *sagesse* amidst their own institutionalised neglect in terms of education, welfare and individual buying power. Furthermore, regarding reciprocity, children unfortunate enough to find themselves in charity-run institutions in this period were widely viewed as being morally bankrupt by members of the Catholic Church and were often shunned as substrata by emerging Catholic middle classes. In a discussion of Margaret Louisa Aylward's (1810–1889) founding of the Sisters of the Holy Faith (1867), Jacinta Prunty relates that even between nuns there was considerable antipathy towards the remedying of children deemed sinful by the upper echelons. One mistress within the Sisters of Charity, Sister Ignatius, is said to have been dismissed in the late 1830s for suggesting that the sisters under her care were 'squandering [their] intellectual gifts' by aiding the poor.<sup>8</sup> And yet by the end of the century there are accounts to suggest that these sentiments of resentment

7 Preston, *Charitable Words*, pp. 101–119.

8 Jacinta Prunty, 'Margaret Louisa Aylward', in Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy (eds), *Women Power and Consciousness in 19th Century Ireland* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1995), p. 58.

became commonplace alongside widespread fears of child proselytism in charity institutions.

Theories of child welfare which stress the hierarchical nature of economic progress based upon underhand class and financial structures and amidst encroaching Irish Victorian consumerism are therefore as provocative as they are dangerous. When Pierre Macherey asks of Jules Verne's fiction: 'What did Verne actually find that he had done? What is the relation between the initial project and the work for which it was simply a pretext or a condition?',<sup>9</sup> he seeks not to probe the science-fiction genre for which Verne is usually famed but the 'validity of an ideological project.'<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, then, Verne's only Irish-based novel *P'tit-Bonhomme*, published in 1893, and Hector Malot's foundling narrative *Sans Famille*, published in 1878, will be scrutinised to explore the 'ideological project' of relating children to consumer culture as it was divulged in Victorian French and Irish fiction. The specific consumer and commodity developments made apparent in these Franco-Irish texts are also offered up as travelogues exploring and exporting social history in terms of *fin de siècle* child welfare. In a climate of critical neglect – for there exists as yet no book-length account of Victorian Ireland's consumer culture, let alone the role Irish foundlings played in it – the manner in which children are conceived of in their dealings with consumer culture in both countries thus makes for a profitable exchange. In so doing, it will be proven both provocative and dangerous to contemplate the critical neglect of some of France and Ireland's most prolific and thoughtful Victorian foundling narratives from the standpoint of encroaching consumer culture. Each child protagonist in *P'tit-Bonhomme* and *Sans Famille* ventures throughout France and Ireland to the point of their impoverishment and is then encouraged to engage in the bartering and hawking of wares in the burgeoning consumer capitals of Dublin and Paris. The extent to which these child characters cope with advertising, commodity and consumer culture speaks volumes

9 Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, Translated by Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 183.

10 Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 181.

of extra-fictional concern for child welfare amidst the radical theoretical repositioning of the young as active earners and learners in the marketplace both in Ireland and in France.

### *Sans Famille* and Irish consumerism

May Laffan Hartley (born Mary Laffan, 1849–1916) was the first to translate Malot's *Sans Famille* into English as *No Relations* within two years of the tales' publication in 1880 and the novel later appeared in a host of Irish Catholic School libraries. Little critical attention has been paid to the author who wrote anonymously despite her being held in high esteem by both Yeats and Wilde in the *fin de siècle* period and despite the alacrity with which she writes of children's education and living standards in nineteenth-century Ireland. These are illustrated most pointedly in her novel *Hogan M.P.* (1876),<sup>11</sup> and in the fruitful commentary she offers on Dublin and Ireland's consumer underbelly in her most readily cited work, the *Flitters Tatters and the Counsellor* (1881) short story collection.<sup>12</sup>

Laffan was the product of a mixed marriage between Ellen Sarah Fitzgibbon (18??–1862), a descendant from wealthy Church of Ireland converts from County Limerick, and Michael Laffan (1815–1895), a Catholic whose family originated from Tipperary.<sup>13</sup> Michael Laffan worked in Dublin as a clerk and the family moved house frequently during May's childhood before eventually settling in Blackrock and attending schools nearby. Such details about the mixed nature of May Laffan's background offer an insight into the witty manner with which she relates social relations

11 May Laffan, *Hogan M.P.* (London: Macmillan, 1881).

12 May Laffan, *Flitters, Tatters and the Counsellor and Other Sketches* (London: Macmillan, 1881).

13 For a fuller account of May Laffan Hartley's early years, see Helena Kelleher Kahn, *Late 19th-Century Ireland's Political and Religious Controversies in the Fiction of May Laffan Hartley* (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2005), pp. 13–42.

between Irish Protestants and Catholics; namely, the Irish Ascendancy (*Ismay's Children*, *The Hon. Miss Ferrard*) and the developing social mobility and growth of Dublin's Catholic middle classes (*Hogan M.P.*). Relations between older castes, the spectrum of Catholic middle classes (to which Laffan belonged) and the penury of slum dwelling Catholic children are all given airtime in her fiction, as are contrasts between the Irish secular and established education system and urban and rural manners more generally. It is important to note that whilst Laffan critiques social relations between groups and indeed the Catholic Church, her writing never lampoons and is of a delicacy which would negate the charge of any explicit anti-Catholicism. These witticisms appear most potently to endorse the sentiments of someone who feels a sense of discord with the character of the social class into which she has been born. That said, contemporary reviewers of Catholic fiction were not altogether impressed with her political and religious discernments:

Miss May Laffan, the author of *Hogan, M.P.*, *The Hon. Miss Ferrard* etc., is not a persona grata with Irish Nationalists. But she is a very clever writer which is perhaps one of the reasons, for we do not like her way of putting things. One is more likely to be offended by witty sneers than by stupid [J]eers. *Ismay's Children* (New York: Macmillan & Co.) is her best book. It has all the cleverness of *Hogan, M.P.*, without the cynicism and hardness so strange in an Irishwoman which spoiled that brilliant novel.<sup>14</sup>

Evidence of May Laffan's interest in France and her ability to read and write in the French language is peppered throughout her writing. Chapters are frequently prefaced with quotations from French authors as varied as Pascal, Ernest Renan and George Bousquet. One of her last works, a novella entitled *A Singer's Story* (1885) is also staged in Paris. It might seem unsurprising then that the location and the foundling narrative of *Sans Famille* interested Laffan. *Sans Famille's* treatment of orphaned and neglected children seemed a heady match for Laffan's philanthropic concerns and this could be easily bound with an interest in Rémi's social mobility brought

14 Maurice Francis Egan, 'A Chat About New Books,' in *The Catholic World*, XLVII:2 73 (1887), pp. 411–419 (pp. 417–418).

about by consumer culture. A number of Dublin's merchants, advertisers, capitalists and leading pioneers in consumption either emanated or benefited from the new financial prowess that emergent middle class Catholics amassed by the 1870s. Surprisingly forward-thinking in her own fiction, the child characters that Laffan creates embody knowingness and a consumer literacy to permit engagement in the process of Irish consumption all the while refuting any colonial or imperial analogies which might be imposed on literary child characters elsewhere in the empire in the 1870s. Perhaps it was with a willingness to see this class transformation in Malot's *Sans Famille* that she undertook the translation initially.

The stealth and dexterity of Laffan's translation of *Sans Famille* is apparent in her commitment to rendering the tale as is, without abridgement, which was not the case for subsequent translations of Jules Verne's *Foundling Mick*. The translator was keen to maintain original French characters' names and to mimic the lengthy and floral first person narration of Rémi as he travels around France and England as part of a musical troupe. Laffan was extraordinarily industrious authoring a short story collection and a novel, *Christy Carew*<sup>15</sup> during the years she took to conduct this translation from 1878 to 1880. It is clear from the many child-oriented themes of her other Irish situated works, her 'sympathetic and lively'<sup>16</sup> translation and from her involvement in the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children that child protection, particularly that of foundlings was of especial interest. It is also an interesting coincidence then that Laffan's mother had died when May was just thirteen years old. Most positively, Laffan and Malot worked to expose children benefitting from consumer culture as well as their battles with the grimy underbellies of Dublin and Paris as consumer capitals.

Notably in *Sans Famille*, Rémi's journey towards self-actualisation – that is, in finding his true parents – is entwined with a corresponding mastery of musical street performance. This enables him to earn money to

15 May Laffan, *Christy Carew* (London: MacMillan, 1878).

16 Helena Kelleher Kahn, *Late 19th-Century Ireland's Political and Religious Controversies*, p. 50.

engage in consumption in France and in England. However, of marked contrast is the protagonist's assured sense of property in the early stages of the novel before he is aware of his status as a foundling. Laffan communicates Malot's rendering of Rémi's sense of ownership in no uncertain rhetoric:

It was my very own, my property, my own estate: I arranged it as I chose, according to the whim of the moment; and whenever I spoke of it, as I did twenty times a day, I said 'my garden.'<sup>17</sup>

The simplistic, over-stressed personal pronouns in this rhetoric of possession at an early stage in Rémi's development later give way to a maturity of spirit and economic understanding. Of old Vitalis who adopts Rémi and along with two dogs and forms an entertainment enterprise of street musicians, the protagonist states in quasi-third person:

It does not necessarily follow if a man buys children for forty francs each that he is an ogre and that he is laying in a provision of fresh flesh to eat.<sup>18</sup>

Further, when Rémi encounters Mattia in Paris at a workhouse for runaways which is watched over by a sadistic character named Garofoli, Rémi's intention is to gain understanding of beggar children and the obscure nature of Parisian donors who 'give to please themselves, and not to please others.'<sup>19</sup> In staging this workhouse debauchery early as 1878, Henri Malot is tapping into French and Irish philanthropic concerns about the treatment of and mortality of children in state institutions founded to remedy their poor predicaments. The decrepitude of Irish workhouses was noted by the Irish Poor Law Inquiries at around the same time as Malot's writing. Another option for institutionalising children which emerged in the early 1860s in Ireland was that of boarding out children to foster families who in turn received money for their care. This was initially a success by dint of a series

17 Hector Henri Malot, *The Boy Wanderer: Or No Relations*. Translated by May Laffan (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1887), p. 31.

18 Malot, *The Boy Wanderer*, p. 37.

19 Malot, *The Boy Wanderer*, p. 168.

of advertisements offered to publicise the financial recoup that the scheme offered, as Joseph Robins has noted:

A special committee of the board was established to make the necessary arrangements and it issued advertisements including applications from persons willing to take one or two children. [...] The annual payment offered by the committee for caring for a child was £5. As a result of its first advertisements, twenty-three children were boarded-out in October 1862 and were taken by families 'of a very comfortable and respectable class.'<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, boarding out was met with consternation by one author of an article in the *Dublin University Magazine* who stated that the Irish peasantry was 'of a much lower class than the Scotch, their dwellings and persons not being by any means so clean and tidy as would be desirable for pauper-nurses.'<sup>21</sup>

What then was the 'ideological project'<sup>22</sup> behind Laffan and Malot's apparent concern for foundling children and their flourishing into economically astute individuals? Some curious responses lie in pseudo-Freudian interpretations of these novels. As such, the oedipal fixation of Malot and Verne's male heroes are stressed and are related back to a deconstruction of hierarchies as a reflection of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. This could constitute a montage of semblances reminiscent of Althusser and indeed supports Peter Hunt's claims that children's literature ought to be completely removed from the literary hierarchy:

It is sometimes claimed that the picture book is the one genuinely original contribution that children's literature has made to literature in general, all its other genres being merely imitative. If this is so, the traditional hierarchy might then observe, this is merely proof of the essential triviality of the form: what place is there in a

20 Robins, *The Lost Children*, p. 276.

21 J.A. Scott, 'The Irish Poor Law Inquiry', *Dublin University Magazine*, 58:1 (1861), p. 70. Quoted in Virginia Crossman, 'Cribbed, Contained and Confined? The Care of Children under the Irish Poor Law 1850-1920', *Eire-Ireland*, 44:1&2 (2009), pp. 37-61 (p. 47).

22 Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 181.



respectable literary system for what is usually a thirty-two page text, often with minimal words, and intended for a scarcely literate audience?<sup>23</sup>

Resistance to these theories, however, lends credence to the cultural critique offered up by Malot's persistent monetary transactions in *Sans Famille* and the keenness with which the work was translated by an Irish pioneer in child welfare. The Irish concern for child welfare in Laffan's translation belies any 'heartfelt' efforts to institutionalise foundlings in Ireland in the 1860s. Irish philanthropists of the late nineteenth century were ignorant of the fact that young children were being flagrantly encouraged to endorse an embryonic consumer culture in emerging 'buy Irish' campaigns. National Irish advertising to children during this period flourished in short-lived Irish children's magazines such as *Young Ireland* (1875–1891), the 'Fireside Club' section of the *Weekly Freeman* and later, the Christian Brothers' *Our Boys* publication. In these magazines children were urged to embrace national alternatives to the 'fiction of the union'<sup>24</sup> by reading the works of passionately patriotic intellectuals. Simultaneously, young consumers were invited to invest in the betterment of the nation by subscribing to these 'penny dreadfuls' which contained child-friendly advertising supplements. It is pertinent timing at this period of Irish national commercial impetus that Laffan chooses to translate a consumerist bildungsroman which paints Rémi's stay at Red Lion Court in London as being fraught with corruption and economic failure. While residing with the rogue-trading Driscoll family in London, Rémi and Mattia are seen to marvel at the splendour of British commodities which have been fraudulently amassed:

What a number of things there were! The marvel was how they could pile them into these vehicles: pieces of stuff, knitted goods, caps, handkerchiefs, neckties, stockings, undergarments, vests, buttons, thread, sewing-cotton, etc. etc.[...] And while

23 Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 288.

24 For further information see Janette Condon, "A Better Kind of Mental Food": Imperialism and National Resistance in Juvenile Magazines for the Late Nineteenth-Century Irish Child; in *Victoria's Own? Discourses of Cultural Imperialism and National Resistance in Nineteenth Century Children's Literature in Ireland*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Galway: National University of Ireland, 1999), pp. 104–143.

this work was going on, we saw taken out of the cellar packages which had arrived at Red Lion Court, not by a direct route from the shops in which these goods were usually sold.<sup>25</sup>

While the children are in awe of the wealth of commodities placed before them, it is not without meek awareness of their dual positions as consumers and potential street hawkers that the procurement of these British goods is dismissed as by the narrator as being 'not by a direct route from the shops in which these goods were generally sold.' In short, it is thanks to Laffan's translation of the streetwise and economically independent attitude of Rémi and his companion that the overarching influence of children as consumers becomes apparent in French and in British terms.

### *Foundling Mick* the entrepreneur

Both Verne and Malot were subjected to the criticism that they wrote with such velocity that profiteering was a prime objective in their output, as if they were fulfilling today's *phénomène quick-book*. In 1905 André Laurie (a pseudonym of Paschal Grousset) wrote of Verne:

*Beaucoup de gens qui écrivent dans une langue apocalyptique des choses que personne ne lit sont allés dire : c'est un auteur pour livre de prix !*<sup>26</sup>

(Many people who write in an apocalyptic style which nobody else reads would say that he writes bargain books!)

And yet little critical commentary has been made on the correlation between Verne's publishing economy and the financial *savoir faire* of the Irish entrepreneur character, Foundling Mick. In a discussion of the marketing of

25 Malot, *The Boy Wanderer*. p. 433.

26 André Laurie, *Le Temps*, 26 March 1905, in Francis Lacassin (ed.), *Des Enfants sur Les Routes* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1994), p. 1138. (My translation)

Verne's fiction by Hetzel and English publishers, Arthur B. Evans is keen to stress that the target audience was often of a particular demographic:

A very shrewd businessman, Verne's French publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel had great success in marketing his books to readers both young and old. American and British publishers adopted many of Hetzel's successful strategies, but they chose to promote Verne's English translations exclusively to a juvenile audience [...] with elegant cloth-bound luxury editions that could be given as holiday gifts, with collectible editions like those of the 'Every Boy's Library' series by Routledge, or with magazine serials such as *The Boy's Own Paper* [...] Verne's works were marketed primarily to British and American boys.<sup>27</sup>

It is curious that the character Foundling Mick matches this very demographic – male, English speaking, thrifty and juvenile – and yet he has not been considered for his Irish descent and neither has the potential consumerist interest *P'Tit Bonhomme* would incite amongst boys. Only in 1919, some twenty four years after the translation do we see *Foundling Mick* feature in Stephen J.M. Brown's list of 'Irish Fiction for Boys' supplement in *Studies*<sup>28</sup> and although this novel was being taught by this time in translation in Irish Catholic schools, critical interest and praise for the Irish nature of Verne's novel in Ireland itself seems to have gone awry. The significance of Verne writing about Ireland may have in fact provided more of an inflection of French admiration for Ireland than vice versa. Hetzel, with designs to market the book to French children must have had an awareness of a potential interest in Ireland amongst the readership. Similarly, France is mentioned within the opening lines of the novel as being a historic ally of Ireland and both countries and judged mutual enemies of England. In a recent review of the novel, Tony Canavan suggests that to twenty-first-century readers, the 'historical novel' *Foundling Mick* is '[a] pretext to present a guide to Irish politics and society. It is a view of Ireland that

27 Arthur B. Evans, 'Jules Verne's English Translations', in *Science Fiction Studies* 31:1 (2005), (pp. 80–104), p. 83.

28 Stephen J.M. Brown, 'II.-Irish Fiction for Boys' in *Studies* 8 (1919), p. 661.

will have revisionists choking on their cornflakes.<sup>29</sup> Whilst this may ring true in terms of the novel's advocacy of home rule and descriptions of the mistreatment of children in industrial schools or through the boarding out system, developing business acumen within the protagonist is presented as being an altogether natural process in tune with Ireland's developing autonomous consumer culture. In this sense, Jules Verne's choice of Ireland as a locus to stage a foundling narrative as opposed to his homeland (as was the case some fifteen years previously with Hector Malot's *Sans Famille*) marked a deliberate break in any typical rags to riches narrative with which French children might already be acclimatised. In so doing Verne would also provide considerable scope as to the European significance of Irish political events during the 1870s and 1880s.

*P'Tit Bonhomme* was first translated anonymously into English as *Foundling Mick* in 1895. There have been a number of adaptations and abridged renderings of *Foundling Mick* since 1895 including one entitled *A Lad of Grit*. By the 1930s one abridgement of the novel was found listed as required reading on English courses throughout many Irish secondary schools. Kieran O'Driscoll from the Centre for Translation and Textual Studies at Dublin City University advises that whoever the translator of the 1895 edition was, they displayed a familiarity with Irish vernacular expressing 'semantic fidelity with an idiomatic use of Hiberno-English.'<sup>30</sup> By considering the translator's rendering of the character name 'Thornpipe' as 'Hornpipe' in the English translation, one might say he or she was also familiar with the difficulties with which Irish speakers of English pronounce the voiceless dental fricative.

While there is evidence enough in the translation of speech to suggest the translator's first hand encounters of Irish vernacular, there remains significant room for conjecture as to whether or not Jules Verne ever physically visited Ireland. It has been suggested that Paschal Grousset and Jules

29 Tony Canavan, "Rattling Yarns." Review of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Foundling Mick* by Jules Verne, in *Books Ireland* 305 (2008), (pp. 184–186), p. 185.

30 Kieran O'Driscoll, 'Translating Foundling Mick', in Jules Verne, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Foundling Mick* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2008), p. 221.

Verne had collaborated on an earlier novel *L'Épave du Cynthia* (1885) and that they could be linked together by their joint commitment to the publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel and their authoring of works of a similarly science-fictional bent. Hetzel was also the long-term editor of a pedagogical publication entitled *Magasin d'Education et de Récréation* and had an interest in soliciting authors who wrote for children. Claiming lack of records of Verne's visitation of Ireland, critics are keen to paint much of *P'Tit Bonhomme* as being inspired by Grousset's critical letters of Ireland which were written under the pseudonym Philippe Daryl and appeared in *Le Temps* between 1886 and 1887.<sup>31</sup> While documentation exists in the form of letters to his editor to prove that Verne visited the Hebrides and the isle of Mull as well as England, there is little concrete evidence to suggest his touring of Ireland. It is fascinating then that Verne evidenced sound enough knowledge of the Irish land wars, agricultural crises, the Home Rule movement and nationalist press to annotate *Foundling Mick's* narrative with mixed historical references from 1875 to 1884, during which the sequence of fiction unravels. Such is the attention devoted to Ireland's social and political history that a left-of-centre political standpoint emerges in *Foundling Mick* which is sympathetic to the toils of the Irish peasantry, working classes and especially the plight of children. We should hesitate to label this as a 'republican' stance as it has been claimed elsewhere with surety that despite his convictions, Verne had very little firsthand experience of Ireland either socially or politically. One excerpt which would bolster this is an exaggerated claim that there were insurance salesmen marauding the outskirts of Donegal, in an area 'which we shall denote by the letter R' and who sought insurances upon the lives of children from workhouse owners, 'in other words insuring their death.'<sup>32</sup> Such activity had not been recorded in any history and even seems to be an act of poetic licence.

Indeed, later in the tale, twelve miles from Tralee, 'in a district of country held almost exclusively by "foreigners" that is to say by landlords

31 Later compiled in English in an anonymously translated edition: Philippe Daryl, *Ireland's Disease* (London: Routledge, 1888).

32 Jules Verne, *Foundling Mick* (Royal Irish Academy: Dublin, 2008), p. 72.

who are not Irish, but English and Scotch men' (p. 56), Mick finds himself working on Murdoch and MacCarthy's farm. As a result of a failure to pay rack rent on time, Mick later witnesses the farm's dissolution by local policemen at the hands of a landlord known only as Kirwan. Following a lengthy description of the pillaging of the property and beating of its occupants in a prose of ironically Flaubertian delicacy, an abrupt but politically poignant observation is made of the dispossessed tenants:

MacCarthy and his younger son were arrested together with Murdoch: their resistance to the police was undeniable. In consequence, they were deprived of the benefit of the law of 1870. (p. 56)

From the standpoint of Irish Victorian consumer culture, Verne's view chimes with those of recent revisionist historians who have turned to credit the Irish peasantry with a previously unacknowledged intelligence and economic sensibility. Amongst these revisionist theories, one view pertains to highlight that prior to absentee landlordism Irish peasants already had a stable and autonomous system of hierarchies built upon familial succession and landownership. This allusion might be extended to the economic prowess of the Irish peasantry. Irish literature from the late nineteenth century which describes the immediate post-famine period and the toil of peasants in singularly dismissive terms can thus be considered covert Freudian sublimation in its creativity. Given that the symbolists of the 1890s valued art for art's sake, Irish authors describing the peasantry in fiction could be seen to be defiant in their rejection of the artistic peasant. Representing Ireland as such would implicate an economic dependence upon others. Although peasants had been utilised and repositioned as agents of realism in Victorian English theatre and while they constituted a rustic chorus in Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels, amongst other examples, Irish representations of peasants could be seen to be more readily adapted as a vehicle for artistic – if not economic – change in fictions written on or about the periphery of Land Act successions.

What makes *Foundling Mick* particularly innovative in terms of its socio-economic commentary then? While it was 'researched' and set between the 1870s and 1880s; composed and published by 1893, the novel

acknowledges the astute business acumen of the Irish peasantry in a manner that was exaggerated without stage Irishry or tales of excess. The character Foundling Mick is described to garner business acumen from 1875 when he assists Hornpipe as a puppeteer in an amusingly lavish enactment of Queen Victoria's court. In the years leading up to the denouement of the plot in 1884, Mick survives a foundling hospital; a charity institution; works on a farm, is a servant to Anglo-Irish ascendants before developing his own business which he takes to Cork and Belfast and then settles to buy a bazaar named Mick, Dick & Co. on Bedford Street in Dublin. Surprisingly though, a number of critics of Verne's science-fiction have failed to recognise the sociological plight taken in his literature. In what appears a critique of Cartesian culture using Verne as a medium, Bernard Blanc compiled a fictional interview with Verne in an unusual piece entitled *Pourquoi j'ai tué Jules Verne/ Why I killed Jules Verne*.<sup>33</sup> Blanc, writing in 1978, is eager to paint Verne as a demolisher of the science-fiction genre and as an author completely ignorant of the children to and about whom he writes. In order to communicate the vehemence and offence with which Blanc writes this segment has been provided in the original French with an attempted English translation beneath:

*BB – Bonjour, Jules. Comment va ? [...]*

*JV – Oh, vous savez, ça ne m'étonne pas de vous voir là. Je m'y attendais, un jour ou l'autre ...*

*BB – Me vouvoie. Moi, je lui dis tu, exprès.*

*Tu veux qu'on cause un peu ?*

*[...] Une bonne soirée cool en perspective, au coin du feu, à se raconter des voyages extraordinaires.*

*BB – Monsieur Jules Verne [...] je pense qu'il est largement temps que tu t'arrêtes d'écrire tes conneries. Et ... comme tu sembles ne pas l'avoir compris plus tôt, je viens te donner un petit coup de main.*

*JV – Ah, c'est donc vous ces lettres de menace qui choquaient très sérieusement dans tous ces messages d'amitié qui me sont arrivés depuis des mois, quand les gens ont commencé à savoir que j'étais malade.*

33 Bernard Blanc, *Pourquoi J'ai Tué Jules Verne* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1978), pp. 13–14.

BB – *Ouais, c'est moi, le vioque. T'aurais dû comprendre, merde, on n'en serait pas arrivé là ... Je serais resté chez moi, peinard, à lire de la science-fiction progressiste [...]*

JV – *Eh, vous savez, je ne suis quand même pas responsable de tout !*

BB – *Fait pas l'innocent, Jules ! tu as fabriqué tout ça ! [...]* C'est toi qui as propagé ce sale virus dans les couches les plus populaires. Et surtout chez les gosses. Merde, t'y as pensé, aux gosses ? (p. 13)

BB – Hey Jules. How's it going?

JV – Oh you know, one isn't surprised to see you there. One knew that it would come to this sooner or later.

BB – Did he just refer to himself as 'one'? I casually asked him 'how's it going?' for a reason!

BB – Do you fancy chatting for a bit? [...] I'm relishing the prospect of a nice relaxed evening, sitting by the fire, telling each other about our respective *voyages extraordinaires*.

BB – Mister Jules Verne [...] I think it's about time you stop writing your cobbler's and, since you haven't already clocked on, I am here to give you a hand with that [...]

JV – Ah, it was you who sent me those death threats then. I found them amidst all of the get well soon notes I received when I was ill.

BB – Yeah you old codger, it was me. You should have clocked on, bloody hell, it didn't have to come to this. I would have stayed at home otherwise reading progressive science fiction [...]

JV – Hmm, I'm not accountable for everything you know!

BB – You're no angel Jules! You made all of that up! [...] It is you who spread this filthy science fiction disease into the most populated of social strata ... And above all you spread it out amongst the kids. Bloody hell, did you even realise? Amongst the kids?

Bernard Blanc's tirade is comical in its blanket dismissal of one of France's greatest authors as a pompous and unwarranted forefather of the science fiction genre. Nonetheless, one wonders whether or not staging interviews and plotting the murder of Jules Verne is the most effective way to bring the science-fiction genre into a serious forum of literary discussion. Most shocking is that at the time of writing, ten years after the educational enlightenment evoked by youth participation in Parisian riots, a self-proclaimed philosopher has the seeming audacity to allege that Verne ventured out to deliberately rupture children's fiction: '*Merde, t'y as pensé, aux gosses ?*'

In the character of Foundling Mick, it is clear that Verne sought to provide an example of a child endowed with such financial prowess and awareness of his own complicity in Irish advertising culture that child



welfare concerns resisted anything of the blasé sci-fi infections Blanc decries. Even in the early stages of the novel Mick is portrayed as a fine, literate, child consumer. When literacy rates amongst Irish children outstripped those of the British mainland in the early 1880s, Verne alerts the reader to alternative modes of literary advertisement which would inculcate young consumers. In a particular instance, Mick is portrayed as a proudly competent consumer identifying his own role on stage by the advertisement of a play. Mick was to play the part of a foundling on stage, ironically enough:

[...] so wide was the story of the foundling known, and so attractive was the announcement of –

‘A MOTHER’S REMORSE’

A thrilling drama by the celebrated John Smith.

The Duchess of Kendal – Miss Anna Watson.

Harry – ‘Foundling Mick’, aged five years and a half.

Our little lad would have been proud had he stopped before the big poster. He knew how to read, and there was his own name – such as it was – in great letters on a white ground (p. 49).

Irony is of course pivotal to this understanding of Verne’s writing process. Moreover, as Mick develops into a fully fledged consumer by the age of ten-and-a-half, his commercial exploits are casually aligned with the ‘buy Irish’ campaigns which flavoured nationalist rhetoric and which were to constitute a fundamental part of DeValera’s new state years later. While in Belfast in November 1885, Mick is said to be interested in ‘evidences of its industry and prosperity’ and ‘[...]the trade [of Belfast] not in its factions.’<sup>34</sup> This is curious commentary from a child narrator who would have been in the city at the height of Land League debates in the wake of Gladstone’s Land Act of 1886 which saw a number of urban riots being undertaken by unionists in objection to the act. Indeed, there was also an increase in agrarian radicalism in the lead up to the 1886 Act which Paul Bew notes:

34 Verne, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Foundling Mick*, p. 183.

The epoch of the Land League saw a vigorous revival of agrarian radicalism [...] in both the Catholic and Protestant tenant communities. 'Landlords' and 'the nominees of landlords' found life at the polls very hard indeed. (p. 183)

That Mick is described to put aside the potent political concerns for the Land divisions of Ulster and instead focus upon the plight of workers protesting about their wages outside a factory and an important business transaction with a supplier of the Boys' Bazaar speaks volumes for the efficacy with which the character has embraced the phenomenon of entrepreneurship by dint of his status as a foundling. At the close of the novel, Mick is reunited with a childhood friend named Cissy who he met some ten years previously in a poor school in Galway. The MacCarthy family make a reappearance at the novel's close and arrive in Dublin aboard the *Queensland* emigrant ship having spent an unpleasant five years in Melbourne. Foundling Mick is adopted by the MacCarthy family and in a final stroke of dramatic irony, uses the finances he has accrued with the Boys' Bazaar to support their resettlement on a farm in Ireland.

## Conclusion: why foundlings?

Valorising the wisdom of the orphaned or charity child was a common trope of nineteenth-century literature. One only need consider Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* (1855), Maria Edgeworth's *The Purple Jar* (1809) and a host of European 'rags to riches' narratives to see why, by the 1870s, Dublin and Paris were embraced as the exotic settings most able to stage child-consumer development. In the context of British child welfare concerns of this period, it was known that a number of Irish children were being forced to beg publicly by their poor families so that they might be granted fee-free admittance to charity workhouses. In 1897 it was noted that over half of the 1,410 arrivals in Irish workhouses were there as a result of being arrested for public beggary. Much earlier in the post-Famine period, Henry Mayhew notes in his iconic survey of the adverse social effects of

London's industrialisation, *London labour and the London poor*<sup>35</sup> that similarly crafty behaviour occurred amongst Irish and English children excusing their beggary as salesmanship:

There are ten certified schools in London, established for the express purpose of receiving and reforming vagrant children, under the industrial schools act. In the whole metropolis not twenty children have been secured under the act, though the streets are thickly strewn with proper occupants for the certified schools. The magistrates affirm that the difficulty lies in defining the term 'vagrancy.' These children generally carry some small article for sale or profess to be engaged in some occupation and so escape the charge of begging, which would be an act of vagrancy and consign them to an industrial school.<sup>36</sup>

However much child delinquency could be excused on the grounds of explicating the semantics behind the term 'vagrancy' in London between 1840 and 1860, it is a French author writing of Ireland and an Irish author-ess translating a French foundling narrative who decide that Franco-Irish backdrops would be most appropriate for situating alternative foundling narratives.

In concluding this discussion of children, 'the charity myth' and Victorian consumer culture in Ireland and in France, one question persists nevertheless: why foundlings? Whether drawn from the Robinson Crusoe predicament or from other mythical interpretations, both Verne and Malot were fixated with the physical growth of young children entwined with an economic maturity which was contextually viable. Child welfare advances for foundlings in Ireland did all but address the newfound pressures put upon children to engage with a consumer culture that was gaining more momentum and rather offered cash incentives to parents willing to adopt orphaned children under the boarding out scheme in Ireland.

The key to escaping bankruptcy and to discovering one's true family, in Franco-Irish foundling terms was ultimately to engage with the developing Victorian marketplace. One of the key benefits of offering a foundling

35 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols (London: Griffin, Bohn & Co, 1861), p. 2.

36 Mayhew, *London Labour*, iv, p. 273.

hero in Franco-Irish Victorian narratives was the neutrality of removing characters from any distinct family unit or the economic and social controls imbibed therein. In this sense, Verne, Malot and Laffan employed or translated the role of the foundling child as a means of distancing to enable a subtle critiquing of the implications consumer culture and economic development had upon the child. As such, the institution of the family could be questioned at a safe distance from class and church speculations. Given the radical reimagining that the family unit underwent at the turn of the century in Irish state rhetoric in particular, Malot, Laffan and Verne's depictions of alternate, street families seem somewhat pre-emptive.

Such dissonance between the forward-thinking subjects preferred for discussion in the fiction from 1870 to 1900 – namely children and consumer culture – and a child readership or audience held captive by older narratives which would relate the child to theories of self betterment highlights the mutual interest that Irish and French fictions had in presenting foundling narratives which were historically informed without being static or prescriptive to previous Victorian forms. This phenomenon has been captured in an alternative manner by the Belgian economist and Verne specialist Robert Pourvoyeur. Pourvoyeur sees Verne's proliferation in science fiction writings at the end of the nineteenth century and his scant socio-economic commentary to be, akin to Macherey's thesis, grounded upon a difficulty of thematic writing:

*Verne, si ouvert aux idées scientifiques nouvelles, n'a pas semblé prouver la même curiosité en matière économique. 'Trop de mots' pas assez de science naturelle ?*<sup>37</sup>

(Verne who was so very open to new scientific ideas did not seem to be able to evidence the same curiosity as far as the subject of economics was concerned: did an excess of 'words' mean there was not enough of 'natural' science?)

Surely the lack of science *dite* 'naturelle' in Verne's *P'Tit Bonhomme* as in Malot's *Sans Famille*, is a testament to the socio-economic history of

37 Robert Pourvoyeur, 'Jules Verne Economiste', in François Raymond and Simone Vierne (eds), *Jules Verne et les Sciences Humaines* (Paris: Union Générale: 1979), p. 286. (My translation).

which foundlings played a part: In Ireland, as in France. As such, fictional child pioneers in commerce would serve to represent the scale of consumer culture as it imbibed and solicited younger participants in the process in Ireland and in France. Whilst unapparent at the time, Rémi and Mick can now be noted as some of the earliest Franco-Irish fictional child capitalists.

BENJAMIN KEATINGE

## ‘The clouds of Ireland gathered over France’: Harry Clifton’s *Secular Eden*

One of the most gratifying developments in contemporary Irish poetry was the nomination in 2010 of Harry Clifton as Ireland Professor of Poetry for a three-year period. Readers of his magisterial 2007 volume *Secular Eden: Paris Notebooks 1994–2004*, published by Wake Forest University Press (which was awarded the Irish Times Poetry prize in April 2008), will not necessarily have been surprised at the news. Nonetheless, Clifton’s comparative invisibility compared to some of the previous holders of the post (John Montague, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Paul Durcan and Michael Longley) may have caused an eyebrow or two to be raised in less informed quarters. The citation for the award referred to Clifton’s deep commitment to the art of poetry<sup>1</sup> and those who have followed the poet’s development from his earliest volume *The Walls of Carthage* (1977) to his *The Desert Route: Selected Poems 1973–1988* (1992) and subsequent volume *Night Train Through the Brenner* (1994), all published by Gallery Press, will have observed an aesthetic dedication to a certain formal craftsmanship which reached its apotheosis with *Secular Eden*.

Clifton gave his own explanation for his comparative invisibility in Ireland in an interview with David Wheatley in August 1996, where he claimed that his lack of identification with certain major currents in

1 On Clifton’s appointment, Pat Moylan, Chairman of the Arts Council of Ireland said: ‘I am absolutely thrilled that Harry Clifton will be the fifth Ireland Professor of Poetry. A gifted and internationally-respected poet, Clifton is a writer deeply committed to the art of poetry and this honour is richly deserved.’ *The Irish Times*, Thursday 1 July 2010. <[http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0701/1224273707910\\_pf.html](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0701/1224273707910_pf.html)>. Accessed 8 January 2011.

contemporary Irish poetry, including Northern Ireland, ‘the new wave of women’s poetry’, Irish language poetry and ‘the emergence of a Dublin working-class literary consciousness’, had delayed his reception.<sup>2</sup> Added to this is Clifton’s own stated disinclination to work ‘with the sun in [his] eyes’ and his self-confessed ‘hermetic’ temperament (‘Interview’, p. 41). Born in Dublin in 1952, Clifton’s well-travelled, comparatively rootless aesthetic has proved resistant to neat integration into pre-existing Irish models leading to the perception of a poet working outside the mainstream whose recent success represents a belated acknowledgement by the home artistic Establishment.

This essay seeks to read Clifton’s poetry within the terms Clifton has set himself: secularism, the city, history, migration, deracination, the voyage out and the experience of homecoming. In doing so, it will point to parallels and precedents in modern Irish poetry. The essay will also examine the specifically French locale of *Secular Eden* and explore to what extent Clifton has co-opted and explored French republican ideals. The essay will first of all seek to contextualise the critical debate around Clifton’s poetry of exile and then it will look at examples of alienation and estrangement in his first four collections. The second half of the essay focuses on Clifton’s transitional volume *Night Train Through the Brenner* (1994) leading to the poems from *Secular Eden* (2007) which are my principal concern.

In the Beckettian scenario of the poem ‘A Talking Head on the Rue du Bac’ from *Secular Eden*, Clifton identifies his own travels as those of happenstance, not design:

Just following the curve of the world  
 In my own small way,  
 Rambling on, with nothing to say,  
 From shelter to shelter.<sup>3</sup>

2 ‘Interview with Harry Clifton’, by David Wheatley, in *Metre* 1 (Autumn 1996), pp. 40–46 (p. 40). Hereafter abbreviated as ‘Interview’ with page number in parentheses.

3 Harry Clifton, ‘Talking Head on the Rue du Bac’, in *Secular Eden* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 2007), p. 23. Hereafter *SE* with page number in parentheses.

In exactly this manner, Clifton and his wife, the novelist Deirdre Madden, found themselves living in Paris in 1994 and ended up staying there for a decade during which time most of the Notebooks which make up *Secular Eden* were composed. As Clifton explains: 'We had been living in Germany for the academic year 1993–94, came to Paris almost accidentally in the summer of 1994, intending to stay a year at most, if possible, on the way to Ireland, and ended up living there, very happily, for a decade.'<sup>4</sup> The collection is imbued with Clifton's own sense of himself as a migratory and unassimilated writer who writes, in some ways, 'against the grain' of Irish poetry in its more 'homespun' forms and specifically in tension with the Gaelic *dinnsheanchas* mode variously found in poems by Yeats, Kavanagh and Heaney. Indeed, Clifton's deracinated muse poses the question asked by Richard Tillinghast: 'Is Clifton an Irish poet? ... The sense of rootedness in Ireland as a place is just not there in Clifton's work.'<sup>5</sup>

Of course, one does not wish to oversimplify the history of Irish poetry, nor to deny that such questions have been asked before, notably of a similarly 'rootless' poet – Louis MacNeice – now, more often than not, claimed as Irish, *faute de mieux*. Nor can we classify Clifton's oeuvre as purely 'deracinated'. As Tillinghast notes, there is an attachment to place and, indeed, a perceptive and atmospheric immersion in a certain kind of European, and global, place-lore. However, the place-lore is international and associated with history rather than local issues and is not linked to mythology or story-telling as in the Gaelic *dinnsheanchas* tradition. It is often characterised by borders and locales of transit or non-European locales which boast a certain exoticism. Clifton's presentation of Paris shows us the international side of that city and its cultural diversity as a city of migrants; but in doing this, we cannot say Clifton is unaware of the specificities of place, quite the opposite in fact. Tillinghast refers to Clifton's 'attenuated, impersonal' aesthetic and his 'cool surfaces and lack of obvious affect' as

4 Harry Clifton, private communication to the author, 20 July 2011.

5 Richard Tillinghast, 'The Future of Irish Poetry?', in *Finding Ireland* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), pp. 193–217, p. 199.



part of his general disengagement and philosophical scepticism.<sup>6</sup> As we will see, Clifton's 'cold eye' misses nothing even as it registers non-commitment towards his chosen locales. This temperamental scepticism echoes that of Louis MacNeice, with whose poetry Clifton also exhibits strong formal similarities. MacNeice and Clifton choose well-crafted, meditative stanzas to develop lines of thought which are played out via rhyme and half-rhyme; in Clifton's case we witness a move away from the regular quatrains in his earlier collections towards more complex stanzaic patterns in *Secular Eden*. Both poets also reflect an important shift in Irish poetry away from the countryside and 'the land' to the city, and not just Dublin, but the modern metropolis, places like London and Paris. And both poets remind us of the trend towards what Elmer Kennedy-Andrews calls 'diasporic notions of culture and identity'<sup>7</sup> already alluded to.

Indeed, one might postulate a counter-tradition, originating with MacNeice, which challenges the ideals of Irish-Ireland – the land, the Irish language and the religious consciousness of the people – by foregrounding counter-examples of secularised urban life in an Anglophone or European sphere. This is the mode of writing found particularly in Derek Mahon in the north and Harry Clifton in the south, but it encompasses aspects of other contemporary poets from Paul Muldoon to Tom Paulin, to Paul Durcan, to name only well-established voices. Speaking of the (now) older generation of northern poets (Heaney, Mahon, Longley) John Goodby notes in *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History* (2000):

To a large extent these geographical (and to some extent historical) displacements have thus served to extend, rather than break with, the core concerns – of responsibility, home, alienation, community – which marked their earlier work. For younger poets, however, an already existing scepticism towards such terms within the Irish context permitted a fuller acceptance of displacement, which informed the aesthetic stances and formal strategies of their poetry in correspondingly more radical fashion.<sup>8</sup>

6 Tillinghast, p. 199 and p. 201.

7 Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home: Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland 1968–2008* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), p. 11.

8 John Goodby, *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 282.

Thus, if an older generation are, in some sense, still tethered (by choice and circumstance) to geographical origin and local historical experience, the younger generation experience things in a less grounded, more free-standing way. And as Goodby confirms: 'one major, if unexplored "tradition" in Irish writing has been of *dislocation*, of diaspora and (in older terminology) emigrant writing'.<sup>9</sup> An accelerated trend towards international rather than local contexts for Irish poetry has been variously suggested by critics such as Justin Quinn, John McDonagh, John Goodby and Elmer Kennedy-Andrews. This essay will consider how Clifton participates in this trend and how Irish, French and many other locales are used in his work.

In retrospect, it is possible to read or even to 'situate' Clifton's early poetry more easily than in the 1970s and 1980s when his first volumes were published. As Clifton suggests in his interview with David Wheatley, there is a sense in which his poetry did not 'fit' into the contemporary scene leading to general neglect of his growing oeuvre. Clifton adopts a deliberately anchorless voice in his first volume using an alienated interiority to survey his far-flung surroundings. So, the poem 'In the World' from *Office of the Salt Merchant* (1979) excavates the bare bones of an identity in an African setting:

Two or three false starts –  
I'm in the world, the paid servant  
Of an African government,  
Living in plateau hotels

Where the desert blows in, a man  
Of official silences,  
Longwindedness, immunised  
Against everything but myself.<sup>10</sup>

One senses in this poem a tendentious identity and cultivated alienation which is immune from the official criteria of identity: family origins,

9 Goodby, p. 282. Italics in original.

10 Harry Clifton, 'Three Poems' in *Office of the Salt Merchant* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1979), p. 11. Hereafter *OSM* with page number in parentheses.

bloodgroup, eyecolour which are mentioned in stanzas seven and eight. Nonetheless, the poem anticipates the terms in which Clifton will view his international wanderings. Clifton's mixed family background – on his mother's side South American ancestry and on his father's side, Irish blood – is presented here as one possible reason for his restless travelling, his need 'to complete [his] personality, to find its second half, the part that didn't correspond to external Irish life' ('Interview', p. 41). In this poem's terms, being 'in the world' sounds wearisome and hence some kind of documentary or literary evidence is needed to counter the tropical lethargy which threatens to overwhelm Clifton's 'paperthin / Credentials' (*OSM*, p. 11).

Clifton's liking for 'in-between' spaces is buttressed by his equal fascination of infertile or hostile landscapes. His first four books culminate with *The Desert Route: Selected Poems 1973–1988* (1992) which restates the terms of Clifton's artistic displacement. As he again notes in an interview: 'For me the desert is a place of clarity and emptiness, and a point of departure; I don't see it in terms of desolation' ('Interview', p. 42). Indeed, it is in the emptiness and stillness of unpopulated locales that Clifton's poetic imagination is stirred whether he evokes deserts (as in the poems 'The Walls of Carthage' or 'The Desert Route') or the jungles of the tropics, or even in the cityscapes of Dublin and other European cities. Thus in 'Latitude 5° N' (from *Office of the Salt Merchant*), the jungle features as the backdrop of another meditation on identity:

Sitting in the jungle, engine ticking over,  
Thinking all this ... No forest of background noises  
To distract me, [...]

Nothing but silence

Five degrees from the equator –  
Silence of growth, before growth  
Proliferates into desires; and the agelessness  
Of the man with no birth certificate,  
Innocent of history. (*OSM*, pp. 32–33)

Here, official twentieth-century man confronts a primitive locale where the documented self is not prizeworthy and there is a certain non-literate, unhistorical obscuring of self in the untamed 'growth' which surrounds

him. To what extent can the poet take on the mantle of identity outside history, the poem asks? Whereas, in *Secular Eden*, Clifton will present the undocumented interwar refugees as persecuted victims of history: 'Irrational, fleeting, caught between wars, / Faking our own death, in thirteen nation-states, / As the monies collapse / And the borders, all of us transmigrating / Like souls, through the neutral space on the map' (*SE*, p. 200), here, in this earlier volume, we witness the stillness of pre-history, arrested historical growth, passively awaiting expulsion into the currents of political and social change.

In these examples there seems to be a 'human distance, separation pure' (*OSM*, p. 42) between Clifton and his environment through which the poet exhibits an insulated mental autonomy from his observed surroundings. Clifton dramatises a poetic persona with low-voltage circumspection while 'wishing himself elsewhere' ('The Desert Route', *OSM*, p. 27). As we will see, Clifton's nuanced response to both cityscape and landscape remains a potent part of his poetic armoury and the volume which principally concerns us here, *Secular Eden*, is a powerful meditation on the individual's orientation and disorientation in the modern urban space of Paris where Clifton lived between 1994 and 2004. One might suggest these early sketches are somewhat self-absorbed, slightly monochromatic responses to a lived environment, which only partially anticipate the more colourful palette which Clifton uses in his more expansive and historically grounded poems in *Night Train Through the Brenner* (1994) and *Secular Eden* (2007).

Clifton's first four volumes reflect travels in Africa (Nigeria) and Asia (Thailand) and the foreignness of these places is presented with a mental self-sufficiency on the part of the poet which contains and distances him from experience even as he encounters his surroundings. Equally, however, Clifton treats his home town of Dublin with the same sense of detached circumspection so that home and abroad are presented with a tonally-similar, dry distaste. So, the first poem of Clifton's third volume *Comparative Lives* (1982) describes a homecoming with total absence of enthusiasm in 'Early Days':

Anonymous, passing back  
 Into the Live Register  
 Of Ireland, I'm home again  
 On the beaten track –  
 [...]

My estate [...]  
 Time and silence,  
 Rented room.<sup>11</sup>

The monosyllables echo each other here as Clifton exchanges the lethargy of the tropics for a 'Rented room' in Dublin. The homecoming is deliberately anti-climactic, morose even. We feel none of the high voltage of social and historical engagement found in Clifton's more recent work.

This attitude of cultivated 'indifference' ('Night in the Chinese Quarter', *CL*, p. 42) seems to bring together these early poems under the banner of an Eliotic distaste for the raw material of life. It also seems that Clifton's deliberate focus on the seedier side of life – Asian or African brothels as well as Dublin streetwalkers – is another consistent feature of the poet's weary non-engagement. The love encounters here are fleeting and illicit, their sensuality exudes a certain exoticism, but also appears one-sided and emotionally incomplete, if not frankly exploitative. Indeed, the loved object appears as part of the alienated surroundings so that even a 'love poem' of sorts, 'Ireland' contains an aura of essential loneliness:

Wild seed,  
 Warrens of breeding  
 Everywhere ... on the Atlantic side  
 Graveyards of joyrides,  
 Used cars.

11 Harry Clifton, 'Early Days' in *Comparative Lives* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1982), p. 9. Hereafter abbreviated as *CL* with page number in parentheses.

A ferry  
Left some hours ago  
For the mainland ... nothing to carry us  
Back into history, now,  
Until tomorrow. ('Ireland', *CL*, p. 13)

In this poem, the couple are marooned, but their island is without romantic trappings and, as the poem states, there will be 'no breakthrough / Into adulthood' (*CL*, p. 13). The sense of incompleteness is palpable and the 'Wild seed' generates no warmth. This is equally the case with the Asian love poems where vaguely sensual women flit in and out of the poetic canvass in a deliberately desolate way so that, as Clifton writes of another encounter, somehow the poet must dignify the raw emptiness of the relationship or discuss his own inability to do so:

I'm left to invent you, like a vanished muse  
In a nightclub, selling nakedness  
To the dead in spirit, anonymous  
In dark transactions, failures of consciousness – ('One', *CL*, p. 49)

Stanzas such as these suggest an emotional and artistic dead-end which can only be overcome by a more grounded relationship. In this respect, both *The Liberal Cage* (1988) and *Night Train Through the Brenner* (1994) are transitional volumes which celebrate the intimacy of Clifton's marriage to the novelist Deirdre Madden. However, as we will see, even as Clifton begins to celebrate a certain kind of domesticity – an important strand of *Night Train Through the Brenner*, composed principally in the Abruzzo, Italy – the essential rootlessness remains.

The critic and poet Justin Quinn finds a balance of attachments in Clifton's early work which, he argues, is superseded by a more international aesthetic in his recent work:

In the work of his first books, Clifton often tries to relate his experiences in Asia or Africa to Ireland, and his own status as a kind of exile. However, in his later work from the 1990s and 2000s, he has become more willing to let the Irish context slip. Many of his poems are portraits of writers, artists and politicians who have become unmoored from their homes and drift through the world constantly negotiating

their identity against the background of a foreign language, foreign mores and foreign cityscapes.<sup>12</sup>

Looking at Clifton's work more broadly and acknowledging its tendency towards detachment as much as attachment, we may agree with Quinn that Clifton's later volumes have been better appreciated because a new generation of poets have called into question the national essentialism of much Irish writing by poets from an earlier generation such as Thomas Kinsella and Richard Murphy or Seamus Heaney and John Montague and including (arguably) all of Clifton's predecessors as Ireland Professor of Poetry. Instead of a poetry of place or 'the matter of Ireland', Clifton advances displacement, 'placelessness' or an improvised sense of home avoiding as much as possible the lore of Irish geography and history. In this sense, the fact that some contemporary Irish poets have abandoned, according to Quinn, 'the nation as a framework for Irish poetry'<sup>13</sup> may be a sign of maturity and self-confidence. Indeed, Quinn identifies an international tendency in Irish poets like Paul Muldoon, Greg Delanty, Eamon Grennan as well as Harry Clifton and also an occlusion of Irish material in poets like Peter Sirr, Vona Groarke and Catriona O'Reilly. Similarly, speaking of a new generation of poets from Northern Ireland, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews writes:

Received identities and concepts of home continue to be interrogated as these new young poets seek out the fault-lines in familiar terrain, question the official maps, cross borders, break up consecrated ground, take roads less travelled by. Frequently, the desire to belong is in open conflict with the urge to flight. Attention is no longer focused on 'one dear perpetual place', but on multiple other places. Traversing internal, national and international frontiers, the younger poets are most at home occupying in-between places or inner spaces, zones between dream and reality, this world and the otherworld [...] the poet can be in several places at one time. These new poets represent the first genuinely post-national generation [...]<sup>14</sup>

12 Justin Quinn, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern Irish Poetry 1800–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 190.

13 Quinn, p. 191.

14 Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home: Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland 1968–2008*, p. 249.

This framework helps contextualise Clifton's aesthetic and his interest in being elsewhere, just as it suggests that he has ridden the wave of a broader Irish poetic trend. Clifton may be regarded as an early example of this post-national trend and this tendency encompasses a general lack of interest in collective national memory, or a concern with memory and history as transnational and international phenomena. Nor is Clifton interested in engagement in contemporary Irish politics in the manner of, say, Paul Durcan or Brendan Kennelly. For Clifton, place is incidental, not essential, as he explains:

'International' to me is just 'national' turned inside out. The real thing whether at home or away somewhere is universality of experience, albeit refracted through the prism of this or that place or city – the whereabouts are incidental, as long as the experience is crystallised and recognisable, identifiable with, by anyone. I have always sought 'alienation', in the sense of the detachment/anonymity of being elsewhere, as a way of clearing my own head and heart, of getting around or beyond what you call 'the matter of Ireland', though there is plenty of Irish matter in *Secular Eden*.<sup>15</sup>

*Night Train Through the Brenner* (1994) as well as Clifton's memoir titled *On the Spine of Italy: A Year in the Abruzzi* (1999) form a kind of contextual travelogue and prelude to the poems Clifton was writing between 1994 and 2004 while in Paris. *Night Train Through the Brenner* begins with a kind of testament to love and travel in which Clifton envisions a solidarity of purpose with his wife Deirdre Madden, dedicatee of the volume. We notice immediately a different, more hopeful and buoyant mood and a kind of romantic questing spirit:

Today Dublin, tomorrow Paris or Rome –  
And the blur of cities  
Is one City, simultaneous,  
Eternal, from which we are exiled forever.

And I say to you, 'Let us make a home  
In ourselves, in each other ...'<sup>16</sup>

15 Harry Clifton, private communication to the author, 20 July 2011.

16 Harry Clifton, 'In our own city, we are exiles ...', in *Night Train Through the Brenner* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1994), p. 11.



Clifton here offsets the private and public realms, but the poem equally suggests that they coexist in tension with each other and that love cannot banish history or deny the ‘statues of public men’<sup>17</sup> their presence and importance. Nonetheless, love as a temporary shelter or productive coexistence gives Clifton’s poetry an uplifted mood in *Night Train Through the Brenner* while also producing a greater sense of active engagement in the social and communal world.

Indeed, Clifton spent a whole year in the Abruzzi in a secluded mountain village, living rent free in a disused parish house beside an almost disused village church, and became part of a small but supportive Italian village environment as detailed in *On the Spine of Italy: A Year in the Abruzzi*. Many of the themes from Clifton’s Italian sojourn carry over into *Secular Eden*, including domestic plenitude, shared social/municipal space, secularisation and, not least, the relationship between exile and belonging. This latter dialectic is foregrounded in the final poem of the volume ‘The Canto of Ulysses’ which commits Clifton to an ongoing quest for elsewhere even as he celebrates the virtues of life in the village:

The shutters go up, like thunder,  
 On the street below. If the soul fed  
 On coffee, aromatic bread,  
 Niceties raised to the power of art,  
 We would long ago have knuckled under  
 To perfection, in the green heart  
 Of Italy, settled here,  
 And gone to sleep in the years.

But what was it Dante said  
 About ordinary life? My mind wanders  
 Like Ulysses, through the early sounds, [...]  
 As if I could ever go home!<sup>18</sup>

17 Harry Clifton, ‘*In our own city, we are exiles ...*’, in *Night Train Through the Brenner*, p. 11.

18 Harry Clifton, ‘The Canto of Ulysses’, in *Night Train Through the Brenner*, p. 69.

It is a decisive statement for continued adventure and travel, to strive and not to yield. But as these stanzas also suggest, Clifton's Italian poems and his memoir are minutely detailed in their documentation of the habits and lifestyles of their Italian village neighbours and the pleasures of the mountains. The village is isolated, especially in winter and Clifton and his wife live as part of a closed community. The village evokes for Clifton 'blue stillness, contemplative time'<sup>19</sup> and is an enabling space for concentrated writing. In this, it exhibits some of the edenic qualities which Clifton will go on to identify in Paris as an ideal urban space for those who prefer to keep moving and keep writing.

The intensely local nature of life in the village is taken for granted; each year emigrants return from the USA or Canada with the expectation of marrying into the same small community from whence they came. In such a situation, the village church would have played a pivotal role in village life in the past. Now, however, Clifton's notes, the Church's power has dwindled:

We were living through the end of a certain kind of religion, and we watched it on the wane. Its churches, here in the mountains, were neglected ruins, its congregations had long since vanished. Sullen and introverted though the village was, it too was experiencing the spiritual adulthood of the world.<sup>20</sup>

Exactly what this 'spiritual adulthood' amounts to is perhaps the most central point of Clifton's statement in *Secular Eden* as it is found germinating here in his earlier, Italian-inspired work. The village in Italy is an outpost which has heard the news and is adapting to a post-religious era. The visitors who return from far-off cities each year bring their secularism with them. The village is therefore moving from a religious temporality and religious identity into history and the material and social forces which shape the lives of individuals as much as nations. Even as Clifton and Deirdre Madden enjoy the seclusion and stillness, historical and secular realities

19 Harry Clifton, *On the Spine of Italy: A Year in the Abruzzi* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 197.

20 Clifton, *On the Spine of Italy*, p. 72.

have encroached on the village confronting the faithful with a modern form of 'spiritual adulthood'.

This 'spiritual adulthood' is further adumbrated by Clifton in his interview with David Wheatley:

One of the things I like about French life, strangely enough, is that it is completely, or almost completely, post-religious in the conventional sense. It seems to have reached a kind of nadir that Ireland has not yet reached, and instead of creating problems that somehow clarifies things for me. To live in France is to live at a point of ending and a point of new beginning, a point where there is nothing left of the old religious clutter and nothing new has really begun. ('Interview', p. 42)

Clifton assumes an inexorable spiritual decline of the kind now visible in the crisis of the Catholic Church in Ireland. He also assumes possibilities and freedoms associated with this decline whereby 'spiritual adulthood' is enabling, even exhilarating. French society is seen as post-religious rather than, as in Ireland's case, just in transition away from orthodox belief. Equally liberating for Clifton is what he describes as 'the Cartesian clarity of Paris' which enables, for him, a broad brushstroke approach to writing which evades what he calls 'the emotionalism of living in Ireland'.<sup>21</sup> It seems that alongside spiritual adulthood comes a kind of intellectual honesty which facilitates the writing of 'broad meditative poems' which deal with, in the poet's words, 'the big muddy river of universal history'.<sup>22</sup>

This 'big muddy river' includes the historical facts of secularism in France even though Clifton only dwells on some of these details in *Secular Eden*. The long history of secularism and anti-clericalism in France dates, of course, back to the Revolution but the formal separation of Church and State was confirmed by the Separation bill which passed into law in December 1905 which, according to historian Rod Kedward, 'firmly dis-established' the Catholic church 'from all state subsidy and protection'. From this point, in Kedward's words, 'Secularism was firmly established

21 Harry Clifton, private communication to the author, 20 July 2011.

22 Harry Clifton, private communication to the author, 20 July 2011.

as the central pillar of the twentieth-century republic.<sup>23</sup> We should nonetheless be cautious about attributing to contemporary French society the Cartesian rationalism Clifton alludes to. In a survey conducted in 1994, it was found that 74 per cent of the adult population believe in God, while 64 per cent declare themselves Catholic even though only 9 per cent admit to practising religion regularly.<sup>24</sup> According to William Smith in an essay on 'The Church' in France, we are dealing with a country:

[...] far removed from the stereotype of Cartesian rationalism [...] It is a France in which people are looking for an aim and purpose to their existence [...] Mother Theresa and the Abbé Pierre are seen as inspirational role models [...] In so far as Christianity, and in particular Catholicism are concerned, the overall impression is that the Church with its tightly ordered dogmas and rules is rapidly losing ground to a 'pick-and-mix' approach to religion [...] Belief survives, but it does not imply acceptance of the Church's teaching on faith or morals.<sup>25</sup>

We must allow, therefore, in Clifton's analysis of the post-religious situation in France, the occlusion of the 10–20 per cent of French people who still adhere, in varying degrees, to the Catholic Church, not to mention those of other confessions, including Islam and Judaism.

Clifton's choice of title for *Secular Eden* is apposite to the metropolitan situation of Paris at the end of the twentieth century even if it does not give a full reflection of religious feeling in France. The poems in the collection are designed, as Clifton explains, to 'draw attention to something central not just in French or Parisian life, but a western thing in general – the tension between secular and religious ideals.'<sup>26</sup> Not least amongst secular ideals is the concept of leisure and enjoyment as currently practised in the non-religious West. The poem 'God in France', from *Secular Eden*, refers to the American novelist Saul Bellow's statement, when asked who

23 Rod Kedward, *France and the French: A Modern History* (New York: Overlook Press, 2007), pp. 28–29.

24 A. Woodrow, 'The Beliefs of the French', in *The Tablet* (21 May 1994), p. 643.

25 William Smith, 'The Church', in *Aspects of Contemporary France*, edited by Sheila Perry (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 155.

26 Harry Clifton, private communication to the author, 20 July 2011.

he would most like to be: 'I would like to be God in France, where no one believes anymore. No calls on me, I could sit all day in cafés ....' (*SE*, p. 53) The poem imagines an unemployed God 'Adrift on the everyday' who will 'Let Judgement take care of itself' and instead 'celebrate' the 'randomness, flux' and 'freedom' of the modern city (*SE*, pp. 53–55). The fire and brimstone God of conventional Christianity has simply given up and in his stead comes a certain weightless irresponsibility. Clifton, we might say, takes Camus at his word and imagines Sisyphus happy in a post-religious age. The logic of Clifton's 'secular Eden' is one where 'spiritual adulthood' entails not just a reorientation of fundamental questions but also a certain plenitude and freedom. All the paraphernalia of death, judgement, sin, guilt, heaven, hell and punishment are washed away and this cleansing process is evident in the title poem of the collection, 'Secular Eden', which imagines life without the burdens of religious consciousness:

Six o'clock in secular Eden –  
 No-one will ever fall from grace  
 Where the bells are electric, and the chimes  
 Of a French municipal hall  
 Preserve us in time.

The Place de la Grand Armée  
 Is empty. The Place de la Paix  
 With its locked-up church, and its one café,  
 Illuminates the flag of state  
 At the end of the Seventh Day.

A rattle of skateboards-  
 Children playing. There go lovers,  
 Crossing race and bloodline. And the flight-paths  
 Write their celestial Word  
 On the sky above us

In silence, on the deepening blue.  
 No guilt now, only vertigo  
 To the end of time, if anyone stops to think –  
 And the lights of cash-dispensers  
 From the all-night banks

Coming on, as if by a hidden hand.  
And the *apokatastasis*  
Of the healthfood shop, to be entered into,  
With the pure, organic apple  
There in the window. (*SE*, p. 96)

This is a poem aware of both the depth and shallowness of a post-religious age. The dangers of capitalist overindulgence are acknowledged in the reference to 'the all-night banks'. However, the poem foregrounds the civic realities of peace and play. Indeed, one might retitile the poem 'Still Life of the Secular City', given the freeze-frame way it captures the various, mainly secular, institutions of modern France: the municipal hall, locked-up church, the café and the healthfood shop. The Greek phrase '*apokatastasis*' means 'restoration' or 're-establishment' and clearly, the poem suggests a certain restoration of innocence in modern secularism, such as that of the children or lovers. Meanwhile, a reminder of an older eschatology, that of the Fall, seems present in the 'pure, organic apple' of Knowledge in the healthfood shop window.

If this is an edenic moment of freeze-frame perfection, surely it is one which contains the possibility of interruption and loss of innocence. It seems that the forces of history are momentarily arrested in time but that the complacency here ('No guilt now, only vertigo') renders the edenic moment vulnerable. Indeed, the word *apokatastasis* suggests also cyclical return and such cycles do not necessarily result in the liberation from history which the poem momentarily presents. Eden cannot exist conceptually without the apple of discord and the Fall and the poem seems poised between the edenic moment and its interruption.

In *Secular Eden* as a whole, the concept of secularism put forward is one which cannot be fully innocent of history, but rather amounts to the encounter of history without religious creeds to complicate the issues at stake. In the Parisian context, the inter-war period and the Occupation are of special interest. Indeed, the volume is populated by historical ghosts who act as specular counterparts to the complacently contented lovers and passers-by of the present moment. The interruption of history brings

a darker form of secular knowledge to bear on the present as here in the poem 'The House of the Deportee':

Always in shadow, the house of the deportee  
 Planted its own landmark  
 On the avenue. Groceries, carparks  
 Owed their lives to him, who was taken away,

Bewitching himself to a tree at his own front door,  
 And in April, the spores,  
 Like mattress ticking, feathers that flew,  
 Swarmed at the windows hindsight could see through.

Not that the house was empty. Upstairs light,  
 Diurnal time, and the shapes  
 Of daily living – sudden figures of eight  
 And vague daguerreotypes

From the age of black and white  
 Against the shades. November, and at night,  
 While the asphalt smoked  
 With rain and the sizzling wakes

Of passing cars, the immigrant quarter slept  
 Behind double locks, iron shutters.  
 There, where trading hours were never kept,  
 Where the laws were lived in spirit, not in letter,

Where brilliant ilfachromes,  
 Household idylls, plastered the city gates,  
 They still remembered the man who got up from his plate  
 To answer a doorbell once, and never came home. (*SE*, p. 61)

This is a poem based on the shadowy violence of the Occupation and the *guerre franco-française* as it still weighs upon modern French civic infrastructure and the national conscience. Importantly, Clifton confronts the house of the deportee as a phenomenon in present-day Paris which exhibits the same *unheimlich* atmosphere in the 1990s as it undoubtedly had in 1942 or 1943 at the time of the deportation of its previous owner.

Therefore, we should read the 'Groceries' and 'car parks', the 'Upstairs light', the 'passing cars' as phenomena observed by the poet in the present day which uncannily echo the atmosphere of the house and its surrounding district in the 1940s. The house, paradoxically, has an aura of permanence; it has 'Planted its own landmark' with the previous owner 'Bewitching himself to a tree' at his doorstep like a mythological character. The tree image echoes, once again, the Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden, the former bringing knowledge of sin and death, the latter yielding immortality, even of the ghostly kind suggested here where: 'They still remembered the man who got up from his plate / To answer a doorbell once, and never came home.' The references to photographic techniques allow us to read the poem in the same pictorial way as 'Secular Eden', as a moment frozen in time, like the instant the doorbell rings. The 'vague daguerreotypes' of the poem encompass the images both of the old deported owner of this property and whatever family has supplanted him of whom, Clifton suggests, we only have ghostly glimpses either in wartime or in the 1990s house of the deportee. There is, in this poem, a kind of coalescence of past and present; Clifton is the latter-day witness, but his view of the house conjures the very atmosphere of wartime even in 1990s Paris. The differentiation between an older mode of photography, the daguerreotype, which is 'From the age of black and white', and the wartime struggle between resister and collaborator, with a newer photographic method, the *ilfachrome*, reinforces coalescence of past and present. The *ilfachrome* was invented in the 1960s and allows for colour reproduction of images to be accurate and long-lasting; it is a technique used in galleries and archives to ensure the fidelity and permanence of the photographic image – the very archives which store information of Nazi atrocities across Europe. Therefore, in the age of colour reproduction, Clifton's poem somehow preserves the black and white integrity of the original even as he acknowledges the full colour 'Household idylls' and the 'Groceries' and 'carparks' of the contemporary district in the 1990s. Such a reading allows for the presentness of the past which is a feature of Clifton's historical imagination; it is a past which weighs against, even as it is integrated into, a supposedly weightless present.



Central to Clifton's conception of the French capital is its status as a great international city which has welcomed many thousands of immigrants over the years, not least *émigré* intellectuals such as the poet himself and his Irish predecessors including Joyce and Beckett, and more recently John Montague and Derek Mahon. Clifton's volume traces a certain sociology of inter-war, wartime and post-war Paris and foregrounds Paris' status as a city of immigrants. The present-day city is, to borrow another poet's phrase, 'incorrigibly plural' with its diverse population representing most ethnicities and nationalities in the world. One senses in Clifton's detached treatment of some landmark cafés the impersonal qualities of the city, its capacity to allow individual lives to be lived individually:

[...] millions of strange people  
 Whirled like atoms through the hub of Montparnasse  
 As night comes down, and the lit conceptual cages,  
 Dome, Select, Rotonde, the stamping-grounds  
 Of seeing and being seen, the gilt cafés  
 And mirrored brothels of the rue de l'Echaudée,  
 [...]  
 Invite appraisal (*SE*, p. 20)

Thus Paris is the city of the *flâneur*, the intellectual or political exile, the great, good international city. It is up to individuals to invent '*readymade pasts and illusive futures*' for themselves, as the epigraph to 'White Russians' suggests, to improvise and exploit 'the neutral space on the map' ('Benjamin Fondane Departs for the East', *SE*, p. 200). History imposes itself on the communal fabric as the inter-war presence of white Russians confirms and also the presence of diverse poets and artists – Paul Celan, Benjamin Fondane, Samuel Beckett, Alberto Giacometti, Salvador Dali – none of whose nationalities was French but each of whom is associated with the cultural reputation of the city and its capacity to house the intellectual migrant. Of course, these intellectual figures also suffered the rigours of the Occupation and, in Fondane's case, actually perished in the Holocaust. Clifton feels part of this general convergence of identities as he scans the entry doorbells of an apartment building in 'White Russians':

I scan them, floor by floor, the lists of names –  
Champy, Coudert, Floras, Garnier.  
Van Ronsele – where did he come from?  
Klein, our resident German – prisoner or refugee?  
Fellow tenants, footsteps on the stairs  
That smell of beeswax, voices behind doors,  
Presences, through the ceilings and the floors  
Of arrondissement twelve. What exiles? What despairs?  
Lair-Ferreira? Crossing the Pyrenees  
From the Spanish Civil War?  
Lazarevitch, of course, and you and me. (*SE*, p. 10)

As Clifton appropriately asks, with great formal dexterity, 'What exiles? What despairs?' These are people, one imagines and the poem's persona assumes, who have suffered from the depredations of history. In reality, Clifton's apartment during his ten-year stay in Paris was in the Clamart district, a picturesque suburb near the Meudon forest, south west of Paris. As it happens this was near to where Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva lived in the nineteen thirties, a poet whose career and life were blighted by the transformations of post-revolutionary Russia. Clifton also resurrects the voice of Romanian-born poet Benjamin Fondane, a victim of the deportations whose death and posthumous rediscovery provide a fitting example of a particular type of literary afterlife.<sup>27</sup> Fondane's voice is found in:

[...] a Paris street  
Old letterbox, a drop-zone for the infinite  
In a leaf-littered hallway, where a publisher long ago  
Went out of business, and a young man searches  
In the sibylline mess and the overflow  
For a few lost words [...] (*SE*, p. 201)

27 See the magnificent concluding poem of *Secular Eden*, 'Benjamin Fondane Departs for the East'. For fuller treatment of this poem as a Holocaust poem see my article 'Responses to the Holocaust in Modern Irish Poetry', *Estudios Irlandeses* 6 (2011), pp. 21–38. Available at <<http://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/indexnavy.htm>>.

and, as such, he subsists as a shadowy presence in the modern city just like the deportee of the earlier poem. Instead of the afterlife of religious temporality, Fondane's influence is effected in and through history and his life and work are modified 'in the guts of the living' to use Auden's phrase. Whether Clifton is looking at names on a doorbell or simply walking the Paris streets, he is alert to the ghostly presence of lost names, and the burdens they have bequeathed.

## Conclusion

This essay has focused mainly on Clifton's migratory aesthetic from early to later collections and his presentation of the French capital in *Secular Eden*. But in fact, the scope of *Secular Eden* is global and the poems range from Paris to Dublin to Poland to Sydney to Sweden and Antarctica, to name just some locations. While this range of reference appears to confirm Clifton's international outlook, it would nonetheless be foolish to overlook the Irish reference points in the collection. On the one hand, Ireland is shown as a rejected force-field as in the poem 'Icy Pandemonium' where the poet returns to Paris from Dublin after a Christmas with his family:

[...]      And it's goodbye, once again,  
 To the high stool at the counter, cigarette-haze,  
 To love made quietly, in a sacred room  
 Away from the family circle, the need to explain,

To the brief and glittering frenzy of Christmastide  
 And the notion of home (*SE*, p. 65)

Clifton here seems to be saying goodbye to the realities of home as much as 'the notion of home' since the latter can hardly be done away with so easily. The family environment may be irritating, tense and depressing, but it is hard to ignore completely. In other poems, like 'Mont Sainte-Genevieve', written in memory of Munster poet Séan Dunne, there is a greater balance

of attachments between such places as 'the Latin Quarter' and the 'scree off an Irish hillside. / Knockmealdowns / Or Commeraghs maybe.' (*SE*, p. 0) or memories of an evening 'in Cork, / Over glasses, in the silence of the Long Valley' (*SE*, p. 85). Clearly, such deep attachments cannot be wished away too easily. Sometimes one senses that there is 'unfinished business' ('North Great Georges Street', *SE*, p. 80) between the poet and his home country and it may not be surprising that Clifton and his wife chose to return to Ireland in 2004. As Clifton comments: 'After a difficult period of re-entry, coming home to old and new demons has been good for me.'<sup>28</sup>

It is with this sense of spiritual and geographical pragmatism that Clifton's arresting sonnet 'Picardy' was surely written where the migratory swallows of late summer in northern France are described as 'blowing hot and cold / In their own force-fields' (*SE*, p. 56) getting ready for their autumn flight to their wintering grounds in Africa. Clifton acknowledges and celebrates the happenstance of his and his wife's chosen domicile, what he calls:

Our one-step-forward-two-steps-back advance,  
And the clouds of Ireland, gathering over France. (*SE*, p. 56)

As a volume of poems which draws on all the resources of European culture, from a poet who hails from Ireland but is not immured in Irish cultural circumstances, these sentiments seem an appropriate assertion of the migratory intellect Clifton is gifted with.



RAYMOND MULLEN

## ‘How Can Time be Gathered in and Kissed?’: The Phenomenology of Memory in John McGahern’s *That They May Face the Rising Sun*

‘Keep it simple, in the beginning was the image.’<sup>1</sup> The image and the attempt to render the image as ‘memory becoming imagination’ was at the centre of McGahern’s artistic vision from the outset of his career, as evidenced in his letter to Michael McLaverty in 1965. Three years later he would draft the first version of his essay ‘The Image: A Prologue to a Reading’, but it was a vision that would shift and change over his life. In the unfinished, self-reflective jotting in his manuscripts in Galway, McGahern remarked that if he had one criticism of ‘The Image’ it was that it was ‘perhaps too serious.’<sup>2</sup> This lends weight to the idea that McGahern had moved even further from the bleak existentialist stance present in his earlier novels, certainly the revised version of ‘The Image’ that appeared roughly five years after he had written his unpublished reflection was devoid of the Self-oriented thrust of the original. Gone are the references to the individual, the absurd and the failures of love.<sup>3</sup> In *John McGahern – A Private World*, McGahern offered, perhaps, his most illuminating insight into his creative and artistic process. This intimate and revealing documentary filmed in 2004 for RTÉ’s Arts Lives series, shortly after McGahern

- 1 John McGahern, *Dear Mr. McLaverty: The Literary Correspondence of John McGahern and Michael McLaverty*, edited by John Killen (Belfast: Linen Hall Library, 2006), p. 43.
- 2 John McGahern MSS, P71/1298 & P71/1299; *Love of the World: Essays*, edited by Stanley van der Ziel (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 9.
- 3 Compare ‘The Image: Prologue to a Reading at the Rockefeller University [1968]’ and ‘The Image [1991]’, *Love of the World*, pp. 5–8.

had completed – but had yet to publish – *Memoir*, he talked frankly of the importance *That They May Face the Rising Sun* played in his successful recapturing of the Image.<sup>4</sup>

It is not at all surprising that *That They May Face the Rising Sun* has confounded many of McGahern's critics. It represents a significant departure from the early pessimism of *The Barracks* and *The Dark*, the experimental period of *The Leavetaking* and *The Pornographer*, and the return to the familiar territory of the family in existential crisis that he describes in *Amongst Women*. Stanley van der Ziel argues that the novel dispenses with the thin plotlines of his earlier novels and that *That They May Face the Rising Sun* 'does not fit into an existing *form* or *genre*.'<sup>5</sup> Eamonn Hughes says of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* that it is: 'an inexplicable novel, which is to say that it seems to break with, rather than emerge from, any trajectory or pattern' evident in his earlier fiction.<sup>6</sup> However, one discernible route that can be plotted – though in Eamonn Hughes's defence, it is one made easier in light of *Memoir* and *John McGahern – A Private World* – is that *That They May Face the Rising Sun* represented a culmination of McGahern's 'constant experiment' of 'memory becoming imagination'. *That They May Face the Rising Sun* unlocked the lost Image for McGahern in a wave of artistic remembering that reflects the evolving nature of the influence of Proust on his writing, with whom he shared a phenomenological intuition. Valerie Minogue notes of Proust's aesthetic:

Proust creates for us a new language which will make articulate what was previously inarticulate, and communicate what was locked up in the privacy of the individual. *Du côté de chez Swann* is an introduction to this personal language. It uncovers for us the roots of Marcel's vocabulary and syntax, the fundamental and recurring patterns that have formed his style.<sup>7</sup>

4 *John McGahern – A Private World*, directed by Pat Collins (Hummingbird/Harvest Films Production for RTÉ, 2005).

5 Stanley van der Ziel, 'The Aesthetics of Redemption: John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 93:372 (Winter 2004), p. 475.

6 Eamonn Hughes, "All That Surrounds Our Life": Time, Sex and Death in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, *Irish University Review*, 35:1 (Spring/Summer 2005), p. 147.

7 Valerie Minogue, *Proust: Du côté de chez Swann* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), p. 9.

A comparison can be drawn here between Proust's 'new language' and the evolution and fulfilment of McGahern's artistic vision. Merleau-Ponty writes that: 'True philosophy consists in learning to relook at the world' and this manoeuvre by McGahern constituted a rejection of the cynicism and ultimately unfulfilling nature of the absurd philosophic outlook of Camus which is so dominant in his earlier novels.<sup>8</sup> Equally, this shift in artistic vision did not constitute a sudden change for McGahern, it was no mere vicissitude that he abandoned the relatively traditional novel form that constituted his earlier works in favour of a 'nearly plotless narrative.'<sup>9</sup> And perhaps it was not such a significant change after all: 'I'm only writing in the same way as I've always written', he said to Eamon Maher in 2002.<sup>10</sup> It was the logical continuation of the artistic journey that he started in *The Barracks*, and that he was to first outline in his essay 'The Image' [1968].

For Merleau-Ponty, nothing can be gained by transferring into consciousness the time that belongs to things, 'if we repeated "in consciousness" the mistake of defining it as a succession of instances of now',<sup>11</sup> Yet this is precisely what psychoanalytic and autobiographical analyses of McGahern's work try to achieve when they attempt to explain the consciousness of the past in terms of memories and consciousness of the future in terms of the projection of these memories:

The refutation of 'physiological theories' of memory, in Bergson for example, is undertaken in the domain of casual explanation; it consists in showing that paths in the brain and other bodily expedients are not adequate causes of the phenomena

- 8 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. xxiii. First published as *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).
- 9 David W. Madden, 'By the Lake, by John McGahern', review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* [By the Lake], in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 22:3 (Fall, 2002). <<http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/book/?fa=customcontent&GCOI=1564710033010&extrasfile=A076759D-BoDo-Bo86-B686448930EA4E7F.html>>. Accessed 16 February 2010.
- 10 'Interview with John McGahern', in Eamon Maher, *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003), p. 145.
- 11 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 478.



of memory; that, for example, nothing can be found in the body to account for the order of disappearance of memories in cases of progressive aphasia. The discussion conducted on these lines certainly discredits the idea of a bodily storage of the past: the body is no longer a receptacle of engrams, but an organ of mimicry with the function of ensuring the intuitive realisation of the 'intentions' of consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

What is at stake in McGahern's writing, then, is his very own approach to 'being-in-the-world': he writes to see, because he needs to write, and it is through words that he sees. It is a vision of the world that shares much in common with Proust. From a reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Proust and McGahern's artistic and philosophical visions of human experience and existence are broadly in line. But phenomenology is not an absolute. Merleau-Ponty explains the failure to find a solution to the phenomenological reduction, identified by Husserl as one of the key discoveries of phenomenology:

If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on the which they are trying to seize [...] there is no thought which embraces all our thought.<sup>13</sup>

While McGahern and Proust in their writings are expressing their experiences of 'wonder' at the world, they recognise that it is a paradoxical exercise. They realised that they had to break free from their familiar acceptance of the world, but also that from that break they learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world. Phenomenology is, as Merleau-Ponty explained, not an idealistic philosophy, but it emphasises the meaning of consciousness as a transaction between the self and the world.<sup>14</sup> It was this recognition of the failure of the absurd, the fatalistic 'misunderstanding of [Kant's] interpreters, with the "existential dissidents"',<sup>15</sup> which was at

12 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 479.

13 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. xv. For Merleau-Ponty, the complete phenomenological reduction is impossible, but McGahern and Proust offer some of the best examples of an artist's attempt to reflect their wonder at the world.

14 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. xvi.

15 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. xv.

the heart of McGahern's declaration to Patrick Gordon that he 'wouldn't read Camus for his ideas.'<sup>16</sup>

The significance of Merleau-Ponty's view of phenomenology to literary criticism is the emphasis that it places on perception:

My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colours, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately 'place' in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams.<sup>17</sup>

Merleau-Ponty describes perception as 'the background from which all acts stand out'.<sup>18</sup> The relevance of phenomenology to a study of literature is that it is a subjective philosophy which takes its starting point in the consciousness of the subject. As Merleau-Ponty notes:

I am not the outcome or meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological, or sociological investigation [...] All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view.<sup>19</sup>

However, for Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity does not equate to solipsism/narcissistic introspection; indeed, he rejects Augustine's dictum that truth resides in interiority: 'There is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself'.<sup>20</sup> According to McGahern, he had been fascinated with Augustine's *Confessions* before he came to read Proust who informed his theory that 'out of memory comes the image, and the image is the language of the imagination'.<sup>21</sup> In the 'Preface' to his final col-

16 Patrick Gordon, 'Interview ... John McGahern', *Scrivener: A literary Magazine*, 5:2 (1984), p. 25.

17 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. xi.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Merleau-Ponty, p. xii.

21 'Appendix: An Interview with John McGahern', in John Whyte, *History, Myth and Ritual in the Fiction of John McGahern: Strategies of Transcendence* (Lewistown: Edwin Mellon Press, 2002), p. 231.

lection of short stories, *Creatures of the Earth*, McGahern wrote: 'The god of life is accident. Fiction has to be true to a central idea or vision of life.' It will be argued that this vision is central to McGahern's phenomenological study of memory.

There is a molecular modality of the ego and the body in *Time*, but consciousness and memory are constants in McGahern's and Proust's fiction. McGahern told James Whyte that one of his favourite definitions of art can be found in a book written by his friend D.J. Gordon, who had helped him find a position at Reading University. Gordon states that: 'art [...] abolishes time and establishes memory.' McGahern reflected: 'I don't think you can have the image without memory.'<sup>22</sup> He had earlier tested this idea in his novels and short stories, such as 'Like All Other Men', in which the narrator describes his aesthetic vision: 'In my end is my beginning, he recalled. In my beginning is my end, his and hers, mine and thine. It seemed to stretch out, complete as the emptiness, endless like a wedding ring.'<sup>23</sup> In *That They May Face the Rising Sun* McGahern succeeds in abolishing time through the art of memory becoming imagination – if Beckett sees *Time* as 'that double headed monster of damnation and salvation,'<sup>24</sup> then in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* that double-headed serpent of time has eaten its own tail.

An awareness of the imaginary as the step that follows perception is clearly at work in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In *Time Regained*, the final book of his great novel, Proust muses on the role of the writer and the creative vision:

The idea of *Time* was of value to me for yet another reason: it was a spur, it told me that it was time to begin if I wished to attain to what I had sometimes perceived in the course of my life, in brief lightning-flashes, on the Guermantes way and in my

22 Ibid. McGahern also refers to this idea in an interview with Eamon Maher, see Maher, *John McGahern*, p. 146: 'You couldn't have the image without memory. The image is at the base of the imagination and it's the basic language of writing.'

23 John McGahern, *The Collected Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 280.

24 Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1999), p. 11.

drives in the carriage of Mme de Villeparisis, at those moments of perception which had made me think life was worth living.<sup>25</sup>

In *Time Regained*, Proust finally comes to the realisation that life can only be fully lived in the act of remembrance and its crystallisation in writing:

How much more worth living did it appear to me now, now that I seemed to see that this life that we live in half-darkness can be illumined, this life that at every moment we distort can be restored to its true pristine shape, that a life, in short, can be realised in the confines of a book! (VI, 507)

A similar vision is at the heart of McGahern's writing. When McGahern speaks of 'memory becoming imagination' he is speaking of the artistic impulse to shape the materials of perception in the narrative of his fiction. In *John McGahern – The Art of Memory*, Dermot McCarthy quotes Paul Ricœur's argument in 'The Creativity of Language' that: 'the meaning of human existence is not just the power to change or master the world, but also the ability to be remembered and recollected in narrative discourse, to be *memorable*', and this is the case for McGahern, as it was for Proust, and indeed Camus.<sup>26</sup> 'In the beginning was my mother,'<sup>27</sup> McGahern wrote in *Memoir*, and sure enough that book is certainly a homage to the 'beloved, his mother, that memorialises her through "the inventive power of language"'. McCarthy writes that McGahern's *Memoir*:

[transforms] the beloved into the spirit of place, which explains the profound love of place that imbues *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. McGahern did not turn away from the centring force of his earlier work for his last novel – on the contrary, the beloved remains omnipresent but in a form that is no longer a cause of mourning

25 Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu/In Search of Lost Time*, 6 vols, translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and T. Kilmartin, revised by D.J. Enright (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), VI p. 507. Further reference to this edition will appear within the body of the essay, with appropriate volume and page numbers for each citation.

26 Dermot McCarthy, *John McGahern and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 28.

27 John McGahern, *Memoir* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 2.

but of burgeoning celebration, no longer an absence that haunts, but a presence that enlivens.<sup>28</sup>

But he fails to take into account that regardless of the partial harmony between author and art, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* does not owe its success as a fiction to occurrences in McGahern's life. The life experiences of McGahern and Proust may have been transposed to their novels and they might have left an indelible mark upon them, but the achievements of these writers are due to their compositions alone, which project a world in which their narrators attempt to recapture an earlier life. For Ricœur, then: 'Time lost and time regained are thus to be understood together as the features of a fictive experience unfolded within a fictive world.'<sup>29</sup>

Many critics and reviewers of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* have highlighted the novel's 'plotless' form. In 'Fallen Nobility: The World of John McGahern', Declan Kiberd makes the comparison between Flaubert's ideal plotless novel and McGahern's extension of that theory to the lake world of Shruhaun.<sup>30</sup> Eamonn Hughes makes the point that with *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, McGahern has 'freed himself' from the constraints of plot through a 'repetitive style' which 'denies the passing of time, the motor of plot.'<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, time is crucial to the novel's plot: in fact, the plot is fundamentally concerned with McGahern's attempt to abolish time and establish his art of memory becoming imagination. Even the title (explained in an important moment in the novel after Ruttledge, Ryan, Jamesie and a number of other men have excavated a grave for Johnny in Shruhaun cemetery) *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, points to the centrality of the solar cycle in this work. To paraphrase Sartre's idiosyncratic and highly personal attempt at an 'Explanation

28 McCarthy, *John McGahern*, pp. 28–29.

29 Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 2, trans. by K. McLaughlin and D. Pellaur (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 131. Ricœur illustrates his fictive experience of Time by citing examples from three literary works: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Der Zauberberg* and *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

30 Declan Kiberd, 'Fallen Nobility: The World of John McGahern', *Irish University Review*, 35:1 (Spring/Summer 2005) p. 167.

31 Hughes, 'All That Surrounds Our Life', p. 158.

of *L'Étranger*: this is not a novel that 'explains and coordinates' while it recaptures events, substituting an informal order for chronological events.<sup>32</sup> In *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, McGahern was moving away from what constituted for Sartre a real novel which, for him:

Demands a continuous duration, a becoming, the clear presence of the irreversibility of time [...] I would hesitate to call a novel this series of inert present-times which allow us to see underneath the mechanical workings of a many-tiered cake. Or it might be a moralist's short novel in the style of [Voltaire's] *Zadig* or *Candide* with a discreet touch of satire and ironic portraits.<sup>33</sup>

Stanley van der Ziel makes a similar point to Sartre in his article 'The Aesthetics of Redemption: John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*', where he observes that McGahern's final novel does not fit conveniently into any particular genre: 'that does not mean it does not fit into any aesthetic or intellectual tradition, that it does not have any possible influences or predecessors',<sup>34</sup> and it is abundantly clear that Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* is chief among them.

Most of the action in the novel orbits around the world of the lake in the Leitrim–Roscommon borderlands, that familiar universe of so much of John McGahern's writing, and home to returned émigré Joe Ruttledge and his wife Kate. But this is no longer McGahern retelling the same story again and again, that charge so often levelled at McGahern by 'some not-so-astute critics'<sup>35</sup> over the years. Gone are the domineering father, the rebellious sons, the existentialist antiheroes and the looming death of the mother that account for the archetypal inhabitants and inertial forces of McGahern's earlier worlds of *The Barracks*, *The Dark*, *The Leavetaking*, *The Pornographer*, *Amongst Women* and many of his short stories. McGahern

32 Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Explication de *L'Étranger*', *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), pp. 120–121. Quoted by Olivier Todd in *Albert Camus: A Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), p. 152.

33 Todd, *Albert Camus*, p. 155.

34 Van der Ziel, 'The Aesthetics of Redemption', p. 475.

35 Van der Ziel, Review of *Memoir*, in *Irish University Review*, 35:2 (Autumn/Winter, 2005), p. 463.

introduces the reader to the principal characters through a series of extended scenes, vignettes and carefully crafted portraits. The chief players include: Joe and Kate Rutledge; Jamesie Murphy, his wife Mary, and his brother Johnny; the former 'homeboy', Bill Evans; chief procrastinator and part-time mortician, Patrick Ryan; serial philanderer and all-round rogue, John Quinn; publican, funeral director and Provisional IRA Commander, Jimmy Joe McKiernan; and Rutledge's uncle, the enigmatic Shah – and the Shah's faithful associate Frank Dolan. McGahern explores many of the themes that are familiar to his earlier works through the portrayals of these characters and their various narratives. Political, social and domestic violence is represented by characters such as John Quinn and Jimmy Joe McKiernan; Bill Evans is the victim of clerical and institutional neglect; the minor characters of the priest, the bank clerk and teachers, often referred to simply in anecdote, nonetheless reflect the dominance of the *petite bourgeoisie* in post-Independence Irish society where doctors, farmers and priests constitute the ruling elite, but their absence should not be underestimated, as Jamesie warns: 'Let nobody try to best the guards or the doctors or teachers. They have their own ways of getting back at you.'<sup>36</sup> The problems of emigration and rural-to-urban migration are all important themes addressed in *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, but as in his earlier writing, these subjects are treated in an indicative context and the real issue that is at stake here is McGahern's phenomenological quest to portray meaning in the chaos of this universe through his art. The Rutledges are the conduit through which these other characters function in the world of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. But as in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the novel panoramically juxtaposes the portraits of its various characters in this fictional cosmos in which the Rutledges' viewpoint is but one of many. Nevertheless, like the primacy of the Narrator in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the Rutledges' central location in these stories should not be understated as they are often

36 John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 34. Further reference to this novel will appear in the body of this essay in brackets with appropriate page numbers for each citation.

the means by which the other characters' narratives are elucidated and their problems solved.

The idea of intersubjectivity is an integral part of the human experience of 'being-in-the-world' in Proust and McGahern. Indeed, it is not too fanciful to argue that the conception of memory as a means of suspending time evinced in the works of Proust and McGahern is based on a phenomenological view of intersubjectivity, as the successive selves that Proust identifies as the essence of human existence (both his own and that of others) seem to manifest themselves to one narrating consciousness whose perspective is a fixed point in Time around which these selves navigate. While the self is continuously changing in a cycle of metamorphoses, the narrating consciousness is unchanging. This shared artistic vision of the agency of memory and its relationship to time strikes a chord with Merleau-Ponty's exposition of the phenomenological world in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed when the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from *subjectivity and intersubjectivity which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own.*<sup>37</sup> [My italics]

In *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust expands on the power of memory to suspend time, which he goes on to describe as lying at the core of his aesthetic vision:

In a book which tried to tell the story of a life it would be necessary to use not the two-dimensional psychology which we normally use but a quite different sort of three-dimensional psychology [This awareness] added *a new beauty* to those resurrections of the past which my memory had effected while I was following my thoughts alone in the library, since memory by itself, when it introduced the past, unmodified, into the present – the past just as it was at the moment when it was itself the present – suppresses the mighty dimension of Time which is the dimension in which life is lived. (*RTP*, VI, 506)

37 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. xxii.



Early on in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* Ruttledge reveals himself to be one of the main ‘mouthpieces’, or conduits, for the idea of intersubjectivity. In the opening pages of the novel, he expands on Bishop Berkeley’s maxim of *esse est percipi*: ‘The way we perceive ourselves and how we are perceived are often very different’, which Jamesie refutes thus: ‘Pay no heed [...] Thought pissed in the bed and thought he was sweating. His wife thought otherwise’ (*TRS*, 3). Jamesie’s stubborn anti-intellectual stance acts as a constant foil to Ruttledge, but like Dr. Johnson who misinterpreted Berkeley’s ideas, Jamesie does not ‘know the world’ (*TRS*, 312) as well as he claims.

Nicholas Zurbrugg in *Beckett and Proust* argues that Proust’s characters in *A la recherche du temps perdu* exhibit three modes of existence: positive, negative and nihilistic. Simply put, the categories serve to demarcate the different ethical or moral zones within which Proust’s characters operate. For the most part, Proust’s characters almost universally attempt to break away from their quotidian habitual existences when they follow their positive, negative and nihilistic moral impulses. Zurbrugg points to the case of Albertine in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, who is the one exception to this pattern and ‘remains immature and ethically neutral, trapped, as it were within a zone of habitual hedonism.’<sup>38</sup> This way of seeing Proust’s

38 Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust* (Gerard’s Cross: Colin Smythe; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1988), p. 23. Zurbrugg discusses these ideas at length in 2, 3 and 4 of this book. Parallels can be drawn between Zurbrugg’s paradigm and that expressed by Beckett in relation to ‘Murphy’s mind’. Murphy’s ‘Cartesian catastrophe’ is his inability to reconcile the dualism of body and soul, an idea also shared by Merleau-Ponty, who viewed Descartes’ philosophy as a contradiction necessitating Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution’ (*Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 49 and x). Murphy’s mind was a development of the ideas Beckett explored in *Proust* and his earlier abandoned novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. ‘In the first zone, “forms with parallel” are perceived by consciousness and their reconfiguration in Proustian terms is voluntary. In the second, “forms without parallel” indicate that the constraints of consciousness are relaxed, and activity is involuntary. In the third, the dark zone, the “matrix of surds”, the mid experiences total freedom: this is the atomist void, the Freudian unconscious, Schopenhauer’s will-lessness, or the world of quanta and non-Newtonian motion, often merged as the embryonic state of primal pleasure.’

characters may be profitably applied to the inhabitants of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, where characters such as the Rutledges and Jamesie and Mary strive to attain a positive mode of existence, whereas John Quinn, Patrick Ryan and Jimmy Joe McKiernan are shown to quite often move from their habitual existences to fulfil their nihilistic desires. The case is particularly true in regards to John Quinn, whose brutality and threatening promiscuity are symptomatic of his inability to escape his negative mode of existence. While Ryan is merely an indolent bully, Quinn is an altogether different beast. As Proust explains in one of his many formulations of what Zurbrugg calls his 'law of repulsion,'<sup>39</sup> '*Plus le désir avance, plus la possession véritable s'éloigne*' ('The more ardently one desires, the more remote the chance of true consummation becomes,' *RTP*, III, 450). John Quinn's insatiable sexual appetite is the result of his inability, or reluctance, to find 'true consummation' with his three wives, or with the other inhabitants of Shruhaun and the lake world for that matter. John Quinn, an 'old villain' (*TRS*, 38) is first introduced during the Rutledges' remembrance of their move back to Ireland early in the novel. He arrives dramatically and diabolically 'In clouds of smoke' (*TRS*, 23) at their home by the lake with the superficial intention of welcoming them to the community. However, a number of clues alert the reader to his sinister nature: 'John Quinn was a tall, powerfully built, handsome man, wearing a well-cut suit, his thick grey hair brushed back. As soon as he spoke there was an immediate discrepancy between the handsome physique and the cajoling voice' (*TRS*, 23).

The image of this domineering paternal figure is a familiar feature of McGahern's stories, but here he is relegated to a bit part. Nonetheless, his 'clouds of smoke' cast a dark shadow. It soon transpires that he has an ulterior motive for his visit, directing his attention on Joe Rutledge, though

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See Samuel Beckett, Murphy (London: Picador, 1977), p. 81; C.J. Ackerley & S.E. Gontarski (eds), *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), pp. 132–35, and pp. 387–89. Perhaps it is this third zone of the unconscious mind, which the inmates of the Magdalene Mental Mercyseat inhabit and a state so envied by Murphy, where Bill Evans is so happily sequestered.

39 Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust*, p. 52.

with one leering eye on Kate, he gets down to the 'business' that brought him to the Ruttedges:

Your lovely woman is bound to have women friends of her own. And if she could place one of them in my house she'd have a friend of her own close by. We'd be great neighbours and the two houses would get on wonderfully well together and all visiting and helping one another and happy together. (*TRS*, 24)

Kate immediately makes her excuses and leaves, explaining to Rutledge and Jamesie mid-remembrance that she: 'couldn't bear to be in the same room with him. Very few people have that effect on me' (*TRS*, 25), Ruttedges respond by invoking Berkeley once more in another moment of authorial metafiction: 'I was wondering if he was real while he was talking' (*TRS*, 25). Of course, 'naught is more real',<sup>40</sup> as Beckett's Murphy says, and while notwithstanding Quinn's outrageous behaviour, his insincerity and wiles, he is eminently believable. Quinn 'was real, all right' (*TRS*, 25), the embodiment of what McGahern meant when he said: 'one of the differences between life and writing is that writing has always to be believable, whereas much of what goes on in life doesn't'.<sup>41</sup> Jamesie then narrates Quinn's back story, revealing that his marriage to Margaret Sweeney was one of financial imperative; all he wanted was to get his hands on her parents' farm, which 'was the sweetest place around [...] and they had money when no one had money' (*TRS*, 26). After a period of courting, he found favour with Margaret's mother and, despite Mr. Sweeney's reservations, they were married. After the ceremony, he brought Margaret down to the seashore where, in full view of the wedding party, he consummated the marriage there and then:

John Quinn put the blanket he had brought down on the rock. Margaret looked as if she was trying to break away but he could have held her with one hand. It was over before anybody rightly knew. He lifted the blue dress up over her head and put her down on the blanket. The screech she let out would put your heart crossways. John Quinn stood between her and the house while he was fixing his trousers and

40 Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 138.

41 Maher, *John McGahern*, p. 147.

belt. He must have been afraid she'd try and break back on her own but she just lay there on the ground. In the end he had to lift her and straighten her dress in his arms. (TRS, 30)

Margaret, like her parents, soon 'faded away' but not until after Quinn had fathered eight children to her. As McCarthy notes, Quinn takes on a Chaucerian quality: 'he is slightly larger than life, like a folk character who ultimately gets his comeuppance. Kate and Ruttledge immediately find him repulsive, and their judgement of him does not change; but like all in the world around the lake they accept him for what he is.'<sup>42</sup> In a similar vein, Sampson has observed that all of McGahern's characters in this novel seem like 'medieval humours' of a 'morality play': 'the lecherous Quinn, the curious Jamesie, the hungry Evans, the shrewd and taciturn Shah, the lost emigrant Johnny, the actor and procrastinator Ryan, the returned native Ruttledge.'<sup>43</sup> McGahern softens Quinn's story by portraying him as someone willing to face up to authority in his confrontation with the Dickensian-sounding Missus Killboy who inflicts corporal punishment on his children, but this only serves to highlight his hypocrisy – he is fundamentally irredeemable.

The character of Bill Evans signals McGahern's most explicit reference to Proust in the novel, in which he quotes the translated title of C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin's first edition of the *A la recherche du temps perdu*: 'Bill Evans could no more look forward than he could look back. He existed in a small closed circle of the present. *Remembrance of things past* and dreams of things to come were instruments of torture' (TRS, 176) [italics mine]. Evans is a composite of some of McGahern's past 'Homeboys': part Stevie in 'Christmas', part Lavin of the eponymous short story, part John in *The Dark*. He serves as a reminder to the reader of the appalling history of clerical and institutional abuse in Ireland. Bill Evans exists in a Limbo of habitual existence, neither able to move forward nor back. He is unable to redeem himself in memory and is pained at others'

42 McCarthy, p. 298.

43 Sampson, 'Open to the World: A reading of John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*', *Irish University Review*, 35:1 (Spring/Summer 2005), p. 139.

attempts to do so for him: 'Stop torturing me. It was the same unmistakable cry that had to be bowed to then as the silence [...] respected it now' (*TRS*, 176). Like Patrick Ryan who stubbornly refuses to allow himself to experience the world through memory with his mantra of: 'I disremember lad' (*TRS*, 69), Evans suffers from what Proust believes to be an existential deficiency, as Zurbrugg has identified in his Beckettian analysis of *A la recherche du temps perdu*:

Just as [Proust's] analyses of exemplary actions attributed to man's perfectibility to positive forms of self-sacrifice, which allow the artist and non-artist alike to transcend the mediocrity of habitual, egotistical, rational and imaginary reality, and to attain authentic self-realisation by employing their finest faculties to the full, his analyses of non-habitual modes of flawed self-realisation similarly attribute these instances of exceptional imperfection to specific ethical factors.<sup>44</sup>

Like Charlus in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Bill Evans is stuck in '*le même cercle vicieux*' ('the same old vicious circle', *RTP*, XIV, 161), in which his fear of things past holds him hostage in the present. His substitute pleasures are found instead in the immediate gratification of his animal urges to sate his appetite for, and his venal susceptibility to, cigarettes, whiskey and food. By the novel's end, he has been ensconced in the purpose built development of *Tráthnóna*, and he has never been happier. Evans is in a state of permanent twilight terror, with no ability to see beyond the ennui of *inniu* the promise of *amárach*, or salvation in *inné* – 'next stop: night', as Ruttledge warns: 'Not many will know what *Tráthnóna* means' (*TRS*, 226–227).

The death of Jamesie's brother Johnny as *That They May Face the Rising Sun* draws to a close is not completely unexpected: just as the Easter scene replays the opening passages of the book, the reader has come to expect a natural cycle of repetition and Johnny's death had already been prefigured in the death of Edmund Ryan, Patrick Ryan's unfortunate brother. However, with part-time mortician Patrick Ryan missing, Ruttledge's offer to 'lay Johnny out' does come as something of a surprise. Jamesie

44 Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust*, p. 52.

responds hesitantly, searching Ruttledge's face: 'Will you be able?' (*TRS*, 286) Ruttledge proffers that, like Beckett's Murphy, he had worked in hospitals when he was a student. It is a trial that he is prepared to face for his friend Jamesie. Dermot McCarthy argues that this is a form of request from Ruttledge to Jamesie and the community of Shruhaun and the lake world, to be 'admitted' perhaps:

If Ruttledge has been the outsider until this moment, preparing the corpse will take him across the threshold. He would always be 'different' and 'special' and a bit 'above' the locals, perhaps, but this will bring him inside their world, at the end of the episode, Jamesie, without asking, includes him in the grave digging duty.<sup>45</sup>

Ruttledge's deed of performing Johnny's laying out is conducted within view of Jamesie's houseguests, and despite their best attempts to shut them out, the door is literally opened on his role at the centre of the community. In phenomenological terms, thinking death is equated with thinking it in relation to being: 'As an existential of *Dasein*, death is more real for man than any other reality.'<sup>46</sup> Death plays a crucial role in Ruttledge's understanding of the world around him and consequently himself and of being, since it demonstrates that he 'is not the absolute master of the totality of beings, nor of himself, but is ultimately naked and defenceless before the overwhelming power of being.'<sup>47</sup> However, McGahern's description is not one of cold existential reality; there is compassion and an understanding in the narrator's free indirect access to Ruttledge's conscience:

The innate sacredness of each single life stood out more starkly in death than in the whole of its natural life. To see him naked was also to know what his character and clothes had disguised – the wonderful physical specimen he had been. That perfect co-ordination of hand and eye that had caused so many wildfowl to fall like stones from the air had been no accident. That hand, too, had now fallen. (*TRS*, 288)

45 McCarthy, *John McGahern*, p. 302.

46 James M. Demske, *Being, Man and Death: A Key to Heidegger* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1970), p. 139.

47 Demske, *Being, Man and Death*, p. 139.

It is interesting to note here that Heidegger in *On the Way to Language* associates being and 'the holy' with the colour blue, which has come to symbolise John Quinn for Ruttledge; but like McGahern's use of 'religious', 'the holy' should be divorced from any theological applications of the word:

As in the Hölderlin interpretations, 'the holy' signifies being, which in Trakl is symbolised as 'blueness' or 'the blue' (*die Bläue*). The downfall is the perishing of the inauthentic form of man which preoccupies itself exclusively with beings in everyday existence, without asking the meaning of being. The downfall is, at the same time, a passage to the realm of authentic human dwelling upon the earth, i.e. the blue, in the domain of the holy, in the nearness of being. In order to discover this realm, the stranger must first suffer destruction; he must 'lose himself in the spiritual twilight of the blue.'<sup>48</sup>

Ruttledge thus comes to terms with the finality of death through his preparation of Johnny's corpse, he 'suffers destruction' vicariously through the death of Johnny and redeems his own blueness from the world in the shade of the Iron Mountains. Eamon Maher has argued that this is one of the key moments in the book, describing it as a spiritual experience for Ruttledge.<sup>49</sup> But the caveat must be issued again that this is only religious, or spiritual, in the sense of McGahern's humanist spirituality.

Echoes of Proust can be discerned in McGahern's reckoning with death; as Proust revealed in *Time Regained*: 'The remembrance of love had helped me not to fear death. For I realised that dying was not something new, but that on the contrary since my childhood I had died many times' (*RTP*, VI, 515). Writing, then, is unveiled as a means of confronting existential angst; in McGahern's last work, *Memoir*, his autobiographical writing offered the ultimate balm to existential anxiety. For Proust, the work of art would be a means of accessing something close to immortality: 'The cruel law of art is that people die and we ourselves die after exhausting every form of suffering, so that over our heads may grow the grass not of oblivion but of eternal life, the vigorous and luxuriant growth of a true work of art' (*RTP*, VI, 516). In the closing pages of *Time Regained*,

48 Demske, p. 141.

49 Maher, *Local to the Universal*, p. 126.

Proust nevertheless reaches a realisation that time cannot be suspended indefinitely and that the form of endurance offered by the work of art is not immortality: 'Eternal duration is promised no more to men's works than to men' (*RTP*, VI, 524). At the point when the narrating consciousness exits the stage the expectant reader feels an affinity with the author: while the death of the narrator is suspended, the awareness that the author is long since dead is inescapable.

The Shakespearean grave-digging motif has been a constant throughout much of McGahern's writing, and it is fitting that it brings *That They May Face the Rising Sun* circling upwards, contrarily, to its conclusion. Only Jamesie, Ruttledge, Patrick Ryan, Big Mick Madden are assembled to dig the grave, joined later by John Quinn who arrives with a shovel over his shoulder. The arrival of John Quinn suggests a moment of reconciliation, that he may be veering back towards a habitual mode of existence, as he says following Patrick Ryan's faux-homily when the grave has been dug: 'It'd nearly make you start think' (*TRS*, 297). Even though only four of the principal characters are in attendance, the scene is described by McGahern in such a way that all of Shruhaun and the lake world are convened at the graveside in a wave of Proustian involuntary remembrances. Again the image is central: memory is stimulated through sight and sound as allusions to Monaghan Day, the 'cunts of bees', the Shah and Frank Dolan and the blue mountains and the blue lake of being abound. The scene culminates in one final crescendo when Patrick Ryan realises that he has marked the grave out incorrectly: 'We have widened the wrong fucken end' (*TRS*, 296). When Ruttledge asks if 'it makes a great difference that his head lies in the west', Ryan takes particular relish in replying condescendingly that 'it makes every difference, lad, or makes no difference' before delivering his melodramatic lines:

'He sleeps with his head in the west ... so that when he wakes he may face the rising sun.' Looking from face to face and drawing himself to full height, Patrick Ryan stretched his arms dramatically towards the east. 'We look to the resurrection of the dead.' (*TRS*, 297)



This is another moment of metafiction, as McGahern allows Ryan to upstage Johnny and deliver the grand *dénouement* of the novel's title, basking in the light from the rose window of the Abbey. Johnny had acted in an amateur production of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, 'terrible eejity stuff' (*TRS*, 101) in Mary's words, but it was the source of Johnny's misery and the reason for his exile after he failed to woo his co-star, Anne Mulvey. The east-west calamity dovetails perfectly and recalls Ruttledge quoting from the play which taunts Johnny even in death: 'It's Pegeen I'm only seeing, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe from this place to the Eastern world?' (*TRS*, 101)

It is the coming together of individuals in the intersubjectivity of Johnny's burial that reveals the secular vision at the heart of McGahern's novel. In an echo of Voltaire's maxim '*Il faut cultiver son jardin*',<sup>50</sup> the characters of Shruhaun seem to acknowledge that repose is to be found only in communal endeavours. For McGahern, the significance of the Christian symbolism of burial lies in the awareness that transcendence is to be found only in a communication of the self and other. The work of art becomes the ultimate attempt at transcending the divide between self and other, self and the world, a divide that cannot be bridged by existential metaphysical or epiphanies. In response to Jamesie's question 'Do you think there is an afterlife?', Ruttledge muses:

I suspect hell and heaven and purgatory – even eternity – all come from our experience of life and may have nothing to do with anything else once we cross to the other side. (*TRS*, 310)

In *That They May Face the Rising Sun* the dead find their resurrection in the image, in memory – and it is here, where McGahern finally realises his Proustian aspirations. It is a vision of human experience that is broadly in line with that described and explained by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Citing Eugen Fink, a student of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty summarised phenomenology as the experience of 'wonder' at the world. As he explains,

50 Voltaire, *Candide*, translated and edited by Shane Weller, Dual Language Edition (London: Dover Publication, [1759], 2003), p. 166.

phenomenology is not an idealistic philosophy as it emphasises the meaning of consciousness as a transaction between the self and the world: 'It recognises my thought itself as an inalienable fact, and does away with any kind of idealism in revealing me as "being-in-the-world."' <sup>51</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, as for Proust and McGahern, the rejection of God in favour of a vision of existence as contingent does not lead to a sense of nihilistic dejection in the face of existence but rather affirms the truth of being-in-the-world:

We experience, not a genuine eternity and a participation in the One, but concrete acts of taking up and carrying forward by which, through time's accidents, we are linked in relationships with ourselves and others. In short, we experience a participation in the world, and 'being-in-truth' is indistinguishable from 'being-in-the-world.' <sup>52</sup>

Whereas McGahern's early writing was a constant experiment, a search for 'being-in-truth', it was only in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* where McGahern would ultimately fulfil the apotheosis of his vision of 'memory becoming imagination'.

51 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 459.

52 Ibid.



EAMON MAHER

## ‘Beware the Hypocrites and the Pharisees!’: François Mauriac’s Impact on Some Twentieth-Century Irish Novelists

When one reflects on the main literary, cultural and social events that took place in France during the twentieth century, one is inevitably drawn to the figure of François Mauriac (1885–1970). Because of his longevity and phenomenal talent as a writer of fiction, autobiography and journalism, Mauriac became the icon for a troubled country that had to endure the pain and suffering associated with two World Wars, the second of which led to disgrace and vilification because of France’s capitulation to the Nazi army and its subsequent collaboration with German occupation under the provisional Pétain government. Mauriac’s words were regularly employed by General de Gaulle to rally the French people during the Occupation in his radio transmissions from London and there was considerable mutual respect between the writer and politician, the latter of whom came to represent, like no other, France’s sole hope of redemption and resurrection from the morass left in the wake of World War II.

French literary developments were also shaped by the seismic changes that took place during the twentieth century, which partly explains the popularity of existentialism and the New Novel, movements characterised by angst and a distrust of the capacity of words to capture in an adequate manner the horror and absurdity of the human condition. The Algerian War (1954–1962) heaped more gloom and despair on an already fragile French public psyche. At the turn of the century (in 1905), there had been the official separation of Church and State, which came to be the cornerstone of an increasingly secular, anti-clerical movement in France that is loosely described as *‘la laïcité’*. As a devout Catholic, Mauriac was somewhat exceptional among French writers and intellectuals of the twentieth

century. Never an apologist for the Catholic Church, he was in fact quite prepared to point out the shortcomings of its clergy and followers in his novels, essays and the influential *Bloc-Notes*, published in *Le Figaro*. That said, he had a life-long commitment to Catholicism, the religion that shaped his vision of existence in a marked manner.

Jean-Luc Barré's recent biography of Mauriac reveals, among other things, the writer's homosexual leanings – the source of much torment for both the family man and the Catholic – which had been suspected by many, without ever being publicly aired. It also outlined the impact of his harsh Catholic upbringing by a Jansenistic mother, who was widowed early in life, on his literary output.<sup>1</sup> The city of Bordeaux and the surrounding Landes district were also lasting influences on Mauriac. The family home in Malagar, with the surrounding pine trees and vines, along with the various family members and local characters, their Catholic bourgeois attitudes and beliefs, their acquisitiveness and malice, these were all examined microscopically – some might say pitilessly – by Mauriac in his fictional depictions, most of which have strong autobiographical overtones. He described in the essay *Dieu et Mammon* the danger associated with the literary project when he wrote: '*Écrire, c'est se livrer*' (Writing is an exposure of oneself).<sup>2</sup>

Barré highlights how Catholicism was not a freely chosen option for Mauriac, who once wrote: '*Pour moi, j'appartiens à la race de ceux qui, nés dans le catholicisme, ont compris, à peine l'âge d'homme atteint, qu'ils ne pourraient plus s'en évader*' (I belong to the race of men who were born into Catholicism and who understood in early adulthood that they could never subsequently escape from its clutches).<sup>3</sup> We can already detect a connection between the Malagar writer and some of his Irish counterparts, who were equally unable to escape from the religion of their childhood. The area

1 Jean-Luc Barré, *François Mauriac Biographie intime 1885–1940* (Paris: Fayard, 2009) and *François Mauriac Biographie intime 1940–1970* (Paris: Fayard, 2010).

2 *Dieu et Mammon* (1928), in Jacques Petit (ed.), *François Mauriac: Oeuvres romanesques et théâtrales complètes*, Tome II (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade/Gallimard, 1979), p. 777. For subsequent references to works from this edition, we will simply use the abbreviation Pl. II, followed by the page number. All translations are my own.

3 *Dieu et Mammon*, Pl. II, p. 785.

of sexuality was especially fraught in this regard, as both Irish and French writers from a Catholic background represented their characters' view of the body as a source of sin, something that rendered sexuality, even when given the imprimatur of marriage, both dangerous and evil. The following lines are revealing with regard to Mauriac's upbringing:

*Elevé dans l'idée toute janséniste d'un Dieu implacable, auquel tout homme doit se soumettre sans débat pour expier sa faute originelle, l'enfant vit dès son plus jeune âge dans la hantise d'offenser ou contrarier ce juge à la fois inaccessible et omniprésent.*

(Raised in the very Jansenistic notion of a callous God before whom all must bow without question in order to atone for original sin, the child lived out his early years haunted by the fear of offending or upsetting this harsh judge, who was both inaccessible and omnipresent.)<sup>4</sup>

Mauriac constantly underlined his Catholic faith as being at the core of his life's vocation. In spite of this, his novels and essays were scathing in their exposition of avarice and hypocrisy among the Catholic bourgeois propertied class to which he belonged. There is more than a tinge of lasciviousness and evil palpable in some of his favourite fictional creations, a fact that caused several French Catholics to question how one of their own could write novels that portrayed sin in such a seductive light. Donat O'Donnell (a nom de plume for Conor Cruise O'Brien) captured the response of French Catholics to Mauriac's work in the following manner:

The real charge against Mauriac was that his tone, and the images he evoked, suggested a secret sympathy, a connivance with sin, instead of the uncompromising detestation of sin which Catholic critics felt they had a right to expect from a Catholic novelist.<sup>5</sup>

From an early point in his career, Mauriac realised that the characters he brought to life most successfully in his fiction were, generally speaking, not drawn from the ranks of the virtuous. His most accomplished

4 Barré, *François Mauriac Biographie intime 1885-1940*, p. 49. My translation.

5 Donat O'Donnell, *Maria Cross: Imaginative Patterns in a group of Modern Catholic Writers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), p. 30. This was a pioneering study that has stood the test of time very well.

creations, some of whom we will discuss in this chapter, tended to succumb to temptation and evil, a course of action that brought with it the peril of eternal damnation. Mauriac also realised that his own life experience was contained in everything he wrote, a not unusual discovery for a novelist. For example, we read in *Le romancier et ses personnages*: '*Derrière le roman le plus objectif... se dissimule toujours ce drame vécu du romancier, cette lutte individuelle avec ses démons et avec ses sphinx*' (Behind the most objective fiction ... can always be found the real-life drama of the novelist, the deep personal struggle with his demons and sphinxes).<sup>6</sup> When one is faced, as was clearly the case for Mauriac, with the danger of unveiling secrets that have the potential to upset one's family and friends each time one takes up the pen to write, it becomes a risky exercise. Even though the novelist might be determined to hide the dark side of his nature, there is no guarantee that this side will not emerge in spite of his best efforts. Monsters like Thérèse Desqueyroux, who attempts to poison her husband Bernard, whom she finds sexually unappealing, and pours scorn on the religious hypocrisy of his family, would have perturbed certain elements within the Landes bourgeoisie. Were her views and character meant to be typical of the class and area in which the novel is set? An equally valid question that could be asked is whether Thérèse is in some way a manifestation of Mauriac's own preoccupations at the time of the novel's composition. And what of the embittered lawyer Louis in *Le Noeud de vipères* who tries to exclude his children from his will when he discovers they have been plotting against him? For years he had been estranged from his wife and did everything in his power to undermine her religious beliefs. Where did this character emerge from? The novel was written at a time when Mauriac had recently emerged from a crisis of faith and the positive ending could be attributable to a new spiritual optimism. Then there is Brigitte Pian (*La Pharisienne*) who, through a misguided scrupulosity and an inability to distance herself from the affairs of others, destroys a couple's attempt to live in married harmony and causes untoward damage to family members and other acquaintances. This character is very much a product of

6 *Le romancier et ses personnages* (1933), Pl. II, p. 855.

her specific background and religious formation, which would have been obvious to anyone brought up a Catholic in provincial France at the turn of the last century.

This chapter will examine how in his depiction of religious hypocrisy and Pharisaism Mauriac influenced certain Irish novelists' treatment of religion in their own works. Obviously, Mauriac came from a background and culture that was French and not Irish. Nevertheless, a writer of his stature (Nobel Laureate for Literature in 1952) and one who based his fictions in a recognisably Catholic milieu, was bound to be familiar to Irish novelists in English translation. In fact, Kate O'Brien, Brian Moore and John Broderick all cite Mauriac as one of their primary influences, whereas John McGahern's approach to religion and his disdain for those who use it for social advantage, resonates closely with Mauriac's views.<sup>7</sup> Obviously the Irish writers will not be dealt with in anything like the same detail as Mauriac, nor will it be claimed that they ever attained the lofty heights of the '*romancier de Malagar*'. The main objective will be to find common ground between the writers with a view to tracing a French imprint on Irish fiction.

*Thérèse Desqueyroux* is considered by many critics to be Mauriac's chef d'oeuvre. Published in 1927, during the inter-war period in France, it contains much contentious material in relation to Mauriac's rather jaundiced view of the class into which he was born. By openly declaring in his Foreword that he had sympathy for his heroine's plight and that he would have liked to bring about her conversion, the writer knew that he was in danger of alienating a large number of his '*bienpensant*' readers. He addresses the following comment to his character in the Foreword: 'But had I shown you thus redeemed there would have been no lack of readers to raise a cry of sacrilege, even though they may hold as an article of Faith the Fall and

7 Denis Sampson, while citing a number of French influences on McGahern such as Baudelaire, Céline, Flaubert and Proust, observes: 'Notable in his absence is François Mauriac, prominent apologist for a Catholic and conservative France at this time, but the lack of reference to him is not clear evidence that McGahern did not read any of his novels; on the contrary, it is more than likely that he did.' *Young John McGahern: Becoming a Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 55–56.



Ransom of our torn and twisted natures.<sup>8</sup> Taking the side of an accused murderer, someone who was openly disdainful of what passed for religious piety in her husband and his family, was not going to endear Mauriac to many around Bordeaux and the Landes, where the novel is set. Thinking back on her reasons for getting married, Thérèse acknowledges that her close friendship with Bernard's sister, Anne de la Trave,<sup>9</sup> was a factor. But the main motivation was that the land of the two families 'seemed made for fusion' (25) and Thérèse had 'the sense of property in her blood' (31). This fascination with the land is something with which Irish writers can identify. An even stronger link, however, might be the disappointment engendered by the new bride's first experience of sex. Like many characters one encounters in twentieth-century Irish fiction, Thérèse associates the sexual act with the loss of innocence: 'Everything which dates from before my marriage I see now as bathed in a light of purity – doubtless because that time stands out in such vivid contrast to the indelible filth of my wedded life' (22). There is more than just a smidgeon of Jansenism in these lines, an attitude that is reinforced in the following description:

I always saw Bernard as a man who charged head-down at pleasure, while I lay like a corpse, motionless, as though fearing that, at the slightest gesture on my part, this madman, this epileptic, might strangle me. (35)

Once she becomes pregnant, Bernard's family view her as 'the woman who bore within her the future master of unnumbered trees' (44). Although they believe themselves to be upright Catholics, they have no qualms about criticising neighbours, paying their workers poor wages and generally behaving in a thoroughly unchristian manner. In contrast, Thérèse detects a real mystical quality in the local parish priest, whom she observes closely during her visits to church. At the Corpus Christi procession one year, she stares

- 8 François Mauriac, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. This is taken from the Gerald Hopkins translation, *Thérèse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Modern Classics, 1981), pp. 9–10. All subsequent quotes will be from this edition, with the page numbers in brackets.
- 9 There is plenty of scope for those who would view this relationship as highlighting a strong lesbian attraction on Thérèse's part.

at the priest holding aloft the sacred host 'with that look of suffering on his face', followed by Bernard, who was 'doing his duty' (73). This episode sums up the shallowness of Bernard's religious faith compared to the priest's and is one of the reasons why Thérèse turns away from religion and falls prey to the evil voices urging her to poison her husband.

A brief switch to the Irish writers will reveal a similar distaste for those who fail to live up to their religious principles. While Kate O'Brien (1897–1974), like Mauriac, came from quite a privileged background and was intensely Catholic during her youth, she ended up turning away from the Church when she saw the extent to which it was merely a social mask for many of her compatriots. She wrote with great affection about the nuns who were responsible for her education in Laurel Hill, Limerick, in the semi-autobiographical novel *The Land of Spices* (1941) and produced what is in my view the best example of an Irish Catholic novel with *The Ante-Room* (1934). Notwithstanding that, O'Brien was sharply critical of the hypocritical use of religion by many Irish people. Her lesbianism made her feel marginalised and exposed in the Ireland of the early years of the newly established Irish state, which were dominated by de Valera's ideal of a self-sufficient, Catholic and morally upright country. The young heroine of *Mary Lavelle* (1936) discovers sexual liberation when she travels to Spain to work as a governess and ends up having an affair with a man who is destined to be one of Spain's great leaders.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Mauriac's Thérèse, Mary Lavelle enjoys her first sexual encounter with Juanito:

She lay under his hands and marvelled at her peace. She thought of school and home, of John (her fiancé), of God's law and sin, and did not let herself discard such thoughts. They existed, as real and true as ever, with all their conditional claims on her – but this claim was his, and she would answer it taking the consequences.<sup>11</sup>

10 The autobiographical resonances of this novel are strong, as O'Brien herself spent a year as a governess in Spain and had an affair with a Spanish aristocrat while there.

11 Kate O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 308. Subsequent citations will be to this edition, with page numbers in brackets.

The young heroine is fully cognisant of the moral implications of making love a married man, the danger it poses to her relationship with both her fiancé back in Ireland, and with God. By committing this act, she is distancing herself from all she was taught as a child. It is not hard to imagine how, in 1936, Mary Lavelle's 'fall from grace' caused something of a stir in Ireland and was promptly banned – a fate that also befell, strangely enough, *The Land of Spices*. Even more shocking than the sex scene with Juanito, perhaps, was the confession of her lesbian love for Mary by Agatha Conlon, another woman working as a governess in Spain: 'Are you shocked? I like you the way a man would, you see. I never see you without wanting to touch you ... It's a sin to feel like that.' To which Mary replies: 'Oh, everything's a sin!' (285). Such a cavalier dismissal of sin was daring for its time and O'Brien is unique in the way in which she confronted such taboo subjects in her work. Undoubtedly influenced by her university education (where, significantly, she took French for her degree in UCD and came under the tutelage of the renowned scholar, Professor Roger Chauviré), and her experience of life in Spain and France, O'Brien viewed Ireland as something of a cultural and spiritual backwater and looked to the continent for a more enlightened approach to issues like sexual morality. Brian Fallon notes:

Her novels remain especially valuable because they depict the impact of the Church on thinking, educated middle class women, through the medium of nuns as well as the male clergy. She spoke to and for people who, while they might be critical of many of the Church's sayings and doings, still counted themselves as believing Catholics in spiritual communion with millions around the world.<sup>12</sup>

Although sympathetic to the ceremonial side of Catholicism, writers like Kate O'Brien were not prepared to bend the knee to the Church when its pronouncements were at variance with her personal convictions. Such independence of mind reminds one of Mauriac, who had a preference for characters who rebelled against the status quo and ended up as a

12 Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998), p. 192.

result being reviled and ostracised. Thérèse, after the court acquittal of her alleged attempt to murder Bernard, is left on her own in her aunt's residence, Argelouse, with only the pine trees to 'witness the slow process of her suffocation' (85). She had hoped to explain to her husband the type of physical and mental lethargy, the evil prompting that almost caused her to bring about his death. But he had no time for explanations. All that mattered to him was that the family honour should be safeguarded and that they would keep any potential scandal under wraps.

The preservation of the good name of the family at all costs is a feature of one of John Broderick's (1927–1989) most accomplished novels, *The Waking of Willie Ryan* (1965), which relates how a midlands family, the Ryans, on discovering that one of its number, Willie, had been involved in a homosexual relationship with a well-to-do local man, Roger, decide, with the collusion of the local parish priest, Fr. Mannix, to have him committed to a mental asylum. When he returns home after twenty-five years, his family's proviso for allowing Willie to stay is that he should give a public demonstration of his spiritual rehabilitation. His sister-in-law Mary seeks to justify the decision to have Willie incarcerated to her son, Chris, by pointing to his apostasy: 'He has never been to Mass or confession since he was a young man, and he didn't change his ways in the asylum.'<sup>13</sup> The same woman is quick to criticise the Church's newly found concern with the poor and points out the inherent contradiction in Fr. Mannix driving a Mercedes, when a Morris Minor would suit him perfectly well! Some of the best scenes of the novel revolve around the exchanges between Willie and Fr. Mannix. The latter is a little suspicious of the family's plan to arrange a special Mass in Chris' house at which Willie will receive Holy Communion as proof of his return to the religious fold. Willie considers hypocrisy to be the worst sin of all, but equally he is aware that his unwillingness to conform has led to serious problems in his life. He wants the priest to know the truth about what happened all those years ago, how Roger and he had

13 John Broderick, *The Waking of Willie Ryan* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004), p. 47. Subsequent references will be to this edition, with page numbers in parentheses.

continued seeing each other long after it was assumed their relationship had ended. He declares to Fr. Mannix:

‘Roger never gave up what you like to call “vice”. If it’s of any interest to you now I never wanted it, not with him anyway. It was he who – how would you put it? – seduced me. Yes, that’s how you’d put it. I hated it; but I did it because I loved him!’ (200–201)

This admission reveals to the priest how Willie’s ‘conversion’ was mere pretence and, worse, perhaps even sacrilegious. In order to get some breathing space from the Ryans, he had gone along with their desire for social respectability. But, as he admitted to Fr. Mannix, he is annoyed by the superficial religious adherence of those around him: “God, God, God”, said Willie, puffing out his lips and blowing at the smoke. “You all talk about Him, the whole lot of you. I’m tired of hearing about God. He’s a convenient excuse for the hypocrites to get their own way.” (198) Like Thérèse, who is considered to be a heretic by her in-laws, Willie seems to possess more genuine Christian principles than the other members of his family. That is because there is an appreciation by him of what religion should entail. After his sudden death, his sister-in-law Mary’s sense of relief is due to the removal of a possible threat to the family reputation. Her disdain is now reserved for the parish priest who is crestfallen and guilt-ridden at the knowledge that he participated in an injustice all those years ago when he acted with the Ryans to ensure Willie’s committal. There is also the added problem of his intuition at the funeral Mass that Willie had been in a state of mortal sin when he died. Mary finds the priest’s emotion at the graveside demeaning: “I never saw a priest act like that, swaying and muttering like he was going to fall in, and nobody could hear a word he said. You’d think he was drunk, the Lord save us.” (238)

Broderick’s caustic portrayal of life in small-town midlands Ireland is all the more telling for the fact that he himself issued from this milieu, his family having owned a successful bakery in Athlone. When he spoke of Pharisaism among shopkeepers and the business community, he, like Mauriac, knew what he was talking about. An intensely devout man, Broderick suffered because of his difficulties in reconciling a deep-rooted faith with his homosexuality. By raising in his novels issues like avarice,

homosexuality, hypocrisy, sex outside marriage, priests engaged in sexual relationships with female parishioners, Broderick knew the risks to which he exposed himself. He was sheltered from the worst effects of the virulent reaction his writings evoked among many, especially the more pious members of society, by having recourse to a considerable personal fortune. A cultivated man with an excellent knowledge of continental literature, he declared on several occasions that Mauriac was the only literary influence of which he was aware. So it is not unduly surprising that Broderick foregrounds the theme of hypocrisy, a trait that caused him genuine annoyance. In *Don Juaneen* (1963), we read the following description of the wealthy O'Connor couple:

Their whole life was permeated with a profound and largely unconscious hypocrisy. Money was the only God they worshipped; *although, pious and bigoted Catholics as they were, they would have been horrified if anyone had told them so.*<sup>14</sup>

Mauriac is similarly scathing of people who consider themselves irreproachable Catholics and never stop to question their religious principles. *Le Noeud de vipères* (1932) illustrates how those who distance themselves from religion often do so because of the poor example provided by the so-called upright Catholics they observe around them. At the start of the novel, Louis is presented as an elderly man who has enjoyed a successful career as an advocate, speculator and landowner. Before he dies, he seeks to get his affairs in order and keeps a diary which he imagines his wife Isa reading after his death. The source of his antipathy towards his wife stems from her fatal admission, during their honeymoon, that it was mainly her parents who wanted her to marry Louis rather than the handsome, but less suitable, man with whom she had been involved before meeting Louis. The pain inflicted by this admission is sharp and it stays with Louis throughout his life. Aware of his lack of physical charm, the fact that he inspired no apparent repugnance in Isa caused the young man's heart to soar:

14 John Broderick, *Don Juaneen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), p. 43. My emphasis.

I had become suddenly aware that I was no longer unpleasing, had ceased to repel, was not odious any more. One of the most important moments of my life was when you said: 'How extraordinary that a man should have such long lashes!'<sup>15</sup>

His joy is short-lived, however, as has been already stated. After the honeymoon, he settles into what he views as a loveless marriage and immerses himself in his legal career. He also takes delight in undermining his wife's religious scruples. He makes a point of eating meat on Fridays and of never going to Mass. He points out contradictions in Isa's pronouncements and underlines how she is not being true to her Catholic faith. In some ways, his teasing may have been a way of trying to find answers to some of the dilemmas he is going through himself. He points out to Isa in one of his diary entries: 'Those who oppose you in religion have, really, a very much nobler idea of it than you realize, or than they realize themselves. Why, otherwise, would they be so affronted at the way in which you debase it?' (50–51). Louis touches on the source of his anger here: it is not religion per se he despises, but rather what passes for religious propriety among his wife and children. They view themselves as superior beings whose salvation is guaranteed. Complex theological or moral questions do not disturb their complacency. They never interrogate their avarice, their mistreatment of the poor, their lack of charity.

Louis, on the other hand, is nothing if not lucid and he knows what a dismal creature he is. For example, at one stage he is tempted to embark on an affair with Isa's sister, Marinette, who married an elderly Baron whose will stipulated that she would inherit his fortune provided she did not remarry after his death. Everybody thought this was a small enough sacrifice to make for the millions Marinette had been bequeathed. But widowed at the age of thirty, Marinette had other needs she wanted to fulfil. She and Louis became close when she came to stay in Calèse, Louis' country residence, shortly after her husband's death. One evening, they were on the point of kissing when fate intervened in the shape of the Abbé Ardouin,

15 François Mauriac, *The Knot of Vipers*. Translated by Gerard Hopkins (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 35. All quotes will be to this edition, with page numbers in brackets.

who walked by close to where they stood. The moment passed and some time later Marinette got married and turned her back on her inheritance, only to die shortly afterwards.

Louis carefully outlines all the main events of his life to explain why he acted the way he did to his wife. But while he is away in Paris plotting to give his fortune to his bastard son, Robert, Isa predeceases him, and with her death his rancour disappears. Before he departed for Paris, the couple had shared a moment of intimacy in which Isa dismissed his assertion that all she ever needed was the children: 'My children! Do you realize that when we took to having separate rooms, I never, for years and years, had one of them to sleep with me, even when they were ill, because I was always half expecting, half hoping, that you would come' (136). Fragments of letters she burnt on the eve of her death further reveal that she had been aware of his philandering, deeply upset at the attraction she detected between Louis and her sister and that she had, in fact, been in love with him throughout their years together. His blind desire for vengeance disappears, to be replaced by the sad realisation of his ill-judged opinion of his spouse:

Like a dog barking at the moon, I was held in thrall by a reflection. Fancy waking up at sixty-eight! Fancy being reborn at the very moment of my death! If only I may be granted just a few more years, a few months, a few weeks ... (177)

Louis ends up parting with his fortune, which he now sees as insignificant, and prepares for his imminent death. He knows that his children and grandchildren are not sincere in their religious principles: 'It is precisely the attitude that, all my life, I have loathed and detested, the caricature and mean interpretation of the Christian life which I had deliberately chosen to regard as the essence of the religious mind, in order that I might feel free to hate it' (198).

Mauriac also emphasises this pharisaic approach in the person of Brigitte Pian, the main character of the 1941 novel, *La Pharisiennne*. Brigitte, a devout Christian and a tireless supporter of the poor, gives all the appearance of being a devoted mother to her step-children. Yet she is perverse in her dealings with her step-son's school prefect, Monsieur Puybaraud, and the teacher Octavia Tronche, when they begin a relationship. Puybaraud



belonged to a type of lay Third Order, but it was not unusual for someone in his position to get married. His error, in Brigitte's eyes, is that he puts the love of a woman ahead of a higher calling. She remonstrates with Octavia: 'Wretched girl! Am I to understand that this man is already bound to somebody whose claims are absolute? Are you setting yourself against the ordinances of God?'<sup>16</sup>

When the couple decide to go ahead and get married in spite of Madame Octave's objections, they find themselves reduced to penury, as their former benefactress ensures that Puybaraud is deprived of work in any local Catholic school or Catholic-run institution. Prior to their marriage, Octavia had written to Puybaraud to say how, much and all as she admired Madame Brigitte and appreciated her advice, she was wrong on one very important point: 'She does not realize, as you and I do, that all flesh, imperfect and corrupt though it may be, is holy; that, in spite of original sin, the birth of a child is still God's loveliest mystery' (54). Ironically, she will subsequently die in childbirth, which only serves to convince Mme Pian that the relationship was doomed from the start.

The Pharisee does not confine her attentions to those outside the family either. When Michèle becomes attracted to her brother's friend, Jean de Mirbel, Madame Pian is quick to oppose the relationship on the grounds that it is not a suitable match for her step-daughter. The boy has been sent as a punishment to stay with the Abbé Calou, a gentle intellectual with a soft spot for black sheep. The kindly priest assures Jean that the imposed separation from Michèle will only strengthen the bond between them:

'You're not one of the virtuous, I know. You're not of that kind ... You are one of those whom Christ came into the world to save. Michèle loves you for what you are, just as God loves you because you are as He made you.' (108)

Michèle is indeed aware of what type of person Jean is, but she argues that 'it's better to be a dirty beast than to have Brigitte Pian's brand of virtue!'

16 François Mauriac, *A Woman of the Pharisees*. Translated by Gerard Hopkins (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 22. This edition will be used for all quotes, with the page numbers in parentheses.

(65) She goes on: 'I'd rather be in Hell without her than in Heaven with her!' (66) Brigitte is not always aware of the havoc she wreaks by interfering incessantly in the lives of others. She writes to the Abbé Calou's superior to complain about how he facilitated the exchange of letters between Michèle and Jean, thus making life very difficult for the priest – his faculties are removed as a result of Brigitte's intervention. She tries to destroy the good character of his first wife's virtue to her husband, which may be responsible for his death from a heart attack a short time later. A trail of destruction follows her every step. At the end of the novel, she is consumed, for the first time, with a deep human passion for a local doctor called Gellis. After his death in a freak road accident, Brigitte feels his presence all around her, a realisation that leads her 'into the calm ways of God' (202). Mauriac concludes his novel with the following pronouncement:

In the evening of her life, Brigitte Pian had come to the knowledge that it is useless to play the part of a proud servitor eager to impress his master by a show of readiness to repay his debts to the last farthing. It had been revealed to her that our Father does not ask us to give a scrupulous account of what merits we can claim. She understood at last that it is not our deserts that matter but our love. (203)

Brian Moore (1921–1999) was exposed from a young age to the dangers of bigotry and sectarianism. Growing up in Belfast in the 1920s and 1930s, he realised that he 'lacked the religious sense'. This was problematic in a city riven by sectarian divisions, and especially when you happened to be living, as Moore was, in a devout, nationalistic family. Although he lost his faith when he was quite young, Moore continued to be fascinated with those who held on to religious belief as a guiding force in their lives. From his very first novel, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), Moore showed a keen understanding of people who were trapped in a type of Catholic ghetto. His heroine, Judith Hearne, after years of tending to the needs of her elderly aunt, finds herself in financial difficulties and with an alcohol dependency. She moves from place to place, usually forced to leave when a landlady becomes annoyed at her drunken excesses. Judith's commitment to religion is the one thing that sustains her in her arid existence. The Sunday visits to the O'Neills, so much the highlight of her week, are dreaded by her hosts and only tolerated out of a sense of Christian duty.

If the Mauriacian influence is to be seen anywhere in Moore's work, it has to be in the fine psychological probing of his characters' most private thoughts. From the opening page of this first novel, Judith Hearne's priorities are highlighted. While unpacking in her new digs, she carefully unwraps the oleograph of the Sacred Heart, which gets pride of place at the head of her bed. Next comes the photograph of her dear aunt, which she puts in a prominent spot on her bedside locker. Religion and family are what matter to the middle-aged spinster. As the narrative progresses, Judith's faith in both of these is severely tested. The first step on her downfall comes from the mistaken belief that her landlady's brother, James Madden, a returned emigrant, has romantic designs on her. Fooled by the outward signs of prosperity – some old jewels and a watch – he believes that she might be willing to invest in one of his less than brilliant business ventures. The discovery that he had no interest in her as a woman leads to a serious drinking binge, at the end of which she ends up in the local church, where she turns to God for succour. To her, the tabernacle is where He is constantly present, but as she stares up at it she begins to wonder if her life of deprivation has been in vain. What if there was no God? What if the tabernacle was empty? She cries out in anger: 'Why do You torture me, alone and silent behind Your little door? Why?'<sup>17</sup> She makes her way unsteadily to the altar, pulls across the little curtain in front of the tabernacle, tries unsuccessfully to open the door before collapsing in a heap on the altar. The parish priest, Fr. Quigley, to whom she had attempted to reveal her problems in confession, is shocked on entering the church shortly afterwards. His main desire is to keep things quiet, so he arranges to have Judith housed in a residence run by the nuns, which the O'Neills agree to pay for. The priest fails to practice what he preaches. Some weeks previously, Judith had been impressed with one of his sermons in which he berated those present for their lack of devotion to God, who was neglected in favour of the cinema, alcohol and gambling:

17 Brian Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (London: Flamingo, 1994), p. 240. Future references will be taken from this edition, with page numbers in parentheses.

‘Have you ever seen the young men of this parish queuing up to get into a sodality meeting? Or have you ever seen the girls and women of this parish lining up to get into the Children of Mary Devotions? You have not, and I’ll tell any man he’s a liar if he says he has.’ (71)

Then comes the punch line:

‘Well,’ he said quietly. ‘I just want to tell those people one thing. If you don’t have time for God, *God will have no time for you.*’ (73) (Original emphasis).

Judith had naively taken what the priest said literally. When she visited him in confession, he was in a hurry to leave so as not to be late for a golf appointment. He had not shown the attention to his parishioners that he demanded they pay to God. Similarly, James Madden thinks nothing of going to Mass the morning after he raped his sister’s maid. His nephew Bernie takes it upon himself to open Miss Hearne’s eyes with regard to James Madden’s true feelings for her. He also avails of the opportunity to have a side swipe at her religious convictions:

‘And what has religion ever done for you, may I ask? Do you think that God gives a damn about the likes of you and me? I don’t know what got you into this mess. I can guess – you’re no beauty and this is a hard country to find a man – but I know what’s keeping you this way. Your silly religious scruples. You’re waiting for a miracle. Look at yourself: a poor piano teacher, lonely, drinking yourself crazy in a furnished room. Do you want to thank God for that?’ (182)

As is the case in many of Mauriac’s novels, Moore presents a rather bleak picture of religion as it was practised in his native Belfast. He knew that if he continued living in such a poisoned environment that he would feel stifled. Thus he was fortunate that a position in the Ministry of War allowed him to escape during World War II. Catholicism is more of a social phenomenon than a deep-felt need for the majority of the characters he depicts, especially when the novels are set in Belfast. Denis Sampson offers the following assessment of the heroine of Moore’s first novel:

The collapse of Judith Hearne’s faith is accompanied by a recognition that all along she has concealed from herself her essential loneliness, and that, just as she has been free to fantasise, she is equally free to rebel against the hypocritical

conformity that has repressed her freedom for herself. Hers is a desperate, drunken and failed rebellion, and, in Moore's view, that is true to the way most rebellions are aborted in life.<sup>18</sup>

With John McGahern, we encounter a slightly different portrayal of Catholicism. Suspicious of the authoritarian, fortress Church that he encountered when growing up in the north-west midlands in the 1930s and 1940s, McGahern was nonetheless attracted to the ceremonies and rituals of Catholicism. In his essay 'The Church and its Spire', he wrote of his indebtedness to the positive religion played in his life:

I have nothing but gratitude for the spiritual remnants of that upbringing, the sense of our origins beyond the bounds of sense, an awareness of mystery and wonderment, grace and sacrament, and the absolute equality of all women and men underneath the sun of heaven. That is all that now remains. Belief as such has long gone.<sup>19</sup>

This sacramental side of religion was associated by the writer with his mother, a woman of deep faith who died when McGahern was ten. The harsher, authoritarian side of Catholicism, the dire warnings about the dangers of hell and damnation, of sex, the need to show respect for one's parents, especially the patriarch, was the father's legacy to him. Overall, McGahern was quite sympathetic in his portrayal of Catholicism. The characters who have faith get solace from it, especially when faced with the prospect of dying – this was also the case with his mother. In his first novel, *The Barracks* (1963), the heroine Elizabeth Reegan discovers that she has terminal breast cancer and reaches a heightened appreciation of the physical world that she will be soon leaving behind her. During a visit to the doctor, she is reminded of the similarity of this situation to confession: 'It was her body's sickness and not her soul's that she was confessing now but as always there was the irrational fear and shame.'<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth recognises

18 Denis Sampson, *Brian Moore: The Chameleon Novelist* (Dublin: Marino, 1998), p. 96.

19 John McGahern, 'The Church and its Spire', in Stanley van der Ziel (ed.), *Love of the World: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 133.

20 John McGahern, *The Barracks* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 81. All quotes will be from this edition, with page numbers in parentheses.

that the priest and the doctor are the ones with the power to bring hope or damnation. She remembers the time when, shortly after her marriage to Reegan, a police sergeant, the local parish priest approached her about joining the Legion of Mary, which she views as 'a kind of legalised gossiping school to the women and a convenient pool of labour that the priest could draw on for catering committees' (163). She incurs the priest's wrath by declining his invitation, which was more an order than a request. When pressed for her reasons, she explained that it was because of a dislike for organisations, which prompts the priest to retort: 'So, my dear woman, you dislike the Catholic Church: it happens to be an organisation, you know, that's founded on Divine Truth ...' (163).

From that point onwards, Elizabeth was viewed as a renegade in the parish and had a strained relationship with the clergy. She could not agree to get involved in something out of a desire to gain social respectability, as she saw so many other women do. Hypocrisy is foreign to her: she will not engage in the gossiping that is a popular pastime among the other guards' wives. She prefers to get on with the housework, look after her husband and the children from his first marriage – he lost his other wife to cancer also. McGahern's portrayal of this spiritual middle-aged woman on the threshold of death was clearly influenced by what he witnessed his own mother endure when he was a young boy. This explains his sensitivity and softness of touch when it comes to portraying Elizabeth's inner life. She is remarkably stoical in accepting her fate and, although utterly alone as she takes her leave of the world, she manages to appreciate the joy that life bestowed on her:

All the apparent futility of her life in this barracks came at last to rest on this sense of mystery. It gave the hours idled away in boredom or remorse as much validity as a blaze of passion, all was under its eternal sway. She felt for a moment pure, without guilt. She'd no desire to clutch for the facts and figures of explanation, only it was there or wasn't there and if there was any relationship they would meet in the moment of her death. (211)

Not for Elizabeth the theological or rational elucidation of her faith; 'the facts and figures of explanation' do not matter to her. Instead, she enjoys spending time in the quietness of the church, intoning the Rosary, attending

religious ceremonies, especially at Christmas and Easter. The actions of the domineering priest do not make her turn her back on Catholicism. In chronicling her life's experiences in the careful manner she does (the novel is very much narrated from her point of view), Elizabeth is in some way fulfilling the role of the writer. In fact, McGahern's artistic quest was strongly bound up with the promise he made his dying mother that he would say Mass for the repose of her soul. We read in *Memoir*:

Instead of being a priest of god, I would be the god of a small, vivid world. I must have had some sense of how outrageous and laughable this would appear to the world, because I told no one, but it did serve its first purpose – it set me free.<sup>21</sup>

As with his predecessor Joyce, art replaced religion as McGahern's abiding preoccupation and it provided him with the balm to sooth the many scars he endured at the hands of a violent and abusive father. By the time he came to write his last novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002), he had reached an accommodation with the world and was thus in a position to see the more positive aspects of religion as it was practised by the inhabitants around a lake, in a setting that was strikingly similar to McGahern's own house in Foxfield Co. Leitrim. The tone of this novel is strikingly different to anything one encounters in the previous work. It is almost as if the burial of the father at the end of *Amongst Women* provided the necessary catharsis for him to write a form of pastoral elegy that is a paean to his beloved mother. Seamus Deane saw the novel as 'a therapeutic reprise of the author's own career, a celebration of an Ireland that had formerly been the object of chill analysis as well as loving evocation.'<sup>22</sup> The returned emigrant Ruttledge, a former seminarian, is regularly taunted by his friend and neighbour, Jamesie, about why he and his wife Kate never attend any of the religious services. When Ruttledge replies that he misses going but that he doesn't believe, Jamesie retorts: "I don't believe", he mimicked. "None of us believes and we go. That's no bar." When asked in his

21 John McGahern, *Memoir* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), p. 205.

22 Seamus Deane, 'A New Dawn'. Review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, in *The Guardian*, 12 January 2002.

turn why he goes if he doesn't believe, Jamesie replies: 'To look at the girls. To see the whole performance ... We go to see all the other hypocrites.'<sup>23</sup> The humour here provides a type of antidote to what had previously been a cold analysis of religious oppressiveness. McGahern's interaction with Catholicism was a complex and at times painful one. The banning of his second book, *The Dark*, in 1965 caused him to lose his job as a primary teacher in Clontarf and put him on a collision course with the Catholic Church, which at the time had almost exclusive control of primary education in Ireland. But rather than being embittered at how he had been treated, McGahern continued to be grateful for how the Church provided him with a sense of beauty and mystery that would nourish his art and make him into the writer he would become.

So what degree of influence can we say that Mauriac exerted on Irish writers? It is very difficult to respond to a question like that, because literary influences are almost impossible to establish in an exact manner. We do know that the novelists chosen were all aware of Mauriac and that three of them cited him as a direct influence. Catholicism is something with which all the novelists were familiar also. Most of the Irish writers abandoned the practice of religion when they entered adulthood, but the debt remained and was acknowledged. Mauriac went through periods of doubt at various stages in his life, but he never stepped definitively outside of the Catholic fold. If, as he claimed, writing is revealing of one's inner secrets, Mauriac comes across as being '*impitoyable*' (pitiless) when it comes to portraying hypocrites and Pharisees. The Irish writers were similarly scathing in their depictions of this trait and would probably empathise with Mauriac's admission in *Le romancier et ses personnages* when discussing two of his most compelling characters:

*Le héros du Noeud de vipères ou l'empoisonneuse Thérèse Desqueyroux, aussi horribles qu'ils apparaissent, sont dépourvus de la seule chose que je haisse au monde et que j'ai peine à supporter dans une créature humaine, et qui est la complaisance et la satisfaction. Ils ne sont pas contents d'eux-mêmes, ils connaissent leur misère.*

23 John McGahern, *That they May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), p. 2.



(The hero of *Le Noeud de vipères* or the poison-administering Thérèse, as distasteful as they appear to many, are free of the one thing that I detest above all else in the world and which I have difficulty enduring in any human being: complacency, self-satisfaction. They are not happy with themselves, they know their own misery.)<sup>24</sup>

The allure of Louis and Thérèse comes largely from their determination to be true to their inner voice and to distance themselves from the Pharisees around them. This particular attribute is shared by a number of the characters brought to life by the Irish authors and points to a clear area of common interest and convergence.

24 *Le romancier et ses personnages*, Pl. II, p. 852.

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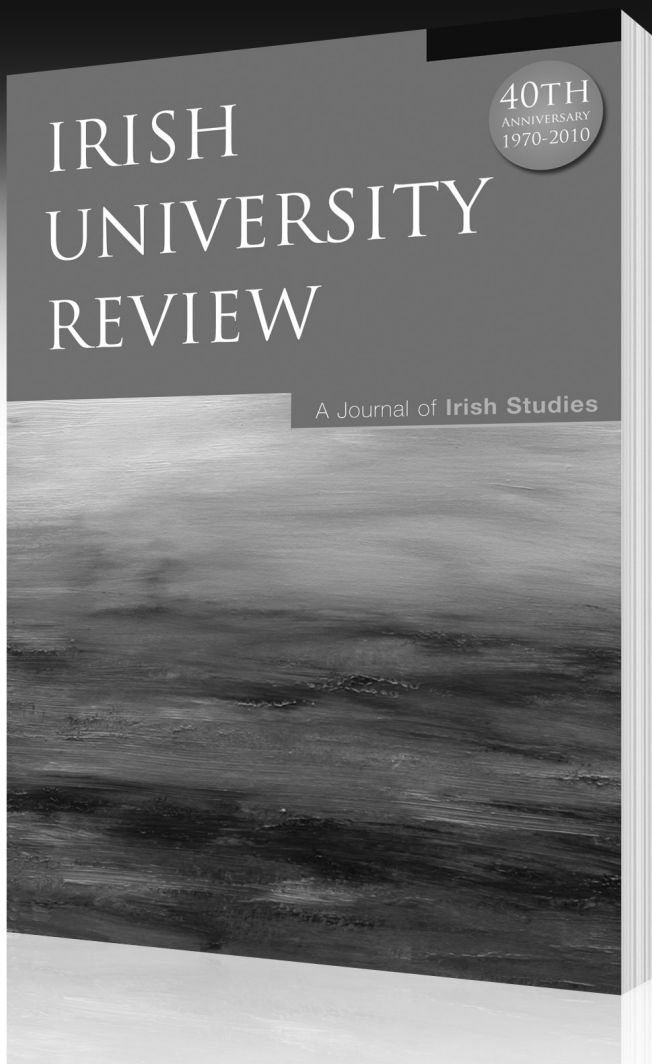
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