

Celtic Literatures in the Twentieth Century

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CELTIC LITERATURES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Irish and Celtic Studies at the University of Ulster hosted at Coleraine, between the 24th and 26th August 2000, a very successful and informative conference on Celtic Literatures in the Twentieth Century. The lectures and the discussions were of a high standard, and it was the intention of the organisers to edit and publish the proceedings as soon as possible thereafter. Unfortunately, due to difficulties in assembling some of the papers, this was not possible and, consequently, publication has been delayed much longer than was originally anticipated. Despite this delay, we feel that those papers which we have received merit publication at this time, not only because of their intrinsic merits, but also because they represent the views of the authors on their respective topics at the turn of the twenty first century and will hopefully be of value to those interested in the state of the modern Celtic literatures.

Thirteen papers are published in the volume. Five present important overviews and appreciations of the major literary works produced in a number of the Celtic languages during the course of the twentieth century. They include chapters by Alan Titley and Diarmaid Ó Doibhlin on, respectively, Irish prose and Irish poetry, and by Ronald Black on Scottish Gaelic poetry. Peredur Lynch discusses and assesses Welsh literature and Francis Favereau deals with Breton literature.

The remaining papers examine more specific aspects of the traditions. Donald Meek's contribution fills a significant gap in the proceedings in that it deals with Scottish Gaelic prose writing; more specifically, the author considers the influence of Christianity on some twentieth

century Gaelic short stories. In a contribution dealing specifically with drama, Eugene McKendry examines the work of the Irish dramatist Críostóir Ó Floinn, in the light of the European dramatic tradition, from Classical Greek theatre to the artistic innovations of Richard Wagner. Seán Mac Corraidh's paper, which is the only one to be written in a Celtic language (Irish), investigates the contribution made by the pre-eminent author of Ulster Irish, Seosamh Mac Grianna, to Irish lexicography in his capacity as a translator of works of English into Irish. Mac Grianna's translations were made under the auspices of the Irish Government's publishing arm, *An Gúm*, and a study of the early years of this important and contentious body forms the subject of Gearóidín Uí Laighléis' paper. Art J. Hughes reflects on echoes of the great Blasket Island classic *An tOileánach* and Mac Grianna's starkly enigmatic and prescient *Mo Bhealach Féin* in Flann O'Brien's *The Hard Life*. Pádraig Ó Fuaráin's subject is that of landscape in the writings of the great Scottish Gaelic poet, Sorley MacLean. Finally, Sabine Heinz offers an appreciation of the writings of the influential Welsh author, writer, and activist, Angharad Tomos, and Gwenno Pi-ette (Sven-Meyer) examines the interesting and provocative matter of Breton literature during the German Occupation (1940-1944).

Séamus Mac Mathúna

Ailbhe Ó Corráin



ALAN TITLEY

Twentieth Century Irish Prose

One of the difficulties in offering a paper with such a broad title as this is the uncertainty of whether to give a general survey, a critical introduction, a listing of the best and most beautiful or just to make a personal statement. I can't promise to do all of these, but I hope what I have to say will be more than just a mish-mash, a hodge-podge and a mixum-gatherum. I am also aware of a goodly number of general essays on this, or on related matters dealing with Irish literature in the twentieth century, and do not wish to simply cover old ground. But I do wish to recall a paper delivered by Máirtín Ó Cadhain with a title curiously similar to mine which he delivered at a congress like this one in Cardiff the year before his death. His theme and mine are the same, but it is instructive to note how things have changed, not quite utterly, but changed nonetheless since 1969. In purely literary terms it has been a *malairt bhisigh*, a change for the better.

His was a general survey with some good quips, some true, some less fair, as quips tend to be. He warned us of the danger of Celtic scholars being more interested in dialects and "more concerned with the type of Irish and the idioms in a piece of writing than with its literary value" while begging the question of what "literary value" might be. His comment on Séamas Ó Grianna that he wrote "*Caisleáin Óir* followed by a series of horror novels, where horror does not mean a literary catalogue, but simply horrible" (Ó Cadhain 1971: 147) still draws a giggle but is less than fair to some of those novels. And while it is true, as he put it, that "whole lots of novels got written by the most unexpected people, and quantity surveyors noticed that these had become twice and three times the size of previous novels" as a result of the foundation of *An Gúm*, as a comment it seriously undervalues the work of that agency in promoting Irish literature and writing.

More interestingly, he hardly mentions any specific prose works at all. And where he does he makes special mention of Frank O'Connor who never produced a book in Irish, Liam O'Flaherty who only wrote one and whose most famous story concerns the suicide of an old cow, and he singles out Liam Ó Catháin's historical trilogy which was not originally written in Irish but subsequently arranged. He gives one brief paragraph to drama and makes no mention whatsoever of discursive, critical, historical or reflective prose. The big change today is that any account of prose must place a great deal of the non-fictional in the centre of things.

To put it another way: the book in which Ó Cadhain's essay appears features lectures on Welsh poetry and literature, Scottish Gaelic poetry, Lowland Scots poetry, Writing in Breton and Anglo-Irish poetry. It appears as the proceedings of a conference held in Cardiff in 1969 under the title of *Literature in Celtic Countries*. The obvious missing link is any lecture on Irish poetry. Yet the last thirty-five years have been largely seen as thirty-five years of poetry by most cultural commentators. That is why this talk is a plea for prose.

The Irish writers who attempted to build anew a modern Irish prose at the close of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth were not quite starting from the egg. They were building from the shattered shell of the seventeenth century and grafting new colours from international species. The Irish situation was different from other colonial ones where English was introduced primarily as the language of administration, and consequently of higher education and learning, while native languages grubbed around in everyday life and in the lower castes of register. English did not replace the native languages of India or Africa as it nearly completely did in Ireland. So the Irish writer was not merely attempting to bridge the stylistic gap of more than two hundred years, he was also recreating the language as he went on.

Much prose suffers from the fact that it is not poetry. That is, the ordinary hack prose writer doesn't have the glamour about him that the poet necessarily claims because he is denied access to the mysteries which ordinary discourse can't reach. All modern prose in all languages has been at its best as poetic as most poetry has been prosaic, and writing in Irish is no exception. The poetry which bards of the medieval period produced by virtue of placing a stone upon their bellies and mumbling overnight in a darkened room is no better in substance than that which the *prosateur* produces because he has to meet the deadline of an irascible editor, or scribble about the dull quotidian, or recount a story that has

been often told before, or satisfy the demands of an educational system that requires that writing be ordinary, yet exciting, yet safe.

This homily is delivered, not so much because the tradition of Irish poetry is so strong that it threatens to overwhelm everything else that is written, but because, despite the long tradition of Irish prose, equally as ancient as that of the versifiers and therefore almost exceptional in Western European literatures, it seems always to be placed secondary to the musers, the messers, the metrifyers and the mystical masseurs because of their domination of the scribbled word for two hundred years prior to 1900. It is not, of course, that there is some kind of metaphysical rivalry between prose and poetry since various literary forms generally shape up because of social and political conditions. Poetry flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Irish because it was relatively easy for an impoverished rhymester to rattle off innumerable verses on any subject in field or fair which took his fancy—whether it was the loss of a spade or the loan of a spancel; prose demanded the hard intellectual graft and sufficient leisure which was denied by the political regime. It is for that reason that the twentieth century has been the century of prose in Irish literature *par excellence*; there has been more prose written and read and thought about in the twentieth century in Irish than *in all the previous centuries put together* for all our two thousand years.

The great critical debate at the turn of the century was whether Irish prose should be based on the classical standard set down by Seathrún Céitinn at the time of the Counter-Reformation or, on the ordinary speech of the people used in their everyday and everynight and everymidafternoon lives. It was as if English writers wished to model their prose on the unbridled sentences of Thomas Nashe or the heavy iron curtains of John Milton, rather than on the gabble of a Shropshire lad or the cant of a cockney. While this might seem a wondrously strange and weird debate for those who inhabit an unbroken tradition, it is interesting that the Chinese, Greek and Arabic literary scenes suffered a similar wrangle at roughly the same time. As far as my paltry knowledge goes, modernism won the day on every occasion in each of these countries.

It did so in Ireland because writers don't generally give a ship's shine or a sheep's shake for what the critics say, or alternatively, because they are usually the best critics themselves. It is clear that An tAthair Peadar Ua Laoghaire, otherwise Canon Peter O'Leary, was not clear what he was about when he embarked on the first Irish novel, *Séadna*, published in book form, after serialisation, in 1904. It is equally clear, however, that he satisfied large numbers of Irish readers in produc-

ing a novel that was all things to all people (except for thousands from Ulster and Connacht who hated his dialect). It is, at the one time, a folk-novel based on an international tale, a study of individual character as in the best nineteenth-century Jamesian plodder, a book for beginners which the sophisticated can appreciate, a medieval allegory of good and evil, a thriller where the suspense is held until the last few pages, a documentary which describes the lives of ordinary “peasants” in a rural community, and a postmodernist tale which is self-reflective and self-critical. There is no doubt that it was a theme that suited bang-on as a dead-cert the concerns and the limitations of its author; we know that because most of the other attempts at creativity by An tAthair Peadar were successful only as failures, an example of which might be his second novel, *Niamh* (1907), which stretches our credulity a lot more than the eponymous hero was ever stretched. This was the novel which dealt with the triumphant victory of Brian Boru against the Barbarian hordes from Scandinavia at the beach of Clontarf, driving them into the holy tide and back to their heathen refuges in Stavanger or wherever, and which one critic pronounced would “not be popular with Vikings”. What An tAthair Peadar did succeed in doing was establishing the speech of the ordinary people as the normal standard for everyday prose, and despite dialect bigots’ misgivings about his Muskerry muscular diction, the principle was conceded and hankerers after the seventeenth century retired to their studies.

It would be oversimplistic to say that we can divide Irish writers into two camps from the beginning of the century, that is, the traditionalists and the modernists, but it is a pleasantly crude classification that serves some purposes as crude classifications do. The traditionalists would argue that the modernists were not being true to the genius of the Irish language and to the facts of Irish-speaking communities, while the modernists would argue that the traditionalists were confusing the nineteenth century and the folksy with life itself, while not being able to see the semantic wood for the linguistic tree. The truth might be that in any complete language or complete literature you need the lot, and readers of English literature in Ireland will find no difficulty in swallowing the experimentalism of a James Joyce, a Robert MacLiam Wilson or a Sebastian Barry with the same bitter pill as a Brinsley MacNamara, a Frank O’Connor or a Maeve Binchy, who wrote as if the twentieth century never happened. Although there is no inherent virtue in whoring after alien gods or goddesses, Padraic Ó Conaire proved in his short stories and in his one successful novel, *Deoraíocht* (1910), that much could be learned by applying one’s own experience to the technique of a Dostoyevsky, a Dickens or a Balzac. Despite his penchant for walking very close to the cliff

between horror and melodrama, or for stepping on the very thin ice of depressing realism across the bog of improbable fact, he is still worth reading because we know that somewhere underneath all the schmaltz there is a real writer struggling to emerge, even if he breaks through only in fits and bleeps and glimmers and starts.

The much-reviled-by-revisionists Pádraig Mac Piarais succeeded in implementing a revolution in politics, in education and in literature, which is more than can be said for any of his detractors. While his revolution in politics failed because the guns arrayed against him were too great, and his attempt to change education floundered on the hard-headedness of parents who wanted their children to be trained in gainful employment as economic timeservers and wageslaves as they were themselves, his influence on literature remained profound because of his sensitivity and courage as a critic. In that, he joins a select band of writers in Ireland whose criticism was always more creative than their imaginative work, and of whom Daniel Corkery and Sean O'Faolain (as biographer) would be prominent. Pearse had a generosity of soul and a sharpness of critical perception which has set the standard for much that has been written about literature in Irish unto the present day.

One of the main differences between any account of literature in Irish and in English in this century must be the importance accorded to regional and dialectical writing in Irish. Although much writing in English in this century has centred upon coming home through the fields past the lake by lough begorrah and twice round the black church on the old bog road neath the green leafy shade in our village of longing amongst women as an only child and mind the dresser, we can readily see that much of its impetus is sentimental where it is not financial. In the case of Irish, it is much more likely to be part of the battle of the dialects, where each region tried to show by literary excellence that its particular forms should be dominant in whatever national standard would eventually emerge. Thus an Ulster *madadh* or a Munster *madra* became just more than hound dogs who were neither high class nor barking all the time, but carried the aspirations of an entire province in their paws.

Although the Munster dialect remained most prestigious for the first quarter century because of the success of An tAthair Peadar Ua Laoghaire's writings – with no little help from his friends – and the amazing dictionary of Patrick Dineen, there was a putsch by Ulster writers in the twenties and thirties which helped to restore equilibrium and some sense of proportion. Although containing in many

ways the most extensive Gaeltacht, Connacht, until the arrival of Máirtín Ó Cadhain as a major writer in the late nineteen forties, remained, like its hurlers and footballers, permanently at the bottom rung of losers and no-hopers, in slumber deep and unknowing. The Ulster revival was spearheaded by Séamas Ó Grianna, who wrote under the pen-name Máire, and his younger, more talented and more unhinged brother, Seosamh Mac Grianna. One of the great signs of life about these authors is that there is still a lively critical debate about their worth, although this is sometimes influenced by one's proximity or distance to or from Donegal. Critical geographers have noted that their esteem grows in direct proportion to how close the reader is to Rann na Feirste, but they are not likely to be covered with plaudits in the University of West Kerry. For all that, much about Máire is remarkable. He invented a form of the short story that was all his own, and he wrote a series of novels that were invariably interesting until he decided to introduce a plot. His best work is comic masquerading as tragic, and his misfortune was to have wearied the critics and his readers before his best novel, *Bean Ruadh de Dhálach*, was published in the nineteen sixties, long after everyone had given up the ghost and the spirit and the flesh and had gone home to their sheep. His autobiographies, *Nuair a Bhí mé Óg* and *Saol Corrach*, are masterpieces of tenderness and acerbity, and show what he was capable of if he hadn't read Pat McGill or presumed that Thomas Carlyle was a greater writer than he was. His greatest achievement is that he succeeded in producing a substantial body of worthwhile reading material for his own people and for enthusiasts of Ulster Irish from Belfast, occasionally reaching base camp on the mountains of Parnassus but never in danger of falling off the cliff of ambition at the summit.

His other achievement was that he added the much-needed ingredient of imagination to that documentary literature which was growing in each Gaeltacht as scholars persuaded small farmers and fisherman that they had something to say. Some did and some didn't. There was, of course, value in documenting the way of life, and more importantly, the language of the Gaeltacht while it remained strong. In this sense, most Gaeltacht autobiographies and old-timers' reminiscences are interesting, although only very few of them should be confused with literature. The most famous of these autobiographies is undoubtedly Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* (1929), which was later translated as *The Islandman* and received some international recognition. This form of writing in Irish is almost *sui generis* in so far as it is about so-called ordinary people writing about their so-called ordinary lives, whereas most autobiographies which attain fame are written by the rich or the famous or those who are famous because they are

rich. Tomás Ó Criomhthain was no ordinary person, however, but a single-minded literary craftsman who learned to write his language when he was advanced in years and who provided a classic virtually without models. His prose, in the original, is as cold as the water around the Great Blasket, as supple as the seals which he hunted, as clean as the west wind and as tough as the hide of an old cow. He is the most unromantic of writers despite the apparent exotic location and the photography of calendar decorators. He wrote a second classic, *Allagar na hInise*, which is really just a lot of old talk, but which is more poetic in its execution than a shelf-full of celebrated anthologies with greater pretensions.

Seosamh Mac Grianna joined in the cult of autobiographies when he published *Mo Bhealach Féin* (1940) after a few novels and a fine collection of short stories. It is really an imaginative credo and a defiant manifesto against the world, more than any kind of reconstruction of the externals of life, and still remains one of our best statements about the frustrated and misunderstood artist. He was our existentialist before we had heard of the word, our rebel when all the others had gone soft or joined the civil service, our anarchist when others were looking for a code to live by. One always feels when reading him that there was much potential left unfulfilled, much talent that was never quite expressed. His final work, *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan*, which is really only the initial cut of a novel, is written in a prose that is the most poetic and magical and mysterious of all in the twentieth century. It is a prose which never seems to touch the ground, and is yet not forced, nor stylised, nor flourishy. At its best it is like another language which bears only a syntactical relationship to Irish. It is like seeing language through a rain drop, brightly. It is far from the land, but comes from some kind of, well, why not say, spring. Some translations approach it in beauty of language and of expression – Niall Ó Dónaill's version of Denis Ireland's *Cathair Phrotastúnach* for example – but Mac Grianna's voice is an *Ur*-original of an *Ur*-original and stands alone in the gap of the north.

The nineteen twenties and thirties saw the greatest outpouring of prose of all kinds apart from the last two decades. Although this outpouring may have been only great in bulk, it was certainly necessary in order to provide reading and working material for the new generation of people either learning or rediscovering the language. The state publishing company, *An Gúm*, which was founded in the nineteen twenties, provided support for original and for translated books. Many of the world's classics were rendered into Irish and are examples of what good translations should be. Its policy on original novels and short stories was not quite as successful, partly because you cannot order the coming of good au-

thors and partly because writers in Irish suffered the same malaise as their counterparts in English after the independence of the Irish Free State. This era of dull and plodding realism seemed to produce the same novels and short stories over and over again under different titles, although a few like Éamonn Mac Giolla Iasachta's *Cúrsaí Thomáis* (1927) – later translated into English as *The Little Fields of Carrick* – or Barra Ó Caochlaigh's *Lucht Ceoil* (1932) can still bear a close reading.

It was not until after the great barbarian war of 1939-45 that creative and imaginative prose underwent a transformation. For some reason, much was made at the time of Séamas Ó Néill's *Tonn Tuile* (1947), a novel which attempted to depict marital tensions in Dublin during the war. Unfortunately the main character and narrator is – with no hint of irony – such a prig, and the prose is as thin as toilet paper, that we find it impossible to empathise either with the author's intentions or his style, if such a word is at all applicable. It may have been welcomed more for its apparent modern urban setting than for its literary content in the belief that it heralded a departure from the dominant rural prose tradition up until then. The worst excesses of that tradition were beautifully and hilariously parodied in Myles na gCopaleen's *An Béal Bocht* (1941) some years previously, although the author admitted several times that his novel was written out of a profound respect for *An tOileánach* which it is seemingly sending up. Parodying of the stage Irishman remains a serious business, however, when one of them is regularly returned as a TD with the votes of the mountainy sheepfarmers of south Kerry on the promise of keeping his people poor for all eternity so that they can cadge the subsidies from the European Germans.

It was Máirtín Ó Cadhain's magisterial and masterful *Cré na Cille* (1949) which more than anything else broke the back of the realist incubus. If "the speech of the people" had been the literary catch-cry for so long, Ó Cadhain took it as far as it could possibly go and beyond. For, if we exclude some introductory passages to some of the interludes in which the book is divided, the entire novel is in straight talk, or what passes for straight talk in a rural community. More than that, all the characters are dead and buried in a graveyard in Connemara which means – necessarily – that their movement is restricted and that their development can go only in the direction of decomposition. And in a sense this is ironically apt, since the traditional novel is wonderfully decomposed within a form which is uniquely his own, and traditional society is buried under six feet and tens of thousands of words of bitchiness, and backbiting, and taunts, and sneers, and slugging, and animadversions. If one of the reasons for the cultivation of literature is to glorify

language, then *Cré na Cille* does it with power and wonder; it also showed, once again, that the rural novel could be modernist, just as *Tonn Tuile* had shown that the urban novel could be retrogressive. These sociological divisions much loved by those who think that the literature of the dual-carriageway is superior to that of the boreen, or that Finglas lilies smell sweeter than sweet Finogue willies, or who prefer their own real horny bull in a field to artificial insemination in an alley, never had much meaning when it came to the hot stuff of writing. Irish prose had been both rural and urban from the start, and had contained within it the traditional and the experimental. Good writers always understand that it is the critic who sucks his categories for comfort and who keeps putting the psycho back into analysis.

Máirtín Ó Cadhain did for the short story in a series of collections what he had also done for the novel. Although he had published one book of tales before the war, it was a work he was inclined to disown, but he was always proud of the best of his stories in *An Braon Broghach* (1948) and *Cois Caoláire* (1953). These best stories had to do with the toughness of life in his native Cois Fharraige, but they are written without the real sentimentality or the false toughness which marred one of the finest collections of short stories of that time, Liam Ó Flaithearta's *Dúil* (1953). Máirtín Ó Cadhain did not publish another book for seventeen years when *An tSraith ar Lár* (1967), the first of a trilogy of collections of short stories, appeared. This and *An tSraith dhá Tógáil* (1970) contain his finest writing apart from *Cré na Cille*, but they were part of such a good body of writing which appeared in the nineteen sixties that they seemed less remarkable than they do now.

Any collection of the finest of Irish prose would be overburdened with writing from the nineteen sixties. It was in particular Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, Diarmaid Ó Súilleabháin and Breandán Ó Doibhlin who were innovative and courageous, and in an entirely different way Dónall Mac Amhlaigh and Pádraig Ua Maoileoin who breathed new life into more traditional forms of fiction. It was during this decade that Máire's best novel, the aforementioned *Bean Ruadh de Dhálach* (1966), was published, and even the censors shone on his brother Seosamh's forgotten novel, *An Druma Mór* (1969), which was written in the nineteen thirties but remained in the womb of the Gúm all those years because of political pressure. While it would always be wrong to compare Irish literature with the literatures of the major world languages, there was much written in those years of which anyone could be proud, no matter in what language it was composed.

Irish prose speaks, of course, to our particular condition and situation; if it did not it would be mad. But at its best it reaches out to touch others whose historical life might at least be analogous to ours. It is very likely that we have more in common with Latvian or Serbian or Shona literature, if we were to really know about them, than with the words of the great powers who decide what modernity or sensibility in our time is. There could certainly never be an Irish Kipling, just as surely as there couldn't be an English Séamas Ó Grianna. It shouldn't be any mystery that the concerns of the Irish-speaking community both within and without the traditional Gaeltacht have largely shaped the kind of literature we get; writing in Irish is never just a mirror image of writing in English in Ireland, despite the similarity of landscape and the old familiar faces. Yes, there was much hankering after a simpler rural life and the virtues therein contained in many Irish novels and short stories, but there was also much savage criticism. Yes, there were a lot of political tales of uncomplicated morality, with the goodies and baddies lined up fairly simply on either side, but it is occasionally sensible to be unambivalent about the evil of colonialism. Where writing in Irish seems to differ remarkably from writing in English is that there appears to be a lot less chips on a lot fewer shoulders about the awfulness of Ireland, the oppression of the brutal clergy and the misery of family life. There is no *Angela's Ashes* in Irish, even though the reality of growing up in Limerick must have been much worse than anything that Frank McCourt could invent. In fact, despite trenchant and critical examination of the past, present and possible future of the country in works as diverse as Breandán Ó Doibhlin's *An Branar gan Cur* (1979), Diarmaid Ó Súilleabháin's *Maeldún* (1972), or Breandán Ó hEithir's *Sionnach ar mo Dhuán* (1988), you get the distinct impression that this is a place where the good life can be lived. Put another way, the anger in Irish fiction is positive rather than defeatist, because if it was defeatist, of course, it wouldn't be written at all at all.

After the death of Máirtín Ó Cadhain Irish prose seemed to go into decline for at least a decade. This may also have had something to do with the resurgence of poetry and the inability of people to keep both in their heads at the same time. Whichever way, we lose, and the seventies were not a hugely successful time for creative prose but the eighties and the nineties and the new century have seen a requickening. There was the hugely popular *Lig Sinn i gCathú* (1976) by Breandán Ó hEithir which topped the bestseller lists in any language for several weeks. This was partly due to the fact that it was a prize-winning novel, partly because it dealt with sex, booze and growing up, partly because it was well-marketed, and partly because the author was a well-known journalist and broad-

caster. It proved, however, that Irish novels could sell well if they got the same hype as their counterparts in English. Breandán Ó hEithir's second previously-mentioned novel *Sionnach ar mo Dhuán* (1988) superiorly written, broader in scope, greater in ambition, more deeply layered, more fully executed, did not enjoy the same success. It seemed for a while that a long complex narrative was beyond the energy of many readers of Irish fed on lyric poems and bytes of journalism. There was always a category of Irish reader who wanted their authors to be famous as long as their books were unread. A similar fate of neglect befell Dónal Mac Amhlaigh's *Deoraithe* (1986), a novel which more than any other captured the life of the struggling Irish working class in fifties England. I am not aware that anything like it has appeared in English. When we think of the drain of energy and talent that this scandalous emigration entailed we wonder at the morality of writers anguishing over the petty pains of their own growing up as if their suffering had cosmic consequences. Compared with the horror and vacuity and suffering of this forced emigration, adultery in Ardee or buggery in Ballyunion seems a facile subject and an easy target. Mac Amhlaigh was the great documenter of this experience, of course, as he had shown in *Dialann Deorai* (1960). But his novel is a massive imaginative recreation in sweep and in detail of what it was like to be there and to suffer the swings and barbs of outrageous fortunes. Not so much a slice as a chunk of life with all the beef left in.

One could at least predict that there should be novels on growing up – yet again – or on exile – however rare – but nothing prepared Irish readers for the whirlwind of *Cuifeach Mo Lon Dubh Bui* (1983) by an unknown and unsung twenty-one year old from Fermanagh called Séamas Mac Annaidh. This was a storm of a book linking prehistoric myth with lexicographical *seán*ces with student life with the Donegal Gaeltacht with rock bands with current politics in a thin wobbly interweaving narrative which went everywhere and nowhere and beyond. Students were heard laughing while reading it in libraries, and dull shiny-pated professors puzzled how they could fit it into their tight scheme of things between Pádraic Ó Conaire and Máirtín Ó Cadhain. It didn't matter because it was a whale and a howl of a book whose energy was infectious and which presaged a great literary career for its author. Unfortunately the follow-ups didn't hit home as sharply. *Mo Dhá Mhici* (1986) had some of the same madcap energy but a little dissipated, and *Rubble na Mickies* (1990) degenerated into the literary games beloved of postmodernist critics. At least this meant that literature in Irish could be anything it wanted to be and was not being written at the behest of any simple easily-defined agenda. It is a

point of view difficult to hammer across when the market for books in Irish insists on sentimentality, slush and slop. Many Irish-speakers might abhor Mac Annaidh because he was not “traditional” enough, and Anglo-Irishists despise him because he dared outside his reserve. This is the dilemma facing every writer in Irish today, whether to soup up the folksy bit for the national theme park, or to write as if Irish was one of those languages which dealt with the whole world up and down and in and out, amen.

Pádraig Standún never had that problem. He writes for his own people, the local community of Conamara and the islands. They are his own people because he has been a priest among them for more than thirty years. He has written twelve novels to date, all of which deal with the bleak realities of life in rural Ireland without sentimentality or romanticism. All in all he is the best selling author in Irish word for word and pound for pound. His initial novel *Súil le Breith* (1983) may have had a certain scandalous success because of its theme of priest and lover and clash with authority, but his later works show that he is involved in every aspect of his community. The problem of priestly celibacy surfaces in *Cíocras* (1992), while lesbianism is the central concern of *Cion Mná* (1992). Outsiders poking their knowing noses into rural mores fashions the plot of *Na hAnthropologicals* (1994), while *Stigmata* (1995) sets up a debate between superstition and real Christian morality. Pádraig Standún has admitted that his novels are simply a means of disseminating Christianity. His Christianity, however, is not always the stuff of conforming beliefs but is concerned with setting the oak of orthodoxy against the reed of bending life. Although his characters sometimes get bogged down in theological disputes that never took place in any bar or kitchen they always retain enough life to demonstrate that they are people in books and not counters in those abstract journalistic debates which constitute intellectual life in Ireland. The real, although intangible Dublin 4, of *The Sunday Independent*, of what used to be The Democratic Left, of confused and degraded Blueshirts, of sneaking Unionist regarders, of gobblers-up of the considered trifles of state-classists of every hie and hue, all these do not simply or even complicatedly exist in the world of Pádraig Standún. It is an Ireland bent to his own agenda without a doubt, but it is not a Martin McDonagh stage-construction, a tourist wish-fulfillment, a John B. Keaney up-and-at-’em, bull-in-the-parlour romp in the fields or behind the haystacks. Whether his novels live on or not, they are certainly far more than a documentary account of what it was like to live then in the butt-end of the twentieth century and now at the beginning of a so-called new millennium in a writhing Ireland neither here nor

there scratching their gods. The point about Pádraig Standún is that he would be relevant to Ireland no matter which language he wrote in.

More parlous than this is the state of the short story. For many years touted as *the* Irish literary genre *par excellence* and boasting a pedigree exceeding that of Shergar and Master MacGrath there hasn't been a great deal to shiver the timbers of all and sundry in the last twenty years. There has been the noted exception of Pádraic Breathnach who with at least six collections of short stories at the last count is away ahead of the field in a prolixity of production which is tempered only by the spare beauty of his prose. He is a minimalist searching for the significant moment in the dross of everyday encounters. We would have said that he might have been influenced by Raymond Carver only that we know that he was writing before him. He has been criticised for going over the same ground again and again and again but there is no real reason for ceasing to do something because it is being done well. His first attempt at a novel cannot really be counted a success (although his second contains some of the most spectacular earthy and erotic writing in modern Irish), but it at least points up the fact that some writers are particularly suited to one *genre* rather than another. Seán Mac Mathúna's stories in his two collections *Ding agus Scéalta Eile* (1983) and *Banana* (1999) reproduce a world which is like a different dimension. They seem to bear some relationship to this world that is not fantasy, or magic realism, or just out of the good old imagination. Adjectives like "quirky" or "individualistic" seem to demean a talent that is brilliant, and may detract from the moral seriousness of his humour and his wonderful inventions. Everyone says he is fabulous – in both senses of that word – but they are a little scared that they can't quite pin him down. Some writers have, of course, crossed the divide and written the prose of the long haul and the short gasp simultaneously. A recently much-praised writer from the Kerry Gaeltacht is Pádraig Ó Cíobháin who suddenly produced several novels and collections of short stories. He is important in that he continues the tradition of Gaeltacht writing while modernising and expanding it. The first flush of Gaeltacht autobiographies in the twenties and the thirties has indeed been followed by a second slush in the past ten years or so. Whereas the early books were delineating a way of life which was quickly vanishing the new wave was largely a rip-off of the fame that they had earned. The publication of sentimental memoirs hardly helps the self-confidence of a community even if they do look good on the shelves of the latest interpretative centre. Ó Cíobháin's stories, even if they are sometimes unwieldy and undisciplined, show a vibrancy beating within the heart of a community

and an imagination confident in its own authenticity beyond special pleading and image. There have, undoubtedly, been fine collections by individual authors including Fionntán de Brún, Pádraig Ó Siadhail and Pól Ó Muirí, but it is too early to say if they are going to be singletons or to eventually twin themselves to the greater tradition.

So far I have been attempting to draw out some of the patterns of contemporary Irish writing and to mention some of the more important figures. There is still the clash, or at least the contrast, between the more “traditional” writing and the more “modernist” – even if increasingly these terms begin to mean less and less. There is writing for the Gaeltacht market, for the learners’ market, for the learned market. But because of the nature of the Irish-speaking and reading public – much fractured, very loyal, often uncritical, subject to false dawns and new horizons every which year – it is necessarily true that a great part of the best of writing in Irish consists of successful singletons. Because virtually nobody can make their living from writing exclusively in Irish unless they live on watercress and dingleberries in a hovel far from the sight of humankind it is not surprising that we have a lot of one-book authors, many bad, some indifferent, but quite a few of an excellent quality. These admit of no easy pattern, but are far and away the biggest category of books in Irish. This element of anarchy is an important factor in keeping the life and excitement of the unexpected alive in the literature.

As the author of three novels, three collections of stories, several plays and some works of literary scholarship it would be genuinely immodest of me not to mention myself. If my first novel *Méirscrí na Treibhe* (1978) is bloated and soupy, and *Stiall Fhial Feola* (1980) amounts to Gothic schlock, *An Fear Dána* (1993) is, I like to think, a fine literary novel. It is an imaginative reconstruction of the life and times of a thirteenth century bardic Irish poet who was banished to Scotland because of an admitted murder and later was involved in the crusades. It is also a meditation on the Gaelic (Irish and Scottish) literary traditions seen through the mind of somebody who was there at its height. *Eiriceachtaí agus scéalta eile* (1987) is a collection of which I would still not change a word, while *Fabhalscéalta* (1995) are short allegorical and parabolic pieces of a kind not attempted in Ireland before. *Leabhar Nóra Ní Anluain* (1998) is a collection of more than one hundred stories in just about every *genre* of story that has been set down by the *genreists*. Drama is a more tricky medium because theatre in Ireland, whether in Irish or in English, depends on fat subsidies from the state. My own *Tagann Godot* (1991), which as one might expect is a sequel to Beckett’s

famous play was staged by the Abbey, toured the country, translated into other languages, and produced outside Ireland. *An Ghráin agus an Ghruaim* (1999) attempted to kill off the awful Irish rural play for ever, but unfortunately words alone are not the only good in such a situation. Many Irish writers would like to write for the stage, but the lack of outlets and the conservatism of the directing establishment inhibit the development of a vibrant theatre.

The single most important development in writing in Irish during the last quarter of a century has been the appearance of real and committed literary and historical scholarship. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Irish literary and linguistic scholarship had been in thrall to the desiccated and, strange as it may seem, emasculated Germanic tradition. It is not that this tradition of meticulous philological exactitude does not have its place in the academies of arts; to hunt the origin of a word back through modern Irish to early modern to classical to middle to old to ancient to forest to putative Celtic to supposed Sanskrit to reconstructed Indo-European to Cro-Magnon croaks and Neolithic grunts certainly has a kind of orgasmic excitement for some people. But to suppose that this is the *only* kind of Irish scholarship worth talking about, as has sometimes been argued, flies in the face of the normal intellectual discourse in other languages and cultures. Anybody studying Irish in the university in the nineteen sixties would have found difficulty in finding any book of any length and substance dealing with a writer, or a *genre*, or a theme, or a topic in modern Irish literature. There were essays and articles and bits and pieces. Since then however, there have been major studies of a literary kind of individual authors, of movements, of forms of literature, of philosophical reflection.

This reflective study of literature in Irish may be said to have begun with the American scholar Frank O'Brien's *Filíocht Ghaeilge na linne seo* (1968). Although it is generally seen now as a deeply flawed work because of the author's lack of sympathy with and, therefore, understanding of Seán Ó Ríordáin it paved the way for other kinds of literary scholarship beyond the merely philological. On the other hand, there has been no comparable study of Irish poetry since then despite its flower and its bloom. Aisling Nic Dhonnchadha has tackled the first generation of the modern short story in *An Gearrscéal sa Ghaeilge 1900—1940* (1981) and has published a book on women in the short story subsequently, Pádraig Ó Siadhail has examined the Irish theatrical movement with *Stair Drámaíocht na Gaeilge* (1993) and I have treated comprehensively of the novel myself in *An tÚrscéal Gaeilge* (1991). Individual authors have also received full frontal critical treatment. Sometimes this has been in the form of a literary biography as

in Seán Ó Coileáin's *Seán Ó Ríordáin: Beatha agus Saothar* (1982) which made excellent use of the subject's own diaries and papers. Elliptically told and drawn from a well of deep empathy the author echoes Ó Ríordáin's own prose style which is one of the finest in modern Irish when it doesn't tend towards self-parody. Máirín Nic Eoin's *Eoghan Ó Tuairisc: Beatha agus Saothar* (1988) is a more objective study of the bilingual novelist, dramatist and poet who only belatedly began to get the recognition he deserved. These biographies dramatise not the choice between perfection of the life and perfection of the work as is so often the case, but the profound artistic loneliness and frustration of the writer in Irish in his own country. They are case studies of the artist whose only way out is down. They point out yet again that, despite the clichés of the cosseted Irish writer (and this was a cliché that was never true), the lot of him who wrote in the native tongue would be either frustration or circumscribed ambition. Pádraic Ó Conaire, the subject of a major biographical and critical study by Pádraigín Riggs, died from drink and vagrancy at a scandalously early age; Seosamh Mac Grianna, who carried the hopes of Ulster into the gap, suffered mental breakdown and clamped up in silence to the end of his isolated days in hospital; his brother Séamas took the state's shilling and contented himself with writing variations on the same romantic theme for half a century when the sharpness of his intellect and the acerbity of his style suggested he could have done much more; Seán Ó Ríordáin degenerated into pastiche and personal isolation; Eoghan Ó Tuairisc fluctuated between anger and despair.

The only major writer so far who seems to have negotiated himself successfully through this morass was Máirtín Ó Cadhain. He is the subject of Gearóid Denvir's *Cadhain Aonair* (1987), but this is much more a study of the writings than of the writer. It is a rich and lucid book dealing in microcriticism with a sustained flair. Denvir's is a liberal and engaged criticism which treats the writer, his words and his intentions with the seriousness which they deserve. A sign of the maturity of literary scholarship in Irish is that critics have now begun to engage in factious disputations about the nature of theory and its place in the examination of literature. Some of this credit must go to Breandán Ó Doibhlin, Professor of French in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, who introduced much Francophone thought into Irish studies in the nineteen sixties. His criticism, and the school which followed him, introduced a discipline and seriousness into the reading of literature which is still with us. Maybe not inevitably, but certainly understandably, the more recent theoretical entanglements have cast their soupy darkness upon this intelligent discourse. Unfortunately for its lackeys, just as

they began to put their ragwort roots down it began to be discovered that they were being discarded elsewhere. The structuralism that is now as dead as a dolmen maintained a certain glassy sheen in Irish for a few years after its international decease despite massive shots of institutional aids. This did not prevent others whoring after the certainty that only a theory can give, and even if it was never found, still retains the attraction of the perfect ideal, like courtly love or instant slimming or goblets of nectar. No matter, a lively intellectual or even theoretical debate is now part of Irish writing. More interestingly, after the hand-me-down, off-the-peg, thrown-away remnants of the fag-ends of recycled French and American whacked-out ideas have been embarrassingly laid aside, there are signs that Irish critics are beginning to set down their own theories based on the particular circumstances of writing in Irish today.

Irish literary scholarship does not deal with Irish alone. No literature lives by self-referential incestuous cross-talk. An interesting and entirely successful development has been discourse on writers in other languages but who have a relationship with the other Gaelic tradition. One of the most valuable of these is Máire Ní Annracháin's study of the contemporary Scottish poet Sorley MacLean, *Aisling agus Tóir: an Slánú i bhFíliocht Shomhairle Mhic Gill-Eain* (1992). Apart from its intrinsic value as a work of meticulous criticism and its unusually sensitive use of theory, it is a landmark book in the re-accommodation of the Irish and the Scottish Gaelic traditions. These traditions were sundered by the growth of sectarianism in religion and English-speaking political nationalism in politics. There is some hope that the writers and artists can reconstruct part of that valuable community of cultural interests. Flann O'Brien or Myles na gCopaleen or Brian O'Nolan is best known internationally for his quirky, funny and literary novels such as *At Swim-two-birds* or *The Dalkey Archive*. Like Brendan Behan, or Patrick Pearse, or Liam O'Flaherty, however, he also wrote in Irish. His classic novel *An Béal Bocht* and its antecedents, along with his entire corpus of writing in Irish is the subject of Breandán Ó Conaire's *Myles na Gaeilge* (1986). This is a book which hunts down to its lair in the Irish tradition just about every hint and echo and nuance in Myles na gCopaleen's work, and is an indispensable study for anyone who wishes to know anything about his hard life and good times. In a different direction Gréagóir Ó Dúill's literary biography of Sir Samuel Ferguson *Samuel Ferguson: Beatha agus Saothar* (1993) uncovers the interest that this Northern poet had in the Irish language and its literature and destroys the facile fiction of a one-strand easily-reducible Gaelic tradition. The contemporary poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill has been

well-served by critical studies in particular by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, and by Pádraig de Paor, who has also written challengingly on Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Gabriel Rosenstock.

Unlike English studies (until very recently) Irish literature was always perceived to be more than the sum of its poetry, fiction and drama. It encompassed history and social studies and reflective prose just as well. Although, not surprisingly, most Irish people engaged in original research in any of these areas will publish their findings in English, there have been some contributions in Irish to the sum of human knowledge not available elsewhere. A few examples will suffice. Liam Ó Caithnia's *Stair na hIomána* (1980) is, ostensibly, close on a thousand-page history of the game of hurling. But it is just as much a history of the pastimes and leisure of the common people of the country from the beginning of records to the present day. No other historian dealing in the social past has approached his depth of digging or his breadth of references. And in the best tradition of feeling historians he is a superb stylist who brings his subject to life and entices you to read on for the pleasure of the prose just as much as for the quality of his insight. Máirín Nic Eoin's *B'Ait Leo Bean* (1999) is an examination of the place and role and position and image of women in Irish literature. There is nothing like it, or approaching it in English. She rereads Irish literature from a different ideological point of view and we can never read it again in quite the same way. More specifically Breandán Ó Buachalla rewrites Irish literary and cultural history in his *Aisling Ghéar* (1996). He re-examines and revisits all Irish cultural assumptions of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and finds them flawed and inadequate. His exhaustive trawl through more than six hundred poems and whatever other archive material it was possible to delve into provides us with the most exhaustively and meticulously researched book on Irish literature in any language. Tadhg Ó Dúshláine has examined the European influence on Irish prose of the seventeenth century, and Mícheál Mac Craith has rewritten our understanding of the *dánta grá*, the courtly love poetry of the late middle-ages. Irish scholarship is always re-inventing and reshaping itself, a scholarship which has been well-served by vibrant publishing houses, in particular An Clóchomhar and An Sagart, and Cois Life in more recent times. Much valuable work has been done in other areas also, reinforcing my earlier assertion that there has never been a greater amount of material over a wider range of subjects by a bigger number of authors in the Irish language than ever before. Much trash and much dross has been penned, of course, but much also that is of immediate and of more permanent value.

Some fifteen years ago I wrote a big fat book on the Irish novel, *An tÚrscéal Gaeilge*. It consisted of a general and detailed study of the entire corpus of novels written in Irish since novel-writing began. Although definitions of the novel are beautifully fuzzy and lead to border wars between critics of fiercely dogmatic persuasions, we may take it that something like one hundred and sixty novels were written between 1900 and 1990. Thirty of these were written in the nineteen eighties making it the most productive decade up until then. But since my study a quick run of my fingers across my shelves shows me that more than 100 novels have been published in the nineteen nineties. This is just about exactly half the novels in one ten year period that were published in the previous nine decades! Máirtín Ó Cadhain's quantity surveyors would be well-pleased. These travel through a rake of social commentary novels by Pádraig Standún, great wild writing by Pádraig Ó Cíobháin, intellectually crafted novels by Liam Mac Cóil – particularly his magisterial historical novel *Fontenoy* (2005), political examinations by Pádraig Ó Siadhail, psychological trawlings by Liam Ó Muirthile, rollicking Gaeltacht schlockers by Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé, “gay fiction” of deep and serious intent by Michéal Ó Conghaile plus detective novels, thrillers, fantasy, historical romances and whatever you're having yourself. The novel was never stronger.

And yet there is less talk about any of them. When Máirtín Ó Cadhain's long-awaited novel *Athnuachan* was published in 1995 – a novel which had been suppressed during his life-time and whose fame had gone before it – there was very little fanfare. His *Cré na Cille* (1949) got more than twenty reviews within a few weeks, and a steady supply of critical essays over the following years. By comparison *Athnuachan* fell into grounds of silence. A greater silence has met the publication of his much-awaited *Barbed Wire* (2002), but this may have much more to do with the difficulty and development of its language than with anything else. It is not, probably, a novel, but as nobody knows what a novel is, it just might be. It is extended prose, and there is a kind of narrative, but it might better be described as a marvellous piece of writing wherein we can only swim, and maybe drown. I have been told that people in the Donegal Gaeltacht and learners of Irish in Belfast would wait eagerly for Séamas Ó Grianna's next novel; there is no writer today who commands that kind of expectation.

Part of this is just the sheer noise of humanity and the clamour of other things to do. But it is also a product of the plenitude of reading material and our inability to know what to do with it. There was a time when every novel or work of half-decent prose was an event. Now it is just a flicker. Allied to that, there is

little or no consensus any more within the Irish-language community as to what constitutes good literature. Idiomatic phrases are not enough and the tension has long since drained out of the “modern” versus “tradition” debate. But this need not be a bad thing. Anarchy and lack of direction are shorthand for energy and fecundity.

So there is no need to end on a note of pessimism. Yes and alas, the early expectation of a revival of the language throughout the country in one or two generations did not happen. The notion of the Irish language seeping eastwards from Spiddal into Galway, or from Gaoth Dobhair across the wasted fastnesses to attack the sad suburban life of Letterkenny, or moving from house to house from Ring into Dungarvan and beyond now seems mad; languages do not move geographically unless they are being prodded by huge military and economic forces irresistible to the common herd. The Irish were always pretty paltry colonialists and the roaring Celtic tiger gobbles up its poor in English. That the *Gaeltachtaí* or Irish-speaking districts are thinner and more attenuated and speak a more impoverished language than ever before is hardly worth trying to deny. And yet more people claim to speak and to know the language than any time in the last one hundred years. It is still the language of communities in various parts of the country and increasingly of networks of individuals and of families and of like-minded groups. It receives state support from both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland in differing measures of enthusiasm and of begrudgery. In other words, it will not kick the bucket or even croak like Cornish or Trumai or Tocharian. Irish prose continues and will continue to be written as long as the language lives – and it will live for a long time yet. Prophets of its death and demise have departed the scene long before its time. The writers of its prose will be as great or as bad or as indifferent as the language itself will be, and its art will be as wondrous or as awful or as boring as the gods of inspiration who decide this stuff decide.

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DIARMAID Ó DOIBHLIN

Twentieth Century Irish Poetry: *Dath Géime na mBó*¹

There is the well-known story, apocryphal no doubt, concerning the modern Irish poet Seán Ó Ríordáin.

In the days before writers in residence became a familiar feature in Irish Universities, Professor Seán Ó Tuama and others at University College, Cork, managed to find the finance to engage Seán Ó Ríordáin to take some classes in contemporary poetry for students of Irish.² Ó Ríordáin somewhat reluctantly agreed to take the classes and by all accounts found the exercise very testing. And the story goes that he arrived in class with copies of Ó Tuama (1973) and Breandán Ó Doibhlin (1967), presented these to the students with the words “Read these. These fellows know more about my poetry than I do”. The story is of course apocryphal and yet it encapsulates something very central in Ó Ríordáin’s attitude to his poetry which he summed up in a verse introducing his first collection of poems:

Seo libh a dhánta tríd an tír
Ní mó ná sásta sinne libh,
Ach ba lú ná sin bhur sástacht linn,
Dá mb’ eol díbh leath bhur n-ainnise. (Ó Ríordáin 1986: 26)

Ó Ríordáin was all too conscious of the pain and anguish – indeed the misery – that lay at the core of his own creativity and certainly would have great diffi-

¹ This title is taken from Seán Ó Ríordáin’s poem *Cuireadh* found in *Eireaball Spideoige* (Ó Ríordáin 1986: 44).

² The precise account of the appointment of Ó Ríordáin to University College, Cork is to be found in Ó Coileáin 1982: 349.

culty in laying bare his soul to a mixed bag of young students in his own native Cork. He shunned public readings of his poetry and seems to me to have little appetite for this now normal practice of contemporary literary life. Yet the Ó Tuama and Ó Doibhlin articles contained careful and thoughtful exegesis of the themes and concerns of Ó Ríordáin's poems and demonstrated the considerable lyrical gifts which he brought to his craft. These critical articles served to place him among the small and elite band of contemporary poets in both English and Irish practicing in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s.

Dein is cuir solas im dhearcaibhse
Is chífhead dath géime na mbó;
Tar chugham is cloisfead gan bac ar bith
Rannaireacht rúnda na rós. (Ó Ríordáin 1986: 44)

In an early poem *An Peaca* Ó Ríordáin has written “is do chritheas le fuacht na filíochta”, and those of us who read poems for pleasure and satisfaction know that good poetry can and often does send shivers down the spine and impact on the whole personality. In the poem *Cuireadh* from the same collection Ó Ríordáin is asking for the gifts of the Muses so that he can feel and see the whole beauty and mystery of the world and life, and the gift he is asking for in the poem is to feel and to transmit the lushness of cows at milking-time in the rich pastures of Munster, to grasp the “inscape” of things, or as Hopkins put it “the dearest freshness deep down things”.

There can be little doubt in my view that Seán Ó Ríordáin, despite a relatively small output, is the most significant Irish language poet of the twentieth century. Professor Ó Tuama has described him as the most significant poet in Gaelic letters since Aogán Ó Rathaille (1670? –1720?). What Ó Tuama was seeking to signify in my view was that Ó Ríordáin brought to his poetry a unique passion, and the ability to hone and shape the language to his specific concerns. Yet there were generations between the two poets, with change of social circumstance, and change of taste. And most importantly there was the steady and continuing decline in the place and relevance of the Irish language in the lives of the great mass of the people.

Down in Ballykeel in the parish of Mullaghbawn in County Armagh, Arthur Bennett (1793-1879), stone mason, Gaelic scribe and occasional poet, was nearing the end of his days and he knew it was time for him to make some arrangement about the Gaelic manuscripts he had in his possession (see Ó Fiaich

and Ó Caithnia 1979). It was near the end of the nineteenth century and the native Irish had not yet to any great extent become involved in the printed book culture – a feature that did not develop really until the coming of the Gaelic League. Art Bennett was a scarred and difficult man who at the same time was extremely proud of the Gaelic lore and heritage that he was carrying around in his head and the access he had as a professional scribe to the long tradition of poetry. He knew that the conquest of Ireland had brought in the “tonnbhriseadh an tseanghnáthaimh” and he knew the vehemence of Aogán Ó Rathaile’s cry against the “foireann ó chrích Dover” who “i ngeall ar pingin” (or for nothing!) had got their hands on the whole material wealth of Ireland. All his life, like most of his neighbours he had faced and lived with almost excruciating poverty. His daughter, “a fine girl” as he called her, had died of starvation at the age of fifteen and he had written to Robert Mac Adam in Belfast that there was neither food nor drink in the house or money to buy it or indeed bury his “fine girl”. He decided to leave his papers to his old friend and neighbour Father Patrick Lamb, Parish Priest of Culloville who was a scribe and poor scholar in his own right. Father Lamb, as it turned out, predeceased him and when Bennett himself died in 1879 (the year Patrick Pearse was born in Dublin), the tradition of poetry in his native district of Oirialla was virtually at an end.

After Bennett’s death the tradition of poetry and poetry writing had passed here in the north of Ireland to the Donegal Gaeltacht where the language was still vibrant, to Gleann Fhinne in particular where Peadar Breathnach was head of a local school of poetry and to Rann na Feirste where what became known as the “Fílí gan Iomrá” were active. Énrí Ó Muirgheasa (1934: 297-337) collected from the oral tradition the poems of the Breathnach circle, and Seosamh Mac Grianna (1926) and his brother Séamas Ó Grianna (1942) wrote down from their uncle Johnny Shéamaisín what had survived in local memory of the poems of those O’Donnells of Rann na Feirste.

As with Bennett we are now in the realm of folk poetry with the focus on local happenings and a localised vision, and we are dealing with a tradition which is spiralling downwards. What is striking, however, in all this localised “folk poetry” is the extraordinary vibrancy and vitality which is still there in the language and every now and then we come across lines that sparkle and verses that are memorable and have the real power and flow of great poetry. Séamas O’Donnell sitting on the rocks by the beach in Rann na Feirste where his strong son has been lost at sea keens as beautifully and as movingly as has

ever been done in the Irish Language or indeed any other language, and gathers into it all the horrors of a such a cruel parting, all the woe of the impermanence and of the fragility of the human condition:

An chéad Mháirt den Fhómhar ba bhrónach is ba tuirseach mo scéal –
lámh thapaidh a bhí cróga a ghabháil romhamsa go leabaidh na néal:
ar charraig na ndeor, mo bhrón, gur chaill mé mo radharc,
is go dté mé faoi fhód cha dtógaim m’aigne ’do dhéidh.

...

Mo mhallacht go buan ar bhruach an chladaigh seo thíos
a d’fhág mé faoi ghruaim, is rinne gual díom in aice mo chroí;
is é do chuir ins an uaigh, monuar, a d’fhag mise gan bhrí,
gan mhisneach, gan stuaim, ach ’mo thruaill bhocht ag imeacht le gaoith.
(Ó Buachalla 1976: 67)

The striking metaphor in the last line with its freshness, its originality, and the sense of helplessness it conveys, serves to lift this poem out of the ordinary and it is strikingly beautiful and moving. Not only does it express the heartbreak, it brings to a great extent the pain and anguish under control, and soothes the loss. And it is no surprise that at many Donegal Gaeltacht wakes this song or poem is still sung at midnight.

Now we could argue that a song or poem of this quality is “pure chance”, an accident as it were, but it is fairer to say that where the living language of the Gaeltacht was artistically woven into subject matter which touched the heart the potentiality for great poetry was always there, and “Amhrán Phádraig Shéamuis” with the powerfully controlled emotion it carries soothed and continues to soothe to this day.

The “Fílí gan Iomrá” were succeeded essentially by their cousins, the Mac Grianna brothers Seosamh, Séamas and Seán Bán, and by Niall Ó Donaill of Loch an Lúir who was also a cousin. Between them they published in various journals about fifty poems and we should remember that these writers were essentially prose writers who played a formidable and creative role in the development of modern Gaelic prose literature. They were writing in the philosophical context of the Gaelic Revival which had grown out of late European Romanticism, which was abroad everywhere in Ireland. Some of Niall Ó Dónaill’s poems are very effective, very musical and tender in tone, and in that beautifully lyrical Donegal Irish of which he was a master. It is I think a

matter of some regret that he did not write more verse with his vast knowledge of the history and memories of the Donegal Gaeltacht people, his consciousness of the rugged hostile landscape, and with his unsurpassed grasp of idiomatic Donegal Irish he might have developed into a major poet. Much of his prose writing, especially in *Na Glúnta Rosannacha*, is powerfully lyrical as in this passage where he illustrates the continuity of the native tradition and how the language and cultural heritage binds communities together through the generations:

Chuaigh siad tharam aréir go suailceach, céad míle Rosannach ag cleachtadh na haiséirí. Bhí Cosán na mBeathach líonta leo, ag teacht ina scaiftí agus ina bpéirí, gan duine ar bith uaigneach nó duine ar bith corr ina measc. Tháinig Eoghainín Shéarlais le céasla, Micheál Rua le bata, Scia-thán Righin le corrán, Pádraig Mór le sac mine... Bhí siad uilig ag comhrá go pléisiúrtha agus ag déanamh grinn, agus tháinig cuideachta shuairc ina gcosamar. Chuala mé Tom Mór ag cur a challáin leis an ghaoth aniar; Micheál Charadáin ag dearbhadh gur lean an ghealach é; Máire Chonnachtach ag aibéil chainte leis na filí...

Níor luigh aois nó easláinte ar aon duine de shlua Rosann an tráth sin, ach an sinsear chomh héascaidh ar a choiscéim leis an duine óg. Ach chonaictheas dóibh uilig gur throm an codladh a bhí déanta acu agus gur chumhra an anál a tháinig anocht chucu as spéir na réalt...

Bhreachnaigh mé siar na glúnta iad... Mhorthaigh mé Tarlach Rua ag comhrá le Aodh Bán ar an oíche a bhí sé ag scoilteadh clogad i gClasaidh na gCnámh. Bhagair Maolmhuire ar Fheilimí Cham go ndíreochadh sé a mhúinéal leis an bhata bhuí dá dtéadh sé bealach na dTuath chun na haiséirí... Chuaigh mé siar aoiseanna. Chonaic mé Cróine Bheag ag teacht aniar ag Port an Aigin i gcurach, an chaoibhean bheag ag teacht go sámh chun na cuideachta. Bhí a héadan solasta i ndiaidh a comaoine a dhéanamh le Dia ar an oileán mhara...

Ach leis sin scairt an coileach... Chuaigh na fíreín soir Clochán an Dúin Bháin agus thug a n-aghaidh anonn ar bhóránacht an lae go ceolmhar.

Is íontach liom ansin go dtáinig lámh fhuar ar an mhaidin. D'éirigh an ceol caol, mar bheadh sé ag teacht as an tsaol eile. Bhí sé chomh huasal le héadan na marbh, ach bhí cumha mhór fhada na beatha ann. Chuala mé thiar thall ina dheireadh: “Beidh tú linn, a Dhálaigh, nuair a dhéanfaimid ar gcualt”. Mo sheanchumadóir, Aodh Phádraig Duibh, a bhí ag beachtú rann. (Ó Dónaill 1952: 138-140)

The idea expressed in that prose passage, despite all the circumstantial change, is not all that far removed from the idea expressed by Aogán Ó Raithile at the beginning of the eighteenth century:

Stadfadsa feasta – is gar dom éag gan mhoill
Ó treascradh dragain Leamhan, Léin is Laoi;
Rachad ’na bhfasc le searc na laoch don chill,
Na flatha fá raibh mo shean roimh éag do Chríost.
(Ó Tuama and Kinsella 1981: 166)

Seosamh Mac Grianna did translations of some of the Young Ireland poetry and Séamas Ó Grianna’s songs or poems are still very much alive in the Donegal Gaeltacht. His “Tráthnóna Beag Aréir” is still extremely popular in the Donegal Gaeltacht and among the northern Irish Language community.³

These Gaeltacht songs tend to be very local and to exhibit primarily local colour and relevance but whatever about their limitations they do exhibit a buoyancy and vibrancy of language, which by this time has to a great extent vanished. The tradition of the local poem celebrating the local hurling match, cockfight or hunt or local squabble – a tradition at one time very widespread – seems to me to be evaporating before the onward conquest of Country and Western. The more is the pity! Did Homer, after all, not grow out of a whole world of local poems and should we not consider, say, the influence of a Cavan or a Hurl on a young Heaney. All poetry, of course, comes out of some primarily local context, a local specific atmosphere and colour, be it Toner’s bog, or the roads around Iniskeen or “Dún Chaoin fé sholas an tráthnóna” or “Ceann Dubhrann na ndumhchann bán”.

Whatever about the “dúchas filíochta” which lay behind the Mac Grianna brothers and Niall Ó Dónaill, it was the Gaelic League founded in 1893 which ushered in the whole modern era of literature, created the opportunities for publishing and indeed laid out many of the themes and tone. The spirit of this new modern literature, patchy as it inevitably was in the early stages and to many somewhat naïve, is a spirit of celebration. In spite of everything – famine, marginalisation, and all those woes, real and imaginary, the historic Irish people had managed to survive with their own authentic culture intact, and most importantly its own unique and historic lan-

³ For this type of local poem see Ó Searcaigh 1976.

guage. The celebration of this mode was a matter of some pride and was engaged in with much energy and enthusiasm. And An tAthair Peadar Ó Laoghaire (1839-1920) – a much underestimated writer – insisted that the new literature should use as its raw material the ordinary everyday speech of Gaeltacht people.

This whole early period – this period of celebration of the Gaelic mode – is dominated to a great degree intellectually by Professor Daniel Corkery, nicknamed by Lorcán Ó Muireadhaigh (1925: 29) Professor CORKERRY. Corkery was an inspirational and highly gifted critic, but he seemed to view all literature as a vehicle of nationalism and seemed to misunderstand the real nature of culture which is an ever-evolving phenomenon, ever-renewing itself, and drawing to itself new ways and modes of thinking and of expression.

The most prolific poet of this early period is Douglas Hyde (1860-1949), the founder of the Gaelic League. Hyde to my mind is an enigma. He was opposed to all forms of violence and political involvement and at the same time I can, I believe, detect the roar of the Thompson machine gun behind his cerebral paper of the necessity for the de-anglicisation of Ireland (Hyde 1961). And yet he was out there in Gaelic-speaking Ireland, filling his notebooks with songs and stories, prayers and charms which he wrote down from native speakers of Irish. He copied into his notebooks such poems as *Bean an Fhir Rua*, *Caisleán Uí Néill* and *An Draighneán Donn*.

Atá bó agam ar shliabh, is fada mé 'na diaidh is do chaill mé mo chiall le
nódhchar
Dá seoladh soir is siar, is gach áit a ngabhann an ghrian, nó go bhfilleann sí
aniar tráthnóna.
Nuair 'fhéachaimse anúnn sa mbaile a bhfuil mo rún tuiteann ó mo shúil
ghlais deora
A Dhia mhóir na ngrás tabhair fuascailt ar mo chás is gur Bean Dubh a
d'fhág fá bhrón mé. ⁴ (Hyde 1893: 114)

To clarify what I am getting at here I ask myself – how could someone who recorded material as musical, as lyrical and as moving as *Bean Dhubh an Ghleanna* sit down at his desk and produce this sort of poem:

⁴ The original text in Hyde 1893: 114 has been slightly emended to comply with the modern standard of the language [Eds.].

Bhí mé tráth sona
's súgach leis sin,
'Nois táim go dona
Tuirseach is tinn;
'G cuimhneamh ar chailín
D'óiche 's de lá,
Caillte le cailín,
Gonta le grá.

...

Cailín mar ise
Níl insan saol,
Agus d'fhág sise
Mise gan chéill.

...

A Dhé na ngrása
Éist le m'impí,
Tabhair 'm mo bhás-sa,
Nó tabhair 'm í.

...

Féach mo chainte
Éist liom a rún,
Tá mé mar chaora
Caora gan uan! (de hÍde 1985: 270-2)

It is only fair to say that not all of Hyde's versification is as banal as that and one suspects (and hopes!) that he had a huge grin on his face when he finished those lines. He was a gifted translator and a highly effective populariser and propagandist, but the real imaginative gifts of this formative period of the new literature are to be found in the small handful of poems Pádraig Mac Piarais wrote (Ó Coighligh 1981). Mac Piarais, like Hyde, had learned his Irish, and had found his Gaeltacht in the west of Ireland. He had found moreover a vision of a new and authentic literature in prose and in verse which in many ways was to set the norm for modern poetry in Irish. He was at heart a Romantic, much taken with "the little rabbits in a field lit by a slanting sun" and with "children with bare feet upon the sands of some ebbing sea, or playing on the streets of little towns in Connacht". His romantic soul, or perhaps we should say his Victorian soul, turns back again and again to the images and sentiments which reflect the transitory nature of the human condition. His poem *Bean tSléibhe ag caoineadh a mic* was built

around a traditional keen he heard a woman in Bealtaine in Gort an Choirce make for her dead son but what I believe to be his finest poem *Cad tuige díbh dom chiapadh*, despite a certain vagueness, is carefully constructed and has a native and authentic ring about it and a powerful imagery at its core:

Níl sásamh i ndán dom' mhianaibh lem' ré,
 Óir ní sásamh an sásamh do mhianas inné,
 'S is cíocraí an chonairt den tsásamh do fuair –
 'S go síoraí ní chodlód go gcodlaíod san uaigh. (Ó Coighligh 1981: 43)

Mac Piarais also wrote a number of short poems or “ranns” as he called them. They remind one of the little poems one finds as glosses in the early medieval Irish manuscripts which scholars of the time were bringing to the light of day. Some of these little “ranns” are charmingly beautiful, such as the short poem he wrote in memory of his girlfriend who was drowned off the Great Blasket:

A chinn álainn na mná do ghrádhás,
 I lár na hoíche cuimhním ort:
 Ach filleann léargas le gile gréine–
 Mo léan an chnumh chaol dod' chnaí anocht!

A ghlóir ionmhain dob íseal aoibhinn,
 An fíor go gcualas trém shuanaibh thú?
 Nó an fíor an t-eolas atá dom' bheoghoin?
 Mo bhrón, sa tuamba níl fuaim ná guth! (Ó Coighligh 1981: 44)

Mac Piarais was executed for his part in the 1916 Rising. His contemporaries and indeed his immediate successors by and large lacked his imaginative gifts if not the linguistic skills. At any rate the War of Independence was soon raging, and following that came the Civil War where much energy was expended at the expense among other things of real literary development and debate. Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (1905: 54), a master of the traditional metres of Irish, published a number of volumes of verse but they are now somewhat dated and to a great extent moribund:

I mBaile Bhúirme do gheobhtha an fhéileacht,
 Is fíor-chroidhe Gaedhealach is gnáthach romhat
 Mná tighe múinte agus leanbaí léigheanta
 Mar ba dhual do Ghaeidhil bheith de réir sean-nós.

Liam Gógán, a collaborator with Ó Duinnín in his work on the Irish-English Dictionary (1927), published several volumes of poetry, and some of the poems such as *Na Coisithe* have a real vitality and competence about them:

I gcoim na hoíche cloisim iad
Na coisithe ar siúl
Airím iad, ní fheicim iad,
Ní fios cá bhfuil a gcuaird.

I gcoim na hoíche dorcha,
Is an uile ní i suan,
Airím teacht na gcoisithe
I lár an bhaile chiúin.

An daoine iad nach sona dóibh,
Nó anamna i bponc
Nach aoibhinn dóibh an t-ionad san
I gcónaíd go buan?

I gcoim na hoíche dorcha,
Is cách ina chodladh suain,
Isea chloisim-se na coisithe
Ag teacht is ag imeacht uaim. (Ó Dúill 2000: 25)

The simplicity and directness of language, the effective use of repetition create a texture of mystery which marks the poem out.

Donnchadh Ó Liatháin (1869-1950) from this era also, it seems to me, had real talent. His little collection of poems not published until 1955 under the unfortunate title *Rosc Catha na Gaedhilge* reflect the principal theme of this early era – the celebration of Gaelic Ireland with its traditional language and values, although these values were hardly ever explored. In their favour, however, it has to be remembered that as poets these writers were closer to the living tradition of language and poetry in the Gaeltacht areas. And we must remember also that the impetus to create the new state had come in no small measure from the Irish Language and Irish Ireland movements and that there was a high degree of confidence around that a new Gaelic-speaking state would inevitably evolve. In a sense the language movement had allowed itself become rural and parochial, self-serving and inward looking, shunning real emotional and intellectual concerns. Breandan

Behan in a ruthless foray damned this whole world and expresses the frustrations and disenchantment which many within the language movement no doubt felt:

Guí an Rannaire.

Dá bhfeicfinn fear fásta as Gaoluinn líofa
 Ag cur síos go sibhialta ar nithe is ar dhaoine,
 Meoin is tuairimí, i ráite an lae seo
 Soibealta, sómhar, soicheallach, saolta,
 Bheinn an-tsásta a theagasc d’éisteacht
 File fiáin, fearúil, feadánach,
 Bard beo bíogach bríomhar bastallach
 Piantach paiseanta peannphágánach.

Ariú, mo chreach, cad é an fhirinne?
 Statseirbhísigh ó Chorca Dhuibhne,
 Bobarúin eile ó chladaigh Thír Chonaill,
 Is ó phortaigh na Gaillimhe, mar bharr ar an ndonas,
 Gaeil Bhleá Cliath fê órchnap Fáinne,
 Pioneers páistiúla, pollta, piteánta,
 Maighdeana malla, maola, marbhánta
 Gach duine acu críochnaithe, cúramach, cráifeach.

Dá dtiocfadh file ag séideadh gríosai
 Raghainn abhaile, mo ghnó agam críochnaíth. (Ó Tuama 1950: 107)

Behan, of course, was well aware that there was a new generation of poets moving into place. Séamas Ó Grianna too had learned from bitter experience that the ideal of a Gaelic Ireland was largely a pipe dream. He recounts in his autobiography *Saol Corrach* how he was invited to address the Leitrim Men’s Association in Dublin. He worked hard on his topic – James Clarence Mangan – and was certain that his talk would persuade his listeners to the values of the Ireland that once was in it – “An Éire a bhí anallód ann” – and to return to the language of their ancestors. There was a popular band on the stage, playing popular music. Ó Grianna with that wicked and withering wit, of which he was a master, gives the text of the song they were singing:

They call him Cuban Pete
 He’s the king of the rhumba beat;
 When he sits on the hill
 He sings “chick, chic, chic, chicubum chic”.

They make way for Ó Grianna on the stage and he delivers his lecture. When he finished he was certain that he had moved his listeners, and that someone in the hall would rise up and sing Róisín Dubh! The Master of Ceremony at the function came out on the stage, thanked Ó Grianna for his talk and added “By special request, Mr X will give us Cuban Pete and the Rhumba Beat” (Ó Grianna 1945: 224-233).

The emerging reality, in the later thirties and early forties, was that a new generation was coming into being, a generation of philosophic reflection. New ideas and new methodologies were shortly to appear. Government would not and indeed could not, revive Irish. The often strident and fundamental nationalism was destined to perish with Hitler and Mussolini. This new reflective generation created *Comhar*, a journal which had a profound influence in the developing literary scene.

Three poets – Seán Ó Ríordáin, Máire Mhac an tSaoi, and Máirtín Ó Direáin – dominate in this era although it seems to me that Eoghan Ó Tuairisc perhaps deserves to be included with these three if only for his splendid *Aifreann na Marbh* (Ó Tuairisc 1964: 26-46).

Ó Direáin, recognising the artistic urge within himself, heard Tadhg Ó Donchadha lecture on poetry in Galway, and began to write simple and haunting poems based on his memories of his native island Inis Mór. His rhythms or metrics are grounded on the living speech of his own people on the island, and it is fair to say that when many people today see the Aran islands they see them through the eyes of Ó Direáin, and the images he created in his poems. These simple images he created from his personal memory of island life stay with us and have become to a great extent universal.

Cuimhní Cinn

Maireann a gcuimhne fós im aigne:
Báiníní bána is léinte geala,
Léinte gorma is veistí glasa,
Treabhsair is dráir de bhréidín baile
Bhíodh ar fheara cásacha aosta
Ag triall ar an Aifreann maidin Domhnaigh
De shiúl cos ar aistear fhada,
A mhúsclaíodh im óige smaointe ionamsa
Ar ghlaire, ar úire, is fós ar bheannaíocht.

Maireann a gcuimhne fós im aigne:
 Cótaí cóirithe fada dearga,
 Cótaí gorma le plúirín daite,
 Seálta troma aníos as Gaillimh,
 Bhíodh ar mhná piochta néata
 Ag triall ar an Aifreann mar an gcéanna;
 Is cé go bhfuilid ag imeacht as faisean
 Maireann a gcuimhne fós im aigne,
 Is mairfidh cinnte go dté mé i dtalamh. (Ó Tuama 1950: 51)

Ó Direáin's language is exquisitely beautiful and he can create an image drawn from the immediate island world around him with consummate ease. His poem *Olc Liom* where he compares and contrasts his own creative work as a poet with that of his people's almost impossible struggle against the elements is technically perfect and a profound endorsement of the life of ordinary islanders:

A thuistí tháinig romham sall
 Go dtí Domhnall an tSrutháin
 Olc liom mar tháscaim díbhse
 Nár chuireas is nár bhaineas
 Is nár thógas fós fál,
 Nach ndearna mac chun fónaimh
 Dár bpór, dár nós, dár ndúchas.

Táir agam gach giota páir
 Mar luach, mar dhuais nuair fháim,
 Ar shaothar suarach gan cháil,
 Seach bhúr ngleic le toinn aird,
 Le cré in éadan carraige,
 Ag rámhadh in aghaidh bhúr ndáin
 Ar ucht ard na farraige. (Ó Direáin 1957: 59)

Máire Mhac an tSaoi came from an entirely different background. She had, unlike Ó Direáin and Ó Ríordáin, access to University education, but like Ó Ríordáin she made Dún Chaoin in the Kerry Gaeltacht her spiritual home. She returned to the traditional metres, and explored contemporary and universal themes in some splendid poems. Her first collection of poems *Margadh na*

Saoire, published in 1956, established her reputation as an important and talented poet with rare lyrical gifts and I believe that poems such as *Ceathrúintí Mháire Ní Ógáin*, *An Seanghalar*, *Freagra*, *Athdheirdre*, and *Jack*, will survive for a very long time. Seventeen years passed between her first and second volume, which to me at any rate does not seem to have maintained the excellence of the first volume.

I have already spoken of Ó Ríordáin. It is my view that Seán Ó Ríordáin is the most accomplished poet of the modern era. He is one of the very few poets to have had the mind of a philosopher and postulates in his poems a consciousness which is ceaselessly self-examining. His “teampall”, as he might have called it, survives on the tensions which were everywhere in life, between good and evil, between Irish and English, between purity and impurity, between darkness and light, and there are endless storms rattling at his windows. Poems from his second collection *Brosna* such as *Muscail do mhisneach*, and *Fiabhras*, show graphically his ability to seek answers to the most fundamental questions in life, and in *Fiabhras* in particular where he draws his spare and precise imagery from what he called in an earlier poem “ar chláirseach shean na ngnáthrud”, he creates a mature and moving reflection on the threatening fragility of the human condition:

Tá sléibhte na leapan mós ard,
Tá breoiteacht 'na brothall 'na lár
Is fada an t-aistear urlár,
Is na mílte is na mílte i gcéin
Tá suí agus seasamh sa saol.

Atáimid i gceantar bráillín
Ar éigean más cuimhin linn cathaoir,
Ach bhí tráth sar ba mhachaire sinn,
In aimsir choisíochta fadó,
Go mbimis chomh hard le fuinneog.

Tá pictúir ar an bhfalla ag at,
Tá an fráma imithe ina lacht,
Ceal creidimh ní féidir é bhac
Tá nithe ag druidim fém dhéin
Is braithim ag titim an saol.

Tá ceantar ag taisteal ón spéir
 Tá comharsanacht suite ar mo mhéar,
 Dob fhuirist dom breith ar shéipéal,
 Tá ba ar an mbóthar ó thuaidh,
 Is níl ba na síoraíochta chomh ciúin. (Ó Ríordáin 1964: 20)

When in a bout of fever the body begins to become fluid and disintegrates, and following that the mind disintegrates, we begin to lose our grasp on the only world we know, and are confronted by the frightening prospect of eternity about which we know nothing. Our sensory world forsakes us, and then our reason abandons us and we are left with nothing that is certain except the terror of it all. The poem never loses focus and is honed throughout; and a logical thread, moving from idea and emotion with an imagery that is culled from the basic everyday world of the hospital ward is maintained throughout. The poem is in the final analysis a powerfully emotional and intellectual confrontation with an important fact of human existence. Ó Ríordáin all his life was plagued by wretched health, and is forever conscious of the slight hold we have as human beings on human life.

A very brief word then about the contemporary scene.⁵ As with *Comhar* in the late 1930s and early 1940s, it was the new poetry magazine *Inti* founded by Micheál Davitt which provided the platform for emerging poets. Generally speaking if one were to judge on the basis of the volume of collections published, then one might believe that modern poetry was in a very healthy state. It is in my view all too close to us to make any real or substantial judgements in this area. I have to say however that I find myself uncomfortable with the seemingly endless poetry readings with the poet assuming something of the role as a pop star, and poems written in Irish being almost simultaneously translated into English. It is impossible, I believe, to predict significance in relation to the future, or indeed to assess the current scene objectively.

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, often acclaimed as the most gifted poet of our own particular time – a view with which I concur – has a little poem entitled *Ceist na Teangan* or the question of the language:

⁵ A useful guide to the contemporary poetry scene is provided by *An Nuafhilíocht: Léachtaí Cholm Cille XVII*, and Ó Dúill 2000 gives a valuable introduction to this period. Students of this area should also consult Titley 1986, and Kiberd 1995.

Cuirim mo dhóchas ar snámh
i mbáidín na teangan
faoi mar a leagfá naíonán
i gliabhán
a bheadh fite fuaite
de dhuilleoga feileastraim
is bitíúman agus pic
bheith cuimilte lena thóin

ansan é a leagadh síos
i measc na ngiolcach
is coigeal na mbán sí
le taobh na habhann,
féachaint n'fheadaraís
cá dtabhardfaidh an sruth é,
féachaint, dála Mhaoise,
an bhfóirfidh iníon Fhorainn? (Ní Dhomhnaill 1993: 9)

The truth is that the whole question of the language and its survival is as precious and precarious as the poet indicates, and one has to hold on to hope. So too for the survival and future enrichment of poetry in that language.

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RONALD BLACK

Twentieth Century Scottish Gaelic Poetry

The poetry of Donald MacDonald, *Dòmhnall Aonghais Bhàin* (1926–2000) of South Lochboisdale in South Uist has a fascinatingly metamorphic quality. Other poets may visualise nature as woman, but Dòmhnall visualises woman as nature. Of Angela Binnie, South Lochboisdale, he says:

*Mar dhreach an lon duibh am measg nan cléiteag
Tha d'fhalt cho réidh ann an cumadh òrdail;
Tha blàths an t-samhraidh a'snàmh 'nad ghruaidhean,
Tha mhil ga suaineadh an snuadh do bhòidhche.*

Like the blackbird's hue among the snowflakes
Is your hair that flows in ordered arrangement;
The warmth of summer swims in your cheeks
And honey's mixed into the hue of your loveliness (MacDonald 2000: 86).

Addressing his fellow-poet Mary Maclean in Grimsay,¹ he takes the honey idea a stage further:

*Mar ghathan gréin 'san àird' an-iar
Tha ìomhaigh chiùin na h-òigh',
Tha blàths is càirdeas, agus rian,
Tha Crìostalachd 'nad fheòil;
Tha àilleachd a'snàmh 'nad ghnùis —
Gach seòrsa fùir as bòidhch',
Tha ròsan 's ùbhlán 'na do ghruaidh
'S céir-bheach mun cuairt do bheòil.*

¹ For Mary Maclean (1921–) see Black 1999: 438–45, 783–84.

Like rays of sunshine out in the west
Is the girl's serene appearance,
There's warmth and friendship, and self-possession,
There's Christianity in your flesh;
There's beauty swimming in your face —
Each kind of flower that's loveliest,
Roses and apples are in your cheek
And beeswax around your mouth. (MacDonald 2000: 28–29)

Céir-bheach mun cuairt do bheòil? A thousand years of tradition lurk behind that one. Maybe it is no coincidence that Dòmhnall said it to a poet, for a less knowledgeable lady might have misunderstood him. Dòmhnall worked with a courtly tradition of symbols, many of his own devising. *Tha blas na meala air do phògan*, a songmaker might have said, “The taste of honey's in your kisses”, or, if the girl were doing the singing, *Fear na gruaige mar an t-òr / 'S na pòig' air bhlas meala*, “The man whose hair is like gold / And whose kiss tastes of honey”.

But kissing was not Dòmhnall's business, for the girls and women he praised were not to be linked to himself, but to the beauty and bounty and colour and promise of nature. If we search the fifty or more poems that he made in praise of girls and women for clues as to how he knew them, we find relatives and neighbours, nurses and home helps, but also people whom he spotted at Mass, or whose picture he saw in a newspaper, including even Camilla Parker Bowles.

So Dòmhnall never kissed Mary Maclean, but beeswax is first cousin to honey, and by speaking of it he says in one word that her lips are sweet (though not necessarily available for tasting) and smooth – and of the highest quality.

It occurred to me to ask an art historian if there is a painter who does this.² She mentioned Dali for surrealism, then Delacroix for romanticism, but we settled for Edward Hornel, a homelier artist who had set off, as had Dòmhnall Aonghais Bhàin, on the road that leads from realism to symbolism. In *The Brook* of 1891 it is hard to say whether the subject is the brook or the three (or is it four?) young girls who, sharing the colours of the landscape, look resolutely towards an apple-tree and away from the artist.

² My daughter Catriona Black, Press and Information Manager, The National Galleries of Scotland, whom I would like to thank for her enthusiastic help and advice throughout the preparation of this paper. I would also like to thank Gillian Johnstone, Mrs Elizabeth Ferro and John Higgitt, all of the Department of Fine Art, University of Edinburgh.



Hornel, Edward Atkinson. *The Brook*, 1891. GLAHA 43887.
Photo © Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.
(See the plate for the colour version of the image.)

The same game of “visual hide-and-seek” is going on in *Blowing Dandelions*, painted in the same year by Hornel’s friend George Henry.³ This enlightening relationship between poetry and fine art is the method which I propose to use now to present my view of twentieth century Gaelic verse. Of course such a relationship can exist potentially on different levels. Here are the most important of them.

- A1 *photographic studies* of the poets themselves
- A2 *studies in other media* of the poets themselves

³ Macmillan 1990: 277. As Macmillan (1990: 283) points out, the absorption of figures into the landscape owes something to the Kintyre painter William Mactaggart, who was (at least in childhood) a native Gaelic speaker. Yet another good example of the motif is Hornel’s *In the Orchard '94*, for which see Harris & Halsby 1998: 100: in it, five young women and girls may be picked out amidst the foliage of a birch-tree, only one of them looking at the artist. Murdo Macdonald (2000: 137) points out that compositionally these works by Hornel and Henry owe much to Japanese prints. Hornel and Henry visited Japan in 1893.

- B1 works of art which *inspire* specific poems
- B2 works of art which *illustrate* specific poems
- C1 existing works of art evoked in the reader's/hearer's mind by *a specific image or poem*
- C2 existing works of art evoked in the reader's/hearer's mind by *the totality of a poet's work*

A1

Some anthologies such as Christopher Whyte's *An Aghaidh na Sìorraidheachd* provide a photograph of each poet. Recently we have also had two very different ethnographic studies of Highland poetry, Tom McKean's *Hebridean Song-Maker* and Timothy Neat's *The Voice of the Bard*, which have a strong photographic element. We have also had an ethnographic study of an individual poet, *Òrain Dhòmhnail Ailein*, where the photographic content was minimal, and my more straightforward edition of *Dòmhnall Aonghais Bhàin, Smuaintean fo Èiseabhal*, where it was quite substantial.⁴

A2

In 1979–80 Alexander Moffat made paintings and sketches of seven Scottish poets including Iain Crichton Smith and Sorley MacLean. These appeared in a splendid book called *Seven Poets* which included poems, photographs, transcripts of conversations and introductions to the poets as well as the paintings and sketches, and also in an exhibition which travelled to galleries all over the UK during 1981. I suspect the composition of the MacLean portrait was inspired by a picture by William Crossbie which I will come to under B2.

B1

The inspiration of poems by works of art can be explicit or implicit. On the explicit side, Catriona Montgomery (1947–) has a neat little poem “An Ceusadh”: *Air dealbh fhaicinn de “An Ceusadh” le Micheal Angelo: do mo mhàthair fhèin* (“On seeing ‘The Crucifixion’ by Michelangelo: for my own mother”). The translation is the author's own. I feel sure she was thinking of the well-known Michelangelo's sculpture *Pietà*.

⁴ *Wish I Was Here*, a multicultural anthology, was published at the Edinburgh Book Festival on 25 September 2000. It included splendid photographs of eleven Gaelic poets including again Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh, who is an art teacher by profession, Siùsaidh NicNèill, and Mac Mhurchaidh a Stal (Murdo MacDonald). These photographs and poems were mounted as an exhibition which opened under the same title in Edinburgh on 13 September 2000 and then went on tour in Scotland, England and Wales.

*Thusa 'n-sin a' deuradh na fala,
mis' an-seo a' sileadh nan deur. . .
a' mhàthair a' caoidh a cuid cloinne
a tha fhathast 'na cuideachd 's a dh'fhalbh.*

You there dripping the blood,
I here pouring tears. . .
the mother lamenting her children
who are both in her company and gone (Black 1999: 624–25).

Catriona's eldest brother Murdo had suffered brain damage as a result of a motor accident in 1962 and was nursed at home first by her mother and then by her younger sister Morag, who is also a poet and a very fine one. In the end, in 1989, both mother and son had to go into a nursing home. Then in 1998, four years after this poem was published, Morag's son Roy was killed in a road accident. Catriona contacted me specially to ask me to mention this in *An Tuil*, which I did (Black 1999: 810).

Also explicit are the numerous references to art and artists in the work of Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh and of Christopher Whyte, who lived for many years in Italy. In his long poem "A' Mheanbhchuileag" MacFhionnlaigh (1948–) says for instance:

*Thuir Giacometti uair
nan robh teine ann an ealainnann
gun teasraigeadh esan cat roimh Rembrandt.
Duine glic.
Cha sgrìach peantadh sna lasraichean.*

Giacometti said once
that if there were a fire in an art gallery
he would rescue a cat before a Rembrandt.
A wise man.
A painting will not scream in the flames (Black 1999: 636–37).

And Whyte (1952–) has a poem "Fontana Maggiore" which describes the fountain in the main square of Perugia, built by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano in 1272–73. It begins:

An dèidh dha obair a chrìochnachadh, tha Giovanni Pisano, a dhealbh am fuaran agus a shnaidh na clàir, a' cur a sgeilb a thaobh, agus ag ràdh:

*Tha mi air na h-uisgeachan
a chuibhreachadh an cearcall coilionta
de mhàrmhor, air dath an t-sneachda is nan ròs,
gu bhith 'na gheata-latha a chuireas srian
is riaghladh air na steallaidhean bho doimhne,
air sìor-leum ceannairceach nan tobar dorch.*

His work finished, Giovanni Pisano, who designed the fountain and carved the panels, puts his chisel down, and says:

I have bound the waters,
in a perfect circle of marble,
the colour of snow and roses,
a day gate to bridle and control
the upsurge from the deep,
the eternal, anarchic leaping of dark wells (Black 1999: 662–63).

Still more interesting is the *implicit* use of works of art by poets. For example I think there need be very little doubt that Andy Warhol's *Marilyn x 100* of 1962 (see Hicks n.d.: 71–73) is the inspiration behind Aonghas MacNeacail's poem "Marilyn Monroe", though his repetition of *òr, òr, òr* reminds me of another classic piece of pop art as well, Tom Wesselmann's *Great American Nude No. 57* of 1964.

*Òr 'na do ghruaig
òr ann an inean do chas
òr ann an ruisg chadalach do shùilean beò
òr 'na do ghruaidhean, 'nam fathann athaidh
òr ruadh do bhilean
òr sa ghualainn mhìn àrd a' fasgadh do smig
òr anns a' bhroilleach ghealltanach
paisgte 'na bhad
òr 'na do chneas seang, air miadan do chruachan
ann an lùb nan sliasaid is
air glùin nan dìomhaireachd*

rinn d' adhbrainn òrach
dannsa caol
do gach sùil a shealladh
airgead-beò 'na do chuislean
airgead-beò 'na do chridhe
airgead-beò gu na h-iomail
dhe d' anam
agus d' osnadh, do ghàire
do ghuth-seinn, do ghuth-labhairt
mar bhraoin de dh'òr
agus do gach fear a chum
air lios leaghteach nan dealbh thu
òr, o
bhàrr calgach do chlaiginn gu
buinn rùisgte do chas
òr, òr, òr,
beò no marbh
their cuid nach robh thu cho cùbhraidh
's iad a' deothal an t-sùigh
á sporan suilt òrach do bhèin
òr, òr, òr

Gold in your hair
 gold in the nails on your feet
 gold in the sleepy lids of your living eyes
 gold in your cheeks, in their rumour of a blush
 red gold of your lips
 gold in the raised shoulder that shelters your chin
 gold in your breasts, their promise
 enfolded in wisps
 gold in your slender waist, on the meadows of your hip
 in the curve of thigh and
 on your knee of mysteries
 your golden ankle gave
 slim dances
 that any eye could see
 quicksilver in your veins
 quicksilver in your heart

quicksilver to every corner
of your soul
and your sighs, your laugh
your singing, your speech
like a mist of gold
and to every man who kept you
on the screen's dissolving field
gold, from
the maned top of your skull
to the bare soles of your feet
gold, gold, gold,
alive or dead
some say you weren't so fragrant
as they suck the substance
from the fertile purse of your skin
gold, gold, gold (Black 1999: 576–77).

Warhol, Andy. *Gold Marilyn Monroe*, 1962.
New York, Museum of
Modern Art (MoMA).
Synthetic polymer paint,
silkscreened, and oil on
canvas, 6'11 1/4" x 57"
(211.4 x 144.7 cm). Gift
of Philip Johnson.
316.1962.

Digital Image © 2005,
2007, The Museum of
Modern Art, New York /
Scala, Florence. © Photo
Scala, Florence.

(See the plate for the
colour version of the
image.)



B2

MacNeacail himself (1942-) is in the lead here, having published two separate long poems, “An Cathadh Mór” (“The Great Snowbattle”) and “Sireadh Bradain Sicir” (“Seeking Wise Salmon”), both in collaboration with the artist Simon Fraser. MacFhionnlaigh is perhaps unique in having illustrated his own poem “A’ Mheanbhuileag”. These illustrations are interesting I think for their exploration of spatial dimensions, and this is, too, the main theme of the poem.

*Tha mi beag, agus is toil leam na rudan beaga:
an sìol adhlaict’ a sgoltas an cabhsair;
an t-sileag uisg’ a chaitheas a’ chlach;
a’ ghainmhein mhìn a thiodhlaiceas am biorramaid;
a’ chiad ian a chuireas fàilt’ air a’ ghréin;
an dùthaich bheag, an cànan beag;
facal na firinn as truime na ’n Domhan.*

I am small, and I like the small things:
the buried seed that splits the sidewalk;
the water-drop that devours the stone;
the grain of sand that inters the pyramid;
the first bird that welcomes the sun;
the little country, the little language;
the word of truth that is heavier than the World (Black 1999: 638–39).

But I am sure that most of us when we think of the illustration of Gaelic poetry would recall the surrealist pictures by William Crosbie in Sorley MacLean’s *Dàin do Eimhir* of 1942. Crosbie, who died last year aged 84, is described by Murdo Macdonald (2000: 185–86) as follows: “As early as 1934, Crosbie had shown precocious talent in the remarkable *Heart Knife*, employing flat, curved forms which . . . prefigure the imagery of the English Constructivist-Surrealist John Tunnard. Crosbie went on to study with Léger in Paris and was influenced by him in the formal language he developed for mural commissions from the 1940s onwards . . . Crosbie also made a major contribution as an illustrator for [the publisher William] MacLellan, not least to Sorley Maclean’s important early collection of poems *Dàin do Eimhir / Songs to Eimhir*.”



Crosbie, William. *Heart Knife*, 1934. GMA 1714.
© Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

In *Scottish Painting* William Hardie (1994: 156) is equally enthusiastic about *Heart Knife*, describing it as “a brilliant construction of geometrical abstract forms inscribed with set square and dividers on the plane surface and yet occupying three-dimensional space, demonstrated by the presence of areas of light and shadow and by the spring-like line with a ball at its top which is in arrested motion”. The “spring-like line with a ball at its top” reappears in *Dàin do Eimhir*. More recently I understand the Lewis artist Will Maclean has made a series of drawings inspired by Sorley’s poetry,⁵ and now still more fresh work is under way in a project called “Leabhar Mór na Gàidhlig”, which I understand involves 15 poets each from Scotland and Ireland with a team of about 50 visual artists and calligraphers realising their work⁶.

⁵ “*Hallaig, Death Fish Study I* (1984, BM) . . . is one of a series of drawings inspired by Sorley MacLean’s poetry, and recalling Cowie in execution, in which Maclean associates the militarisation of the west of Scotland and its nuclear submarine bases with the earlier tragic history of the Highlands and the new threat of ecological disaster.” (Macmillan 1990: 396–97). In *Scottish Art* Murdo Macdonald (2000: 199–200) says that “Will Maclean in constructions and prints from the 1970s onwards reflects on loss of maritime skills and the Gaelic language”.

⁶ The project was launched in Edinburgh on 25 September 2000. Its results were subsequently published in 2001 (see “Afterword”).

There are, I think, some important differences between my categories. The poet may be inspired by any work of art of any period. Indeed in this context I have mentioned artists from Pisano in the 13th century to Warhol in the 20th. By contrast an illustrator, whether it be Crosbie, Fraser, MacFhionnlaigh or anyone else, will wish to visualise the verse in some contemporary style which mutually enriches both art and poetry. But when we come, as I do now, to my category C, the field is open again. The verse may be twentieth-century, but the image which it evokes in the mind, or which the individual can seek out to help him explore it, may be from any place or period at all. In fact the more remote the picture from the poetry in time or place, the better the argument can be made for the universality of the poetry.

C1

Let me take a case in point. This will be my example of C1, “existing works of art evoked in the reader’s/hearer’s mind by a *specific image or poem*”. Dòmhnall Aonghais Bhàin’s “Mo Reul Iùil” is in my opinion one of the finest Gaelic lovesongs of the twentieth century, and in it he says something which to me is best realised by Rubens’ *Landscape with Rainbow* of c. 1635.

*Gur eireachdail’ air ùrlar thu
Na gàrradh-fhlùr fo bhlàth,
Cho dreachmhor ris an ùrchoill’
Fo ungadh drùchd bho ’n àird;
Mar bhogha-frois ’san iarmailt
Le dathan ciatach àigh
'S gach ceann dheth ann am fion-lios
Gu riarachadh ar càil.*

You’re better poised on a dance-floor
Than a flower-garden in bloom,
As fine in form as young forest
Anointed by heaven’s dew;
Like a rainbow in the sky
With pretty colours from providence
And each end of it in vineyards
To gratify our tastes (MacDonald 2000: 56–57).

C2

What I want to do is simply to present you with an image which sums up what to me is most memorable about each of some leading twentieth-century Scottish Gaelic poets. In many cases this image will be linked to a poem or part of a poem which I regard as central to his work. First, another Donald MacDonald, Dòmhnall Ruadh Chorùna (1887–1967). He was our outstanding poet of the First World War and we can make a major statement about war by means of contrasting images. “Òran Arras” as we see Highland soldiers marching to the trenches. The war marked the real beginning of the 20th century in Gaelic society; the final penetration of the English world to the Gaelic heartland, and the English refrain works here like the tuck of an alien drum.

'Illean, march at ease!
Rìgh na Sìth bhith mar ruin
A' dol chun na strì
'S chun na cill aig Arras;
'Illean, march at ease!

Tha 'nochd, oidhche Luain,
Teannadh suas ri faire,
A' dol chun na h-uaign
Far nach fhuasg'lear barrall;
'Illean, march at ease!

Tillidh cuid dhinn slàn,
Cuid fo chràdh lann fala,
'S, mar a tha e 'n dàn,
Roinn le bàs a dh'fhanas;
'Illean, march at ease!

Gus ar tìr a dhìon,
Eadar liath is leanabh,
Mar dhaoìn 'às an rian
Nì sinn 'n sgian a tharraing;
'Illean, march at ease!

*'S lionmhor fear is té
Tha 'n tìr nan geug 'nan caithris
Feitheamh ris an sgeul
Bhios aig a' chléir ri aithris;
'Illean, march at ease!*

*Gura lionmhor sùil
Shileas dlùth 's nach caidil
Nuair thig fios on Chrùn
Nach bi dùil ri 'm balaich;
'Illean, march at ease!*

Lads, *march at ease!*
The King of Peace be with us
Going to the strife
And to the tomb at Arras;
Lads, *march at ease!*

Tonight, Monday night,
Moving up to guard,
Going to the grave
Where no bootlace is untied;
Lads, *march at ease!*

Some of us will return unscathed,
Some in agony of bloody blade,
And, according to our fate,
Some in company of death will stay;
Lads, *march at ease!*

To defend our land,
From grey hairs to child,
Like men gone mad
We will draw the knife;
Lads, *march at ease!*

Many men and women
 Lie awake in heroes' land
 Waiting for the news
 That the clerk has to tell;
 Lads, *march at ease!*

Many an eye will weep
 Profusely without sleep
 When word comes from the Crown
 That their lads won't be expected;
 Lads, *march at ease!* (Black 1999: 122–23)

Dòmhnall Ruadh Chorùna is so named because his house in North Uist was built by his great-grandfather who fought at La Coruña in 1809, and in fact as one of his editors has pointed out, his background thus contained a certain glorification of war which was to expire forever in the mud of France. So it is a coincidence, but a satisfying one, that I felt driven to Goya to portray the image that balances this one out. In “Tha Mi Duilich, Cianail, Duilich” Dòmhnall Ruadh says:

*Chì mi brògan agus aodach,
 Chì mi aodainn agus làmhan
 Nochdte an talamh na Frainge
 Far 'n do chaill mi mo chuid bhràithrean.*

I see boots, I see clothes,
 I see faces and hands
 Showing in the soil of France
 Where I lost my brothers (Black 1999: 136–37).

The picture in question is *Saturn Devouring one of his Children* of 1820–23. I will never forget the summer of 1968 when I saw it in the Prado along with the first exhibition that Franco had ever permitted of Goya's gruesome war sketches, full of severed limbs and random body parts. In those days you stepped into the Prado out of bustling streets which were a startling mix of bourgeois prosperity and one-legged and one-armed veterans of the Civil War, many of them still in their forties.

This brings me to Sorley MacLean (1911–96). MacLean shows over and over in that astonishing flood of poetry that poured out of him in the thirties how he

was torn between love and duty, duty above all to the class struggle which was being fought out in Spain. But duty isn't a fashionable or even comprehensible emotion nowadays, and I think the greatest universal in MacLean's verse is the depiction of that extraordinary psychosis which is called being in love. His constant symbol for this, in poem after poem, is the face, and my choice to illustrate it is Gino Severini's *The Blue Dancer* of 1912.

*Tha aodann ga mo thathaich,
Ga mo leantainn dh'oidhche 's latha:
Tha aodann buadh-mhor nìghne
'S e sìor agairt.*

*Tha e labhairt ri mo chridhe
Nach fhaodar sgaradh a shireadh
Eadar miann agus susbaint
A' chuspair dho-rìghinn. . .*

A face haunts me,
Following me day and night:
The triumphant face of a girl
Is pleading all the time.

It is saying to my heart
That a division may not be sought
Between desire and the substance
Of its unattainable object. . .

I will omit twenty-six quatrains of agonising and come to the conclusion, which shows that the year is 1940 and that Hitler has attacked Russia.

*Ma tha Arm Dearg a' chinne
An gleachd bàis ri taobh an Dnieper;
Chan e euchd a ghaisge
As fhaisg 'air mo chridhe,*

*Ach aodann a tha gam thathaich,
Ga mo leantainn dh'oidhche 's latha,
Aodann buadh-mhor nìghne
'S e sìor labhairt.*

Though the Red Army of humanity
Is in the death-struggle beside the Dnieper,
It is not the deed of its heroism
That is nearest my heart,

But a face that is haunting me,
Following me day and night,
The triumphant face of a girl
That is always speaking (MacLean 1989: 158–65).

One of my most abiding memories out of twenty years of university teaching is of an Honours student who was given the choice of selecting any poem by Sorley MacLean to present in class. She picked one of his very last poems, “A’ Ghort Mhór” (“The Great Famine”). When I asked her why, she said: “I like it because it is relevant to today, rather than all that stuff about love.” This gave me much food for thought concerning the electronic age. Is a disaster in Ethiopia experienced vicariously on TV more immediate to the young than their own emotions? Or, conversely, in an age which doesn’t value poetry, is poetry considered irrelevant to the emotions?

George Campbell Hay (1915–84) wrote verse in approximately equal proportions on two subjects: on the one hand the landscape and seascape of his native Kintyre, on the other hand the landscape and people of Algeria and Tunisia. To me the central truth here is anthropological. Hay’s Kintyre landscapes are empty, just as Donnchadh Ban Macintyre’s late-eighteenth-century landscape in “Moladh Beinn Dóbhraín” is empty, because after 1745 the heroic tradition of the Gael (the tradition represented by John Michael Wright’s portrait of Lord Mungo Murray *c.* 1680) had gone, indeed with clearances and the loss of the Gaelic language the Gael himself had gone. In mid-twentieth-century Algeria Hay found a people who were just as oppressed as the Highland people had ever been but whose language and traditions had survived intact. These he imbibed voraciously. The traditions and the poems are full of exciting colour and detail so I think the perfect companion to them is the pictures made by Delacroix in Morocco and Algeria in the 1830s. From Lord Mungo we go to *The Kaïd* of 1837, then to the painter’s Moroccan sketchbooks of 1832, and finally to the *Seated Arab* of 1832, whom I see as Hay’s favourite tradition-bearer, Atman. The words with greatest resonance here are: *Is aithne dhomh thu, Atmain* “I know you, Atman.”

Rinn thu goid 'nad éiginn,
 Dh'fhiach thu breug gu faotainn ás;
 Dhìt iad, chàin is chuip iad thu,
 Is chuir iad thu fo ghlais.

Bha 'm beul onarach a dhìt thu
 Pladach bideach sa ghnùis ghlais;
 Bha Ceartas sreamshùileach o sgrùdadh
 A leabhar cunntais, 's iad sìor phailt.

Ach am beul a dhearbhadh breugach,
 Bha e modhail, éibhinn, binn;
 Fhuair mi eirmseachd is sgeòil uaith
 'S gun e ro eòlach air tràth bìdh.

Thogte do shùil on obair
 Á cruth an t-saoghail a dheoghal tlachd;
 Mhol thu Debel Iussuf dhomh,
 A cumadh is a dath.

Is aithne dhomh thu, Atmain,
 Bean do thaighe 's do chóignear òg,
 Do bhaidnein ghobhar is t'asail,
 Do ghoirtein seagail is do bhó.

Is aithne dhomh thu, Atmain:
 Is fear thu, 's tha thu beò,
 Dà nì nach eil am breitheamh,
 'S a chaill e 'chothrom gu bhith fòs. . .

Nan robh thu beairteach, is do chaolan
 Garbh le caoile t'airein sgith,
 Cha bhiodh tu 'chuideachd air na mìolan
 An dubh phrìosan Mhondovì.

Nuair gheibh breitheamh còir na cùirte
 Làn a shùla de mo dhruim,
 Thig mi a thaobh gu d'fhàilteachadh
 Trast an t-sràid ma chì mi thù.

*Sidna Aissa, chaidh a cheusadh
Mar ri mèirlich air bàrr sléibh,
'S b'e 'n toibheum, Atmain, àicheadh
Gur bràthair dhomh thu fhéin.*

You thieved in your need,
And you tried a lie to get off;
They condemned you, reviled you and whipped you,
And they put you under lock and key.

The honourable mouth that condemned you
Was blubberish and tiny in the grey face;
And Justice was bleary-eyed from scrutinising
Its account-books, and they ever showing abundance.

But the mouth which was found lying
Was mannerly, cheerful and melodious;
I got sharp repartee and tales from it
Though it was not too well acquainted with a meal.

Your eye would be raised from your work
To draw pleasure from the shape of the world;
You praised Jebel Yussuf to me,
Its form and its colour.

I know you, Atman,
The woman of your house and your five young things,
Your little clump of goats and your ass,
Your plot of rye and your cow.

I know you, Atman:
You are a man, and you are alive,
Two things the judge is not,
And that he has lost his chance of being ever. . .

Had you been wealthy, and your gut
Thick with the leanness of your tired ploughmen,
You would not be keeping company with the lice
In the black prison of Mondovi.

When the decent judge of the court
 Gets the fill of his eye of my back,
 I will come aside to welcome you
 Across the street if I see you.

Our Lord Jesus was crucified
 Along with thieves on the top of a hill,
 And it would be blasphemy, Atman, to deny
 That you are a brother of mine (Black 1999: 366–69).

A two-volume definitive edition of Hay’s verse was published and edited by Michel Byrne (see Byrne 2001). Hay’s North African verse, and especially his long poem “Mochtàr is Dùghall”, broadened the range of Gaelic verse still further than did MacLean’s ventures into psychoanalysis. But these two poets took pride in the great thematic relevance of their work to Gaelic language, literature and society. At the end of the century Chris Whyte extended the range of Gaelic verse even farther still by deliberately eschewing obvious thematic relevance. “Fontana Maggiore” was a small example; a much bigger one is his detailed study in 744 lines of the world of a nineteenth-century Italian opera-singer, “Bho Leabhar-Latha Maria Malibran”, for whom I think *Madame Moitessier* by Ingres (1851) is an absolutely perfect image. Just as Malibran appeals to Chris Whyte, the Junoesque Madame Moitessier appealed to Ingres for what he called her “terrible beauty” (Honour & Fleming 1991: 558).

Donald John MacDonald (*Dòmhnall Iain Dhonnchaidh*, 1919-86) was the son of one of the greatest Gaelic tradition-bearers of the twentieth century. But he was also a victim of the times in which he lived. He spent five years in German prisoner-of-war camps, and a new edition of his account of this experience, *Fo Sgàil a’ Swastika*, has just been published. So when he speaks of back-breaking labour and physical suffering we should listen to him, and this he does to memorable effect in “Òran an Fheamnaidh”. My picture is Thomas Austen Brown’s *Homeward* of 1890.

*Ochòin, a chiallain, gur mì tha cianail
 ’S mi ’n-seo gam riasladh am bial na Cròice:
 An todhar fiadhaich ’s e doirbh a lionadh,
 ’S chan eil sa chrìostachd na spìonadh ròin’ às.*

*Nuair nì mi 'n gràpa chur sìos le m' shàil ann,
 Bidh snìomh air cnàmhan mun teàrn e òirleach,
 'S nuair gheibh mi 'm bàrr e, 's chan ann gun spàirn dhomh,
 An truaighe snàithl' bhios an sàs 'na mheòirean.*

*Mum faigh mi dìol d'heath 's a' chairt a lionadh,
 Mo mheòirean piante gun sian ach tòcadh:
 Thig stamh na liathaig am bàrr le m' spìonadh
 'S gur ann mu m' bhial a bhios crìoch a bhòidse.*

*'S e mhadainn choirb-fhuair le gaoith 's le stoirm
 A bhith triall a dh'fheamhadh thug searbh-bhlas dhòmhs' air;
 'S gum b'fheàrr dhomh falbh às 's mi phòsadh banacheaird,
 'S bhiodh saoghal soirbh agam 's airgead pòca.*

*Nach cruaidh an càs dhomh 's do shluagh an àite
 Bhith fuar is pàiteach an sàs am beòshlaint',
 'S na nì mi dh'àiteach gus 'n cinn am bàrr ann,
 Cha phàigh e 'm màl dhomh ged s ànrach dhòmhs' e.*

*Gur bochd ri chunntais g' eil luchd mo dhùthcha
 Fo mhurt 's fo mhùiseig aig dùirn nan rògair,
 Is Alba chliùiteach a dhearbha a biùthas
 Fo chealg nan iùdhach 's a stiùir 'nan crògan.*

*Ged mhaoladh m' fhiaclan às aonais dìot ann
 Chan fhaod mi lìon chur air iasg Loch Ròdhag
 'S gach maor is iarla tha 'n gaoth na crìostachd
 Gum faod iad iasgach gu 'm miann fo m' shròin ann.*

*A Bhrusaich stàtail, nam biodh tu 'n-dràsta
 Ri faicinn càradh nan Gaidheal còire,
 Fo bhinn nan tràillea a mhill ar nàisean:
 Tha tìr nan àrdbheann aig pràig fo 'm brògan.*

*Nam biodh ri fhaotainn an déidh mo shaothrach
 Na phàigheadh m' aodach, air ghaol mo chòmhdach,
 Cha bhiodh mo shaorsa cho cruaidh 's cho daor dhomh,
 'S cha bhiodh mo shaoghal cho lughdaicht' òg dhomh.*

Pity me, friend, I'm sad and in misery
Struggling here at the mouth of the Cròic:
The manure of the wild's so hard to collect,
No-one in Christendom could pluck a hair of it.

When I put the graip down into it with my heel,
There'll be bones dislocated before it goes in an inch,
And when I get it aloft, by no means without effort,
The devil a strand is stuck in its prongs.

Before I've enough of it to fill the cart,
My fingers are tortured with nothing but swelling:
The stem of the tangles comes up with my straining
Till the end of its voyage is round about my mouth.

It's the cursed cold morning with wind and with storm
That's made going to get seaweed taste so bitter to me;
I'd be better to leave and marry a tinkerness,
I'd have an easy life and money in my pocket.

It's the wretched fate of myself and my neighbours
To be cold and thirsty while making a living,
When all the tilling I do to make the crop grow there
Will not pay my rent despite all my distress.

It's sad to reflect that the people of my country
Are mocked and abused by the threats of scoundrels,
While glorious Scotland that's proved her renown
Is duped by capitalists with her helm in their fists.

Though my teeth are blunted for lack of nourishment
Not a net may I set for the fish of Loch Roag
While each bailiff and earl ever heard of in Christendom
May fish all they like there right under my nose.

O stately Bruce, could you only see now
The present plight of the gracious Gael,
Condemned by the trash who've destroyed our nation:
The land of the mountains trampled by vermin.

If even I got after all my labour
 The cost of my clothes, just enough to cover me,
 My freedom would not be so harsh and restricted,
 My life would not be so lessened when young (Black 1999: 418–21).

Dòmhnall Iain's political tone is the same as that of his uncle Donald Macintyre (*Dòmhnall Ruadh Phàislig*, 1889–1964), a still greater poet, who had moved from South Uist to work as a brickie in the Glasgow area and who wedded a tradition-bearer's way with words and images to the politics of Red Clydeside in the era of the Depression and the Second World War. The combination is explosive, and the strength of his satire on Mussolini has to be experienced to be believed, but to my mind it is this bricklayer's descriptions of ostentatious consumption by the rich that resonate most in the mind. The rich simply disgust him. This is the sort of message that he was sending home to people like his nephew in Uist; this, too, is the stuff of which revolutions are made. My picture is of an appropriate place, colour and era, the English artist Edward Burra's surrealist *John Deth* of 1932, and it shows exactly how Dòmhnall Ruadh sees the ruling classes as macabre figures living in a world of fantasy.⁷

*Chan ann am freastal bhuntàta
 Bhios fear tha 'm pàrlamaid Shasainn
 Le brot de shùghadh nan cnàmhan
 Cha mhò, tràth anns a' mhadainn,
 A chàirear ugh air a bhialaibh
 A dh'eug an t-ian o chionn fad' ann,
 Cho luath 's a bhuaileas e spàin ann
 Gheibh am fàileadh a-mach às
 A leagadh each.*

*Ach nuair a chuirear gu biadh e
 Chan fhaca criostaidh a leithid,
 Gheibh e chur air a bhialaibh
 De dh'airm na riaraidheadh seisear;
 Gur gann gum b' urrainn mi àireamh*

⁷ Private collection. See Wilson 1982: Plate 45. The broader political topic, period and atmosphere of the poem are well represented by Expressionists such as Georg Grosz (1893–1959). His *Leichenbegängnis* ('Funeral Procession') of 1917–18 shows a teeming city street suffused in black and red, grotesque heads and a coffin from which the skeleton has escaped and is drinking out of a bottle. See Elger 1991: 202–205.

*Eadar spàinnean is sgeinean
Na bheir an duine ga ionnsaigh
Mum faigh e 'n cùrsa mu dheireadh
A chur a-steach.*

*Bidh brat beag geal air a ghlùinean
Air son an smùrach a chumail
No shuas fo sprogan ga lùbadh
'S e sìos 'na stiùp air a mhuineal;
Bidh na h-airm aig gach làimh dheth,
'S e dol an greim on taobh muigh annt',
'S tuilleadh shuas air a bhialaibh
Nuair bhios a' chiad fheadhainn ullamh
Gus bhith 'nam bad.*

*Móran sheirbheiseach daonnan
Aig na daoine 'ud mun àite
Gus bhith gam freasgairt air ùrlar
'S a' cumail sùl' air an àirneis:
Tha iad boireann is fireann ann
Dhe gach fine agus nàisein
Gu ruige còcaire Frangach
Nach fàgadh feann air mul-mhàgan
Ris 'n can iad chef.*

*Chan e muirsgian no srùban
A nì chùis far bheil esan
Gam fàgail bramasach sunndach
Ach làn mo sgùrdeadh de dh'eisir
'S rudan milis is cnòintean
Is cus de sheòrsachan eile
Agus botal de dh'fhìona
Bhios lethcheud bliadhna 'ann an seilear
Mun tig i às.*

*A h-uile annlan bhios aca
 Gun toirinn seachdain gan àireamh:
 Chan fhaighinn toradh na buaile
 A dh'ìm no uachdar no chàise
 Gun chus de dh'ainmean neònach
 Air cus de sheòrsachan àraid
 Eadar iasg agus ianlaith
 Nach fhac' thu riamh aig do mhàthair
 Ga chur sa phrais.*

*A Dhùghaill Chiobair, a nàbaidh,
 Cha b' fhealla-dhà leam a chumtais
 A h-uile h-uan thug thu cràdh air
 'S e call gu bràth bhith 'na rùda,
 Ach 's beag a shaoil leat, a christaidh,
 A liuthad biadh a bha sùghar
 A thug thu asta le t' fhiacian
 'S a thilg thu dh'ìochdar an dùnain
 Gun toirt fa-near.*

*Nach ort bhiodh an t-iongnadh
 Gum bi mi smaointinn air uairibh
 Nam biodh tu oidhche dhe d' shaoghal
 A-muigh air aoigheachd aig uaislean —
 'S tu faicinn maighdinn aig bòrd ann
 'S dath an òir air a cuailean
 'Na suidhe, rùisgt' air do bhialaibh
 A com 's a cìochan 's a guaillean,
 'S i 'g ithe chlach.*

*Ach 's ioma greim a tha neònach
 A bhios aig geòcairean craosach
 Tha 'g iarraidh annas an-còmhnaidh
 Anns gach seòl air an smaoinich;
 Cha bu mhisd' iad ach b' fheàrrd' iad
 Traisg is càdamh na h-Aoine,
 Feuch an sùghadh an stamag
 A tha le eallach gun traoghadh
 Air tighinn a-mach.*

*Nach ann tha 'n aon ghiorra-shaoghail
 Aig na daoine ' bhios gam feitheamh,
 'S nuair bhiomaid gu sgàineadh
 Nach bi na h-àrmainn ud leathach;
 'S mi 'nan cuideachd nach iarradh,
 Cha ghabhainn miann air a leithid —
 Gum b' fheàrr leam poit dhen bhuntàta
 Ga cumail blàth ris an teine
 Gu'm bruicheadh sgat.*

*An luchd-riaghlaidh a fhuair sinn,
 Och mo thruaighe ri aithris
 Gur e sinn fhéin a chuir suas iad
 Tha 'n-diugh gar luaircneadh fo 'n casan;
 Dh'fhalbh ar sith air an t-saoghal
 'S dh'fhalbh ar saorsa ri 'r maireann
 An latha leigeadh an t-òrdugh
 Gu bodach-ròcais na galladh —
 E fhéin 's an gamp. . .*

*Nach mise chunnaic an latha
 Nach fhaca m' athair 'na aimsir,
 Nach fhaca linn a chaidh seachad
 Bhon cheangail Sasann ri Albainn:
 Latha dh'adhbharaich masladh
 Do dhaoine chleachd a bhith calma,
 'S a leig am follais le firinn
 Cho fad 's tha 'n ìmpireachd ainmeil
 Air dol air n-ais.*

*An latha b' fheudar do cheannabhaidh
 Na rìoghachd airgeadach bheartach
 A dhol gu diblidh don Ghearmailt
 Gun urad armachd 's am bata
 Gus guidhe 's griosad na sith 'ann —
 An nì bha cinnteach nach faighteadh
 Bho fhear a dhearbhadh air na h-Iùdhaich
 Gum biodh ar dùthaich fon t-slacan
 Nam biomaid lag. . .*

*Fhuair e 'n t-Eadailteach còmh' ris
 A rinn am fòirneart cho gràineil
 Air daoine dubha gun èolas,
 Gun tuigse air seòltachd an nàisein,
 A' mort le nimh às an adhar
 A dh'fhir 's de mhnathan 's de phàistean,
 'S nach do nochd dhaibh de thròcaire
 Am fear bhiodh leòint' anns an àraich
 A dh'fhaighinn às. . .*

*Sin ar duais agaibh cinnteach
 Air son na tìm a chaidh seachad
 A dh'fhàg sibh riaghladh ar tìre
 An làmhan cliochdairean Shasainn
 A dhùin ar sùilean 's ar cluasan
 'S a cheangail buarach m'ar casan —
 Cho trang ag aimhreit mu stòras
 Gun d'fhalbh na h-eòin aig a' chlamhan
 An trod nan cearc.*

*Fichead bliadhn' thug a' ghràisg ud
 (An rud as nàir' dhuinn ri aithris)
 A' còpadh muilleanan airgid
 Am pòca chealgairean carach
 Le sluagh na dùthcha gun chosnadh
 Is gaoir na gort' air gach bealach —
 A' falbh 'nan creutairean truagha,
 Le'n druim ga shuathadh ri balla
 Gun an deamhan car. . .*

No man in England's parliament
 Is dependent on potatoes
 With a broth of bone bree
 Nor, early in the morning,
 Is an egg stuck in front of him
 Whose bird died long ago,
 And which when pierced by a spoon
 Releases a scent that would
 Knock down a horse.

But when summoned to dine
 No Christian's seen the like,
 For in front of him's fixed
 Enough armaments for six;
 I could scarcely compute
 What with knives and with spoons
 What the man has picked up
 By the time he has tucked
 The last course away.

A little white cloth
 Catches crumbs on his knees
 Or is turned under his chin
 Like a bib down his neck;
 He has weapons both sides of him,
 Working in from the outside,
 And more up to the front of him
 When the first lot are finished
 For going in to attack.

Such people have plenty
 Of servants around them
 For coming and going
 And attending the tables:
 There are females and males
 Of different races and nations
 All the way to a French cook
 Who'd skin even a frog —
 He's called a *chef*.

No cockle or razorfish
 Will suffice in his presence
 To leave them fartingly happy
 But my lap full of oysters
 And sweet things and nuts
 And lots of other ingredients
 With a bottle of wine
 That's fifty years in a cellar
 Before it comes out.

All the side-foods they have
I'd take a week to relate:
I'd get no yield from the cowfold
Of cream or butter or cheese
Without a host of strange names
For a host of weird dishes
From fish through to poultry
That you never saw your mother
 Put in the pot.

O neighbour, Dugald the Shepherd,
I'd find it no joke to count
Every lamb you castrated
To prevent being a tup,
But you never guessed, Christian,
How many foods that were juicy
You removed with your teeth
And threw on the dunghill
 Without a thought.

It sometimes occurs to me
How surprised you would be
If one night in your life
You were asked out by gentry —
You'd see a girl at a table there
With tresses of gold
With her throat, breasts and shoulders
Sitting naked before you,

 And she eating balls.
But there's many strange bites
That such gluttons of greed take
Since they always seek novelty
In every way thinkable;
They'd be no worse, indeed better,
Of fast and abstinence each Friday,
To try to rein in their stomachs
Which with burden undrained
 Are bulging out.

All the folk who attend them
 Suffer shortness of life,
 For when we're near bursting
 Those lads are just half full;
 I'd have no wish to join them,
 I'd have no appetite for it —
 Give me a pot of potatoes
 Being kept warm by the fire
 Till a skate boiled.

The rulers we're landed with,
 Oh how sad to relate
 That's it's we who raised up
 Those who now trample us down;
 Our peace went from the world
 And our freedom forever
 The day the summons was given
 To that bloody scarecrow —
 Him and his gamp. . .

I've observed an event
 Never seen by my father,
 Seen by no generation
 Since England's union with Scotland:
 A day that brought shame
 On people used to being brave,
 And that revealed the stark truth
 Of how the once-celebrated empire
 Has declined.

The day that the leader
 Of that rich capitalist kingdom
 Went abjectly to Germany
 Armed with not even a stick
 To negotiate for peace there —
 The thing certain not to be had
 From a man who'd showed by the Jews
 How our land would be hammered
 If we were weak. . .

With him's the Italian
Who sent violence so loathsome
Against blacks who knew nothing
Of the nation's duplicity,
Dropping poison from the air
To slaughter men, women and children,
While showing not even the mercy
Of letting wounded men flee
 From the battlefield. . .

That's our certain reward for you
For all the time that's gone by
While you left the governing of our country
To the con-men of England
Who closed our eyes and our ears
And cow-fettered our feet —
So busy squabbling about wealth
That the hawk snatched the chickens
 While the hens fought.

Twenty years have that rabble spent
(It's our shame to relate)
Stuffing millions of pounds
In the pockets of swindlers
While unemployment's been rife
And hunger crying on each highway —
Folk wandering disconsolate,
Their backs propping up walls
 With damn all to do. . . (Black 1999: 188–97).

From the Wall Street Crash and Munich we turn to another defining moment of the 20th century, the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, which I will visualise through Goya's *The Third of May 1808*. Donnchadh MacDhunléibhe (1877–1964) is probably the most outstanding twentieth-century Gaelic poet who made a life for himself abroad, in his case South Africa. He was a sculptor and master mason and was responsible for the masonry of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, which he rightly and proudly described as *ceòl mór reòdhte gu cloich ghil*, “classical

music frozen in white stone”.⁸ He made a prosperous life for himself as a senior civil servant living deep among the Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and this gives added force to his best poem, “Bean Dubh a’ Caoidh a Fir a Chaidh a Mharbhadh leis a’ Phoileas” (“A Black Woman Mourns her Husband Killed by the Police”). His nephew told me (Black 1999: 729) how “he sent me a very long poem, in English (10 pages?) on Sharpeville, where some 77 Africans had been shot dead by police (mostly in the back). This had obviously affected him greatly.” The wonderful thing about the poem is how this eighty-three-year-old man blended all the rhythm, imagery and passion of Gaelic women’s waulking-songs with his subject-matter. But then, as Hay had shown for the other end of the continent, the experience of the Gael and of the African are not so different, as is demonstrated by Stuart Bodek’s book-illustration *The Innocent* from the 1980s. You may find some of the poem’s contents disturbing; the refrain is Xhosa and means “God Save Us”.

*Car son, a Dhé a tha sa chathair,
Car son an-diugh a rinn Thu ’n latha?*
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

*Mo-nuar gum faca mi a shoillse
Ach a bhith gu bràth san oidhche.*
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

*Och, mo chràdh, mo chràdh ’s mo léireadh
An latha thug iad uam mo cheudghràdh.*
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

*Do chorp donn an-sin ’na laighe,
Toll air tholl a’ sileadh fala.*
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

*Am fear bòidheach laigh ri m’ thaobh-sa
An-sin ’s a mhionach às a’ slaodadh.*
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

⁸ “The dictum that ‘architecture is frozen music’ . . . originated in Germany and was diffused to the rest of Europe by Mme de Staël” (Honour 1981: 119). Honour uses ‘Frozen Music’ as the title of his chapter on Romantic sculpture.

Aichbheil, aichbheil, sgrios is léireadh
Air an luchd a rinn mo cheusadh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Éist ri m'ghuidhean, Rìgh nan Dùilean,
Éist ri m'athchuinge 's ri m'ùrnaigh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Tha 'n luchd bàn an-diugh làn aigheir
'S tha mo phàistean-sa gun athair.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Is tha mo bheatha-sa nis falamh —
Ach ceadaich dhomh, mum fàg mi 'n talamh,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Air m'fhear-céile an-sin 'na shìneadh,
Nuair a thig mo mhic gu ìre,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

An éirig dhuinn air son ar dòrainn,
Latha réidh a ghearradh sgòrnan,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Ghearradh sgòrnan nam fear fuileach,
Fuil mu m'dhòrnaibh suas gu uilinn,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

A bhith gan reubadh is gam pianadh
Is deagh fhaobhar air mo sgian-sa:
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Thoir latha dhuinn gu saor a' pàigheadh
Fhir is mhnathan agus phàistean
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

*An luchd ghil a bhual ar daoine;
Cuairt mu 'n amhaichean de 'n caolain —
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.*

*Cuairt de 'n caolain an àite chneapan,
Is siridh mi 'n-sin taobh do leapach,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.*

*Na fiachan uile air an dìoladh,
Fhir 's a ghràidh, 's tu 'n-sin 'ad' shìneadh.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.*

Why, O God upon the throne,
Why did you make the day today?
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Alas that I ever saw its brightness,
I'd rather it were night forever.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Oh my pain, my pain, my torment's
The day they took my first love from me.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Your brown body lying before me,
Blood pouring out from wound on wound.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

The handsome man who lay beside me
There with his intestines trailing loose.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Vengeance, vengeance, grief, destruction
On the people who've had me crucified.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

King of the Elements, hear my oaths,
Listen to my petition and my prayer.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Today the whites are full of gladness
And my children have no father.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

And my life is empty now —
But grant me, while I'm still on earth,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

For my husband lying before me,
When my sons have come of age,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

In compensation for our grief,
Some perfect day for cutting throats,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

For cutting throats of bloody men,
Blood on my fists up to the elbow,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

For tearing them and torturing them
With a good blade upon my knife:
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Give us a day to pay back freely
The men, the women and the children
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

Of the white folk who struck our people
With a turn of their guts around their necks —
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

A turn of their guts instead of beads,
 And then I'll seek the side of your bed,
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele.

All the debts having been paid,
 Beloved husband, who's lying before me.
Baba Inkòsi Sikelele, Baba Inkòsi Sikelele. (Black 1999: 74–79).

For a group of poets in the third quarter of the century, mainly from Lewis, the most fundamental issue is the tense relationship between the traditional world of home dominated by the Presbyterian Church and the alien but attractive world in which they made a living.



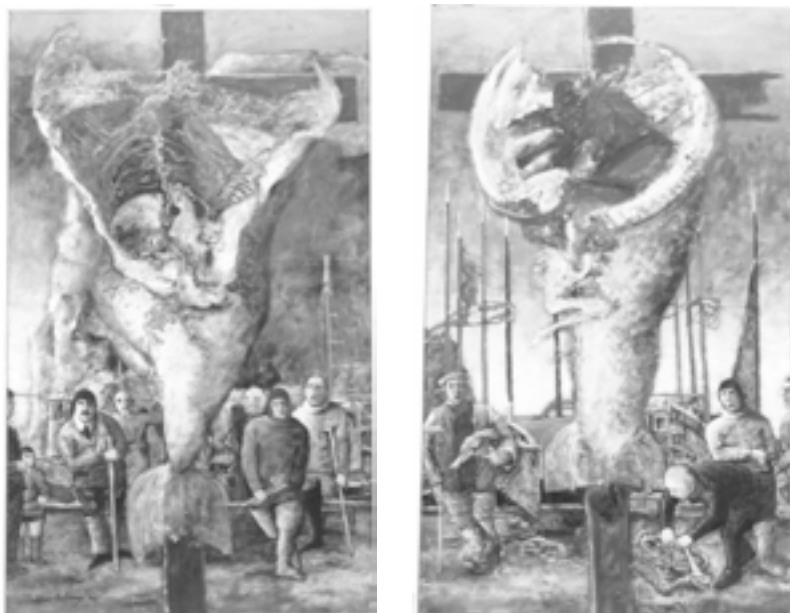
Bellany, John. *Allegory*, 1964
 (centre panel). GMA 3359.

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 Modern Art, Edinburgh.

The most important members of the group are Derick Thomson, Iain Crichton Smith and Donald MacAulay, but the relationship is neatly expressed by a portrait of a much younger poet, Babs NicGriogair, in *Wish I Was Here*. It is a kind of existentialism of which one summary is that ironic book-title *Wish I Was Here*, and another is John Murray's line in his classic short story "Am Pàrtaidh" that the Gael is 'na choigreach anns a h-uile h-àite ach air an tràna no air a' bhàta, "a stranger everywhere except on the train or the boat" (Moireach 1973: 22).

There is no doubt in my mind which artist's work sums this up best for us: John Bellany, of whom Murdo Macdonald (2000: 198–9) writes:

Interpreting his own background in a Presbyterian fishing village on the east coast, but in the light of a growing post-war challenge to beliefs of all kinds, in the 1960s John Bellany created a remarkable group of paintings of which this allegorical crucifixion is one . . . His understanding of the psychology of Presbyterian, east-coast fishing communities produced paintings that have a stark and unmistakable authority.



Bellany, John. *Allegory*, 1964 (left and right panel).

GMA 3359. © Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

The mock crucifixion, the world dominated by fish guts spilling out, the realistic rendering of a series of strong characters, are pure Derick Thomson: in Bellany's case the characters are fishermen from Port Seton where he lives, in Thomson's case they are crofter-fishermen from Point in Lewis where he comes from. Duncan Macmillan (1990: 403) comments that the men "are arranged like the soldiers at the Crucifixion, but they too are victims. It is the human condition to be caught thus between the inseparable and equally exacting demands of physical and metaphysical necessity."

That is exactly the message of Thomson's wonderful verse portraits of the people of Lewis (e.g. Black 1999: 472–75). When one then comes to a typical poem by the late Iain Crichton Smith (1928–98), “Aig a’ Chladh”, and puts it beside Bellany’s *Sea People*, the correspondence between poetry and painting is startling.⁹

*Chunna mi aig a’ chladh an-dé iad,
Le adan dubh orr’, ’s grian ag éirigh,
Deàrrsadh dhitheanan mu’n casan
Is fear a’ caitheamh searbh-léine.*

*Lasair an adhair, cuan a’ seinn,
Dòrtadh fheur, is seasmhachd bheann,
Còmhradh bàsmhor adan dorcha,
Bàrdachd samhraidh bun-os-cionn.*

*Latha farsaing fad’ air fàire,
Bìoball a’ losgadh ann an làmhnan
Gaoithe ’s gréine, ’s cuan a’ tuiteam
Mar dheise fhalamh air an tràigh ud.*

*’S tha esan a-nise far a bheil e,
Mo nàbaidh ’na laighe fon t-seillean
A’ crònán am measg dhithean milis.
B’e ’m bàs a thug bàs dha ’s cha b’e ’m peileir.*

*Is grian a’ dòrtadh, cuan a’ dòrtadh,
Adan dubh’ gu dorch a’ seòladh
Air cuan ròsan mar a dh’fhalbhas
Facail bhochd air làn na ceòlraidh.*

⁹ The composition of *Sea People* appears to owe something to Edvard Munch’s *The Dance of Life* of 1899–1900 (Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo), which shows figures on a greensward against a dynamic background of sea and setting sun (see Ehrlich 1989: 34–5). The principal figures clearly have something to say about rites of passage such as birth, marriage and death, and Ehrlich’s (1989: 12) commentary on the painting could equally apply to Smith’s poem: “The symbolic use of harsh, clashing colour and the distortion of the figures and the space they inhabit conveys an extraordinary emotional tension and characteristically Nordic intensity which is deeply disturbing.”

I saw them yesterday at the cemetery
Wearing black hats, while a sun was rising,
A glowing of flowers about their feet
And one wearing a salt shirt.

Glitter of the sky, sea singing,
Pouring of grass, steadiness of mountains,
Mortal conversation of black hats,
Poetry of summer topsy turvy.

A long wide day on the horizon,
A Bible burning in the hands
Of wind and sun, and a sea falling
Like an empty dress on that shore.

But he is now where he is,
My neighbour lying under the bee
That is humming among sweet flowers.
It was death that killed him and not the bullet.

Sun pouring, sea pouring,
Black hats darkly sailing
On a sea of roses as there sail
Poor words on a full tide of music (Black 1999: 516–17).

Macmillan says (1990: 403) of the painting that Bellany here sets figures hieratically against the sea, and he goes on: “The two principals are a man and a woman, but she is half fish . . . Increasingly he used this kind of symbolism to deal with themes that reflected a . . . personal angst . . . As we have no access to [these figures], we must regard the drama that they enact as an event of which we are witness, but in which we cannot participate.” On returning to my own comments on this poem in *An Tuil* (Black 1999: liv), I am amazed to find that they could equally be read as a commentary on the painting, which I had seen years before but which I certainly was not thinking of when I wrote the commentary. I pointed out that Smith opposes static symbols of order like *ad* “a hat” and *díthean* “a flower” to dynamic symbols of disorder like *seòladh* “sailing” and *teine* “fire”, and that in this poem these are mixed and balanced to an extraordinary degree, *adan dubh gu dorch ’a’ seòladh*, “black hats darkly sailing”, for example,

to “paint a dynamic picture of a static scene to express the unity of the cosmos with private grief”.

Dyce, William.
*The Man
of Sorrows*,
1860.

NG 2410.

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land, Edinburgh.



Thomson (1921–) examined his own “personal angst” in poem after poem, book after book, culminating in the sequence “Àirc a’ Choimhcheangail” of 1982 which to my mind is his most fundamental work. It means “The Ark of the Covenant” but also “The Synthesis of the Relationship”. With a sweep of his net he echoes his best work of the past while surging forward to make new statements, admitting for the first time that Lewis religion may be admired for its confidence, strength, and profound traditional and emotional roots.

For this new softly-softly approach I have chosen an old softly-softly image, William Dyce’s Pre-Raphaelite *The Man of Sorrows* of 1860, which shows Christ against a barren Highland landscape that could very easily be the interior of Lewis.

Thomson here speaks affectionately of the popular view of the afterlife, then goes on to the subject of fishermen in a way that has nothing in common with Bellany and everything in common with Dyce.

*Bha a' bheatha sin
gu bhith maireannach;
cha tigeadh galar nan còig oidhch' oirr',
no foill caithimh;
cha chuireadh suaile gu grunnid i,
bha i tèaraint' bho shàthadh beugaileid,
cha toireadh fiabhras gu ceann i.
Bhiodh i milis
le ìm is iasg,
is carthannachd,
laoidhean is sailm,
coibhneas fo phlaide
is lit sa mhadainn.*

*Iasgairean a bh' annta fhèin
cuideachd.
Bha am muir na b' fhiadhaiche,
bha na creagan aosta greannach
ged a bhiodh grian orr',
ach bha 'n aon mhiann
's an aon acras air an siubhal,
's bha na daoine dha'n innseadh iad an sgeul
a-cheart cho faisg air an talamh
is eòlach air na clachan,
co-dhiù air son ballaist,
is thuigeadh iad buaidh
an Fhir a thionndaidheadh iad gu aran
no a ghluaiseadh tè mhòr dhiubh bho bheul 'uaigh.*

That life
 was to be everlasting;
 no fifth-night fever would overtake it,
 nor wily tuberculosis;
 a sea-swell would not put it to the bottom,
 no maor chun na sitig;
 nor a ground-officer turn it out of doors;
 it was safe from bayonet thrust,
 fever would not bring it to a close.
 It would be sweet
 with butter and fish,
 and good company,
 hymns and psalms,
 favours under the blanket
 and porridge in the morning.

They themselves were fishermen
 too.
 The sea was wilder,
 the ancient rocks more surly
 though the sun shone on them,
 but they lived with the same desire
 and the same hunger,
 and the people to whom they told their story
 were just as close to the ground
 and familiar with stones,
 especially for ballast;
 they could understand the power
 of One who could turn stones to bread
 or move a huge one from the mouth of His grave (Black 1999: 468–69).

With that surprisingly Pre-Raphaelite poem we emerge into a post-Existentialist atmosphere. The third quarter of the century was so completely dominated by expatriate angst that everything else, like love and war, was pushed to the margins, and mythology, which had been prominent in the first and second quarters, disappeared completely. It was resurrected in the fourth quarter by MacNeacail and Whyte, for example in MacNeacail's libretto "Sgàthach", which was performed to tremendous critical acclaim in 1998 in

the Eden Court Theatre in Inverness. Since it was based on Táin Bó Cuailnge it needed a cast of thousands, and I have been told that each night it was performed the Isle of Skye was empty. Those who were not on stage were packing the stalls.

*Agus dhutsa, Chù Chulainn, ged bu diachainn chruaidh mo ghnè-sa thu,
an duais as àraid òrdha tha 'n còir mo thabhairt,
an duais nach làimhsich ach gaisgeach àraid,
gun coisinn thu mus fàg thu mi.*

*An Gath Beilge 'na lasair, chuireadh farmad air na diathan:
càithe leis an aon chois, fàgail aon leòn anns a' chliathaich,
trichead riofag sgaoileadh mach tromh chuislean dol an dìobhail —
an gaisgeach a gheibh sealbh air tha bhuaidh 'na dhàn anns an iargall.*

And to you, Cù Chulainn, sorest test of my good nature,
this rare most precious prize that I can give you,
which the greatest son of war alone can handle,
you will have earned before you leave.

The Fiery Dart is flaming, arousing envy among the great gods:
thrown by the one foot, makes only one wound in the body,
through which thirty barbs spread to ensure the strike is fatal —
the hero who possesses it is destined for great triumphs
(Black 1999: 578–79).

Freed from Presbyterian angst and then also from the threat of nuclear holocaust, poets in the last quarter felt more able to participate in debates on language and politics and the universal concerns of the time such as materialism, social change and the environment. Myles Campbell (1944–) is the best at doing all this in my opinion, and he has a tremendous sense of humour. My picture here is Don Eddy's *New Shoes for H* of 1973–74. (The “H” is apparently a tribute to Henri Matisse and Hans Hofmann.) Doreen Ehrlich (1989: 110) describes the scene as “familiar yet ambiguous in its displacement of reality”, and it provides the perfect goldfish-bowl setting for Campbell's “Na Liopan”. In a shop like this we all feel a little bit naked, and most men of my generation and Campbell's will be ill at ease.

*An uair seo se na liopan a bh' ann
anns a' bhùth-aodaich i 'na seasamh
fa mo chomhair 's mi 'g iarraidh briogais
caileag bhòidheach a' bhodhaig chuimir
na cam-lùban bàn a' tuiteam mu gualainn
's i reic aodach fir.*

*Bha iad pinc agus cruinn agus deiseil
gu bruidhinn iad cho làn is i
cho dùid cho ciùin cho còir
's mise cho lom a' faireachdainn
fa comhair am measg an aodaich
a' ceannach briogais. Seann dheise orm
caran robach 's m'inean gun ghearradh
a' faireachdainn salach sean ise
òg cho glan air a h-éideadh
's mise ag iarraidh 'na làthair
còmhdach fa comhair mi lom
ise gun aodach an t-aingeal
le briogais.*

This time it was the lips
as she stood before me in the clothes shop
and I wanting trousers
the pretty trim-bodied girl
fair curls falling on her shoulders
selling men's clothes.

They were pink and round and ready
to speak they so full she
so shy so calm so kind
and I so bare feeling
before her among the clothes
buying trousers. With an old suit
somewhat ragged and my nails uncut
feeling dirty old she
young so cleanly clothed
I wanting in her presence

a covering before her bare
 she without clothes the angel
 with trousers (Black 1999: 604–07).

I will finish with our outstanding long poem of the 1990s, “Bogha-Frois san Oidhche” by Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh, not just because of its resonant imagery but because it provides a lesson in methodology that will help me sum up the approach I have put forward in this paper. It is an account of how his seven-year-old son was struck down by a brain virus and slowly recovered. Strong imagery and structural unity is provided by *The Wizard of Oz* and the Bible, and yet to me the fundamental concerns and atmosphere of the poem are conveyed by something different – Julian Schnabel’s huge Maximalist picture *Pre History: Glory, Honor, Privilege and Poverty* of 1981. Hilton Kramer writes in Alistair Hicks’s *Art of Our Time* (n.d.: 59–61) that in Schnabel’s work “the sheer multiplicity of images is . . . more important than the identity of any single one of them”, and this is reflected in the media with which he works: this picture is made with oil and antlers on pony skin. Hugh Honour and John Fleming (1991: 718) say that “the images pour through the richly worked density of surface without disclosing their meaning fully, if at all”, and that “an uneasiness lurks behind the apparent openness”, but to me this obsessive child-centred nightmare is “Bogha-Frois san Oidhche”, as can be seen from this section where we find ourselves both in the bowels of Edinburgh’s Royal Hospital for Sick Children and in the bowels of a parent’s worst nightmare. The random banality of imagery in the painting is matched by the random banality of imagery in the poem; yet the central Christian image of the boy-child invests both with depth, power and clarity.

*Bha prìomh thrannsa-cheangail an ospadail air leth mì-chàilear.
 Seòrsa de chaolan iochdarach a bh’ ann.
 Donn. Dorch. Teth. Teann. Claon.
 Cha robh làr no mullach no balla réidh.
 An-siud ’s an-seo stobadh pìob a-mach gus bagairt
 a dhèanamh air do cheann.*

*Bheireadh lioft (nan nochdadh e), no staidhre, suas thu
 chun an t-seòmair-bhìdh. (Bhon innidh chun na stamaig?)
 A réir coltais cha tàinig e a-steach air cuid dhen
 fhoireann-bìdh cho cianail truagh*

*'s a bha feadhainn dhe na pàrantan.
 Daoine s dòcha nach robh air greim ithe fad làithean,
 a bha air a bhith 'nan suidhe ri taobh leabaidh leanaihb
 a bha a' bàsachadh. A shlaod iad fhèin air falbh, 's dòcha
 gus blasad bìdh a ghabhail. A' fàgail
 na codach bu mhò d'heath air an truinnsear.
 Cha robh clann ceadaichte san t-seòmar-bìdh.
 Bha an staidhre, ge-tà, sgeadaichte le dealbhan a rinn clann.
 Duilleagan an fhoghair fhathast air cuid dhiubh, tha cuimhn' agam.
 Cha mhòr gun tug mi sùil orra.
 Ge b' e càit an coimheadainn a là no a dh'oidhche,
 bha mo fhradharc lionte le balach rag air leabaidh.*

The main connecting corridor of the hospital was particularly off-putting.
 It was a sort of lower gut.
 Brown. Dark. Hot. Constricting. Twisting.
 Not a floor nor a ceiling nor a wall was regular.
 Here and there a pipe would jut out
 and threaten your head.

A lift (if it appeared) or a stairway would take you up
 to the canteen. (From bowel to stomach?)
 And some of the dining-staff didn't seem to realise
 just how distraught
 many people were.
 Parents who perhaps had not eaten for days.
 Who had been sitting at the bedside
 of their dying child. Eventually
 they'd come to eat something. Only
 to leave most of it on the plate.
 Children were not allowed in the canteen.
 The stairway, though, was decorated with paintings by children.
 I remember some collages with autumn leaves.
 I really wasn't capable of taking them in.
 Wherever I looked, day or night, I saw before my eyes
 a paralysed boy on a bed (Black 1999: 646–47).

Coming towards my conclusions: painting and poetry were inextricably linked in the minds of philosophers such as Aristotle and of all the Renaissance Humanists who followed their example. In *Ars Poetica* Horace declared *ut pictura, poesis*: “as is painting, so is poetry”. Plutarch attributed to Simonides a saying that “painting is mute poetry, poetry a speaking picture” (Lee 1967: 3). The theories of the Humanists could yield rich results if applied to *traditional* Gaelic verse. I have tried to show how the principle can be applied to *modern* Gaelic verse, and I would be interested to hear if any similar work has been done in other Celtic languages. Finally, to sum up my methodology:

1. It offers a visual language in which to summarise an image, a poem, a poet, or a genre.
2. Artistic medium can be chosen to reflect poetic medium – for example a classic or romantic painting for traditional verse-forms, or Louis le Brocquy’s inkblots for Aonghas MacNeacail’s libretto, or pop art for a pop poem.
3. Period can be matched or rejected: Bellany and Dyce reflect Thomson’s different moods.
4. Linkage with art-historical criticism provides us with an extra *language* of discourse which can be used provided we use it with discretion: “romantic” (Hay), “surreal” (Dòmhnall Ruadh Phàislig), even “Pre-Raphaelite” (Thomson).
5. The method allows us to express universality while avoiding cliché and stereotype. I think the only Highland scenery I have shown had Iain Crichton Smith, Sorley MacLean or Christ sitting in it. I could have used Gaelic-speaking artists like William McTaggart or Will Maclean but neither of them provided any image that I have seen which made any statement about the poetry that I *personally* wanted to make. One can, or arguably even *must*, reject imposed iconography, e.g. by replacing Crosbie with Severini to visualise *Dàin do Eimhir*, or *The Wizard of Oz* with Schnabel to visualise “Bogha-Frois san Oidhche”.
6. The method offers an extra dimension by which the poetry can be made to live, especially in the very fashionable context of book backed up by exhibition.
7. Conversely, poetry can invest pictures with meaning: note the cases, like Schnabel, where art critics were a lot more perplexed than we were.

8. Finally my approach has allowed me to present what I *feel* about 20th-century Scottish Gaelic verse: that I find interesting and important work wherever I look, and that it is far more than just MacLean, Hay, Thomson, Smith and MacAulay.

AFTERWORD

I have chosen to present my paper above in the form in which it was delivered on 24 August 2000. My principal reason for doing so is that the relationship between Scottish Gaelic verse and fine art has since been explored in a very different way by *Leabhar Mòr na Gàidhlig* (the imminent publication of which is mentioned in my text) and its associated travelling exhibition. I therefore wish my paper to stand as a discussion of *l'état de la question* in 2000.

Leabhar Mòr na Gàidhlig is a presentation of my category B2, “works of art which illustrate specific poems”, whereas my own paper consists almost entirely of a presentation of categories C1 and C2, “existing works of art evoked in the reader’s/hearer’s mind by a specific image or poem” or “by the totality of a poet’s work” (many of my examples of C2 would be better described as C1, so perhaps no meaningful distinction can be made). To put this another way, I write as a literary critic, using pictures as a tool to aid the interpretation of twentieth-century poetry, while *Leabhar Mòr na Gàidhlig* uses poems of all periods as a matrix for the creation of a Gaelic visual art for today. These are different strategies with different aims, and should not be confused. Both are of educational merit, I believe, and *Leabhar Mòr na Gàidhlig* has led to a further development, *Leabhar Beag na Gàidhlig* (Aberdeen, 2005), in which children’s poems and related pictures are presented together, most of the pictures being by the young poets themselves.

My second reason for presenting this paper as a snapshot in time is that the topic is moving rapidly. According to *The Herald*, 5 October 2005, Dundee University and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig are embarking on a “Window to the West” initiative, funded by a grant of £550,000 from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. This will explore “the inter-relations of visual art and Gaelic language and culture, in an attempt to create opportunities for the understanding of Gaelic culture as a key to understanding Scotland”.

The poet Mary Maclean, mentioned at the beginning of the paper, died in 2004. John Higgitt (footnote 2) died in 2006.

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PEREDUR LYNCH

Twentieth Century Welsh Literature¹

The twentieth century in Wales was a period of considerable literary achievement in both Welsh and English.² This chapter is concerned throughout with literature written in Welsh, although one hardly needs to state that it is only in the context of both national literatures, as some recent stimulating studies have shown, that the totality of Wales during the twentieth century, its tensions and internal differences, can be fully comprehended and appreciated (Davies 2003; M. Wynn Thomas 1995 and 1999). Welsh literary life was conducted for most of the period under consideration against a background of significant linguistic change. In 1901 Welsh was spoken by 929,824 people, or 49.9% of the population of Wales; by 1991 that number had declined to 508,098, a mere 18.6% of the population (Jenkins and Williams 2000: 2-3). That Welsh literature should have flourished in such a context is, at first sight, a perplexing paradox. It could be argued however that its vitality was fuelled both by the angst of writers engaged with an increasingly endangered and marginalised language and by a deep political commitment to safeguard the future of that language. At the be-

¹ I am indebted to Professor Branwen H. Jarvis for her comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

² Entries on all the writers discussed in this chapter will be found in Stephens (1998), the standard reference work in the field of Welsh literature. Johnston (1998) also provides a valuable insight into the field together with useful references for those unable to read Welsh. A wide-ranging and up-to-date selection of twentieth-century Welsh poetry in translation is contained in Elfyn and Rowlands (2003). References to further translations, especially of prose, will be found in the on-line "Bibliography of Welsh Literature in English Translation" at the Centre for Research into the English Literature and Language of Wales, University of Wales Swansea. Consulted 15 June 2004. <<http://bwlet.net/>> See also Reynolds (2005).

ginning of the twenty-first century one is able to speak of Welsh, statistically at least, in terms of resilience and hopeful signs of recovery (Aitchison and Carter 2004: 145), and the safeguarding of the language as a medium of literature and intellectual dialogue during the twentieth century has played no mean part in enabling one to do so.

I 1893-1918

During the two decades leading up to the First World War, Welsh literature witnessed a distinct change of direction. Connected with such figures as Owen M. Edwards (1858-1920), John Morris-Jones (1864-1929), T. Gwynn Jones (1871-1949) and W.J. Gruffydd (1881-1954), the “literary revival”, as this broad movement is usually referred to, has often been viewed in the past in sharp contrast with the literature of the Victorian era. In reality however, it was very much a creation of nineteenth-century Wales and, ultimately, of those twin forces that had transformed Welsh society during the same period, namely industrialisation and Nonconformity.

Between 1801 and 1911 Wales’s population increased fourfold from 601,767 to 2,442,041 (D. Jones 1998: 17), and nothing attests more to the power that “king coal” in particular exercised over its economy and people than the fact that on the eve of the First World War over a quarter of a million men were employed in its extraction. (Francis and Smith 1980: Appendix IV). Up to the 1890s at least, the expansion of the south Wales coalfield was largely sustained by internal migration, and Welsh was not only able to survive in an industrial environment, but also in many respects to thrive, as was the case in the slate-quarrying areas of Gwynedd and the south-west coalfield. Although not a state language, through the influence of the circulating schools of the eighteenth century and the Sunday schools movement, Welsh had entered the industrial age with remarkable levels of literacy among its speakers and more attuned to the age of print than any of the other Celtic languages. Invigorated by industrial expansion, it is hardly surprising that the Victorian era was a golden age of Welsh printing, its thriving vernacular press serving a seemingly ever-expanding population, and some of its publishers showing breathtaking ambition, such as Gee a’i Fab of Denbigh who published a ten-volume Welsh encyclopaedia – *Y Gwyddoniadur Cymreig* – in supplements between 1854 and 1879 (Philip Henry Jones 1998: 173-87). Much of this activity was fuelled by the needs of Nonconformity. By the middle of the century, Nonconformity had acquired a hegemony that extended well beyond the nation’s spir-

itual life and was to become the galvanising force of a remarkable national awakening that permeated much of the life of Wales from the 1860s onwards. In ideological terms it was an awakening very much within the confines of that common sense of Britishness that has been so eloquently described by Linda Colley (1996), and to which the Welsh (both as Protestants and “Cambro-Britons”) had a particular affinity. National sentiment was stirred, not by a separatist agenda as in the case of Ireland, but by a deep yearning for recognition of Wales’s distinct place within the Imperial Parliament. In politics, the awakening has been well documented (Morgan 1980). It found an outlet in Liberalism and was impassioned by such radical issues as land reform and the disestablishment of the Church in Wales. The emergence of the Eisteddfod as a truly national institution together with the creation of a National Library and a National Museum (in 1907 and 1908 respectively) were further signs of a vigorous new awareness of the unity of Wales. Similar patriotic endeavours in the field of higher education culminated in 1893 in the creation of a federal University of Wales, and it goes without saying that the literary revival was very much a child of this national awakening.³

Bearing in mind that the nineteenth century in Wales was, throughout, a period of immense literary activity – in output, at least, there is some substance to the claim that it was a *grande siècle* (H.T. Edwards 2001: 71-86) – the literary “revival” can hardly be viewed as a dramatic rekindling of creativity. It was, rather, a phenomenon very much concerned with exacting new standards and with enforcing a new hierarchy of literary values in a land that had been, throughout the centuries, bereft of seats of higher learning and where that quintessential Victorian literary figure, the preacher-poet, had long held sway. The study of texts fostered a sharper awareness of Wales’s medieval literary inheritance and, similarly, in historiography, the work of J.E. Lloyd (1861-1947) did much to undermine the common Protestant assumption that medieval Wales was nothing more than a land of darkness, superstition and Popery (Lloyd 1911). Naturally, the literary revival drew considerable strength and succour from the Welsh departments of the new university colleges and it was as much concerned with

³ It should be noted however that beneath this newly-found national self-confidence there existed some extremely ambivalent attitudes towards Welsh. Among the emerging Nonconformist *bourgeoisie*, English was increasingly seen as a prestige language and a means of upward mobility, and the language was further marginalised by rapid expansion of state education. A sense of linguistic inferiority was also fostered by the ritualistic attacks of the London press. In a notorious onslaught in the *Times* in 1864, Welsh was described as a “semibarbarous language” and “the curse of Wales” (quoted in Edwards 1980: 327).

the setting of new standards in linguistic and literary scholarship as it was with literature in the narrow sense.

John Morris-Jones was a central figure of the revival and encompassed both its scholarly and literary aspects. Oxford trained, he had initially entered Jesus College in 1883 to study mathematics, but under the influence of the Jesus Professor of Celtic, John Rhŷs, he became an avid researcher of the Celtic languages. At Oxford during the 1880s his studies of Welsh could hardly have been a dispassionate pursuit. The founding of the Dafydd ap Gwilym Society in 1886 was indicative of patriotic stirrings among Oxford's Welsh students and it was through the deliberations of this exile community that Morris-Jones's scholarly instincts were fused with a concern for the future directions of Welsh literature. A formidable linguist, he became preoccupied with matters that form an inherent part of emergent nationalisms – the standardisation of language and the creation of a fixed orthography. In late nineteenth-century Wales, the *creation* of a literary register, as in the case of Basque for example in more recent times, was not an issue. It already existed. But set against the standards of the *cywydd* period and those of early-modern prose-writers, such as Ellis Wynne (1671-1734), Morris-Jones was troubled (to a pathological extent, some would claim) by what he considered to be the “debased” nature of the literary language, the creeping influence of English upon its idiom and those quirks and oddities introduced by pseudo-grammarians of an earlier generation such as William Owen Pughe (1759-1835). “Following Ellis Wynne”, he declared in 1898, and without a hint of irony it should be noted, “nobody, apart possibly from Goronwy Owen, has been able to compose such vigorous and splendid Welsh prose” (Morris-Jones 1898: xxxiii). Appointed a lecturer at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, in 1889, Morris-Jones became a one-man Welsh equivalent of the *Académie française*. His highly prescriptive *Welsh Grammar: Historical and Comparative* appeared in 1913, and although his “Oxford Welsh”, as it was often referred to, created a climate of fear for ordinary writers of Welsh, his prescriptions invariably had the effects of bringing the literary language into closer proximity with the natural idiom of its speakers. He was also a trenchant critic of the stilted and long-winded style of Victorian Welsh prose. In prose, as in poetry, clarity and exactness of form became marked features of Morris-Jones's “new school”, and in that respect it is evident that the “revival” was driven by a strong classical impulse.

Morris-Jones's influence was also keenly felt on the stage of the National Eisteddfod, especially as an adjudicator in the Chair competition for poetry writ-

ten in *cynganedd*, and in such a judgmental and evaluative role his donnish pedantry was given a free rein. Although his limitations as a critic are abundantly clear by now (Lynch 1993: 293-328), there is little doubt that he gave *cynganedd* – that essential feature of Welsh “strict-metre poetry” – a new vitality,⁴ and with his unrivalled knowledge of medieval poetry, his authority, once again, rested on tradition and the practices of the past. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Eisteddfod had awarded its main prizes for lengthy poems in the epic mould, often on religious subjects or in praise of Royalty and the heroes of Empire. Read within a meaningful cultural and social context, such poetry has proved to be a fruitful field of study in recent times (H.T. Edwards 1980 and Millward 1998); yet viewed from a narrower aesthetic perspective it is apparent that the Eisteddfod poets were toiling in a creative cul-de-sac. However, with T. Gwynn Jones’s “Ymadawiad Arthur” (“The Passing of Arthur”), awarded the chair at the Bangor National Eisteddfod of 1902, one can state that the revival had come of age. To find *cynganedd* practised with such melodious elegance one would have to return to the classical praise poetry of the fifteenth century. But in marvelling only at “Ymadawiad Arthur’s” consummate beauty, one is in danger of losing sight of T. Gwynn Jones’s true significance as a poet. As in the case of Ruskin, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, T. Gwynn Jones delved into the medieval past, and Celtic mythology in particular, in order to re-engage with an age of innocence and create a mythic bulwark against the inhumane ravages of industrial capitalism. Furthermore, set within a specific Welsh context, “Ymadawiad Arthur” can be viewed as T. Gwynn Jones’s adieu to the progressive optimism of Victorian Wales and to a Liberal national awakening that had reached a political impasse with the failure of the *Cymru Fydd* or Young Wales home-rule movement in 1896. Arthur’s passing and Bedwyr’s forlorn return to battle at the end of the poem are very much the symbols of unfulfilled national aspirations. In that respect, “Ymadawiad Arthur” can be seen as pointing to future developments and the transition from what Tom Nairn once called the “circumscribed patriotism” (1977: 13) of the nineteenth century to the modern Welsh nationalism of the post-war period.

⁴ *Cynganedd*, to quote one authority, is “the most sophisticated system of sound-patterning practised in any poetry in the world” (Preminger and Brogan 1993: 265); formulised during the fourteenth century, it was reanimated by the Eisteddfod movement at the end of the eighteenth century. *Cynganedd* was practised, alongside blank-verse and a host of accentual-syllabic verse-forms, throughout the nineteenth century. All metrical forms that do not contain *cynganedd* are generically referred to in Welsh as *canu rhydd* ‘free-metre verse’.

“Ymadawiad Arthur” is indicative, in many ways, of the general direction Welsh poetry took at the beginning of the twentieth century. In its emphasis on language, style and form, the revival may well have betrayed the influence of Classicism, but it was a Romantic movement above everything else. In the free-metre lyrics of John Morris-Jones, W.J. Gruffydd and others, in R. Williams Parry’s (1884-1956) celebrated *awdl* – a lengthy poem written in *cynghanedd* – “Yr Haf” (Summer) one finds a world inhabited by fair maidens and melancholic poets; a medieval landscape forever enclosed in mist, and an incessant wind laden with *hiraeth* disturbing the leaves. Little wonder that Alun Llywelyn-Williams gave the title *Y Nos, y Niwl, a’r Ynys* (“The Night, the Mist and the Island”) to his magisterial study of the poetry of the period, published in 1960. Celebrating the sensual and transient – “love’s transient second lasts longer than a lifetime of hell” as W.J. Gruffydd put it in his “Trystan ac Eryllt” – it was poetry that unashamedly challenged staid Victorian sensibilities, and in the case of a reading public more accustomed to hymns, didactic literature and temperance songs, it may well have appeared at first a wee bit risqué. Yet it was poetry that they enthusiastically took to heart and cherished. In his sonnet “Madrondod” (“Giddiness”), published in sober middle age, T.H. Parry-Williams (1887-1975) speaks of one heady summer during his youth when, between bouts of studying Horace and Catullus, he became “blind drunk” (*yn feddw fawr*) on the “new wine” of a volume of Welsh lyrics composed by R. Silyn Roberts (1871-1930) and W.J. Gruffydd (Parry-Williams 1972: 77). Somehow, within the sweet rhythms and aesthetic Romanticism of such poetry one also captures the naive innocence of that Edwardian Indian summer that was to be so tragically curtailed by the dreadful events of 1914-18.

Although the revival – W.J. Gruffydd’s play *Beddau’r Proffwydi* is one of the clearest examples – represents a rejection of some of the shibboleths of the Victorian era and a superficial rebellion against the more obvious hypocrisies of chapel life, it can hardly be viewed as a departure from the core socio-political values of the Liberal-Nonconformist tradition. Indeed, with Owen M. Edwards the revival came to champion some of the cherished myths of that tradition. Edwards’s popular and lucid essays on literary matters and Welsh history, his autobiographical writing and travel books, were enthusiastically received during his own age and, more importantly, his idealised portrayal of the close-knit rural community of his native Llanuwchllyn in Merionethshire (in essays such as *Clych Atgof* (1906) “The Bells of Memory”) became an essential part of one of the most enduring and influential myths of Victorian Wales, that of the romanti-

cised Welsh *gwerin* (common people or folk). O.M. Edwards's mythologised Welsh *gwerinwr* (common man) was, of course, very much the descendent of European Romanticism, but he was also imbued with the best qualities of Welsh Liberal-Nonconformity; sober, literate and honest, he was emancipated from darkness by the religious revivals of the eighteenth century and forever upright on his upland holding in the face of the tyranny of the Established Church and an Anglicised landed gentry (Llywelyn-Williams 1960: 141-61; P. Morgan 1967). The *gwerinwr*, to all purposes, was a culmination of the history of Wales, and in this mythic guise he was to lead Welsh literature into a partial state of denial. At a time when the industrialisation of Wales was not only reaching its high-water mark, but was also a daily reality for probably a majority of Welsh speakers, the Wales of O.M. Edwards's *gwerin* was an unequivocally rural and agrarian construct, although it should be stressed that an idealised version of the miner had, by the turn of the century, been grafted onto the *gwerin* myth and was to remain (side by side with the noble quarryman) one of the stock images of Welsh literature well into the twentieth century (H. T. Edwards 1994). The darker and harsher sides of Welsh rural society were also, for a considerable time, to remain unexplored. O.M. Edwards's Llanuwchllyn, on the other hand, became a template for the depiction and celebration of rural life in a host of autobiographies and a substantial body of poetry during the twentieth century.

O.M. Edwards's *gwerinwr* was rooted, to a limited degree, in some sort of contemporary reality. From the vestry and the *cymanfa ganu* (hymn-singing festival) to the stage of the National Eisteddfod, the cultural life of Victorian Wales was one of amateur mass-participation. In the field of literature an astonishing number of craftsmen, miners, quarrymen and tenant farmers took delight in composing the occasional lyric or *englyn* and competing in local Eisteddfodau. This cultural framework, broadly based and egalitarian in spirit, survived well into the twentieth century; it explains why Alan Llwyd and Gwynn ap Gwilym had to scour the work of five thousand poets in preparing a twentieth-century anthology of Welsh poetry (Llwyd 1987: 4); why the second best-selling publication devoted entirely to poetry in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the Welsh language *Barddas* (Minhinnick 2003: ix), and why Radio Cymru is the only radio service that the present writer is aware of that hosts a weekly knock-out competition for teams of poets. However, as Dafydd Glyn Jones once remarked, such a broadly-based literary life is always in danger of "opting for the third and fourth rate" (1971: 177); it can be blindly antagonistic to the avant-garde, and the relationship of its upholders and myth-

makers with the University of Wales's Welsh Departments – the main fulcrum of literary innovation in twentieth-century Wales – has often been strained (R.M. Jones 1993: 2).

II 1914-1939

Mae'r hen delynnau genid gynt
Ynghrog ar gangau'r helyg draw,
A gwaedd y bechgyn lond y gwynt,
A'u gwaed yn gymysg efo'r glaw.

[The old harps that once were sung, /
Now hang upon the willow trees /
And the lads' anguish fills the breeze /
And their blood mingles with the rain].

So sang Ellis Humphrey Evans (1887-1917), a farmer from Trawsfynydd in Merionethshire, in his short lyric “Rhyfel” (War), the most memorable Welsh poem composed during the First World War (Hedd Wyn 1931: 1). Ellis Humphrey Evans, or Hedd Wyn, to give him his bardic name, was killed in the battle of Pilken Ridge on 31 July 1917; a little over a month later he was posthumously awarded the Chair at the National Eisteddfod of Wales. In “Rhyfel” we enter a topsy-turvy world of spiritual dislocation where old values and certainties have forever been destroyed. Although God still exists, he is a God far removed from the chaos of the world; a God in self-imposed exile, “in retreat on a far away horizon” (*ar drai ar orwel pell*). It could further be argued that “Rhyfel”, in a prophetic manner, also captures the dilemma that was to face Welsh literature in the post-war period. The old harps had been destroyed. In a world that had been on a four-year killing spree, what relevance any more had the sweet music of the neo-Romantic poets? The challenge facing Welsh literature was that of creating a new poetics or modernist idiom.

The problems involved are clearly present in T. Gwynn Jones's lengthy narrative poem, “Madog”, composed in 1918 and loosely based on the story of the medieval Welsh prince Madog ap Owain Gwynedd, who, according to Welsh lore, was the first European to set foot on American soil. The central theme of

T. Gwynn Jones's "Madog" is undoubtedly the futility of war; and yet the dark poignancy of its message is blunted by its medieval setting and somehow lost in the richly woven tapestry of the poet's diction and *cynghanedd*. T. Gwynn Jones's problem was not that of attitude – he undoubtedly realised that the world had been turned upside down by the relentless slaughter of the war – but rather the fact that he was unable, at that time at least, to free himself from the stylistic shackles of the romantic revival. However, the most venerated poet of the inter-war years, R. Williams Parry, fully realised by the end of the war that the medievalism that had formed an integral part of his *awdl* "Yr Haf" (1910) was well and truly a thing of the past. In the sonnet "Adref" (Homewards), first published in 1917, he sounds the death-knell of the aestheticism of his early poetry and dismisses his romantic wanderings among the "the knights of Christendom" as utter folly (Parry 1998: 5). The war hardly made a modernist out of R. Williams Parry (A.E. Housman was, after all, one of his literary heroes), but it was a major turning point in his career. We see the standardised attitudes of the early poetry giving way to celebrated poems such as "Y Llwynog" (The Fox) that aim to capture momentary experiences with meticulous precision. One would, of course, be ludicrously overstating his case in claiming that "Y Llwynog" represents a radically new Welsh poetics. However, it is indicative of a gradual stylistic movement in R. Williams Parry's poetry away from the ornate towards the plain, a process that began during the war years as he set about to expunge from his diction the medieval archaisms that had been one of the hallmarks of pre-war poetry. It is this concern with directness, more than anything else, that lends sombre dignity to his elegies (in the *englyn* metre) for friends and acquaintances killed in the war. As his career progressed, his language also began to oscillate between a formal and more colloquial register, a development that led, in sonnets such as "Y Peilon" (The Pylon), "Hen Gychwr Afon Angau" (The Old Boatman of the River of Death) and "Dyffryn Nantlle Ddoe a Heddiw" (Nantlle Valley Yesterday and Today), to an ironic interplay of styles. As for R. Williams Parry's themes, the war's greatest legacy was pessimism. Nature, it is true, gave him solace – but the war, once again, had made a difference by undermining that basic Romantic assumption that nature and human consciousness existed in harmony with each other. In "Yr Haf", nature served as a mirror for the joys and tribulations of love. Post-1918, nature in his poetry becomes divorced and alienated from human existence, an unperturbed and, at times, a rather eerie observer of man's follies and mortality.

Although an interesting body of war literature was produced in Welsh (Williams 1993 and 1996), it was in an indirect manner, as in the case of R. Williams Parry, that the war of 1914-18 exerted its most significant influence on Welsh literature. It gave new directions to the currents of thought and, as we shall see, created a much more intense and intellectually-charged artistic climate during the 1920s and 1930s. It also had a liberating effect on some young writers. New territories were explored and, under the influence of D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley and Sigmund Freud, one sees a preoccupation with sin, psychology and matters of the flesh. In the field of poetry, the most notable example of this preoccupation was the prize-winning poem of E. Prosser Rhys (1901-45) at the National Eisteddfod in 1924 that scandalised Nonconformist Wales with its reference to a homosexual love affair. The play *Cwm Glo* (Coal Valley) by J. Kitchener Davies's (1902-52) occasioned a further outcry in 1935 with its bold treatment of the more sordid aspects of Welsh working-class life. The war also brought about major changes in the socio-political landscape of Wales. The biggest political casualty of the trenches was the Liberal Party. In the south Wales valleys, against a background of unyielding Anglicisation, the Labour Party gained the ascendancy, although its triumph was underpinned more by a Lib-Lab consensus than a whole-hearted conversion to a secular collectivist ideology. In the case of a small group of Welsh-speaking literati, disaffection with Liberalism was to lead in 1925 to the founding of the Welsh Nationalist Party, or *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* (The National Party of Wales) as it was then known. During its first five years the party's main concern was the Welsh language, and in the realms of practical politics it made little headway until the 1960s.⁵ And yet on the intellectual front, at that point where literature, criticism and political theory converge, the influence of its main ideologue, the playwright, poet and critic Saunders Lewis (1893-1985), was seminal.

Nearly twenty years after his death, Saunders Lewis remains, especially among modern-day nationalists, as enigmatic a figure as ever, the object of both adulation and sharp criticism. On account of the Penyberth incident (he committed a symbolic act of arson in 1936 at an RAF bombing school on the Llŷn peninsula) and his subsequent imprisonment, he is still seen as that "necessary figure" without whom nationalism in modern Wales would hardly have emerged as a living force (Humphreys 1983: 13). But for the party he created, his rightward leanings in particular have long been the source of great unease (R.W. Jones

⁵ It was not until 1930 that *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* adopted Dominion or Commonwealth status as its constitutional aim.

1999: 165). In his eyes, a dynamic and sophisticated literary life, rooted in Welsh tradition, but European in outlook, was of vital importance for the future health of his country. It would serve, in part, as an antidote against parochialism and a spirit of inferiority that had been engendered in Wales both by centuries of English cultural subjugation and what he once referred to in his youth as “the black barbarism of its Nonconformity” (Lewis 1993: 442). Through his own example he gave the artist in Wales a new sense of vocation, and although tradition figures large in his literary criticism, as in the case of such kindred spirits as T.S. Eliot and David Jones, he was no unadventurous traditionalist himself. In literature as in politics, the *status quo* was not an option. Although Wales was to preoccupy his mind for the best part of his life, in his writing, both creative and political, there is no cheap patriotic posturing. The matter of Wales is undoubtedly present in a number of his plays and poems, but at an intense intellectual level.

Born in Wallasey, the son of a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist minister, Lewis was of impeccable Nonconformist stock; but one of the dominant themes of his life and writing is his sustained and intellectually cohesive assault on the core values of the Liberal-Nonconformist tradition. He returned to the Protestant land of his fathers in 1920 an avowed Francophile and deeply influenced by the radical conservatism of the French Catholic revival. (After much anguish he finally converted to Roman Catholicism in 1932.) Like T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, he was an artist fiercely at odds with the modern world; he abhorred a technological age that, in his opinion, had debased the sanctity of life by turning craftsmen into cogwheels and a rural peasantry into a proletariat. In Wales, other ills had also conspired to sap what had once been, in Lewis’s rosy reading of the past, a stable Christian social order. For Protestant interpreters, the history of Wales from the sixteenth century onwards had long been seen as a matter of linear progression. For Lewis, on the other hand, the Tudor settlement and the Reformation were unmitigated disasters. Through the growth of the British nation-state, Wales, which had once been an integral part of Catholic Christendom, became divorced from Europe and a cultural backwater; its native gentry class, long the mainstay of a vibrant literary life, also became Anglicised in speech and outlook. Although the Methodist revivals of the eighteenth century reinvigorated Welsh spiritual life, by aligning itself with Liberalism during the course of the nineteenth century Methodism became the conduit of an unhealthy and dangerous individualism, an inoculator of self-advancement and upward mobility at the expense of more noble spiritual ideals and a sense of responsibil-

ity that encompassed the national community. Furthermore, by succumbing to Modernism in theology, Methodism's moral fibre was greatly weakened as it lost sight of the central importance of sin in the Christian faith.

By the twentieth century what Wales lacked more than anything else, according to Lewis's harsh critique of the Liberal-Nonconformist tradition,⁶ was a ruling class or intellectual vanguard sensitive to the claims of the past, and with the motto *noblesse oblige* ringing in its ears. It is hardly surprising therefore that his theatre gravitates to a great measure towards ruling élites. Be they from the world of myth and pseudo-history as in *Blodeuwedd* and *Buchedd Garmon* (The Life of Germanus), be they historical figures as in *Siwan* (Joan), or from contemporary life as in *Gymerwch Chi Sigaret?* (Have a Cigarette?) and *Brad* (Betrayal), the spotlight is firmly on characters upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of leading others. (In that respect, Lewis's war experience as a lieutenant in the South Wales Borderers is often overlooked as a formative influence.) Their moral dilemma is not an unfamiliar one. It is often a Corneillian conflict between passion and reason, between the affairs of the heart and wider responsibilities and obligations that entail the upholding of honour and tradition. Inevitably, at some point, a choice has to be made and a dramatic course of action followed, for good or for worse, to its logical end. For a period of six decades Lewis's output as a playwright was considerable, but it is not unlikely at all that his future fame may well rest on a slender body of verse. Although embroiled in some of the major controversies of his age, one is always reminded by breath-taking poems of faith such as "Mair Fadlen" (Mary Magdalen) that he was, first and foremost, a Christian, a writer who adhered for most of his adult life to the principle of *catholicisme d'abord*. It was with him also that Welsh poetry acquired a truly modernist idiom at the end of the 1930s. With its *vers libre* masking adopted forms of some medieval Welsh metres, with its prose-like rhythms at times, 'Y Dilyw' (The Deluge) in particular is a tour-de-force in stylistic experimentation. Written in 1939, it surveys the devastation

⁶ The manner in which this critique informed the political doctrines of *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* in its early years has been admirably studied by Dafydd Glyn Jones (1983: 23-78) and D. Tecwyn Lloyd (1988: 212-333). Lewis endorsed a "third way" between collectivism/statist authoritarianism and unrestrained capitalism/anarchic individualism, a notion familiar to all students of political Catholicism in Europe between the Wars (see Buchanan and Conway 1996: 15 *et passim*). Needless to say, such ideas were hopelessly out of touch with the realities of Wales in the 1920s and 1930s. In Harri Webb's memorable words, for the populace at large it seemed all *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* had to offer were "three acres and a Welsh-speaking cow" (Webb 1997: 13).

caused by the depression in south Wales. On the one hand, it contains vitriolic criticism of *laissez-faire* economic policies; but the proletariat of south Wales is also depicted as ‘human wreckage’, a ‘spineless’ people ‘knowing neither language nor dialect’ and unable to ‘bleed’, ‘as former men bled’ (Lewis 1993: 10-12). ‘Y Dilyw’ remains a highly contentious work, a poem devoid of Christian compassion according to D. Tecwyn Lloyd (1969: 156-7), a *cri de cœur* against the dehumanising ravages of industrial capitalism according to others (D. Gwenallt Jones 1950: 71-2).⁷

With the irrepressible presence of Saunders Lewis, it is not surprising that the world of Welsh letters witnessed an increasing degree of political polarisation during the 1920s and 1930s. For those who saw no conflict whatsoever between safeguarding the cultural integrity of Wales on the one hand, and being part of a wider British political community on the other – an ideology, it should be noted, to which all Welsh writers had subscribed between the Reformation and the second half of the nineteenth century – the establishment of *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* in 1925 was, at best, a rather bizarre development. However, even among those who were generally receptive to the notion of investing greater political power in Wales itself, a cause espoused from within the Liberal Party by the *Cymru Fydd* movement during the 1880s and 1890s, the traditionalist and anti-modernist stance of Saunders Lewis and W. Ambrose Bebb (1894-1955), another leading member of *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru*, created rifts and became a cause of increasing consternation. Such tensions can be traced on the pages of the most influential Welsh literary periodical of the inter-war years, *Y Llenor* (1922-55); they animate the comments of its editor, W.J. Gruffydd, and are often present in the reviews and essays of R.T. Jenkins (1881-1969), who, like Gruffydd, was a staunch defender of those values that lay at the heart of Welsh radical dissent. With Saunders Lewis and Ambrose Bebb drawing inspiration from the literature and politics of the French Catholic revival, attitudes towards France also acquired some significance during these decades of intellectual wrestling and lent an interesting ideological dimension to a rather surprising *genre* – travel-writing. Two books in particular stand out: W. Ambrose Bebb’s *Crwydro’r Cyfandir* (1936) (Travelling the Continent) and R. T. Jenkins’s *Ffrainc a’i Phobl* (1930) (France and her People). Erudite and steeped in the

⁷ By depicting the financiers of Wall Street with “their Hebrew nostrils in the quarterly statistics” (Lewis 1993: 10-12) Lewis has also left himself open to the accusation of anti-Semitism. The matter has been judiciously dealt with by Grahame Davies (1999: 67-71). The play *Esther* (1958) is, of course, a moving tribute to the survival of Judaism in the face of persecution and adversity.

history of France, R.T. Jenkins was, like W. Ambrose Bebb, a historian by trade; however he never succumbed to the blind adulation of all things French one finds in Bebb's writing and was perplexed by the latter's naive enthusiasm for Charles Maurras's virulent *Action française*. On a lighter note, the divide between the two even encompassed French cuisine and the relative values of wine and tea. As is customary with a Francophile, the most rustic of meals and the roughest *vin de table* sent Bebb into orgasmic raptures of joy. For Jenkins, *vin de table* was simply *vin de table*, and even French cuisine of the highest order was no guarantee against the occasional dodgy meal. With its distinctive left-wing views, the periodical *Tir Newydd* (New Fields) (1935-9) added yet another dimension to the polarisation of the period and, under the influence of Auden *et al.*, sounded its clarion in support of literature and poetry that was relevant to the proletarian struggle and the great march towards a new world order. The driving force behind this publication was the young critic and poet Alun Llywelyn-Williams (1913-88). While *Tir Newydd*, it must be admitted, failed in its grand aim of steering Welsh literature towards the realities of the machine age, the suburban setting and cosmopolitan feel of many of Alun Llywelyn-Williams's own dignified poems were an important new departure for Welsh poetry.

Tir Newydd brings us face to face with those ideological debates that informed much of the literary life of the Western world during the 1930s. However, for that modernist feeling of alienation, one has to turn to the apolitical poetry and ground-breaking prose of T.H. Parry-Williams (1887-1975) whose *Ysgrifau* (1928) (Essays) and *Cerddi* (1931) (Poems) are among the major landmarks of twentieth-century Welsh literature. Of all the Welsh writers of the inter-war years, it was Parry-Williams, more than anyone else, who succeeded in getting to grips with man's tortured existence in the modern world, although in his company we steer well clear of those nightmarish entanglements one finds in the work of Franz Kafka. To the uninitiated, his poems appear at first deceptively simple. With the language of his sonnets and unassuming *rhigwm* metre (rhyming couplets) often bordering on the colloquial, we have the antithesis of T. Gwynn Jones's luxuriant style. However T.H. Parry-Williams is a poet who defies simple definitions. Some of his poems were inspired by the craggy bare landscape of his native Snowdonia; a series of poems relate to his experiences on a South American cruise; and in some instances we seem to be in the presence of a sensitive and inquisitive mind grappling with profound metaphysical matters. But when things begin to get interesting, when the reader feels he is

about to fathom Parry-Williams's inner self, when great revelations seem to be at hand, one is often turned away with ironic indifference. As Saunders Lewis pointed out in a pioneering review in 1931 (R. Gerallt Jones 1999: 100), his *ysgrifau* (essays) are, in spirit, if not in style and diction, prose poems or prose lyrics, and form an essential part of his creative *œuvre*. (In that respect they are quite unlike the English "literary essay".) Subjective in manner, they often describe in minute detail and in tightly structured paragraphs seemingly insignificant experiences that relate to particular subject matters or objects. In "Glaw" (Rain), for example, the experience recounted is that of sheltering on a rain-swept Sunday in the porch of a chapel while a service was being conducted inside. The puddles forming beneath the sodden raincoats of the congregation are described with cinematic precision, as indeed are a number of childhood memories that come flooding back as Parry-Williams begins to muse on rain. One is deluded into thinking that these rather mundane details will eventually lead somewhere, that they are exempla that will enable the author to arrive at a grand philosophical conclusion. However, it never really comes to that. Parry-Williams relates how he was roused from his thoughts by the sound of the organ. He opened the door. It was still raining. He put on his hat; raised the collar of his coat; and off he went again into the rain (Parry-Williams 1984: 36-8).

Needless to say, one of the most pleasing aspects of Parry-Williams's essays is their limpid and effortless prose, and, surveying twentieth-century Welsh literature in its entirety, it is difficult not to be impressed by the general linguistic dexterity of those writers who came of age during the 1920s and 1930s. That they, more than their successors, should have such an assured grasp of the language was no mere accident or gift of the gods. Most of them were born and raised at the end of the nineteenth century in essentially monoglot Welsh communities and in areas where the language had retained its idiomatic richness and colloquial vitality. From a tender age they were also immersed in the literary language through affiliation to religious institutions in which the word, both figuratively and literally, reigned supreme. Furthermore, a great many of them were able to take full advantage of the Welsh Secondary Education Act of 1889, and even the English secondary education they encountered at least had the effect, in those happy days of grammar, précis and Latin, of sharpening their linguistic sensibilities. In the field of the short-story and novel, the towering presence among them was undoubtedly Kate Roberts (1891-1985), and such is her stature that one could be forgiven for assuming that, with her, the modern Welsh

short story and novel somehow appear *ex nihilo*. That was most certainly not the case.

With the notable exception of the work of Daniel Owen (1836-95), throughout the nineteenth century the Welsh novel can hardly be said to have developed beyond the didactic and melodramatic. At the turn of the century, the literary “revival” also failed miserably to build upon Daniel Owen’s success and take on board the social realism that had transformed the English novel and its European counterpart. As with so many of the ills of Wales, it is customary to lay the blame for this state of affairs at the door of the poor old Nonconformists. There was, of course, within the Nonconformist *mentalité* an ingrained suspicion of all that was not edifying, and as late as 1933, at a Methodist *Sasiwn* (Convocation) in Glanamau, a minister would speak of drama for example “as not belonging to the Kingdom of Christ” (Owain 1948: 2). As Hywel Teifi Edwards has pointed out, the stranglehold of the O.M. Edwards myth on the Welsh imagination may be another reason for the paucity of Welsh industrial fiction in the realistic mould dealing specifically with the south Wales valleys (Edwards 1994: xxxi-xxxii). In relation to the subject matter of Kate Roberts’s early work – the life that evolved around the slate quarries of north-west Wales – the short-story writer Richard Hughes Williams (1878-1919) was, of course, an important precursor, and although writing by and large within the confines of the great *gwerin* myth, it should also be remembered that her contemporary, D.J. Williams, also contributed to steering the Welsh short story to new heights from the 1930s onwards with the warm humanity of his portrayal of life in rural Carmarthenshire. During the 1920s, in Saunders Lewis’s *Monica* and E. Tegla Davies’s *Gŵr Pen y Bryn* (1923) a new degree of seriousness is also detected in the field of the Welsh novel, although opinions remain divided as to whether the latter constitutes a ground-breaking psychological study or an old-fashioned moralistic tale of spiritual conversion (Rowlands 1998: 164-5).

Kate Roberts’s literary output during the 1920s and 1930s relates, in the main, to her own upbringing in Rhosgadfan, a village adjacent to the Nantlle valley, which, by the close of the nineteenth century, had become one of the main areas of slate extraction in north-west Wales. In her short novel, *Traed Mewn Cyffion* (1936) (Feet in Chains), for example, we read not only about the tribulations of the Gruffudd family between the 1880s and the First World War, but also about the realities of life in a Welsh-speaking semi-industrial society, a life that evolves around the family’s smallholding and the distant quarry. Although Kate Roberts was a leading member of *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru*,

she steers well clear of propaganda in her writing, and, unlike Saunders Lewis, her characters never face grand and dramatic dilemmas. As a host of critics have remarked over the years, their main attributes are their stoical and, in one sense, heroic willingness to endure pain and suffering; their resignation to the fact that their feet are, metaphorically, in chains and that no escape is possible from their harsh economic circumstances. Kate Roberts's world is far removed from that of O.M. Edwards's mythical *gwerin*; her characters display surprisingly little religious fervour and show no great enthusiasm for that distinct cultural life that flourished around the chapels. Yet their values are Protestant to the core: debt is viewed as a cardinal sin; the continuous struggle to get ends to meet is faced with sober dignity; humility and the ability not to draw attention to oneself are considered virtues of the highest order. One could probably argue that such writing constitutes a rather conformist view of a fundamentally unjust society. And as for Kate Roberts's portrayal of women, rarely, for example, in twentieth-century literature have their domestic chores been described with such a profound eye for detail and, at times, what can only be described as loving care. However, one would be spectacularly wide of the mark in suggesting that these observations are a conscious reaffirmation on her part of the traditional roles afforded to women within an essentially patriarchal society. Kate Roberts's women can hardly be described as subservient weaker vessels. When pushed, characters such as Jane Gruffudd in *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, and Ann Jôs in the story "Prentisiad Huw" (Huw's Apprenticeship), are able to turn the tables with ease on their male foes. More important, there is also in her work a succinct critique of the institution of marriage itself: however romantic those impulses that lead to the altar, the exchange of vows sound their death-knell and commit women to a life of inevitable toil, compounded, more often than not, by child-bearing.

III 1939-1979

In the eyes of many readers, the Second World War draws the line under *yr oes aur*, that "golden age" of Welsh literature during the 1920s and 1930s. It was, however, during the 1950s that Saunders Lewis was at his most productive as a playwright; Kate Roberts was also, from 1949 onwards, to follow a newer, more introspective, path drawing on her experiences as a widow in the small market town of Denbigh. Yet there is no doubting the fact that the post-war years provide us with an altogether different literary landscape. Apart from the

fact that distinct new voices were to be heard in the fields of poetry and prose, the war effectively brought to an end those ideological altercations that had split the world of Welsh letters during the 1920s and 1930s. Following his defeat at the hands of W.J. Gruffydd in the viciously fought University of Wales by-election of 1942, Saunders Lewis effectively withdrew from the world of party politics, and from 1945 onwards, after its French detour during the 1930s, *Plaid Cymru* (as the Welsh Nationalist Party then came to be known) was steered by its new president, Gwynfor Evans, to re-engage with the Welsh radical tradition and to occupy a left-of-centre position more in keeping with a membership that consisted mainly of pacifists, poets and ministers of religion. By and large, from 1945 onwards it could be claimed that a majority of Welsh writers shared the same political outlook; they were Gwynfor's people; irritated by Labour's centralist attitudes, but quietly optimistic that one sunny day, seated between Cuba and Cyprus (as that unionist joke of the 1960s and 1970s put it), *Cymru* would acquire its due place among the nation-states of the world. Such political unanimity could easily have provided a bland and insipid backdrop for the literary life of Wales during these years, but that did not prove to be the case. During the late 1940s and 1950s some notable esthetical battles were fought and, furthermore, the distinct crisis of faith that permeated the life of much of the western world in the post-war era was to provoke startlingly different responses among Welsh writers.

In the field of poetry the major influence in the immediate post-war period was that of D. Gwenallt Jones (1899-1969), referred to simply as Gwenallt by his Welsh audience and revered as one of the three great Christian poets of modern Wales (the other two being Saunders Lewis and Waldo Williams). With his discordant rhythms and his harsh and masculine use of language, Gwenallt gave voice to some of his poems, "Y Meirwon" (The Dead) being the most notable example, to the sufferings of industrial Wales, and although, doctrinally, a conservative, his work shows him to have been a Christian who was aggressively concerned with social justice. There was, in his words, a place "for the fist of Karl Marx" within Christ's church (James 2001: 152). The matter of Wales is also extensively addressed in his poetry and, not surprisingly, faith and nationality are inextricably linked. From the age of the so-called "Celtic" saints to the Protestant Reformation and the great evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century, it was the Christian tradition, in Gwenallt's mind, that gave integrity to the history of Wales; under the guiding hand of Providence, the promulgators of the Gospel had not only led the Welsh to the Christian fold but also moulded them

as a people and nation. Many of Gwenallt's concerns were shared by Waldo Williams (1904-1971). Both were of the opinion that only spiritual regeneration would enable mankind to withstand the three great evils of the twentieth century, namely militarism, unfettered state power and the rampant materialism of the Western world, and the advent of the Cold War undoubtedly gave this yearning a greater degree of urgency. However, theologically, there was a great deal of difference between the two. Gwenallt's poems are robustly Calvinist in tone; in his view, the ultimate source of even the injustices of industrial society was not capitalism *per se* but original sin and man's fallen state. Turning to Waldo, on the other hand, one searches his work in vain for rigid doctrines or a dogmatic core. He was fired by a belief in the innate goodness of all men, and even the horrors of the Second World War did not diminish his faith in the brotherhood of man nor undermine his conviction that basic human decency, such as that displayed by the unassuming hill farmers of the Preseli mountains, would, one day, prevail over what Saint Paul referred to as "the rulers of the darkness of this age". Divorced from their literary context, such sentiments may well seem naïve and nebulous, but in Waldo's poetry – his celebrated poem "Mewn Dau Gae" (In Two Fields) for example – the New Jerusalem is a distinct possibility and the object of a profound mystical experience. While Waldo's many admirers lay great stress on the visionary quality of his poetry, critical scholarship has also been concerned with the task of identifying his intellectual debts. The millenarianism of the Christian Socialist revival of the late-Victorian period and the teachings of the Society of Friends – Waldo Williams became a member in 1953 – are among the more obvious influences; the example of Mahatma Gandhi and his anti-imperialist struggles was also a continuous source of inspiration for him.

Both Gwenallt and Waldo possessed a broad stylistic range, but their most mature poems, Gwenallt's "Rhydcymerau" for example, and Waldo's allusive and surreal "Cwmwl Haf" (A Summer Cloud), place them among the avant-garde of the 1950s. Apart from their example, and that of Saunders Lewis and Alun Llywelyn-Williams, a further stimulus in the field of Welsh poetry was provided during the 1940s by a coterie of younger writers who called themselves the Cadwgan Circle, among whom the most influential figures were J. Gwyn Griffiths (1911-2004), Pennar Davies (1911-96), Rhydwen Williams (1916-97) and Gareth Alban Davies (1926–). Modernistic in temperament and displaying an acute awareness of mainstream European literary trends, the Cadwgan Circle were trenchant critics of those minor but immensely popular lyrical poets such as Eifion Wyn (1867-

1926), Crwys (1875-1968), I.D. Hooson (1880-1948), Cynan (1895-1970) and Iorwerth C. Peate (1901-82) whose literary values were shaped by the romantic revival of the beginning of the century. Reviewing Iorwerth C. Peate's *Y Deyrnas Goll* (The Lost Kingdom) in 1947, J. Gwyn Griffiths directed his scorn in particular towards Peate's nostalgia for the old rural way of life, his tired imagery and the tame regularity of his accentual-syllabic verse-forms (Griffiths 1947). During the 1950s the innovative aspirations of the Cadwgan Circle were realised by two poets in particular, Euros Bowen (1904-88) and Bobi Jones (1929-). Both stubbornly refused to play to the gallery, and Bowen's bold experimentations with verse-forms and *cynghanedd*, together with his abstruse diction and intense imagery (he was heavily influenced by French Symbolism), increasingly antagonised readers of Welsh poetry and provoked some heated arguments during the 1950s and 1960s concerning aesthetics and the function of poetry (Llwyd 1986, 43-76; Hughes 1996, 14-29).

Bobi Jones announced his arrival on the Welsh literary scene during the late 1940s with such daring images as "*Y mae f'ymennydd wedi caca ar fy meddwl*" (My brain has defecated upon my mind), and came to play the role of the *enfant terrible* with some panache (Bobi Jones 1949). Displaying much more wit and irony than Bowen, the young Jones had that freshness of language that reminds one of the great fourteenth-century poet Dafydd ap Gwilym and the same child-like ability to see the world anew. In outlook there are certain similarities between himself and Bowen. The pessimism of both R. Williams Parry and T.H. Parry-Williams is firmly rejected. Praise becomes the norm. Having grafted the influences of Symbolism onto the classical Welsh epideictic tradition, Bowen's nature poetry became a sacramental celebration of God's creation. In Bobi Jones's poetry God's creative will permeates everything; it sanctifies love between man and wife; it is present among the grime and pistons in the poem "*Gyrrwr Trên*" (Train-driver), and hallows even some of the more mundane activities of day-to-day family life. Between the 1950s and the present, not only in the field of poetry, but also as a novelist, short-story writer and literary critic (as a critic he writes under the name R.M. Jones) Bobi Jones has been Wales's most prolific man of letters. As in the case of Euros Bowen, the hostility he has often encountered as a poet is indicative of the general reaction to the modernistic tendency in other countries. It also shows how the *avant-garde* is often deemed, within a minority-language context, to be at odds with the utilitarian needs of language maintenance.

When one turns to the Welsh novel during the 1940s and 1950s one encounters two authors whose relationship with their audience was quite different. The

enthusiasm with which the novels of T. Rowland Hughes (1903-49) were received between 1943 and 1947 showed that there was an insatiable desire among Welsh readers for the twentieth century's quintessential literary form and, during the 1950s, Islwyn Ffowc Elis (1924-2004) gave further vitality to the Welsh novel. Elis's *Cysgod y Cryman* (1953) (Shadow of the Scythe), and its sequel, *Yn ôl i Leiflor* (1956) (Back to Lleiflor), gave Welsh reading in general an immense boost at a time when the Welsh book-trade was suffering the ill-effects of post-war austerity. With gripping stories concerning such matters as the tribulations of love and youthful rebellion against accepted norms and traditions, both novels were joyfully read by a new generation of Welsh readers. We see the protagonist, Harri Vaughan, a farmer's son from rather genteel Montgomeryshire, returning home from University College Bangor an avowed Marxist. Harri's political leanings lead him to turn the family farm into a co-operative venture. But one should not be misled. *Cysgod y Cryman* and *Yn ôl i Leiflor* are not Marxist critiques of the failings of Western capitalism. Nothing of the sort. Harri, the college atheist, is slowly attracted back to the Christian fold, and both texts constitute a yearning for stability and social cohesion amidst the dislocations created by the Second World War and by the growing crisis of Welsh Nonconformity. In a much more subtle manner, the same dislocations also inform the work of the short-story writer and playwright John Gwilym Jones (1904-88). In his plays the gaze is firmly on the inner man and on the inner turmoil of characters in search of self-awareness and self-fulfilment, often within an emotionally restrictive maze of family ties. But his work also constitutes an important statement on contemporary Welsh life. The predicament of his principal characters is, in essence, the existentialist *angoisse* of an educated generation that has out-grown the faith of its more humble Nonconformist fathers. In sharp contrast with much of the poetry of the immediate post-war period, there is no simple reaffirmation of faith in John Gwilym Jones's work, and there is no clearer theatrical representation of the diminishing influence of Nonconformity than the rambling old minister, Richard Gruffydd, in the play *Gŵr Llonydd* (A Man of Rest). Influenced as he was by Samuel Becket, Gwenlyn Parry (1932-91) presented the demise of religion in a much more bewildering manner. While John Gwilym Jones's characters are able to articulate their uncertainties, in Parry's plays there is only disorientation and fragmentation, and even the traditional language of religious speculation has been rendered meaningless. During the 1950s and 1960s it was Wales's playwrights therefore, rather than its poets, who confronted their audience with the stark truth that the hegemony of Nonconformity was well and truly at an end.

For many, the demise of the Nonconformist tradition represented the end of what was held to be a distinct and essentially rural “Welsh way of life”. Such a view is discernible in a rich vein of autobiographical writing that appeared during the 1950s and 1960s, a body of work that bears comparison to the Irish rural autobiographies of a slightly earlier period (Williams and Ford 1992: 270-3; Ó Háinle 1999: 362-5). Some of these autobiographies or books of memoirs, such as *Gŵr o Baradwys* (A Man from Paradwys) (1963) by Ifan Gruffydd (1896-1971), have acquired the status of minor classics and do manage to transcend the overt romanticism and formulaic nature of the genre. In the genre as a whole, the present, more often than not, is found wanting; modernity is deemed to be a bad thing, and the collective view of the past is, in essence, a celebration of O.M. Edwards’s great *gwerin* myth. By the 1960s of course, the dynamic relationship between religion and language that lay at the heart of that myth had unravelled, and one of the most important features of that decade in Wales was the regeneration of the Welsh language and the recasting of Welsh cultural life within a secular mould. In Wales, as elsewhere, it was a decade of protest and discontent, a decade that saw the emergence of the militant Welsh Language Society (*Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*), and also the political coming of age of *Plaid Cymru* in the wake of Gwynfor Evans’s famous Carmarthen by-election victory of 1966. The growth of television prompted secular forms of entertainment and coincided with the emergence of a vigorous Welsh-language pop scene. The same decade also witnessed the lively satirical magazine, *Lol*, hitting the news-stands at the Bala National Eisteddfod of 1967, scandalising the Eisteddfod establishment with its pictures of topless girls and forcing the Archdruid of Wales to seek legal advice. Despite what Gwenallt had taught them, speakers of Welsh came to realise during the 1960s that they were not, after all, God’s chosen people. The great myths of Nonconformity could no longer efface the fact that Pontyberem, Caernarfon and Blaenau Ffestiniog were as much a part of secular “American Wales” as Treorchy and Pontypridd, and had been so for most of the twentieth century. It is probably no coincidence that it fell to a Welshman who was by then living in London, and an Anglican at that, to turn the whole O.M. Edwards myth on its head in 1961. Caradog Prichard’s *Un Nos Ola Leuad* (One Moonlit Night) draws on the author’s upbringing in Bethesda around the time of the First World War. Set against a background of abject poverty, the author’s powerful portrayal of the intrusion of madness, violence and sexual perversions into the world of children, together with his innovative narrative structures, has made this the most acclaimed Welsh novel of the twentieth century. Although, primarily, a study of the darker sides of human conscious-

ness (it transpires that the “narrator” is in fact a convicted killer), Prichard’s novel does, at the same time, offer us an engaging portrayal of a large Welsh-speaking industrial village that had all the dangerous allures of a frontier society. Religion, it is true, plays a formative role in the narrator’s upbringing, but the world around him is also one of prizefighting, bustling pub culture and violent soccer matches that make present-day “hooliganism” look rather tame.

An unmistakably secular Wales is encountered in the novels of Jane Edwards (1938–) and John Rowlands (1938–) who are the chroniclers *par excellence* of their generation’s march from humble beginnings to middle class affluence; from meat and two veg to such exotic 1960s delights as *Asti spumante* and that quintessential sign of suburban sophistication – fondue. The novels of Eigr Lewis Roberts (1939–) also represent a sea change in perceptions and attitudes. Roberts, as T. Rowland Hughes had done some twenty years before her, draws on her experience of life in one of the slate-quarrying areas of north-west Wales. But, whereas Hughes celebrates the sterling Nonconformist qualities of a heroic community facing adversity and oppression, there is little idealism in Roberts’s work; the communal spirit and *bonhomie* of T. Rowland Hughes’s work is conspicuously absent and chapel-going has become the peripheral activity of a faithful few. The changing face of Wales is also a marked feature of the poetry of Gwyn Thomas (1936–), the most innovative and influential poet of his generation. His colloquial rhythms and diction, together with the accessibility of his poems, have been well commented upon (Jones and Rowlands 1980: 159; Llwyd 1984: 5) and, in many respects, his work constitutes a rejection of the “high” literary ideals of the Cadwgan Circle. A preoccupation with urban culture, with television and Hollywood movies, and with the commodities of a consumer society, is also apparent in his poetry. His Wales is one of “Televisions, cars, washing machines / Bathrooms, records, bingo / ... a new world for our language” (Thomas 2000: 46), and his output, up to the early 1980s at least, is ripe for analysis in the context of the Pop art movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In the sense that Thomas has consciously blurred the boundaries between “high” and “popular” culture, Joseph P. Clancy is probably right in tentatively attaching the label “post-modernism” to his work (Thomas 1982: 8). However, Gwyn Thomas is a poet who could easily be misrepresented in a general survey such as the present one. He may well be at ease with Americana, but his cultural reference points also encompass the Classical and the Biblical and Welsh literature from the medieval period to the present. In tone, he combines the overtly humorous and ironic with the despondent lyricism of a poet

unnerved by the great questions of life. While great stress has been laid on the colloquial nature of his diction, a recent Formalist reading of his poetry revealed a “defamiliarisation” (Russ. *otstranyeniye*) of language through the juxtaposition of contrasting linguistic registers (Rhys 1992: 161-5). Furthermore, of all the rich creative tensions in his poetry, the most intense is that between his outward modernity and a rigid sense of morality rooted in Christian orthodoxy. But Gwyn Thomas is no Gwenallt: in his poetry religion no longer forms part of an all-pervasive Nonconformist national narrative.

IV 1979-1997

During the 1960s and 1970s, Welsh literati joyfully sensed that they were going somewhere. Although the decline in the numbers of Welsh speakers remained to be reversed, the successes of the Welsh Language Society, and the startling growth of both Welsh-medium education and language institutions such as the Books Council of Wales, had deluded them into thinking that the new Jerusalem was beyond the next hill. On 2 March 1979, however, they were rudely awoken from their dreams. The referendum of 1 March saw a crushing defeat for the Labour Party’s plans to create a Welsh Assembly that would have granted Wales a limited degree of self-government. Sabotaged from within by Labour’s gang of six (which included both Neil Kinnock and Leo Abse) the ’79 referendum and the devolution débâcle heralded the beginning of the locust years and of the relentless march of neo-Liberal economic policies that would irreversibly change the faces of both Anglophone and Welsh-speaking Wales. Coal-mining became a thing of the past, and by the mid-1980s the already fragile socio-linguistic patterns of rural Wales had also become hostage to the contingencies of the free market. Fuelled by the “counter-urbanisation” movement and, in part, by booming house-prices in the south-east of England, rural Wales witnessed immigration from England on an unprecedented scale; but, alas, it was a flight from England’s cities of people who were, by and large, oblivious to the unique linguistic character of their new localities (Carter 1988). From the 1920s onwards, the vitality of Welsh literature had derived from that angst of writing in an endangered language. During the 1980s such angst was being rapidly transformed into an apocalyptic doom. The enduring images of Wales during the period are those of dismantled pitheads and burnt-out holiday cottages, and the gloom that permeated much of the literature of the 1980s and 1990s was memorably captured by the historian Gwyn Alf Williams. “Small wonder that some”, he stated in 1985, “see nothing but a nightmare

vision of a depersonalised Wales which has shrivelled up into a Costa Bureaucratia in the south and a Costa Geriatrica in the north; in between, sheep, holiday homes burning merrily away and fifty folk museums where there used to be communities" (Gwyn A. Williams 1991: 303).

Against such a background, it is hardly surprising that pessimism became a feature of much Welsh poetry during the 1980s, and it is especially visible in the strict-metre or *cynghanedd* poetry of Alan Llwyd (1948–) and Gerallt Lloyd Owen (1944–). Llwyd and Owen, together with Dic Jones (1934–), are the foremost representatives of a remarkable renaissance of *cynghanedd* poetry that has prevailed since the 1970s. Throughout the twentieth century *cynghanedd* was also an essential feature of the poetry of the *beirdd gwlad*, “folk” or country poets who, in an unassuming manner, celebrated the life of their communities, often commenting on local affairs and composing elegies for neighbours and friends. The reintroduction of *cynghanedd* as part of the mainstream was viewed by some metropolitan observers as a bewildering atavistic tendency. It was, according to one commentator, a development “doomed ... to an enfeebling introspective and retrospective agenda” (Bell 1994: 9). However, there is much to be gained by studying this development – and the general nationalist impulse in twentieth-century Welsh literature for that matter – within the context of postcolonial studies and by comparing the revival of traditional verse-forms in Wales, for example, with the conscious decision of an author such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o to re-engage with indigenous African languages (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986). More important, it is hard not to be impressed by the fact that *cynghanedd* poets, despite their occasional overbearing rhetorical flourishes, did produce some moving poems during the 1980s and 1990s, a notable example being Gerallt Lloyd Owen’s elegy for Bedwyr Lewis Jones (1933-92). It is both a mark of the potency of the elegy as a form in Wales, and of the fact that Welsh poets have retained a communal role unthought-of by now among their counterparts in England, that this poem has none of the embarrassing awkwardness of the pronouncements of successive Poets Laureate. On the one hand, it is a dignified lament for a respected public figure, a scholar who had that rare ability to make academic subjects such as place-name studies and Welsh etymology comprehensible to non-specialists. But gnawing beneath the surface there is also a harrowing realisation that the world and language that Bedwyr Lewis Jones had so meticulously described was nearing the abyss (Owen 1993: 33-6).

In 1993, the novelist Wiliam Owen Roberts described the 1980s in Wales as a “black, grotesque decade devoid of hope” (Roberts 1993: 33). His words are found

in a penetrating analysis of Iwan Llwyd's "*Gwreichion*" (Sparks), a collection of poems for which Llwyd (1957–) was awarded the crown at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 1990. "*Gwreichion*" is an important signpost at the beginning of the 1990s in that it bravely points through the impenetrable despair of the post-Referendum and Thatcher years towards vague outlines of hope. It displays a refreshing awareness of the fact that national myths and narratives are not fixed realities; but at the same time it is also a celebration of the power of poetic imagination to sing a new Wales into existence. There is little doubt that Llwyd drew some of his inspiration from an important ideological development in the field of Welsh historiography during the 1980s and 1990s. Both Gwyn Alf Williams's *When was Wales?* (1985) and John Davies's magisterial *Hanes Cymru* (1990) set out to reconcile the "red" and the "green", the progressive and patriotic in Welsh life, an agenda that was to be driven forward in the political field by Ron Davies, the architect of Welsh devolution in 1997. In a similar fashion, one cannot but feel that 1979 also served as a catalyst in the case of Menna Elfyn (1951–) whose ability to interlace the intensely personal and the political in her poems gained her considerable recognition from the 1990s onwards. In her case, new parameters of identity were sought during the 1980s and the national question became a matter of liberation within the wider contexts and solidarities of gender issues, the peace movement, and the anti-apartheid campaign. Similarly, when one turns to Welsh prose, and to the work of novelists as diverse in style as Angharad Tomos (1958–), Aled Islwyn (1953–) and Robat Gruffudd (1943–), it is difficult to escape the shadow of 1979. In *Y Llosgi* (1986) ("Arson") and *Crac Cymraeg* (1996) ("Welsh *craic*") Robat Gruffudd, a leading activist himself during the 1960s and 1970s, coldly dissects the nationalist project of the same period and, inevitably, it is found wanting. Although he locates the crisis of Wales within the broad context of globalisation, he also articulates some uncomfortable truths about the activists of the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s and 1990s their fiery rhetoric had turned into shallow opportunism, and by sober middle-age they usually ended up working for the Welsh media or state-sponsored cultural organisations. A similar gloomy and *fin de siècle* view of the Welsh middling sorts is found in William R. Lewis's powerful play *Golff* in which ideals, dreams and responsibilities are crudely brushed aside by the greed of the Thatcher era. For the Marxist Gareth Miles (1938–) on the other hand, in his novel *Trefaelog* (1989), the cultural nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s was doomed to failure from the very beginning in that it was a middle-class venture led by people who had no comprehension of the class struggle.

Apart from Caradog Prichard's *Un Nos Ola Leuad* and Dafydd Rowlands's underestimated *Mae Theomemphus yn Hen* (Theomemphus is old) (1977), up to the 1980s Welsh fiction remained, by and large, in a realistic mould. But in William Owen Roberts's *Bingo!* (1985) and *Y Pla* (Pestilence) (1987), and during the 1990s, especially in the work of Mihangel Morgan (1955–) and Robin Llywelyn (1958–), it seemed that order and reality were being consciously undermined. Such a development can be attributed partly to the external influences of writers as diverse as Joyce, Kafka, García Márquez and Borges. But as Angharad Price has perceptively pointed out, by the 1990s the fragmentation of organic Welsh-speaking communities meant that the social realism of an author such as Kate Roberts had become difficult to sustain and was, indeed, a negation of the linguistic realities of Wales (Price 2002: 128). In Robin Llywelyn's hands, readers of Welsh were led once again to the realms of the imagination and acquainted themselves with such esoteric characters as Tincar Saffrwm (Saffron Tinker), Pererin Byd (Pilgrim World) and Anwes Bach y Galon (Little Caress Heart). It would be easy to presume that his work offers a fanciful means of evading the realities of the present. However, within its enchantments one finds traces of modern Wales and an agonising fear concerning the dangers posed to the linguistic diversity of the world by the overbearing imperialism of Anglo-American culture. By the close of the 1990s, Mihangel Morgan had firmly established himself as the most productive writer of fiction of his generation. He dwells, often with irreverent humour, on a post-Nonconformist Wales where cross-dressers and leather-clad sado-masochists rub shoulders with professors of Welsh and lorry drivers whose one great ambition in life is to win the chair at the National Eisteddfod. In his prose, the marginalised and disenfranchised come to life, and by rejecting the tired conventions of realism he adroitly undermines those illusions of "normality" that conspire to silence such voices.

CONCLUSION

In compiling this general survey one has been aware, throughout, of at least two dangers. First of all there is a natural tendency in a résumé of this kind to present neat defining features at the expense of showing the complexities of the matters under consideration. It was recently suggested that "too much has been made of the so-called "essence" of Welsh literature", and that "its variegated nature has been too often underplayed" (Rowlands 1998: 159), and whatever one's views regarding earlier centuries, there is little doubt that Welsh literature became a cacophony of voices during the course of the twentieth century. The search for an

inherent quality or a grand defining feature seems therefore to be a futile exercise. However, it goes without saying that the writers discussed in this chapter have all shared a common point of departure into the world of imaginative literature. That departure point of course was Wales, a Wales, furthermore, where the transformation from high capitalism to its “late” and “post-modern” forms was an acute feature of the country’s life. At the beginning of the twenty-first century one finds oneself, figuratively and literally, moving among the debris of an industrial era and a Nonconformist way of life that gave Welsh society such vitality during the nineteenth century. In many ways, twentieth-century Welsh literature can be seen as a complex and drawn-out process of coming to terms with the gradual decline of those twin forces. Were one pressed to identify an underlying theme in twentieth-century Welsh literature, it probably lies with the way authors have defined themselves in relation to the Nonconformist tradition and its passing. It is a thread that links writers as diverse as Owen M. Edwards, Saunders Lewis, T. Rowland Hughes, Jane Edwards, Alan Llwyd, Iwan Llwyd and Mihangel Morgan, and it is plainly obvious that their definitions have extended from downright rejection to a wistful perpetuation of the tradition’s myths.

The second danger has to do with the fact that Welsh is, to use that rather cumbersome term, a lesser used language. Despite protestations to the contrary, one finds within all minority cultures a deep yearning for their artistic and literary endeavours to be validated by the metropolitan centre. In recounting the story of twentieth-century Welsh literature, one is always in danger of trying to relate it to the trajectory of a dominant Anglo-American literature and in danger also of ending up knocking on Harold Bloom’s door. “Hello, Mr Bloom. Here are our Welsh Eliots and Audens. Here is our very own A.E. Housman. Please, can you mention us in the next edition of your mighty *Western Canon*?” The metropolitan reader will undoubtedly come across some familiar tendencies and movements in modern Welsh literature, but s/he will most probably be unnerved by its overt concerns for language, identity and the matter of Wales. And yet it is this feature, more than anything else, that gives modern Welsh literature a truly international dimension and brings it into contact with so much Third World literature and the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century. Welsh literature is, in many ways, an interesting half-way house between Frederic Jameson’s notion of Third World cultural production as national allegory and the more private experiences and concerns of Western or First World literature. Indeed, of all the intellectual challenges that face Welsh scholarship at the present time, there is none more urgent and pressing than to build upon Ned Thomas’s seminal study, *The Welsh Extrem-*

ist, first published in 1971 and reissued in 1991 (Thomas 1991), and to do so in the light of recent developments in the field of postcolonial studies.⁸ One has only to mention Edward W. Said's excellent reading of W.B. Yeats in order to point to the rewards that such an enterprise would surely yield (Said 1994: 265-88). Over the past twenty years the advent of theory, and the founding of the lively journal *Tu Chwith* in particular, have had a stimulating effect on Welsh letters. However it is a pity in one sense that so much was heard of Derrida and Foucault, so little of Fanon and Said, and of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in particular.

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⁸ Since the completion of this chapter there have been welcome developments in this field; see in particular Aaron and Williams (2005).

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FRANCIS FAVEREAU

Twentieth Century Breton Literature

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century has witnessed a drastic change in the use of the Breton language in its traditional heartland, i.e. in the western half of the peninsula that is historically called Lower Brittany (*Basse-Bretagne* or, in Breton, *Breizh-Izel*). At the turn of the century (1900), a majority of Bretons spoke the language, many of these being monolingual, the number of speakers peaking just before the First World War (according to Gourvil (1952) some 1.2 million out of a population of a million and a half). However, by the middle of the twentieth century, only half a million were using the language regularly. It had also been proscribed at school since the late nineteenth century. By the 1950s most parents had turned to French as the main medium of communication with their children. As shown by recent surveys, quoted by Broudic (1995) and Quéré (2000), the estimated number of speakers at the end of the twentieth century is a quarter of a million (there are, however, a further 100,000 who understand the language).

Paradoxically, the twentieth century has been, on the whole, the most productive ever for Breton literature. The nineteenth century had already witnessed what has been called an “explosion in written Breton” (Le Berre 1994; see also Le Dû & Le Berre 1987). In his doctoral thesis, Le Berre records some two hundred nineteenth century Breton authors. The vast majority of them, however, are obscure writers. As pointed out by Abeozen (1957), many were priests and clerics and many of the hundreds of books that were printed and sold in their thousands, were religious in nature, being primarily works of devotion for Catholics. Revivalist literature is also well represented by some famous authors

(La Villemarqué, Luzel etc.), especially in what can be labelled popular lore which was collected and published during that century (poetry – *gwerziou*, *soniou* – and tales from oral sources). However, some more contemporary literary genres were also represented (lyrical poetry, ironic verses, historical plays, but also some fiction etc.).

The number of authors writing in Breton in the twentieth century is probably higher still, several hundred according to Favereau's estimates (1991, 2001). Few of these, however, can be regarded as creative authors: they are rather *écrivants*. Not more than a dozen could be considered "great writers" or authors of note. The most famous wrote and published in both Breton and French (such as Le Braz, Calloc'h, Malmanche, Hélias).

BRETON REVIVAL DURING THE "BELLE EPOQUE"

The turn of the twentieth century was marked by many revivals in the Breton peninsula, isolated though it was then in the context of the French state. Perhaps because of its isolation, it was deemed by Gauguin and his Pont-Aven school to be an exotic "terre des peintres" ('painters' land'). A remote and even backward wilderness for many, it was the resort of travelling writers like Pierre Loti, a Frenchman who wrote some Breton fiction in French. *Pêcheur d'Islande* (*The Fisherman of Iceland*) was a popular novel about Breton cod-fishers which has been dramatised in a number of films and is said to have influenced J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. Loti also wrote about the Basque country and Turkey (he was generally fond of exotic and maritime settings) and he is still celebrated in those countries.

This type of "regionalist" literature was also developed by a few Breton writers, some of whom were native speakers of Breton, like Anatole Le Braz (1859-1926), who remains very popular today for his celebrated *Légende de la Mort chez les Bretons Armoricaïns*, recently studied in detail by Piriou (1995, 1999). Dozens of lesser-known poets wrote verse about Brittany on the French models of the late nineteenth century. A movement of Breton Parnasse poets, including J. M. de Heredia and Leconte de Lisle, had developed before the blossoming of the Celtic bardic movement (Welsh *Gorsedd*) at the beginning of the century. Taldir-Jaffrennou (1879-1956), the leader of this new Breton bardic movement, who in 1899 was proclaimed a "bard" in Cardiff at the age of twenty and then in 1933 was made an "arch-druid", wrote not only in Breton and French, but occasionally also in Welsh.

Much of the determination displayed by these writers is a product of their opposition to the brutal intrusion of the French state in Breton-speaking Brittany at the end of the nineteenth century. The most popular media in the Breton language were the Catholic monthly (or weekly) magazines that developed at the start of the twentieth century in each of the three Breton-speaking dioceses (Quimper and Léon, Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier, Morbihan): namely “Fezi ha Breiz” (“Faith and Brittany”), “Koaz ar Vretoned” (“The Cross of the Bretons”), “Dihunamb” (“Let us wake up”).

For decades these magazines published poems, tales, serial novels, as well as many religious and historical articles – quite often Catholic *exemplae* – that were read by many thousands of people. The Catechism was taught through the medium of Breton to a majority of children until the Second World War. Teaching in schools was otherwise in French only. These Catholic magazines were closely linked to the so-called dominant “agrarian block” (clergy and gentry, as well as educated peasants), at a time when three-quarters of the Breton-speaking population were still “peasants” (farmers or rural folk), and all of them advocated the defence of both “faith and Breton” (*Feiz ha Breiz*, a rhyming slogan in Breton dating from the seventeenth century), in what has been analysed as a reactionary ideology. The Radicals endeavoured to separate Church and State in France (the *lois laïques* of the 1900s), which led them to turn not only against the Catholic Church but also against the Breton language itself, which was so closely linked to it.

Dozens of authors demonstrated a determination to maintain tradition, through poetry and tales, which tended to evolve into more modern short stories, but also in drama. Playwriting was developed by two priests in two main dramatic centres, J. Le Bayon (1876-1935) in Morbihan and J.-M. Perrot (1877-1943) in Léon. This was didactic theatre, from a Catholic viewpoint, but both dramatists became very popular in their native regions and were hailed by critics, in both the French and international press. One must add, however, that other ideological viewpoints, such as republican, socialist, anarchist and libertarian, can also be found in the writing of that period.

Calloc’h (1888-1917) stands out as the most gifted poet of his generation. He was born in the southern island of Groix, “three leagues out at sea”. He was refused entry into the priesthood (for some obscure reason) and was later to be reformed by the army. Eager to fight the “Barbarian” Germans, he became involved in the First World War at its outbreak, seeing himself as “a true Catholic and a true Bre-

ton”, and died in the trenches in 1917. He became famous for his nostalgic and patriotic poetic volume, *Ar en Deulin* (“Kneeling”). It was published in Breton and accompanied by a French translation made by a friend of his. It still remains the symbol of the Breton cultural revival thwarted by the “great war”.

BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

Between the two world wars, modernism surfaced as an issue that caused something of a split among the older generation of Breton writers. Of course, prose continued its steady development, as did prose fiction, for instance in *Bilzig*, an excellent novel of boyhood education by F. Le Lay (1859-1937), a staunch Republican and a historian with an academic background, who became the mayor of his small sea-side town. Also interesting is Malmanche’s neo-symbolist theatre in Breton; Tanguy Malmanche (1875-1963) had been writing since the beginning of the century, and became better known during this period, although his plays were never much performed, maybe because they were written simply to be read, as Morvannou (1987) has suggested.

But these years (from the 1920s to the 1940s) were first and foremost those of *Gwalarn* (1925-1944), a literary review launched by Roparz Hemon as a magazine with rather élitist views aimed at creating a “national renaissance”. It set the cultural agenda of the new nationalist movement *Breiz Atao*, a group of a few hundred activists and militants, who had “awakened” and dedicated themselves to Breton nationalism. They sought self-government and even total independence in the 1930s, but gained very little support from the Breton population. The latter were too busy learning French in order to gain equal rights, and were very much ashamed of their identity, according to sociologists such as Elegoët (1978) and Le Coadic (1998). Some right-wing autonomists were extremists (some seventy young men fought with the German Nazis) and, as a result, the whole movement disappeared after 1944 (some members becoming exiles in Ireland). Nevertheless, the 165 issues of *Gwalarn* did create a great deal of novel and pioneering literary work, including translations, mostly from European classics, but also rather symbolically from Celtic sources (Irish mythological texts as well as Welsh Arthurian literature).

These “modernist” and nationalistic authors, rather diverse in style, followed their own poetic paths, ancient and new. Publishing short stories and novels, they were at first eager and enthusiastic, but tended to become depressed, as events turned against their ideals, especially at the end of the Second World War. The

“dream” is a central theme in much of their work, as demonstrated by Calvez (2000) and Favereau (2001). This new writing, prestigious though it may be, can be compared to “néo-Breton” architecture and the modern art style; it was very lively in the pre-war period, as exemplified in the *Seiz Breur* artistic movement which has been well illustrated in a recent exhibition and catalogue, published in both Breton and French (Le Couédic and Veillard, 2000).

Poets attempted to cultivate supposed Celtic roots, symbols of a “re-enchanted” world (Calvez 2000) in an ardent and modernistic style, exemplified for instance in the work of Roparz Hemon (L. Nemo, 1900-78), much as Yeats had done in Ireland. Some genuine prose masterpieces have also appeared such as the collected short stories of J. Riou (1899-1937), who died from tuberculosis and whose illness was presented as an omen in much of his fiction, in contrast to the poetic depiction of his native land. Riou had to leave Brittany at an early age to be schooled in a Spanish religious institution, because of new French laws passed in the 1900s. Here also should be mentioned Kerrien (1900-92) who renounced literature after the publication of his first and only philosophical novel, in order to become a theologian. One might also mention some fresco-like novels and some brilliant novellas by Y. Le Drézen (1899-1972), or dark and often autobiographical short stories by F. Elies-Abeozen (studied by Denis, 1988), as well as several other works of fiction written by at least a dozen writers. One could include here a number of female authors such as Meavenn (alias F. Rosec, born in 1911) whose novel, *Ar Follez Yaouank*, a story situated in Ireland during the Irish civil war, was made into a film by the well-known French director, Yves Allégret (‘La Jeune Folle’, 1952).

But on the whole this was quite a self-centred literature, and although this work has become canonical reading for present-day students, since Breton became a fully-fledged academic subject and part of the official curriculum in the 1980s, not much of it has so far been translated (only some prose works by Riou, Drezen, Hemon and Kerrien).

Radio broadcasting during the second world war (from 1940 to 1944 led by R. Hemon under direct German authority), as well as quite different programmes directed by P. J. Hélias after the Liberation of France in 1945 also had a profound influence on Breton writing, as a lot of literary material was broadcast (including chronicles, short plays etc.; see Calvez 2000).

THE AFTERMATH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In the aftermath of the Second World War, for two decades at least, the Breton movement had to turn from politics to folklore. But as far as literature is concerned, there was hardly any truce at all. Since 1945, the movement defending and promoting Breton identity, first and foremost through militant literature, developed in reviews such as *Al Liamm* (meaning “The Link”, supposedly referring to the “Celts”, and publishing articles in Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic but more significantly indicating continuity with *Gwalarn*). This Breton-language review which published intimate poetry, pessimistic short stories in an Anglo-Saxon style and several other genres, had by the end of the twentieth century seen perhaps 300 issues.

But the juvenile tone of the 1930s and the 1940s disappeared in the aftermath of the war: the 1950s and 1960s produced some much darker works, in the period called the Reconstruction. Poetry was either Catholic in inspiration, as in the work of Maodez Glanndour (a traditionalist priest, but a refined and tender poet, whose real name was L. Le Floc’h, 1909-86) or rather intimate and subdued in style, as if the Breton poet felt that he was now alone and estranged in a changing society: *Evidon va-unan* (1955), for instance, which is the title of the poetic works of Ronan Huon (born in 1922), the director of *Al Liamm*, means “for me myself”.

Yet it is in the short story, a very popular genre for many young activists like R. Huon, Y. Olier and P. Denez (all born at the beginning of the 1920s), that the new pessimism is most apparent, as if Breton prose-writers were expressing their own “traversée du désert” and that of so many Breton nationalists. This prose is often Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-Irish) in style, understandably so since this was considered to be an alternative to the French models that these authors rejected as a matter of principle. It has been labelled a rather “depressing literature” (Kervella 1991), which expresses the impotence of intellectuals in face of the dissolution of traditional Breton identity (way of life, landscapes and mindscapes, religion, as well as the Breton language itself, whose demise has become alarming since these crucial 1950s).

At least three generations of writers, born between the 1920s and the 1970s, have written in the *Al Liamm* literary review during the past half century, and many have published books (there are some 200 books in their catalogue). Few of these, how-

ever, have been translated, except into Welsh or into other minority languages (such as Flemish, for instance).

“BRETON ANGER”

After 1968, “Breton anger” was voiced by both popular singers and by activist poets, most of whom were leftists, challenging an ageing Gaullist France: Y. Gwernig (born in 1925), Y.-B. Piriou (born in 1937), P. Keineg (born in 1944).

This literary ideology drew upon the anger of a whole generation, mainly the post-war “baby-boomers” that had witnessed the violent wrath of peasants and workers in demonstrations and riots, as well as experiencing the political upheavals caused by French decolonisation in the late 1950s and the symbolic events of May 1968.

Glenmor (E. Le Scanff, born 1931), who regarded himself as a true “bard”, and as a lonesome activist had created his own public, was followed by the younger Servat and Stivell (both born in the 1940s, the latter becoming famous worldwide). These musicians sang contemporary poems written by Piriou and Keineg (a poet and playwright, who has become an American scholar since the 1980s) to large audiences. *Le Printemps des Bonnets Rouges*, for example, a play written by Keineg about the revolt of Breton peasants in 1675 during the reign of the absolutist king Louis XIV, was performed in front of tens of thousands of enthusiastic spectators in 1975.

Two other poets became famous, largely through the media, and especially on French television. Anjela Duval (1905-81), a spinster and a “peasant poet”, has been regarded as the last of the Breton peasants of old. Being both traditional in inspiration and also an “angry woman” through her reaction to the destruction of her environment and of her native tongue and culture, she has had an impact roughly comparable to that of Tomás Ó Criomhain, on the Irish literary scene. A fiery nationalist, she began writing verses only in the late 1950s. Her “complete works”, well over a thousand pages of poetry and poetic prose, have been published by Le Coadic (2000).

The second is Youenn Gwernig, a protest singer and a poet in three languages (Breton, French, and American English). He emigrated to the United States in the 1950s and made friends there with Jack Kerouac, the beatnik writer, whose remote ancestors – as he was proud to say – had come from Brittany; on Gwernig’s

return after ten years in exile, he became a kind of avant-garde American-Breton inspiration for the new generation.

TESTIMONIAL WRITERS

In the meantime, another magazine, *Brud* (“Fame”) vied with its elders by favouring testimonies to the dying civilisation of rural Brittany, publishing memoirs (often recordings from the very beginning of the century, considered to be a golden age) very much as in Ireland, another part of the “Celtic fringe”. These writers were devoted to the traditional Breton society of their youth, although they accepted that it was becoming urbanised and laicised, all the more so as several of them had been active in the resistance against the Nazis and were linked to influential people within the State (and within the Catholic Church).

Their common aim was to make an inventory of Breton “civilisation” as it had been in their youth before its demise, as Renan had said should be done (maintaining that a language has lived long enough when it has been recorded by “science”).

This kind of literature is perhaps best exemplified by Per-Jakez Hélias (1914-95), in his tremendously successful best-seller, called “mémoires d’un Breton du Pays Bigouden” (Le Cheval d’Orgueil, 1975, *The Horse of Pride*, well-known in America, the Breton version *Marh al Lorh* appearing only in 1986). This famous book remains an excellent example of a contemporary “life-story” (a bilingual biography with an ethnological disposition) and nowadays it is analysed by both critics and sociologists (two colloquiums on this important writer were held by the universities of Rennes and Brest in 1999 and 2000).

Before him, two other major authors had written memoirs, both fine pieces of work, as Hélias himself has said, although they are less well-known since they were published in Breton only: Jarl Priel (Ch. Trémel, 1885-1965), who had been a globe-trotter in Russia under the Czars and elsewhere (Algeria, Paris boulevard theatre), and Y. ar Gow (Y. Le Goff, 1897-1966), a rural lawyer who knew better than most the life of his central Cornouaille district and who wrote a somewhat nostalgic autobiography describing that community.

Hélias is the best-known of them all, however. He became very famous, first of all through the media (on radio after 1945, then on television and in the daily press) as millions of copies of his book were sold and he became *the* Breton writer in the minds of the French-reading public (he was translated into some sixteen languages). By the time of his death in 1995 he had written all sorts of

books: lively sketches in Breton for his radio broadcasts in the 1950s, then successful plays in both Breton and French which were regularly performed from the 1960s onwards, then serialised chronicles that were eventually to form his best-seller, as well as several books of fine poetry (produced bilingually) that have made an excellent volume (*D'un Autre Monde / A-berz eur Bed All*, 1991); also many novels, mostly in French, in his later years. He was, indeed, a kind of Breton "Great Communicator", always welcome in the media, either in Brittany or in the Paris studios, and his masterpiece *Le Cheval d'Orgueil* is deemed by several critics (such as the American scholar W. Calin in a recent study, 2001) to possess universal value.

Another dozen writers from the same generation have written memoirs or autobiographies in the same vein. Three of them are quite famous, and are linked with the Catholic hierarchy, V. Favé (1902-97) who was bishop of Quimper for many years, Father Médard (1908-88) a monk who was a famous preacher in Breton until the 1950s and V. Seité (1908-94) who was a friar and teacher. However, many other writers have produced literature from quite different points of view (such as G. Eliès, Y. Miossec, S. Loguillard etc.).

A MIXED GENERATION

At the end of the century, over the last two decades, say, Brittany has changed more than ever before according to most historians, linguists and sociologists, both institutionally and from a sociolinguistic viewpoint. Regionalisation on the one hand, with some devolution of power to a Breton assembly (especially since 1982), and, on the other hand, the introduction of a European perspective (including new models like Wales, Scotland and the Basque country), have enabled the majority of Bretons (90% in recent surveys) to regain a positive self-identity, having overcome their self-consciousness and the cultural embarrassment that characterised them half a century ago. Over the last decade, Brittany appears to have become a *finistère* (symbolically at the edge of Europe) that stands open to the rest of the world.

This seems to have contributed to a genuine literary renewal (about a hundred titles are published in Breton every year, more than ever before); bilingual schooling has developed steadily (in 2000 there were some 12,000 pupils in bilingual schools and about 20,000 school children learning Breton). Even if greater numbers would be welcome, this gives Breton letters an honourable rank, as it were, among small lit-

eratures, those called “constricted literatures” (*littératures de l’exiguïté*) by Canadian literary analyst F. Paré (1994).

The favourite genre today appears to be the novel, manifested in historical fiction, contemporary chronicles, autobiographical stories, as well as “black” novels, detective stories and even mainstream ‘who-dunnits’. There also exists more experimental prose-writing (over a dozen authors having written experimental novels, for example Y. Gerven, M. Madeg, F. Peru, K. Brisson, Y.-V. Lagadeg, A. Renault etc.). Dozens of authors have published in the two favourite genres over the century: the short story (collected volumes have been published by the Breton-American poet R. Galand / Reun ar C’halan, T. Huon, J. Philippe, L. Tangi) and poetry (K. Kedez, G. Denez, A. Botrel, B. Tangi, L. Tangi), some being translated into a range of languages, (including lyrics, accompanying a marked revival in singing in the last decade of the twentieth century, with a dozen male or female singers such as D. Abernot, K. Nicolas etc.).

This revival has also touched Breton drama, and is evident in the creation of several young theatrical companies, one of them *Teatr Penn-ar-Bed* performing, at times, Helias in English and another semi-professional company, *Strollad ar Vro Bagan*, that has been producing Breton plays for over twenty years now and, for instance, performed a Celtic Passion with over a hundred actors (and singers etc.) in front of some 30,000 spectators in 1995. One of these actors, Naig Rozmor, is a fine poet, who has been writing personal verses and translating foreign poetry since the 1970s. Her autobiographical play, *Ar Mestr* (1997), has just been translated into Welsh (*Y Meistr*), having been a popular success on stage and on TV in the 1990s. Indeed, over the last two decades, television has contributed to the diffusion of Breton literature through adaptations and short TV films. A series of documentary programmes, ranging from a half an hour to one and a half hours, has been produced about the main writers of the century: *Skrivañ ar c’hantved*, (‘writing of the century’) was produced by a new company, *Kalanna*, to which the present contributor has contributed along with writers such as Calloc’h, Malmanche, Hemon / Nemo, Drezen and Riou, Helias, Duval). Last but not least, a few literary sites have even been created on the world wide web!

In many ways, the end of the twentieth century seems to have given a boost not only to literary creativity in Breton, but also to the promotion and study of the language; proof perhaps that the “miraculous renaissance” which began and was hailed by Taldir at the beginning of the century, has been rather successful.

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DONALD E. MEEK

Big Ivor and John Calvin: Christianity in Twentieth Century Gaelic Short Stories¹

My aim in this paper is to consider a very small part of a very large theme. The presentation of aspects of the Christian faith in twentieth-century Gaelic prose is a subject worthy of much deeper study and reflection than can be attempted here. For our purposes it suffices to note that, in the course of the century, Gaelic writers adopted a much more critical attitude towards the Protestant church in the Highlands than had been evident in the nineteenth century. This was due partly to the loss of the church's authority in key domains. It had been the primary vehicle of Gaelic publishing in the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth century, and particularly in the second half of that century, Gaelic publishing was diversified and largely secularised, thus allowing new voices to challenge older ones. Voices within the church also became more critical of its role, as is evident in the writings of the Rev. Donald Lamont, editor of the Gaelic Supplement of the Church of Scotland magazine, *Life and Work*, from 1907 to 1951. Lamont's "Cille Sgumain" sketches, which focused on an imaginary parish and its minister, the Rev. Neil MacFarlane, B.D., included letters allegedly sent to him by parishioners. By using such devices, Lamont was able to create "critical distance", and to produce mildly satirical accounts of parish events (Murchison 1960). Lamont stimulated other, non-clerical, writers, most notably Finlay J. MacDonald, whose hilarious story, "Am Basàr" ("The Bazaar"), daringly took passing swipes at communions, conventions and other church meetings. MacDonald's main character –

¹ I am very grateful to Professor Donald MacAulay for his comments on an early draft of this paper.

a talkative lady called “Seonag” – was a development of Lamont’s “Seònaid Eachainn” (MacDhòmhnaill 1958: 28-34).

MacDonald’s theme – rather out-of-touch Highland characters trying to come to terms with new trends in church life, such as the holding of a bazaar – is echoed in the concerns of several Gaelic short stories from the 1950s, which appears to have been a decade of particular significance in the development of this genre. In what follows, I intend to restrict myself to a trinity of modern Scottish Gaelic short stories, and to concentrate on only one of these stories before discussing some wider aspects of the theme as reflected in two recent novels.

Two of the three short stories are by well-known writers. The one is Derick Thomson’s “Bean a’ Mhinisteir” (“The Minister’s Wife”), first broadcast on radio in 1953, and the other is Finlay J. MacDonald’s “Air Beulaibh an t-Sluaigh” (“Before the Public”), first published in the Gaelic periodical *Gairm* in 1958. Both short stories deal with aspects of Christianity in the Scottish Highlands, and particularly with the power and influence of the evangelical Protestant church. Thomson’s “Bean a’ Mhinisteir” concerns the most important family in the church’s hierarchy, namely that in the manse, and explores the worldviews of the minister and his wife. The wife is an incomer to the Gaelic community, with a love for, and interest in, the world of Nature, while her husband is the conventional Gaelic minister. He conforms until he has a serious accident, and falls over a cliff in pursuit of his wife’s dog. During a brief period of recovery and prior to insanity, he temporarily appears to embrace his wife’s perspectives (MacLeòid 1970: 58-65).

MacDonald’s “Air Beulaibh an t-Sluaigh” likewise focuses on the manse family, but specifically on the minister’s daughter, Seonag. She is very much aware of the pressures exerted by her privileged position. She is expected to conform to the expectations of the community and of the manse family; but she becomes pregnant, and has to make some difficult decisions relative to these pressures. Her friend and the father of her child is Pàdraig, a medical student. Pàdraig comes under the influence of her father’s new-style American preaching, and, just before Seonag tells him her news, he informs her that he has made a far-reaching decision to abandon medicine and become a minister (MacLeòid 1970: 46-57). Both stories share some common ground, since they explore the theme of community expectations and the individual’s con-

formity, or non-conformity, while also introducing a very subtle interplay of deep human instincts and primordial pressures.

THE PROVENANCE OF “IOMHAR MÒR”

My main concern, however, is with the oldest of the trinity of tales, namely “Iomhar Mòr” (“Big Ivor”), a story which first appeared in 1950 in *An Cabairneach*, the innovative Gaelic magazine of the Portree branch of *Comunn na h-Oigridh*, the young people’s branch of *An Comunn Gaidhealach*. Its authorship is unknown, and therefore we do not have the problem of “privileging” the story with an authorial context. In the case of the other two tales, we know something about Derick Thomson and Finlay J. MacDonald, and we may find it hard not to search for biographical dimensions and personal agendas in their work. With regard to “Iomhar Mòr”, we may speculate that so assured a tale did not come from the pen of a secondary school pupil, and we may suppose that it was contributed by a mature writer. We could suggest possible authors among the “usual suspects” of that period, but no writer among those who have published a collection of stories has owned up. We may have our suspicions, and these may be enhanced by the present discussion, but we are not at liberty to go beyond the general mask of *An Cabairneach*. The magazine was edited by the Gaelic teacher at Portree High School, Iain Steele, and appeared only occasionally – in 1944, 1945, 1950, and 1962 (MacLeòid 1970: 73-79, 126).

The publication of “Iomhar Mòr” in 1950 is interesting in the light of later developments in Gaelic literature. It pre-dates the founding of *Gairm* in 1952, and it contains within it some themes which were to appear in subsequent Gaelic writing, most notably Iain Crichton Smith’s novella, *An t-Aonaran* (Mac a’ Ghobhainn 1976). I am not suggesting that Smith is the author of this tale; the stylistic evidence, in fact, rules this out. I am, however, implying that “Iomhar Mòr” has a very important place in the history of modern Scottish Gaelic literature, and that its significance is worthy of some acknowledgement.

The rediscovery of “Iomhar Mòr” after some twenty years of neglect is due to Dr Donald John MacLeod, who included it in his very useful anthology of Gaelic short stories, *Dorcha Tro Ghlainne* (1970). There “Iomhar Mòr” was presented sequentially as the ninth out of thirteen stories edited by Dr MacLeod. MacLeod’s selection was organised round the theme of *mothachadh an duine a’ fàs, air a chumadh, is a’ crionadh* (“the awareness of man as he grows,

is moulded, and declines”) (see also the fine introduction in MacLeòid 1970: 9-21). To some extent, MacLeod’s selection was a response to a new surge of interest in the short story among Gaelic writers of the late 1960s, and owed much to John Murray’s contributions to the genre. Murray’s “Feòil a’ Gheamhraidh” (“Winter Meat”) is the first story in MacLeod’s selection (1970: 22-25). I myself first encountered “Iomhar Mòr” in MacLeod’s anthology, and I never forgot it after my first spine-tingling reading. It has lived menacingly in my mind since 1970, and recently it sprang to the forefront of my thinking when I was teaching a first-level class on modern Gaelic literature. Here I wish to suggest alternative interpretations of “Iomhar Mòr”. I aim to place it within the context of the two other tales that I have summarised, but I hope also to relate it to some key themes of late twentieth-century Gaelic literature, both prose and verse. In today’s terminology, I want to re-read and re-position “Iomhar Mòr”.

SUMMARY

First, let me offer a very brief summary of “Iomhar Mòr”. The tale begins with a flash-back to a funeral in Cill Cheidh, which is that of Iomhar Mòr, recently deceased. The author tells us of his – and, for the moment, I presume authorial masculinity! – considerable unease when attending the interment of Iomhar in a particularly hallowed part of the graveyard, Reilig nan Naomh, where only the truly great men of the faith have been buried in the past, and where no-one in the recent past has been buried. He recalls that his grandfather told him of an occasion on which the earth of Reilig nan Naomh spewed up the coffin of a stranger who had been buried there at an earlier period. By this stage, however, the old traditions about the graveyard had been largely forgotten or were regarded as mere superstitions. The author, however, feels that he must warn the men of the community not to be so precipitate in placing Iomhar there, but he is over-ruled by Dòmhnall Chaluim, who has a very bad conscience about the way in which the community first treated Iomhar. Dòmhnall Chaluim relates that Iomhar Mòr is worthy of his place of rest, having repaid the disdain of the community with kindness, and that he himself has been the beneficiary. The author submits to Dòmhnall’s view, albeit reluctantly. He goes on to tell how Iomhar Mòr came to Geàrraidh. Nobody knew where he had come from; he just appeared, and took up residence in a black house on Dòmhnall Chaluim’s croft. Iomhar’s abrupt assumption of tenancy angered Dòmhnall greatly, and the matter was the talk of the town. Indeed, after an unsuccessful attempt to evict Iomhar, Dòmhnall and Iomhar fought it out, and Dòm-

hnull got the backing of the local youth in a sustained attack on the house. Matters reached the law-court, but the judge ruled in favour of Iomhar's remaining in the house. Thereafter the village was filled with fear and tension, and Iomhar and Dòmhnall were at daggers drawn. However, a complete change in attitude occurred, and Iomhar came to be highly esteemed. The cause of this remarkable shift was a child who had gone missing – Dòmhnall Chaluim's child. Every place was searched, and eventually the author and a companion found their way to Iomhar's house. Iomhar showed immediate sympathy for the community, and changed his usual frown to a look of pity. He also made straight for Dòmhnall Chaluim and promised to help him in every possible way to find the child. The two men were reconciled, and went to search the shore together. The child was not found – but a left shoe belonging to a child was discovered on the edge of the *machair*. Thereafter, matters improved; Iomhar was accepted as a member of the community, and he and Dòmhnall buried the hatchet. The author got to know Iomhar reasonably well, and went to visit him on his death-bed. Iomhar asked him to clear the house after his death, and to return the key to Dòmhnall Chaluim. After the funeral the author began to search the house, and began in the lower part. As he was at work in a dark corner – not quite as dark as the rest – he found something which, he claimed, explained his feeling of unease at the funeral. His discovery was no less than a little shoe – the shoe for the right foot of a child. And there, with the reference to the second shoe, the story ends.

The chilling twist in the tail of this story is memorable, and all the more since it resonates with public concerns at the present time. Though this story is set somewhere in the Highlands, it is broad in its theme, and timeless in its relevance. That in itself is no small achievement.

INTERPRETATIONS

How then should we interpret “Iomhar Mòr”? We can understand the tale in different ways, but I would suggest three possible routes to take:

(1) We can see this as no more and no less than “a good story”. We are given a lot of emotional ups and downs in the course of the tale; fear and unease (at the very beginning), mystery (with the stranger's arrival), conflict (between the stranger and the village and between him and Dòmhnall Chaluim), sorrow (the missing child), reconciliation (between Iomhar and Dòmhnall Chaluim and the village), and finally that spine-chilling sense of injustice, right at the end, cul-

minating in the cliff-hanger on which the storyteller positions the possible deed of the stranger. We ask ourselves whether Iomhar found the shoe and kept it, so as not to cause further pain in the community, or whether he is directly involved in the disappearance of the child. We can “enjoy” all of the various tensions created throughout the work, and leave the story there.

(2) We may read “Iomhar Mòr” without making too much of the identity of the main character, and confine our interpretation to the reactions of the community which is portrayed in the story. Iomhar need be no more and no less than an incomer who has an abundant measure of the rather arrogant style that Highland people attribute to such new arrivals; his particularly overbearing manner causes tension at communal and individual levels. This tension is resolved by a *crisis*; the crisis causes the stranger to pull close to the community, and reconciliation is thereby achieved. The stranger is then given a place of esteem. Vulnerability is thus a key theme; the community is able to resist the stranger to a certain extent, but capitulates when something goes wrong. The sympathy of the stranger at a time of crisis is sufficient to reverse previous antipathies, and to gain him lasting respect. We may read the story as a warning to Gaelic communities not to accept sweets from strangers. Like children, Gaelic communities are vulnerable to the blandishments of outsiders.

(3) Our third interpretation would carry forward the points made in the second interpretation, but it would make much more of the person of Iomhar Mòr. He is not just an alien person; he is an alien power. That alien power can be interpreted in various ways. Is the new power personal or collective? If the latter, is the power that of the church? Or a new power within the church? Or a new power within society, of which the church is a part? How, then, is that power regarded by the writer? Is it seen as benevolent or intrinsically evil, or both, wearing the mask of benevolence and concern at critical moments in the life of a community, but using the weak moments in community confidence to gain a dangerous foothold in its value-system?

The opening paragraph of the story identifies the source of the author’s unease at Iomhar Mòr’s funeral, and the decision to give him a resting place in Reilig nan Naomh, which was reserved for the fathers of the faith. This suggests that we are meant to read the story as a spiritual allegory of some kind. We may note the words that are actually used to portray Iomhar Mòr and his actions. Dòmhnall Chaluum talks of him in terms which are reminiscent of the biblical

account of Christ, “despised and rejected of men”, but repaying rejection with kindness:

Thainig e nur measg ... gun daoine, gun chuideachd, gun chàirdean, agus cha be a’ bhàidh a nochd sibh dha; thionndaidh sibh ur cùlaibh ris agus mhag sibh air. Ach an uair a thainig an dòrainn an rathad a bha mo theaghlach-sa, phàigh Iomhar Mòr ana-ceartas le caomhalachd agus coibhneas, agus bhon latha sin gus an latha ’n diugh bha e na chùl-taic s na chomhartachd dhòmhsa agus dhuibhse (MacLeòid 1970: 74).

(“He came among you ... without relatives, without companions, without friends, and it was not a warm side that you showed him; you turned your backs on him, and you mocked him. But when distress came the way of my family, Big Ivor paid for injustice with compassion and kindness, and from that day until today he has been a support and a comfort to me and to you.”)

One can hear the homiletic cadences in that commendation.

Yet Iomhar is also described as *an duine caol àrd dorcha ud* (“that tall thin dark man”). He has *na sùilean dubha nimheil ud* (“those black poisonous eyes”) as he skulks down the road. The only sound that comes out of his house is *bragadaich mar gum bitheadh am fear a bha stigh a’ briseadh mhaidean* (“banging as if the man inside were breaking sticks”). Children are immediately in fear of him: *Cha leigeadh tu leas ach Iomhar Mòr ainmeachadh ris an leanabh bu mhiosa sa Gheàrraidh agus bha e cho modhail ris an uan* (“You had only to mention the name of Big Ivor to the worst child in the Geàrraidh and he became as well mannered as a lamb”) (MacLeòid 1970: 75-76). Unquestionably, Iomhar is seen by the writer as a bogey-man, and an evil power – but whom or what does he represent?

Those of us who know the poetry of Derick Thomson will think fairly readily of another incomer who is very similarly portrayed – *fear àrd caol dubh / is aodach dubh air* (“a tall, thin black-haired man / wearing black clothes”). This is, of course, Thomson’s *Bodach-ròcais*, the title of a poem published in *An Rathad Cian* (1970). The *bodach-ròcais* (“scarecrow”) comes into the cèilidh house and destroys or represses the natural cultural pursuits of the story-tellers, singers and card-players who are inside. Like Iomhar Mòr, he is a destructive force, and possesses a supernatural ability to take the goodness from pastimes

previously regarded as wholesome – *thug e 'n toradh as a' cheòl* (“he took the goodness out of the music”). Thomson’s scarecrow figure is, of course, the stereotypical, evangelical Calvinist minister of nineteenth-century Lewis (MacAulay 1976: 164-5). Iomhar Mòr appears to carry a similar symbolic significance. Part of his persona is religious, and it also has destructive tendencies. But he is unlikely to be a symbolic John Calvin. Can we find a more convincing contemporary context?

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

We have already noted that the story first appeared in 1950, and that it predates two stories, by Thomson and MacDonald respectively, which have religion and evangelical Christianity as their theme. These were written in 1953 (“*Bean a’ Mhinisteir*”) and 1958 (“*Air Beulaibh an t-Sluaigh*”) (MacLeòid 1970: 126). The 1950s, and particularly the period 1950-55, were a time of heightened religious activity in both the Highlands and Islands and the wider Scottish mainland. In Lewis between 1949 and 1953, the Faith Mission evangelist, Duncan Campbell, was at the centre of a religious awakening which is often regarded as the last significant religious revival in the British Isles, though there were smaller awakenings elsewhere in the Hebrides in the later 1950s (de S. Cameron 1993: 715). We may note that Duncan Campbell was not a native of Lewis; he hailed from Benderloch in Argyll, and was technically a stranger in Lewis, even though he spoke and preached in Gaelic (de S. Cameron 1993: 217).

Evangelical campaigning was also found in the Scottish Lowlands. In 1955, the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow was the focus of the Tell Scotland crusade conducted by the American evangelist, Billy Graham. The impact of Billy Graham on both ministers and people throughout Scotland was substantial (de S. Cameron 1993: 376). This is reflected in the story “*Air Beulaibh an t-Sluaigh*”, in which the change of style and emphasis evident in Seonag’s father is ascribed to the influence of the American evangelist. Seonag is portrayed as being dismayed at her father’s new style:

S bha gràin a beatha aice air an t-searmonachadh ùr ris an robh a h-athair riamh bho chaidh e gu coinneamhan an Amaireaganaich. Cha robh guth air na seann searmoin chiùine, chomhartail a b’ àbhaist cridheachan a bhlàthachadh; cha robh ann a-nise ach an t-iompachadh, an t-iompachadh. Agus an èigheach (MacLeòid 1970: 47).

“And she truly hated the new preaching which her father had adopted ever since he went to the American’s meetings. There was no mention of the old, gentle, comforting sermons that used to warm hearts; there was nothing now but conversion, conversion. And the yelling.”)

It is of significance that Seonag’s father adopts the new preaching mode at a time of family crisis, following his wife’s death. Unable to derive consolation from his “traditional” faith, he goes to Glasgow, and comes back a changed man, with a new gleam in his eye and a new power in his preaching (MacLeòid 1970: 47). Billy Graham is the “stranger” who helps him to conquer his crisis, and whose style is absorbed into a Highland community through imitation. The minister is thus the conduit through which new and disturbing expressions of the Christian faith enter the community, and challenge its earlier values. The parallel with “Iomhar Mòr” is striking, and suggests that the two stories may have been composed by the same author.

Gaelic poets as well as prose-writers were aware of new religious influences in the Highlands and Islands. A change of emphasis in contemporary Lewis preaching in this period is noted also by Donald MacAulay (1976: 192-5) in a poem pointedly entitled “Soisgeul 1955”:

*Bha mi a raoir anns a’ choinneamh;
bha an taigh làn chun an dorais,
cha robh àite suidhe ann
ach geimhil chumhang air an staighre.*

*Dh’éisid mi ris an t-sailm: am fonn
a’ falbh leinn air seòl mara
cho dìomhair ri Maol Dùn:
dh’éisid mi ris an ùrnaigh
seirm shaorsinneil, shruthach –
iuchair-dàin mo dhaoine.*

*An uair sin thàinig an searmon
- teintean ifrinn a th’ anns an fhasan –
bagairt neimheil, fhuadan
a lìon an taigh le uamhann is coimeasg.
Is thàinig an cadal-deilgeanach na mo chasan...*

Here the poet recollects his experience of being at a cottage meeting in which the music and prayer were in tune with the culture, but in which the sermon was hostile and alien. Although the poet was saved (in another sense) by the pins and needles in his feet, this new, passionate evangelicalism affected many young people at broadly the same stage of life as Seonag and Pàdraig in Mac-Donald's story.²

This brings us back to "Iomhar Mòr". In particular, we may note the manner in which the stranger commandeers a cottage, and is potentially implicated (by the author's parting shot) in the fate of a missing child, perhaps implying that the new force has the power to steal children from the community. If the main thrust of "Iomhar Mòr" is religious, its primary concern is likely to be not the old-style "Calvinism" of an earlier day, but the new evangelists and the passionate new evangelicalism, entering the Highlands and Islands forcefully in the late 1940s and early 1950s. An Geàrraidh, the setting of "Iomhar Mòr", already has a Christian tradition, symbolised by Reilig nan Naomh, the section of the graveyard reserved for the finest local saints. The impact of the new evangelicalism and people's reactions to it may be one of the writer's concerns. Thus, after an initial period of opposition and rejection, Dòmhnall Chaluum is converted (in the religious sense) to Iomhar Mòr as others were to Christ.

But could the thrust of the tale be broader than contemporary evangelicalism? The primary concern of the writer, it seems to me, is to ponder how much is gained – or lost – by both the individual and the community in the process of accommodating the stranger. As a consequence of the new understanding between Iomhar and Dòmhnall Chaluum, old customs and time-honoured traditions are over-ruled in deference to the former enemy of the community, as the ironic burial of Iomhar Mòr in Reilig nan Naomh indicates.

Here it is relevant to recollect that the late 1940s and the 1950s were a time of reassessment in the Gaelic communities after the Second World War. The war had made these communities vulnerable to intrusion by big powers such as the British army and the Royal Air Force. By 1950, when "Iomhar Mòr" was composed, new initiatives were being undertaken in an attempt to preserve some of the riches of Gaelic culture in the Highlands and Islands, as the creation of the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh in 1951 indicates. These new initiatives proceeded alongside further major intrusions in the later

² For a discussion of twentieth-century Gaelic poets and the Christian faith, see Meek 2002.

1950s, like the Rocket Range in Benbecula, which was stoutly resisted initially, but came to be a mainstay of the local economy, while also acting as a de-Gaelicising influence.

We should note, in fact, the quiet symbolic subtlety with which “Iomhar Mòr” has been written. We have to read between the lines, and extrapolate these wider concerns from the text in a manner reminiscent of short stories such as John Murray’s “Feòil a’ Gheamhraidh”. In this respect, the story contrasts with “Bean a’ Mhinisteir” and “Air Beulaibh an t-Sluaigh”, where the targets are identified clearly. “Bean a’ Mhinisteir” is more restrained and symbolically closer to “Iomhar Mòr”. The minister’s wife, who is the “stranger” in terms of the conventions of the village, is the catalyst for her husband’s fall – a concept charged with theological and biblical significance. The outcome of the tragedy makes us think deeply, since it results in the minister’s temporary awareness of a wider world before insanity finally takes over. “Air Beulaibh an t-Sluaigh”, which leaves little to symbolism, is probably the frankest story yet written in Gaelic on a religious theme, since it uses “shock tactics” to galvanise the reader. It is thus at the other end of the spectrum from “Iomhar Mòr”, though the two stories do have significant points in common.

“STRANGER FICTION”

The theme of “Iomhar Mòr”, namely the stranger who comes into the community and causes tensions of all sorts, became a very marked feature of Gaelic writing after 1970. It is particularly evident in Iain Crichton Smith’s *An t-Aonaran* (“The Loner”) of 1976. The frame of Smith’s novella is strikingly reminiscent of “Iomhar Mòr”. Indeed, the two are so close as to suggest that “Iomhar Mòr” may have been something of a catalyst for Smith. In *An t-Aonaran*, however, the stranger’s presence is used by the author as an opportunity to explore the existential theme of meaninglessness. The stranger has opted out of normal existence, and his impact on the village is described by a retired schoolmaster called Teàrlach. In reacting with deep mistrust and suspicion to the newcomer in their midst, he shows that such “loneliness” is an integral part of his own existence, and that it is also a malaise found more generally within the village. Few are devoid of its symptoms. Even the minister suffers a loss of verbal articulation, and comes to the schoolmaster for advice because he is unable to declaim the sermon which he has prepared for a particular Sunday service (Mac a’Ghobhainn 1976: 67-71). In Smith’s novella, evangelicalism hovers on the edge of existentialism, and is seen to lose power as a communi-

cative force when the arrival of the *aonaran* plunges the village into its fatal bout of second-guessing and self-examination. The church and its members are almost invariably portrayed as somewhat distasteful people who are spiteful and negative in their views of others. Indeed, one is left to wonder to what extent the author wishes to imply that the church is largely responsible for the alienation of people from one another, in terms of understanding both “incomers” and those who are natives of Gaelic communities. It is significant that, apart from the schoolmaster himself, it is Cairistiona, *boireannach dona Crìosdaidh* (“a bad Christian woman”) who never misses the communions, who thinks the worst of the stranger. In a manner directly recalling “Iomhar Mòr”, she suggests that he may even be a child-molester (Mac a’Ghobhainn 1976: 7-9). Eventually, the schoolmaster “arranges” the departure of the stranger from the village. The plot of Smith’s novella therefore works in the opposite way from that of “Iomhar Mòr”. The stranger is ejected in the former, while he is accepted in the latter, but loss and a nasty feeling of injustice accompany both processes.

The “stranger” motif in modern Gaelic literature, and particularly the presence of the *aonaran* (“loner”), is thus used very effectively to comment on common modern dilemmas. As it develops beyond “Iomhar Mòr”, the motif retains a surprisingly close link with religious matters. Religious influence in Gaelic communities is one of the strands in a much more recent story with another *aonaran* at its heart, namely Alasdair Campbell’s short novel, *Am Fear Meadhanach* (“The Man in the Middle”) (Caimbeul 1992). This *aonaran* is not a stranger to the Gaelic world but a native of Lewis, namely Murchadh MacLeòid, who is suffering from cancer and returns to spend his last days in his native community. He is therefore *meadhanach* (“middling”) in terms of his health. The “returning exile” has been a teacher in Glasgow, and obtains a part-time teaching post in a school not far from his village. He belongs to a family of four, and is *meadhanach* (“in between”) since he has two brothers, the younger a doctor and the elder a highly regarded minister in the Free Church. The latter is Dòmhnall M. MacLeòid, regularly referred to in the novel as *an t-urramach* (“the reverend”). The novel is to some extent a satirical overview of a number of different but interlocking communities, notably the main character’s family, his local community and the wider Gaelic world, as well as the ever-present network of the church. The speaker’s elder brother, *an t-urramach*, is a thinly disguised caricature of a well-known Free Church minister of a similar name. Murchadh often contrasts himself with his brothers, but particu-

larly with *an t-urramach*. Most importantly, Murchadh has no faith in God, in contrast to *an t-urramach*'s dogmatic certainty. The difference between the two brothers is worked out at various practical levels. *An t-urramach* is a "high achiever", as is Uilleam, the doctor, who writes books and belongs to the "arty" Gaelic set. Murchadh, on the other hand, has had a humdrum existence as a schoolteacher of the kind in Iain Crichton Smith's *An t-Aonaran*, and regards himself as a failure. Murchadh is unable to appreciate either Uilleam's books or *an t-urramach*'s best-selling volume of Gaelic sermons, and all three brothers are shut out from one another's literary worlds:

Nàire air an urramach nach do leugh e a-riamh leabhar a sgrìobh a bhràthair bho cheann gu ceann. Thuirt mi ris nach b'urrainn dhomhsa treabhadh tromhpa a bharrachd. Bidh an t-urramach fhèin a' sgrìobhadh. Bha laoidh a sgrìobh e anns a' Mhonthly Record. Agus leabhar beag shearmon, cruaidh trì notaichean, bog not' agus leth-cheud sgillinn. Searmoin, leis an Urr. Dòmhnall M. MacLeòid, M.A. Sin an tiotal a tha air. Chaidh mi 'm bogadh annsan aig Searmon 1, duilleag 1, ach d'fhuair mi na b'fhaide na sin fhèin; ach cheannaich gu leòr chrìosdaidhean an leabhar, thathas air ath-chlò-bhualadh ceithir turais, 's tha 'n t-urramach a' dèanamh prothaid bheag às, chan eil fhios a'm an ann dha fhèin no dhan eaglais. Ach chan e sgrìobhaiche nàdurach a th' anns an urramach. Tha e nas ealanta le theanga na tha e le peann (Caimbeul 1992: 33-34).

("Shame upon the reverend that he never read a book that his brother wrote from beginning to end. I said to him that I could not plough through them either. The reverend himself writes. There was a hymn which he wrote in the *Monthly Record*. And a little book of sermons, hard-back three pounds, soft-back a pound and fifty pence. *Sermons by the Rev. Donald M. MacLeod, M.A.* That's its title. I immersed myself in it at Sermon 1, page 1, but I got no further than that; but plenty of Christians bought the book, it has been reprinted four times, and the reverend makes a little profit from it, though I do not know whether it is for himself or for the church. But the reverend is not a natural writer. He is more skilful with his tongue than he is with his pen.")

The satire in this passage will not be lost on those familiar with the writings of the real MacLeod. The speaker goes on to state that, in his opinion, the most gifted writer in the family was his sister Margaret, who wrote splendid, but

grammarless, letters about her global travels until she married a widowed missionary in Malaya. Thereafter, her grammar improved markedly, but her topics became much more serious, embracing the corruption of human nature and the plight of the world (Caimbeul 1992: 34).

The speaker's view of the destructive effect of religious experience is transparent. It is particularly interesting that the Lewis Revival of the 1950s, with Duncan Campbell at its centre, is recalled in a section in which Murchadh reflects on why the Headmistress of the school in which he works never married:

Eadar dleasdanas is diadhachd, ciamar a bha dol a shoirbheachadh le fear-suirghe co-dhiù? Thàinig an cùram oirre, mar a thàinig air iomadh tè dhe seòrs', nuair a bha Donnchadh Caimbeul air chaoch anns na h-Eileanan, aig toiseach nam 50s. Làithean neònach, daoine mòr a' toirt na leap' orr' aig àird a' mheadhan-latha, daoine eile a' bruidhinn mun deidhinn; oidhcheannan cho murrainneach, sàmhach 's gun cluinneadh tu, air leth-siar a' bhail' againn, fuaim na h-aibhne a' dòrtadh, man morghan, fon an drochaid shìos anns a' ghleann (Caimbeul 1992: 51-2).

(“Between duty [to her parents] and devotion to God, how would any suitor have got anywhere anyway? The *cùram* (i.e. concern of soul) came upon her, as came upon many a woman of her kind, when Duncan Campbell was going mad in the Islands, at the beginning of the 50s. Strange days, grown-ups taking to their beds at the height of mid-day, other people talking about them; nights so still and quiet that you could hear, on the far side of our township, the sound of the river pouring, like rough sand, under the bridge down in the glen.”)

Yet the writer provides a warm-hearted picture of Iseabail, the Headmistress. Despite her religious commitment, she retains her sharp wit and good humour, and is herself subjected to local criticism for her choice of hat at a Christmas service: “*Abair bonaid air tè-aidich!*” (“What a hat for a professing woman!”) (Caimbeul 1992: 53).

This deft portrait and the ongoing discussion of the impact of the “Campbell revival” on reproductive patterns (an age-old canard) reinforces the argument at the heart of this paper, namely that the religious experiences of the early 1950s stimulated not only the churches, but also a group of modern Gaelic

writers who began to adopt a critical, and at times strongly dismissive, stance towards the new crusade- or revival-based brand of evangelicalism.

CONCLUSION

“*Iomhar Mòr*” deserves to be taken out of its somewhat obscure place in the history of Gaelic writing in the twentieth century. The present study suggests that it belongs, at least in part, to a small but formative cycle of tales and poems produced in the 1950s which adopted a critical attitude towards evangelical experience in the Highlands, as themes and styles of preaching changed. This was the period which helped to determine how the Gaelic poets and prose-writers of the later twentieth century viewed Highland evangelicalism, and it is important to note that they were reacting, not so much against what might be termed “traditional Highland religion”, but against the hybrid species which was being created partly through the influence of American crusade-evangelism. This too was the period when the Highlands and Islands began to accommodate both alien intrusions for the sake of economic regeneration and initiatives for the preservation of Gaelic culture. The uneasy relationship between the old and the new, between the outsider and insider, is the central theme of “*Iomhar Mòr*”. It anticipates – brilliantly – many of the stresses and strains and hard choices that were to afflict the Gaelic communities in the second half of the twentieth century.

“*Iomhar Mòr*” is also generically important. Appearing in 1950, it was the first in a series of modern creative interpretations of strangers in the Gaelic communities. The stranger depicted within it offered a powerful symbol which could be deployed at various levels, and was particularly useful in identifying and “earthing” a complex range of forces which were vexing Gaelic writers and their communities. In particular, the “stranger/loner motif” allowed writers sufficient distance and disguise to engage in a critical evaluation of the impact of religion in the Highlands and Islands, as seen from a number of different angles. The tension which such evaluation could create, even when using masks, is reflected in the fact that “*Iomhar Mòr*” was published anonymously and the writer has never owned up. Subsequent writers felt no such need for anonymity. Yet, despite the freshness which each writer brought to the picture, their themes and even their images overlap, and some of these can be traced back to “*Iomhar Mòr*”. “*Iomhar Mòr*” thus appears to have foreshadowed and encouraged a major development in the Gaelic liter-

ary output of the second half of the twentieth century. Paradoxically, therefore, it seems that the stimulus of contemporary evangelicalism and social change, however negative in the eyes of the poets and prose-writers, has greatly aided the growth of modern Gaelic literature.

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EUGENE MCKENDRY

Innovation and Tradition in the Drama of Críostóir Ó Floinn

Born in Limerick in 1923, Críostóir Ó Floinn has written in a range of genres in Irish and English: novels, poetry, autobiography, as well as drama. He is a member of *Aosdána*, the select group of artists who receive a stipendium from the Irish government.

In the 19th century the operatic composer Richard Wagner developed a vision that was new for drama and for the theatrical experience, a vision that depended on the technology of theatre as much as it relied upon the plot, or upon psychology. He wished to produce a total artistic work in the theatre – *Gesamtkunstwerk* as he called it. For him, it was no longer sufficient to offer or create the theatrical experience as a direct interaction between actor and audience. As well as the actors, there were other elements to be considered in the production—music, scenery, costume, lighting, and this all under the control of the director, who achieves the status of artist under the auspices of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This role of the director is imaginatively developed even further by Ó Floinn in the introduction to the play ‘*Cad d’imigh ar Fheidhlimidh?*’ (‘Whatever happened to Feidhlimidh?’)

Ghlac mé leis an léiritheoir san amharclann mar scéalai, atá ag cur scéalta i láthair a lucht éisteachta chomh taitneamhach, chomh healaíonta agus atá ar a chumas. Ba é Feidhlimidh scéalai Chonchúir Rí Uladh. Rinne mé ceangal idir eisean agus an léiritheoir; trí mheán ealaíon na hamharclainne.

(Ó Floinn CDF: Réamhrá)

I accepted the theatre director as a story-teller, presenting stories to his audience as enjoyably and as artistically as possible. Feidhlimidh was the story-teller of Conor the King of Ulster. I made a link between him and the director, through the art of the theatre.

The same concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* left its mark on theatre architecture when Wagner built his theatre in Bayreuth, a building which permitted him to realise his artistic vision and leave a heritage, *fágadh le huacht é* ('it was left in inheritance'), to dramatists like Críostóir Ó Floinn, since it is clear that this is the kind of production that Ó Floinn advises for his own dramas, for example this note at the beginning of 'Aggiornamento'.

Toisc go ngluaiseann an gníomhrú ó áit go háit is le cabhair soilsiú oiriúnach agus mionradharcra ar áiteanna éagsúla ar an stáitse a chuirfear ar suíomh in iúl, seachas le láithreán righin ar an sean-nós. (Ó Floinn Agg: vi)

Because the action moves from place to place, the scene will be set with the help of suitable lighting and scenery detail in various parts of the stage rather than by a traditional, inflexible set.

When he says 'láithreán righin, inflexible set' here he is referring to the traditional single-scene 'box-sets' such as 'the drawing-room', 'the courtroom' etc., which appear realistic, but were difficult to change, unlike the staging which Ó Floinn proposes in his introduction to 'Mise Raifteirí an File':

Is léir go mbeidh éifeacht an dráma mar shiamsa amharclainne ag brath go mór ar an bhfeidhm a bhainfear as dearadh, ceol, soilsiú agus as an gcomhréir idir na gluaiseachtaí. (Ó Floinn MRF: 7)

It is clear that the effectiveness of the play as a theatrical entertainment will depend upon the use made of design, music, lighting and the correlation of the movements.

And again in the introduction to 'Cad d'Imigh ar Fheidhlimidh?':

San amharclann go fíor, níl rud ar bith ann go dtí go gcruthaíonn an léiritheoir agus na haisteoirí agus lucht soilse agus ceoil agus rince an taispeántas atá le taitneamh ealaíonta a thabhairt don phobal. (Ó Floinn CDF: Réamhrá)

... in the theatre, there is basically nothing there until the producer, the actors, the dance, music and lighting team, create the artistic spectacle they bring to the public.

Dá mbeadh an dráma seo á léiriú, d'iarrfainn cabhair ealaíontóirí uile na hamharclainne chuige, i dteannta an léiritheora agus na n-aisteoirí. Bheadh an ceol agus an rince agus an soilsiú chomh tábhachtach céanna leis an bhfriotal chun an scéal seo thar scéalta a chur i láthair go fiorealaíonta. (Ó Floinn CDF: Réamhrá)

If this play is being produced, I would seek the help of all of the theatre's artists, as well as the producer and the actors. Music, dance and lighting would be every bit as important as dialogue in presenting this story of stories in a truly artistic manner.

Nevertheless, while we can interpret the perspective of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in these passages, one is not thereby arguing an exclusive, single strand of influence of Wagner on Ó Floinn.

Wagner's dramatic influence is only one thread in the fabric of western drama going back two and a half millennia, and Ó Floinn is a dramatist who admits the total theatre heritage, from the 21st century back to Greek classicism and epic, a heritage which covers, *inter alia*, theme, philosophy, language register, and all those aspects which Ó Floinn calls the '*modh inste*', storytelling manner, or directorial technique. This is what he seems to refer to in his introduction to '*Mise Raifteirí an File*':

Ar mhodh inste Shakespeare atá an dráma á chur i láthair, i dtreo gur féidir gluaiseacht go héasca ó shuíomh go suíomh, ó ré go ré. (Ó Floinn MRF: 7)

The play is presented in a Shakespearean storytelling manner, so that it is possible to move easily from scene to scene, from period to period.

This Shakespearean manner came about when the said playwright built his theatre, the Globe, in London and the architecture and design of the stage itself allowed the dramatist considerable flexibility. The stage of the Globe enabled Shakespeare to write plays with numerous scenes, but requiring minimal scenery. In this way, plays such as 'Anthony and Cleopatra' could be produced, with its 40 scenes, situated "in several parts of the Roman Empire", just as easily as the 'Comedy of Errors', which has only 11 scenes, all in the town of Ephesus (*cf.* Scanlan 1988: 82). Except for the easily moved stage artefacts, furniture, banners, armour etc. ('*mionradharcra*' as Ó Floinn calls it), the stage could have the same appearance for both plays. But it is at the level of linguistic expression, *friotal*,

that Shakespeare and the classical writers succeed in creating situation and atmosphere. The imagination predominates and the words themselves have the power to create a picture or scene. For example, listen to Macbeth's use of language as he puts expression to his thoughts and mental condition at nightfall.

Light thickens; and the crow
makes wing to the rooky wood:
Good things of day begin to drop and drowse;
While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
(Shakespeare 'Macbeth': Act 3, Scene II)

In a theatre building without artificial lighting, such as the Shakespearean stage, where performances usually took place in daylight, this mode of expression works upon the imagination directly through influencing our emotions, as against our senses (which offer contrary evidence – daytime not night-time for example). This is the imagination of poetic diction. The prologue or chorus plays an important role in the classical theatre of Greece and Shakespeare. It provides information to the audience on the incidents or plot, and conspires to encourage the audience's imagination in developing the fantasy of the theatrical experience.

The prologue to Shakespeare's 'Henry V' exhorts us: 'Let us on your imaginary forces work', and continues to explain to us how we can best benefit from a production of 'Henry V' in the Globe (*cf.* Scanlan 1988: 85):

Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean tears asunder.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
Into a thousand parts divide one man
And make imaginary puissance.
Think, and when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs in the receiving earth:
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings.
(Shakespeare 'Henry V': Prologue)

'to suppose', 'to think', 'to imagine', "for 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings" – we are in the realm of the mind and imagination. It is no

surprise, I feel, that the character Douglas Hyde/Dúghlas de hÍde in ‘*Mise Raifteirí an File*’ says that Shakespeare is his favourite poet, for Hyde acts as Ó Floinn’s *alter ego* in the play, as well as being a character in his own right, and performing the functions of prologue and chorus. He comes in at the beginning of the play and stimulates our imagination:

Nuair a chaitear cloch in uisce, corraítear an t-uisce. Titeann an chloch go dtí an tóin agus luíonn sí ansin, ach i bhfad tar éis di titim, maireann gluaiseacht an uisce agus feictear ar a uachtar an tonn a ghin an chloch. Snámhann an tonn seo amach ón gceartlár, mar fháinne mór; go dtí go sroicheann sí an bruach. Sin samhail, dar liom, den chorrail nó den suaitheadh a ghineann file i measc a muintire. Titeann an file ó neamh isteach sa saol; nuair a bhíonn a ré tugtha, sciobann an bás uainn an file, ach fanann an suaitheadh, an ghluaiseacht saoihiúlachta, a thionscnaigh sé, mar a bheadh tonn ar uisce an tsaoil, tonn a shnámhann amach i bhfad ó áit dúchais an fhile. Is amhlaidh a tharla sé gur buaileadh i m’aghaidhse an tonn saoihiúlachta a thóg file bocht dall i gContae na Gaillimhe, file a fuair bás níos mó ná dhá scór bliain sul má chuala mise tracht air. Seo mar a tharla... (Ó Floinn MRF: 15-16)

When a stone is thrown into water, the water is disturbed. The stone falls to the bottom and it lies there, but long after its fall, the movement of the water remains and the wave that the stone has generated is perceived on its surface. The wave flows out from the centre, like a great ring, until it reaches the bank. That is an illustration, I think, of the vibration or agitation the poet generates amongst his people. The poet falls from heaven into the world; when his time is over, death snatches the poet from us, but the movement remains; the tremor of knowledge that he aroused like a wave on the water of life, a wave which flows out far from the native place of the poet. Thus it happened that I was confronted by the wave of wisdom that a poor blind poet in County Galway generated, a poet who died more than forty years before I had even heard of him. This is how it happened

...

Some readers may recognise the prose introduction that Hyde himself wrote to his edition of *Abhráin agus Dánta an Reachtuire/ Poems ascribed to Rafferty*, but, through the magic of the theatre, Ó Floinn raises that prose to the level of poetry. He outdoes Molière’s ‘*Bourgeois Gentilhomme*’. More prosaically, he allows a vocabulary of criticism to combine with Hyde’s image, allowing im-

agination and intellect to go the extra distance – ‘*fanann an suaitheadh, an ghluaiseacht saoihiúlachta* – the tremor, the civilising movement, endures’.

In the same play, the poem by Raifteirí ‘*Seanchas na Sceiche*’ (‘The History of the Thornbush’) works on our emotional imagination as well. This long poem retells in ballad narrative the history of Ireland. Raftery is dead today. His *alter ego* De hÍde is dead as well; Ó Floinn is not dead, but when he and ourselves are all under the clay, the poetry – this poem – ‘*an suaitheadh, an ghluaiseacht saoihiúlachta*’, will live on as witness to the heritage and communal memory of Ireland. Behind ‘*Seanchas na Sceiche*’ in ‘*Mise Raifteirí an File*’ there is an archetypal image of Irish consciousness. If we impose such an interpretation on the poem, we are going back further again, to the times and practices of Greek theatre, where the narrative truth of the elements, or of history, is accepted, in order to make a minute analysis of the tension and the conflict which those facts arouse in the mind and world of the characters. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the character Frank O’Connor is so bitter in his attack on ‘*Seanchas na Sceiche*’. He says:

Da-daa, da-dee, dee-daa, da-dee. And so it drags its slow length along for more than a hundred stanzas of four lines each; a potted history of Ireland, beginning before the Deluge, all told by a thorny bush to blind Raftery the wandering fiddler. Doggerel, of course, pure doggerel. (Ó Floinn MRF: 105-106)

In the play, O’Connor stands for the mentality that denies Irish as a living language and literature. “Irish literature” he wrote, “ends with Merriman, the last of the real poets, who died in 1804” (Ó Floinn MRF: 114), thus dismissing the existence of Raifteirí himself, who lived after this date. But the thornbush lives on as an inspiring challenge, continuous, classical, nourishing our imagination and our emotions with a stability that rejects the mentality that says, “*Tá an teanga marbh*, long live the language”.

Another advantage of the classical idiom and tradition is that it expresses our thoughts and feelings clearly and more completely, in a dialect that most of us cannot speak fluently, but in which we recognise our truth. Perhaps it is that stable, unapologetic interpretation of the past that displeases O’Connor:

*Gach ní in Éirinn riamh dar tharla
Is é Sceachán Áth Cinn atá suite le trácht air.
Sular céasadh Críost ar chrann dubh na páise*

Bhí mise ar garda faoi shioc is faoi bháisteach. (Ó Floinn MRF:104, 245)
 Everything in Ireland that ever happened
 The Bush at Headford is placed to comment on it.
 Before Christ was crucified on the black tree of the Passion
 I was on guard through frost and torrent.

One should add that Frank O'Connor the person is not necessarily the same as Frank O'Connor the character in the play, as Ó Floinn explains in the introduction:

Más cúis leis na saoihe a líofa a éiríonn Lady Gregory i labhairt na Gaeilge go luath sa dráma, tuigfidh na fealsaimh nach cín lae ná stair atá á scríobh agam ach dráma. (Ó Floinn MRF: 7).

If the pedants take issue with how fluent Lady Gregory becomes in speaking Irish early in the play, the philosophers will understand that it is not a diary nor a history that I am writing, but a drama.

It is also possible that O'Connor has another role in the play – that he stands for a certain view of progress in literature, against attitudes, structure and techniques that have become calcified and sterile. To this extent, we, and obviously Ó Floinn, can agree with him. But Ó Floinn in his work clearly demonstrates that an appreciation of classicism and continuity in theatrical tradition is not a rejection of the new. Ó Floinn is a modern playwright in his topics, production, expression and in every other way. We can quickly overview some of his plays:

'*Cóta Bán Chríost*' ('The Order of Melchizadek'): Ó Floinn here examines a priest's dilemma when faced on Christmas Eve by a visitor who claims that she has miraculously conceived a child. The staging is traditional with box sets, but we do not need the techniques of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in this ferocious, incredible but challenging work which slashes to the marrow of easily received ideas.

'*Aggiornamento*', about two curmudgeonly old characters faced with modernisation in society – the title means 'Bringing up to Date'. This play is written in a lighter vein that revealed the author's flair for robust comedy, hard-hitting dialogue, and wit.

'*Is é Dúirt Polonius*' ('As Polonius said'): If the title echoes Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', and while there is a strong breath of Greek tragedy in the play, the

subject and treatment are nevertheless totally contemporary – the individual worker manipulated by employer and union.

In ‘*Mise Raifteirí an File*’, he displays his technical mastery within the dramatic tradition; and it is no fossilised tradition, but a dynamic, imaginative one. In this play, the poet Raifteirí, from the beginning of the 19th century, finds his experience passed on through history by Douglas Hyde who acts as a character in his own right and period, and as a prologue for the modern audience who find the artistic, historical, political issues and arguments of Raifteirí’s period transferred through time. The chronology is fractured, with characters and incidents tripping over each other across time. What is being studied is not specific incident or narrative, but attitudes and values, and how the same issues and problems arising from them occur throughout history and in cultural discourse.

When Ó Floinn says that ‘*Mise Raifteirí an File*’ is to be presented in the Shakespearean ‘*modh inste*’, or manner of telling, he also says,

Ní shásódh neamhchroineolaíocht na n-eachtraí na prionsabail righne a leag Arastotail, fealsamh, síos don drámaíocht. (Ó Floinn MRF: 7)

The unchronological quality of the events would not satisfy the rigorous principles laid down by the philosopher Aristotle for the theatre.

If he mentions Aristotle and the *prima facie* gap between ‘*Mise Raifteirí an File*’ and the principles to be found in Aristotle’s *Poetics* he is not repudiating or rejecting Aristotelian values, indeed the opposite can be argued. Throughout, and by means of, his dramatic works he acknowledges the works of Aristotle as a corner stone to the heritage of tragedy in western literature. Obviously, tragedy is common in western tradition. The French playwright Giraudoux, for example, named his play ‘Amphitryon 38’ since he reckoned that there had been 37 previous plays treating that story. Ó Floinn, it must be said, invents his own stories and incidents but the classical influence and tradition is none the less marked for that.

Time prevents us from detailing the play ‘*Cad d’Imigh ar Fheidhlimidh?*’, but in it Ó Floinn fills that apparent vacuum or lacuna between the fall of the classical world and the Renaissance with stories from the Irish classical tradition, as he says,

An iarracht seo agam ar chleamhnas a dhéanamh idir chlasaic seo na Gaeilge agus ealaín bheo na hamharclainne i dtéarmaí ár linne. (Ó Floinn CDF: Réamhrá)

This attempt of mine at making a match between this classic of the Irish language and the living art of the theatre in contemporary terms.

He makes a conscious effort in this play to bind together the classical theatre of Greece, the classical story tradition of Ireland, and the theatre arts of the 20th century. He writes in the introduction:

An béaloideas agus na scríbhinní, bhí siad ann romhainn, scéal na Tána á aithris ar an tinteán agus sa scriptorium leis na céadta, leis na mílte bliain, anuas. Ach ní raibh an amharclann fhoirmiúil againn ariamh, mar Ghaeil, gan againn ach an amharclann sin atá i bhfad níos beo agus níos treise, amharclann na samhlaíochta in aigne an scéalaí agus an lucht éisteachta. Ghlac mé le traidisiún sin ár muintire. (Ó Floinn CDF: Réamhrá)

Folklore and the manuscripts, they were there before us, the story of the Táin being recited at the fireside and in the scriptorium for hundreds, for thousands of years. But we, as Gaels, never had a formal theatre, we only had that theatre which is more lively and more powerful, the theatre of the imagination in the mind of the story-teller and the audience. I embraced that tradition of our people.

Ó Floinn takes the classical Irish tradition, *traidisiún ár muintire*, refers it back to Greece, and brings it forward to our own times, making the links between the fall of the classical world, via the early Irish period, through the bardic age, then the time of Raifteirí, Hyde, to today.

THE GROWTH OF THEATRE

The Classical Greek theatre, growing out of Dionysian worship, decayed, and in ancient Rome public theatre became trivial and degrading. One reaction against the excesses of the Roman theatre was the custom of reading tragedies in select gatherings:

It is thought that this was the purpose behind the tragedies of Seneca, a Stoic philosopher and statesman under the emperor Nero in the 1st century AD, for there is no record of any of his works having been produced. While his plays lack the craftsmanship of the Greeks, Seneca's importance lies in the fact that he was the principal medium through which Renaissance writers became acquainted with Greek tragedy. His division of the plays into five acts, his exaggeration of the melodramatic and violent aspects of the originals, his emphasis on rhetoric, and his preoccupation with the conflict between passion and reason helped to shape the Elizabethan drama and French Neoclassical tragedy which followed more than a millennium later.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992: 534)

Ó Floinn can most effectively be considered in the light of this dramatic heritage.

The early church fathers considered the theatre of the day to be a debased art and in the 6th century the theatres were closed. In due course, however, theatre re-emerged in a process that recalls the development of theatre from early Greek ritual activity.

Whereas the Greek theatre had grown out of Dionysian worship, the mediaeval theatre originated as an expression of the Christian religion. The two cycles would eventually merge during the Renaissance, but for centuries before that the theatre was left to grope its way blindly through the Dark Ages. (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992: 534)

Between the classical and the mediaeval periods, the theatrical impulse was kept alive by the popular entertainers and storytellers who wandered throughout Europe. The popular theatre and the literary theatre were to grow alongside and intermingled with each other. During the late Middle Ages the popular entertainers found a more secure place at royal courts and in the households of the European nobility, where they acted, sang and played music at their masters' festivities (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992: 535). In Ireland, however, and crucially, the nature of entertainment in the houses of the nobility differed from the rest of Europe, since in Ireland there was a unique aristocratic society and bardic culture. We will return to this. A consequence of the Catholic Church's adoption of Latin was that classical texts continued to be read

throughout Europe, to an extent thanks to the endeavours of Irish or Irish-trained monks and scholars of the early Mediaeval period.

Mediaeval religious theatre in Europe grows directly from the ritual of the Mass itself, which contains many theatrical elements as a physical manifestation of the invisible, spiritual world. In the same spirit or inspiration that motivated Irish monks to express their faith and love of God in the intricacy and skill of their manuscript illumination, the mediaeval monks over all Europe, including Ireland, believed that harmony expressed religious values. So from the 9th century the musical effectiveness of the plainsong of the church was developed through antiphonal singing where one choir responds to another. From this came the trope, a musical amplification or embellishment of a liturgical text by adding another text in poetry or prose.

In a 10th manuscript from the Monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland, an Irish foundation as it happens, we find the trope originally added to the Introit of the Easter mass in which the choir was divided into two parts. It relates the visit of the three Marys to Christ's tomb. They find it empty and guarded by an angel. One section of the choir, representing the angels, asks, "*Quem Quaeritis?*" ("Whom do you seek?") to which the other half, representing the Marys, responds, and a short dialogue follows. In translation it runs:

- Angel* *Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o Christicolae?* Whom do you seek
in the sepulchre, O Christians?
- Marys* Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, O celestial ones.
- Angel* He is not here; he is risen, just as he foretold. Go, announce that
he is risen from the sepulchre.

(Gassner 1987: 35)

The origins of the union of action, impersonation and dialogue can be discerned here. In due course the angel was represented by the priest, the Marys by three choirboys, and directions were added. Secular characters appeared, such as the spice merchant who haggles with the three Marys over the price of the ointment, a possible forerunner of the doctor figure in mummers and folk plays. The *Quem Quaeritis?* soon spread throughout Europe (more than 400 versions survive, including a 14th century version preserved in Marsh's Library, Dublin), and by the end of the 10th century it had become a self-contained liturgical drama (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992: 535). In Ireland, it has a particular resonance in the song '*Caoineadh na dTri Mhuire*', illustrating the

particularly Irish ability and confidence to take Christian material and make a totally native expression, in this case the tradition of the Keen or *Caoineadh*.

During the 11th and 12th centuries, other biblical themes were treated. So, in the Christmas season, a ritual developed from an early sermon *Ordo Prophetorum* where the prophets one by one stepped forward and prophesied the coming of Christ. The areas where the plays were performed were extended from the altar to various locations throughout the church.

The clergy's intention of making the key episodes of the liturgy as vivid and accessible as possible to uneducated congregations was so successfully realised that by the end of the 12th century the plays incorporated spoken dialogue, partly in the vernacular, and were moved outside in front of the church to be performed independently of the liturgical service.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992: 535)

Once the theatre had been moved outside the church, production of the plays was gradually taken over by the laity, and performances were given entirely in the vernacular... The number of short plays proliferated until they were organised into great cycles covering the whole biblical story.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992: 535)

As the presentation of these plays grew more elaborate, they became a civic affair. In England (and Anglo-Norman Dublin, Fitz-Simons 1983: 10) each trade guild would enact a particular play, usually related to its own craft or trade. So the building of Noah's Ark, for example, would be presented by the shipwrights or the carpenters, the bakers staged the Last Supper, and the butchers officiated at the crucifixion. This was, despite the religious theme, secular theatre. Furthermore, once the mystery cycles had abandoned the uniformity of Latin, national differences developed.

The next development in western theatre was the morality play of the 15th century, and then the rediscovery of the classical tradition, also in the 15th century, and the Renaissance, moving on to the theatrical tradition we are familiar with in England, France and so on.

In many ways, Ireland experienced the Renaissance in a totally different manner to the rest of Europe, but it is wrong to imagine that the Renaissance passed Ireland by, as is sometimes claimed. Nevertheless, the differences, indeed the shortcomings of the Irish experience are manifest. The political history of Ire-

land shows the control of society being wrenched from Gaelic and then Norman-Irish hands at the very time when the effects of the Renaissance began to be felt in these islands. The theatre, in particular, became an urban art, with patrons and printing at its disposal. This did not happen with Irish, and so we have to wait until the end of the 19th century for the emergence of an Irish language theatre.

What might be considered more interesting, however, is the position of theatre in Ireland prior to the Tudor period. The Normans came to Ireland in 1169, but the fusion of the Norman feudal and the native Gaelic traditions actually gave rise to a great flourishing of art and literature in this late Mediaeval period, from 1200 onwards. Bardic poetry, for example, achieved its full flowering during this period, which is also known as the period of the Gaelic Revival when the Normans became considered as *Ipsis Hibernis Hiberniores—More Irish than the Irish themselves*. English administrative and cultural influence was limited to a narrow and insecure presence in the Pale around Dublin and other urban settlements.

Was there no theatre in Gaelic Ireland and if not, why not? The answer to this lies, I feel, in the very particular circumstances of Ireland. The pattern we have seen emerging in Europe up to now is of a theatre developing from the practices and influence of the Church in a feudal Europe, in an urban environment with a greater density of population, and with the participation of trade guilds. These urban guilds never existed in Gaelic Ireland, and the only references extant to mediaeval theatre refer to the cities, with performances in French, Latin or English often with troupes visiting from England. (*cf.* Fitz-Simons 1983: 10)

Feudalism in Ireland was an external system, and inimical to the native Irish system of society. The early feudal church in Ireland was also often anti-Irish. Many monasteries founded by the Normans had very particular regulations, restricting or forbidding the admittance of native Irish members of the congregation, and certainly forbidding the use of Irish. Originally, French and Latin were the languages accepted. These restrictions were most effectively imposed in the Pale, and so it is there that we find the references to mediaeval drama in the common European pattern. However, outside this narrow geographical area and its sphere of influence, it would be meaningless to expect a similar experience. The individuality of the Irish tradition needs careful consideration, particularly since there is a common tendency to consider artistic achievement only from a standard perspective, thereby denying an alternative. If one sees drama solely from the devel-

opment described above, from Church to feudal, the early Irish could be judged to be without a dramatic tendency, and lack an element of imaginary expression. The formal theatre did not develop in Gaelic Ireland for the particular reasons mentioned, and through elements of conservatism within the Bardic order, but the impulse to drama can be found within the tradition. Take the most famous of Irish texts – *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (‘The Cattle Raid of Cúailnge’). It is full of passages of dramatic tension such as the pillowtalk between Ailill and Medb. Most importantly, it is a dialogue. To quote:

Once when their royal bed was laid out for Ailill and Medb... they had this talk on the pillows.

‘It is true what they say, love,’ Ailill said, ‘it is well for the wife of a wealthy man.’

‘True enough,’ the woman said. ‘What put that in your mind?’

‘It struck me,’ Ailill said, ‘how much better off you are today than the day I married you.’

‘I was well enough off without you,’ Medb said.

‘Then your wealth was something I didn’t know or hear much about,’ Ailill said, ‘Except for your woman’s things, and the neighbouring enemies making off with loot and plunder.’

‘Not at all,’ Medb, ‘but with the High King of Ireland for my father ...’
(and so on). (Kinsella 1970: 52)

The standard form of the tales is prose narration, not epic poetry as in the heroic literature of Greece and the Germanic countries. Very rarely are the tales cast in metrical form, although there is room for poetry in the prose narration when it becomes necessary to express emotions that are of unusual intensity. One of the terms applied to some of the oldest verses is *roscadh*. An example of a *roscadh* is the greeting of Cet to Conall Cernach in *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* (‘The Story of Mac Dathó’s Pig’).

Fo-chen Conall

Críde licce

Lindbruth loga luchair ega

Guss flann ferge

Fo chích curad

Créchtaiḡ cathbúadaig

At-comsa mac Findchoime frim

(Thurneysen 1969: 14)

‘Welcome, Conall, heart of stone, fierce heat of a lynx, glitter of ice, red-strength of anger under the breast of a scarred, battle-victorious champion. The son of Findchoim, you are a match for me’.

This tale is preserved in an 8th century version, but is quite evident that it reflects a much earlier composition and society, with elements such as the contest for the ‘Champion’s Portion.’ The incident has all the vigour and barbarism of Homeric epic, but note the power of the oral confrontation, and the dramatic, indeed melodramatic, vitality of what we would now call the theatrical impact:

‘It is true,’ said Cet, ‘you are a greater hero than I. But if (my brother) Anluan were in the house, he would give you a different contest. It is a pity he is not here.’

‘But he is!’ said Conall, taking Anluan’s head from his belt; and he flung it at Cet across his chest, so that a gush of blood burst over his mouth.

As Patrick Rafroidi noted in his article ‘Nation of Myth-makers’ (1972: 157):

As to the Gaelic tradition, if its dramatic productions are unknown to us, this doesn’t amount to offering evidence of the absence of a primitive mythical drama.

Rafroidi cites (1972: 157) the stimulating theory (impossible to prove) which George Sigerson puts forward in *Bards of the Gael and Gall* concerning the Deirdre story, *Longes mac nUislen* (‘The Exile of the sons of Uisliu’ = Hull 1949):

Though now presented as a heroic romance, interspersed with poems, it appears to me probable that this romance form covers, and partly conceals, a more ancient drama. If this be so, then it is a mistake to search for an Epic in what is really a Tragedy. (Sigerson 1907: 383)

Sigerson then works out his idea, arranging the drama into a five-act play, with the conclusion:

From this outline, it will be seen how naturally the tale resolves itself into a Tragedy. There is manifestly dramatic purpose shown in repeating the opening royal banquet-scene, followed by the peaceful chess-scene of Act I, under contrasting circumstances in Act III. The characters are well sustained and the heroine is kept prominent. It is difficult to suppose its char-

acters were never impersonated by male and female actors—declaiming their different parts. The lays were sung, accompanied by music. It we remember that the Gaels are dramatic even in conversation, and that masquerading parties (with deer-skin masks) used to visit Anglo-Irish quarters, such as Charlemont, the probability becomes almost a certainty. This piece may, therefore, be the first Tragedy, outside the classic languages, in the literature of Europe. (Sigerson 1907: 390)

Consider also the reflection of Douglas Hyde in his *Literary History of Ireland*:

I have already observed that great producers of literature as the Irish always were—until this century—they never developed a drama. The nearest approach to such a thing is in these Ossianic poems. The dialogue between St Patrick and Ossian—of which there is, in most of the poems, either more or less—is quite dramatic in its form. Even the reciters of the present day appear to feel this, and I have heard the censorious self-satisfied tone of Patrick, and the querulous vindictive whine of the half-starved old man, reproduced with considerable humour by a reciter. But I think it nearly certain—though I cannot prove it—that in former days there was real acting and a dialogue between two persons, one representing the saint and the other the old pagan. It was from a less promising beginning than this that the drama of Æschylus developed. But nothing could develop in later Ireland. Everything, time after time, was arrested in its growth. Again and again the tree of Irish literature put forth fresh blossoms and before they could fully expand they were nipped off. The conception of bringing the spirit of Paganism and of Christianity together in the persons of the last great poet and warrior of the one, and the first great saint of the other, was truly dramatic in its conception, and the spirit and humour with which it has been carried out in the pieces which have come down to us are a strong presumption that under happier circumstances something great would have developed from it. (Hyde 1899: 511)

The Dionysian rituals of Greece have been compared to the *Oenachs* or great gatherings of Ireland, such as the *Oenach Tailteann* (Fair of Tailtu), described in *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann* ('The Annals of the Four Masters'), and lasting until the fall of Gaelic Ireland.

What is clear from existing accounts is that these *Oenachs* were full of lively activity, from sports to storytelling, with prizes for the successful participants,

and opportunities for public exhibition and performance. The atmosphere and subject matter of these gatherings would have been conducive to the development of theatre, as in ancient Greece, and also in India and China, but it did not happen in Ireland. The step from relating tales to acting did not happen in the manner of ancient Greece. The intellectual development and philosophical analysis of Greek tragedy are also lacking, but we cannot, on these grounds, dismiss out of hand the qualities of ancient and mediaeval Irish literature, which is impressive in its own right, and not always fully appreciated for its particular intellectual and artistic achievement.

The Irish experience is remarkable for the richness of the literature in the vernacular language, Irish. Elsewhere in Western Europe, Christianity had been introduced in the wake of Romanisation and the native pre-Roman cultures had been suppressed or had not developed literacy. In Ireland, however, the pre-Christian culture and traditions continued, merging with the new to create a vibrant vernacular literature, in a standard learned language containing secular and pre-Christian as well as Christian religious material.

The dual nature of literature in Ireland, where there was an indigenous caste of learned men as well as the Christian clerics, facilitated the development of a practice of literature that was totally different to the rest of Europe. The learned classes of the old order became the priests, lawyers, doctors and professional poets of the new Christian Ireland. The very strength of the native tradition may be considered as one of the reasons why theatre as we understand it did not develop. The tradition was mature and self-confident enough to utilise its own resources, independently of the Church. At the very time when we see the emergence of proto-theatre from the practices of the Church in mediaeval Europe, from the 10th to the 12th centuries, the Bardic Syntactical Tracts were brought to completion in Ireland, allowing the professional poets in Ireland and Scotland a linguistic and cultural tool which had no parallel. The courts elsewhere had their entertainers, but pride of place was held by the bardic poet, secure and jealous of his role. He, and the system of patronage which sponsored him, and which he defended and recorded, were conservative. The clergy also adopted vernacular literature earlier than elsewhere and continued to cultivate it. One of the reasons why the Reformation did not take hold in Ireland may be that the learned class there felt it had access to knowledge within the non-feudal society, and had developed a cultural cohabitation which did not foster the tensions which led to the Reformation elsewhere. Again, an example of how blanket values must not be applied to interpret Gaelic and other experiences.

By the time of the Battle of Kinsale, the Gaelic cultural system was highly developed but rather static. The changes which challenged the conservative aspects of Irish culture and society in the late Mediaeval period were dominated by the colonial assault posed by English intervention and this broader political history is as far as most of us ever consider. But it would be wrong to imagine that the Gaelic system was immutable. When the Gaelic aristocratic system collapsed after Kinsale, the popular culture of the people hastened to fill the vacuum, hence the emergence of the ‘*amhrán*’ or popular metres. But this cultural opportunism was limited in its potential because of the lack of political power and patronage. The popular literature of Ireland in the 17th and 18th centuries is remarkably sophisticated, particularly the popular songs, but there is no theatre in Irish – because there is practically no urban base, no sponsorship or patronage, no printing.

We have to wait until the end of the 19th century before we can consider the possibility of a Gaelic theatre, and it is probably the weakest of the literary forms in Irish, but this weakness is due in no small degree to those socio-economic factors which surround the language.

Ó FLOINN

Ó Floinn can therefore be seen as attempting to reclaim and reconstruct, reinvent perhaps, a particular tradition which has been submerged for three hundred years, but has as good a claim to legitimacy and continuity as the mainstream European tradition, which only rediscovered its Classical values in the Renaissance, whereas the Irish tradition had flourished and created its own individuality during the so-called Dark Ages.

Having rediscovered the pathway from Greece, to classical Ireland, to modern Ireland, how successfully does he bridge the gap?

The environment in which ‘*Is é Dúirt Polonius*’ is placed is the world of office bureaucracy and trade unions in a modern society, far away from the Greece of Thebes and Oedipus. But the heritage of tragedy has left its undeniable mark on the drama.

It is not noted who composed the cover notes to the published edition of the play, the author or the publisher, but one could not make a more succinct synopsis of the significance of tragedy in our times:

*Téama mór na tragóide riamh é an choimhlint idir an laoch agus an chin-
niúint. Sa saol nua-aimseartha is é an duine aonair a bhíonn i gceist ag
drámadóirí agus é á bhrú faoi chois ag cumhachtaí an tsaoil, go háirithe
ag ollchóras an stáit agus ag an maorlathas. Ní taise don dráma seo é.
De réir mar a bhíonn an duine aonair ag dul i bhfostú sa saol, is amh-
laidh sin is fusa don maorlathas éagóir a dhéanamh air bíodh nach le
haon mhailís phearsanta a ghníomhaíonn seirbhísigh na hollchumhachta.
Ach bíonn an toradh mar an gcéanna don duine aonair—imní agus crá,
bochtaineacht agus difhostaíocht, agus sa deireadh an bád bán. Ach is
measa an tarcaisne ná gach ní. An féidir le duine a fhéinmheas a choin-
neáil ina leithéid de chás? (Ó Floinn Pol: Cover Notes)*

The struggle between the hero and fate has always been the great theme of tragedy. In this modern world, dramatists focus upon the individual who is crushed under by life's powers, particularly by the state system and bureaucracy. This play is no different. As the individual becomes embroiled in life, it becomes easier for bureaucracy to do him an injustice, even if the servants of the authorities don't act through personal malice. But the result is the same for the individual – worry and concern, poverty and unemployment, and finally the emigrant boat. But the scorn is the worst of all. Can a person retain his self respect in such circumstances?

From the point of view of subject matter, therefore, '*Is é Dúirt Polonius*' is a classical tragedy, and the production will also contain classical elements. There is a chorus in the play. If one interprets this play at the level of modern realist or social drama, there is no functional rationale for the chorus. But as soon as we accept the classical tradition, we have a transformed play, a deeper, more effective play. We can now perceive Diarmuid Ó Ródaí, the principal character, as a classical hero, with the qualities and weaknesses identified with such a character.

Now, what exactly did Polonius say? Polonius is a character in Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', best remembered for his speech which includes:

This above all: To thine own self be true
Because it follows as the day the night,
The night the day,
Thou cannot then be false to any man.
(Shakespeare, 'Hamlet': Act 1, Scene 3)

‘*Cóta Bán Chríost*’ (‘The White Coat of Christ’), which brought Ó Floinn wide recognition and controversy, was produced in English at the 1967 Dublin Theatre festival as ‘The Order of Melchizadek’. In the play we have a tragic hero who understands Polonius’ advice – Father Jude, who remains true to his calling, his beliefs, and his God, that is the Christian God, as against the gods of tragedy under whose whim the human race suffers in classical tragedy.

The strength of the effect that ‘*Cóta Bán Chríost*’ has upon the audience lies in the power of the story itself. The ‘*modh inste*’ and recommended production are ‘traditional’ enough, ‘*Láithreán righin ar an sean-nós*’ (i.e. box sets). But if we were only to make a simple narrative interpretation of the subject of the play, we would be left with a melodrama which, from a moral perspective, is “obscene and blasphemous” as the directors of the Abbey Theatre said at the time.

A pregnant young woman, Máire, comes to the house of the young priest Father Jude on Christmas Eve night. She claims that she bears an immaculate conception, as happened on that first Christmas night almost 2000 years before. The priest accepts her story and gives her shelter. As a result of the scandal in the parish they are forced to leave and go to live in a distant city. And then, Máire tells the truth – she wanted to destroy a priest in revenge for her brother, a student priest dismissed from clerical college. Her mother was also dismissed from her teaching job and found an early grave. Máire slept with her brother and became pregnant. The brother has now disappeared and Máire remains with a thirst for revenge. Now that she has managed to take a priest away from his parish and destroy his reputation, she intends to have an abortion. And then, towards the end of *Glúaiseacht* or Movement II, she comes up with the most diabolic plan of all. She will let the child in her womb come to its term instead of aborting it if the priest breaks his vow of chastity with her. At the beginning of *Glúaiseacht* III, the child has been born prematurely although the question of her ultimatum hovers. The priest is working as a watchman and Maire feels a growing affection for him and love for the child. However, she does not want to be a burden on the priest any more and, as a solution, she kills the child and herself. When Jude returns home and finds the corpses he reads the Mass of the Resurrection.

A tale of horror, without any doubt, and it is no surprise, perhaps, that words like ‘obscene, blasphemous, strained melodramatics’ were used to describe both the English and Irish versions.

If we do not accept, or perceive, the tragic vein, much of the literary and moral weight of the play is lost. For example, ‘*Cóta Bán Chríost*’ and ‘*Is é Dúirt Polonius*’ were on the A-Level syllabus in Northern Ireland. The examinations board may be congratulated for their courage in choosing Ó Floinn, but they are hardly to be praised for their understanding of the plays as reflected in the examination questions:

- Would you describe the conclusion of this play as a surprise ending?
- It is not true to say that there are only 2 characters in this play, Máire and An Sagart. The fact is that Máire portrays a number of different characters. Discuss.
- Is it true to say that in this play the character of the priest does not change while the character of Máire is continually developing?
- ‘The priest was making such progress with the conversion of the girl that I did not expect her to commit suicide at the end’. Would you consider this fair comment on the play?
- Had not Jude shown a certain weakness of character in the opening scenes, he would not have had to endure the difficulties which he experienced later. Discuss.

And how would you answer this question? “What kind of audience would best appreciate this play? Give reasons.” Perhaps an audience with a taste for ‘obscenity and blasphemy.’ And the questions about Polonius aren’t any better. In the examination questions above we are given a picture of two unstable, distraught people. But it is exactly the opposite that can be interpreted if we read the play in the light of the classical tragedy tradition. Father Jude is a tragic hero, a man who is neither too good nor too bad. He makes a choice, and he stands by that choice. He is a priest, and he totally accepts that calling, with the basic tenets, beliefs and duties attached to it. But he also receives the strength and support which the priesthood offers him. If he is a fool, he says, he is God’s fool, “*Is mise amadán Dé, agus ceap magaidh an Diabhail*”, but he is also wrapped around with the sacerdotal White Coat of Christ.

As for Máire, sad to say, there is a strong logic in her actions throughout the play. Having embarked upon her chosen path, she cannot depart or escape from the grinding, inevitable fate of tragedy. The suffering of the innocent is intolerable – particularly the death of the child in this case. A ‘Tragic Waste’ with

neither fairness nor justification, but which is a characteristic of tragedy. In Gloucester's lament in 'King Lear', for example:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods.
They kill us for their sport.
(Shakespeare, 'King Lear': Act 4, Scene 1)

But as Malcolm said about Cawdor, "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it." (Shakespeare, 'Macbeth': Act 1, Scene 4). It is as a consequence of the unselfish, if improbable and unpalatable, reasoning behind Máire's death that the priest can read a Mass of hope and forgiveness, of Resurrection, which is the significant title of the third *Gluaiseacht* of the play. I don't know what the theologians or canon lawyers would make of the case of '*Cóta Bán Chríost*', but one can understand it as a Catharsis, or purgation in the tradition of classical tragedy. The paradox and ineluctable logic of tragedy and Máire's final act come to mind when we read the gardener's lament in the Entr'acte of Giraudoux's 'Electre':

C'est toujours de la pureté. C'est cela que c'est, la Tragédie, avec ses incestes, ses parricides: de la pureté, c'est à dire en somme de l'innocence. Je ne sais si vous êtes comme moi; mais moi, dans la tragédie, la pharaonne qui se suicide me dit espoir, le maréchal qui trahit me dit foi, le duc qui assassine me dit tendresse. C'est une enterprise d'amour, la cruauté ... pardon je veux dire la Tragédie. (Giraudoux 'Electre': Entr'acte)

It has always to do with purity. That's what Tragedy is, with its incests, its parricides: purity, in summary, innocence. I don't know if you are like me; but for me, in Tragedy, the pharaohess who commits suicide speaks of hope, the field marshal who betrays says faithfulness to me, the duke who assassinates says tenderness to me. Cruelty—pardon, I mean tragedy – is an undertaking of love.

Discussion of the vocabulary of Aristotle's *Poetics* has been avoided: *nemesis*, *hubris*, *hamartia*, *catharsis* etc., but the values of classical tragedy permeate Ó Floinn's theatre. This vocabulary of tragedy gives us a critical tradition as well. We can broaden our understanding if we look, for example, towards the classical tragedy of France, particularly Corneille and Racine. There are echoes of the Corneillean hero in Father Jude's character. In Corneille's philosophy we en-

counter that civil, optimistic idealism, which places its hope in ‘*raison*’ and ‘*honneur*’, which moves towards the ‘*sublime*’, that is the noble and exalted. Another keyword in Corneille’s drama is the word ‘*gloire*’. In ‘*Le Cid*’ this glory emerges from mediaeval morality and honour; in ‘*Cinna*’ and ‘*Horace*’, from Roman discipline and patriotism; and then in ‘*Polyeucte*’, from Christianity.

The Corneillian hero is also an impassioned person – ‘*passioné*’; he does not go against reason, but tries to transcend it, to achieve ‘*gloire*’.

But if one can interpret strong Corneillean echoes in the character and actions of Father Jude, one also discerns more of the Racinian hero in the character of Máire. The French author and critic Charles Péguy wrote:

Les blessures que nous recevons, nous les recevons dans Racine; Les êtres que nous sommes, nous le sommes dans Corneille. (Péguy 1957: 770)

The wounds we receive, we receive them in Racine; the beings we are, we are so in Corneille.

Corneille provides us with a positive philosophy, but Racine’s philosophy moves towards destruction, where all things fall apart. There is a strong Jansenistic tendency in Racine, which has a negative view of the instinct of love. It is Máire who comes to mind when we see Phèdre;

*Ce n’est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée
C’est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée.*
(Racine ‘*Phèdre*’: Act 1, Scene 1)

It is no longer ardour concealed in my veins:
It is Venus totally fastened to her prey.

One can quote similar sentiments from the ‘*Maximes*’ of La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), who shared the Jansenistic Port Royal values of Racine:

Si on juge de l’amour par la plupart de ses effets, il ressemble plus à la haine qu’à l’amitié. (La Rochefoucauld 1957: 23)

If one judges love by most of its effects, it is more like hate than friendship.

And again,

La plus juste comparaison qu'on puisse faire de l'amour, c'est celle de la fièvre; nous n'avons plus de pouvoir sur l'un que sur l'autre, soit par sa violence ou par sa durée. (La Rochefoucauld 1957:353)

The best comparison one can with love is a fever; we have no more power over one than the other, either in their violence or their durability.

Love; Fever. One is reminded of M^áire. Here we encounter uncontrolled passion and desires, challenging the precepts of Christian society, *La Condition Chrétienne*. These contexts are very stimulating and informative to anyone attempting to get an insight into the motivation of the characters in Ó Floinn's work.

In the 20th-21st century, it is '*La Condition Humaine*', rather than the '*Condition Chrétienne*' which attracts the attention of those engaged in literature. For many people, this is a Post-Christian age, where evil is independent of God and of Man. Le Droguiste says in Giroudaux's play 'Intermezzo':

Le monde... n'offre avec générosité que sa cruauté et sa bêtise. (Giroudaux, 'Intermezzo': Act 2, Scene 8)

Life is only generous in its cruelty and stupidity.

As for death through Christian sacrifice, on behalf of one's fellow man, there is no such thing:

Un homme qui a l'air d'être mort pour des hommes, je peux le dire, cela se cherche. (Giroudaux, 'Electre': Act 1, Scene 3)

A man who appears to have died for others, I can tell you, that's hard to find.

But even the post-Christian writer does not necessarily need to be totally despondent, without hope. He can have confidence and hope in humanity itself, in the individual human being, in human love and in the very joy of life. As the Jardinier says in 'Electre':

Joie et amour, oui. Je viens vous dire que c'est préférable a Aigreur et Haine... Evidemment, la vie est ratée, mais c'est très, très bien, la vie. (Giroudaux, 'Electre': Entr'acte)

Joy and love, yes. I tell you that it's preferable to Bitterness and Hate...
Clearly, life is a failure, but life is also very, very good.

Of course, Ó Floinn understands civilising humanism, but his great achievement in an increasingly deracinated, revisionist, post-Gaelic, post-Christian world, is that he recognises and acknowledges the qualities and strengths of a certain, reflective Christianity, of a particular Gaelic sensibility, of all the manifestations of humanity and culture. He recognises them in the historical development of this country and its civilisation, and it is his understanding and interpretation of this heritage of civilisation that is at the heart of his pluralism. His worldview is universalist, rather than globalist. As the character Raifteirí says at the end of *Mise Raifteirí an File* when he reflects upon the ruins of his own home, of Lady Gregory's Coole House, of the house that the Gaelic League gave to Hyde, all reduced to rubble:

Tá slí anseo daoibh. Is buaine an Sceach ná an Teach.

There is a way forward here for you. The Bush is more lasting than the House.

The Bush, the metaphor of continuity and durability in heritage and culture, the Bush is more durable than the material edifice.

ABBREVIATIONS

Agg = 'Aggiornamento', see Ó Floinn 1969.

CBC = 'Cóta Bán Chríost', see Ó Floinn 1968.

CDF = 'Cad d'Imigh ar Fheidhlimidh?', see Ó Floinn 1978.

MRF = 'Mise Raifteirí an File', see Ó Floinn 1974.

Pol = 'Is é Dúirt Polonius', see Ó Floinn 1973.

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SEÁN MAC CORRAIDH

Seiftiúlacht Sheosaimh Mhic Grianna Mar Aistritheoir¹

ACHOIMRE

Chuir Seosamh Mac Grianna Gaeilge ar dhá shaothar déag Béarla ar foilsíodh deich geinn acu sna tríochaidí agus an dá cheann eile sna caogaidí. Sa pháipéar seo, tugtar léiriú ar na straitéisí ar bhain an t-aistritheoir úsáid astu le Gaeilge a chur ar théarmaíocht an Bhéarla agus foirmeacha Gaeilge a mbeadh glacadh coitianta leo. Scrúdaítear an tseiftiúlacht a bhí sa duine i mbun cheapadh na dtéarmaí agus na hacmhainní teangeolaíocha Gaeilge a bhí aige. Maítear sa pháipéar seo gur taisce theangeolaíoch iad na haistriúcháin seo nár baineadh leath a leasa astu go fóill.

SCÉIM AN AISTRIÚCHÁIN

Le haistriúcháin Sheosaimh Mhic Grianna a lonnú ina gcomhthéacs stairiúil, caithfear breathnú ar dtús ar an obair a bhí ar siúl ag an Ghúm agus ar na cuspóirí a bhí leagtha amach ag lucht a bhunaithe agus a stiúrtha. Is féidir breathnú ar chuspóirí na scéime ó pheispictíochtaí an stáit, na scríbhneoirí, na léitheoirí agus na Gaeilge. Cad é a bhí le gnóthú ag na daoine sin agus ag na rudaí sin as scéim aistriúcháin? Mar seo a thráchtann Maolaodhóg Ó Ruairc air sin (1997: 1):

Ba é ba chuspóir don scéim sin saothar idirnáisiúnta litríochta a aistriú go Gaeilge chun lón léitheoireachta a chur ar fáil don phobal agus chun na

¹ Aithníonn údar an pháipéir seo an treoir agus an chomhairle a fuair sé do thaighde ar aistriúcháin Sheosaimh Mhic Grianna ón Ollamh Séamus Mac Mathúna, Institiúid Taighde na Gaeilge agus na Ceiltise, Ollscoil Uladh, Cúil Raithin.

scríbhneoirí is fearr Gaeilge a chur ag obair agus luach saothair cinnte éigin a fháil as a bheith ag scríobh i nGaeilge. Ceapadh go ndéanfadh an scéim acmhainní na Gaeilge a fhairsingiú fad a bhí faghairt á chur ar bhuanna nádúrtha scríbhneoireachta na n-údar a bhí páirteach sa scéim.

Maíonn Ó Muirí (1999: 119) gur easpa treorach agus aidhmeanna aimhréidhe a chraigh an scéim ardaidhmeannach seo. Ó thaobh na leabhar a foilsíodh, is fíor gur ón Bhéarla den chuid is mó a tiontaíodh iad, rud a d'fhág rogha ag an phobal léitheoireachta in Éirinn idir an bunleabhar agus an t-aistriúchán. Ní deacair a shamhlú cé acu rogha a rinne siad! Ina dhiaidh sin, is fiú machnamh a dhéanamh ar a gcuireann Cronin (1996: 157) i gcumhne dúinn: d'athraigh an scéim seo staid na foilsitheoireachta go mór sa Ghaeilge agus ní raibh sé ar chor ar bith neamhghnách aistriúcháin a sholáthar le dúshraith liteartha a dhaingniú i bhforbairt teangacha eile.

EICLÉICTEACHAS AGUS LÍON NA BHFOCAL

Nuair a scrúdaítear na teidil a aistríodh feictear gur bailiúchán eicléicteach iad ar an ábhar gurbh iad na haistritheoirí iad féin a thoghadh na leabhair ar mhian leo Gaeilge a chur orthu as liosta a thiomsaíodh painéal comhairleach. Is cosúil go mbíodh líon na bhfocal barrthábhachtach i bpróiseas an roghnaithe. Dá mhéad é líon na bhfocal, b'amhlaidh ba mhó a bhí le gnóthú. Chonaic Cronin (1996: 159) an éagsúlacht seo sna teidil mar bhua sa scéim sa mhéid gur cuireadh scéalta de gach cineál ar fáil nach raibh ar fáil roimhe sin, ina measc, scéalta do pháistí, scéalta bleachttaireachta agus eachtraíochta, ficsean liteartha chomh maith le saothair fealsúnachta agus dhiagachta. Os a choinne sin, mhaígh sé go raibh an scéim gan fócas.

LÓN LÉITHEOIREACHTA ACH MASLA DO NA SCRÍBHNEOIRÍ

Bhí rún ag an Ghúm freastal ar na riachtanais léitheoireachta a shíl siad bheith ag an phobal léitheoireachta .i. muintir na hÉireann, a bhí ag dul a thabhairt chucu féin teanga oifigiúil úr an stáit ach mar a mhínigh Cronin (1996: 157):

The Irish situation was somewhat different in that diglossia was extensive and that literate monoglots in Irish were a rarity. Thus Irish people who could read the English original were less likely to read the Irish translation.

Go bunúsach ní raibh daoine a raibh léamh an Bhéarla acu ag dul a léamh aistriúchán Gaeilge nuair a bhí léamh an bhunleabhair ar a n-acmhainn acu. Os a choinne sin, is é barúil Alan Tittley (1991: 46), mar shampla, go raibh tionchar ag an scéim a bhí dearfach agus nach dtugtar aitheantas don dearfach sin ach go hannamh. Dar leisean gur chuidigh obair an aistriúcháin le scríbhneoirí ina mbunscríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach sa Ghaeilge agus ina dtuigbheáil don litriocht. Ach is furasta a fheiceáil cad chuige a mbeadh scríbhneoir ildánach mar Sheosamh Mac Grianna ag déanamh amach gur mhasla a bhí in obair an aistriúcháin dó féin agus dá chomhúdair Ghaeilge ag rá is de nach raibh sé ann féin nó i scríbhneoir ar bith eile in Éirinn ardlitriocht a chruthú i nGaeilge.

FOINSÍ EOLAIS AR NA CANÚINTÍ

Taispeánann na haistriúcháin nach bhfuil an Ghaeilge ar dhóigh ar bith ar deireadh mar theanga liteartha agus *genres* éagsúla á láimhseáil trína meán. Ar an ábhar gur éiligh scéim an aistriúcháin comhsheasmhacht sa litriú agus nár tharla eagarthóireacht ar chanúintí na n-aistritheoirí ach sa bheag, is “storehouses of dialectal differences” iad, mar a mhínigh Cronin (1996: 160). Tá scagadh déanta in Hughes (1987) ar an fhianaise ortagrafach atá i leabhar de chuid Shéamais Uí Ghrianna, *An Draoidín*, a foilsíodh sa bhliain 1959 ar fhorbairtí a bhí ag teacht ar an Ghaeilge mar a labhair an bunadh óg í le taobh mar a labhraíodh na glúnta roimhe sin agus a léiríodh sa leabhar sin. Is foinsí neamhscrúdaithe iad na haistriúcháin a sholáthródh an-mhórán eolais ar Ghaeilge Thír Chonaill mar a bhí sí san am a ndearnadh na haistriúcháin. Ní dhearnadh fiosrú ar na haistriúcháin seo go fóill ó thaobh na foclóireachta de ach oiread, cé gur chuir Tomás de Bhaldraithe in iúl dom i gcomhreagra pearsanta gurbh fhiú iad a iniúchadh.

CANÚINT, ACMHAINNÍ TEANGEOLAÍOCHA AGUS SEIFTIÚLACHT AN AISTRITHEORA

Fágadh na haistritheoirí le húsáid a bhaint as a gcanúint féin, as a n-acmhainní teangeolaíocha féin agus as a seiftiúlacht féin nuair a bhí téarmaíocht le ceapadh de thairbhe nárbh ann do théarmaíocht a raibh glacadh coitianta léi. Is ar na hacmhainní sin agus ar an tseiftiúlacht sin mar atá siad le sonrú in aistriúcháin Sheosamh Mhic Grianna is mian liomsa aird a dhíriú sa pháipéar seo.

Maíonn Ó hEaráin (1986: ix) gurbh iad foclóirí Lane (1904) agus Dinneen (1927) na leabhair thagartha a bhí ag Niall Ó Dónaill agus é ag cur Gaeilge ar Bhéarla. Is doiligh a rá go cainníochtúil cad é an úsáid a baineadh as foclóir Uí Dhuinnín agus níor aimsigh mé féin ach na cúpla sampla seo den úsáid sin i dtaca le Seosamh Mac Grianna de a nglacaim leis gur ag Lane a fuarthas iad: “labyrinth” *achranán* (BH 31); “sexton” *adhnaclach* (I 476); “stand, gallery” *gléachas* (TC 257); BH 101, I 618) “zealot” *iméadaire* (BH 53). Is fiú cuimhniú gur focail iad nach mbeadh le fáil aige i stór focal a chanúna féin.

Dhéanfainn féin amach go raibh a oiread muiníne aige as féin mar aistritheoir agus a bhí aige as féin mar fhile agus mar údar. Tá fianaise sna haistriúcháin gurbh fhearr leis a théarma féin a cheapadh fiú agus téarma ar fáil aige ag Lane. Tugaim anois na téarmaí Béarla, téarmaí Mhic Grianna faoi chló trom, noda na leabhar agus uimhreacha na leathanach, agus ansin téarmaí Lane, faoi chló Iodálach: **CLAÍOMH MARA** “CUTLASS” (IFDT 93) LANE: *claidheamh cam*; **CLOCH GHRÉINE** “SUNDIAL” (TC 327) LANE: *caidiol, uairghrianach*; **DREACHEOLAS** “PHYSIOGNOMY” (I 32) LANE: *gnaoifhios*; **FEOLAMHÁNACH** “CANNIBAL” (MD 16) LANE: *fear ite daoine*. Ar ndóigh tá an cleachtadh sin ag teacht leis an mhasla a thug Mac Grianna do “lucht na drochGhaeilge” a thug “cumannachas” ar an fhocal Béarla “communism” (Mac Grianna 1968: 38). **Comharshailbh** a rogha féin. Níor cheart go mbeadh iontas orainn mar sin de go ndíúltaíodh sé do théarmaíocht a chruinníodh nó a chumadh daoine eile.

AN CHRUTHAITHEACHT AGUS AN FHILEATACHT

Nochtar leithead agus doimhneacht a chuid eolais ar an Ghaeilge san aistriúchán chruthaitheach fhiliúnta a rinne sé ar an téarmaíocht nach raibh le fáil aige go minic i bhfoclóirí agus mar sin de a bhfuil a lorg agus a sheiftiúlacht go láidir le sonrú uirthi. Tugaim an téarma as leabhair thagartha an lae inniu fosta (Ó Dónaill 1977 = FGB feasta; de Bhaldráithe 1959 = EID feasta). Is fiú a tabhairt faoi deara anseo nach mbíodh leisce air comhfhocail a cheapadh agus go gcleachtadh sé bealaí dúchasacha díorthaithe focal, mar shampla, *doras* > *doirse* > *doirseoir*, mar sin de, *tine* > *tinte* > *tinteoir*:

ANPHÓTAIRE “TEETOTALLER” (MD 81); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: lán-staonaire;

BOCHTSHRÁID “SLUM”; LANE: *gan liostú* (TC 393); EID: sluma, cúlsráid sh-uarach;

BRÓNCHLUICHE “TRAGEDY” (SB 142); LANE: *slaonasadh, marbhneasadh*; EID: traigéide, bróndráma;

CATHAOIR LONGADÁIN “ROCKING CHAIR” (DCA 63); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: cathaoir luascáin;

CNEÁCHEANGAL “BANDAGE” (IFDT 83); LANE: *crios, ceangal*; EID: buadán, bindealán;

COSFHÁINNE “ANKLET” (DCA 131); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: braisléad murnáin;

CROÍÁN FARRAIGE “SHIPMATE” (MD 216); LANE: *céile, compánach, guailidhe* “mate”; EID: comrádaí farraige;

CRUINNEOLAS “GEOGRAPHY” (BH 22); LANE: *tlachtghraibhtheacht, fiorthuairisc na talmhan nó na gcríoch*; EID: geografaíocht, tíreolaíocht;

FALSÓIR CLADAIGH “BEACHCOMBER” (TC 63); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: fear raice;

IDIRBHEATHACH “JENNET” (E 9); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: capaillín Spáinneach;

LEABACHÁN “COUCH” (SB 46, 51); LANE: *binnse, peall, calainn, cuil, cuiste*, etc.; EID: tolg, cúiste;

LONGARM “NAVY” (IFDT 36); LANE: *cabhlach*; EID: cabhlach (cogaidh);

SAOR AIMSIRE “APPRENTICE” (BH 153); LANE: *adhbhar, fóghlúinteach, printíseach*; EID: printíseach, ábhar (ailtire etc.);

STARTHAÍOCHT “TRADITION” (DCA 60); LANE: *gnáthchuímhne, seanchuímhne, buanchuímhne*; EID: traidisiún, seanchas;

SUÍÓG “SOFA” (MO 165); LANE: *sínteán*; EID: tolg;

TÁBHACHT “ECONOMICS” (TC 464); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: eacnamaíocht;

TINTEOIR “FIREMAN” (MD 15, 143); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: fear tine (dóiteáin);

TOBARCHITH “FOUNTAIN” (BH 205); LANE: *fuarán, tiobruid, tobar do spréachas uisce*; EID: fuarán, foínse, cuisle (uisce);

UAMHACHBHÓTHAR “TUNNEL” (TC 15); LANE: *tonnadóir*; EID: tollán.

EASPA COMHSHEASMHACHTA SA TÉARMAÍOCHT

Cruthú ar a shaoire a bhí Mac Grianna i mbun cheapadh na téarmaíochta an iomad téarmaí ar thángthas orthu ar an aontearma sa bhun-Bhéarla. Míníonn an easpa eagarthóireachta an ghné sin ach ina dhiaidh sin, nochtar dúinn cumas an aistriheora agus saibhreas a chuid Gaeilge. Seo samplaí den chleachtadh sin:

BÁD TARRAINGTHE (MD 35), **TARRANGTÁN** (MD 137) “TUG”; LANE: *gan liostú*;

BLÁTHEACH (TC 282), **TEACH NA MBLÁTH** (TC 324), **TEACH PLANDAÍ** (TC 548) “GREENHOUSE”; LANE: *gan liostú*;

BRÓG OÍCHE (MD 37), **BRÓGÁN** (DCA 124), **BRÓIGÍN** (TC 447), **LIUBHÁN** (SB 93) “SLIPPER”; LANE: *bróga seomra*;

CARRÁN (E 166, MO 81), **CARRÓG** (E 47) “CARRIAGE”; LANE: *caráiste*;

CLIABHÁN (BH 442), **CLIABHÓG** (MD 210) “CAGE”; LANE: *cás, éanadán, cléibhín*;

DABHACH FOTHragtha (TC 225), **FOLCÁN** (BH 279) “BATH”; LANE: *inead ionnlata, ionnaltóir*;

GLUAISEACHT AR AGHAIDH (TC 249), **IARRAIDH CHUN TOSAIGH** (TC 250), **SÍTHEADH** (TC 191) “PROGRESS”; LANE: *imtheacht, dul ar aghaidh*;

RÁMHROTHÁN (SB 33), **ROTHCHÉASLA** (E 261) “PROPELLER”; LANE: *gan liostú*;

SAIGEÁR (DCA 190), **TOITEÁN** (SB 133) “CIGAR”; LANE: *gan liostú*;

Thángthas fosta ar neamh-chomhsheasmhacht in úsáid na ndeirí *-án* agus *-óg*:

Is léiriú iad seo fosta ar an mhearhall a bhíodh ar scríbhneoirí a bhíodh ag iarraidh scríobh i nGaeilge agus téarmaí seasta inghlactha in easnamh uirthi.

AN GAELÚ AGUS AN TRASLITRÍÚ

Tá seiftiúlacht Mhic Grianna le sonrú go láidir ar an ghnás a bhí aige agus é i mbun cheapadh téarmaí. Is léir ó na haistriúcháin go gcleachtadh sé go mór Gaelú théarmaí an Bhéarla:

CROCHCHURADH “CRUSADER” (I 228); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: crosáidí, curadh croise;

DAINGEANBHARÚLACH “DECISIVE” (E 243); LANE: *cinnteach*; EID: cinntitheach, deimhnitheach;

GAISC-CHLUICHÍ “HEROICS” (BH 345); LANE: *gan liostú*; EID: gaisce;

IONAD SIÚIL “PROMENADE” (TC 561); LANE: *ionad spaisteoireachta*; EID: cosán spaisteoireachta, promanád.

LÚTHGHNÍOMHACH “ATHLETIC” (I 19); LANE: *láidir, lúthmhar*; EID: lúthchleasach;

Tá blaiseadh beag den traslitríú le sonrú fosta: **SAIGEÁR** “CIGAR” (DCA 190); **CRÍS** “CREESE” (IFDT 166); **PEANSAL** “PENCIL” (MO 27); **PORSALÁN** “PORCELAIN” (SB 105).

TUILLEADH CEAPADÓIREACHTA NÓ FOIRMEACHA CANÚNACHA?

Tá aistriúcháin Sheosaimh Mhic Grianna breac le foirmeacha nár baineadh dóibh san eagarthóireacht ach nach féidir a rá go dearfa ina dtaobh cé acu foirmeacha canúnacha nó ceapacháin iad. Is é an bharúil atá agam féin nó gur toradh iad ar dhá thobar sin a chanúna agus a cheapadóireachta. Tugaim anseo fosta leagana coitianta na bhfocal sin as foclóirí Gaeilge an lae inniu:

AONRACÁN “HERMIT” (I 216); LANE: *díthreabhach*; EID: díthreabhach; FGB: aonracán = aonarán;

CEANNAIRCEOIR “REBEL” (TC 65); LANE: *méirleach*; EID: ceannairceach; FGB: ceannarcóir = ceannairceach;

DÍMINNEAS “DISCORDANCE” (MO); LANE: *esaontas, aimhréidhe*; EID: míbhinneas;

DÍOMUNTÁISTE “DISADVANTAGE” (I 410, 412, 582); LANE: *aimhleas*; EID: míbhuntáiste;

DÍOMUNTÁISTEACH “DISADVANTAGEOUS” (IFDT 214); LANE: *urchóideach*; EID: míbhuntáisteach;

DOFHEICSEANACH “INVISIBLE” (DCA 172, I 76); LANE: *dófhaicsiona*; EID: dofheicthe;

DOFHUILSTEANACH “INTOLERABLE” (DCA: 110); LANE: dofhulaingthe; EID: dofhulaingthe;

FÍOCHMHARACH “FIERCE” (TC 89, I 421); LANE: *anuais, borb, colgach, fíochmhar, fiadhain*, etc.;

POILITICÍ “POLITICIAN” (MD 176, 209); LANE: *riaghlaitheoir glic céillidhe cúramach*; EID: polaiteoir;

SCARÚNTEOIR “SEPARATIST” (BH 99); LANE: *deaghailteoir*; EID: scarúnaí.

BLÚIRÍNÍ EOLAIS AR DHEILBHÍOCHT GHAeilGE AN AISTRITHEORA

Tá foirmeacha briathar, aidiachtaí agus ainmfhocal ar léiriú iad ar dheilbhíocht Ghaeilge an aistritheora:

ABAIR (MO 72, 219; E 207) foirm spléach, modh táscach, aimsir láithreach an bhriathair *abair* “say”, FGB: deir;

BHEIR (MO 6) modh táscach, aimsir chaite an bhriathair *beir* “lay”, FGB: rug;

CLUINEADH (TC 547; I 246, 247; DCA 73) saorbhriathar, modh táscach, aimsir chaite an bhriathair *cluinn* “hear”, FGB: chualathas;

MINICEACHA (TC 229) breischéim na haidiachta *minic* “often”, FGB: minice;

SCIANACHA (MO 158) foirm iolra an ainmfhocail *scian* “knife”, FGB: sceana.

CIALL LE SEACHADADH

Ach staidéar a dhéanamh ar na haistriúcháin, bheadh a fhios agat ó bheith ag léamh théacs na bunteanga cad é an teachtaireacht agus an bhri go díreach atá le táirgeadh ag an aistritheoir sa teanga eile. Thángthas ar mholl samplaí inar bhain an t-aistritheoir brí as focail seachas an ghnáthchiall a bheadh leo a léiríonn, dar liom, tábhacht na n-aistriúchán mar fhoinsé ag foclóirithe. Is cosúil gur ag tarraingt as tobar a chanúna féin agus as tobar a sheiftiúlachta féin a bhí sé sa phróiseas seo:

(a) **DUINE A CHUR AMÚ**, “TO BOTHER SOMEONE”

“Go off, now and *don't be bothering me*” (Byrne 1926: 78).

“Imthigh anois agus *ná bí a’ mo chur amudha*” (TC 106).

FGB: duine a chur amú, “to mislead someone”.

(b) **TEACHT IN ARAICIS DUINE** “TO COMPROMISE WITH SOMEONE”

“John”, he barked, “take those damned things off.”

“What, sir?”

“Those whiskers. They look like a disguise.”

“But, sir!”

“Take them off, I said. Damn it! You look like a painter. What Irish constituency would elect you with that handicap?”

“But I rather like it, sir!”

“Take it off!”

“*I’ll compromise*, sir. Leave it to me” (Byrne 1926: 42-3).

“A Sheáin,” arsa seisean, “bain díot an rud damanta sin.”

“Goidé, a dhuine uasail?”

“Bain díot an fhéasóg sin. Tá sí cosamhail le cruth folaighthe.”

“Ach, a dhuine uasail.”

“Bain díot í, a deirim. Damnughadh air! Tá tú cosamhail le péinteóir. Cá bhfuil an ceanntar Parlaimente i n-Éirinn a thoghfadh thú agus an murab-eadh sin ort?”

“Acht tá cineál dúile agam intí, a dhuine uasail.”

“Bain díot í.”

“*Tiocfaidh mé in d’araicis*, a dhuine uasail. Fág agamsa é” (TC 63).

LANE: *réidhtighim*; FGB: teacht in araicis duine, “to come to meet someone”.

(c) **RUD A RÁ GO CIANACH** “TO GRUMBLE”

“Look here,” *the Citizen grumbled* (Byrne 1926: 337).

“Éist annseo liom,” *arsa an Citizen go cianach* (TC 412).

LANE: *dramhdaim, ceasachtaim, cannránaim, ciarsánaim*; FGB: cianach, “restless”.

(d) **RUD A RÁ GO DÁIGHFHOCLACH** “TO SAY SOMETHING EMPHATICALLY”

When the Prior had ceased what he meant as a conciliatory harangue, *his companion said briefly and emphatically*, “I speak French, the language of King Richard and his nobles; but I understand English sufficiently to communicate with natives of the country” (Scott 1987: 41).

Nuair a thost an Páior i ndiaidh óráid a dhéanamh a ba mhian leis a bheith béalbhinn, *dubhairt a chuallaidhe go goirid dáigh-fhoclach*, “labhraím-se i gcomhnaidhe an Fhrainncis, teangaidh Rí Risteárd agus a chuid uasal; acht tuigim an Béarla maith go leor le cainnt a dhéanamh le áitreabhaidhthe na tíre.” (I 47)

LANE: *do labhairt le neart bhriathra*, “to speak with emphasis”.

(e) **RUD A RÁ AGUS GAN A LEITHÉID DE PHLÉISIÚR ORT** “TO SAY SOMETHING UNENTHUSIASTICALLY”

“A’m brave an’ early,” *Foxy agreed without enthusiasm* (O Donnell 1929: 63).

“Tá mé breagh luath,” arsa an fear ruadh, *agus gan a leithéid de phléisiúr air*” (E 58).

LANE: *caondúthrachtach*, “enthusiastic”.

(f) **GARAÍOCHT A DHÉANAMH DO DHUINE** “TO PATRONISE SOMEONE” (= “patronise” sa chiall “help, support, do a service to somebody”)

He was full of Charlie’s feat and inclined to be *patronising* (O Donnell 1979: 91).

Bhí cuid mhór iongantais le déanamh aige de ghníomh Thoirdealbhaigh agus ba mhaith leis bheith *ag déanamh garaidheachta dó* (MO 167).

LANE: *dídeánaim*; FGB: garaíocht a dhéanamh do dhuine, “to be of service to someone”

(g) IONTAS A DHÉANAMH DE RUD “TO OBJECT TO SOMETHING”

That was the wisest thing about his mother: she never *minded* the dogs and many a woman, he knew would object to his dogs in her drawing-room, be they ever so clean (Byrne 1926: 146-7).

Ba sin an rud a ba chéillidhe fá n-a máthair. *Ní thearn sí iongantas ar bith* ariamh de mhadaidh, agus bhí a fhios aige gurbh iomdha bean nár mhaith léithe madaidh a bheith aici ina seomra caidrimh, ba chuma goidé comh glan agus bhí siad (TC 185).

LANE: *An bhfuil aon rud nach dtaitnigheann leaf?* “Is there anything that is not to your mind?”; FGB: *iontas a dhéanamh de rud*, “to wonder at something”.

(h) RUD A DHÉANAMH SAOR “TO VULGARISE SOMETHING” (= “to cheapen something”)

On the other hand, he might have raged, enlarging on a favourite theme of his: to wit that all Latins were immoral and, worse than immoral, unwashed. *That the Alps were vulgarised by tourists*, while MacGillicuddy’s Reeks were majestic and exclusive (Byrne 1926: 30).

B’fhéidir, ina áit sin gurbh é an rud a rachadh sé ar an daoraigh, agus thoiseóchadh sé a thrácht ar rud ar b’áin leis labhairt air, go raibh na Laideanaigh uilig neamhgheamnaidhe agus rud a ba mheasa ná sin, go raibh siad salach. *Go dtearn na triallairí na h-Ailpeannaí saor*, agus go raibh Sléibhte Mac Giolla Coda ríoghamhail agus mór-luachach (TC 47-8).

LANE: *codarmáanta, díoscar, gráisceamhail*.

(i) ÉIRÍ MARBH IDIR DO DHÁ LÁIMH “TO RELAX ONE’S GRIP” (= “to become limp, to slack, to loosen one’s grip”)

“My God, Phil!” Charlie said. “My God, Phil!” he choked. “Phil, Phil!” he said again. *Phil relaxed in his grasp*. “Was it me cut yer mouth, Charlie?” (O Donnell 1979: 114).

“A Dhia, a Fheilimidh!” arsa Tarlach. “A Dhia, a Fheilimidh.” Bhithear á thachtadh.

“A Fheilimidh, a Fheilimidh!” ar seisean arís.

D'éirigh Feilimídh marbh idir a dhá láimh.

“An mise a ghearr do bhéal, a Tharlaigh?” arsa Feilimídh (MO 216).

FGB: *scaoileadh greama* “loosening of hold”.

(j) **CEAD A THABHAIRT DO DHUINE RUD A DHÉANAMH** “TO ENABLE SOMEONE TO DO SOMETHING” (“to give someone freedom to do something”)

He set off at a trot, his red bundle bumping on his back. When he was a good distance away he stopped to thrust up his trousers *so that he could run better* (O'Donnell 1929: 37).

D'imthigh sé ar sodar, agus an ceangaltán dearg ag boc-léimnigh ar a dhruim. Nuair a bhí sé giota maith chun siubhail stad sé gur thrustáil sé a bhrístí *le cead a thabhairt dó reathachtáil ní b'fhearr* (E 31).

LANE: *do dhéanamh cumasach*; FGB: *cead a thabhairt*, “to give permission”.

(k) **DUINE A THACHTADH** “TO BAFFLE SOMEONE” (= “to stump someone”)

And while she fixed the neck-band of a shirt, she told Cormac what the master had said to her about Hughie; he was the best in the school at the inspection, and answered not only every question the inspector could put on him for his own class, but answered questions that *the highest class in the school was stuck at*; and there were things left in his head, the master said, that no question had touched (O'Donnell 1929: 33).

Agus a fhad agus bhí sí ag cur balach ar choileár léineadh, d'innis sí do Chormac goidé adubhairt an maighistir léithe fá Aodh; ba é a b'fhearr ar an sgoil ag an sgrúdughadh; níorbh é amháin go dtug sé freagra ar achán cheist ar cuireadh air ins an rang a rabh sé féin ann, acht thug sé freagra ar cheisteanna *a thacht an rang a b'airde ins an sgoil*; agus mhaidh an maighistir go rabh eolas ina cheann nach deachaidh an cheastóireacht a fhad leis (E 28).

LANE: *meallaim, mearuighim, millim, meangaim*; FGB: *tacht*, “choke, strangle, suffocate”.

(l) CÚL A BHEITH AGAT “TO HAVE SECURITY”

“Yes, it shall be. Hark, Malluch! Stop not in thy offer of sesterii. Advance them to talents, if any there be who dare so high. Five, ten, twenty talents; ay fifty, so the wager be with Messala himself.”

“It is a mighty sum, said Malluch. *“I must have security.”*”

“So thou shalt. Go to Simonides and tell him I wish the matter arranged” (Wallace 1965: 276).

“Seadh, béidh sé mar sin. Éist, a Mhalluich! Ná coigil na sesterii. Déan tallainn daobhtha, má bhíonn uchtach ag aon duine a nglacadh. Cúig thallann, deich gcinn, fiche; ‘seadh agus leith-chéad, más le Messala é féin a chuirfear an geall.’”

“Tá an t-airgead iongantach mór,” arsa Malluch, *“caithfidh mé cúl a bheith agam.”*”

“Agus beidh. Gabh chuig Simonides, agus abair leis gur maith liom sin a shocrú” (BH 399-400).

LANE: *dearbhacht, sábháltacht*, etc.; FGB: cúl airgid, “reserve of money”.

(m) CAITHEAMH AIMSIRE a. gin. (mar aidiacht) “AMATEUR (PART-TIME)”

“Burton, I don’t want to hear anything about it. *I’m an amateur rider*, and the money end of it doesn’t interest me, beyond my own small bets” (Byrne 1926: 189).

“A Bhurton, ní maith liom iomrádh ar bith a chluinstin ar sin. *Níl ionnam ach marcach caitheamh-aimsire*, agus ní miste liom fá cheann an airgid dó, acht amháin na gealltaí beaga atá agam féin air” (TC 236).

LANE: *gan liostú*; FGB: caitheamh aimsire, “pastime”.

CONCLUÍDÍ

Tá léará solais á chaitheamh agam sa pháipéar seo ar ghné eile den *genius* a bhí i Seosamh Mac Grianna atá le mothú ar a chuid aistriúchán, sa mhéid gur ceardaí focal a bhí ann. Ba den riachtanas an cheardaíocht chéanna focal agus gan teacht ag an aistritheoir ar mhórán den téarmaíocht a bhí le tiontú go Gaeilge aige. Is léir go bhfuil an fhileatacht agus an mháistreacht sa Ghaeilge atá le haireachtáil ar a

shaothar cruthaitheach le mothú againn sna haistriúcháin, cé go bhfacthas dó féin gur mhúch obair an aistriúcháin an drithleog a bhí ann. Is léir nach dtugadh sé isteach do na foinsí a bhí ar lámh aige. Dhéanadh sé ceann amháin de dhá rud. Shéanadh sé iad nó dhéanadh sé neamhiontas díobh.

Tá sé scríofa ag Ó Ruairc (1997: 1-2) go raibh na fionscríbhneoirí chomh tuirseach sin i ndiaidh iad na haistriúcháin a dhéanamh nach raibh fuinneamh iontu dul i gceann na scríbhneoireachta cruthaithí. Mhaígh Titley (1991: 469) nach dtiocfadh le duine teacht slán lena chloigeann i ndiaidh milliún focal a aistriú taobh istigh de thrí bliana. Chuir Mac an Bheatha (1967: 6) in iúl gur cóngaraí do mhilliún go leith líon na bhfocal de réir a chomhairimh féin.

Is eiseamláirí cumhachtacha iad na haistriúcháin seo ar cheird an aistriúcháin nuair a d'éirigh leis an aistritheoir saothair úra a chruthú nach n-aithneofaí orthu gur tiontaíodh ón Bhéarla iad. Bheadh úsáid mhór leo i dteagasc scileanna na ceirde sin. Léirigh Mac Grianna go raibh eolas thar na bearta aige ar an dá theanga nuair a d'éirigh leis chomh maith sin san fhiontar. Tá scoth na Gaeilge sna haistriúcháin seo agus ní furasta a aithint gur tiontaíodh go Gaeilge iad. Thagair Ó Ruairc (1988: 31) don áilleacht, don bheocht agus don saibhreas Gaeilge atá in *Eadarbhaile* agus scríobh sé nár aithin sé gur ag léamh aistriúcháin a bhí sé.

Tá mórán le foghlaim againn uathu ní amháin faoi inniúlacht liteartha na Gaeilge ach faoin aistritheoir chomh maith a mheas go raibh an obair chomh furasta lena bhróg a cheangal ach a raibh dímheas aige uirthi san am céanna. Chruthaigh sé agus nocht sé an inniúlacht chéanna agus níor baineadh leath a leasa as an téarmaíocht a cheap sé go fóill nó ní bhfaighfear mórán di i bhfoclóirí an lae inniu.

Measaimse gur taiscí tábhachtacha iad na haistriúcháin seo. Bheinn den bharúil gur bhoichte sinn dá n-éagmais agus gur mhór an cúnamh é eolas ar na haistriúcháin a bheith ag daoine, mo dhála féin, a bhíonn ag coraíocht go laethúil leis an dá theanga i réimsí an oideachais, na hiriseoireachta, na drámaíochta, na litríochta, na meán, na craoltóireachta agus na foilsitheoireachta. Is mór an pléisiúr domsa anseo faill a bheith agam gnéithe de sheiftiúlacht agus d'acmhainneacht shaibhir theangeolaíoch Sheosaimh Mhic Grianna a fhoilsíú².

² Foilsíodh *Seosamh Mac Grianna: Aistritheoir* (An Clóchomhar, Baile Átha Cliath) le Seán Mac Corraidh i 2004 [Eds.].

AISTRÍÚCHÁIN SHEOSAIMH MHC GRIANNA

NODA

- BG: *Báthadh an Ghrosvenor* (The Wreck of the Grosvenor, W. Clark Russell), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1955.
- BH: *Ben Hur* (Ben Hur, Lew Wallace), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1933.
- DCA: *Díth Céille Almayer* (Almayer's Folly, J. Conrad), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1936.
- E: *Eadarbhaile* (Adriagoole, P. O'Donnell), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1953.
- I: *Ivanhoe* (Ivanhoe, W. Scott), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1937.
- IFDT: *Imeachtaí Fhear Dheireadh Teaghlaigh* (Adventures of a Younger Son, E.J. Trelawney), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1936.
- MD: *An Mairnéalach Dubh* (The Nigger of the Narcissus, J. Conrad), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1933.
- MO: *Muintir an Oileáin* (Islanders, P. O'Donnell), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1952 (1935).
- PF: *An Páistín Fionn* (The Whiteheaded Boy, L. Robinson), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1934.
- SB: *Séideán Bruithne* (Typhoon and Amy Foster, J. Conrad), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1935.
- TC: *Teach an Chrochadóra* (Hangman's House, Donn Byrne), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1935.
- TS: *Teacht fríd an tSeagal* (Comin' thro' the Rye, H. Mathers), Oifig an tSoláthair, BÁC, 1932.

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GEARÓIDÍN UÍ LAIGHLÉIS

An Gúm: The Early Years

The ratification of Seán Ua Ceallaigh as Minister for Irish on the 29 June 1920 indicated the Provisional Government's willingness to support the Irish Language as a matter of urgency. The contribution of Cathal Brugha, later shot by Free-State Forces, Terence McSwiney, and Piaras Béaslaí to name just a few, ensured that matters pertaining to Irish were not entirely overshadowed by other matters in the first Dáil which were perceived to be more important, matters such as the release of prisoners and the war with Britain.

Following the aborted attempt of Pádraic Ó Conaire's *An Ridireacht Liteartha*, which was a proposal to ensure a readership for the authors brave enough to write in Irish, a campaign was started in August of 1920 in the newspaper *Misneach* to provide reading material in Irish, the paper vigorously arguing that it was not worth having an Irish Education if there was not to be a literature available in Irish. The dearth of reading material was in stark contrast to the success of the work of the Gaelic League through which thousands were learning to speak and to read Irish.

The Gaelic League was more than twenty five years old, and whilst they had published a large number of books in the first years, the amount being published in the early twenties was abysmal indeed. There were many and varied reasons for this, ranging from the dismal sales of the books which were being published to the unavailability of some of the authors. There was, also, a huge influx of English reading material becoming widely available, mystery novels, light romances, periodicals, not to mention the descendants of the much criticised and abhorred *Penny Dreadfuls*.

Pádraic Ó Conaire's fierce criticism of the "tyranny of the schoolchild" had already become commonplace in 1917:

Smacht na n-óg an smacht is measa. Smacht na n-óg atá ag baint meabhrach de lucht scríofa na Gaeilge. Smacht na n-óg ata ag lomadh nualitriocht na Gaeilge (Denvir, 1978: 80).

The tyranny of youth is worst of all. This tyranny is destroying the intelligence of Irish writers. This tyranny is desiccating modern Irish Literature.

The incestuous relationship between the Irish language and Education was to continue, however, in the Provisional Government itself. For example, Liam de Róiste explained in 1920 that the Minister for Irish should be conversant with the whole problem of Primary Education, so that he would be able to assign the language its proper place on the curriculum (*Miontuairisc an Chéad Dála*, 163).

On the 11 March 1921, the Dáil heard that the Minister for Irish, Seán Ua Ceallaigh, had been arrested a few days previously. According to the minutes for that session,

Prosecution of the work of the Department was becoming necessarily more difficult owing to enemy activity, especially in the Irish-speaking counties such as Cork and Kerry. A Programme of Bilingual Education was being drafted. It was the duty of Aireacht na Gaedhilge / Ministry for Irish to see that the necessary textbooks and other literature was available for the schools, and a scheme was being prepared for the publication of a certain number of books (*Miontuairisc an Chéad Dála*, 265).

The scheme had not yet assumed definite shape, but would be ready before the next meeting of the Dáil, and it was proposed to ask the Dáil to empower the Ministry to allocate £2,000 for this work. It was reported that £500 had already been allocated to the Minister for Irish for books and literature the year before, but a larger scheme was required and consequently a larger sum of money. There was now an urgent necessity for textbooks, schoolbooks and translations on standard works, as many schools were reporting that they were greatly handicapped for the want of these books. Aireacht na Gaedhilge had decided the previous December to support Cumann na nÚdar, (the Authors' Club) a collection of writers formed in 1920 whose aim was to work together in getting help with the publishing of books, and the issue was considered a "Matter of Urgency". There were, according to the Minister, at least eight textbooks in the hands of people unable to publish them.

Thus given is the embryo of the scheme as set forth by the Provisional Government in 1920/21. This was actually the beginning of the scheme which was to be called in later years *An Gúm*. The question may be asked what exactly does the word *Gúm* mean? It is one of the words in Irish for *scheme* or *plan*, and not, as some may think the name of a large Soviet Shopping Centre in Moscow. Seosamh Mac Grianna, tongue in cheek, described how an Irish speaker in his sleep was approached by a beautiful maiden who presents him with the word from *Cín Dromma Sneachta*. Patrick Henchy in *Irish Words and Expressions from Corofin in County Clare* defined it as “a plan, a stunt, a gimmick” (De Bhaldraithe, 1982: 167). Whilst not being uncommon in some parts of the Gaeltacht, the word was quite new to a lot of people as the following letter from an Alfred O’Rahilly (Cork University Press) illustrates:

There were a few Irish words such as Gúm in your scheme for helping the publication of books in Ireland which I did not understand... (Gúm G8 vol. 2).

First called the Scheme for assisting the Publication of Secondary School texts in Irish, (Gúm G6 vol. 2) it was never intended that it should be called *An Gúm*. The word seemed to catch the imagination of both workers and public and many letters in the Gúm files are from people talking about the scheme “known as the Gúm”. As early as 11 October 1926 the Gúm was mentioned in letters in the form of a proper noun and before this a letter was addressed to An Seabhac 1st September 1926 in response to his appeal for help: “... *faoin nGúm oifigiúil i gcomhair foilsithe leabhair*” (Gúm N0038). A memo dated September 1929 argues:

The use of the term Gúm to describe the scheme as originally set up, and that Scheme alone, might cause confusion. It should apply to the entire works of the amalgamated Committee. Mr. Nicholls agrees with this opinion (Gúm G5 vol.1).

Memos dated in the 1940’s consistently use the term “Brainse na bhFoilseachán” as well as “An Gúm”. The scheme, the premises and the actual organisation now all come under the title *An Gúm*.

This particular scheme in the 1920’s was found to be faulty and in 1924 the Assistant Secretary for the Department of Education sent a letter to Seoirse Mac Niocaill, an inspector in the Department of Education, criticising the scheme and looking for advice as to how to produce books in Irish to fill the dearth that was hindering the advancement of Irish Education and eventual Gaelicisation of the

country (Gúm G6, vol.2). Mac Niocaill sent his advice back on the 19 June 1924 and in that letter we find the actual proposed structure of An Gúm. A letter from the same file dated the 16 October 1924 to the Secretary in the Department of Finance states quite clearly:

I am directed by the Minister for Education to draw attention to the serious difficulties which his dept. meets with in carrying out its policy of Gaelicisation especially in secondary schools owing to the want of suitable textbooks...

This letter indicates that the responsibility for Gaelicisation rested with the Department for Education which in turn was answerable to the Department of Finance, as indeed was every other department. After much discussion, letter writing, consultation, it was decided to form two committees which would consist of experts in the Irish Language, one of whom should be an expert on Ulster Irish. The first meeting of Coiste na Leabhar/ The Book Committee, was held on 7 May 1926. Among the first members were: Dúbhghlas de hÍde, later first President of Ireland, Tórna, writer, Piaras Béaslaí, writer, and politician, Leon Ó Broin, historian, and later the secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, Tomás Ó Máille, and Micheál Breathnach (Gúm G39). Énrí Ó Muirgh-easa and P.S. Ó Tighearnaigh were co-opted onto the committee soon after. The primary business of Coiste na Leabhar was to examine the manuscripts put before the Department, and advise the Department as to a) should they be accepted, as they were, b) should they be accepted on condition they are changed, or c) should they be rejected? They were also responsible for the binding, cover, and appearance of the books, and of the price to be paid to the writers (Gúm G/39). At that first meeting they were advised of the two types of books which the Department of Education wanted: 1) Books suitable for use in the Secondary schools and 2) Other books which would be of benefit to learners of the language.

The second committee, An Coiste Foillsiúcháin (Publications Committee) was formed on the 22 September 1927. Again, the people chosen were involved in the Irish language in various ways: Seoirse Mac Niocaill, Piaras Béaslaí (again), Tomás Ó Máille, Father Pádraig de Brún, Risteárd Ó Foghludha, Luise Gabhánach Ní Dhubhthaigh, Colm Ó Murchadha, and Gearóid Ó Lochlainn (Gúm 68). Their responsibilities were to supply a vast amount of reading material for the public, of both fiction and non-fiction. In order to fulfil this objective they were to encourage the creation of translations and writing of novels. One of the first things which this committee did was to organise a translating competition

and an advertisement was placed in the *Irish Independent* 9 February 1928 encouraging Irish speakers to enter the competition. As well as a prize the winning entrant would then go on to translate further works for the Coiste Foillsiúcháin (Gúm 151).

Each entrant could choose from a selection of passages chosen by the committee. As well as a prize the winning entrant would then go on to translate further works for the Coiste Foillsiúcháin. This first competition attracted 79 entrants and many others made inquiries. They organised a number of similar competitions in the first few years (Gúm G130, Gúm G183). A letter from Séamas Ó Grianna on the 3 May 1930 asks the committee for more information about the competition:

Cuir chugam gach tuairisc fan iomaidheacht aistriúcháin i nGaeilge. B'fhéidir go dtabharfainn iarraidh ar chuid de a dhéanamh (Gúm G18).

A scheme devised for writing non-fiction books in 1929, did not attract the same amount of people and merely managed to annoy some of the potential writers, not least Piaras Béaslaí and Séamas Ó Searcaigh (Gúm G 17). In 1933 they sanctioned a competition for a collection of Connacht proverbs which was won by Tomás Ó Máille and which was not without its own amount of controversy either.

It became obvious, however, that the two committees could be merged into one, and they were thus amalgamated under the title Coiste na Leabhar, given four additional members and held their first meeting on 28 July 1928 (Gúm G8(4) and Gúm 56). The minutes of these meetings indicate that the members kept strictly to their brief, and the books were discussed, progress was noted, and decisions made regarding their suitability. The committee was disbanded in 1933 as it was difficult for the members to meet together on a regular basis. Dúbhghlas de hÍde for example was unable to attend many of the meetings, citing pressures of work and other committees as the main reasons (Gúm G0 51). Because of this problem with attendance it was decided in 1931 that if a book was recommended by two or more readers it could be entered on the list immediately without the approval of the whole committee.

The original plans for the scheme in 1920 gave precedence to text books and translations but by 1926 it was suggested that original novels should be written in Irish as well, novels “which were recommended or approved as being suitable for use as readers in Secondary Schools” (Gúm G8 vol.2). The letter goes on to say that other types of books were to be published under the scheme:

Travel books, biographies, and other books of a type that are in general demand in other countries. It would probably be supplied chiefly by translation from English and other modern languages.

This letter was dated 22 January 1926, and was sent to the Department of Finance looking for £5,000 to finance the scheme.

A wide range of work was undertaken by An Gúm straight away. As well as original novels and translations, by February 1931 they had published 28 dramas (Gúm G7). The idea of a children's colour comic in Irish was mooted, investigations were made to the possibility of using American matrixes but the whole project was deemed as being too expensive (Gúm G145). Enquiries were made into the possibility of translations from Scottish Gaelic in 1932, but on examination of the material available at the time no further action was taken on this either (Gúm G1).

An Gúm was up and running, they employed proofreaders, artists, and editors (Gúm G0 71, G0 88). And they needed to employ publishers. The files indicate quite clearly that there was no firm policy for a number of years as regards the actual publishing of the books. From the very outset publishing firms such as Cork University Press were unhappy with the idea of a state funded publishing house. The aforementioned Alfred O'Rahilly (Cork University Press) expressed his concern that publishers such as his were excluded from the process:

And that it seems that it is the intention of the Stationary Office to start as a firm for the publication of Irish books in competition with other publishers, and subsidised by public money (Gúm G8 vol.2).

In reply to his letter Mr O'Rahilly was told that the Stationary Office did not print, they gave out the work, and that any firm could tender for the same work.

Letters of protest were submitted also from The Educational Company of Ireland. In common with other printers in Ireland they were asked by the Stationary Office to quote for the printing of four books in October 1926. They replied that they had already spent £10,000 on publishing books in Irish and felt that it was no longer what we might call today a *level playing field*. They asked for some special consideration and that if none was forthcoming, they would be forced to retire from such an unequal contest (Gúm G7).

It was thought at first that the books would not be published directly by the Stationary Office, but rather by the firm of publishers selected for that purpose. However by the 19 November 1927, it was stated that the Stationary Office

should be named as publishers for all books under the scheme. This decision was obviously overturned because by the 3rd December that same year it was decided that books would bear the name of the publishers and a letter dated to the Department of Education 8 April 1929 from the Stationary Office indicates that the matter had not yet been cleared up. By 30 August, 1930, the Stationary Office said that Eason's was now terminating its contract as selling agents and that they could sell the books themselves. This meant that An Gúm had no contact with the printers, as all proofs went to the printers via the Stationary Office and vice versa (Gúm G8).

Independent publishers or not, An Gúm was up and running, and by 1937 it had published 362 texts altogether, 169 of these being translations. Of the first 100 works of fiction published, approximately 60% were translations.

The question has been raised many times, why more original works in Irish were not published, why so many works were translated whilst ignoring the obvious talent of a writer like Seosamh Mac Grianna. Leaving the afore mentioned writer out of the picture for a moment, however, it was long argued that the country did not as yet have many good Irish speaking authors. Indeed, that was one of the aims of the translation scheme, that the Irish authors would glean some knowledge about the different "genres" and therefore would produce better work. The books chosen, however, were not always good examples of high-quality literature. Quite the reverse in some cases. Freeman Willis Crofts, for example, has been described by Alan Titley as "the most boring writer of detective novels EVER, bar none!" The choice of these books reflected quite accurately the reading taste in English of the Irish people at the time. Great works were also translated, however, works by Dickens, Tchekov, William Carleton, Maupassant, Joseph Conrad, Shakespeare, not to mention Enid Blyton (*The Famous Jimmy*, 1940).

However, although many aspired to reading a native literature written by native speakers, as far back as 1907 Edward Martyn had this to say:

If we had some such work in Irish it would be a model and inspiration to future authors. Of course, some will say that we have many original writers in Irish. We have no doubt: but the people with interesting ideas do not know Irish at all or well enough, and those who know Irish do not appear to have very much to say (O'Leary, 1994: 362).

It was accepted by many, therefore, from the beginning of the century, that a translation of the world's classics could only be of benefit to the language. It was

after all, the key to literary development in other countries and as Philip O’Leary (1994: 363) says about such protagonists of translation:

For such revivalists, the real importance of translation was as a catalyst to the shaping of Irish as a twentieth century literary language.

When asked what exactly the Gúm could do to meet the needs of An Comhar Dramaíochta (Gúm G7) they were told that translations of dramas by Ibsen and Molière would be beneficial to the advancement of drama through Irish. Ernest Blythe showed his support for translation in *An Claidheamh Soluis* 1917:

And I think it far better to produce a translation of a famous book than to throw newly composed rubbish to the people.

As Ernest Blythe was instrumental in the setting up of the Gúm, this stance was to manifest itself in the work of the Gúm which saw them publishing many more translations than original novels in the 20’s and the 30’s.

The broad range of books translated has been described as a double-edged sword. It meant that there was a wide variety of novels translated, certainly, but it also showed that there was no firm policy behind the scheme. A fine example of this lack of policy overall is that neither Piaras Béaslaí nor Tórna knew whether to accept the mss. *Sgéalta ó Uibh Ráthach* as it contained some folklore (Gúm N0033).

Pleading the case for a number of books of Irish interest to be translated, Roi-beárd Ó Faracháin (1937: 170) asked in 1937 how many such books were among the 170 books which had been translated from English.

Not more than one dozen whole, but there is a flood of ephemeral fiction which would not be read by any cultured reader, or bought by the man who likes that kind of stuff, because he can get it at sixpence in the cheap reprints which are pouring in hundreds from the English Presses. It is a lamentable waste of time, money and opportunity.

Another indication as to why more original works were not published is found in the Gúm files on the original books, books which never actually saw the light of day. It is unfortunate or, perhaps not, that these particular scripts were returned to the authors as some of the comments by the readers (i.e. the examiners) indicate that they would in themselves speak volumes. A comment from an obviously weary reader asks why the author, a retired priest, should change the dog to a cat half way through the novel. Another reader, this time a guardian of “caint

na ndaoine” (*the speech of the people*) talking about a different novel, declared that the young author would NEVER have Irish as indicated by the phrase “Chuaigh sé síos go maith”—“ It went down well”. The same Roibeárd Ó Faracháin (1937: 170) stated:

I have not attempted any appraisal of the original books. Many of them, of course, would have no chance of reaching print if they were written in English.

Out of the first 500 works of fiction presented to the Gúm, 40-50% was rejected. There were as many reasons for rejection as there were manuscripts to be rejected. *Scéalta Gearra* by Micheál Ó Gríobhtha was rejected as the stories were not suited to each other (“*ag teacht le chéile*”). Works submitted by writers such as Séamas Ó Grianna and Pádraig Óg Ó Conaire were rejected outright were as being “ró-lag” (Gúm N0013). A manuscript entitled *Ceachta Beaga Eolaíochta* was rejected as having nothing new to offer; Father Ó Nualláin’s submitted *Graiméar na Gaedhilge*, (Irish Grammar) warranted this remark from Tomás Ó Máille:

He calls it a grammar of modern Irish but it only appears to pertain to his own Irish and that of a Father Peadar O’Leary’s. (Gúm N0024)

And finally, speaking of priests, Father Énrí Ó Muirgheasa from Omeath when asked if the manuscript *An Goban Saor* submitted by Énrí Ó hAnnuain in 1926 was worth publishing stated quite frankly that the fire was the only place worthy of it (Gúm N0036). It’s not clear why *Natalicia Míle Bliain Roimh Chríost* by Sr. Aloysius was rejected!

The fact that a book was accepted did not always indicate general satisfaction from the panel of readers. A very telling remark is given in a note to the minister’s secretary. The note is written on the side of the page on which an evaluation recommends the acceptance of the novel *File Callánach* by Seán Mac Maoláin:

Although not an excellent story, I recommend its acceptance due to the dearth of newly written novels in Irish (Gúm N0632).

It would appear also that nepotism wasn’t entirely unheard of as we find that when the first readers rejected a story, some of the editors were sometimes determined to persue the matter until they found readers who would recommend the book. This happened in the case of the novel *Ór Inis Tor*: “these two reports are against accepting the manuscript. It would help us greatly to get another report”. A letter from Seán McLennon states:

The author is a member of the staff and I feel that we should be very careful to avoid the temptation to be indulgent to him on that account. For this reason I am reluctant to recommend the acceptance of the book even though two editors would be in favour of that course. The consensus of opinion of the three outside readers is against acceptance (Gúm N0710).

This particular novel, incidentally, although severely criticised by most readers, was later chosen as a novel on the A level course in the North and later it was to be studied in the secondary schools in the South. 6000 copies in all were sold. This might be said to be ironic at the very least.

The translation scheme ended officially in 1939, but had in reality ended 6 years before when it became clear that the translations were not being read. By 1933 a memo deemed that original works must *always* take precedence over translations, and also no further translations were to be commissioned unless absolutely necessary. The absence of this particular file on the end of the Translation Scheme means that we can only speculate as to the thoughts and opinions of the Gúm staff.

As I have mentioned before, many of those concerned with providing a modern literature in Irish supported, in theory at least, the translations of works into Irish. Others, however, strongly disagreed with the practice. Seosamh Mac Grianna repeatedly declared that the Gúm gave credibility to the belief that nothing good could be composed in Irish and that anything worthwhile must come from the other side of the Irish Sea. (Cronin, 1996, 157) Other writers felt that it was an altogether unnatural process, translating French and Russian novels into Irish. (*An tUltach*, Lá Fhéile Pádraig, 1925).

In his book *Translating Ireland*, Michael Cronin (1996: 160) mentions that

Policing translation was an element in a larger ideological project aimed at using Irish to create a more conservative national culture.

In 1925, just as the Gúm was being born, divorce was made illegal in the newly founded state. A strong Catholic viewpoint was exercised in all aspects of Irish life and, as part of the Department of Education, An Gúm was probably no exception. What was called Moral Vigilance was still the order of the day. Whilst not going so far as to demand a “balla cosanta” or defence wall around the country as was being championed at the beginning of the century, the wish that an Irish Ireland should also be a Catholic Ireland was still prevalent throughout a strong section of the population. It is of little surprise that in 1934 the following paragraph should pass as a review of the translations of *Trent's Last Case* by E.C.

Bentley and *The Pit Prop Syndicate* by F.W. Crofts in the magazine *Ar Aghaidh*:

A Pagan life is shown in these two translations – as far as life of any description is shown, a life in which a person is killed and a life in which no reason is given that the person should not be killed if that particular sport is enjoyed by someone. (*Ar Aghaidh*, Deireadh Fómhair, 1934).

Leaving the translation scheme but staying with Catholic moral standards, one of the first books to be published by An Gúm, *Fánaí*, caused quite some trouble, and a letter of resignation by Fr. Richard Fleming, P.P. from Coiste na Leabhar (the book committee) is significant:

The book is not written in idiomatic Irish and I think that it would be sinful to put it into the hands of young people. Whether from the Irish point of view... (Gúm, N0124).

It is hard to judge from that particular letter whether bad Irish or worse morals was the greater sin.

This leads us to the conclusion, just as Michael Cronin implies, that an Irish language policy was not the only one being pursued, but also a more general cultural policy reflecting the ethos of the state. I could find no written guidelines as regards censorship in the files, only a document concerning Canon law in regard to specific Catholic publications. It appears that the Gúm readers and editors themselves imposed the tight moral code. A small footnote to this could be the dilemma faced by the editor of *Téarmaí Ceoil*, (Gúm G15) as he ponders on what the correct Irish for “nocturne” should be: *Ní doigh liom gur ceart Nocht-Fhonn = Nocturne d’fhágaint istigh.* (*Nocht-fhonn* could be translated as “naked desire”.)

As regards the actual payment received by the writers, it has often been said that the stipends paid to the translators were mean and “*suarach*”. I would argue that this was not so. There is no doubt that the Gúm were hard taskmasters. Translators late in producing the script were punished financially for doing so and lost a percentage of their earnings. If 10% of the work was late they lost 10% of the total earnings. If the Gúm and the author had varying ideas on the amount of words in original text, the Gúm won, and if there should be, for example, 74,678 words the writer was paid for 74,000. The average fee for translations was £1 per thousand words, the amount of words from the original text was taken into account. This refutes the myth that translators “extended” the novel in order to earn more money. One particular author, Seán Mac Maoláin, was able to earn £486 in

a period of thirteen months, from November 1929—December 1930. Seosamh Mac Grianna, well over £200 in the same period, and the following is a note taken from the minutes of the by now almost redundant SPIL in December 1931:

There was considerable discussion on the question of future publications by the society, and it was pointed out that it would be difficult if not impossible to get competent authors in face of the liberal remuneration being offered to Irish writers by the Gúm (Minutes of the 23 December 1931).

Did An Gúm actually succeed in influencing Irish cultural Policy in providing material in Irish to help those who wanted it? The answer to that question is like the answer to most. It did and it did not. The translation policy certainly did not entice the general public to race out and read the latest detective story translated into Irish, but people did buy AND read most of the original works. Séamas Ó Néill published a survey in 1946 in the magazine *The Bell* on the amount of times in which the translations from the Gúm were taken from a Public library in Dublin. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Fardorougha*, *the Miser*, and *The Fair God*, were on loan just five times each. *Coming thro' the Rye*, *The Cask*, *Sally Kavanagh*, *Herr und Hund*, and *The Graves of Kilmorna* never actually left the library although the classic *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was borrowed by eleven readers in the space of ten years. Whilst I would cast doubts on exactly how scientific the survey was, the results are a reflection of most of what has been written about the translation scheme, and it is worth reading his conclusions:

Every public library now has a number of shelves heavy in Irish, but if the true result is to be seen in the use the public makes of the published works, time and money have been largely wasted. I am afraid this list which is a fair Durchschnitt, points to the conclusion that readers of Irish will not read translations of books which they can easily procure in English (Ó Néill, 1946: 47).

Support is shown from An Gúm's own files. Figures from file A126 show that An Gúm was instructed to lower the prices of most of the translations in 1937 as it became clear that there was no demand for them. Séamas Ó Néill did not stop at the figures for the translations but gave us also figures for original novels. These proved much more encouraging: *An Béal Bocht* was borrowed 24 times in 3 years and *Indé agus Indiu* borrowed 31 times in 6 years.

Even Séamas Ó Néill, however, would probably have been surprised by the fact that in 1957 97,000 books were sold as waste paper by An Gúm for £180.

97,000 is patently a lot of books. Some attempts were made at distributing the books, firstly at a reduced rate to libraries, and then free of charge to some areas in the Gaeltacht. They were not offered free of charge outside of the Gaeltacht. This created not a little fuss when first discovered, and opponents of the scheme were quick to criticise the whole venture. The majority of the books disposed were from the *Laethanta Gréine* series or from the translations commissioned in the 20's and 30's. It was stated in the Dáil that they had been printed far in excess of the possible markets and apparently without any realistic survey of the possible market. There is some information pertaining to this event in the Gúm files and the files from Roinn an Taoisigh. Here are a few examples of the copies involved:

- *Fánaí*: 5,000 copies printed 1927. 2, 580 copies sold as waste paper 1955, 400 copies retained.
- *An Danar*, 3,000 printed, 2000 sold as wastepaper 1955, 200 copies retained.

Books from the *Laethanta Gréine* series which was published in the early thirties fared even worse:

- *An tIarla Éamon*, 10,000 printed in 1932. 6,450 sold as waste paper, 400 copies retained.

Even Seosamh Mac Grianna could not guarantee a readership:

- *Na Lochlannaigh*, 1000 printed in 1938. 500 sold as wastepaper 1955, 100 copies retained.

In giving evidence to the Public Account Committee the Accounting Officer of the Department of Education defended the work which had been done. Discouraging on the evidence he had given two years previously, he said:

From the information I then gave, an impression might arise that our sales of Gúm books were very small and so that the reading public for Irish books was very limited. Perhaps you will allow me the other side of the medal, that is, that the Gúm has to date sold a million and a quarter of works. When it is considered that the Department is not a commercial organisation and has no travellers on the road, and that the sale of general works – not to speak of translations – in English in this country is so small that original novels in English published here are few and far between perhaps it will be agreed that the Gúm, starting with a reading public that it had almost to create, in the circumstances has not done badly in selling the

million and a quarter copies, many of them translations. I say all this because the committee has reserved comment on the position and I felt that, in justice to the scheme, the positive side of the sales deserved to be underlined (Roinn an Taoisigh, S 95 38B).

If we look at the original aims of the Gúm, we see that they were trying to provide textbooks and reading material primarily for schools. Is it possible to enact a cultural change in this way? It seems unlikely! In August 1921 Sean Ua Ceallaigh was appointed Minister for Education and from that time onwards the responsibility for Irish lay with the Minister for Education. This should have come as no surprise, as the minutes from the first two years suggest this. This meant that Irish was tied to what some people would consider to be the two most conservative groups in the country – Civil Servants and the Department of Education. The Gúm files show that the Civil Service changed little under the new regime in Dublin. Many problems, for example, were encountered by Civil Servants who were writing and translating for the Gúm, as they were only allowed to earn a certain amount of money for this extra work. For example, a letter written in 1929 by Proinnsias Ó Dubhthaigh to W. Doolin, Department of Finance looking for clarification regarding special payments to civil servants from “our Irish Texts and General Publications” states “a paragraph has been added telling us that the “approval is subject to the conditions applicable to Salaried Civil Servants as laid down in Treasury minute of 19th March 1890.” This letter shows that they were dependant on decisions made many years before the foundation of the Free State and that an enormous amount of time was spent on detail such as to whether or not the aforementioned point was actually a minute, or a report of a minute (Gúm G6 vol. 1).

Proinnsias Ó Dubhthaigh campaigned ceaselessly for the abolition of the new regulations regarding the extra payment. His argument (March 1931) was that it was already difficult to get writers and translators in Irish:

As regards payments to translators and writers of Irish, the scarcity of these writers is one of our difficulties, and it seems unreasonable that the small number of Civil Servants who are able, and willing, to write something in Irish worth publication should be discouraged (Gúm G6).

He stated that there was a clear case for the people writing Irish to be exempt from the Conditions of the Treasury Minute. He received a letter saying that there should be no exceptions to the rule and that they were to follow the normal procedures for Civil Servants undertaking other work by the State.

The files pertaining to payments provide an exact account of the monies paid to authors, artists and readers. Leon Ó Broin warranted a lot of attention as he was deemed to earn too much money (Gúm G6 vol.2). This was one of the reasons why Proinnias Ó Dubhthaigh wanted special rules for those already in the Civil Service who were willing to write or translate for the Gúm.

The Civil Service attention to the amount of words, a lack of direction from the Minister himself, and long delays in publishing all created problems for the Gúm. It was not unusual for a time lapse of perhaps 6-7 years to pass before a book would be published. Although it wasn't fair to blame the Gúm it was perceived to be their fault. All monies, however, were tightly controlled by the Roinn Airgeadais, including monies pertaining to the Gúm.

Why did it take so long to publish the books? An article by Ernest Blythe in the *Irish Independent* in 1936 addressed the issue of delay in the Gúm. It is, perhaps worthwhile to note that he himself wasn't in power at the time. He described the way the Gúm and the Stationary Office blamed each other. The writers would blame the proof-readers; the editors would blame the writers:

When, five years ago, I was investigating the cause of the terrible delays which occur in publishing accepted manuscripts, I found that the system that still exists baffled all attempts to fix responsibility.

The author dealt with the Publication Section of the Department of Education, which dealt with the Stationary Office, a sub-department of the Department of Finance, which dealt with the Printers. The author laid the blame for delays on the Gúm, the Stationary Office or the printer, but naturally held himself faultless.

The Education Office blamed the writers, or some of them, whose erratic spelling and careless work, including, in the case of certain translators, a tendency to skip difficult passages, caused the task of editorial revision to be unduly prolonged and laborious: it also blamed the Stationary Office for delaying copy and proofs on their way to and from the printer, and for failing to adopt any firm attitude towards printers, no matter how dilatory they were.

The Stationary Office blamed the Department of Education for delay in returning corrected proofs and for making on proofs alterations which should have been made in the manuscript before it went to the printer at all. Printers complained that they did not get proofs back in time, and were faced with extensive authors corrections, even when books were in paged proof: they protested against being expected to upset their business to remedy delays for which others were responsible (*Irish Independent* 28/12/36).

Interesting to note, he also blamed the use of the Gaelic type for the delay saying that it took too much time to read.

The Stationary Office wrote to the Minister for Finance on the 20/1/1937 denying the charges that they blamed the Department of Education (An Gúm). They blamed the authors for shoddy work and also blamed the Gaelic type for causing delays in the process. From my own research, I found that An Gúm was not slow in their work and that the main reasons for delay were the problems encountered by the printers and the Stationary Office.

As regards the issue of Gaelic type, the first few years of An Gúm saw the administration trying to encourage the use of Roman type. In October 1928 an issue was directed that all print must be in Roman type for translations. If a translator wanted the book printed in Gaelic type then he should submit the script in Gaelic type (Gúm G 10). The policy regarding original material was not quite as strict. The following excerpt from a letter regarding “new forms of agreement” outlines exactly the policy towards the Gaelic type in 1929:

The present position in regard to type is that, for the current financial year, at least 1 in 3 of the books to which Agreement no. 1 will apply must be printed in Roman type. The carrying out of the details of this arrangement has been left to the Committee’s discretion. Up to the present no great difficulty has been experienced in securing the consent of the necessary number of authors to the printing of their books in Roman type; and as a result of the experience of the past year, I personally feel satisfied that that it would be possible to secure, were we asked to do so, that in future years even so many as 2 out of 3 books be printed in Roman type. The prejudice against the use of Roman type in the case of the books published by the committee is undoubtedly weakening, and one of the reasons for this is that we have not coerced, or attempted directly to coerce, individual authors into having their books printed in it. I fear however, that if paragraph 3 of Agreement no. 1 be altered on the lines proposed it would probably be interpreted as *lámh láidir* by some of the more Die-Hard Gaelic-type enthusiasts, and that an atmosphere harmful to our work might thereby be created (Gúm G 5 vol.1).

De Valera’s return to power halted this however, and a fine example of this shift in policy is to be found in file G013 regarding the *Laethanta Gréine* series, a series for children. Although seven books had already been prepared in roman type, all new books were to be set in Gaelic type and the old ones re-set.

As regards the Gúm's contribution to the cultural change, it is very difficult to judge exactly the effect which it had on the public in general. One must look at the broader picture of Irish Society at the time. The Dáil of 1922 and the appointments made by Arthur Griffith in the Seanad made many think that the system was not changed. People became disenchanted with the Irish language as well as with the system, both North and South of the Border. As one reporter in *An tUltach* said in 1924:

Some of the people who were most helpful in the promotion of the language during the troubles would only laugh at you now if you were to speak in Irish to them. (*An tUltach*, Aibreán, 1951)

Some of the members of government were ex-Gaelic Leaguers. They had succeeded in getting there on what many considered the back of a Cultural Revolution. Much was expected from them but they failed to deliver all that was necessary to revive the Irish language. Perhaps too much was indeed expected of them when there was so much other work to be done. Moreover, the membership of Conradh na Gaeilge declined rapidly in the 20's.

I mentioned the Civil Service's attention to bureaucracy, but I need to balance this with a few examples of how genuine human feelings entered the arena as well. Carl Heidenburg, (Gúm G 028) Cathal Ó Sandair, and Seosamh Mac Grianna's wife all appealed to the Gúm for financial help and many of the same civil servants tried their best to find ways of accommodating them, although it was obvious that they were quite restricted. The Taoiseach himself, Eamon De Valera tried to intervene on a number of occasions. The following is an excerpt from a letter addressed to the Dept. of Education:

In the course of his remarks the Taoiseach repeatedly expressed concern about the position of Máire whom he understands to be in poor circumstances and whose ability as a writer of Irish is, he fears, being allowed to go to waste. He said that Máire should be attached to the Gúm and dictionary work practically whole time and given a decent salary (Roinn an Taoisigh).

The question can be asked: Will a state funded publishing house ever produce good writers? Yes, it clearly can if it can conduct its affairs without too much interference from the State. As one author stated in 1937:

Books which are books are living things, and Civil Service which is Civil Service is a very nearly dead thing (*Bonaventura*, Summer, 1937).

The very nearly dead thing failed to tap into the natural talents of Seosamh Mac Grianna. Seosamh Mac Grianna was an independent thinker, aware of his own talent, not suited to the ways of red tape. An independent or maybe even a cantankerous character, he needed to be free of the shackles of time limits and word counting.

The Gúm enterprise, however, was an honest attempt to provide reading material in Irish and this was patently successful. There is, however, a tension between the administrative bureaucratic mind and the creative spirit of those who write literature. This is a tension which can never be fully resolved. On the other hand, it is necessary to state that most of the worthwhile literature in Irish written in the 1920s and 30s was published by the Gúm. In this sense they were instrumental in preparing the way for the flowering of literature in the 50's and 60's and thereafter.

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ART J. HUGHES

Possible Echoes from
An tOileánach and
Mo Bhealach Féin
in Flann O'Brien's *The Hard Life*

INTRODUCTION

If one is to survey literature in Ireland in the late nineteenth and on into the twentieth century, one can see that there are at least two linguistic literary canons to consider. Much has, of course, been made nationally and internationally of the “Celtic Revival” from the post-Macpherson era of the late eighteenth century through to the time of Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge and others (McCormack 1985, Welch 1988). Yet Dublin in the 1890s was also to witness the beginnings of a revival of literature in the Irish language, due in no small part to the leadership of Douglas Hyde and others within *Conradh na Gaedhilge* (or “The Gaelic League”) (Dunleavy & Dunleavy 1991; Ó Tuama 1972). Given the nature of this bilingual situation, one could hardly have expected that the two spheres of English and Irish could somehow remain immune or aloof from each other.

At a very manifest level, one can cite how Anglo-Irish literature, in the form of the Celtic twilight, borrowed much from the English-language translations of the corpus of medieval Gaelic literature which were becoming more and more widespread in the nineteenth century—with people such as Standish James O’Grady, due to his English adaptations of the Ulster Cycle (1882) and the Finn Cycle (1892), being referred to as a father of the Anglo-Irish revival. We

are also aware that many of the themes of Yeats' plays owe much to the playwright's familiarity with such anthologies, either translated directly from, or based loosely upon, materials from Early Irish.

In addition to borrowings from early Irish literature, influences from the contemporary modern folk literature of Gaelic Ireland (such as folklore, tales, songs etc.) would also find their way into English-language works. In this regard, the English-language translations provided by Douglas Hyde in his *Love Songs of Connaught* (1893) would have a considerable influence on the Irish Literary Theatre. A classic example would be the work of John Millington Synge, as has been demonstrated by Kiberd (1979) in his monograph on Synge and the Irish language.

While borrowings from the Gaelic canon, old and modern, into Anglo-Irish literature have received attention, there is also the matter of how literature in the English language would influence the newly emerging corpus of literary works in modern Irish. It would be foolhardy in the extreme, for example, to narrowly interpret twentieth-century Irish-language literature – undoubtedly one of the more lasting and successful legacies bequeathed by the Gaelic League (O'Leary 1994) – solely within the confines of the Gaeltacht society from which this literature's primary inspiration has been drawn. A case in point is *An tOileánach*, the work of the Blasket Island author Tomás Ó Criomhthain (1929, translated into English by Robin Flower (1934) as *The Islandman T. O'Crohan*).

To many in Europe, Ireland enjoyed the exotic status of being on the fringes of Western European society and was looked upon as a place where a rural, peasant, pre-industrialised – if not medieval – old world prevailed. In the De Valera era, the subsistence, fisher-gatherer economy of the Blasket Islands (off the coast of County Kerry), with its highly orally-literate folk culture was almost regarded as a microcosm of Gaelic Ireland. Yet, based upon Muiris Mac Conghail's work on the literature of the Blaskets, one could argue that although Ó Criomhthain gave tuition in modern spoken Irish to visitors who came to his remote island such as Carl Marstrander (a Norwegian professor and eminent Celticist), Robin Flower (Deputy Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Museum) or Brian Ó Ceallaigh (a Trinity College law graduate and Irish-language enthusiast), the case could be made that Ó Criomhthain himself had received in return the equivalent to of Open University course with English translations of Pierre Loti's *Iceland Fisherman* and Maxim Gorky's

tales of the Russian peasantry forming a part of his curriculum (Mac Conghail 1987: 140). Nollaig Mac Congáil has hinted how Donegal author Séamas Ó Grianna was attracted to writing (initially in English) in the hope of becoming as renowned an author as the Donegal English-language author Patrick MacGill,¹ and in Ó Grianna's extensive collection of Gaelic works he often cited authors such as Shakespeare, Burns, Kipling, John Mitchel etc. (Mac Congáil 1990: 16-18).²

**BRIAN Ó NUALLÁIN/BRIAN O'NOLAN, FLANN O'BRIEN,
MYLES NA GCOPALEEN**

The author who perhaps most fully reflects the bilingual condition of the Irish literary world of his day is Brian Ó Nualláin, arguably one of the most talented bilingual writers to have emerged in Ireland in the twentieth century. Brian Ó Nualláin, Myles na gCopaleen or Flann O'Brien (1911-66) is certainly recognised as one of the most satirical writers to emerge in modern Ireland (Clissman 1975, Costello & Van der Kamp 1987, Cronin 1989). As Flann O'Brien he penned four English-language novels: *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), *The Hard Life* (1961), *The Dalkey Archive* (1964) and *The Third Policeman* (1967, penned in the 1940s). An unfinished novel, *Slattery's Sago Saga* would later be published along with his plays. Some of his most sustained public exposure was in his *Irish Times* column the *Cruiskeen Lawn*. This column was bilingual but his most celebrated exclusively Irish-language work was *An Béal Bocht* (1941, translated into English by Patrick Power (1964) as *The Poor Mouth*).

An Béal Bocht, one of O'Brien's most sustained narratives, demonstrated a detailed familiarity with and close reading of Irish-language works published in the post-Gaelic-League era, as has been meticulously demonstrated by Ó Conaire (1986).³ *An Béal Bocht* was an extremely audacious and controversial work which could almost be interpreted as the *Satanic Verses* of its day. It both satirised and drew, to a large extent, on the classic canon of works published

¹ "Rachadh mo gháir ar fud an domhain. Bheinn ionchurtha le Pat Mac Gill", Máire *Comhar* Nollaig 1947 (Mac Congáil 1989: 15).

² See also De Brún 2002 *passim* on the influence of Thomas Carlyle on Seosamh Mac Grianna's work.

³ For a condensed summary of Gaelic motifs in *An Béal Bocht/The Poor Mouth* (= *PM*), see Farnan 1997.

by early twentieth-century post-Gaelic League authors such as Blasket islander Tomás Ó Criomhthain's autobiography *An tOileánach* ("The Islandman") or the *oeuvre* of Donegal author "Máire" (i.e. Séamas Ó Grianna) – especially his early works published in the 1920s such as *Cith is Dealán* and *Caisleáin Óir*. Some indication of the magnitude of the provocative nature of *An Béal Bocht* may be found in the deliberate slurs against the icons *par excellence* of both Irish nationalism and Gaelic Ireland in that Eamon de Valera was branded "a false prophet",⁴ while the President Douglas Hyde was also derided, if we assume that the character bearing the pen-name "The Eager Cat" in chapter 4 of *The Poor Mouth* is meant as a parody of Douglas Hyde. *An Béal Bocht/The Poor Mouth* was not, of course, the first occasion upon which Ó Nualláin would publicly and brashly assail these two prominent figures, for in the May 1931 edition of the University College Dublin magazine *Cothrom Féinne*, under the pen-name Brother Barnabas, he portrayed De Valera and Hyde (then Professor of Irish at UCD) as Hitler and Mussolini (Costello & Van der Kamp 1987: 42).

In addition to pouring derision on the key texts of the fledgling modern Irish-language literature – the main preoccupation of *An Béal Bocht* – one is also aware that Brian Ó Nualláin included references to nineteenth-century works from the world of Anglo-Irish literature where the "stage Irishman" was portrayed. The pseudonym *Myles na gCopaleen* was derived from a character in the 1860 play *The Colleen Bawn*, the work of Dublin-born Irish-American playwright Dion Boucicault, and there is also the deliberate spelling of "diversion" and "adventure" as stage-Irish *divarsion* and *advinture* in the opening page of *An Béal Bocht*.

ON Ó NUALLÁIN'S CONTINUAL REWORKING OF OTHER PEOPLE'S IDEAS

Whatever the strengths are of Brian Ó Nualláin as a writer – and one could cite in particular his prowess for satire, dialogue, anecdote etc. – there are certain literary aspects which are not depicted in any substantial detail in his work

"O'Sanassa will have another day! said I like a false prophet" (*PM* 93). This phrase, as Power points out (*PM* 127), paraphrases an Irish adage *Beidh lá eile ag an bPaorach!* ("Power will have another day!") referring to the parting words of Edmund Power of Dungarvan as he stood on the gallows in the autumn of 1798. The phrase was often cited by de Valera.

among which we could list characterisation or relationships. The question of his ability to produce sustained prose rather than short articles for his columns may be a rather unfair one given Ó Nualláin's work and domestic commitments following the death of his father in 1937 (Costello & Van der Kamp 1987: 61). One further trait of Ó Nualláin's writings is the tendency to rework ideas from existing plots. Costello and Van der Kamp have considered the topic of borrowings in a number of cases in Ó Nualláin's work and put forward the view that "the ransacking of other men's literature to parodic purpose would remain a common device with O'Nolan" (1987: 57). They cite his use of Baron Corvo's *Hadrian VII* as material for his aborted *Children of Destiny*, a novel concerning the fortunes of the first Irishman to become Pope. Discussing the layout and style of Ó Nualláin's *Cruiskeen Lawn*, Costello and Van der Kamp (1987: 72) hint at the possibility of influence from precursors such as Father Prout and the *Daily Express* column *Beachcomber*. In their treatment of Ó Nualláin's play *Faustus Kelly*, these critics further claim that:

... he transposed the scenario of Gounod's opera *Faust* based on Goethe's original drama, to an Irish setting, making good use of his own experiences of local government. His main character was a local councillor who sells his soul to the Devil for political power, and the plot made deft use of traditional Irish political rhetoric (1987: 79).

IRISH-LANGUAGE MATERIALS IN FLANN O'BRIEN'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE WORK

The remainder of this paper will examine the possibility that passages from *The Hard Life* (1961) may reflect influences from Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* and/or Seosamh Mac Grianna's Irish-language work *Mo Bhealach Féin* (1940).⁵ Borrowings from Irish literature into Flann O'Brien's English-language works are by no means a rarity. His novel *At Swim Two Birds* borrows its title from the Shannon place-name occurring in Irish sources as *Snámh Dá Éan*,⁶ while the novel itself contains a *mélange* of sources, including some material from his contemporaries coupled with materials from early Irish literature such as the Finn Cycle and *Sweeney Astray*.

⁵ For background on Mac Grianna, see Mac Congáil 1990, Ó Muiri 1999 and De Brún 2002.

⁶ On the location of the place-name which occurs in early Irish literature as *Snámh Dá Éan* (lit. 'The Swim of Two Birds', Latinised as *Vadum Duorum Avium*) and which was located between Meath and *Mag Ai* on the Shannon, see Hogan (1910: 614).

Such borrowings from Gaelic literature in *At Swim Two Birds* are quite easy to detect, but the fact that O'Brien indulges in this practice in one part of his English-language corpus must alert us to the fact that this device may well have been reverted to elsewhere in not so obvious ways. While Costello and Van der Kamp (1987: 79) are quite justified in their assertion that O'Brien, in his play *Faustus Kelly*, "transposed the scenario of Gounod's opera *Faust* based on Goethe's original drama", Irish readers, of course, would consider the possibility of an influence from Cork-born Father Peadar Ó Laoghaire's 1904 novel *Séadna* whose main theme also deals with how the central character Séadna sells his soul to the devil (*an fear dubh*).⁷

THE HARD LIFE

Flann O'Brien's 1961 novel *The Hard Life* (*HL*) concerns the career of two orphans brought up in Dublin by a relative Mr Collopy. Manus, the more enterprising and Machiavellian of the twins, indulges in a series of attempts to make money including the manufacture of quack remedies. The ailing Mr Collopy is finally granted an audience with the Pope and raises, among other items, the subject of public toilets. This work can hardly be rated as one of O'Brien's literary triumphs. *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* describes how the "mordant narrative is pervaded by an atmosphere of hypocrisy and futility, relieved only by the comic vulgarity of the characters" (Welch 1996: 237), a point painfully born out by the puerile use of "Father Fahrt" as the name of the Jesuit priest who appears in the novel. Scholars who have specialised in the work and life of Flann O'Brien are guarded as to the merits of this particular novel. For example, Hurson concedes that the "*The Hard Life* wavers between realism and the marvellous, never really committing itself to either mode and it is to my mind the least appealing of O'Brien's works ... [and is] a rather makeshift production" (1997: 119). She goes on to state that the book "... suffers not only from the absence of an intrinsically interesting plot, but from the absence of any compulsory order of discourse" (1997: 122).

As in other English novels by Flann O'Brien, the style of James Joyce is often cited as a prominent influence,⁸ but, as with most of O'Brien's works, influ-

⁷ On Peadar Ó Laoghaire (1839-1920), see Ó Céirín's introduction to *MyS* and also *Séadna* (*Eng.*).

⁸ Clissman (1975: 292) speaks of the "literary domination of Joyce" in O'Brien's work, see also Morash (1997) and Hurson (1997: 122).

ences from a wide range of sources are also to be found. During the course of the novel the resourceful Manus not only attempts to market various bogus health products but even goes as far as setting up an academy. Hurson has pointed out that his academy's 'curriculum' is a collection of transcripts from pertinent National Library volumes and that the work would also have been influenced by "excerpts from the *Conspectus of Arts and Natural Sciences*" (1997: 125-6).

In addition to the Joycean undercurrents mentioned above and the sources just mentioned by Hurson, there can also be little doubt that Irish-language sources play a part at various stages throughout the *Hard Life*. An indication of Gaelic substratum is provided when Finbarr, the main narrator and the more reserved of the brothers, tells us, on receipt of the headed paper from his fraudulent brother's London University Academy, abbreviated as L.U.A., that he was "amused afterwards to notice in an Irish dictionary that *lua* means 'a kick'" (HL 81).

It is well known that Tomás Ó Criomhthain's Blasket autobiography *An tOileánach* ("The Islandman") is one of the works most frequently referred to by Brian Ó Nualláin, both in his Irish satire *An Béal Bocht*, and in countless articles in *An Cruiskeen Lawn*. Despite being used as a major item of ridicule in *An Béal Bocht*, it is clear that *An tOileánach* was a text of which Ó Nualláin was extremely fond (Ó Conaire 1986: 120-22). The opening of *The Hard Life* is reminiscent, to a degree, of the opening of *The Islandman*:

It is not that I half knew my mother. I knew half of her: the lower half—her lap, legs, feet, her hands and wrists as she bent forward. Very dimly I seem to remember her voice. At the time, of course, I was very young (HL opening lines, chapter 1).

I was born on St Thomas's Day in the year 1856. I can recall being at my mother's breast for I was four years before I was weaned. I am 'the scrapings of the pot', the last of the litter. That was why I was left so long at the breasts (IM opening lines, chapter 1).⁹

Later on in chapter 11, O'Brien seems to take a further swipe at the Kerry Gaeltacht, akin to those delivered in *An Béal Bocht*. When Collopy informs the

⁹ Cf. Is cuimhin liom mé a bheith ar bhrollach mo mháthar. Ceithre bliana a bhíos sular baineadh de dhiúl mé. Is mé dríodar an chrúiscín, deireadh an áil. Sin é an réasún ar fágadh chomh fada ar na cíocha mé (*An tO*: opening lines).

scheming Manus that Sergeant Driscoll of the Dublin Metropolitan Police had called at the house that morning to make enquiries, Manus dismisses the sergeant as follows:

The wilds of Kerry, I'll go bail. The banatee [= *bean an tí* 'woman of the house'] up at six in the morning to get ready thirteen breakfasts out of a load of spuds, maybe a few leaves of kale, injun meal, salt and buttermilk, Breakfast for Herself, Himself, the eight babies and the three pigs, all out of the one pot. That's the sort of cods we have looking after law and order in Dublin (*HL* 75).

Earlier in chapter 10 of *The Hard Life*, Collopy and Father Fahrt are involved in a discussion on the role of the Jesuits in the history of the Catholic Church. During a rather heated point in their discussion Collopy accuses Fr Fahrt of being selective with the truth to which the Jesuit retorts:

"Nonsense. Truth is truth" (*HL* 65).

Collopy in his defence resorts to the Gaelic canon:

"There is a phrase in Irish—I'm sorry through no fault of mine I am largely unacquainted with the old tongue. But the phrase says this: "The truth does be bitter". I think you know how right that is" (*ib.*).

Father Fahrt then responds with the Latin adage:

Magna est veritas et prevalebit (ib.).

The Gaelic utterance paraphrased here is the well known Gaelic proverb *Bíonn an fhírinne searbh*,¹⁰ which O'Brien would have encountered in *An tOileánach/The Islandman*, when Tomás Ó Criomhthain is loosing his patience with his brother-in-law's behaviour during a visit to the mainland in Dingle (*An tO* 76 = *IM* 69):

Gan mhagadh gan bhréag, bhí an fhírinne ag teacht uaidh. Ach cad é an mhaith sin, bíonn an fhírinne searbh uaireanta.

Sure enough he was telling the truth, but what was the good! The truth itself is bitter sometimes.

¹⁰ Cf. *Bíonn an fhírinne searbh go minic* ('Truth is often bitter') from a 19th-century collection of Gaelic proverbs (Hughes 1998: 108, no. 194).

One further source for this Gaelic adage may be the opening of Seosamh Mac Grianna's 1940 autobiographical novel *Mo Bhealach Féin* which begins:

Deir siad go bhfuil an fhirinne searbh, acht creid mise, ní searbh atá sí acht garbh, agus sin an fáth a seachantar í (MBF 5).

They say that truth is bitter, but believe me, it is harsh rather than bitter, and that is why it is avoided.

Mo Bhealach Féin ("My Own Way") describes how Donegal author Seosamh Mac Grianna journeys from his native Irish-speaking Rannafast in Ulster to Dublin and then on to Wales on his journey in pursuit of his literary ideals. During the course of this novel Mac Grianna reveals how he resorted to various measures either to avoid identification or in order to make money. To this end Mac Grianna assumed various bogus *personae*. We see for example that Mac Grianna gives his name as "Art Mac Cumhaigh" with his address as "Úirchill an Chreagáin". This was a reference to the late 18th-century South Armagh Gaelic poet Art Mac Cumhaigh, whose most famous *aisling* (or "vision poem") was entitled *Úirchill an Chreagáin* "The Graveyard of Creggan", a parish church near Crossmaglen.¹¹ In a Dublin lodging's Mac Grianna assumes the identity of yet another Ulster folk poet, Cathal Buidhe Mac Giolla Ghunna (*MBF* 23).¹² Having fallen on hard times in the same city, Mac Grianna resorts to setting himself up as a fortune-teller (*MBF* 35).

¹¹ Sources relating to the work and life of Art Mac Cumhaigh include Ó Muirgheasa 1916 and Ó Fiaich 1972 & 1973.

¹² On Mac Giolla Ghunna see Ó Buachalla 1975 and for an English translation of one of his most famous pieces, *An Bonnán Buidhe* ("The Yellow Bittern"), see Ó Tuama & Kinsella 1981: 132-5.

STARTLING !!!

ELI BEN ALIM

*says your future can be foretold, and that of your lover,
your child, and your friend in trouble.*

*ELI BEN ALIM, Arab prophet, knows the future
as the skilled pilot knows the hidden rocks
and the safe anchorages.*

*He has travelled the five continents, has predicted for GENERAL WILLIAM-
SON, U.S.A., and for*

*HENRI BEAUVAIS, famous French actor,
the MAHATMA GANDHI, and
the ex-King of Bulgaria.*

Send ELI BEN ALIM a frank account of your problems.

Give sex, date of birth. Enclose P.O. value 1s 2d., or stamps.

Address _____

In *The Hard Life* Manus makes bogus claims relating to the range of subjects on offer at his academy (HL 81), while further on in the novel he produces a grandiose label for his gravid water (HL 92):

THE GRAVID WATER

The miraculous specific for the
complete cure within one
month of the abominable
scourge known as Rheumatoid
Arthritis

Dose—one t-spoonful three
times daily after meals

Prepared at LONDON ACADEMY LABORATORIES

Elsewhere in *Mo Bhealach Féin* (MBF 121) Mac Grianna realises that every human wish (however sensible or irrational) can be exploited for commercial

use, including fortune-telling, except that Eli Ben Alim might have difficulty competing, in Cardiff, with professional psychologists such as Dr Robert Scott-McGlade.¹³ The exploitation of human desires for commercial purposes is a recurring theme in both *Mo Bhealach Féin* and *The Hard Life*.

Hopefully, then, we have shown that there are certain loose parallels between *The Hard Life* and *Mo Bhealach Féin* in terms of the use of bogus names and money-making schemes (especially in the form of fraudulent newspaper advertisements) devised by both Seosamh Mac Grianna and Manus. Brian Ó Nualláin was familiar with works published by Seosamh Mac Grianna before *Mo Bhealach Féin*. Ó Conaire (1986: 85) records that Ó Nualláin wrote a favourable review of Seosamh Mac Grianna's *Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill* (1931). In articles in *Inniu* and *An Cruiskeen Lawn*, however, Myles listed Mac Grianna's collection of short stories entitled *An Grádh agus an Ghruaim* ("Love and Gloom") as belonging to the "black and white school of literature" (*an Scoil Bán-Dubh*, see Ó Conaire 1986: 88). The reason for the latter remark was that O'Nolan wanted to see a creative literature emerge in Irish rather than the usual flood of reminiscences of life in the Gaeltacht (such as Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* or Peadar Ó Laoghaire's *Mo Sgéal Féin* (= *MyS*)) or what he viewed as the rather bland "black and white" short stories in the folk-tale mould such as Séamas Ó Grianna's collection *Cith is Dealán* ("Shower and Sunshine") and he evidently interpreted Mac Grianna's *An Grádh agus an Ghruaim* ("Love and Gloom") as falling into this category.

Nevertheless, Seosamh Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féin* must be considered as a work of literary integrity and one of the most significant pieces of Irish writing to have emerged in the twentieth century. While we can be sure that Flann O'Brien had read Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* and that echoes of this can be found in *The Hard Life*, one must allow for the distinct possibility that similar echoes from Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féin* may also be detected in the same O'Brien novel. Perhaps the most significant point to emerge from this

¹³ 'Níl aon mhian dá bhfuil ag an duine, céillidhe nó dichéillidhe, nach ndéantar pighneacha orthaí. Tcháidh tú lucht léigheamh fortún agus oifigeacha acú ins na sráideanna is breaghtha ar an bhaile. Bhí neart farsaingighe agam-sa i mBaile Átha Cliath nuair a bhí mé 'mo Eli Ben Alim, acht ar an bhaile seo ní bhéinn acht ag briseadh mo chroidhe ag coimhlint le daoín a rabh seasgairacht deánta cheana féin acú, agus b'fhéidir saidhbhreas. Tá cárda fir acú in mo phóca ins an am i láthair, agus an scríbhinn seo a leanas priontáilte go measamhail air:

DR. ROBERT SCOTT-MCGLADE

Professional Psychologist

brief investigation, is that these borrowings are indicative of the extensive knowledge O'Brien had of most literary genres in the Ireland of his generation, for whatever his strengths or shortcomings as a writer,¹⁴ there can be few who could rival the extent of his reading and awareness coupled with his ability to feel, at firsthand, the literary pulse of Ireland in all her languages, old and modern, in the first half of the twentieth century.

ABBREVIATIONS

- An tO* *An tOileánach*. Tomás Ó Criomhtain. Clo Talbot, Baile Átha Cliath (1972).
- HL* *The Hard Life*. Flann O'Brien. Picadaor, London (1961, repr. 1976).
- IM* *The Islandman*. T. O'Crohan, translated by Robin Flower. Talbot Press, Dublin (1934, repr. Oxford University Press 1978).
- MBF* *Mo Bhealach Féin*. Seosamh Mac Grianna. Baile Átha Cliath (1940).
- MyS* *My Story*, by Peter O'Leary (= Peadar Ó Laoghaire), a translation by Cyril T. Ó Ceirín. Mercier Press, Cork (1970).
- PM* *The Poor Mouth (An Béal Bocht) a bad story about the hard life edited by Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien)* translated by Patrick C. Power. Picador, Pan Books, London (1973).
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¹⁴ While Costello & Van der Kamp 1987: 61 remarked how "he raided literature for his material, rebuilding what he took into a new and fantastic edifice", the result in the case of the rather disparate *Hard Life* may not have been as successful as in O'Brien's other works.

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PÁDRAIG Ó FUARÁIN

Landscape in the Poetry of Sorley MacLean

Sorley MacLean was born on the island of Raasay in 1911 and he spent by far the greater part of his life within a short distance of his birthplace. Much of his poetry is rooted in the history and traditions of the islands of Raasay and Skye. In this paper I will be saying

1. That the landscape is a central element in his evocation of the past of his people;
2. That in the landscape of the islands he found images which enabled him to relate that past to contemporary happenings in the wider world;
3. That some features of the landscape provided him with images through which he could explore abstract ideas of good and evil;
4. That his poetry reveals an intense personal engagement with and love for the landscape of the islands.

MacLean's family on both sides were great tradition bearers. As a child he was immersed in the language, literature and music of Gaelic Scotland. Both his father's and his mother's people had suffered in the Clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries when hundreds of crofters had been driven from their holdings to make way for sheep. His family were socially and politically aware and his mother had taken part in the activities of the Land League in Skye in the 1880's when the crofters had begun their resistance to the landlords. The stories of the past and particularly the history of the Clearances profoundly affected him. The story of his people became part of his personal experience and helped to form his social conscience and his political outlook.

Unlike many of his contemporaries MacLean was not, to use a phrase of Donald MacAulay, “processed out in the course of (his) education” (MacAulay 1976: 68). When he wrote of the Clearances he wrote out of a community which still had vivid memories of the sufferings of their parents and grandparents and he set the events that happened in the places where they happened so that the landscape became an integral and a necessary part of the story he was telling. He didn’t see the landscape as an exile or a stranger might see it. He celebrated the beauty of places but he did not idealise them. He was conscious that the beauty almost always concealed reminders of pain and misery. The poem ‘*An t-Eilean*’ is a paean of praise for the island of Skye but it ends in despair.

*Chan eil dòchas ri do bhailtean
éirigh ard le gaire ’s aiteas,
’s chan eil fiughair ri do dhaoine
’s Aimeireaga ’s an Fhraing ’gam faotainn.
Mairg an t-sùil a chì air fairge
ian mór marbh na h-Albann.*

There is no hope of your townships
Rising with gladness and laughter
And your men are not expected
When America and France take them.
Pity the eye that sees on the ocean
The great dead bird of Skye. (MacLean 1989: 58-9)

As a boy MacLean rejected the harsh Calvinism in which he had been reared. He could not accept a religion which taught that a high percentage of the lovable people that he knew were condemned to eternal damnation. Likewise he had difficulty in contemplating the beauty of an earthly paradise without remembering the hell on earth suffered by so many innocent people.

*Dé ’n t-sìorruidheachd inntin ’s an cuirear
Aimeireaga mu Dheas no Belsen,
agus ’a ghrian air Sgurr Urain
’s a bhearraidhean gearrte ’san t-sneachda?*

In what eternity of the mind
 Will South America and Belsen be put
 With the sun on Sgurr Urain
 And its ridges cut in snow? (MacLean 1989: 262-3)

Over a hundred places in Skye and Raasay are named in the poetry – many of them several times – and each place is associated with an event of the past or is used as image or symbol. The Cullin, the great range of hills on the Island of Skye, is ever present. It is “our noble Cullin”, “rocky terrible Cullin”, “the antlered Cullin”, it is a symbol of the triumph of hope and courage over adversity.

*Neor-thaing chithear an Cuilithionn
 's e 'èirigh air taobh eile duilghe;
 Cuilithionn liriceach nan saor,
 Cuilithionn aigeannach nan laoch,
 Cuilithionn na h-inntinne mòire,
 Cuilithionn cridhe garbh na dórainn.*

Nevertheless the Cullin is seen
 Rising on the far side of agony
 The lyric Cullin of the free
 The ardent Cullin of the heroic
 The Cullin of the great mind
 The Cullin of the rugged heart of sorrow. (MacLean 1989: 126-9)

As the piper enters ‘*Uamha 'n Óir*’ – ‘The Cave of Gold’ – the question is asked,

*Carson a dh'fhàg e Dùis MhicLeòid,
 Na bruthaichean gorma 's na lochan,
 na rubhannan, na h-eileanan 's na tràighean,
 An t-aran, an fheòil 's am fion
 'S an t-eathar mòr ud air an fhàire,
 An Cuillithionn far an robh e riamh?*

Why did he leave the land of MacLeod,
 The green braes and the lochs,
 The headlands, the islands and the shores,
 The bread, the flesh and the wine,
 And the big boat on the horizon,
 The Cullin where it always was? (MacLean 1989: 284-5)

In ‘*Am Mùr Gorm*’ – ‘The Blue Rampart’ – the Cullin would be

'na mhùr eagarra gorm
ag crioslachadh le bhalla-criche
na tha 'nam chridhe borb.

an exact and serrated blue rampart
 girdling with its march-wall
 all that is in my fierce heart. (MacLean 1989: 142-3)

were it not for the vision of the face of his beloved which he sees in the leafy branches of the Tree of Strings. The Tree of Strings – ‘*Craobh nan Teud*’ – is the name of one of the great compositions for the Highland bagpipe. MacLean used it as a symbol of the source of art. The tree is rooted in misery and hardship but from its foliage comes the inspiration for great music and poetry.

Tha Craobh nan Teud
air aodann cruaidhchàis,
tha calbh nan dàn
air àird na truaighe.

The Tree of Strings
 on the face of hardship;
 the pillar of poems
 on the height of misery. (MacLean 1989: 48-9)

In 1938, prompted by his reading of Hugh MacDiarmid’s “A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle”, he conceived the idea of writing a long poem on the human condition “radiating from the history of Skye and the West Highlands to Europe and what I knew of the rest of the world”. (MacLean 1985: 12) Like most intellectuals and artists of his time, he saw the spread of Fascism as the great threat to humanity and he saw Socialism as the only bulwark against it. He saw the same

forces that had caused the Clearances in the 19th century at work in the Europe of the 1930's.

*On mhealladh ìochdarain gach tìre
Le uachdarain, le stàt 's lagh sìobhalt
Agus leis gach ioma strìopach
a reic an anam air a' phrìs ud
A fhuair gallachan ant-saoghail
On bhuaidhaich urrachan na maoinne.*

Ever since the humble of every land
Were deceived by ruling-class, State and Civil law
And by every prostitute
Who sold their souls for that price
That the bitches of the world have earned
Since the great people of wealth have triumphed. (MacLean 1989: 80-1)

The poem – ‘*An Cuilthionn*’ – was never completed, but the thousand or so lines that he considered worth preserving can, at one level, be read as a *dinnseanchas* of the island of Skye. At another level it was an attempt, in the words of John MacInnes (quoted by Raymond J. Ross) “to bring together ... the Highland Clearances and the success of Fascism in Spain in the thirties as related events in the same historical process” (Ross, 1986: 102).

After a salute to Hugh MacDiarmid, the poem begins with a vivid description of the person climbing to the summit of Sgurr na Gilleann, one of the peaks in the Cullin Mountains.

*Anns an dìreadh bhon choire,
Cas air sgeilpe, miar air oireig,
Uchd ri ulbhaig, bial ri sgorraig,
Air ceum corrach ceann gun bhoile;
gaoirdean rìghinn treun gun tilleadh
Gu ruig fàire do chóigimh bidein
far am brist air ceann na spàirne
Muir mhór chiar nan tonn gàbro,
Roinn nan dromannan caola àrda,
An crios-onfhaidh dorcha stàilinn.*

In the ascent from the corrie
Foot on shelf, finger on little edge
Chest to boulder, mouth to jutty,
On crank step not dizzy,
Tough arm strong, unturning
Till it grasps the skyline of your fifth peak
When will break on the struggle below
The great dim sea of gabbro waves
Knife of high narrow ridges
Belt of dark steel surge. (MacLean 1989: 64-5)

From his vantage point he can look down on the Island of Skye and:

*'S an dhiùchdas dhomhsa càs mo chàirdean,
Eachdraidh bhrònach an eilein àlainn.*

There lies before me the plight of my kindred
The woeful history of the lovely island. (MacLean 1989: 66-7)

He climbs the other peaks of the Cullin and looks on the beauty of the island:

*Ag amharc sìos air Coire 'n Uaigneis
Troimh bharcadh a' cheò mun cuairt orm,
Ann am bristeadh an t-siabain
Dhealraich aiteal òir air sgiathan
Iolaire dol seachad shìos ann
Ri taobh nam ballachan cliathaich;
Is dhomhsa that glòir gach ianlaith
Aiteal òir an eòin Sgitheanaich.
Thionndaidh mi, 's a tuath 's an iarthuath
Bha Minginis 'na bòidhche shianta
Agus Bràcadal uaine;
Diùirinis is Tròndairnis bhuaipe.*

Looking down on the Corrie of Solitude
Through the mist surging around me
In a breaking of the drift
A glimmer of gold shone on the wings
Of an eagle passing below

Beside the flanking walls;
 And to me above the glimmer of all birds
 The golden glimmer of the Skye bird.
 I turned, and north and north-west
 There was Minginis in her enchanted beauty
 And green Bracadale
 Diuirinis and Trondarnis beyond. (MacLean 1989: 68-9)

But the island is denuded of its young men:

Móran fhuaran 's gainne fhiùran.

Multitude of springs, fewness of young men. (MacLean 1989: 66-7)

The eagles have been replaced by scavengers:

*'S chithear an t-Eilean mór 'na lùban,
 Gurrach feannaig air gach dùn ann,
 Feannagan dubha boga claona,
 Ar leò gur iolaire gach aon dhiùbh.*

And the great island is seen with its winding shores,
 A hoodicrow squatting on each dun
 Black soft squinting hoodicrows
 Who think themselves all eagles. (Ibid.)

Some of the people driven from their holdings had wished that the glens would become a wasteland. Their wish has been granted. The bracken has invaded the pasture lands and tillage-fields of the crofters making them useless to the new owners. But others saw only the beauty of the bracken in the great empty spaces. The loss and suffering of the people of the Clearances was obscured and trivialised by the sentimental writers of the so-called Celtic Twilight who knew little of the past and whose readers were the middle-classes of the Lowlands and of England.¹

¹ In an essay on *Realism in Gaelic Poetry*, Sorley said of the writers of the Celtic Twilight – people such as Marjorie Kennedy Fraser – “They have had their hour in the drawing-rooms of Edinburgh and London; they have soothed the ears of old ladies of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie; they have spoken after dinner, hiding with a halo the bracken that grew with the Clearances” (MacLean 1985: 20).

*Chì mi bailtean bha 'm Bràigh Aoineart
Fo thaomadh frainich 'nan aibhnean;
'S chi mi Feasgar fann nan Gàidheal
Lias frainich bhuidhe ruigheachd nèimhe.*

I see the townships in Brae Eynort
Rivers with pouring of bracken
And I see the faint Twilight of the Gaels
With a glimmer of bracken reaching heaven. (MacLean 1989: 68-9)

Spirits of the past come to visit him. He hears the voice of the girl who was kidnapped while gathering shellfish in Gesto in 1739 and sold as an indentured servant in the Carolinas. She is lamenting the places she will never see again:

*'Beinn Thota-Gormuil na fear sgiamhach,
Beinn Dubhagraich, m'ionam 's mo chiall.'*

'Ben Thota-Gormuil of the handsome men,
Ben Duagraich, my dear love'. (MacLean 1989: 70-1)

The spirits of the poets are there – Neil MacLeod “lamenting the glen where he was young” and Big Mary (Máiri Mór nan Oran) comes “to tell of the dead of MacLeod”.

The spirits of the oppressors are there too;

*An iaras, air ceann na Gàrsbheinn,
Chunnacas an Dotair Màrtainn,
'S bha MacAlasdair nah-Airde
Anns an eig air mullach Blàbheinn.
Bha Eóghainn Mór air Sgùrr a' Sgùmain
'S e 'g amharc sìos air Rubha 'n Dùnain
Agus Camshronach dlùth ris,
Ag coimhead Mhinginis a rùisg iat.*

South-west, on the head of Garsbheinn
Was seen the Doctor Martin
And MacAllister of the Aird was
In a notch on the top of Blaven.

Big Ewan was on Sgurr an Sgumain
 Looking down on Ru an Dunain,
 And a Cameron near him,
 Contemplating the Minginish they had shorn. (MacLean 1989: 70-3)

He hears the weeping of the dispossessed and the rejoicing of the oppressors:

*Thòisich na Tannasgan air dannsa,
 'S cha b' e siod an iomairt sheannsail,
 Corranach an t-sluaigh a' fàgail
 An ceann gliongarsaich nan àrmmun.*

The ghost band began to dance
 And that was no auspicious exercise,
 The coronach of the people leaving
 Mingled with the jingling din of the gentlemen. (MacLean 1989: 72-3)

And he remembers the people all over the world who are suffering in his own time:

*Curaidhean nam bochd ag cnàmh,
 'Nan closaichean lobhte anns an Spàinn,
 'S na ciadan mìle anns an t-Sin,
 Iobairt air as fhaide brìgh.*

The warriors of the poor mouldering,
 Rotting carcasses in Spain,
 And the hundreds of thousands in China,
 A sacrifice of most distant effect. (MacLean 1989: 74-5)

MacLean was reared in the Free Presbyterian Church and his vocabulary and his imagination were enriched by the language of the Bible and by the rhetoric of the ministers of the church. John MacInnes has written: "It is perfectly clear that he would not be the kind of poet he is if he had ignored the impassioned eloquence of the Church" (MacInnes 1981: 16) while Terence McCaughey said: "It has ... been acknowledged that biblical and homiletic language runs under the surface of MacLean's poetry in rich veins" (McCaughey 1986: 130). Echoes of this impassioned eloquence and biblical language are to be heard in the language which he used in parts of '*An Cuilithionn*' to describe the fate of Skye in the 19th century and the fate

of Europe in the 20th. And he found images in the landscape which enabled him to express his apocalyptic vision. The marshland of Mararabhlainn, to the north of the Cullin became a morass engulfing not only Skye but the whole world:

*Tha na boglaichean air sgaoileadh
Ag cuairteachadh beanntan an t-saoghail,
Gus an sluig iad an Roinn-Eòrpa
Aimeireaga 's an Aisia còmhla.
Fàsaidh is bàrcaidh an ruaimleach
'S i bàthadh ann an tuil mòr bréine
na tha fialaidh còir is dìreach...
Bhàthadh an Cuilithionn 's am Bràighe,
'S cha mhór, Dia anns na nèamhan...
Cò bhair faochadh dhan àmghar
Mur tig an t-Arm Dearg sa chàs seo?*

The morasses have spread
Encircling the mountains of the world
Until they swallow Europe,
America and Asia together.
The red scum will grow and surge
Drowning in a great flood of filth
All that is generous, kind and straight...
The Cullin and the Braes have been drowned
And almost God in the heavens...
Who will give respite to the agony
Unless the Red Army comes in this extremity? (MacLean 1989: 84-5)

An tAigeach – ‘the Stallion’ – is the name of a steep hill in the north-west of Skye. In ‘*An Cuilithionn*’ it appears as the Glendale Stallion – a symbol of the people of Skye and a more general symbol of all people who have been made powerless by oppressors;

*An cuala sibh an sgeul grannda
Gun do spothadh an t-Aigeach?
Bha ioma buirdeasach is baillidh
Ga chumail fodha anns a' chàthar...
Rinn iad mèillich dhe shitrich,
Dh'fhagadh e air an t-sitic.*

Have you heard the ugly story
 That the Stallion has been gelded?
 Many a bourgeois and bailiff
 Was keeping him down in the moss...
 They made a bleating of his neighing,
 He was left in the midden. (MacLean 1989: 86-9)

Glendale is one of the places where, in the 1880's, the crofters began their revolt against the landlords which eventually led to an end to rack-renting and gave the tenants security of tenure. Later on in the poem, the Stallion appears risen and triumphant, a reminder of the victory of the crofters and a portent of the eventual victory of the downtrodden of Europe over Fascism:

*Chunnacas manadh mór is uilebheist
 An t-Aigeach a' sitrich air a' Chuillithionn,
 Eirigh nan creagan a bha builgeadh,
 Air an tug an spiorad tulgadh.
 Bha roghainn nan each móra creagach
 A' bocail air Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh...
 Ghèarr e boc dhe Sgurr an Fheadain
 'S e fàgail uamhaltachd na creige
 Gus ad d' ràinig e 'n càthar,
 A stamp e mar aon pholl-dàmhair.*

A great portent and a monster was seen,
 The Stallion neighing on the Cullin...
 The choice of the big craggy horses
 Was bounding on Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh...
 He made one bound off Sgurr an Fheadain
 Leaving the wild lone cliff
 Until he reached the moss
 Which he stamped into a rutting-bog. (MacLean 1989: 96-7)

'*An Cuilithionn*', as we have it, ends on a note of hope:

*Thar lochan fala clann nan daoine
 thar breòiteachd blàir is strì an aonaich,
 thar bochdainn caithimh fiabhras amhghair,
 thar anacothrom eucoir ainneart ànraidh,*

*thar truaighe eu-dochas gamhlas cuilbheart,
thar ciont is truaillidheachd, gu furachair,
gu treunmhor chithear an Cuilithionn
'S e 'g éirigh air taobh eile duilghe.*

Beyond the lochs of the blood of the children of men,
Beyond the frailty of plain and the labour of the mountain...
Beyond guilt and defilement; watchful,
Heroic, the Cullin is seen
Rising on the other side of sorrow. (MacLean 1989: 130-1)

MacLean wrote ‘*An Cuilithionn*’ during 1939 when he had returned to Edinburgh having spent a year teaching in Mull. “Mull in 1938”, he wrote, “had made me obsessed with the Clearances. I was obsessed also with the approach of war or worse, with the idea of the conquest of the whole of Europe by Nazi-Fascism... which would ultimately make Britain a Fascist State” (MacLean 1989: 63). Six or seven years later he returned to the subject of the Clearances in the poem ‘Hallaig’. By this time he had fought and been wounded in the North African Campaign and he was back teaching in Edinburgh.

Hallaig is a township in Raasay which was cleared after 1846. In time a wood of birch, hazel and rowan grew up around the abandoned houses of the crofters. The poem has an epigraph – ‘Time, the deer, is in the wood of Hallaig’ (*‘Tha tim, am fiadh, an coille Hallaig’*). It begins with a picture which is familiar in many places around the world where people have been driven from their homes:

*Tha bùird is tàirnean air an uinneig
troimh 'm faca mi an Aird an Iar.*

The window is nailed and boarded
Through which I saw the West. (MacLean 1989: 226-7)

The narrator has a vision of the past. He sees Hallaig before the Clearances and he sees the people who were there:

*Tha iad fhathast ann a Hallaig,
Clann Ghill-Eain’s Clann MhicLeòid,
na bh’ ann ri libnn Mhic Ghille-Chaluim:
Chunnacas na mairbh beò.*

*na fir 'nan laighe air an lianaig
aig ceann gach taighe a bh' ann,
na h-igheanan 'nan coille bheithe,
dìreach an druim, crom an ceann.*

They are still in Hallaig,
MacLeans and MacLeods
All who were there in the time of Mac Gille-Chaluim;
The dead have been seen alive.

The men lying on the green
At the end of every house that was,
The girls a wood of birches,
Straight their backs, bent their heads. (MacLean 1989: 228-9)

But “Time, the deer” is in the wood and soon the memory will fade. Only love can keep the memory alive;

*'s nuair theàrnas grian air cùl Dhùn Cana
thig peileir dian á gunna Ghaoil;*

*'s buailear am fiadh a tha 'na thuaineal
a' snòtach nan làraichean feòir;
thig reothadh air a shùil 'sa' choille:
chan fhaighear lorg air fhuil ri m' bheò.*

And when the sun goes down behind Dun Cana,
A vehement bullet will come from the gun of love

And will strike the deer that goes dizzily
Sniffing at the grass-grown ruined homes;
His eye will freeze in the wood
His blood will not be traced while I live. (MacLean 1989: 230-1)

In Hallaig good and evil have a cyclic relationship. The wood, which makes the vision possible, would not be there were it not for the violence and suffering of the clearance. The vision, in some way, redeems the past but time is eating away at it and only the violence of love can put time in abeyance.

Seamus Heaney has written, “Hallaig is a key poem because it is about haunting and loss and this is persistent through the work” (Heaney 1986: 3). Hallaig is also about remembrance and love and the making of the poem was in itself an act of love for the place and for the people who had lived there.

One of the themes of Hallaig is the interdependence of good and evil. It is a recurring theme in MacLean’s poetry and he explored it in a mythological context in the long poem ‘*Coilltean Ratharsair*’ – ‘The Woods of Raasay’.

The pinewoods of Raasay were planted to replace an earlier mixed plantation which had been felled. In the poem the woods become a sort of Garden of Eden. It is a place of ecstasy, full of colour and movement. Everything there pleases the senses and raises the spirits:

*Coille na gréine
 ’s i éibhneach is mireagach...
 A’ choille ’s i mùirneach
 ri sùgradh nam marannan.*

The sunlit wood,
 Joyful and sportive...
 The wood delightful
 With the love-making of the sea. (MacLean 1989: 172-3)

But the gifts of this Paradise have in them the seeds of pain and suffering:

*Thug thu dhomh clogadan,
 clogadan uaine,
 clogad a’ bhioraidh
 is clogad an t-suaimhneis:
 clogadan ùrail
 ’gam chiùrradh le buaireadh,
 clogadan àrdain
 ’gam mhàbadh le luasgan.*

You gave me helmets,
 Green helmets,
 The helmet of the poignant
 And the helmet of the serene:
 New helmets
 Hurting me with temptation,
 Helmets of pride
 Maiming me with unrest. (MacLean 1989: 174-5)

Everything about the wood is ambivalent. The lovely amber shapes which move about the wood at night become “the three shapely naked goddesses” harrying Actaeon. The wood is “my dear prattler /my whispered reason/my sleeping child” but “The adder woke in its rich growth/ in its multi-swift fine foliage /among its leafy branches to wound.” Good and evil, ecstasy and pain, life and death are inextricably linked and grow out of one another. In the end we are left with the mystery:

*Chan eil eòlas, chan eil eòlas
 air crìch dheireannaich gach tòrachd
 no air seòltachd nan lùban
 leis an caill i a cùrsa*

There is no knowledge, no knowledge,
 Of the final end of each pursuit
 Nor of the subtlety of the bends
 With which it loses its course. (MacLean 1989: 182-3)

Máire Ní Annracháin has said, “...is trí dhán a chumadh faoin áit a troidtear in aghaidh an dearmaid...” (Ní Annracháin 1986: 36). In his poetry Sorley MacLean ensured that the past of his people will not be forgotten. He gave universal significance to places that can be found only on the most detailed maps and to events that would be no more than footnotes in the history books. And he revealed his intense love not only for his people but also for the physical landscape of his native place. This love is neither the nostalgic love of the exile nor the excited admiration of the visitor. The descriptions of nature are never sentimental. The writing is often as simple as the nature poetry of the early Irish monks.

*Screapadal anns a' chéitean
Nuair nach eil an fhraineach òg
Ach mu leth troigh a dh' àirde,
Cha mhòr os cionn an fheòir.*

Screapadal in May
When the young bracken is
But half a foot in height
Hardly above the grass. (MacLean 1989: 304-5)

Sometimes he expresses his love of place in language as passionate as that with which he expresses his love for a woman in 'Dàin do Eimhir':

*O Eilein mhóir, Eilein mo ghaoil,
is iomadh oidhche dhiubh a shaoil
liom an cuan mór fhéin bhith luasgan
le do ghaol-sa air a bhuaireadh
is tu 'nad laighe air an fhairge,
eóin mhoir sgiamhaich na h-Albann,
do sgiathan àlainn air na lùbadh
mu Loch Bhràcadail ioma-chùilteach,
do sgiathan bòidheach ri muir sleuchdte
bho 'n Eist Fhiadhaich gu Aird Shléite,
do sgiathan aoibhneach air an sgaoileadh
mu Loch Shnigheasort 's mu 'n t-saoghal!*

O great Island, Island of my love,
Many a night of them I fancied,
The great ocean itself restless
Agitated with love of you
As you lay on the sea, great beautiful bird of Scotland,
Your supremely beautiful wings bent
About many-nooked Loch Bracadale,
Your beautiful wings prostrate on the sea
From the Wild Stallion to the Aird of Sleat,
Your joyous wings spread
About Loch Snizort and the world.

At other times the writing is tender and allusive. A whole world of love and experience is expressed in a few lines:

*Cha chuimhne liom do bhriathran,
eadhon nì a thubhairt thu,
ach Abhainn Arois an àileadh iadhshlait
is àileadh roid air Suidhisnis.*

I do not remember your words,
Even a thing you said,
But Aros Burn in the smell of honeysuckle
And the smell of bog myrtle on Suishnish. (MacLean 1989: 48-9)

Seamus Heaney has written (1986: 5):

In a way MacLean's relation with his landscape is erotic... because the language of his poems has amorousness and an abandon about it which springs from the contemplation of the beloved contours. Contrary to the notion of the poet as one who gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name, MacLean begins with names and habitations.

He has an epic poet's possession of ground, founders, heroes, battles, lovers, legends; all of them at once part of his personal apparatus of feeling and part of the common but threatened ghost-life of his language and culture. But to feel intensely within this first world of tradition is also to feel an imperative to become its custodian and it is impossible to separate the potency of Sorley MacLean's art from this function of keeping and witnessing, being true to the horizon that happens to encircle him.

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SABINE HEINZ

SPOTLIGHT ON THE FICTION OF ANGHARAD TOMOS

Angharad Wyn Tomos, born in 1958 in Llanwnda, near Caernarfon, as the second of five girls,¹ is one of the leading fiction writers in present-day Wales. She started writing and creating whilst playing with her sisters (cf. Meek 1994: 38) and won the Chair in a school *Eisteddfod*. She first caught the public's attention by militant campaigning for the Welsh language. By now she has established herself as a versatile author in various genres.

I

MAJOR WORKS OF ANGHARAD TOMOS FICTION WRITING

Success in the National Youth Eisteddfod of 1982, when she was awarded the Prose Medal for her novel *Hen Fyd Hurt* 'Silly Old World',² proved to be a major milestone in the development of her literary career. In this work, the author reflects upon her own experience of being unemployed in that the main character, Heulwen, is also out of work and takes a course in drawing just as Angharad Tomos herself had done.

Her second novel, *Yma o Hyd* 'Still here' (1985), which was awarded the prize of the *Welsh Academy* and the *Gruffydd John Williams Award*, is considered an outstanding work in either Welsh or English in the Wales of the eighties (cf. M.

¹ For further biographical details, see Heinz (2007: 131-147).

² Since most of Angharad Tomos's works have not yet been translated into English the translations of the titles here are predominantly suggestions by myself.

W. Thomas 1992: 163). It purports to be a diary illicitly scribbled on prison toilet paper by a woman prisoner, named Blodeuwedd, who broke the law while campaigning on behalf of the language. It is Angharad Tomos's own experience which is presented in the book reflecting her stay in prison after climbing up the Crystal Palace television transmitter in autumn 1976 in London when she was campaigning for a Welsh language television channel.³ The suffocating atmosphere of life in jail is suggestive of the threat to Welsh culture.

The title of the novel is taken from the theme song of the Welsh cultural movement of the eighties written by Dafydd Iwan,⁴ who—like Angharad Tomos herself—was a prominent campaigner of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* 'The Welsh Language Society', and a famous opponent of Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister of the UK from 1979-1990). It was a defiant song of militant cultural survivalism after the vote for a Welsh assembly of 1979 was lost.

Angharad Tomos's third novel, *Si Hei Lwli*, was awarded the Prose Medal at the *National Eisteddfod* in 1991. *Si Hei Lwli* is the title of a Welsh lullaby (in: Kinney & Evans 1981: 53) and was translated into German under the title of the German lullaby *Eia Popeia*.⁵ It features Eleni, which means 'this year', a wom-

³ The campaign proved to be successful in 1982 when S4C 'Sianel Pedwar Cymru' was set up.

⁴ The first stanza reads as follows:

Yma O Hyd	(We're) Still Here
'Dwyt ti'm yn cofio Maccsen	You don't remember Maccsen
'Does neb yn ei 'nabod o	Nobody ever knew him
Mae mil chwe chant o flynyddoedd	One thousand and six hundred years
Yn amser rhy hir i'r co'	Is too long to recall
Ond aeth Magnus Maximus o Gymru	but Magnus Maximus left Wales
Yn y flwyddyn tri chant wyth tri	In the year three hundred and eighty three
A'n gadael yn genedl gyfan	And left the nation as one
A heddiw, wele hi!	And today, look at her!
R'yn ni yma o hyd	We're still here
R'yn yma o hyd	We're still here
Er gwaethaf pawb a phopeth...	Despite everybody and everything...

⁵ The first stanza reads as follows:

Si Hei Lwli 'mabi	Eia, popeia, mein Püppchen, schlaf ein
mae'r llong yn mynd i ffwrdd	Eia popeia, wirst müde sein.
Si hei lwli 'mabi	Das Bettchen ist weich, und alles ist still,
Mae'r capten ar y bwrdd	weil mein Püppchen schlafen will.
Si hei lwli lwli lws	Das Pferdchen schläft und das Kälbchen im Stall
Cysga, cysga 'mabi tlws	und hoch auf der Heide die Hühnerchen all,

an in her twenties, who sets out on a car journey together with her aunt Bigw, a woman in her nineties. Again, the novel reflects autobiographical episodes in the life of Angharad Tomos.

The fourth novel for adults, *Titrwm* (1994), written in the form of a prose song, marked a new quality in her fiction. The work offers a new style and reflects an impressive command of the language and a celebration of words (cf. *Golwg* 04.08.1994). Featuring a much greater degree of artistic devices than other novels, this one is a masterpiece and marked a climax of Angharad Tomos's artistic mastery. In the form of a soliloquy, it tells the story of Awen, which means 'inspiration, muse', a deaf and dumb woman who—despite her disadvantages—has learned to read and is keen on books. She is now expecting a baby, *Titrwm*, one of the few people she can communicate with properly.

However, the reason for the difficulty in communicating is not Awen's physical impairment. She is the embodiment of a paralysed Wales and the communication problems derive from the country's gradual marginalisation over the centuries and its present political situation. It is in this context that complete silence develops in Awen's family, in particular when references to her brother are made. The actual reason for this mute co-existence, however, is not revealed until the end of the novel: Awen was raped by an Englishman who was subsequently killed by her brother. Thus, what started lyrically as a story about love, identity and problems of communication eventually turns out to be a subtle political detective story or thriller.

The title *Titrwm* is again a song. It is a song in which a lover throws stones at the window of his beloved, which, as they fall, make a sound like 'ti-trwm'.⁶ Despite being an outstanding piece of writing the novel was not successful in the

Si hei lwli 'mabi,	da haben sie sich ihr Bettchen gemacht,
mae'r llong yn mynd i ffwrdd...	und rufen dem lieben Kindchen "Gut' Nacht!"

In German, the lullaby does not speak about a ship which has an important metaphoric function for the end of the novel. While the German lullaby does not mention a ship, it plays an important metaphoric role in the Welsh novel. The second stanza of the song is not important for the novel and is, therefore, omitted here.

⁶ There are different versions of the song. One of them gives the first stanza as follows:

Titrwm tatrwm, Gwen lliw'r wŷyn,	Pitter-patter, Gwen the colour of lambs
Ni allai'n hwy 'mo'r curo;	I can't knock any longer
Mae'r gwynt yn oer oddi ar y llyn,	The wind is cold from the lake
O flodyn y dyffryn deffro.	Awake, o flower of the valley...

Eisteddfod and this may be the reason that the following one, *Wele'n Gwawrio*, reverted to the style of her first three novels for adults.

Wele'n Gwawrio 'Behold it dawns'⁷ is also the title of a song: it is a Christmas carol (in: George & Brown 1994: 74).⁸ In 1997 it was awarded the Prose Medal at the *Eisteddfod*. The book describes the dawn of the third millennium and is in part a satire on *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*, in which Angharad Tomos was still active (cf. *Y Tafod* 3.21/2005). It is also a story of personal destiny. For the first time in the work of the author, it seems that political frustration, and perhaps fatally weak language, force the main character to escape into the private sphere and seek solace in religion (cf. *Golwg* 30.10.1997). Bianchi calls the novel "a tale of paralysis and suspended death, almost an apotheosis of the *noir* genre"⁹.

In 2004, Angharad Tomos published the historical novel *Rhagom* (2004), a work dealing with the atrocities of the First and Second World Wars. In addition, she has been writing short stories since 1991, e.g. *Ymweliad*, *Angylion Segur*, *Y gŵr wrth ddyfroedd hunllef*. However, her fame rests not only on her fiction writing, but on the versatility of her creativity which is dealt with below.

OTHER GENRES

Angharad Tomos employs various genres. She is fond of travelling and some of her works can be classified as travel literature. She has also written essays and scripts for television. She has co-operated with theatre companies, such as *Hwyl*

⁷ This is a literal translation. Another translation, i.e. 'Dawn is Here', is given at <http://www.wai.org.uk/index.cfm?UUID=242E9791-65BF-7E43-3C7CDDC6462ED359>.

⁸ The first stanza reads as follows:

Wele'n gwawrio ddydd i'w gofio,	Behold the dawning of a day to remember,
Geni Seilo, gorau swydd;	The birth of the Messiah, the finest mission;
Wele ddynion mwyn a moddion;	Behold men of noble disposition
Ddönt â rhoddion iddo'n rhwydd.	Freely bring gifts unto him.
Hen addewid Eden odiaeth,	The old, wondrous promise of Eden,
Wele heddiw ddaeth i ben;	Behold today its fulfilment;
Wele drefniad dwyfol gariad;	Behold the strategy of divine love
O flaen ein llygad heb un llen.	Before our eyes, unimpeded.

As far as I am aware, there is no 'official' translation of this song. I would like to thank William Lloyd Griffith, teacher of Welsh in Dinbych/Wales, for providing me with the material and advising me on the translation.

⁹ See further <http://www.wai.org.uk/index.cfm?UUID=242E9791-65BF7E43-3C7CDD-C6462ED359>.

a *Fflag*, and moved into the genre of the drama, e.g. *Cyffes* (1994). She has also become an experienced prose and drama critic. In 2001, her autobiography *Cnon-yn Afonydd* was published.

The writings of Angharad Tomos are also known to a wider public as she is highly productive as a newspaper columnist and journals writer, particularly in publications of a political and literary nature, such as *Y Tafod* ‘The Tongue’, the bi-monthly journal of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, *Y Faner Newydd* ‘The New Banner’, a journal on politics and literature, *Y Cymro* ‘The Welshman’, a weekly newspaper, *Golwg* ‘View’, a weekly dealing with all aspects of Welsh life, *Barn* ‘Opinion’, a monthly devoted to literature, politics and academia, and *Planet*, a bi-monthly magazine covering the arts, culture and politics in Wales and beyond. She has written for *Yr Herald Cymraeg* ‘The Welsh Herald’ since 1996 and a collection of her articles from the paper, entitled *Y Byd a’r Betws* ‘The World and Betws’, was published in 2003.¹⁰

In 2000, Angharad Tomos produced the academic work *Bywyd a gwaith David Thomas, 1880-1967* ‘The life and work of socialist agitator David Thomas, 1880-1967’ for which she was awarded an M.Phil. The material was used to produce a biography of her grandfather in 2002 entitled *Hiraeth am Yfory; Hanes David Thomas a Mudiad Llafur Gogledd Cymru*.

Overall, she is experienced in essay writing, producing television and other scripts and is well known as a columnist, researcher, critic and also as an academic writer. During the last few years she has been busy with several projects for which she translated, illustrated and continued writing. In addition, she is the author of children’s books.

CHILDREN’S BOOKS

After having worked in the field of educational resources,¹¹ Angharad Tomos became very popular for her children’s series *Rwdlan* ‘to prattle/prattling’, which started in 1983. This was the most successful series of her publisher *Lolfa*¹² and

¹⁰ Betws is the place where the author lives. However, ‘Y Byd a’r Betws’ is also a Welsh idiom equivalent to ‘the world and one’s own square mile’ and could be translated as such.

¹¹ In the eighties—the correct dates are not provided by the *National Library of Wales*—Angharad Tomos worked for the Education Department in Gwynedd and co-wrote educational children’s books, with, amongst others, Gwenno Hywyn.

¹² This publishing house concentrates on the publication of Welsh authors and subjects related to Welsh matters.

was granted the *Tír na n-Óg prize*.¹³ It consists of thirteen individual volumes and is illustrated by her own drawings. It has been partly translated into Breton and Irish. A German translation is in preparation. The story was also successful on television,¹⁴ for which Angharad Tomos wrote the script, and on stage. *Rwdlan* characters can be seen in schools and the stories can be heard on tape. The author reads for children in schools, theatres, children's sessions in the *Eisteddfod*. She also participated in a literary festival in Vienna in 1999.

Her second children's series, *Storiau pell i ffwrdd* 'Far away stories', was published in *Golwg* in 1990, illustrated again by her own drawings. A third series, *Guto* was started in 1990, but has not been finished. In 1993, she completed the novel *Sothach and Sglyfath* 'Trash and Trollop', aimed at nine to twelve year old children. It was also awarded the *Tír na n-Óg prize*. Together with Branwen Nicolas, she published two cookery books with strange recipes for children, i.e. *Stwnsh Rwdlan* in 1997 and *Parti Cwmwl* in 1998. Further re-using the themes of her *Rwdlan*-series, Angharad Tomos also produced a high number of activity books (cf. www.gwales.com). She collected stories and folktales from Dyffryn Nantlle for children in 1990 and has done a tremendous amount of work in translating religious works for children into Welsh.

II STYLE AND CONTENT

The author's novels have been characterised in different ways – thoroughly Welsh, modernist, post-colonial. They have been classified as belonging to the *noir* genre or compared with the work of other female writers.

The novels written by Angharad Tomos are relatively short. This is partly due to the mode of production of many Welsh language novels. Being often written for competitions like the *National Eisteddfod*, there is about a year and a half for the authors to write their works between the announcement of the theme and the date of submission. Novels are seldom more than 200 pages.¹⁵ Those of Angharad

¹³ This is the main prize for children's books in Wales which was created by the *Welsh Book Council*.

¹⁴ The film was twice shown at the Cannes *International Television Festival* (cf. *Golwg* 27.05.1993).

¹⁵ E.g. Mihangel Morgan, 1993, *Dirgel Ddyn* (149 pp.); Robin Llywelyn, 1994, *O'r Harbwr Gwag i'r Cefnfor Gwyn* (192 pp.); Angharad Jones, 1995, *Y Dylluan Wen* (189 pp.); Eirug

Tomos, however, are even shorter and, excluding *Hen Fyd Hurt*, range from 128 to 172 pages. Whether the length really affects the quality of her writings, as is said by Gramich (cf. *Golwg* 30.10.1997), is difficult to judge. They have all gained awards and the author's artistic mastery has been emphasised several times, particularly in relation to *Yma o Hyd* (cf. M. W. Thomas 1992: 168), *Si Hei Lwli* and *Titwrwm*.

SPECIFIC ARTISTIC DEVICES EMPLOYED BY ANGHARAD TOMOS

The first five novels for adults by Angharad Tomos assimilate—to a varying degree—autobiographical episodes and reflect a very personal style of writing; it is a kind of natural narrative recounting daily routines which are embedded in humorous and satirical episodes, philosophical reflections, as well as Welsh and other songs, hymns and poetry. Frequent references to heroes and heroines of other cultures and times reveal a broad knowledge of civilisation, and exhibit cultural depth as well as the author's respect for humanity. She often also places Wales in a global context. Heroes and myths of Welsh tradition, such as Llywelyn and Heledd, are referred to frequently in her work.

In *Yma o Hyd* and *Wele'n Gwawrio*, Angharad Tomos masters the diary style. Diary-keeping has a long tradition in Wales, both as an actual spiritual practice and as a literary convention, and this tradition, in its entirety, is relevant to *Yma o Hyd* (cf. M. W. Thomas 1992: 168).

Apart from *Sothach a Sglyfath*, the novels of Angharad Tomos are told by an 'I myself' (cf. *Golwg* 30.10.1997), a kind of part of herself, a logical reflex of the autobiographical nature of her writing. Awen in *Titwrwm*, for instance, is a female storyteller akin to the Medieval Welsh *cyfarwydd*, and she further talks about heroines. Although the style and contents of her work often reflect the potential strength of women, she does not emphasise the issue of gender in her writing. She rather writes what is most natural to her and concentrates on artistic accomplishment, thus doing justice to a *cyfarwydd*.

Most titles of her works place her fiction firmly in a Welsh context. As was pointed out above, most are song titles and reflect the basic theme and mood of

Wyn, 1998, *Blodyn Tatws* (191 pp.); Eirug Wyn, 2000, *Tri Mochyn Bach*, (124 pp.), Elfyn Pritchard, 2001, *Trwy'r Tynwylwch* (134 pp.), Angharad Price, 2002, *O! Tyn y Gorchudd* (152 pp.); Cefin Roberts, 2003, *Brwydr y Bradwr* (128 pp.).

her novels. She may have discovered the device of using song titles at a later stage in her career as her first novel *Hen Fyd Hurt* is not a song.¹⁶

The author's use of proper names provides an essential basis for her play on words (cf. Heinz 2004: 43-49). Very specific in this context is the choice of the personal names of the main characters. They are important in the first instance for the creation of an authentic Welsh language context. Secondly, they form an integral part of the description of the protagonists and the reader needs to be aware of the earlier resonances in order to fully appreciate what is being said. Hence the medieval story of Blodeuwedd in the *Mabinogi* (who was made of flowers for the hero Lleu, but who subsequently sought to murder him and was punished by being transformed by Lleu into an owl) informs the main character of *Yma o Hyd*.¹⁷ Just as the medieval Blodeuwedd suffers great loneliness and isolation in the woods, this is paralleled in the modern Welsh novel by the imprisonment of Blodeuwedd, the Welsh language campaigner.

Similar functions can be attributed to the other personal names in the works of Angharad Tomos. They are first of all common nouns and need to be understood in their basic meaning. An exception could be seen in the name of Heulwen in *Hen Fyd Hurt*. Although meaning 'sunshine', it is a common personal name, too. However, in Angharad Tomos's novel the name can well be taken in its literal meaning.

The name Eleni in *Si Hei Lwli* emphasises the age gap between the two travellers. Awen in *Titrwm* refers the reader to the cultural and glorious literary past of Wales and Ennyd, which means 'instant', points to the last moments before the onset of a new era in *Wele'n Gwawrio*. Characters in *Rhagom* are given toponyms of Wales, predominantly Caernarfon. The name Bigw in *Si Hei Lwli* is particularly interesting in that its different layers of meaning are very complex. The name is first of all related to the Welsh word *pigo* 'to peck, prick' and its adjective *pigog* 'prickly, thorny'. However, it also refers to Begw, the main character of the collection of short stories by Kate Roberts—the classic writer of Welsh short stories—entitled *Te yn y Grug* (1959). Moreover, Bigw in *Si Hei Lwli* shares some experiences and character traits with Kate Roberts herself, such as the early loss of brother and partner. Both women were strong characters

¹⁶ It may be an echo of the book *Hyn o Fyd* 'What a world' (1964) by Kate Roberts (1891-1985, cf. below).

¹⁷ The exact dating of the tale varies, but it was perhaps written down in the 14th century. For further information as regards content and dating, see Heinz (2007: 94f.). For the Blodeuwedd-motif in Welsh literature, see *ibid.* (83-102).

and different from others, e.g. somewhat egocentric and strange, but with a formidable spirit.

Based on the similarities between Bigw and Begw, Angharad Tomos was compared with Kate Roberts, e.g. in *Golwg* (26.09.1991).¹⁸ The validity of such a comparison is discussed below.

ANGHARAD TOMOS AND KATE ROBERTS

Bigw in *Si Hei Lwli* resembles the description of old women in works written by Kate Roberts, e.g. in *Tywyll Heno* 'Dark Tonight' (1962) and later stories. She had lost her brother and her partner (in the First World War). Bigw suffered from these losses and was socially isolated although financially secure. In later life, she was an independent woman locked into an old body. Living in her more and more dysfunctional body she had to live in an old people's home. After fighting and suffering all her life, she became a strong character who was different, a somewhat egocentric and strange person who was not particularly lovable. Her formidable spirit always tended to break the rules and did not fit into the picture of an ordinary old woman.

However, *Si Hei Lwli* is the only work of Angharad Tomos which is really comparable with that of Kate Roberts. There are similarities (a) in personality between Begw and Bigw, (b) in the descriptions of more or less the same region of Wales, (c) in the atmosphere of the dialogues, (d) in the use of songs, (e) in the reflection of self-confident women and of the world interpreted from the standpoint of women without an explicit focus on any gender question, and (f) in their interest in children's literature.

Some explanations for these similarities are easily accounted for. Both authors were born in the same area, both love(d) their language and vigorously campaign(ed) for it. Nevertheless, there are enough differences between their writings when their works are looked at in detail. For instance, although Kate Roberts had no children herself, she was a teacher of children and a writer of books about them, *Deian a Loli* (1927), *Laura Jones* (1930), and *Te yn y Grug*. Angharad Tomos is a writer of children's stories illustrated by herself.

¹⁸ Angharad Tomos was also compared to Jane Edwards, Eigr Lewis Roberts and Margaid Roberts (cf. *Golwg* 26.09.1991). Bearing in mind the work of other female writers, i.e. Angharad Jones and Sonia Edwards, a firm presentation of women in fiction writing can be observed in Wales. This is a positive factor in comparison with Irish language literature in which males dominate prose writing (cf. Titley 1991: 40, 573, 613).

Her *Rwdlan*-series, for instance, originally featured girls only. The novel *Si Hei Lwli* includes six men. However, they are rather shadows than real beings: three of them remain anonymous and without any character or face, two are ghosts from the past.

While Kate Roberts often writes from the perspective of a housewife (without being one herself!) and refers to workers in quarries, Angharad Tomos does not concentrate on firm settings of social units and relations. Apart from reflecting society, she describes the social context of middle class women, which is rather loose and open to change, thus reflecting a new stage in so-called Western society, i.e. one characterised by increasing individualism accompanied by growing personal isolation. Moreover, the actual profession or occupation of her women is of minor importance, but they are always at the centre of her stories and definitely not bound to house work, e.g. Heulwen in *Hen Fyd Hurt*, Blodeuwedd in *Yma o Hyd*, Eleni in *Si Hei Lwli*, Awen in *Titrwm* and Ennyd in *Wele'n Gwawrio*.

The fiction of both writers is at times quite serious and the main characters often have to bear heavy burdens. Heulwen is frustrated because she is unemployed, Blodeuwedd because she is imprisoned and lonely, Eleni because of troubles with her aunt, Bigw because of her dysfunctional body and personal experience, Awen because she is locked in a body which is deaf, dumb, and, furthermore, pregnant after being raped by a *dyn dwad* 'incomer', and Ennyd because of insufficient changes in Welsh society which would guarantee the Welsh language's survival.

Both authors, however, exhibit some humour. In contrast to Kate Roberts, Angharad Tomos does not always take herself too seriously, except in the novel *Wele'n Gwawrio*. She generally assembles a jigsaw of life in her fiction so that her novels predominantly end up with an optimistic perspective. This may partly be due to the fact that she observes closely developments in other countries and takes radical political actions herself. She allows for changes in society, while Kate Roberts does not. In her children's books, humour also plays an important role.

Personal experience and perhaps also their different religious bonds are responsible for the different outlook of the two authors. Whereas Roberts reflects a rather typical puritanical character, Angharad Tomos is a Methodist following a liberal Christianity. Regardless of their religious belief and divergent attitudes towards direct political action, both writers have produced social criticism in political columns of newspapers. Kate Roberts did so as a journalist and Ang-

harad Tomos as a radical social critic and versatile author aware of an unsatisfactory society.

Taken as a whole, Angharad Tomos excels in a broader spectrum of genres. This may be due to the fact that she works freelance whereas Kate Roberts was first of all a teacher and journalist and also ran a publishing house (Gwasg Gee). That is, the focus of her working life was different and hence Kate Roberts wrote particularly at times when personal tragedies occurred, whereas Angharad Tomos creates continuously as if writing was a permanent means of communication with the world which she both needs and enjoys. Indeed, this seems to be an autobiographical aspect of Awen in *Titrwm*, who is keen on reading and thereby enjoying life.

POLITICAL VS. APOLITICAL WRITING

In *Cydymaith i Lenyddiaeth Gymraeg* (Stephens 1997: 720) it is stated that there is nothing politically salient in the later fiction works of Angharad Tomos. This is not accurate. Political views and attitudes are evident in all her novels. They are apparent in *Titrwm*, for instance, when Awen talks to the baby about the world and its wars, or in *Wele'n Gwawrio*, when Ennyd discusses activities necessary for the Welsh language, or when some characters express disappointment that they did not really shake the system for the sake of the language (cf. Tomos 1997: 43). Moreover, its design as a politically motivated thriller is itself a clear expression of her attitudes and is easily applicable to the reality existing in Wales.

Awen, the deaf, dumb, and pregnant woman in *Titrwm*, who can best communicate with books, the unborn baby and her brother, is the embodiment of the political situation in Wales. The Welsh have been deprived of their language, voice and dreams and are landlocked in their own country. To understand the centrality of the survival of Welsh literature and what has happened in the country, Welsh writers often refer their readers to heroes and heroines from the country's past, be they real or mythical. And this is in consequence exactly the field in which Awen looks for inspiration of how to pass on the heritage of her ancestors to the baby and furnish it with an identity; a baby which is half English and, as such, an incarnation of many young Welsh people at the end of the twentieth century.

Although the direct link between their actual personal situation and the general political situation is more obvious for Heulwen, Blodeuwedd, and Awen, this link also exists for Bigw and Ennyd. In addition, common to all the major female characters of Angharad Tomos, apart from her children's witches, is the brooding

about problems of living in modern society. Moreover, Angharad Tomos's typical allusions to historical events, not only in Wales, can hardly be called apolitical. The novel *Rhagom* is a work of fiction dealing with the problem of war, a topic which keeps re-occurring in the author's writings (cf. for example pp. 45f. in *Si Hei Lwli*). Furthermore, her short stories are often directly inspired by political events, for example, *Angylion Segur* (in: *Golwg* 15.09.1994). After her personal experience of militant action, Angharad Tomos's later works are much more subtle and perfectly set in a seemingly innocuous context, for instance that of the family. In a way her artistic development has been paralleled by her personal one, including her political thinking, her dealing with experiences or the evolving of new creative strategies. Hence, she has found new ways of channeling her ideas and beliefs which always constitute the background of her writing and release a varying degree of salient political allusions.

Political interpretations of the *Rwdlan*-series and the charge of paganism in her works were rejected by the author (cf. *Golwg* 27.05.1993).

IS ANGHARAD TOMOS A WRITER OF POST-COLONIAL FICTION?

Other labellings of the works of Angharad Tomos were those of post-colonialism and modernism. In *Golwg* (04.08.1994), she was compared with post-colonial authors of cultural ethnic minorities like Toni Morrison or Isabelle Allende. There may be aspects of this in *Titrwm*, reflected in Awen's fear of telling anybody about her pregnancy because of the blame she is expecting. However, the author's identity is clearly defined by the use of Welsh songs as titles for her novels (cf. chapter 2.1.2.). Nevertheless, although she herself seems to be certain of her own identity she is uncertain about how to equip her unborn baby with one. That is, her own identity and belonging is given, but the one for the baby is open and not yet decided on, but perhaps under construction with the help of a book for *Titrwm* – its genealogy. Although her brother, i.e. Awen's more radical part, had killed the English, thus taking the immediate threat off her and allowing the protagonist to present *Titrwm* as a Welsh offspring, her attitude towards the baby remains ambivalent. After all, the foreign power had made its way into her most inner part, her most sacred place. Unborn *Titrwm*, therefore, frightens Awen at times, even more since it is the reason for the silence at home, i.e. her home has become strange to Awen, anxiety inducing at times. However, the possibility of a positive solution is left open; the child—a fusion of both cultures which could do justice to both of them—might be welcomed.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND PLOT

Titrwm has a particularly interesting narrative structure and consists of a frame, which is constructed by Awen's pregnancy and her waiting for the baby to be born. Within this frame the story of the protagonist and her history, as well as that of the developing *Titrwm*, are told in parallel by two different narrative layers. Communication with the baby is predominantly carried out by Awen's internal talks and questions to *Titrwm*, whereas her own story, in particular events from the past, are often told, or better exemplified, by the help of a third narrative layer. This consists of episodes out of a book intended for *Titrwm*, in which each page provides a new story. Being part of Awen's history, one of them is her rape by the English father of *Titrwm*. Internal monologues, flashbacks to the past, and philosophical digressions stitch the various narrative layers together. This narrative technique does not support a galloping plot, of course, but causality and development become clearer with every episode and chapter. Every page adds a tessera to put the recipient gradually in the picture of Awen's, i.e. Wales's, state. At the same time, this mosaic structure builds up tension (although some digressions may cause boredom, since their immediate purpose is not obvious). That is, the author's way of telling the story serves the unfolding of a proper thriller. Thus the protagonist's story is told in a spiral-like way, i.e. every page of the book which Awen reads places her back in time leading eventually, however, to the next stage in her life, and is paralleled by *Titrwm*'s development and the gradual unveiling of the murder of the Englishman. The digressions and flashbacks certainly delay the narration, but slowly reveal the shocking truth, i.e. they gradually release little fragments which prepare the reader for the final revelation.

However, a reduced structure of plot alone is not necessarily a feature of post-colonial writing, as can be seen from *Ulysses*, the epoch-defining novel of modernism by James Joyce (1882-1941) or from the works of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), the master of creative writing with little or no plot. Further features of Angharad Tomos's writing, as illustrated below, confirm this view.

METAPHORS, LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

Titrwm carries on the theme of personal and social incarceration as already seen in *Yma o Hyd*. Interpreting Awen as the embodiment of Wales justifies seeing Bigw in *Si Hei Lwli* also metaphorically, i.e. as the personification of Wales and its heritage. At the end of the novel it proves to be lively enough to be passed on

to the younger generation; the book ends with the description of Bigw as a strong ship floating successfully, the one that is sung about in the lullaby *Si Hei Lwli* to Welsh children. And as the prickly old woman is reluctant to accept a useless life or one confined to the company of senile old ladies, so is Welsh heritage reluctant to give way to the English or to be confined to an existence in museums only as in Niall Griffiths's fiction *Grits* (cf. Griffiths 2001: 79), a novel much closer to post-colonialism.

LANGUAGE USE

The language of Angharad Tomos is Welsh as it currently exists with its obvious features of pidginisation (cf. Heinz 2003: 260, 263, 490ff.), as well as with its dialectal properties which place the reader in an authentic Welsh-language setting. Since everybody knows English, such fragments do not create gaps which ask for (re-)construction as does the use of untranslated Welsh in, for instance, Niall Griffiths's novel *Sheepshagger* (cf. Griffiths 2002a: 213). The use of English in the novels of Angharad Tomos serves to depict the ongoing language conflict rather than a fencing off from the centre. Her perspective is different from that of post-colonial writers. She has never belonged to the English world, i.e. to the world of the centre. As such, her language use may at best be called modern. In the same way, she does not feel displaced yet, although a threat to her culture is clearly expressed, as has already been pointed out.

A glimpse of junkie culture and the reproduction of social fragmentation forms part of *Wele'n Gwawrio*. On the whole, however, Angharad Tomos's main characters do not suffer from drug addiction or drown in a world of perversion, violence, despair, and thoughts of committing suicide. The author is not nihilistic, does not concentrate on destructive forces nor on the grotesque, but rather seeks to compose a comprehensive reflection of life including constructive and destructive developments. Despite all disappointments, her characters have the strength to find a way through problems and social troubles, thus suggesting the only way of living in the current world, a way which also fosters hope in its future.

Furthermore, Angharad Tomos herself is different, since she does not suffer as a Welsh person. In particular, she does not suffer as a woman. She sees herself as part of a world full of problems which needs to be changed in a way that ensures that human rights are generally guaranteed and that people have an equal opportunity to develop. Her reflections on society exhibit a more general and global thinking, and put Wales into a global context. In *Yma o Hyd*, for instance, she

states that the greatest pearls of wisdom have been written on prison paper, e.g. by Bonhoeffer, Luther King, Bunyan or the Apostle Paul.

On the whole, therefore, there is not much ground to label Angharad Tomos's work as post-colonial. A narrow classification is elusive. One may also be reminded of the fact that Wales is still part of Great Britain, but has maintained its language more than any other of the Celtic regions.

To return to *Titrwm for a moment*, apart from seeing Awen metaphorically there is also a very direct way of seeing her. Awen should also be looked at as a common representative of pregnant young women with all their hopes and doubts in unpredictable personal and/or social circumstances. Such would evoke very similar ambivalent feelings towards an unborn baby, since the reaction of the environment is as uncertain as the question of how to master the baby's and one's own future. But whatever the extent of the metaphorical meaning of Awen is, Angharad Tomos—at the time of writing the novel without the experience of pregnancy—manages, in particular in the protagonist's monologues, to evoke feelings in potential and expectant mothers which could not be captured better. And part of this mélange of feelings is also the pure marvel at the wonder of feeling a living being develop in one's body; of course, this needs to be embedded into a Welsh context again, and so we get another allusion to the *Mabinogi* in the novel (cf. Tomos 1994: 10; cf. Blodeuwedd in chapter 2.1.2).

Taking all the features of her fiction writing into account, the author's novels do not display clearly developed concepts which are central to post-colonialism. Also the others do not impose a post-colonial interpretation on the reader. On the contrary, as literature should do, Angharad Tomos's novels invite a variety of interpretation.

MODERNISM

The author employs narrative techniques typical of modernist writing, e.g. internal monologues, stream of consciousness, cinematic flashbacks, frame constructions, philosophical digressions, dialectal speech, experiments with form, as seen in *Titrwm*, a novel in the form of a prose song.

The author's stylistic devices include images, or the choice of special vocabulary, the interlacing of elements on the level of composition and a high degree of intertextuality, allusions to mythology, the use of metaphors and symbols. A deliberate use of personal names is also characteristic of modernist writing.

However, some of the devices employed by Angharad Tomos go beyond the concept of modernist writing. The personal names chosen in her novels not only characterise the protagonists to varying degrees, but may also be essential to the basic theme of her fiction. In addition, they emphasise the Welsh context of her writing. The same can be said with regard to the use of Welsh songs as titles of her works or with regard to the metaphors employed by the author. As such, *Bigw* and *Awen* are personifications of various aspects of Wales and *Titrwm* is perhaps even an allegory on Welsh society, as well as being the story of a young pregnant woman.

The frequent use of journeys in her novels may point to a personally preferred motif of the author. Apart from Eleni and Bigw in *Si Hei Lwli Ennyd* in *Wele'n Gwawrio* also travels. She takes on a journey to the peak of Snowdon to welcome the new millennium, and Gwilym in *Rhagom* sets out to join the war.

Mythology is employed by the author either in a rather Romantic mood, thus emphasising the Welsh context again, or to develop theme and plot.

Moreover, the author's writing echoes Welsh poetic techniques particularly in *Titrwm*, but also in *Rhagom*, which is based on the diaries of the brother of her grandfather, or in *Wele'n Gwawrio* and *Yma o Hyd*. In addition, the description of Welsh landscape and nature seems to be typical for large parts of Welsh writing in either language. In particular, mountains are symbols of Welsh identity and of being at home. As a consequence, depictions of the landscape serve both as the provision of an authentic Welsh context as well as a sacred place to escape to. Another possible function of such descriptions is that of theatricalisation, as seen in *Wele'n Gwawrio*.

One last aspect to be mentioned is the varying extent of autobiographical reflections in Angharad Tomos's novels for adults. Taken together, the author represents modern novel writing with culture-based specific features. Some of them are extraordinary, innovative, and unexpected ones which enrich the reader's thinking, and some of them may be difficult to follow for an audience outside of her own culture.

Post-colonial, post-industrial, post-modern, *roman noir* and many more denotations are currently common labels for theoretical frameworks in literature. However, at times, they seem to rather restrict the access to a work or an author. Whatever tools for interpretation they offer, they also channel our view and do not allow unprejudiced thinking. Consequently, they hardly do full justice to a creative mind. As such, aspects of the *noir* genre can be found in

Wele'n Gwawrio, but the end of the novel features rather a resurrection or a new beginning than an indulgence in death. By necessity, the veil of heavily woven multi-fold threads of theories blurs our vision, in particular when applied to non-mainstream cultures with very specific socio-cultural conditions.

As we have seen, a case in point is Angharad Tomos. She manages narrative techniques and artistic devices which are typical of modernist writing. Some chapters in her novels, or isolated artistic devices, may reflect aspects of post-colonial writing or of the *noir* genre. However, taken as a whole, her works defy narrow interpretation and categorisation. Specific conditions of literary production, such as that engendered by the *Eisteddfod*, imply a specific audience and thus may produce specific genres (e.g. *englyn*), literary devices (e.g. *cynghanedd*), contents, metaphors, points of views, linguistic expressions etc. The frequent allusions to history, literature and mythology in Angharad Thomas's fiction anchor it very firmly in Welsh culture which can sometimes cause it to become inward-looking. Nevertheless, it may also be seen as paving the way for the exploration of new cultural and personal horizons.

Altogether, Angharad Tomos can be characterised as a modern writer who excels in a wide range of narrative techniques and artistic devices. Her writing exhibits a personal style of complex, innovative, provocative and thought-inducing reflections of reality blended to varying degrees with autobiographical references. It is firmly rooted in a modern Wales with a heroic past worth remembering.

III

PERCEPTION OF ANGHARAD TOMOS

Angharad Tomos had refused to have her works translated into English. That year, however, *Si Hei Lwli* was translated into English as *Si Hei Lwli: Twilight Song*. It formed part of a series of translations from Welsh into English in order to popularise Welsh literature abroad. Her English-medium writing is limited and mainly serves political purposes, for example *Seeing for ourselves* (in: Planet 106/1994). Her emphasis on Welsh makes her less marketable and affects her level of income and the willingness of institutions like the *British Council* to showcase her talents.

Nevertheless, in particular in relation to her novel *Yma o Hyd*, she was praised for her “high seriousness” and “moral integrity”, and lauded as “the most au-

thoritative of her generation in her human awareness".¹⁹ The celebration of her courage can be seen in *englynion* dedicated to her, a way of honouring an author which may be unique to Wales. Although poems in honour of authors are also known in Ireland, they do not come in traditional metre poetry there. The following is a selection of praise poetry dedicated to Angharad Tomos:

Idris Reynolds (in: Jones 1993: 180): **Angharad Tomos**

Am i'r wyl dy anwylo,—ynom mwy
Ni fydd modd d'anghofio
Gan fod cydwybod y co'
Yn dal i guro dwylo.

Peredur Lynch (in: Jones 1993: 166): **Angharad Tomos** (Bro Delyn 1991)

O'r wyl hon hyd gyrrau'r wlad—fe awn ni
Yn ôl i wag siarad
Yn awr, ei di, Angharad,
O faes gŵyl i faes gad.

Gerallt Lloyd Owen:²⁰ **Angharad Tomos**

Yr wyt yng ngharchar eto—drosof fi,
Dros fy iaith, ond heno
Wyt enaid nad wyt yno;
Wyt rydd am canfed tro.

Dafydd Iwan:²¹ **Cân Angharad**

I gyfarch Angharad Tomos ar ennill y Fedal Ryddiaith yn Steddfod Bro Delyn 1991

Cytgan: Draw yng Ngwlad y Rwla yr ydym oll yn byw
Ambell un yn feidrol ac ambell un yn dduw

¹⁹ See <http://www.wai.org.uk/index.cfm?UUID=242E9791-65BF-7E43-3C7CDDC6462ED359>.

²⁰ For further stanzas, see Jones (1993: 107 f.).

²¹ For the other stanzas, see Iwan (1992: 28).

Yr ychydig yn wahanol a'r rhan fwyaf yr un fath
A phawb yn llawn uchelgais ond Mursen y gath.

I Mae Ceridwen wedi 'madael â'i chastell yn Nymbar Ten
A Strempan yn y carchar am chwerthin ar ei phen
Y Dewin Doeth yn siglo fel pôl piniwn ar y glwyd
Tra cipiwyd job Ceridwen gan y Llipryn Llwyd.

Angharad Tomos's works have had made a strong impact on other authors who share the same cultural heritage. Motifs from her novels can be found in those of other writers, e.g. the motif of conquering inner or safe space. Like Awen in *Titrwm*, Ianto in the novel *Sheepshagger* by Niall Griffiths (2002a), was raped by an Englishman. Ianto also takes revenge, but in a rather mystic and self-satisfying ceremonial way. The motif of conquering space also occurs in other novels by Niall Griffiths, e.g. in *Kelly+Victor* (Griffiths 2002b). Moreover, as in *Wele'n Gwawrio* the action in *Kelly+Victor* takes place around the onset of the new millennium. In *Runt* (Griffiths 2007), using a form of uninterrupted internal monologue, an impaired young protagonist is featured. But, unlike Awen in *Titrwm*, the nameless boy is mentally impaired and belongs to a completely different social class. Moreover, the mood of Griffiths's novel is rather apocalyptic.

As mentioned above, Angharad Tomos makes frequent use of various kinds of journeys in her novels. The metaphorical use of a car trip can also be found in *Grits* by Griffiths (2001, cf. *Si Hei Lwli*). Angharad Tomos's use of the Blo-deuwedd-motif in 1985 certainly contributed to its ongoing and increasing popularity in Welsh, Gaelic and Anglo-Celtic literature (cf. Cusick 2001).

Whatever about the comparisons and labellings, as a result of her excellent and versatile creative writing (and drawing), as well as her continuous political commitment, Angharad Tomos has achieved a considerable reputation in Wales. She was the first woman, for instance, to write her autobiography in the series *Cyfres y Cewri* 'The Series of the Giants'.

As Kate Roberts was the most distinctive writer of fiction in Wales in the twentieth century, we may look forward with anticipation to the continuing contribution of Angharad Tomos to the literature of Wales in the present century. Perhaps her work may reach a standard and level of excellence approximating to that of her distinguished predecessors.

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Breton Literature during the German Occupation (1940-1944): Reflections of Collaboration?¹

The aim of this paper is to discuss three literary works written by three different authors who all believed that the German Occupation offered new prospects for Brittany. Collaboration can be an emotive word, and rather than add fuel to the fire of recent critics of nationalism in Brittany, my purpose is to consider whether the authors' political beliefs and ideology are reflected in these particular works. They are a detective novel, a romantic novel, and a play.

When Yann Kerwerc'hez's (Jean Guerchet) novel, *En ur rambreal*, ("Whilst day-dreaming") was published in 1943, it was hailed as the first detective novel written in Breton, and was awarded the literary prize of the Institut Celtique. Kerwerc'hez was an active member of the nationalist party, the Parti National de Bretagne (PNB), which was, until early 1943 at least, pro-German. He was the chair of the economics committee of the party, and he also sat on the main committee of the Institut Celtique, a body which was funded, albeit indirectly, by the Germans (Calvez 1999: 130).

En ur rambreal is set in a fictional idealised Brittany where Breton is the official language and France is a separate state altogether. It is a peaceful and modern Brittany, willing to tolerate eccentric characters like Yun Pulluc'h, an amateur detective, and although cars and aeroplanes exist, the old traditions have not been forgotten. Yun and his friends do occasionally don the traditional local dress, Breton music is to be heard regularly, and *crêpes* and cider are almost

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Rhisiart Hincks, Dr. Sharon Arbuthnot and Dr. Mary-Ann Constantine for their comments and suggestions on this paper.

obligatory fare. As the novel progresses, with Yun searching high and low for clues in his attempt to solve two murders, it would seem that *En ur rambreal* is a typical example of the detective novel *genre*, where the puzzle is finally solved, the criminals are caught, and justice is done. However, the author in this case turns the whole traditional formula on its head when the murderers are let free, and the murdered are deemed to be the guilty ones. It should be explained that the murdered men are English, the murderers Irish. It is revealed that the victims themselves had committed murder and rape several years previously, abusing their positions as officers in the English army to take advantage of a young Irish girl during the 1916 Irish Rebellion. The murders in Brittany, then, are revenge killings, as one of the Irishmen involved was the girl's fiancée. However, it is now several years later, the English officers are old retired men, who, for all we know (although Kerwerc'hez chooses not to tell us) may greatly regret their crime committed while drunk. They are subjected to mental torture as the two Irish avengers hunt them for months, sending death threats and finally hanging them. Would the two murderers not have had a fair trial in this fellow-Celtic independent Brittany? Yun does not bother to find out, and in fact the Chief Inspector himself admits that he also would have helped them escape had he been in Yun's position.

This unconventional outcome reflects the fascination and sympathy that members of the Nationalist movement, the Emsav, had for the Easter Rising of 1916. As the only Celtic country that was free and independent, Ireland was, and is, greatly admired. As Yun says to his captives:

“Breudeur dre ar ouenn omp holl amañ”.

“We are all brothers of the same race here” (Kerwerc'hez 1943: 236).

During the thirties, books such as Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* had been translated and published in Brittany and nationalist leaders such as Olier Mordrel felt that the Irish rebellion was an example to be followed, including bloodshed if need be. *L'Heure bretonne*, the PNB's newspaper, commemorated Easter Monday throughout the war (Denez 1964: 29-33). PNB leaders could therefore claim that they were imitating the Irish nationalists of the First World War, such as Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who appealed for German support, when they also turned to Germany for help during the Second World War. And could not the adage “England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity” apply to France and Brittany also? It is possible to argue that *En ur ramb-*

real's treatment of the Irish murderers, by vindicating their actions, was at the same time justifying the collaborationist policy of Breton nationalists.

En ur rambreal also reflects contemporary attitudes in another way, although this time these attitudes were common to much of the population in Brittany and France as a whole. It is in his portrayal of the only Jewish character in the book that Kerwerc'hez betrays his anti-Semitism. The 1980 reprint published by Al Liamm, silently does away with this unsavoury aspect, and indeed this second edition illustrates how unwarranted the anti-Semitism really was, as the transformation of Zakaria Abraham Rübenkranz, Jewish Englishman, to J. R. Fatcher, Englishman, is in no way detrimental to the plot of the novel. The role of Rübenkranz / Fatcher is to act as a false suspect so that the Chief Inspector is temporarily misled, a common device in detective stories. As the 1980 version makes clear, it is possible to be ugly, unpleasant, and suspected of dealing in stolen goods, without necessarily being Jewish. Even more telling is when the narrative lapses into gratuitous negative descriptions of the main character as is shown by this example:

Edo mab divalav meuriad ar Zabuloniz endeo ouzh taol.

The ugly son of the tribe of Zabulon was already at the table (Kerwerc'hez 1943: 198)

The 1980 version simply reads:

Fatcher a oa endeo ouzh taol.

Fatcher was already at the table (Kerwerc'hez 1980: 196)

In Kerwerc'hez's mitigation, however, anti-Semitic comments of this kind were not unusual in French and English novels of the period. And unlike some authors in France (Céline being the most obvious example), he was probably not seeking to promote anti-Semitism, but merely used it unthinkingly.

The next of the three authors under consideration is Fañch Elies Abeozen. Unlike Kerwerc'hez, he was not so closely involved into Breton nationalist politics; indeed he had broken away from the party in the early 1930s as he felt that he could no longer agree with the political direction the nationalists were taking. This did not prevent him, however, from continuing his friendship with prominent members such as Fañch Debauvais. During the Occupation he was initially

in charge of the radio station, Radio Roazhon-Breizh, which began broadcasting in November 1940. This was a German initiative and was funded by the Propaganda-Staffel. The one hour a week included Breton-language programmes and French items of Breton interest. The length of the broadcasts increased later to an hour daily, and Roparz Hemon was put in charge. Abeozen continued to contribute to the programmes, however, providing various items including the first radio play ever to be written in Breton.

His romantic novel, entitled *Hervelina Geraouell*, published in 1943, was written in 1942. It is set in the Brittany of the nineteen twenties. The novel is a realistic portrayal of the country at that time, and Abeozen illustrates the contrast between social classes, and between town and country, while describing a Brittany that is quickly changing. Briefly, the plot is that two young students fall in love, but because the man is from a wealthy upper class family and the girl is of peasant stock with a sailor for a father, their relationship is doomed to failure.

Rural Western Brittany is described through the eyes of the main character, Hervelina, as she spends her holidays at home. She notices the new modern houses being built for the influx of tourists and that the traditional costume is no longer worn by the young. Modern French songs mingle with traditional Breton ‘gwerzioù’ at threshing time and even the Pardon at Ar Folgoad, which seems to be timeless and unchanged, is marred by travelling musicians up from Paris with their accordions and violins.

In the novel we also have a portrayal of the Breton movement as it was some twenty years previously, when people scoffed at its ideas and the small number of members, and predicted the death of the language within fifty years. Hervelina and Anton visit the office of the nationalist newspaper *Breiz da Viken*, which is obviously a synonym for *Breiz Atao* (the real name of the nationalist paper during the twenties and thirties), and Hervelina wonders to herself:

“Daoust ha dibenn eun amzer ’zo eo a zo o kenderc’hel da veva-bevaik er gambrig-se, er gelaouennig a vez savet enni evit kant lenner bennak, skignet e-touez tri milion a dud, pe derou eun huñvre kaer a zeuio, deiz pa zeiz, da wir? Piou ’oar!”

“Was it a waste of time to continue to keep body and soul together in this tiny room, with a humble newspaper, writing for a hundred or so readers, distributed amongst three million people, or the beginnings of a beautiful dream that would, one day, come true? Who knows!” (Abeozen 1943: 99)

The reader of 1943 knew, or thought he knew, the answer to that question. By 1942 *L'Heure bretonne*, the contemporary nationalist newspaper, had a circulation of about 25,000 and employed fifty members of staff at its offices in Rennes. Abeozen was writing about the past from the viewpoint of the present success of the movement, and with optimism for the future.

He reflects contemporary attitudes also when he makes Havelina criticise modern architecture, for example, and the complaints her uncle makes about the economic policies that favour the middlemen over the peasants are very much in tune with the Vichy administration's glorification of the peasant way of life. While Vichy's National Revolution delighted many regionalists and confirmed their conservative, traditional outlook on life, it is perhaps surprising to find Abeozen, a former communist, so much in tune with these contemporary ideals. After all, during the years preceding the war he was closely involved with the communist movement, and collaborated with the communist journal *War Zao* (Denez 1989: 9-10; 1990: 7). In 1940, with the German invasion, he changed his tune. In an article published in November 1940 in *L'Heure bretonne*, he wrote:

Gwell eo ganin starda dourn nerzus ar re a dremen en ur gana kan o zrec 'h ha sellout eeun en o daoulagad hep an distera kasoni. Rak abegou start am eus da gredi ne viro trec 'hourien ar C'hornog tamm ebet ouzomp da gas da benn hol labour: Sevel Breiz Nevez war dismantrou ar Bed koz.

I would rather clasp vigorously the hand of the passers-by singing their conquest song and stare right into their eyes without the least hatred. Because I have sound reasons for believing that the conquerors of the West will not hinder us in the slightest in the success of our task: to build a New Brittany on the ruins of the old World (Abeozen 1940).

Abeozen, therefore, decided to abandon his communist ideals in the light of new possibilities for Brittany.

On a more personal note, it would seem that *Havelina Geraouell* was written at a time when Abeozen himself was falling in love, for the second time. He dates the end of the book as the feast of Saint John 1942, and by the following year he had left his wife of twenty two years standing, and his four sons, and had gone to live with his eighteen-year-old secretary. She subsequently became his second wife and bore him two sons.

The last author to be discussed is Roparz Hemon. He must be one of the most influential and well-known members of the Breton cultural movement, and he has received rather a bad press lately as his war-time activities have come under recent scrutiny (e.g. *Le Tregor* 18: 500, cf. “A. D.” 2000). He was certainly a prominent figure during this period, the controller of broadcasting, the general secretary of the Institut Celtique, he relaunched his literary journal *Gwalarn*, founded another intellectual journal *Sterenn*, and was responsible for the more general weekly newspaper *Arvor*.

The work selected here is not famous for its literary merit, but is nevertheless significant as it was written in 1944, at a time when the Breton nationalists’ euphoria had evaporated, and even someone as dedicated and single-minded as Hemon was beginning to realise that he had backed the wrong horse. It is the play *Roperzh Emmet*, written for and performed on the radio. The first part was published in 1944 in *Gwalarn*’s last issue, and the second part was not published until 1948 in *Al Liamm*. The play is based on the story of the Irish rebel Robert Emmet, who, at the turn of the nineteenth century, sought the aid of the French as part of his plan to secure Ireland’s freedom. The allegory is obvious, and in Emmet’s final speech in the dock, it is clear that Hemon is using Emmet’s words to explain and justify his own situation. For France read Germany, for Ireland, Brittany:

Lavaret eo bet on bet e gopr ar C’hallaoued ... Lavaret eo bet em eus gwerzhzet frankiz va bro ... Daoust hag an dra-se eo a felle din? Nann, n’ou bet e gopr nikun. N’em eus bet c’hoant ebet nemet derc’hel va lec’h e-touez dieuberion va bro, nann evit gounit arc’hant pe ur garg uhel, hogen netra nemet evit gwelout va bro digabestr....Ma ‘m eus graet unaniezh gant ar C’hallaoued, se n’em eus graet nemet evit mad Iwerzhon, netra ken.

It has been said that I was in the pay of the French ... It has been said that I sold my country’s freedom ... Is that what I wanted? No, I was not in anyone’s pay. I had no other wish than to keep my place amidst the freedom fighters of my country, not in order to gain money or an important position, but only to see my country liberated ... If I made an agreement with the French, it was only made for the good of Ireland, nothing else (Hemon 1944: 281-2).

Like Emmet, Hemon felt that it would be future generations that would sympathise with him, rather than his contemporary fellow country men, as he announces:

Spi am eus, avat, e teuy un amzer ma kavo va c'homzoù un heklev e kalonoù tud all, hag evit an dud-se e komzan.

I hope, however, that a time will come when my words will find an echo in other people's hearts, and it is to these people that I speak (Hemon 1944: 279).

What is perhaps most poignant, however, is the portrayal of the Irishman living in exile in Italy for twenty years, yearning daily for his homeland, comforting himself with books, music and memories. One suspects that Hemon already had an inkling of what his own fate might be.

When the Liberation finally did come, Roparz Hemon escaped to Germany. On his return in 1945 he was imprisoned until 1946. He was sentenced to ten years of national indignity and therefore was deprived of the right to teach, and forbidden to enter Brittany. After a short time in Paris he decided that exile in a Celtic country was preferable and in July 1947 he emigrated to Ireland, where he stayed until his death in 1978. While working for the Institute for Advanced Studies in Dublin, he continued in his untiring work for the Breton language, producing teaching materials, academic studies, and creative works.

Abeozen was also arrested in 1944 and was imprisoned for thirteenth months. When released in 1945 he too was forbidden to resume his teaching career and could not live in Brittany. He went to Paris where he worked as a proofreader. He did return to Brittany eventually, in 1954, to La Baule, where he died in 1963. Throughout his exile and later years he continued to produce literary and academic works in Breton.

And Kerwerc'hez? He seems to have escaped unnoticed by the French authorities. One can imagine that living in Paris may have helped in his anonymity. Whatever the case, he does not seem to have been arrested or punished, and indeed disappears from the picture altogether. It would appear that he severed his links with the Breton movement completely, and almost certainly did not publish any more literary works in Breton. All that the biographer Lukian Raoul (1992: 124) could discover about him after 1944, was that he died in 1974 in Paris.

In conclusion, is it possible to find evidence of 'collaboration' in the literature discussed above? The authors are known to have welcomed the Occupation, and their works do reflect the political climate in which they were written. However, in no way do they promote German Fascist or Nazi ideals. On the contrary, the

two novels are concerned with promoting the ideal of an independent, free Brittany, while the play is an appeal for understanding why it was necessary to ‘collaborate’. In this context it is important to distinguish between collaborators who ‘made an agreement’ with the Germans, and those extremists who sympathised with Nazi beliefs. In his detective novel, Kerwerc’hez is only guilty of a racism that was typical of the period, in the rest of France as well as in Brittany. Abeozen’s pro-German sentiments were written in a non-literary work, and it should be emphasised that this is a very rare example of a “literary nationalist” expressing pro-German views. They do not appear in his literary output, and there is no mention in *Hervelina Geraouell* of seeking outside help in his dream for a better Brittany. As for Hemon, he has been greatly criticised for his cultural activities during the war (e.g. Calvez 1999), and his play *Roperzh Emmet* reflects his concern at the time that soon he would have to face accusations of treason. Yet racism and sympathy with Nazism are notably absent from all of his work. Like the character Emmet he argues that he simply took advantage of contemporary events in an attempt to improve Brittany’s lot, that he was a collaborator in the non-pejorative sense of the word, not a traitor. While every author inevitably reflects his own time and personal beliefs in his work to a greater or lesser extent, one should be careful before claiming that the literature written in Breton during 1940-44 was necessarily collaborationist.

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