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## No 'replicas/ atone': Northern Irish Poetry after the Peace Process

Gail McConnell

She's dead set against the dead hand  
of Belfast's walls guarding jinkered  
cul-de-sacs, siderows, bottled sloganlands,  
and the multinational malls' slicker  
demarcations, their Xanadu of brands  
entwining mind and income. Yet these replicas  
atone for the brouhaha'd blare of the zones  
she walks among, the bricked-in vigil of her home.

(Gillis 2007: 14)

This is the first stanza of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' from Alan Gillis's *Hawks and Doves*, published in 2007, the year a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland was established. If the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement) of 1998 suggested in both its name and form that the peace process heralded a new political dispensation in Northern Ireland, Gillis's poem makes clear that atonement comes only in the form of capital. Replicas multiply as Belfast rebrands itself, integrates into a global economic order, and awaits the peace dividend that will bring a 'Xanadu of brands' to town. While the Irish economy south of the border crashed, Northern

Ireland was busy playing globalization catch-up and trading on its Troubled past. Replication might even be Northern Ireland's *modus operandi* post-Peace Process, the welcoming of this consumerist Xanadu the ideological reply to the question of how Northern Irish social, economic and political life might take shape after the Troubles; a reply visible in the form of Victoria Square Shopping Centre, 1.8 hectares of retail space developed by the Multi Corporation at a cost of £400 million, which opened in 2008. Like the woman in Gillis's poem, we are still stuck in Ciaran Carson's labyrinthine Belfast, only now corporations demarcate terrain previously zoned by sectarian co-ordinates.

By surveying the work of Leontia Flynn, Miriam Gamble, Alan Gillis and Sinéad Morrissey, this essay proposes that replication is a defining feature of Northern Irish poetry in the post-peace process era: firstly, in this poetry's thematic interest in historical repetition and its critique of the neoliberal normalization and market-driven homogenization of Northern Irish culture in the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement. Related to this dissatisfaction with a Northern Ireland so little changed by its ostensible transition from its Troubled history, I demonstrate that recent Northern Irish poetry reflects on its seemingly diminishing authority and its complicity with the very structures and conditions it critiques. I trace the presentation of the lyric poem as a reproduction or forgery and suggest formal strategies of replication that make visible poetry's involvement in the historical conditions and neoliberal market ideology from which it seeks distance. Lastly, I propose ways in which replication features as resistance, and show how recent Northern Irish poetry offers alternatives to the boredom and despair its ideological context might prompt.

Northern Ireland's attempted transition from troubled past to prosperous future is captured in a memorable photograph of then First and Deputy First Minister Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness (dubbed 'The Chuckle Brothers') sitting side by side on a sofa at the opening of Northern Ireland's first Ikea store in December 2007, in front of a sign that reads 'Home is the most important place in the world'. It shows, in Greg McLaughlin and Stephen Baker's words, 'leaders of a once militant republicanism and truculent loyalism, pacified and domesticated, endorsing a determinedly apolitical and nakedly consumerist brand identity' (2010: 91). These leaders of the new power-sharing executive pose in a site dedicated to replication, to the sale of mass-produced self-assembly flat-pack reproductions. We are no more at home with our Billy bookcases and Poäng chairs, compensation for the 'brouhaha'd blare of the zones' outside. But conspicuous consumption functions as distraction from pressing questions of belonging, segregation and injustice. Gillis's Belfast jinks from sloganlands and painted kerbs to multinational malls, but its nimble transition masks historical continuities and, like the writing on the wall in the fifth chapter of the book of Daniel, a disembodied 'dead hand' prophesies impending disaster. The promise of the poem's title goes unfulfilled. The woman 'waits like a leper/ in the darkened corridor of a debt advice/ counsel room' before breaking down and wishing for oblivion. Instead of the golden sky at the end of the storm invoked in the song we are given atomized existence in 'the dawn's zit of orange'. (Gillis 2007: 14)

Mass surveillance has displaced political vision in Rita Duffy's 2006 painting 'Watchtower 2', which appeared in the post-Agreement north on the cusp of devolved government. Duffy's painting is reproduced on the wraparound cover of Paul Muldoon's *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*, and the poem it inspires, 'Rita Duffy: Watchtower II' (Muldoon 2015: 30-31), trades

in shades of greens on both sides of the border, ‘the whole country ... spread under a camouflage tarp/ rolled out by successive British garrisons/ stationed in Crossmaglen’ ‘Scanners’ have supplanted sight and imagination, specifically *Cathleen ni Houlihan*’s vision of Ireland adapted in Tommy Makem’s 1967 song, which prophesies that the Ulster province captured by strangers’ hands will bloom again: ‘Our vision of Four Green Fields shrinks to the olive drab/ the Brits throw over everything.’ Pastoral prosperity consists of the illegal trade of ‘industrial diesel/ dyed with a green dye’. We might be in any post-partition decade, until this double sonnet’s final lines:

By far the biggest hassle  
is trying to get rid of the green sludge  
left over from the process. It infiltrates our clothes. It’s impossible to budge.

Cross-border co-operation as envisaged in the wake of strand two and three of the Belfast Agreement devolves into black market trading: kerosene cheap in the north mixed with diesel cheap in the south produces a commodity, the by-product of which is dirty waste. The last line’s ‘our’ stretches as wide as the tarp in the poem’s first line, while the rhyme repeats the perceptual difficulty of the first sonnet’s ‘misjudge/ smudge’. ‘Oppressors’ shrink from view as nationalist discourses give way to profiteering. After the peace dividend, little has changed – and in Muldoon’s view ‘the process’ leaves us mired in silt and stained. His choice of verbs is instructive. The attempt to ‘absolve [fuel] of the dye’ cannot stop the ‘infiltration’. The peace process has failed in its attempts at absolution, and has fuelled instead further forms of greed and political surveillance. We are left full of bile.

Aaron Kelly's shrewd analysis describes the continuities that follow the replacement of the conflict with the peace process (2009: 2):

Although the names have changed – from the Troubles to the Peace Process – it is the same rubric of historical enclosure that once viewed bombs, killings and roadblocks as immutable which now regards with consonant certainty the unshakeable ineluctability of multinational capital, corporate re-branding and consumerism. In both cases a whole history of class struggle, issues of gender, disenfranchisement or dissent is erased.

To replicate is to reply and repeat, as in a musical response, but also to fold back. Northern Ireland post-1998 has sought to fold its violent past back on itself and thus away; removing its Troubled history from view in the name of neoliberal normalization and a prosperous future. Because reconciliation has been conceived primarily in economic terms, the state has not adequately addressed poverty and class antagonism and has proved unable to seriously engage the question of how to come to terms with the legacies of a violent conflict in which over 3, 700 individuals lost their lives. In the absence of a truth recovery mechanism, specters proliferate. Bearing witness to the dead is one important facet of recent Northern Irish poetry and 'Found', from Gamble's *Pirate Music*, addresses Jean McConville (Gamble 2014: 65). The title fulfilled only through the dream logic of her daughter's imagination and in the poem's mode of address, its lulling repetitions and rhymes ('true'/'you'/'curlew') prove a rhythmic strange comfort: 'Your daughter dreams the soundless blue.' But this final line sits adjacent to the last line of the previous poem, 'The Others' where, in a dream, a lost necklace is found 'tarmacked/ into the

surface, ... trapped in the body of that thick black sea.' (64) Its meditation on violence, objectification and the return of the repressed re-imagines the 'tar-black face' of the unnamed girl in Seamus Heaney's 'Punishment' (Heaney 1975: 31), while 'Found' names the IRA.

Belfast is devoid of human community in the first poem of Morrissey's 2002 volume *Between Here and There*. 'In Belfast' emphasizes the city's 'intens[ity]' and 'tenacity', its river 'sheeted with silt' below an 'iron sky', 'a ballast of copper and gravitas' (Morrissey 2002: 13) that echoes the 'hard cold fire' of Louis MacNeice's 'Belfast' (MacNeice 2007: 25). The difference here is the absence of the northerner or of any living person. The only breathing practices are commercial:

The inhaling shop-fronts exhale the length  
and breadth of Royal Avenue, pause,  
inhale again. The city is making money  
on a weather-mangled Tuesday.

'In Belfast' was the original title of Derek Mahon's 'Spring in Belfast', the revised title underlining the anxiety and difficulty of placing the self in Belfast (Mahon 1968: 6; 1999: 13). Mahon's speaker recognizes his 'own' community, however uncomfortable the identification, but though Morrissey's poem reinscribes the 'unwieldy' features of Mahon's Belfast there is resolutely no 'we' (Mahon 1999: 13). Morrissey's poem renders labor invisible by ascribing agency to shops and the city (though, as I will suggest below, through one architectural detail the poem offers a site of resistance to a market-driven ideology that effaces human communities).

There is something impossible about inhabiting Belfast. The poem begins, ‘Here’, but ‘here’ is a constantly slipping deictic in the poem, ultimately unplaceable, and this is confirmed in the structure of the book as a whole. Concluding with the chiasmic ‘I am/ as much at home here as I will ever be’ the poem turns on the word ‘here’ and renders both the present and the future unhomely.

Uncivil market processes determine the action and ‘the city’ exists as an abstraction – the idea of commerce and material gain – rather than a community of citizens. In the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement, this fantasized city is projected on an even larger scale, a conveniently lucrative distraction from history summarized in the title of the second poem in the volume: ‘Tourism’. ‘We’ are guilty of such projection – perhaps poet and reader as much as politician and planner. Yet this ‘we’ is shown to be precarious since the construction of community services only the market, like ‘a manufactured prophesy [sic] of spring’. With the arrival of European holiday-makers, ‘Our day has come.’ (14) The phrase ironizes both Irish Republicanism’s ‘Tíocfaidh Ár Lá’ (‘Our day will come’) and the post-peace process imperative that Northern Ireland at last participate in the global market. Troubles tours ensue, ‘as though it’s all over and safe behind bus glass/ like a staked African wasp’, and the distraction of new visitors provides superficial, short-lived relief from difficult histories: ‘we straighten our ties, strengthen our lattés,/ polish our teeth’. Soaring sales of Bushmills do nothing to mask ‘the festering gap in the shipyard/ the Titanic made when it sank’. Another instance of ‘Our talent for holes that are bigger/ than the things themselves’ is ‘our weak-kneed parliament’ – suspended and returned to direct rule from Westminster in the same year *Between Here and There* was published, for what would turn out to be a period of five years. ‘Tourism’ registers the willful refusal of narrating the



past in Northern Ireland and a mania for novelty ('bring us new symbols,/ a new national flag, a xylophone'). Tourists may 'confuse the local kings', but the obsession with sectarian politics has obscured more significant problems of class inequality, poverty and unemployment – problems Belfast seems ill-equipped to acknowledge and resolve.

Atomization and the desire for liberation drive Gillis' 'Deliverance' (2004: 52-53). Everyone is 'on something' and trying to 'get off' in the poem's vision of addiction and pleasure-seeking in which though 'You speak of bonds' there is no human community to speak of, only ever profit margins, and a latent violence. Depersonalization results as 'Somebody, somewhere' repeatedly acts, nameless, contextless, 'almost/ making love' or 'making a killing'. Rural and urban environments crackle with the hum of digital connection but always seem poised on the verge of crisis. Making contact amounts to typing code instead of touching skin to skin:

I fingered your number into the digital skirl  
 that threads these streets, full of bodies on the brink  
 of being found. But your number was dead. (Gillis 2004: 28)

'Our life, half virtual, half-flesh', in Flynn's 'Letter to Friends', it is precisely our enthrallment with connectivity and the endless circulation of information that disables meaningful forms of exchange. The poem opens in a flooded traffic tunnel, a pass turned '*impasse*'. One of the most commonly-used metaphors in media reporting on the political deadlock in Northern Ireland, the local *impasse* extends to a global condition of repetition and stasis, which the financial boom and bust cycle never seriously disrupts. Eco-politics has displaced religion in the post-secular era

(‘for ‘carbon footprint’ try replacing ‘sin’), and feminism seems to have nothing left to say in an anemic political culture in which women are at once ‘top consumers’ and ‘radicals’, and the fixation with achieving consensus on women’s behaviour – ‘They pole-dance but they shouldn’t. No, they should.’ – renders their ‘subjecthood ...elusive’ (Flynn 2011: 40; 35; 42).

Because of the consociational model upon which the Peace Process is grounded, consensus has been the governing logic of Northern Irish politics since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Moreover, as Kelly observes, the elimination of disagreement marks ‘the suspension of politics proper’ (2009: 3) and, in its place, assent to the neoliberal market order. To borrow Hannah Arendt’s terms in her analysis of ancient Greece, the post-peace process Northern Irish state has identified its interests with those of the economy, prioritizing the processes of production and consumption rather than the free debate of the public deliberative arena (Arendt 1998: 160). In doing so, it has enabled the exhaustion of the political and, indeed, of society proper, now a denuded terrain, following the hollowed-out governance that has characterized neoliberal reforms under Reagan and Thatcher and their continuation in center-left and center-right administrations. Gamble’s ‘Normalisation’ speaks to these conditions. The poem is imperative tense instruction in the art of grooming (Gamble 2014: 12):

Pick a well-lit corner, and tie your animal there; ...

Take from the kit a metal curry-comb

and begin tackling the most intransigent layers.

Be economical but thorough; do not stint.

In her intent focus on rituals of respectability the speaker is thoroughly alienated from ‘the animal’. In Gamble’s work the presence of horses, dogs and pigeons with their various oddities, vulnerabilities, wants and needs, insistently thwart a determined humanism and make visible the arrogance of an ideology that renders animal life disposable: if dissatisfied, ‘walk up the yard and ask them for another’. These poems reveal the longed-for wholeness of the liberal subject is predicated upon strategies of othering, and the lengths to which individuals go to perpetuate the fantasy of human uniqueness. Normalization is a means of transcending sectarian logic – ‘Repeat, until you know your left foot from your right’ – only to swap a sectarian paradigm for that of bourgeois humanism.

With ‘two knackered-looking horses/ ... grazing on miles and miles of real estate’, Flynn updates a Muldoonian image (2011: 4). If these are Brownlee’s horses the future into which they gaze has changed from post-agricultural Ireland to property boom, and from an unpredictable poetics of restless, jinking meter to a rhythmically-knackered mundane statement of observed consumption. ‘Letter to Friends’ figures post-peace process Belfast in terms of bribery and regurgitation (41):

Belfast, long the blight  
 and blot on lives has now brought to an end  
 or several ends, it’s grim traumatic fight;                   [sic]  
 the pay-off packet and the dividend  
 amid the double-dealings, halts and heists:  
 a building boom and shopping malls thrown up

like flotsam by our new security.

Rhymed with 'dividend', 'end' morphs from terminus to goal: financial gain the end of the conflict and our 'security' less the newly formed Police Service of Northern Ireland or shopping malls' private firms than the invisible hand of the market. The new Belfast has been vomited into existence. But, as I will suggest below, like the grazing horses the poet, too, is a consumer; a 'maraud[er]' whose self-consciously dubious methods perform a wide-ranging raid on literary tradition and forms (2004: 1). If 'Letter to Friends' adapts W. H. Auden's 'Letter to Lord Byron', from which it quotes in its critique of recreational consumption, from another view its 32 ten-line rhymed stanzas merely repeat the ten-line factory forms of Flynn's earlier work in a strange sort of formal regurgitation.

Recent Northern Irish poetry extends the reflection on consumption found in Muldoon's *Quoof* (1983) and Medbh McGuckian's *The Flower Master* (1982), two collections which emerge while a British government inspired by free-market Reaganomics responds to the hunger strikes of Republican prisoners. Indebted to, and departing from, Heaney's 'Strange Fruit', both books feature edible bodies and images of imprisonment, and reflect rather skeptically on the nutritional value of poetry itself in this context, as well as the media and readerly appetite for consumption of images of Northern Ireland. In *Quoof*, Beatrice's 'tiny nipples/ were bruise-bluish, wild raspberries', a removed womb lies 'like the last beetroot in the pickle jar', and the anorexic (poetic) body, slowly consuming itself, creates nutritional excrement, 'a lemon stain' (Muldoon 2001: 137; 121; 127). Someone 'Getting me to break the lychee's skin... underestimates the taste of sacrifice' in *The Flower Master*, the 'watered/ Body... protected/ By

a crown' desires an edible means of escape on a 'wafer yacht', and McGuckian creates a portrait of a woman from edible seeds ('her lips, like raspberry grain'), making 'The Seed-Picture' one of the self-consuming (poetic) bodies in the volume (McGuckian 1982: 16; 31; 23).

Edible bodies return in Gillis's poetry, in which conspicuous consumption in the north is shown to be symptomatic of broader ideological currents. *Hawks and Doves* opens with 'The Mournes', where 'wasp-buzzed children gorge/ through comedy vampire teeth, George/ and Tony masks' and the view from the mountains to the sea brings thoughts of 'cruisers, carriers, frigates gathering for war' (2007: 11; 12). The mouth turns vampiric, threatening violence through consumption as it hides behind a replica representing the neoliberalism and warmongering of George W. Bush and Tony Blair, a politics of greed and excess. Gillis' poetry features many images of engorgement – most often the speaker devouring and ingesting alcohol, caffeine, sugar, nicotine and salt, as well as infotainment and video games. 'Cold Flow' is a sea of edible bodies and landscapes, many of which are branded: 'smoke fudges the lough like a Cadbury's Twirl™' and 'Whipped-cream snow coats the strawberry brick of houses' (Gillis 2004: 13). The last line of each seven-line stanza becomes the first line of the next, creating a suffocating sense of repetition that cloyes the already sickly-sweet imagery. The poem opens, 'Presley is singing *In the Ghetto*.' The song is a plea for collective responsibility, admonishing those who turn away from the child born into poverty who, unaided, becomes an angry, violent thief. But its plea goes unheard in Belfast, where bodies eat each other. To the man who sees everything as available for his appetite a woman's red lips 'never tasted better', and the subsequent denial of this act of consumption only serves to confirm it with telltale detail: 'It was the cigarette that tasted good. Not her strawberry lips.' In 'Love Bites', lovers' bodies are locked into grotesque and cartoonish

semi-violence in the vein of ‘The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants’, the two ‘gelled together in a thick-set marmalade’ as the lines are locked in mawkish rhyme (‘oesophagus’/ ‘snuggleupphagus’) (2004: 22).

Sonic regurgitations characterize Gillis’ often dizzying syntax. Stuffed with onomatopoeia, alliteration and sprung rhythm, at times his lines almost seem to suffer from indigestion: ‘The glimmer-shimmer-shine of dew droppity dew drops,/ dropping off the juicy leaves, left you drinking from/ her breast-like nectarines’ (2004: 35). This is language as a symptom of its culture’s voracious appetite, where the risk that ‘you will drown/ in the glut-stream of yourself, or nothing’ (2007: 20) is always close. Elsewhere, language is over-caffeinated and cocky. ‘The Lad’ features five ten-line stanzas of slang synonyms for the penis, but the excess of expression shows the speaker even less ‘secure in [his] manhood’ (2007: 41). Gillis’s analysis of the ‘hallucinogenic impressionism’ of MacNeice’s ‘Birmingham’ works to describe the saturated syntax of his own lyrics: ‘The poem’s glitz is all surface, its deeper content is monotony.’ (Gillis 2005: 46) The verbal gymnastics performed in Gillis’s poems frequently represent a culture hungry and hyped-up in the consumption of spectacle, but bored and disempowered.

Though most things are edible, almost nothing is nutritious. In ‘Litter’ (2004: 29), ‘I let the crisp bag/ fall and licked my salty greased fingers,/ then adjusted my balls and watched’. Gillis spotlights his greased palm, placated into passivity by the consumption of convenience food and television; a passive self, ‘coiled against’ a backdrop of rapidly amassing detritus and environmental ruin, whose denials – ‘I never heard’, ‘I never saw’ – solidify complicity with impending ecological disaster. Yet in the poem’s final image the speaker hears ‘the salt-rasped

scouring of an outrageous sea' – perhaps to be rinsed new. His salty fingers bear traces of consumption and waste-production, and evidence of ecological interdependence. Gillis stretches the consequences of the speaker's consumption far beyond the merely human, but also sees in the interaction of plant, animal and mineral life the possibility of renewal. The verb reappears 'On Cloughey Beach', where 'you feel the heave and thrash/ of black-green breakers, bull-headed hellbenders' and 'crosswinds birl and breach to scour/ and scrub clean the hollow and heft of yourself' (2010: 51). Here, under the spell of Gerard Manley Hopkins via Heaney, the compounds, alliteration, assonance and sprung rhythm elsewhere overwhelming or regurgitative indeed revive us. The poem's glitz is not monotony, but variety.

But variety has proven difficult to bear in Northern Ireland. By neutralizing cultural difference in the name of consensus, the post-Peace Process state absolves itself and its citizens of responsibility to the other, particularly the others overlooked as a consequence of the intense focus on Catholic/Protestant difference. One of Gamble's speakers justifies using Union Jack mugs because of their shape and size, perhaps one of the 'Mugs' duped by the belief that such political symbolism can no longer cause offence in Northern Ireland. But the attempt to assimilate into the home a gift that causes discomfort is an uneasy one, the mugs kept 'in the darkest bowels of the cabinet' as though ready to be evacuated (2014: 52). Gamble probes the politics of assimilation in three poems at the center of *Pirate Music*, each concerning a dead whale. 'It' (37) reflects on the fate of the whale stranded in the Thames who

enters the bosom of a populace agog

with good intentions – *we want to make it*  
*one of our own* –

and dies of racket.

Turned celebrity, the whale ‘quite literally dies of sound’, killed by proximity to the human mass and the noisy media frenzy of this spectator sport. Objectification and the eradication of difference in the name of assimilation causes its death.

But as the titles of these poems suggest, Gamble is at pains to point out poetry’s powers of objectification and abridgment. ‘Précis’ confronts us with the awful sight and stench of the mammal’s corpse as ‘its massive carcass moulds’ (34). It is ‘a momentary attraction’, first beached, then displayed ‘when skeletons// are à la mode’ and finally dumped, ‘apparatus, animal shit’. The title shows the poem guilty of a similar exploitation and troubled by the poetic display that makes a spectacle of the mammal. ‘Pirate Music’ warns against anthropocentrism and representational violence even as it catches itself in the act. Its conclusion, ‘this is not/ a parable’ (36), takes the amoral desire for ‘A moral for our times’ explored in Muldoon’s ‘The Frog’ (2001: 120) and plunges it underwater and then up into the (unofficial) airwaves in a book that thoughtfully examines ownership, authority and authenticity. Though the title poem insists it is not an allegory, it replicates the call of the whale ‘believed to be/ the only one/ of its kind’ but ‘porous and piratical’ (Gamble 2014: 35). The lyric poem thought original is shown in a similar light. In ‘Vigilante’, ‘we hope this basic reconstruction/ may breathe, poriferum [sic]’, an image



of the sponge-like poem which shares the whale's porousness as well as its piracy, the speaker spotlighting the forgery of its production: 'this is just an artist's impression/ of an artist' (41).

Here the act of writing poetry appears as mere replication, a theme Morrissey explores through attention to Europe's ill body. Fast forwarding ten years from 'Tourism', with its wish for incorporation in 'the European superstate' (Morrissey 2002: 14), we're in full blown Euro-crisis in 'Don Juan, 2012' (Morrissey 2013: 24-29):

The five most gangrenous toes on Europe's foot –  
Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece –  
are losing blood and blackening from necrosis.

A long poem of 6 cantos, each composed of 12 stanzas in ottava rima, the poem takes as its epigraph a line from Byron's twelfth canto: 'And money, that most pure imagination...'  
Surveying the seemingly apocalyptic present of environmental catastrophe and financial collapse, the poem ironizes the desire for quick-fix redemption at the price of more radical structural change. Though it ranges from cynicism to humor and from narrative to commentary through the rapidity of its stanzas, and takes comic and mock-epic twists and turns with an inventive series of couplets, the first line hints that the poem operates in tragic mode: 'We need a hero. The time is out of joint'. Instead of Don Juan, we are given Donald Johnson, attaché to the European Parliament, seduced and shuffling papers while Syntagma Square burns. On one level Johnson is the poet's double, 'a witness, someone with the skill// of staying low, anonymous and watchful,/ to gather notes .../ on how the current measures have proved harmful/... to 'ordinary

people''. Johnson's complicity in a financial and ideological context, one in which debt is 'bargainable stock' and 'ballooning asset,' is thrown into relief by his role as a skillful commentator on the crisis. Morrissey shows the impossibility of (poetic) detachment and neutrality, foregrounding instead her (and our) willingness to be seduced by the pleasures of consumption and fantasies of salvation. Lives, figurative and literal, are at stake:

Surgeons stand ready, scrubbed and dressed in green.

Austerity! Austerity! – the answer

backed by Merkel, Europe's undisputed Sovereign –

has gripped us all ('we're all in this together')

but is gripping some like a slip-knot at a hanging.

Austerity the 'Fury' with 'abhorred shears'

who 'slits the thin-spun life' – the dreadful price –

the cutting off the nose to save the face...

British Finance Minister George Osborne's big society rhetoric (used to justify savage attacks on public sector wages and rise the state pension age) is played off Milton's vision of death, and the work later invokes the doubled suicide rate in Greece as men and women jump Aegeus-like into the sea (an important difference with Byron's death in Greece).

'Don Juan, 2012' also inherits Byron's meditation on sovereignty, authorship and value. Canto 12 of Byron's poem declares 'O Gold! I still prefer thee unto paper,/ Which makes bank credit like a bank of vapour.' As Alexander Dick argues, the gold standard was introduced in Britain in

1816 in the belief that it would stabilize the financial system by operating as a universal principle, but Byron shows that though his speaker prefers gold to paper, in a capitalist economy, ‘gold is not permanent enough to escape the tide of ever-shifting values’ (Dick 2013: 2; 143). Exploitation and poverty continue in a world where everything is exchangeable. Byron’s rhyme underlines the fragility of paper credit, and ‘paper’ and ‘vapour’ are repeatedly locked into end rhyme in his poem. This might suggest that the cultural authority and value of poetry – another form of paper production – is imperceptible or insubstantial. Certainly poetry is enmeshed in the capitalist economy. The poem, in the twelfth canto, is ‘my speculation’; it seems a conjectural meditation and an act of high risk profiteering (Byron 2008: 748).

Morrissey’s oxymoronic epigraph foregrounds imaginary and financial capital, and raises the specter of poetic forgery as an inescapable condition. Dick suggests that Byron undermines the idea of a gold standard of authentic value by employing imitation and adaption, modalities that reveal themselves as forgeries (Dick 2013: 142). In imitating and adapting Byron’s poem, Morrissey similarly undermines the pretensions of political economy and poetry. Morrissey imagines an economist who ‘proposes simply *giving* Greeks more cash, // to spend just as they like, side-stepping banks’, ‘a means for Greece to thrive without arrears// ...But this is fancy.’ What she imagines is ‘radical’, but corporations, too, thrive through flights of fancy – ‘They made wealth up’. Thus, the poetic imagination must disrupt speculative capitalist logic and its violent effects precisely by revealing itself as involved in that logic. Advancing Byron’s binding together of poetic image-making and the printing of banknotes, ‘Don Juan, 2012’ sees poetic production complicit with more sinister mediums of exchange, those ‘fresh, *creative* way[s] to run accounting/ (and why not?) whereby losses make a plus’. Morrissey is employed to teach

‘Creative Writing’ in the academy; her italicization of ‘creative’ works as tacit self-critique in recognition of a context in which ‘creativity’ is inevitably allied to commerce, and the neoliberal university is rapidly cashing in.<sup>1</sup>

In this ‘the brave new world of know-biz’ and brand management, complete with ‘tone of voice’ marketing-correctness drills for staff (Newey 2015), the UK university system – in which all of the poets referenced here are employed – has become a market-driven institution. It is a world of acronyms and business-speak, ‘content providers’, ‘targets’, ‘benchmarks’, league tables, ‘vision statements’, time allocation schedule records, zero-hour contracts and the dreaded MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), which threatens to do away with the classroom altogether and turn the university into a purely virtual space that provides content rather than education. The Research Excellence Framework – ‘the greatest single threat to higher education in the UK’ in Muldoon’s view (quoted in Elmes 2014) – has helped produce a paranoid culture of grant capture lust, impact statements, managerialism and administrative overload. Poetry is now thoroughly enmeshed in neoliberal mechanisms as slim volumes become ‘outputs’ and poets within the academy are under ever-mounting pressure to account for poetry’s utility and value in an age of impact measuring. Perhaps because of this context, the work of all of the poets discussed here is troubled by poetry’s seemingly deflated cultural authority in the digital age and explicitly reflects on this medium of exchange whose value is in doubt.

Having ‘got its marks back from the public: fail/ and fail again’, poetry has been judged thoroughly irrelevant in Flynn’s ‘Letter to Friends’ (2011: 40):

The problem is we're not sure what it's *for* . . .

It's out of step with our capacities

for being literal – and *lucrative*.

The antithesis of a status update, poetry frustrates the demand for statements of support or opposition, parodied here: '*Leontia is loving all this information*'. But poetry's refusal to contribute to the 'transatlantic – *transworld* – conversation' jams the machine hell-bent on connectivity. The online 'conversation' from which poetry seeks distance is in fact a series of high-speed individual interactions with software technology. Rhyming 'for' with 'obscure', Flynn aligns poetry's purpose with what is not immediately known and difficult to define, while 'capacities' spools back to poetry's 'willed opacities'. Both words have etymological roots in the 'dark', suggesting that poetry is in essence an engagement with what remains hidden from view, the concealments of the private self subtly uncovered in sound pattern and formal design. This raises the issue of audience, since poetry seems not be 'for' everyone, but only those receptive to its strategies of revelation.

Worried about poetry's perceived loss of cultural authority in 'a culture of speeded-up ephemerality' in which 'a hectic, depthless relativism' pervades, where the neoliberal university and 'the 'vibrant', 'dynamic' festivals, the ravenous marketplace' of Po-Biz tries to sell poetry to literal-minded customers, Flynn praises Heaney's 'radical' defense of 'the freedom and the lovely uselessness of poetry' and his belief in poetic authority, autonomy and redress (2014b: 212; 215; 217). What Heaney reminds us, she writes, is that 'poetry is written in an "amateur" capacity, for love, with all the crazy, impractical, self-sacrificing standards that this implies'

(217). Gillis, too, sees in Heaney's example a prescient warning against the neoliberal logic of consumption, reification and atomization: 'He has asserted the validity of individual sensation and immediate experience in an age of disembodied corporate utilitarian anonymity – from Althusser to Amazon and Apple.' (2014: 145) It is precisely by insisting that no 'replicas / atone' – that brand consumption, high-speed digital connectivity and even well-made lyrics cannot stave off the difficulties encountered by the private self coming to terms with a history of loss – that post-peace process Northern Irish poetry strives to hold on to Heaney's example and to the possibility of a poetics in which the idea of love and community remain vital.

Yet Flynn, Gamble, Gillis and Morrissey face very different challenges to those confronted by Heaney. Knowingly, their work expresses an impossible desire for authenticity in a context in which the idea is highly questionable. In part, this follows from the ludic tilt of the postmodern Northern Irish poetry of Muldoon, Carson and McGuckian most immediately inherited; in part, it is context-specific, an after-effect of the end of the Troubles. In Flynn's 'Belfast', 'The sky is a washed-out theatre backcloth/ behind new façades' (Flynn 2008: 2). Gentrification underway, as Belfast seeks to 'bury its past' and 'paper over the cracks/ with car parks and luxury flats' (8), the city is always already staged, always being rewritten: 'Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction.' (2) In this context, novelty is aligned to a postmodern capitalist ideology and not to be trusted. Since Belfast 'will make itself new' (8), poetry must do otherwise, revealing itself in the act of quotation and highlighting the second-handedness of its critique: 'are these *harsh attempts at buyable beauty?*' (2) We are stuck not only in Carson's Belfast but in MacNeice's, and theatrically so – reciting existing poetic scripts.

I want to suggest that this is where replication comes in in recent Northern Irish poetry – from syntactical repetition and rhyme scheme, to stanzaic structures that look like mass-produced ready-mades. Just as Northern Irish politics thrives on replication, replacing one paradigm of historical inevitability with another, recent Northern Irish poetry consciously incorporates repetition and duplication into its formal structures. This is at once to illuminate and critique monotonous political rhetoric and to mark the failure of stanzaic ‘replicas / [to] atone’ for the repetition of structural injustice. While Morrissey rewrites Byron’s ‘paper/vapour’ anxieties for the Euro-crisis, the work of Gillis and Flynn in particular incorporates repetition, banality and homogeneity into poetic textures, emphasising poetry’s entanglement in the global market and its complicity with the structures governing Northern Irish life after the peace process.

Gillis’s poetry makes audible the voices of those left impoverished – materially and psychologically – by a political culture that refuses to address class inequality and sectarian division. But if this implies a responsible poetic version of social realism to redress the inequalities produced by Northern Ireland’s love affair with capitalist ideology, Gillis recognizes poetry’s entanglement in the very ideologies it seeks to critique. In ‘Bob the Builder is a Dickhead’, Gillis shows us (2007: 35):

Belfast where, although the war is over,

the Party of Bollocks and the Party of Balls  
are locked in battle for the City Hall.

Even if you roam, you'll find it difficult  
 to avoid starvation and its twin, the cult  
  
 of profit backed by death planes firing vanity,  
 variable rates, trigger-fingered inanity.

The aggressive masculinity discernible in the speaker's voice is a feature of Gillis's work, shown here to be endemic in Northern Irish politics – a style of posturing to mask powerlessness from which the poet is not exempt. Composed of thirty couplets, the poem is governed by patterns of inevitability and repetition. So while the work exposes the vacuousness of market-driven ideology and critiques the banal sameness of local party politics, it does so using a twinned logic of paired rhymes that renders its complaints equally vapid, trapped in the same conditions of historical enclosure as those 'locked in battle for the City Hall'.

In his analysis of post-Agreement Northern Ireland Cillian McGrattan identifies 'the Janus-faced imperative for looking to the past with one eye on the future' (1), a logic critiqued in Gillis's 'Progress' (2004: 55):

They say that for years Belfast was backwards  
 and it's great now to see some progress.  
  
 So I guess we can look forward to taking boxes  
 from the earth.



Gillis razes the teleological logic of the progress ideology the post-Agreement city has seized as redemption narrative. Progress consists of ‘taking’ in this darkly ironic vision of Belfast on the make from history – first, coffins from the ground, as though trauma can be undone, and then ‘a reassembled head/ ... admires[s] the shy young man/ taking his bomb from the building and driving home.’ This surreal conclusion calls to mind the final image of Keith Douglas’s ‘Cairo Jag’: ‘a man with no head/ has a packet of chocolate and a souvenir of Tripoli’ (Douglas 1998: 102). Douglas’s journalistic detailing of the stench and sounds of Cairo in wartime is troubled by the possibility that the poem is mere souvenir, incongruous in the hands of the dead. For Gillis, writing during a peace process in the aftermath of violent conflict, the poetic frame is always already ‘reassembled’, just as the re-writing of history to facilitate plans for a prosperous future is already underway. Mahon’s ‘Rage for Order’ contrasts Philip Larkin’s high window with Belfast’s ‘scattered glass’ (Mahon 1999: 47), and Gillis continues Mahon’s meditation on violence and artistic responsibility by imagining ‘one hundred thousand particles of glass’ making ‘impossible patterns in the air/ before coalescing into the clarity/ of a window’ (Gillis 2004: 55). This is an admission of complicity with the very narratives of progress that underpin Northern Ireland’s economy-focused recovery, but it also marks the difficulty of retrieving memories of a violent and still recent past that has not yet been made into history. By ‘taking’ what it wants from the past, poetry reassembles and places in its frame experiences that lie beyond the bounds of what can be imagined – violence at one surreal in its effects and quotidian in its occurrences. An anxiety about the process of broken glass ‘coalescing’ into the poetic window haunts the achievement and its clarity, and something ‘impossible’ lingers in this history of physical, psychological and poetic reconstruction. This is at once to call into question the forms of truth recovery that would speed away from the scene of the crime and the site of grief

by fast forwarding into the future, and to recognize the belated condition of post-Peace Process poetry. In Walter Benjamin's description of the Angel of History with his face to the debris of past, it is the storm of progress that blows the angel backwards into the future (Benjamin 1999: 249). Gillis's poem exposes the political amnesia demanded for the maintenance of the liberal democratic order, and its highly suspect uses of the past. The poem's critique of the onward march of progress is a reminder of our debt to the dead, even as we set about reassembly.

More broadly, however, it is rhyme in Gillis's work and in contemporary Northern Irish poetry that enacts the Janus-faced conditions of post-peace process Northern Ireland. Sometimes critiqued for its well-wrought lyric intensity, Northern Irish poetry's rhyming tendencies have greater affinities with Nietzschean recurrence than ornate New Critical urns. As Gillis writes in a review of Muldoon (2003: 156):

What rhyme creates ... is the simultaneous phenomenon of change and recurrence, or identity and difference.... [A]s the linear drive of the poems propels them forwards, the unabating repetition of sounds, words, and phrases creates an overwhelming sense of things turning around in perpetual recurrence. Things keep changing, yet strangely keep the same form, in constant loops of *déjà vu*.

In 'To Belfast', six rhymes repeat sestina-like across four stanzas ('rain', 'grace', 'hand', 'stem', 'trace', 'head') in a troubadour's song of courtly love in uncourtly local idiom: 'May your bulletproof knickers drop like rain' (2004: 16). The longed-for 'higher state of grace' gives way to an image of Belfast as 'a Hollywood film' starring Grace Kelly; divine favor vanishes for the

performative surface glimmer of celebrity and the silver screen. Belfast exists as a city always already ‘traced’ – through surveillance technology, media reportage, a child’s awkward drawing and big budget feature film production. This is Belfast after Carson’s maps of the city as text, and McGuckian’s recognition of globalization’s flattening effects: ‘Ireland/ So like Italy Italians came to film it’ (McGuckian 1982: 31); a globalized double, whose trace the speaker fingers ‘in that other city’s face’ (Gillis 2004: 16). The rhyme scheme’s loops of *déjà vu*, like the endless rain, are played against the variety initiated by the bastardized sestina form – end rhymes morph into noun and verb, the rain into rainbow and raindrop, and the lopped form and missing envoi goes some way towards thwarting the ‘perpetual recurrence’ Gillis recognizes in Irish history.

Imitating the liberal democracy of globalization, the north’s embrace of its narrative of pluralism is precisely what enables the repression of class and material inequality. As Kelly argues (2009: 11):

class antagonism is rewritten as cultural diversity, a revalued sign of society’s healthy polyphony, so that, divested of its own terms and context, the language of class becomes simply one register amongst others of a cultural relativism that rewords a global bourgeois hegemony and material disadvantage as social pluralism. The dominant narratives of a new Northern dispensation of cosmopolitanism intentionally override the appraisal of material disenfranchisement.

Flynn is particularly alert to the problematic politics of the postmodern ideology – and poetry – she has inherited and ‘Belfast’ casts a critical gaze on pluralism’s seemingly redemptive

possibilities. When a football match at Windsor Park takes place in Gay Pride week, the football chant ‘‘We are the Billy Boys’/ gets mixed up, four doors down, with ‘Crazy’ by Patsy Cline’ (2008: 2). Sectarian hatred becomes part of the medley as discourses proliferate in postmodern bricolage and

men are talking of Walter Benjamin, and about ‘Grand Narratives’  
which they always seek to ‘fracture’ and ‘interrogate’.

Far from opening an escape route from the legacies of the past, Northern Irish culture’s turn to postmodernism, with its fracturing of metanarratives, merely repeats the masculine violence and intimidation of Belfast’s recent history.

As Gamble’s poem ‘Bodies’ shows, we are still in Heaney’s ‘land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,/ Of open minds as open as a trap,// Where tongues lie coiled’ (Heaney 1975: 54).

Gamble’s poem casts its eye on governmentality and surveillance, and our responsiveness to invisible forms of captivity and control (Gamble 2014: 60):

A horse must learn to carry its own weight  
through the use of its quarters,  
to take a contact on the mouth  
that’s light but present, like the watchful eye of the law  
when one is a fundamentally law-abiding citizen.

Turning to the reader, the poem replays this Althusserian interpolation and its unnerving repetitions are only made more eerie by the colloquial ‘oh brother’ that interrupts the twice-echoed ‘watchful eye of the law’. The rhetoric of brotherhood and community cannot thwart the processes of state and global surveillance at work, and though ‘oh brother’ intimates the protest song of blues or negro spirituals as a site of resistance to depersonalizing forms of governance, it also signals an Orwellian condition that makes such resistance necessary. Our animal experience in the digital age is one of ‘contact’ rather than touch, of messages communicated by hegemonic soft power. The watchful disembodied eye wields power without authority, roaming more widely than the panopticon gaze with all the tracings technologies of global capitalism at its disposal. Since the law is watchful ‘when one is a fundamentally law-abiding citizen’, the poem’s instruction to govern oneself in response to surveillance and soft power cannot be trusted fully. Repetition underscores the cost of citizenship and the freedoms sacrificed in trusting the law’s authority.

As in ‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’, at stake here is the price of speech and poetic responsibility. The ‘mind-hand’s realisation/... that you cannot merely sing along to the good bits’ (Gamble 2014: 60) rewrites Heaney’s self-censure as a poet ‘Expertly civil-tongued’ in a poem that ends with the repetition and stasis of *déjà vu*: ‘We hug our little destiny again’ (Heaney 1975: 51; 54). Gamble’s meditation on self-silencing bodies, animal and textual, extends Heaney’s reflection on the violent passivity of platitudinous speech. Its strategies of replication struggle to circumvent the ever-watchful global eye through mimicry, just as Heaney’s poem ventriloquizes media hype and ‘civil’ conversation to disrupt the either/or sectarian logic of the Northern Irish ‘situation’. Refusing to say nothing, poetry seeks to assert an

alternative authority to that of the law – perhaps ‘piratical’, engaged in forgery and repetition, but knowingly and deliberately so, in the struggle to resist more violent structures of authority.

Flynn’s speakers and poems mooch ‘primed for compromise’ (2011: 45). The title poem of her first collection, *These Days*, registers the boredom and ennui felt by a well-educated generation that has dead-ended into an already ironized po-mo condition (2004: 54):

These are the days  
of correcting the grammar on library-desk graffiti,  
the cheap, unmistakable thrill of breaking a copyright law.

The final poem in the book, its placement renders the scene and its self-consciously failed *cri de coeur* doubly belated. Noticeable here is the absence of an audience, or an interaction between writer, text and reader. The speaker writes back to the semi-public scrawl, a writer making a text without an audience. The texts made are not new: one adds another layer to what has already been inscribed; the other is an illegal photocopy. While it learns from T.S. Eliot for long enough to show that in renewing tradition (or the graffiti that now passes for it) the individual talent transforms the past with reference to her own historical formation (the correction facilitated by a postgraduate education and some desire to rectify), the audience for such an intervention seems not to exist. The thrill of breaking a copyright law is shortlived in the absence of either an audience or even an intervening agent to punish this transgression. What first appears an anally-retentive form of ennui fully aware of its sense of linguistic superiority (‘These days I haven’t time for people on television or aeroplanes/ who say ‘momentarily’ meaning ‘in just one

moment') might otherwise be read as a desire for poetic repair in a context in which it seems impossible – a tension signaled in the rhyme of 'symbol of redress' and 'The future's all a guess' in the final stanza of 'Letter to Friends' (Flynn 2011: 45).

The poems of *These Days* look like mass-produced ready-mades in their stanzaic shape. As Gamble observes, three fifths of the poems in the volume have been poured through the factory mold of a ten-line framework (2012: 678). This is a formal recognition of complicity with the postmodern condition – its dissolution of metanarratives and ironic *modus operandi* – and, indeed, with the cultural homogeneity of post-Peace process Northern Ireland. They follow Carson's nine-line forms that read like squares of a map but promise no greater coherence. The book opens (Flynn 2004: 1),

Five years out of school and preachy  
with booklearning, it is good to be discovered  
as a marauding child.

This is a portrait of the artist in the act of plundering and the poems that follow rehash song lyrics, perl computer code, brand-name anxiety medication and canonical poems into squares with a syntactical flexibility, looseness and immediacy of address indebted to Frank O'Hara and John Berryman. Flynn's poetry foregrounds childishness, banality, ineptitude and anticlimax in invigoratingly poised lyric forms. There is always a sense of the 'I' marooned between cover versions of the self, the speaker putting herself into italics and quotation marks and dipping, in *Drives*, into other lives – 'Samuel Beckett', 'Elizabeth Bishop', 'Virginia Woolf', 'Marcel

Proust'. These are sonnets and ten-line squares that call attention to historical continuity, repetition and compulsion, borrowing lines from Dorothy Parker and others in poems that reflect on illness – asthma, eczema, depression, anal cysts – to ask what is survivable. Since 'poetry is part of this bullshit' and 'racket', as 'Personality' brilliantly shows, (2008: 10), these poems display themselves as knock-offs and Wikipedia-like artist profiles. Tourism is existential condition rather than leisure pursuit, the speaker sojourning in other lives and places real and imagined. In 'Rome' (2008: 17) the flattening effects of globalization and the Facebook age of self-conscious self-regard ensure 'I can not find Rome. There is too much *Rome* in Rome.' Against Robert Lowell's 'The Ruins of Time' – 'in Rome itself, there is no room for Rome' (Lowell 418) – it has nothing new to say. This is, perhaps, the point. But the speaker's ennui here risks becoming the reader's own.

'Naming It' admits to the Eeyore-like sensibility at work (Flynn 2004: 1):

To think the gloomiest most baffled  
 misadventures might lead so suddenly  
 to a clearing –

For all Flynn's world-weariness, for all her powers of wry critique, her poems continually stumble upon clearings. Behind the knowingly begrudging apprehension of beauty is a poet on the hunt for joy, however ragged its form, as with the description of a friend's vision of billowing Styrofoam balls as a 'basic wage, take-what you-get epiphany'. Seemingly in spite of themselves, the poems offer us the sudden, strange beauty of the commonplace – the 'sky



perversely, brilliant blue’ (2011: 45), or ‘blue as a bunsen-burner flame’ (2011: 59), or ‘the sight of our small brick/ garden, thick with dandelion clocks’ (2004: 29) that stops the speaker in her tracks. These moments of brightening flirt with the hyperbolic to diminish the speaker’s obstinacy rather than the possibility of beauty (2011: 45):

Look, each soot-encrusted brick  
shines in a gold light, pouring from above,  
*celestially* – so that my spirits lift  
against my will.

The sardonic ‘paradise’, ‘sun-comprehending glass’, ‘deep blue air’ and ‘nowhere’ of Larkin’s ‘High Windows’ lie behind these shifts in perspective (Larkin 1988: 165). In ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ (Flynn 2004: 46):

walking through town – the way a dame walks in with a gun  
and a flagging crime plot revives – suddenly, from-nowhere, the sun  
had thrown her weight behind the afternoon’s open spaces.

Despite the light and space signalled here the pluperfect tense puts the sun’s action securely into the past and its heft is somewhat ominous. Flynn echoes Larkin’s endless ‘Nothing’ arrestingly in ‘Two Ways of Looking at An Ultrasound Scan’, as its first view of the scan skitters from the miraculous (‘The Turin Shroud?’) to the comic (‘The Ghost Of All Our Christmasses to Come/ appears/ live! *Via* satellite!’) and finally settles, with the dust, on ‘*nothing./ Nothing at all.*’

(2011: 21) Though Larkin's influence is keenly felt in the dingy buildings, grimy interiors, grim perspectives, and bleak prospects of Flynn's poetry, with this repeated '*nothing*' the poem's dual vision of birth and death takes us closer to Beckett, while its 'we' learns from Plath by offering the reader a more startlingly immediate and confessional contact with '*nothing*'. I say confessional rather than autobiographical because Flynn shows us the self in inverted commas; the 'I' revealed while acting a part. In her elegy for Heaney, Flynn anticipates misreadings of her work that fail to distinguish poet and speakers by staging herself as 'a messed-up woman poet with daddy issues' (Flynn 2014a: 65) As the slang intimates, the woman in 'It's a Wonderful Life' is merely part of the male-constructed 'plot' – both a type and a narrative device. In making herself this 'dame', the speaker shows herself in the act of performance, elsewhere 'shuffling my script' (2004: 45) in a volume that delights in theatricality and role-play. 'The Myth of Tea Boy' muses on the construction of fantasy and, as the radio plays cover versions, 'we'll act like we're in diners/ from everyone's favourite Hopper poster, Nighthawks' (2004: 37). Everything is a copy of a copy.

By foregrounding staginess and flaunting their status as forgeries, Flynn's poems do not so much lack or refuse sincerity than constitute a subtle and vital investigation of what freedom is available and what it might be used for. In a patriarchal plot, female sincerity isn't going to cut it. Flynn admires the 'over-the-top fictions or slightly camp dramas' of McGuckian's early work because of their radical challenge to existing cultural scripts, patriarchal and poststructuralist (2014c: 30). Subtitled 'A Gothic', the first part of Flynn's *Profit and Loss* features poems of murder, bereavement, madness, exorcism, hauntings and doppelgängers, its occasionally camp humor intensifying their eerie and apocalyptic inquiry from the appearance of Yeats's rough

beast in the opening poem onwards. By playing with gothic tropes of doubling and female labor, Flynn's poetry shows that the lines between private and public, natural and artificial, self and other, are always more blurred than they might seem. Repeating the plots, her poetry plays with mimicry as resistance. This is replication with a feminist edge, playful and political.

Flynn's poetry makes visible the pressures on the 'I' that seeks existence in lyric form by exploring the ways the self is shaped by biology, chemistry, religion, history, and ideology. In 'The Superser' the speaker 'deliberately' behaves 'just like Catholics did in books' (2011: 26), while 'Inside the Catedral Nueva', where 'the saints are stood around/ ... posed in their tortures and their ecstasies', the droll commentary foregrounds form: 'The suffering here takes place in High Baroque' (2011:10). In Flynn's work, replication is a strategy revealing that subjectivity is always already constructed and, relatedly, that authenticity in poetry is achieved through formal design. In this Flynn learns from MacNeice – poetic terrain in which, as Mahon noted, 'the surface *was* the core' (Mahon 1996: 22) – as much as from a more recent generation of Irish poets; in 'August', 'the mind, by nature stagey, welds its frame', since the poet, setting scenes in poetic structures, 'cannot catch hold of things' or comprehend time's 'living curve'. (MacNeice 2007: 27) Though everything seems a reproduction or re-enactment, what stops Flynn's meditation on second-handedness becoming tiresome is the poetry's invitation to the reader to recognize and even delight in its use of convention, posture and facade. As we recognize our desire and attempts to stage ourselves, the poems establish the possibility of community between writer, text and reader.

Though the breakdown of community is a common thread in much post-peace process poetry,

Flynn, Gamble, Gillis and Morrissey each offer images of common life that resist the atomization of a market-driven culture. In Morrissey's 'In Belfast', the poem's ostensible pessimism about the possibility of human community is countered by what appears to be insignificant architectural detail (Morrissey 2002: 13):

While the house for the Transport Workers' Union  
 fights the weight of the sky and manages  
 to stay up, under the Albert Bridge the river  
 is simmering at low tide and sheeted with silt.

The hub of Northern Ireland's trade union movement, Transport House (built in 1959) features a five-storey high tiled mural depicting a plane, cranes, a ship, and a factory in a style reminiscent of the heroic iconography of the Soviet Constructivists. Beneath these symbols of Northern Ireland's industry is a phalanx of workers, a uniformed and united proletariat. Situated in close proximity, the monarchical Albert Clock leans away from Transport House in its own fight with the sky as though to demonstrate the clash of ideologies these buildings represent. The speaker imagines 'Victoria Regina steering the ship of the City Hall', but by detailing the presence of the union building, Morrissey observes an exception to Belfast's Victorian architecture that functions as a potential means of resistance to the city's inherited imperial ideology. Though 'A city built upon mud;/ A culture built upon profit' (MacNeice 2007: 140), silt and sales ominously rising, Morrissey's Belfast contains a counter-history to the market-driven march of progress, albeit fleetingly glimpsed.

In Gillis' 'On Cloughey Beach', 'we are hard grains of sand blown over unknown waters' (2010: 52):

to dilate and churn,  
reform and return, huddled in kitchens,  
workplaces, living rooms, in the confusion  
and grace of each other, where we belong.

Nowhere is this confusion and grace more convincingly evidenced than in 'Approaching Your Two Thousand Three Hundred and Thirty-third Night', a sonnet sequence addressed to a six-year old child (Gillis 2010: 88-91). The title twice repeats the number three as the father counts the nights, but for his child there is nothing repetitive about being alive. The poem's tender forms of address counteract the speaker's world-weariness: 'little head, tired arms, try not to dwell on/ dead-eyed meanness, why the world is unfair (90). Being driven home through the dark and on the cusp of sleep, the child's questions 'repeat/ but have unanswered' (88). Here repetition enables imaginative awakening. The child's 'why? why? why?' stimulates the poet-speaker's perceptual capacities and the recognition that 'Together we... walk through the common', admiring the ordinary interactions of humans, plants and non-human animals, from 'couples with dogs poop-scooping on the green' to 'dewdripped spiderwebs in the sun' (89).

Gamble's *Pirate Music* concludes with the surprise of otherness and unknowing in the flight, light and movement of 'Separation Creek', with its invitation

to the house where koala song  
 invades the night,  
 and what we cannot name or see  
 swings light over the canopy of the gums –  
  
 perhaps, someone says, a sugar glider  
 whatever that may be, whatever that may be. (Gamble 2014: 69)

This last repeated phrase delights in the freedom of epistemological and ontological uncertainty. To the speaker's human community, marsupials appear strange, their sounds invasive. Rhythmically, their presence disrupts iambic flow with the double stressed 'swings light', but so does the human effort of guesswork: 'perhaps, someone says'. Poetry's powers of denomination are not to explain, but to sound out – to sound out the limits of knowledge, even, and the potentiality of being: what 'may be' chimes with 'canopy' and 'see' and back to 'be' and 'sea'. 'Whatever that may be' is repetition as a brave welcome to the unknown, an act of surrender (registered rhythmically in its iambic pulse) that connects the speaker's history ('the years of anorexia,/ the years spent uxtering fat children onto ponies') to her future, at the end of a volume that makes visible our fearful attempts to resist the unfamiliar by aggressively asserting authority.

Flynn's 'Without Me', the fifth of five poems of the same title, shows us two people 'flinging ... like a giant frisbee/ this plastic lid of an old rat-poison bin.' (2004: 23) Flynn describes the movement and momentum with repetitive syntax that should be banal:

We were flinging it from you to me, me to you, you to me;  
me-you, you-me, me-you, you back again.

Instead, we are lulled by the lovely rhythm of these lines, which create an unlikely image of community somewhere in Tyrone ‘in the hiatus of a difficult July’, season of sectarian bonfires and parades in Northern Ireland. It is typical of Flynn that a bin lid for toxic material offers an unlikely opportunity for togetherness – but a togetherness the speaker wishes to test:

And I would have sworn that our throw and catch had such momentum  
that its rhythm might survive, somehow, without me.

As in ‘Brinkwomanship’, the poem plays with a fantasy of self-erasure. Many of the poems in this volume examine what the body can survive – asthma (‘Acts of Faith’), anxiety (‘Holland’), anorexia (‘Brinkwomanship’), childbirth (‘For Lily Allen’) and even love (‘Boys’), and, in later work, motherhood (‘*There’s Birds in my Story*’). Though vulnerable, the (female) body is shown to be resilient. What survives here, however, is ‘rhythm’, outlasting even the body. Couched in the conditional tense, the attempt at self-erasure unravels into a quiet declaration of Flynn’s poetic authority – poetry cannot go on ‘without me’ – and of the reader’s vital role in the literary ‘throw and catch’ of textual production and reception. This partnership ensures poetry’s rhythm will survive in spite of the odds.

Flynn’s consciousness of how quickly the body can succumb to illness makes urgent her

attention to beauty and relationships. In perhaps the most tender of all of Flynn's poems, 'My Father's Language' (2011: 28), the speaker witnesses her father experiencing the effects of Alzheimer's. Language cannot stem the persistent 'small waves', the 'slow accumulation of losses', though Flynn shows herself at first trying to use it to do so through conditional tense negation: 'As though... he is not being lost to shadows and incoherence.' Forgetting nouns, 'Everything is a 'thing'':

'Where is the thing? The thing, you know, the thing?'  
 (In this bone-dry wasteland where the nouns have died  
 'daughter' might sometimes be confused with 'wife'.)

Her father's bewilderment is sensitively captured in the frustrated urgency of his non-referential language, and his language-use leads the whole family into a wilderness experience. Father, wife and daughter each experience the deathly wasteland that comes into existence when memory and language are lost. Her father's failure to recognize the speaker could be cause for silence – from anger, fear or grief – but instead she learns her father's language:

*I say: The thing's not lost. No. Take this thing.*  
*Here is the thing. The thing – Daddy – take this thing.*

These are the most moving lines in Flynn's oeuvre – a tender animation of repetitive, non-referential speech that re-establishes hope. This is replication as love, as reassurance and the solidification of bonds, and it proves 'The common and banal [love's] heat can know'



(Kavanagh 2005: 217). The nature of ‘the thing’ matters not. What preserves the father-daughter relationship is address (‘*Daddy*’) and reception (‘*take this thing*’). Likewise poetry, the ‘you to me, me to you’ rhythm, survives. Loss of ‘content’ doesn’t threaten it. After the peace process, Northern Irish poetry cannot atone for losses. Instead, its strategies of replication reveal and resist the discriminatory, atomising and reifying ideologies in which it finds itself entangled; and it can refuse the pessimism and despair such ideologies might provoke only through dependency upon its readers’ recognition of the forms and meanings of its replications. Recent Northern Irish poetry thus establishes the necessity of community between poet, text and reader, who need not, in the end, be ‘at-one’, but engaged in something livelier still: a frisbee-flinging literary ‘throw and catch’ that delights by its ‘momentum’ (Flynn 2004: 23).

## Notes

I would like to thank Joe Cleary for his incisive and encouraging critical commentary on an earlier version of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> In the 1950s Donald Davie, Denis Donoghue and Vivian Mercier, among others, debated the role of the professional critic as a Lecturer in English Literature and how Irish studies would take shape as a consequence. The critic now established in the academy, poets, novelists and

dramatists have followed suit, not as writers-in-residence but as Creative Writing Lecturers. How such changes will affect the state of contemporary poetry, fiction and drama, the university, and the direction of Irish studies remains to be seen, but the emerging literature on the relationship of the academy and creative industries will be instructive. See, for example, Brouillette 2007; 2014 and McGurl 2009.

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