DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

What Snuck about Hopewell and Other Places and Outside the ‘imaginative estate’
Canon, Dialect and Aesthetics in Northern Irish Poetry

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Award date:
2020

Awarding institution:
Queen's University Belfast

Link to publication

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What Snuck about Hopewell and Other Places

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Outside the ‘imaginative estate’:

Canon, Dialect and Aesthetics in Northern Irish Poetry

by

William Scott McKendry, B.A., M.A.

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

the School of Arts, English and Languages, Queen’s University Belfast

in

September 2019
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WHAT SNUCK ABOUT HOPEWELL
AND OTHER PLACES
Come, buy my fine Oranges, Sauce for your Veal,
And charming when squee’zd in a Pot of brown Ale.
Well roasted, with Sugar and Wine in a Cup,
They’ll make a sweet Bishop when Gentlefolks sup.

—Jonathan Swift, ‘Oranges’, 1746

... D’éirigh siad lofa péisteach ar chumhacht
Na huasaicme, uabhar an élite, ach tá na sans culottes
Ar na gaobháir agus caint ar Madame Guillotine.

—Pól Ó Muirí, ‘Muscaedóiri’, 2000
Bridging Statement

BRIDGING ESTATES

The statement below comprises a meditation on the affinities and necessary differences between the creative and critical components of this doctoral project. Concomitantly, it also gives me the opportunity to contextualise some of the abstruse references and formal conceits of the poetry collection, and to reflect on how my critical practice has informed my artistic practice (and vice versa) over the past three years.

Both the collection of poems and the critical study are concerned with ‘estates’ of a kind, both engage with notions of ‘the local’ from the standpoint of the academy, and both interrogate convention. Through investigating (a) the logic of canonisation and (b) uses of nonstandard English within northern Irish poetry, the ‘estate’ of the critical study, ‘Outside the “imaginative estate”: Canon, Dialect and Aesthetics in Northern Irish Poetry’, describes the assets of a lyrical tradition – an amassed collective property, the executors of which are academics and cultural facilitators.¹ What Snuck about Hopewell and Other Places begins and ends on the north Belfast council estate where I spent my first years, an estate occupying an area of the city where my maternal family have lived since at least the early nineteenth century. As well as its envelopment of autobiographical, anecdotal and (academic) historical subjects, the raw material of the collection was taken from the findings of a

¹ As outlined in the introduction to this critical study, this title is taken from a quotation by Michael Longley (1939–) where, extolling the merits of the local ‘coterie or group’, he describes the accumulated creative efforts of a ‘community’ in quasi-pecuniary terms as an ‘imaginative estate’: Michael Longley, ‘Poetry’, Causeway: The Arts in Ulster (Michael Longley (ed.); Belfast: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1971), p. 95.
research venture throughout 2017. Utilising resources including the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and newspaper archives, I was able to track socio-cultural changes to this one square mile of inner-city over the past century. As sketched out in the essay below, ‘Geese in the Hammer’ (Appendix 1), this district has been blighted by poverty and violence, owing to a long history of administrative corruption and neglect, and more recently, Loyalist paramilitarism. As such, the ‘imaginative estate’ of the critical study and ‘the Estate’ from What Snuck about Hopewell are virtually antithetical, the former expressing a wealth of lyrical culture and the latter remaining a place immersed in cultural (as well as socio-economic) poverty.

For want of a better term then, we might say the central theme tying together the raisons d’être of the two components (the literary and the discursive; the Cultural and the cultural) is my preoccupation with visibility, or rather, the imperative to intervene in that which is or isn’t made visible to us in artistic and academic ways. Simply put, the poems comprise images of Belfast working-class life, whereas the chapters of the critical study investigate a relatively unexploited mode and several ‘minor’ poetic voices. The French thinker Jacques Rancière, whose ideas are evoked in the critical component, describes the economy via which we create, receive, aestheticize and politicize the ideas and images of our world as le partage du sensible (the distribution or apportioning of the sensible).¹ I had this conceptualisation – that is, the act of disrupting ‘what is visible and audible within a

particular aesthetico-political regime’ – in mind as I embarked upon my doctoral project in October 2016.\textsuperscript{1}

**THE BELFAST DEMOTIC & SHALLOW EEJIT**

The most conspicuous bridge between the two components of the thesis is observable in how Chapters III and IV investigate the ways in which local language has been used in northern Irish poetry, whilst my own poems include emulations of Northern Hiberno-English. These images of speech are achieved chiefly through the incorporation of Belfast urban vocabulary and grammar, as well as minor deviations from standard spelling. The elements included in these deviations can be distinctively local, although many are shared with other nonstandard Anglic dialects: I drop the <g> from ‘-ing’ gerunds and the final letters of a contractions (doin’, wouldn’); I use words such as ‘jouk’ (*look, peep*), ‘gub’ (*mouth*), ‘slabbery’ (*dripping with saliva*), ‘wick’ (*uncool*), ‘sez’ (*says*), ‘them’s’ (*they are*), ‘yur’ (*your*); I use ‘them’ in place of ‘those’, use ‘did’ where ‘done’ would normatively be, and put ‘but’ at the end of sentences. So, for instance, the Standard English line ‘I was there, yet I don’t recall its drooling mouth’ might be textually realised: ‘I wiz there, can’t mind seein’ its slabbery gub but’. Three years on, this mixed register has become automatic in my creative practice. At a basic level, its function is realism: an effort to capture the ‘unheard voice’ in a sonic sense as well as in a socio-cultural sense. As observed at some length in ‘Outside the “imaginative estate”’, for a host of ideological and socio-psychological reasons, Irish poets (unlike their Scottish counterparts) have shied away from using dialect. Should these dialect poems be perceived as over-parochial

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid., Gabriel Rockhill (ed., trans.), introduction, p. 1.
or cringeworthy to local readers, I’d take it as a compliment for the work. As this mixed register is now my ‘normal’ writing mode, there’s some irony to the fact that I now struggle to write poems approximating standard metropolitan English; evidently, the socio-aesthetic cringe around dialect which is outlined in the introduction and Chapter IV of the critical study isn’t merely a top-down phenomenon.

As well as these subtler instances of dialect, some of the poems in What Snuck about Hopewell – such as ‘Haforz’ and ‘Murl’ – are written in a new phonemic orthography befitting my own Belfast Urban dialect. As far as I’m aware, this orthographic system – which I call ‘Shallow Eejt’ – is the first of its kind devised for Irish English, or at least the first since the standardisation of English spelling began in earnest in the eighteenth century. Phonetic spelling, I have noticed, has become popular of late on social media in Scotland and Ireland, where it’s generally exploited by young people for its comedy value. Influenced by the pioneering ‘Urban Scots’ of Tom Leonard (1944–2018), I wanted to design a textually consistent form of this already organically occurring mode.

As we saw in the conclusion of the critical study, Aodán Mac Póilin describes the standardisation of Ulster-Scots (into ‘Ullans’) as a process involved in maximal differentiation, where orthography and lexicon are as ‘far removed as possible from standard English, and [thus made] as incomprehensible as possible to English-speakers.1 As this was something I wanted to avoid with the poems written in Shallow Eejt, I endeavoured to make its graphemes impressionistic to Hiberno-

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English speakers or those acquainted with its dialects.\(^1\) Take for example the previous sentence: \(\textit{N\text{\`i}nd\text{\`e}vr\text{\`d} d\text{\`e} m\text{\`e}ik th\text{\`a} gr\text{\`a}feemz imp\text{\`r}\text{\`e}\text{\`m}n\text{\`i}steek d\text{\`e} H\text{\`a}\text{\`b}r\text{\`n}\text{\`o}-\text{\`g}\text{\`l\text{\`e}\text{\`e}\text{\`s} spee\text{\`k\text{\`\text{\`}}\text{\`r}z \text{\`v}r thoz akw\text{\`e}ntid w\text{\`e}th ts d\text{\`a}\text{\`l\text{\`e}\text{\`k}ts}.}\)\(^2\) As we can see, most of the letters used for consonants remain the same as those of standard written English. However, because vocal sounds vary so much between Standard Southern British English and Belfast urban English (and indeed, vary throughout the Anglosphere), my choices for vowel letters are more complex.

In impressionistic terms, perhaps the most unwieldy symbol for the reader to acclimatise to is that used for the schwa sound (the vowel in ‘the’), that is <ə>, or <Ə> in capital. Although starting out I wanted to avoid diacritics and double letters, this was inescapable in practical terms. The nomenclature of Shallow Eejıt came as happenstance: ‘Shallow Eejıt’ in Shallow Eejıt is textually realised as ‘Shallow Eejıt’.\(^3\) Initially, I’d had reservations about using <ee> for the close front unrounded vowel [i] (as in ‘we’ or ‘deep’), preferring the letter <i> in accordance with the International Phonetic Alphabet and most Latin languages; but as the word ‘eejit’ seems to have diverged so naturally from ‘idiot’ from the early nineteenth century on, I decided <ee> would be the best fit.\(^4\) This left the problem of the clash between <ee> and <i>, which I resolved by taking the dot off the <i>, making it <ı>, and using it for the near-close front unrounded vowel [ı] (as in ‘picture’ or ‘bit’). For the Belfast

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1. See Appendix 2 for table of symbols used in Shallow Eejıt.
2. Unlike this example (which is a straight translation) following Leonard, linguistic environment is accounted for in Shallow Eejıt. For example, depending where it occurs in a sentence or how I’d like it to be realised by the reader, accounting for tempo and syntax the word ‘the’ could be written as ‘tha’, ‘\(\text{i}\)’, ‘db’, ‘la’ or ‘da’.
3. A phonemic or ‘shallow’ orthography represents the speech sounds it represents in a straightforward manner, as with the likes of Castilian Spanish. Standard English would be considered to have a ‘deep’ orthography.
4. See \textit{OED}. 
urban English vowel used in ‘gate’ (which might sound something like gee-ught to dialectical outsiders), I use <êt>, with the dot over the <e> signifying an <ee>. In IPA terms then, [iə] is realised as <êt>. In a phonologically geeky way, I found it amusing that the ‘e’ steals the dot off the ‘i’.

Of course, I could have written all these poems in the International Phonetic Alphabet, which facilitates a highly accurate phonemic transcription, but as only a minority of readers are familiar with its scheme, I decided to make my own. Furthermore, I found that there are many typographical opportunities to exploit in some of the Unicode symbols available online from languages that use a Roman typographical base. For example, I used the letter <ã> (the ligature for <a> plus <y>) for the Belfast urban English sound which is used for the pronoun ‘I’ – the diphthong [ər] in IPA. With the addition of an <e>, I was then able to use <ãe> for the sound [æi], which approximates that most common of Belfast words, ‘aye’. ¹

One of the pitfalls of implementing a phonemic orthography is clashing homonyms, homophones, homographs and heteronyms. Yet these don’t seem to create much of a problem in everyday speech. For example, very rarely does communication break down between English speakers because of existent overlapping in the homophones ‘rede’ and ‘reed’, ‘reed’ and ‘read’, ‘read’ and ‘red’, ‘red’ and ‘redd’. Speakers are generally quite adept when it comes to phonemic and orthographic nuance. The idea that English spelling reform would obliterate the etymological data between homophones has long been debunked, most notably by American lexicographer Noah Webster (1758–1843). In 1789, Webster noted that

¹ A full list of the letters of Shallow Eejit are provided in Appendix 2.
dictionaries best serve the function of recording lexical history.\(^1\) Shallow Eejt spells the words ‘two’, ‘too’ and ‘to’ as ‘tue’. Admittedly, this irks me as much as it might anyone else, yet in keeping with the Rancièrean imperatives of the critical study, perhaps aesthetic disruptions such as this momentary loss of textual variation are healthy. At any rate, Shallow Eejt is an artistic medium, not a civic one. Unlike Webster’s proposal to steal English from England and bequeath it to the newly independent United States (as discussed in the critical study), my Shallow Eejt doesn’t follow a nationalist, subnationalist or regionalist agenda. That said, it doesn’t shy away (and nor would I) from a proletarianist bias. If anything, it rebukes the constraints put on art and language by utilitarian ideologies – forces which, via government cuts to public funding, keep the arts at a remove from the lower classes. Like the peripheral language it textualizes, Shallow Eejt isn’t proud, it just is and often belligerently so.

Quite unconsciously, both the ‘mixed’ and ‘full’ dialect poems of What Snuck about Hopewell are written in riposte to Scottish critic Willy Maley’s accusation (noted in Chapter IV above) that Irish writers ‘overlook’ an ‘oral tradition […] in favour of a scholastic style, a preferred academic mode that will get them recognition beyond their shores’.\(^2\) Although I provide standard metropolitan English translations for the Shallow Eejt poems, in contrast to Maley’s observation that Irish writers use

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dialect chiefly for ‘funny stuff and light-hearted interludes, for dialogue and quaint colloquial colour’, the poems which use dialect don’t shy away from serious social concerns or the earnestness of a high lyrical mode (if such a thing indeed exists).¹

What Snuck about Hopewell includes elegies for friends I’ve lost to suicide over the past two years: ‘Denmark Street’ for Lukasz Karpinski, and ‘Bob, the Moon and the Black Mountain’ for Robert Holmes.

**HISTORY, CANON & AESTHETICS**

My choice of Martin Mooney (1960–), Alan Gillis (1973–) and Thomas Carnduff (1886–1956) as subjects for the critical study can’t be that surprising given their backgrounds. Like myself, all three are Irish males who’ve written poems about (amongst a myriad of other things) the lives of the Greater Belfast Protestant working class. Although sparingly in Carnduff and Mooney’s case, they all implement dialect in their work. Despite the north of Ireland being known for its poets, these three – along with north Belfast poet Adrian Rice (1958–) – remain in a minority regarding the composition of socially-minded poems about the city’s Protestant working-class. However, if we begin to chop up the demographic delineation of northern Irish working-class Protestant male, there’s a large corpus of contemporary work which has influenced What Snuck about Hopewell – such as the Catholic working-class Belfast poems of Ciaran Carson (1948–) and Padraic Fiacc (1924–), the openly leftist verse of northern Protestants John Hewitt (1907–1987) and Louis MacNeice (1907–1963) or, further south, the images of the Dublin working class in the poetry of Paula Meehan (1955–) and Dermot Bolger (1959–). Work in other genres has captured Belfast Protestant working-class life with great depth and acuity, including the novels

¹ Ibid.
of Glenn Patterson (1961–), the plays of Gary Mitchell (1965–) and, more recently, the short stories of Wendy Erskine (1968–). If *What Snuck about Hopewell* is expected to cordon itself off into a national lineage, these are some of its forebears.

As already mentioned, the Hammer district that I bring into the poetry collection – the site of, in both figurative and actual senses, my primal scene – doesn’t boast a wealth of literature. To paraphrase Rancière’s notion of the ‘part with no part’, despite being the scene of many important historical events, the district is an *estate with no estate*.¹ But despite a dearth of work by artists from (as well as depictions of) the Hammer, there is a bit of variety. Hewitt grew up on the middle-class periphery of the area, and his later work seems infatuated with what he called his ‘childhood’s precinct’ in poems such as ‘Street Names’ (1971), ‘The Mile-long Street’ (1976) and ‘The Way to School’ (1980).² Carnduff, who lived in the area for a time, wrote a poem called ‘The Song of the Hammer’ (1928).³ The bus driver-cum-memoirist John Young Simms (a friend of Carnduff’s), recounted his childhood in the district from the mid-1920s through to the early-40s in his memoir *Farewell to the Hammer* (White Row Press, 1992). The earliest painting of the district I’ve been able to find is a watercolour titled *Conlon Street, off Old Lodge Road, Belfast – Scene of Accident* (1882) by the obscure nineteenth-century landscapist (and

¹ For more on the history of the Hammer, see Appendix 1. At a basic level, by ‘*part des sans parts*’ refers to that portion of the population who have no say. See Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (Liz Heron (trans.), London: Verso, 1995), p. 91.


³ See scrapbooked printed poems at Thomas Carnduff archive at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS21/12/4.
surgeon) James Moore.\(^1\) More recently, the contemporary Belfast watercolourist Stephen Shaw has produced work documenting architectural dereliction in the Hammer area, such as the paintings *Redevelopment* and *Blue Sky Over Malvern Street.*\(^2\)

As I set out to write the poems of what would be *What Snuck about Hopewell* in October 2016, I had a schema in mind. I wanted to write a collection which didn’t leave the square mile that comprises the inner-city district. After a year or so, however – in conjunction with research undertaken for the critical study – I began to appreciate that this was a somewhat disingenuous approach, one which would have been limiting in the final instance. A district is made of its specific character, the shape of its domestic interiors, its buildings, streets and alleyways; more so however, a district is made of its people (its *characters*), who habitually roam elsewhere, usually physically, but often internally and sometimes phantasmagorically. In the version of *What Snuck about Hopewell* which did emerge, as the spatial remit moves out to other parts – to other areas of north Belfast (as in ‘Westland’), to Co Donegal (as in ‘The Last Giant Spider Ghost of Letterfad’) and eventually to Mainland Europe (as in ‘Down in the Gayeulles’) – the Hammer remains the nucleus around which other settings constellate. After all, the collection ends with ‘Doagh’ – a poem where the boy-speaker, staying with his aunt and uncle in rural Co Antrim, longs for the ‘grubby pebbledash’ of his mother’s council house.

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As well as visiting elsewheres, the collection goes into the past to (re)imagine the lives of some of my relatives who live(d) in the Hammer, lyricising comic anecdotes and recording the heirlooms of trauma. ‘Conlon Street, Easter Tuesday’, which recounts my maternal grandmother’s experience of the 1941 Belfast Blitz, is the first poem in the collection of this type. The legacies of World War One and World War Two are deep-seated in the cultural make-up of Ulster Protestants, and in conjunction with the critical study’s interrogation of established historiographies, I wanted What Snuck about Hopewell to scrutinise public and familial narratives. For example, in ‘Conlon Street, Easter Tuesday’, as bombers overhead drop their loads on the city, the poem’s little girl-subject is sent upstairs to fetch domestic ‘luxuries’ for the rest of the family, who’re huddled in the coal cellar. The poem ends with the neglectful mother’s rendition of ‘Hitler Has Only Got One Ball’ drowning-out the cries of her terrified daughter. My grandmother regularly recounts how she bravely fetched ‘luxuries’ during the Blitz, seemingly unaware of the allegory this story conveys around war and class.

My grandmother also tells stories about her beloved uncle, Robert ‘Charlie’ Robinson, who was killed manning anti-aircraft guns in London in 1944. Although she describes Charlie as quiet, unassuming and pious, as I carried out research for the collection, I discovered several newspaper reports from the 1930s which paint a different picture. During the Belfast riots of July 1935 between Unionists and Nationalists, the front page of the Evening Herald reported how Robinson was ‘charged with breaking and entering the licensed premises of John Kelly, Old Lodge road, and stealing a number of bottles of wine’.¹ Eight days later, the Belfast

Newsletter reported how he’d received a nine-month prison sentence.¹ In July 1936, Robinson was fined 20 shillings for assault on a gamekeeper; I took the words from the Newsletter article which describes the events of this attack and court proceedings for the found poem ‘Divis Mountain Trespass’. In July 1938, Robinson ‘had his licence suspended for two years when he was convicted of dangerous driving.’²

Another poem, ‘Robinson on Leave’, takes its raw material from a Newsletter report from December 1939 which gives an account of how Robinson – who’d by then joined the 8th (Belfast) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment of the Royal Artillery – had again found himself on the wrong side of the law:

Two local soldiers “out on a debauch on a night shortly before they were to leave for France” [sic.] were each fined £4 […] on charges of disorderly behaviour and assaulting the police. They were Robert Crawford, of M’Tier Street, and Robert Robinson, of Conlig Street […] Sergeant Kyle said the soldiers were found struggling with each other. Robinson assaulted [a] witness, and […] there was a free fight. The police had to draw their batons […] eventually both the accused escaped.³

The report goes on to describe how Robinson and Crawford’s victims had been left with ‘disfiguring marks’ and how the judge warned the pair that had they been civilians, he ‘would have sent them to prison.’⁴ These raucous stories were offset by a final Newsletter article I found on Robinson and Crawford from October 1940 which forms the basis of the poem ‘Conlig Street’:

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² ‘Belfast Motorist Fined £10’, Belfast Newsletter, 29 July 1938, p. 7.
³ ‘Celebration Before Leaving for France’, Belfast Newsletter, 12 December 1939, p. 6.
⁴ Ibid.
Two Belfastmen who were inseparable, first in civilian life and later in the Army, were laid to rest in the City Cemetery yesterday, having been killed by the same bomb during an air raid in England. They were Gunner Robert Crawford, of M’Tier Street, and Gunner Charles [sic.] Robinson, of Conlig Street.¹

Robinson was a tragic figure, tragic in the Hellenic sense. He was a gamester, a gangster, a rogue, a war hero and – at least according to his niece (my grandmother) and the Anglican minister who wrote him a character reference in 1935 – a loving family man.²

As well as being conducive to the project of What Snuck about Hopewell, in formal and thematic senses, the Robinson poems endeavour to continue a tradition of the Everyman character ‘Robinson’ from the poetry of Nebraskan Weldon Kees (1914 –1955) and Yorkshireman Simon Armitage (1963–).³ The point here, the canonical conceit, is that whilst Armitage’s and Kees’ incarnations of ‘Robinson’ adopt a fictional and enigmatic man in the street through which they consider afresh Western twentieth-century society, my rendition is based on a real person.

In keeping with one of the projects of the critical study (namely, the northern Irish lyrical canon), many of the poems in What Snuck about Hopewell engage with lesser-known canonical leitmotifs. ‘Road Makers and Erato’ for instance, acts as a sequel to Joseph Campbell’s (1879–1944) poems ‘The Labourer’ and ‘The Roadmaker’ (1913) and Seamus Heaney’s ‘Navvy’ (1972). Moreover, this poem was

¹ ‘Double Military Funeral’, Belfast Newsletter, 18 October 1940, p. 7.
² ‘I do not attach much importance to letters from clergymen,’ the Lord Chief Justice said, ‘not through disrespect, but because I feel they do not know half the facts of the case. You looted this unfortunate publican and must pay for it’: ‘Looting Punished’, Belfast Newsletter, 25 July 1935, p. 9.
directly inspired by the section of Chapter I which details Campbell’s impact on Heaney’s work with regard to images of the working class.

Some of the poems in *What Snuck about Hopewell* also share with the critical study a preoccupation with ‘aesthetics’, questions around taste and cultural axiologies. This is often straightforward, as in the second poem in the collection, ‘Nineties Lumpen Proletarian Nights’, where the speaker rejoices in modest comforts – videogames, cigarettes and ‘gravy chips’ from the local takeaway – which, rightly or wrongly, she puts on a par with familial love.¹ In other cases, I attempt to undermine canonical convention in formal terms. This is the case with ‘Leadbetter Street Blues’ which, like the Robinson poems, takes its subject matter from a contemporaneous newspaper story.² No effort was made in any formal way to make ‘Leadbetter Street Blues’ a poem in accordance with the general conventions of unaccompanied Anglophone verse. It’s just a blues song in amongst a collection of lyrics, titled as it is because it recounts a story from 1930 on Leadbetter Street, around the time when blues singer Huddie William Ledbetter (1888–1949), alias Lead Belly, was beginning his career.

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¹ Another poem in the collection, ‘The Floating World made Lumpen Proletarious’, addresses kitsch and refers to Ezra Pound’s ‘In a Station of the Metro’ (1913).

² “‘He has been good to me, and that is why I took to him so much,’” was a statement alleged to have been made to the police by Elizabeth M’Intyre concerning Robert Marks, of Leadbetter Street, who was charged yesterday in the Belfast Police Court with having committed bigamy. M’Intyre was accused of aiding and abetting, and both accused were sent for trial at the Recorder’s Court: ‘Alleged Bigamy’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 30 August 1930, p. 10.
Whilst recognising the inescapability of ideology and the fallacy of the neutral stance or objective viewpoint, if ‘Outside the “imaginative estate”’ and What Snuck about Hopewell are political, they’re not committed in a party-political sense. Although it would be disingenuous to ignore the fact that contemporary Anglophone poetry and its extra-literary institutions are mainly the preserve of the formally educated, this doesn’t mean that the lyric poem is written for the middle or upper classes. At the same time, I don’t endorse a call to proactively bring ‘poetry to the masses’ – not because I find such a prospect dangerous in terms of the genre being more fully subsumed by market consumerism (which it could well be), but because under the socioeconomic status quo, I find such a call fatuous. I find it fatuous in the same way that I’d find a call to bring the work of Swedish film-maker Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007) to the masses fatuous. Such demands assume that (a) the lower classes don’t already appreciate art, and (b) that art might be co-opted in a utilitarian sense to improve the lives of the socially disadvantaged. (In fact, the disadvantaged do appreciate art; and what they need is a political leadership willing to implement social and economic reorganisation, not aesthetic charity).

‘Outside the “imaginative estate”’: Canon, Dialect and Aesthetics in Northern Irish Poetry’ interrogates some of the academic conventions in Irish literary studies; after submission, I hope to publish this critical study as a monograph. Via the medium of the lyric, What Snuck about Hopewell and Other Places mimics the way in which the lower classes of Belfast speak, and records a few of their stories; recently, I’ve had the privilege of having some of these poems published in reputable

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1 ‘Exile on Landscape Terrace’ is the poem which comes closest to direct political utterance with regard to this ‘post-Troubles’ era.
journals on both sides of the Atlantic. Whether the outcomes of this doctoral project constitute a *redistribution of the sensible* in Rancièrean terms isn’t for me to judge, but if they do in some small way, then I’ll be satisfied with the work that I’ve carried out over the past three years.
Appendix 1

GEESE IN THE HAMMER: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

—Mary Oliver, ‘Wild Geese’, 1986

In 2017, BBC NI environment correspondent Conor Macauley published a report on the thousands of greylag geese which had flocked yearly from Iceland to a Belfast council estate. The geese, the piece reveals, grazing on scraps thrown out by residents, were ‘afforded a particularly potent layer of protection’ not by a conservation group, but the local unit of the Loyalist paramilitary the UDA (Ulster Defence Association).¹ The article taps into a media fascination with Loyalist husbandry in north Belfast, with animals owned by figures attaining legendary status – such as Buck Alec (1901–1995) and his toothless lions, Johnny ‘Mad Dog’ Adair (1963–) and his Alsatians ‘Rebel’ and ‘Shane’, and the pair of chihuahuas, ‘Bambi’ and ‘Pepsi’, owned by the late Sammy Duddy (1945–2007).² But the ironic thrust of

Macauley’s piece rests upon the assumption that an armed and largely reactionary militant group, responsible for over 260 recorded killings during the ‘Troubles’ – an organisation currently involved in all manner of criminality – is incapable of invoking ecological ethics.¹

Today as new houses go up on the Estate, the geese no longer winter there. But still fascinated by their yearly return over the past decade and intrigued by the lyrical potential of their relationship with the district, I wonder: what was the specific meaning of these geese? The rumour that tourists who come to see political murals in working-class Belfast are ‘safeguarded’ by paramilitaries lends itself to a cynicism where we guess that somebody somewhere is making a profit. But why protect these geese?

The article’s subtext alludes to how the greylags were territorialised. In a place ostensibly closed to the outside, their presence was okayed by people with no mandate to warrant such an assurance. Regardless of the report’s critical nuance however, I’d contend that by presenting a positive narrative where one can’t exist, the geese story has the capacity to destabilise moral and ideological predispositions, to rupture what French thinker Jacques Rancière (1940–) calls le partage du sensible, the apportioning of ‘what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetico-political regime’.²

Owing to two centuries of systemic negligence and recent paramilitarism, the inner-city district where the BBC story is set, historically called the Old Lodge and

now referred to locally as the ‘Estate’ to differentiate it from the Shankill Road and environs proper, is one of the most deprived in Belfast.¹ Despite its relative academic obscurity, this district has been at times the nucleus of the province’s tumultuous and contested history. Reporting on the 1886 Home Rule riots, *The Leeds Mercury* counted ‘fifty people […] injured’ and two people shot dead by police in the area.² In 1899, the Army’s Royal Irish Rifles and North Staffordshire Regiment and were deployed in order to quell clashes.³ As the 1920s ‘Troubles’ flared, the Old Lodge Road was described as the ‘storm-centre’ of violent disorder.⁴ Throughout the 1935 Belfast riots, eleven people were killed and nine men from the ‘Hammer’ – a neighbourhood which takes up over half of the district – were charged for unlawful assembly.⁵ And the Old Lodge district was the setting of the first high-profile sectarian killing of the recent conflict, the murder of Catholic barman Peter Ward on Malvern Street in June 1966.⁶

I lived in the Hammer when I was a child. Some of my extended family live there still. Although we moved when I was in primary school, the place will always be home to me, my primal scene. Our street, the optimistically named Hopewell Place, is a cul-de-sac for cars but not people, with various entries running off it. Most notable of these is ‘the Lane’, which runs west – past the primary school, the nursery

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¹ Media also often refer to the district by the exonym ‘lower Shankill’.
² ‘Renewed Riots in Belfast’, *The Leeds Mercury*, 9 August 9, 1886.
³ ‘State of the City: Peace and Tranquilly Reign’, *The Belfast News-Letter*, 8 June 1899. This (decidedly optimistic) title toys with the notion of the district as a microcosm.
⁵ ‘Charge of Possessing Firearms in Belfast’, *The Irish Examiner*, 20 July 1935.
⁶ Socialising with friends after work, Ward was shot by the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) as he left the Malvern Arms. See McKittrick et al. (ed.), *Lost Lives*, p. 26.
school and playing fields – out onto Agnes Street, a stretch traversing two of the city’s arterial routes, the Shankill Road and the Crumlin Road. These three thoroughfares along with the Westlink dual carriageway to the southeast comprise the limits of the contemporary Estate.

There were always pigeons and seagulls, but never geese, when we lived there. The streets of the Hammer were considerably livelier in the early 1990s than they are today. The kerbstones were painted the typical red, white and blue, bunting in the same trichromatic swayed throughout the year and, of course, there was motley of flags tied to lampposts and draped from staffs above residents’ front doors. Hundreds of mongrels were put out in the morning and let in at night: dogs of every shape and colour with nothing about them conforming to a pedigree, each with their own vivid temperament which every neighbour seemed to know intimately. After school, children played football, rounders and hide-and-go-seek. British Army patrols traversed the district daily, usually en route somewhere else or on regular beat, but sometimes on exercise. It wouldn’t have been strange to look out the window and see a camouflaged back in your front garden at any time of the day. You could walk right by a crouching squaddie on your way out the front gate to work or school. I recall one with a hackle (feather plume) in his cap letting me look through the scope of his SA80 assault rifle. I didn’t see any geese, but I remember this recurring dream: a policeman’s combination cap bobs above a wall, back and forth – he’s looking for someone, me; he’s on his way to arrest and question me, to leave me to rot in ‘the Crum’, the prison less than two hundred yards from our house. I’d go

1 Perhaps indicative of how young a city Belfast is, roads are normally referred to with the definite article.
shopping on the Crumlin Road with my mother, a stretch which then (and until quite recently) had an aura of what I can only describe as doom about it. One time, as we walked past the gaol on our way to the butchers, we witnessed a prisoners’ protest.¹ They were on the slate pitched roof, some crept along the ridge like tightrope artists, others sat in the gaps where tiles had been smashed in. Some were lobbing tiles down at the policemen and soldiers watching amused from the road below. They looked happy, the prisoners; stubbly, tired, but happy. I asked my mother why they didn’t escape while they had the chance. She said she didn’t know. Sometimes when a prisoner had escaped they’d sound the World War Two air raid siren, which on greyer days must have been alarming to the Estate’s older residents and their film buff grandchildren.

We lived under the cosh of paramilitarism, but this had by the 1990s become a familiar cosh. Things were normal when settled, when life seemed stable, as things are everywhere. As is common in lower-class communities across the Global North, throughout the year some older kid would lift a manhole cover and burst the water main to create ten-foot fountain that we’d dance through. It was certainly no place for flocks of unaccustomed migratory birds. I would have happily thrown stones at a goose then. We threw stones at each other, as the scars on my forehead attest. One of the by-products of paramilitarism is an ostensive level of street safety. We knew instinctively to never leave the area alone, and sensible strangers knew through repute and practice to never come in. The furthest I got was the youth club on Denmark Street at the north-easternmost corner of the district. I didn’t attend –

having a visceral antipathy towards strictly organised ‘activities’ – but the
surrounding area used to flood with heavy rain and we’d build wooden rafts from the
teenagers’ bonfire hoard. Children would go out to play from around the age of
three. They’d be sent to the shop for what was needed: a loaf, brown lemonade,
potatoes, ten cigarettes. Our nearest convenience store was ‘the van’, an illegal
sweetshop-cum-tobacconists operated from a wheel-less blue box truck in the front
garden of a house on Florence Square. Conveniently, a man would also drive around
in a Vauxhall Cavalier at night, stopping every few streets to sell all manner of
things from its boot – from videotapes, to firelighters, to tampons. Truant boys
would knock doors of a weekday afternoon and try to peddle their booty, toys stolen
from Woolworths and Leisure World. My mother used to say she felt sorry for them.
My first Lego set was a raft with pirates, my second was a Robin Hood scene with
Robin himself and two Merry Men posing at their tree HQ; this is even less
believable and just as true as the fact that my fervidly law-abiding grandmother on
my mother’s side, who lived a few doors down from us, once bought from a car boot
a pirated copy of Andrew V. McLaglen’s The Wild Geese (1978) starring Roger
Moore as suave international mercenary Lieutenant Shawn Fynn.

Before I reach for my violin, I should say that I was lucky. They sent me to
the good school, Cliftonville Primary, which was officially ‘integrated’ but attended
mainly by Protestant children. We were Protestants, just about. The local Anglican
church, St Michaels, was used before the real event of the drink-fuelled afterparty of
christenings to give proceedings a slight whiff of spirituality rather than
respectability. I was sent to Sunday school on one occasion. The man who drove the
bus was a bag of nerves and would shout in the children’s faces. I had to be
restrained when I caused a scene after trying the church hall door handle to find it
locked. I wanted to go home. How strange I must have looked to the Baptists, with my curly blond hair and rosy cheeks, an angel bawling and cursing in the House of the Lord. Nobody in the area ever got married. My parents didn’t, and I wasn’t christened either. Christmas was for Santa Claus – usually my father’s friend Big Roy with a goose-feather pillow up his red jacket – the God of Plastic Commodities and Noddy Holder’s raspy Walsall voice. Parents spent more than they had, even got into debt, buying presents for their kids. They were sprawled over the sofa on Christmas Day. In school, they made us sing ‘Once in Royal David’s City’ and dress up as shepherds, wisemen and sheep.

My grandfather on my father’s side would pick me up on Friday afternoons and we’d buy nectarines from the fruit shop or potted herrings from the fishmongers to eat in the park, whether it rained or not. As I said, I was lucky. We’d stop off at the Carnegie library to take out books to read when we got there. He’d go for something on the Spanish Civil War; I loved Barbara and Ed Emberley’s *Drummer Hoff* (1967) and Dick Roughsey’s *The Giant Devil Dingo* (1973). We’d walk the mile or so uphill to Woodvale Park with our books and nectarines, and when we arrived – beyond the bandstand and the bowling green – a bevy of fluffy dirty-white swans would be sailing around the pond; but I don’t recall seeing thousands of greylags on the grass. When we finished reading our books, I asked him hundreds of questions.

Before the ‘slum clearances’ (1968–1974), the Old Lodge district had mainly comprised a familiar grid of redbrick kitchen house terraces such as those of the industrial north of England. Although only half-a-mile from the town centre, at the turn of the nineteenth century the area remained largely unurbanized. An influx of migrants coming to work in the linen mills, many of whom had escaped *An Gorta*
Mór, saw the population of Belfast – which was no more than a village in the early seventeenth century – soar from 53,000 in 1831 to 115,000 in 1853.\(^1\) During this time, between the arterial routes of the Shankill Road and the Crumlin Road foundries were busy. New brick was left out to cool on land soon to be covered with ‘rows of tightly packed two-up-two-down’ houses which for thousands of years had been a grazing place for cattle, attended in the late autumn by flocks of greylags. The upper end of North Street, which runs northwest from Belfast’s centre was once named ‘Goose Lane’, a nomenclature which indicates that before the nineteenth century, wintering geese had been a fixture in the town’s calendar.\(^2\) Throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there were no wide grassy spaces in the Hammer to graze on. Prior to redevelopment, barring a piece of waste ground unimaginatively called the ‘Waste’ and the gravel football pitch-turned-playpark, there was very little unused space, never mind an unused grassy space.\(^3\) Owing to on-pitch brutality, the local football team that played on the gravel pitch earned the moniker ‘Sledgehammer United’; the pitch being their home venue, it became ‘Sledgehammer Park’; when the city corporation built a playpark on the plot where the pitch had been – perhaps to put an end to gory bouts – this name was shortened


\(^2\) David Pierce, *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), p. 524: ‘Victoria street was Cow lane, the street through which cows were driven to graze in the Point fields at the foot of Corporation Street. North street was Goose lane and was named for a similar reason.’

to the ‘Hammer’. ¹ The streets east of the swings and climbing frames eventually took this name.²

Ron Wiener’s *The Rape and Plunder of the Shankill* (1976) details the governmental maladministration and corporate corruption that hung over the late-sixties redevelopment, which he characterises as a ‘horror story which just ran and ran.’³ The streets were redrawn. Once one of the city’s arterial routes, the Old Lodge Road – which ran diagonally through the eponymous district from the junction of Agnes Street and the Crumlin Road southeast towards North Street – was cauterised at the back of the courthouse at Florence Place and redesignated a street. Apart from two dozen houses on Forster Street and Malvern Street (which still stand today) the terraces were levelled. In their place, typical late-twentieth-century style council housing and blocks of flats went up. Catholic and Protestant neighbours were separated by the Westlink dual carriageway, ossifying local sectarian disintegration. Many families moved to the suburbs, others to Australia, South Africa and North America. Many young fathers left to work in Great Britain and never returned. Commercial premises along the Old Lodge Road and Agnes Street were demolished. The local economy was decimated. Prior to redevelopment, facilities had generally ‘met the living needs’ of inhabitants.⁴ ‘There were numerous shops and […] meeting places such as pubs and halls’ but redevelopment ‘greatly reduced’ the number of

¹ Ibid., p. 9.
⁴ Ibid., p. 87.
premises from around seventy to twelve ‘in a community of some 3000 people’. ¹

The number of shops were reduced due to a planned district shopping centre which was never built. The removal of amenities such as ‘coal dealers and scrap dealers’, Wiener writes, accommodated ‘an economic strategy based on the needs of large industrial corporations’. ² The motives of the ‘authorities’ were ‘diametrically opposed’ to the interests of ‘working class communities.’ ³ This situation persisted when we lived in the Hammer and persists still. Within the Estate today, there’s one corner shop, two petrol stations, and a few small businesses on the periphery.

John Young Simms’ memoir *Farewell to the Hammer* (1992) recounts his upbringing in the district from the mid-1920s through the Hungry 30s. Simms describes the depressed but content existence of a dispossessed and disenfranchised community afflicted with sporadic bouts of sectarian violence. Populated with

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¹ Ibid.
² Ibid., pp. 87–88.
³ Ibid., p. 8.
indifferent political charlatans, damaged war veterans and semi-feral preteen children, Simms’ Hammer wasn’t unlike its late-'80s palimpsestic heir, the council estate where I spent my first years. He might have disagreed with such an assertion however. My maternal grandmother, born in 1929, was reared in the old Hammer, in a kitchen house on Conlig Street. They’d have porridge three times a day most days, porridge pie sometimes, or boiled rice with raisins. On Sundays they had soup made with celery leaves, carrots, barley and a shin bone. At Christmas they got an orange (as the cliché goes) and, of course, chocolate. Nobody in the old Hammer ever bought a goose for the holiday season. Having moved away before the ‘slums’ were cleared, Simms’ memoir ends with a mournful account of his first visit to the newly-build Estate. ‘I was lost in the Walks and confused in the Ways’, he writes, ‘the bulldozers had removed forever the old tumbledown houses’ and ‘gouged out the heart of the place’. As he ‘roved around’ what was for him with its pebble-dashed walls and barking dogs an ‘alien quarter’, he writes that even the ‘starlings’ mocked him ‘from the tower of St Michael’s’, but makes no mention of geese.

After redevelopment, in contravention to its objectives, further social deprivation ensued. Wiener writes in the old Hammer, because ‘the street was seen to be an extension of the house [it] belonged to everyone in the neighbourhood’ it was ‘impossible for anyone to commit delinquent actions behind the cloak of anonymity’. The corridors, courts and staircases of the new six-storey blocks locally known as the ‘Weetabix Flats’, ‘full of rubbish and dog shit’, ‘became free play areas for young people [who] for example [started] throwing objects over the edge

1 Simms, *Farewell to the Hammer*, p. 144
2 Ibid.
3 *Rape and Plunder of the Shankill*, p. 91.
including a jack handle which fell on a woman’s head and she had to be rushed to hospital\textsuperscript{1}. It’s important to remember that Wiener was writing this less than two years after the redevelopment’s completion. I remember being in these blocks in the early-1990s with my brother. Their concrete forecourts and quadrangles were perfect for playing Duck, Duck, Goose. Even as a small child, I recall being surprised, pleasantly surprised, at the chaos of the flats. Shouting-matches and the din of crying babies were constants in the background. Everyone left the doors of their maisonettes open and we would wander in and out as we liked. None of the residents ever asked who we were or what we thought we were doing. There would often be a gaunt, tired-looking man spread over an armchair smoking in the living-room, sleeping-bags on the floor, plastic cider bottles lying around. In such instances, we’d turn back and try the next door along the deck access corridor in our search to find the home of our new best friends who were playing a Commodore 64 or an Atari. I’d get goose bumps at the prospect.

Because something very bad had happened, out of the blue my brother and I were ordered one day by our mother to never visit the Weetabix Flats again. From the 1970s onwards, ‘social control’ on the new Estate ‘gradually disappeared’.\textsuperscript{2} The flats were where damaged young adults of the community lived and, unbeknownst to concerned parents, they soon became emporiums of a new type of entrepreneurialism. Unemployment crises across the archipelago, the testosterone-fired moral fugue of the ‘Troubles’, mixed with the local ‘breakdown’ of community ‘ties’ via the decimation of ‘family and friendship links’, brought about the perfect

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
conditions for a new form of 1990s ultra-paramilitarism.\(^1\) Engaged in all manner of
gangsterism – ‘shebeens, drug flats, brothels, extortion rackets, robberies’ – these
*up-and-comers* made their presence known by commissioning a new series of
menacing murals and stepping up ‘violence against Catholics’.\(^2\)

When I was young, the Shankill Road on Saturday afternoons was always
packed with shoppers. Many were there for nostalgic reasons, they or their parents
having moved away during the redevelopment. My father and I would take the Lane
most weeks up to the Road, which invariably meant long spells in the smoky
bookmakers, followed by the payoff of crisps and Coke in the pub. On one such
Saturday afternoon in October 1993, we were in the card shop. Daddy had tasked me
with choosing a birthday card for my grandfather. Someone had rented a bus so that
the whole family could be driven out to my uncle’s house in rural Co Antrim. I was
excited. Doagh was another universe where people went for long walks for the sake
of it and took wicker hampers into fields to eat hard-boiled eggs on tartan quilts. The
sound too much for my six-year-old right ear, I heard only a short *phut* like a fucked
football under the wheel of a car. I wasn’t frightened, until my father let go of my
hand. He wrestled his way past the other customers and moved through the door to
the pavement. The last in the shop, I hymned and hah’d – but I needed to go to the
toilet, so I went out. Sawdust chips like those I’d kick about the butcher’s floor came
down at the rate of snow. Hands and jeans flitted in and out of the mortar dust fog
like goldfish in dirty water come to kiss the glass of their bowl. They dodged me as
they came and went in and out of the grey. I needed to go to the toilet. As the wind

\(^1\) Ibid., pp. 92–97.
cleared the air, I saw a rush of black soles, white soles, perms, curtains, baubles, baggy shirts and baggy jumpers. They were running uphill towards it.¹ I needed to go to the toilet. My father swooped out of the murk, picked me up and followed them.

None of the adults spoke about it on the bus to Doagh. We moved out of the Estate into the suburbs a few miles north not long after the Shankill Bomb. Ballysillan, though leafier and quieter, was just as entangled in the petty social mechanics of the ‘Troubles’.² The children of our new street seemed naïve and gentle – wouldn’t have said boo to a goose – which suited and probably softened me. I didn’t leave the house much. We’d take the bus weekly to visit family in the Hammer. Afternoons on the Shankill Road were less jovial after the unspeakable carnage of October 1993. Two years after the Good Friday Agreement, the BBC reported an ‘Exodus’ from the Estate. During a bloody intra-Loyalist feud, which by the end of the year had claimed the lives of a dozen men, the district became once more the ‘storm-centre’.³ Hundreds of families, whose houses had been subjected to

¹ At 1pm on Saturday the 23rd of October 1993 two members of the PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army) disguised as deliverymen carried a bomb into Frizzell’s fishmongers on the Shankill Road. The bomb exploded prematurely killing eight civilians, a UDA member and one of the bombers; see Claire Duffin and Robert Mendick, ‘Shankill Road bombing: pain that is still raw 20 years on’, 4 May 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10806831/Shankill-Road-bombing-pain-that-is-still-raw-20-years-on.html> (Accessed 7.7.19).
Machinegun and petrol-bomb attacks, were forced to leave.\textsuperscript{1} Susan McKay writes that after decades of paramilitary dominance, in the early years of the new century the [Estate] was a desolate place. A local research project showed significant mental-health problems, high rates of assault against children in their own homes and a level of education attainment that ranked among the lowest in the UK. Less than 1 per cent went on to further education.\textsuperscript{2}

By the end of the first decade of this century, the last of the late-'60s redevelopment flats had been torn down. Grass had grown on the acres of empty space and, as there weren’t so many children to play on it, one November the geese returned.

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\textsuperscript{2} McKay, \textit{Bear in Mind}, p. 190.
## Appendix 2

**Graphemic Variations of Shallow Eejit, An Orthography for Belfast Urban Speech**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approx. IPA Sound</th>
<th>Sample Word</th>
<th>Deviating Graphemes</th>
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<td>glottal stop</td>
<td>button</td>
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<td>flap</td>
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Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the support of Arts & Humanities Research Council (award reference: 1786212), which funded my PhD project from 2016 to 2019 via the Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership.

Firstly, I want to thank my primary supervisor, Dr Michael Pierse, who was so generous with his time; without his great-hearted guidance and advice, this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Dr Stephen Sexton for his invaluable support and encouragement over the past year, my third supervisor, Dr Tara Bergin, and my former supervisor, Dr Kelly Grovier. I’m very grateful to Dr Gail McConnell for allowing me to quote her poem ‘Now’, to Martin Mooney for letting use excerpts from our email correspondence, to Dr Eamonn Hughes and Dr Stephen O’Neill for reading versions of Chapters I and III, and Matthew Rice for reading the poems.

I want to thank the staff at the McClay Library, especially Diarmuid Kennedy and Kriss Leslie, and all the other workers at Queen’s which make the university function – especially Linda Drain, Tracy Duffy and Jennifer Hardy. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the following lecturing staff from the School of Arts, English and Languages for their guidance over the years: Dr Leontia Flynn, Dr Orla Lowry, Professor Glenn Patterson, Professor Mark Burnett, Professor Fran Breaton, Professor Moyra Haslett, Dr Stephen Kelly, Dr Edel Lamb, Dr Philip McGowan, Dr Alex Murray, Dr Joan Rahilly, Dr Andrew Pepper, Dr Sinead Sturgeon, Dr Stephen Kelly and Dr Jimmy McAleavey.

For encouragement in things lyrical, critical, temporal and spiritual, thanks are also due to Professor Sinéad Morrissey, Johnny Kerr, Ryan McLean, Dane Holt, Darren Murphy, Tara McEvoy, Manuela Moser, Stephen Connolly, Stevie ‘Stewarty’ Stewart, Stevie Beat, Stevie Rock & Roll, Happy Stewart, Charlotte Stewart, Mícheál McCann, Dr Darran McCann, Dr Joe Lines, Micky Nolan, Adrian Rice, Dr Padraig Regan, Sacha White, Charlie Lang, Dr Caitlin Newby, Tess Taylor, Susannah Dickey, Paddy Macfarlane, Dawn Watson, Lee Purvis, Jimmy Clegg, Dr Shirin Jindani, Oliver Kingsley, Kate Keane, Ben Harris, Bill Harris, Beth Harris, Dr Portia Woods, Prayag Ray, Neil Caldwell, Amandine Ledru, Barry McAuley, Sandrine Bellot, J.C. Eude, Aaron Love, Dom Small, Maxime Cauvin, Violaine

Special thanks are due to Professor Ciaran Carson and all the attendees of his atelier. “Is he the hardest man in Ulster?” said Medb.”

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