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

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Download date: 29. Aug. 2021
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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AND OTHER PLACES
Come, buy my fine Oranges, Sauce for your Veal,
And charming when squee’d 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
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—Pól Ó Muiri, ‘Muscaedóiri’, 2000
Outside the ‘imaginative estate’:
Canon, Dialect and Aesthetics in Northern Irish Poetry
Abstract

This study on the contemporary northern Irish lyric in English strives to challenge whilst contributing to an aesthetic order – a set of underlying norms and values, loosely attached to a literary establishment – one that governs how and which poems are written, patronised and historicised. Its 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’.¹ In the context of northern Irish poetry, it would be imprudent for us to comprehend this conglomeration of work as all-inclusive, as comprising every poem ever written within a sixty-mile radius of, say, Armagh; thus distinctions must be made, and the critic (having the necessary experience and knowledge) must be free to make such distinctions, to decide on which poets to write about, to confront the work of their peers. But the question arises: what are the properties of those poems which are or aren’t permitted in contribution to such an ‘estate’? And how might we better understand an aesthetic hierarchy of ‘good’ to ‘bad’ poetry with regard to these entry requisites? This study will argue that because the aspects of such an aesthetic code are manifold and ever-changing (to the point of near ineffability) the ‘imaginative estate’ is more aptly understood by what it excludes and how it excludes, rather than what it subsumes. To further complicate matters, these distinctions aren’t always made solely on the basis of an aesthetic code. Other factors – political, philosophical and personal – come into play where the conventions and canons of northern Irish poetry are forged. Although there are a

host of other avenues for investigation, for the sake of brevity this study approaches these questions on two fronts: by (a) looking at the work of two Belfast poets whose work, for a host of reasons, remains critically neglected and thus left on the periphery of the ‘imaginative estate’, and (b) by investigating northern Irish poetry’s complex relationship with nonstandard dialects of English. These components are wed together by standards which I’ll apprehend via a series of close readings and recontextualisations. As this critical study unfolds, it will interrogate critical conventions around ‘standard language’ and ‘canonical standards’.
Introduction

UNMAPPING THE ‘IMAGINATIVE ESTATE’

Chapter I of this study looks at how the work of Irish Revivalist poet Joseph Campbell (1879–1944) has, despite its many innovations, been misread and removed from northern canons since the rise of the ‘Heaney Generation’. Chapter II reads the poetry of Martin Mooney (1964–) – a body of work yet to receive academic attention – in terms of its standing as ‘minor’ poetry and ostensible departures from a local aesthetic. Moving on to dialect, the third chapter, striving to uncover an overlooked dialect verse tradition, comprises a survey of northern poetry written in nonstandard English over the past three centuries. The final chapter considers the contexts and subtexts of dialect as employed by Alan Gillis (1973–), whose poetry can be read as a formal intervention apropos critical debates around dialect and the northern lyric.

THE NORTHERN AESTHETIC

Rarely are the concepts of ‘the aesthetic’ or ‘aesthetics’, with their nuanced manifold of applications, dissected in literary criticism, but as this study will implement them in various ways there is a present need. This thesis strives to avoid conferring an objective aesthetic value upon the ‘appearance and effect’ of any given work, whilst concomitantly proposing that there’s more to how poems are written, read and appreciated than subjective proclivities.¹ If there is an eternal worthiness inherent to some verse, access to such work is hopelessly governed by the same extra-literary contexts (philosophical, political, interpersonal) which promote and patronise

¹ Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976), p. 28.
‘unworthy’ verse. The closing section of this introductory chapter interrogates the interrelationship between (a) canon-building and (b) dialect in the northern Irish poetry (the two thematic components of the thesis) through a short meditation on aesthetics. References in the following four chapters to an ‘aesthetic code’ relate to the expectations bestowed upon lyrical practice before and after composition, rather than some innate quality of the poems. Although cautious not to reduce its complexities, the notion of a dominant northern Irish verse aesthetic is evoked. Largely near-ineffable, informing multifarious interwoven forms and values, this aesthetic code is ever-changing in terms of textual organisation and subject-matter. A departure from Revivalist pieties in Patrick Kavanagh’s *The Great Hunger* (1942), the gutsy conflation of historical moments in Seamus Heaney’s *North* (1975), the demotic maze-making of Ciaran Carson’s *The Irish for No* (1987), the backbreaking pragmatics of Medbh McGuckian’s *The Flower Master* (1982) and the matristic neo-Luddism of Leontia Flynn’s *The Radio* (2018) are some palpable examples of the ‘new’ – shifts which attest to an aesthetic morphology.

Alan Gillis (1973–) opens his debut collection *Somebody, Somewhere* (Gallery, 2004) with ‘The Ulster Way’, a poem functioning as both an introduction to his own poetic as well as a meditation on the tradition into which he writes. Beginning with a burlesque of the typical bucolic scene – the cows and grass of the Revival, through Patrick Kavanagh (1904–1967), John Hewitt (1907–1987), John Montague (1929–2016), Seamus Heaney (1939–2013) and Michael Longley (1939–) – Gillis’s speaker assures his audience that his poetry won’t be ‘about burns or hedges’.\(^1\) There ‘will be no gorse’, he swears,

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you will not be passing into farmland.
Nor will you be set upon by cattle [...]¹

‘The Ulster Way’ offers a pastiche of the northern Irish canon, taking us on a witty, vocabularic hike through a thematic and formal establishment. Here, semantically opaque lines, ‘full of a whatness’, are reminiscent of Medbh McGuckian (1950); Derek Mahon’s (1941–) tendency to anthropomorphise objects is evoked with a tree trunk’s ‘inhumanity’; the poem flirts with the sort of surrealism and puckishness synonymous with Paul Muldoon (1951–); and its (faux-)causticity nods squarely at Tom Paulin (1949–). Toying with grammatical polarity, the speaker describes (emphatically) the many expected tropes that we’ll surely not be subjected to in the pages that follow. If the irony wasn’t clear – this is the way northerners do it – Gillis pushes the conceit on the value of regionality as far as it might go with the poem’s title. The Ulster Way, a veritable totem of Six-County provincialism, is a 625 mile ‘circular walking route’ around the edges of Northern Ireland, marketed for tourists and local ramblers alike.² Matt McGuire concludes that this conceit evinces Gillis’s ‘disavowal of the rustic imperative’, but such a reading ignores instances in Somebody, Somewhere where the speaker yearns to return to a rural idyll.³ The penultimate poem, ‘Killynether’, continues the grammatical polarity game with a series of I nevers (‘I never walked among the celadine [...] never caught my shirt on [...] billhooks’) through which the bucolic, via the speaker’s fixation, is brought

¹ Ibid.
unequivocally to the fore.¹ McGuire is correct where he writes that *Somebody, Somewhere* seeks to ‘reconnect’ the north to a ‘series of narratives that define twenty-first century experience’, but his analysis pits Gillis against the latter’s forebears, defining the poem as one of ‘iconoclastic revisionism’, where the ‘sacred cow’ (whom he names as Heaney) is confronted.² McGuire characterises, somewhat reductively – or at least suggests that Gillis characterises reductively – northern poetry as fraught with ‘literary mythologies’ and ‘exhausted […] rhetoric’ which has served to propagate ‘clichéd perceptions’:

the organic inevitability embedded within certain strains of local poetry can be seen to shore up and delimit the possibilities for thinking and writing about the North. Gillis’s poem is celebratory as it reveals the contingency of such ideological boundaries.³

Whilst this assertion, which forces certain rural facets of northern poetry into one homogenous dolmen, has much truth in it, Gillis’s poetic is in fact under no illusion about the virtual inescapability of tradition; nor does it pretend to exemption from perceptions of ‘clichéd’ identity. McGuire trusts the poem’s speaker too much. As Miriam Gamble notes, ‘there’s more to’ this inaugurating poem.⁴

In a more nuanced analysis, Gamble reads ‘The Ulster Way’ in terms of the post-Ceasefire context. Here ‘warring impulses’ and ‘insecurities’ are understood as symptoms of historical pivotability: it’s noted how the poem reflects a society ‘unmoored between historical identities’, how it oscillates between ‘the Romantic [in

¹ Gillis, *Somebody, Somewhere*, p. 58.
³ Ibid., para 7.
its rural sublimity] and the post-modern [in its apparent vacuity].\(^1\) It’s then inferred that this position enables a synthesis:

Gillis links mastery (or otherwise) of the terrain with the possibilities inherent in language […] This suggest[s] regional identity [i]s something which, whilst needing renovation, is only in the process of finding a new shape […] It] registers the sense, in poetry as in society, of being on the cusp of something ‘new’.

Whilst Gamble’s reading is impressive, in order to verge her argument on a ‘post-ceasefire’ reading, she errs on the side of inconclusiveness with regard to ‘The Ulster Way’ in terms of its metapoetic project or point. She stresses the poem’s novel approach, but ultimately defines it as a compromise in pragmatics, that is, an abortive effort to address the unaddressable. To her, the poem initially seems like a superficial rejection of Heaneyesque pieties, which creates its own space […] by virtue of sheer impudence […] Yet its disserverance must be acknowledged as running deeper, questioning the core as well as the surface of an aesthetic the attraction of which is based on its ability to link individual with locality […]\(^3\)

Gamble seems to underestimate the complexity of this ‘impudence’ however. If the poem interrogates the value of a rural aesthetic as one facet of northern poetry, concurrently it implements and celebrates another facet of that tradition. She acknowledges this herself earlier in her piece where she writes that ‘The Ulster Way’ implements a ‘number of Muldoonesque tricksy manoeuvres designed to blur rather

\(^{1}\) Ibid.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., p. 363.
\(^{3}\) Ibid.
than enhance [...] clarity’.¹ Both Gamble and McGuire underemphasise the role of humour in their analyses.

Beyond (and through) the ‘cheap dig’, Gillis pays homage to his antecedents in this inaugural poem. Had he wished to distance his poetic, disregard rather than mockery would have sufficed. ‘[I]nsecurities’ are evident, but this is a poetic which knows its debt.² The grammatical polarity game – ‘[t]his is not about burns or hedges’ – comprises a feigned denial which ensures that any intentional or unintentional mimicry in the pages that follow is inoculated. As we’ll discuss in Chapter IV, the poem directly succeeding ‘The Ulster Way’ in Somebody, Somewhere acknowledges another strain of the northern aesthetic. ‘12th of October 1994’ demonstrates Gillis’s debt to the city-dwelling, publically-minded poetry of Louis MacNeice (1907–1963). In Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Canon (2017), Kenneth Keating applies Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology to Irish poetry to describe the thematic and formal mechanics of legacy and influence. Via this model, poetic forebears are perceived as ghosts which, ‘according to the logic of Irish poetry criticism, must either be exorcised for being oppressive forces or conjured up as enabling spectres.’³ Keating claims that critics maintain ‘a logic that traces poetic precursors, seeking a single poetic progenitor in the work of a modern poet in order to legitimise their entry into the canon.’⁴ A critic before he was a poet, Gillis is all too aware of this phenomenon, and so deals with the dilemma of spectres preemptively. Undertaking his doctorate under the supervision of Edna Longley at

¹ Ibid., p. 362.
² Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p.32.
Queen’s University Belfast, he completed a research fellowship at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry.¹ The acknowledgments in Somebody, Somewhere thank four people: Ciaran Carson, Peter Fallon of Gallery Press, Medbh McGuckian and his wife, Wendy.² Gamble paraphrases Carson’s poem ‘33333’ (without its original context) to point out that the ‘consciousness’ of the ‘The Ulster Way’ is one which ‘knows its turf “like the back of [its] hand”’.³ This turf isn’t populated by the thin-skinned. The epitome of northern poetry’s culture of persiflage is the relationship between Heaney and Muldoon, which Fran Brearton characterises as an arena of ‘male rivalry’ with ‘cut and thrust behind the cut and paste’.⁴ As well as walking routes and an obsession with beasts and flora, there’s a sense that Gillis is ingratiating himself in this ‘cutting’ way in ‘The Ulster Way’ by mocking one aspect, the rural prerogative, of a northern aesthetic. Not knowing where his poetic will take him, Gillis hedges his bets with a polarity game, whilst acknowledging a local pedigree. If, according to Philip Hobsbaum, the lyric poem (rather than the ‘individual word’) is the single ‘unit’ of language, then ‘The Ulster Way’ comprises a well-wrought, meta-lyrical clod of the northern tradition’s imaginative estate as it was constituted around the turn of the twenty-first century.⁵

² Gillis, Somebody, Somewhere, p. 62.
NORTHERN CANON(S) & PERIODISATION

It’s with great arrogance that critics and anthologists impose their own versions of literary histories, apotheosising key figures to form canons. But it’s an arrogance that must be tolerated; the labours of experts, in this case professional readers, should remain sacrosanct. If critics’ status, their ‘louder voice’, constitutes a form of elitism, it isn’t – in an immediate sense – one founded upon or upholding social inequalities. Nevertheless, with the freedom to compile, comes the freedom to be wrong. When Hobsbaum reasoned in 1970 that a ‘good’ poem is one which is sanctioned as ‘good’ by two diverse opinions – a form of critical triangulation we might say – he didn’t take into account that the critics whose work he refers to in order to make his point – Yvor Winters (1900–1968) and R. P. Blackmur (1904–1965) – were, in being well-off white American males, far from dissimilar with regard to personal experience.

Since Terence Brown’s critical survey, Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster (1975), no serious attempt has been made to compile an all-encompassing northern canon stretching back as far as the seventeenth century. Due to a host of impediments, some specific, some general, the notion of such a compilation remains controversial. One of the more troublesome of these is the question of the north’s constitutional status, which is wed to the designation of how much of Ireland (culturally, spatially) might be defined as the ‘north’. Other considerations include chronology (how recent or far back a canonical history might extend), subjects’ thematic suitability (their connection to the north), as well as considerations of the aesthetic aptitude and reputability of poets.

Where Gillis supposes in ‘The Ulster Way’ that beyond ‘horizons’ and ‘their curving | limitations’ there are ‘other paths to follow’ he could be paraphrasing Terence Brown’s assertion that the northern ‘poet’s imaginative life […] has been
limited by the horizons defined by the colonial predicament’. Taking the Ulster Plantations as his starting point, Brown betrays a soft Nationalist tendency, frequently returning to the ‘province’s status as a British colony’—soft, because whilst the notion of a ‘distinctive Ulster poetic tradition’ is characterised as an ‘absurdity’, Brown is adamant that northern poetry ‘contribute[s]’ to an ‘Anglo-Irish and/or British’ tradition. The fact that books of northern poetry are ‘predominant[ly]’ published in ‘London and Dublin’ is proffered as evidence in support of such an ‘absurdity’. There’s a residual colonial logic here which asserts that because such poetry is written in what we call ‘English’, it owes itself to an Anglocentric British tradition administered from old colonial (now corporate) centres—the Cities of London and Westminster, and Dame Street—socially unintimate with even communities in their immediate environs. Brown’s choices are also revealing with regard to authenticity and identity. His fourth chapter, ‘Of Heroes, Gods and Peasants’, looks at northern Revivalist poets including Joseph Campbell. AE is mentioned, but not included on Brown’s northern canon, possibly as he didn’t regard the second-in-command Dublin Revivalist’s work as conforming to a distinctively northern aesthetic. In linear terms, Louis MacNeice’s style would hardly fit either, but his inclusion is likely founded upon his influence on later poets. Minutiae such as these exhibit the trying task of the canonist.

3 Ibid., p. 2.
Brown’s inclusion of Patrick Kavanagh and Donegal native William Allingham (1824–1889) can be read as a subtle sort of future-proofing, a yearning (which permeates much of *Northern Voices*) to find a non-partisan, cultural-not-political position. In contrast with its common usage as a euphemism for Northern Ireland, Brown uses the ‘North of Ireland’ synonymously with the nine-county province. Considering the changeability of the concepts of ‘northerness’ and ‘the north’ – exemplified in how until the sixteenth century Co Louth was part of Ulster or in that, topographically, Yeats Country is more northern than the Mournes – a consensus remains unlikely. Pointing this out may seem like needless pettifogging over terminology from the safety of a post-conflict armchair, but as we’ll see in Chapter III on dialect and northern poetry, it’s vital that these insuperable issues are raised. Political, linguistic and demographic maps are useless when it comes to questions of a given poet’s ‘identity’ or their work’s ‘authenticity’. As Benedict Kiely rightly notes in his review of *Northern Voices*, those yet to ‘realise that the whole Ulster business is incomprehensible’ are ‘not well-informed’.¹

Frank Ormsby’s *Poets from the North of Ireland* (Blackstaff, 1979) is the best-known anthology offering a northern canon. Although its title is touted as a compromise, given his choice of poets – all born within Northern Ireland – it serves as a nominal fig-leaf. This isn’t to propose an inclination towards Irish partitionism. An anthology tendering a canon fenced-off by the limitations of a contentious political entity, Ormsby’s chronology (only poets born after 1900 are included) suggests an attempt to capture a moment, a shared experience of political crisis, rather than a continuation, as Elmer Kennedy-Andrews claims, of John Hewitt’s regionalism; Hewitt and MacNeice would have been coming of age when the

Government of Ireland Act 1920 was ratified, so the anthology’s parameters are analogous with Northern Ireland, but this is a case of realism rather than a celebration of the status quo.¹

The first edition of Poets from the North of Ireland was criticised for omitting female poets, a problem ‘solved’ by the inclusion of Medbh McGuckian in the 1990 edition. McGuckian was included in Todd Swift and Martin Mooney’s Map-makers’ Colours: New Poets of Northern Ireland (Nu-Age Editions, 1988); and her work stands out in this relatively unknown anthology which exhibits work for the most part ignored by the academy. The spiritual follow-up to Ormsby’s anthology, The future always makes me so thirsty: New Poets from the North of Ireland (Blackstaff, 2016), takes diversity seriously. Whilst stressing the importance of a ‘place-specific poetry canon’, editors Sinéad Morrissey and Stephen Connolly include poets born outside the north who’ve lived there longer than three years. Their selections are poets not at a ‘mid-point in their writing lives but […] closer to the start’; this inclusion of unpublished poets differentiates the anthology from John Brown’s Magnetic North: the Emerging Poets (Lagan, 2006) and Chris Agee’s The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland (Wake Forest, 2008), both of which had only included established poets.² ‘There are more women in these pages’, Morrissey and Connolly write in a dig at Ormsby’s anthology, ‘this body of work is less heteronormative.’³

The future always makes me so thirsty is also ‘strikingly more international’, building upon Agee’s The New North, which includes poets born and raised outside Northern

³ Ibid., p. 13.
Ireland. In a sense, Morrissey and Connolly broadened canonical visibility and viability, continuing a project – began with John Brown’s *In the Chair: Interviews with Poets from the North of Ireland* (2002) – which heightened the profiles of a wide range of ‘minor’ poets as well as those internationally established. The question of whether or not forming a northern poetic canon is a worthwhile endeavour is redundant because quite evidently, whether called-for or not, many incarnations of it already exist.

NORTHERN HISTORIOGRAPHY: THREE ‘REVIVALS’

*The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry* (2012), an invaluable asset to poetry criticism, comprehends Irish poetry in the broadest, unpartitioned, sense. But in their chosen subjects, editors Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis nevertheless promote certain ontologies of northern poetry, with canons and historiographies which reinforce (as well as challenge) earlier perceptions of northern verse – an unsurprising ambivalence perhaps, given the anxieties of ‘The Ulster Way’. In his chapter on northern poetry from the 1940s, Richard Kirkland posits the notion that three poetic ‘revivals’ occurred in the north during the twentieth century – a model which he develops after Michael Longley’s chapter on poetry in *Causeway: The Arts in Ulster* (1971). Longley doesn’t use the term ‘revival’ himself, but writes that the ‘progress’ of northern poetry ‘has defined itself in a sequence of [discrete] energetic spurts’ where ‘The Muse has come and gone […] her sojourns here often prolonged but

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1 Ibid.
never continuous.¹ Although this kind of floral description, which has come to characterise Longley’s prose, makes for inspirational reading, it also in a sense negates the slog of writing and, perhaps more to the point, the slog of extra-literary obligation. Written early in his career, Longley’s survey has an air of the ulterior about it. A historiography is artfully being drawn up and tendered, where the concept of ‘progress’ in northern poetry fits a convenient teleology.

Between them, Kirkland and Longley identify the first of three northern ‘revivals’ in work published around the turn of the century by poets linked to the Ulster Literary Theatre (ULT) such as Joseph Campbell, Moira O’Neill and Ethna Carbery. The second ‘revival’ is said to have begun in the early 1940s with literary activity around Robert Greacen (1920–2008), Roy McFadden (1921–1999) and the magazines with which they were associated, Rann and Lagan. Kirkland also implicates John Hewitt, May Morton and W.R. Rodgers in this ‘revival’ in a ‘semi-detached way’.² The hive of cultural activity in early-1960s Belfast and subsequent rise to international prominence of ‘Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon and Medbh McGuckian’ comprises, the supposition goes, a third ‘revival’.³ The first concern we might have with this model centres on the use and definition of the word ‘revival’. In an Irish context, ‘revival’ is inextricable from the cultural nationalism of the Irish Literary Revival. The thing being revived by Twilight writers, however, was a culture forlorn, not a material writerly tradition tied

³ Ibid.
to a location. The Revivalist raison d’être wasn’t to pick up where an earlier generation had left off, but to discovery a literature beyond the patronage of the coloniser, to find a new ‘source of imaginative power and freedom’. ¹ Is the ‘Heaney generation’ to be considered a revival of the Revival or a purely ‘aesthetic’ revival coterminous with the Northern Ireland predicament?

Where Longley writes that the local ‘coterie or group’, terms he uses synonymously with ‘movement’ when referring to the Ulster Literary Theatre, ‘can inspire its different members and help to extend the imaginative estate of the community to which it belongs’, he’s speaking from his own experience.² These prerogatives of comradery apply ‘more’, he writes

if that community is, like Ulster, small, defined and comparatively isolated. Out of such conditions, and not as a result of self-protective or self-regarding motives on the part of artists, evolved the Ulster Literary Theatre [Kirkland’s first ‘revival’] and the Lagan group of poets [Kirkland’s second ‘revival’].³

It’s made apparent in this excerpt how Kirkland comes to assume that Longley more than hints at the notion of three lyrical ‘revivals’ where he writes that by ‘1921 the first indigenous literary movement in the North, the Ulster Literary Theatre, with its magazine, Uladh, had finished’.⁴ The ULT in fact put on its last production in 1934. If Longley uses ‘the North’ euphemistically here to refer to ‘Northern Ireland’ (1922–), there’s the issue of anachronism, as the theatre predates partition by seventeen years. If Longley is referring to the northern part of the island – and we

² Ibid., p. 94.
³ Ibid., p. 95.
⁴ Ibid.
assume he means an English language ‘literary movement’ – then surely the ‘Weaver Poets’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have a better claim to the title of ‘first indigenous literary movement’ in English. By using words such as ‘indigenous’ and suggesting that the poetry of Joseph Campbell and Moira O’Neill occurred in a spontaneous musical eruption which was in the end unfruitful, Longley mystifies literary history, plotting a set of constellations which we are to read as false starts before the final success of another ‘reawakening’ in the ’60s which would give birth to something lasting. Heather Clark notes that beyond media interest (under the remit of academic and writing facilitator Philip Hobsbaum) Longley and Heaney helped to create the idea of a ‘reawakening’ themselves.¹ Clark writes that ‘Heaney was the first to talk about a “renaissance” in a 1966 article for the Listener.’² The ‘three revival’ model ossifies the notion that the ‘imaginative estate’ has been hypothesised, then anticipated, only to be finally discovered. Telling here too is the anachronistic underplay where the 1965 festival at Queen’s University is cited as the inauguration of a ‘new phase’ in northern poetry, whereas the importance of the Belfast Group (1963–66) is downplayed despite its well-documented part in nourishing the talents of its attendees, not to mention Hobsbaum’s role in getting work published by prestigious presses.³ Of course, since the 1970s, Longley –

¹ Hobsbaum, an English academic, set up writing workshops in Cambridge, London, Belfast and Glasgow. His Belfast Group (1963–66) played an instrumental role in the early writing careers of Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Stewart Parker and Bernard MacLaverty.


³ Faber & Faber and Macmillan respectively. Clark writes in The Ulster Renaissance that ‘Brearton has criticized Hobsbaum for neglecting Longley’s early poems, [but] it was he who launched the young poet’s career by persuading Macmillan to publish No Continuing City, which they had
throughout his tenure as an Arts Council and after – has championed the Ulster-Scots and Gaelic traditions. As we’ll see in Chapter IV, Ulster-Scots is used in his own work, and he recently voiced his support in the Belfast Telegraph for the Irish language, imploring ‘unionists to embrace’ it. Longley has also since credited Hobsbaum. Nevertheless, his account of northern verse in 1971 has had a major impact on Irish literary history. Until Kirkland’s Cathal O’Byrne and the Northern Revival in Ireland, 1890–1960 (2006), early twentieth-century verse from the north was largely absent from academic texts. Although the revision of Longley’s model in his Oxford Companion chapter addresses some anachronisms by employing a topographical (as opposed to political) geography – ‘poetry of the northern part of Ireland during the twentieth century’ – it nevertheless has its own issues with regards to genre and periodisation.\(^2\) For instance, given that Kirkland includes Medbh McGuckian in his third ‘revival’ (whose first chapbook was published in 1980) and that there’s been a virtual continuity of literary and extra-literary activity in Belfast since the mid-1960s, we might assume that this third ‘revival’ is still ongoing; or, given the centennial periodisation employed in this model, we might assume that it ended at some point in the late 1990s.

Longley’s omission of the ‘Weaver Poets’ in his canon of ‘indigenous’ literary movements is likely symptomatic of common aesthetic reservations at the

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time concerning the work’s provenance and worthiness as art – the assumption being that the ‘Weavers’ were mere imitators of Rabbie Burns.¹ Turn-of-the-century northern Revivalists, Kirkland suggests, applied ‘Celtic Revivalist poetic modes to [...] Ulster material’.² But given the tricky heterogeneity of what we call ‘Revivalist literature’, this assumption is questionable. ‘[A]s Revival studies ramify,’ Edna Longley asserts, ‘their conceptualization diversifies’.³ Here are the final lines of Moira O’Neill’s ‘Birds’ (1900) from Songs of Uladh (1904), where the robin redbreast appears alongside an elusory nod to the Gunpowder Plot:

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The time is dark November,
An’ no spring hopes has he:
“Remember,” he sings, “remember!”
Ay, thon’s the wee bird for me.⁴
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Whilst O’Neill is often cited as one of the central figures of northern Revival poetry, there are clear affinities with the ‘Weaver Poets’ and the Scots Romantic tradition in her work. As anyone with a cursory knowledge of it would notice, there’s certainly more of the Scots aesthetic about these lines than the poetry of Yeats, Æ or Synge. Ivan Herbison, citing John Hewitt, suggests that by including the work of Thomas Given (1850-1917) to the ‘Weaver’ canon, we can perceive an ‘end’ to the tradition as late as 1900, which problematizes the notion of a clear, linear literary inheritance and diminishes the idea of a ‘revival’ around this time.⁵

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¹ Longley was, after all, writing three years before Hewitt’s Rhyming Weavers: And Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down (1974).
Beyond a few differences in terminology, Kirkland’s model of three revivals is Longley’s model, a historiographical scheme which relies on the existence of a movement or coterie which has the extra-literary circumstance of a shared environment: writers producing at a specific place and time. And whilst it’s imperative in this era of instant duplication that the materiality of culture – living, rooted art for an immediate audience – is kept inviolable, histories can sometimes be written to the detriment of a deeper understanding of aesthetic morphology.

Originally labelling itself ‘The Ulster Branch of the Irish National Theatre’, the shared environment for poets within or associated with the ULT – Kirkland’s first ‘revival’ – had that other dimension beyond the musal calling, that is, they were unreservedly nationalistic in outlook.¹ This isn’t to suggest some homogeneity of political conviction at the theatre, but to emphasise that by and large, unlike the Belfast as a purely aesthetic breeding ground (Longley’s second and third ‘revivals’), politics and aesthetics went hand in hand for the poets associated with the Ulster Literary Theatre. Unlike the Abbey elite, who largely kept their nationalism ‘cultural’, there were known advanced nationalists amongst the ULT founders.

Though he became a famous disavower of the Easter Rising, Hobson was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Joseph Campbell, an intelligence officer for the IRB during the Rising, wrote to The Nationalist in 1905: ‘Once Belfast begins to become conscious of the national soul […] there will be hope for her. Then and not until then, will she produce good pictures, good

statues, good books, good plays […] good anything […] what makes for a clearer understanding […] of the life that is of her and about her.¹

In the same way that it would be more than an exercise in futureproofing to more accurately describe Twilight literature as a late edition to Ireland’s movements of revivalism stretching back well into the seventeenth century, it might be more precise to define the work of early twentieth-century poets associated with the Ulster Literary Theatre as a constituent to a continuum, rather than a separate ‘revival’.² Chapter I below makes the argument for Joseph Campbell’s inclusion in such a continuum.

Although the three ‘revival’ model at times glosses over rather than contextualises the product of its subject, it must be noted that Longley and Kirkland’s interest in early-twentieth-century northern poetry puts them in a minority within the cultural sphere. Without their accounts, this work would have been further absented from criticism and thus a wider readership ad infinitum.

**AN ABSENT VOICE**

The title of Part VI of Brearton and Gillis’s *Oxford Handbook*, ‘On the Borders: a Further Look at the Language Question’, puns on that of Tom Paulin’s *A New Look at the Language Question* (1983).³ Invariably touted as the starting point for any investigation into Irish poetry and dialect, this pamphlet – the detail and context of which we look at below in Chapter IV – forms a meditation on Irish literature’s relationship with standard British English and Hiberno-English. Whereas in Scotland

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¹ Ibid., 30.
² Edward Bunting’s *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music* (1796) is an important example.
and northern England dialect is expected, Irish poets writing in English largely avoid writing in their own dialects. \footnote{To take one northern dialect as an example, only a handful of poets speaking Belfast urban English (a branch of Mid-Ulster English) have implemented new orthographies in their work as well as grammar and vocabulary. These include Richard Rowley (1877–1947), Thomas Carnduff (1886–1956), Padraic Fiacc (1924–2019), Tom Morgan (1943–) and Alan Gillis. Only one canonical poem over last thirty years constitutes an explicit rendering of Belfast urban English, namely, Alan Gillis’s ‘Last Friday Night’ from 

\textit{Somebody, Somewhere} (2004); we’ll look at the context and composition of this poem in Chapter IV.} Writing in dialect is the author’s manipulation of language – orthography (emulating pronunciation), grammar (emulating a particular syntax and morphology) and the interpolation of a vocabulary – to produce poetry situated in a specific sociolinguistic context. Although northern poets have incorporated aspects of nonstandard English into their work, their poetry for the most part stops short of explicit renderings, that is, verse which applies nonstandard phonemic orthography and extensively uses aspects of nonstandard vocabulary and grammar. This dearth of dialect entails and precludes a dearth of criticism. Although Paul Simpson’s ‘A Stylistic Analysis of Modern Irish Poetry’ includes some analyses of nonstandard language in the work of Heaney and Gillis, the \textit{Oxford Handbook} includes no specific chapter on Hiberno-English. \footnote{See Paul Simpson, ‘A Stylistic Analysis of Modern Irish Poetry’, Fran Brearton and Alan A. Gillis (eds.), \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), \textit{Here Comes}, p 48.}

The ‘nonstandard’ deviates from the standard writing norms of the academy; this can be anything from a Dadaist nonsense vignette to a transcription of an oral story. The use of the word ‘vernacular’ in the present thesis is broader than the \textit{OED}’s definition (the language of ‘people of a particular country or district’) in that it comprises of standard as well as nonstandard aspects of a literary work which are
implicitly (thematicall, rather than textually) involved with a certain social context.¹

‘Vernacular’ can only be defined as the antonym of ‘nonvernacular’, making it, in diachronic terms, virtually indefinable. Black intellectuals, for example, understand ‘vernacular’ as any text set against the dominant discourse.² English was a vernacular subordinate to the Anglo-Norman French, which in turn was once subordinate to Latin. The root of the term is from the Latin verna, ‘home-born slave, native’.³ In the introduction to The Faber Book of Vernacular Verse (1990), Paulin writes that ‘the problem with the term dialect is that it has a certain archaic, quaint, over-baked remoteness that really belongs in the dead fragrance of a folk-museum.’⁴ This aesthetic preconception about ‘dialect’ is what Chapters I and IV of the present thesis seek to challenge. As the etymology of the term ‘dialect’ embodies how language diverges and evolves in its environments, it’s the most neutral, accurate description to describe ‘demotic’ or ‘enchorial’ deviations. We can define ‘dialect’ as those linguistic elements which diverge from standard metropolitan English and are tied to a specific class, ethnical or regional context; ‘dialect’ in poetry is thus that which is both nonstandard (aberrant) and vernacular (socially nondominant) at a textual (graphical and supragraphical) level.⁵

¹ Dialect, in other words, is found in formal medium, whereas a work can be vernacular in content, having no formal origin in a specific regional or social dialect.

² South African academic Grant Farred defines the vernacular as ‘the transcription of the popular (subaltern) experience into political oppositionality’ in What’s My Name: Black Vernacular Intellectuals (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 7.

³ OED.


⁵ By the term ‘socially nondominant’, I mean the voiceless and mislaid, those who are oppressed and/or those without meaningful political representation within their own society.
The second section of this study forms a study on the litero-formal function of nonstandard dialect informed by linguistics. To avoid, as Philip Hobsbaum aptly puts it, a ‘mechanistic conception of language […] set apart from the social world’, first and foremost, uses of dialect are read as artifice – formal technique – in the same vein that artistic representations of personal or communal experience (at their most poignant) are read as artifice.¹ That said, implementations of dialect in poetry signify a relationship with a social demographic, and thus have unavoidable political significances. For want of a better analogy, language must be read across several interwoven spectrums – the gradients of which contain an abundance of socio-historical concerns. Although the below analyses identify dialect in poems as they appear on the page and not from the mouths of their authors, there are elements (rhyme, rhythm and so on) which indicate deviations from the standard. For a text to qualify as an instance of dialect, it must exhibit something which explicitly (textually) sets it apart from the standard.

Custom is always political. Very few people speak with a dialect approximating a form of codified written English; so like a vexed toddler at a wooden shape sorter, writers who grow up speaking an English which deviates to a sizeable degree from the standard written form who wish to write towards that standard are forced to transmogrify the textures of their native speech into an unfit and alienating orthography and syntax.² Thus, at its very core, writing in dialect is a corrective, subversive, and moral action. Writing in your (one’s) own voice is a test

¹ Hobsbaum, A Theory of Communication, p. 194.
² Never having had a Real Academia Española or Académie française equivalent, spelling across English is irregular. Regarding how they correspond to speech, standard English orthographies are at best unintuitive and at worst shambolic (‘red’ realised /ɹɛd/, ‘read’ realised /ɹɛd/, ‘reed’, ‘reed’ and ‘rede’ realised /ɹiːd/).
of how confident you are *one is* regarding your *one’s* native speech. And this isn’t only the case for provincial or lower-class writers. Even those who speak in what we fallacize as ‘spoken standard English’ (perhaps upper middle-class, Home Counties writers) don’t write in a form befitting their native speech. Had Louis MacNeice (1907–1963) altered the orthography of his poetry to suit his Dorset public-school pronunciation, it would differ immensely on the page. Here’s the first stanza of ‘Prognosis’ (1939):

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Goodbye, Winter,
The days are getting longer,
The tea-leaf in the teacup
Is herald of a stranger.¹
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Given that in ‘Bagpipe Music’ (1937) MacNeice rhymes ‘sofa’ with ‘poker’ and ‘heather’ with ‘Vienna’ – something impossible in most Irish varieties of English – we can assume, and confirm from recordings of his BBC Radio days, that he didn’t pronounce his *r* sounds where they were postvocal (for instance, his ‘roger’ would be realised /ɹɒdʒə/).² Here’s a rough illustration of what the above stanza might look like if its orthography accounted for the lack of rhoticity in MacNeice’s speech:

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Goodbye, Wintuh,
The days ah getting longuh,
The tea-leaf in the teacup
Is herald of a stranguh.
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As James and Lesley Milroy observe, ‘absolute standardisation of a spoken language is never achieved’ because it’s always suffused with the ‘organic’:

colloquialisms and aspects of accent and dialect.³ In the same way, no nonstandard

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² Ibid., pp. 96–97.
dialect stands in isolation from its confluent sociolects (class/age) and idiolects (personal/familial); and definitions of these lects often exhibit instances of synonymy. Register can confuse matters to the point where determining what is ‘demotic’ (‘the everyday language of ordinary people’) and what is ‘dialect’ is difficult. One might go as far to say that a dialect is a lect which hasn’t been reified for the purposes of a (national) language – that the form of language used by the majority of speakers inhabiting a particular parish, ethnic community or urban district constitutes the medial, proper use of the designation ‘dialect’. Most dialectal structures come from older standardised (codified) forms; many colloquialisms will make it into dialects; many colloquial forms will be appropriated by the standard language. Yet we can always distinguish between standard and nonstandard, because standard forms are ideologically legitimated. Voices which deviate from the code for to write poems arouse in a listener a sense of differentiation and contemporaneity.

Even as I stress the ideological nature of ‘standard’ English, Chapters III and IV rely on C.I. Macafee’s *A Concise Ulster Dictionary* (1996), a work which attempts to conserve but also – where it offers its own spellings – reifies and ideologizes a Northern Hiberno-English vocabulary. Two central ethical concerns around dialect where it intersects with literature are the quandaries of ownership (regarding cultural characteristics) and authorial authenticity. Some usages of ‘dialect’ are *synthetic*, that is, they co-opt and blend a variety of nonstandard lects to create a new written dialect for a creative context; others are *idiolectic*, striving to capture nonstandard aspects of their author’s own native speech. It’s never absolutely clear to which of these tendencies any given poem is wed, and indeed, given the way in which we acquire language, all writing and speech is polyglottal.

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1 *OED.*
Instances of nonstandard English in literature can’t be read in isolation as they form part of a wider cultural inheritance via language. Therefore, any analyses of dialect in poetry are inseparable from analyses of those structures of poetic formal exchange carried out via approximations of standard forms. These include inheritances from philosophy, religious texts, pop culture, and a host of other underlying narratives.

As explored in Chapter III, the general dearth of dialect in recent northern Irish literature is by no means due to an absence of a local tradition – as the Antrim poetry of James Orr (1770–1816), the Tyrone tales of William Carleton (1794–1869), and the Monaghan short stories of Michael McLaverty (1904–1992) attest. Belfast playwrights have conveyed dialect well, Owen McCafferty (1961–) and Christina Reid’s (1942–2015) plays being exemplars of nuanced applications; but Belfast prose and poetry is more reticent. For instance, out of nine novels by Glenn Patterson, with a host of working-class characters, only a few pages in *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (1995) contain an emulation of nonstandard English.¹

Unfortunately, despite the technical achievements of Derry novelist Frances Molloy’s *No Mate for the Magpie* (1985), its impact on the northern Irish novel aesthetic is minimal. In *The Language of Irish Literature* (1989), Loreto Todd comments on the dialect used in *No Mate for the Magpie*. ‘Molloy […] uses dialect mainly for humour’, Todd writes, ‘[however, it’s] debatable whether any writer, in Ireland or elsewhere, could use an accurately produced dialect as a medium for tragedy’.² A stale dichotomy is drawn between Tragedy and Comedy in this analysis, and Todd seems uncharacteristically ignorant of the function of humour. Why would

¹ For example, Patterson doesn’t drop the final ‘g’ from gerunds and present participles: ‘Old warren. Always reminded me of a tramp I saw that time, somewhere round here […] Flipping wild’: *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), p. 105.
the use of dialect for tragedy be controversial? It’s difficult to say what she means by ‘tragedy’, but surely there’s nothing intrinsically titillating about the formal aspects of lower-class, ethnic-minority or regional language – or if there is, such arousals should be put under scrutiny. Furthermore, critics of ‘High’ culture aren’t alone in their conservation of an intra-linguistic hegemony. Well-documented in the case of the ‘stage Paddy’, humour-via-dialect is pervasive. In personalities such as James Young, John Linehan and Julian Simmons, northern Irish television has had interest in this caper, the implication being that lower-prestiged dialects are no medium for serious art.

With the risk of sounding aphoristic, it’s necessary to iterate that the overwhelming majority of native English speakers speak nonstandard English. In the early 1980s, it was estimated that around 70% of the population of Ireland and Britain spoke in peripheral forms.¹ Due to intra-linguistic hegemony – inexorably attached to class and the power structures tied to regionality – what we call standard Hiberno-English attempts and has attempted to approximate a spuriously ‘higher’ form of the language, that is, the London-centric dominant, which includes a spoken standard (historically, ‘Received Pronunciation’; today, Standard Southern British English) and an affiliated but separate written standard. It’s perhaps reasonable that in the interests of maximising an audience, any writer would write in an accessible form of English; but then again, since when has accessibility been any yardstick with which we judge or patronise a piece of art? (What happens when the uneducated Cockney picks up Chaucer?). Some literature finds its appeal in difficulty. Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939) finds in unintelligibility its raison d’être.

There has been some but not enough debate within the academy around the dearth of dialect in northern Irish literature. Scottish critic Willy Maley writes that Irish English remains problematic, at least in a literary context […]
because Ireland’s writers are self-conscious about its use. Irish English […] is a language that is devalued, and largely absent from literature, from poetry and from public life.¹

According to sociolinguist Raymond Hickey, this general disavowal (and sometimes outright denial) of English dialects in Ireland comes from a ‘post-colonial attitude that anything homegrown is inferior’ and that ‘endorsing English in Ireland is tantamount to disloyalty to Irish [Gaelic]’.² ‘It may seem a little far-fetched,’ he writes, ‘but there could well be an unconscious trauma among the English-speaking Irish today over having abandoned the Irish language.’³ In contrast with this compassionate approach, Maley accuses Irish writers who shun dialect of greed, grandiloquence and national treason. Their overreliance on standard English is ‘[h]yper correction’, he writes, indicative of the ‘downright snobbery’ of ‘a preferred academic mode that will get them recognition beyond their shores.’⁴ According to Maley, in Irish literature ‘[a]ccents [are only] allowed for funny stuff and light-hearted interludes’; its authors are more ‘English than the English themselves, hence their success.’⁵ Whilst some of his points about the responsibility of the individual

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Maley, ‘Ireland, versus, Scotland’, p. 25.
⁵ Ibid.
are fair, Maley’s own nationalism obscures his judgement. He (mis)reads Irish history through a Scots lens. As Hickey notes, we must remember that in contrast with Scotland, ‘[t]he [‘late’] rise of a native [Irish] middle class in the late nineteenth century brought with it a large amount of linguistic prejudice against prominent features of Irish English’. ¹ Should they agree on little else, the vast majority of those who speak any form of Scots agree uncontroversially that they are Scottish. The north of Ireland differs in this regard; a difference which exists, ironically, because of its proximity to Scotland. Ulster-Scots, a dialect brought to Ireland during the Ulster Plantations (1609–1690), is far from uncontroversial. In observing contemporary perceptions of ‘Ulster-Scots’ – and everything artistic, linguistic and social this term signifies – Frank Ferguson identifies a ‘cultural anxiety’, a certain cosmopolitan cringe amongst ‘individuals [who] wish to be perceived as modern sophisticates rather than provincial cultchies, bogtrotters or mountainmen’. ² Some Mid-Ulster English and urban Belfast English speakers shy away from dialect when writing poetry because of connotations around Ulster-Scots. Whilst Ulster-Scots literary and linguistic figures Philip Robinson (1946–) and James Fenton (1931–) are earnest in their creative and scholarly writing, producing a body of work of profound interest, the Ulster-Scots movement has engaged in a number of untruths in the service of an ideological imperative: the attempt to synthesise the various dialects of Ulster-Scots into a unified standard (‘Ullans’) for civic use. This imperative, in keeping with the complex system of loyalties amongst the northern Protestant community, seeks to forge both a national language (for Northern Ireland) out of Ulster-Scots and paradoxically lend support for Scots as a national language (of

¹ Hickey, Irish English, p. 23.
Scotland) of which Ulster-Scots would be one regional dialect. (It’s important to remember that despite its nomenclature, Ulster-Scots is and has been limited to counties Antrim and Derry, and smaller areas in the north of counties Donegal and Down. The vast majority of Anglic speakers in Ulster have always spoken Mid-Ulster English.) Like Scots, Ulster-Scots is the victim of its similitude to English. The late Irish language activist Aodán Mac Póilín, though holding the Ulster-Scots literary tradition in great esteem, described this standardisation as one of maximal differentiation which often renders the dialect ‘incomprehensible to [its own] native speaker[s]’.¹ What we call ‘Ulster-Scots’, then, is actually two things: an organic group of dialects from northern and eastern Ulster with a rich literary tradition stretching back to the seventeenth-century, and a synthetic official written language with an Ulster Unionist-driven, obscurantist lexicon. Understandably, many northern Irish poets go in fear of being misaffiliated with the latter. To complicate matters, some northern poets, such as Miriam Gamble and Martin Mooney, have included images of Scots dialects in their work but are less inclined to implement their native Mid-Ulster English. As Alan Gillis has noted, ‘the differences between Ireland and Scotland […] are small’ but, we could add, the north of Ireland is where this difference, to use the demotic, catches itself on.²

Chapter III looks at how the stage Paddy, lampooning and misappropriating Irish English, has also been complicit in inhibiting poets when it comes to dialect. This conglomeration of local sociopsychological and political anxieties has manifested itself in the north in a form of cultural cringe around dialect. Although

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The O’Maley’s shock tactics might influence some, it’s not enough to affront Irish writers and forcefully remind them of their regional predicament. Idiosyncratic aesthetic proclivities aside, we must ask – beyond patronage, prestige and cold hard cash – why English-speaking Irish writers feel the need to conform to a standard.

**Aesthetic & Utilitarian Standards**

Standardisation in the Anglosphere is so pervasive that writing in an approximation to a standard written form which is – now and again – somewhat coloured with their native speech has become a question of common sense and practice. Sociolinguists James and Lesley Milroy betray their frustration where they write how in ‘public life […] so called knowledge of linguistic matters is still in the realm of folklore’.¹ Indeed, it’s common to hear phrases such as ‘well-spoken’ or ‘vulgar’ in relation to the textures of an accent or dialect, with less emphasis put on context, that is, how such irrational predilections might be founded in regional, ethnical or class prejudice. Fetishistic attitudes also abound, where ‘Language’ is perceived as something beyond the horizon of human error, a tool from the Oxbridge or Ivy League shed, existing (in a platonic sense) in a perfect form (‘standard’) and a corrupted earthly form (‘nonstandard’). Yet in its being a process, language resists regulation and formal redirection. Though none of us own any of these markings or sounds, in being a collective effort, language is always political. The Milroys write that it’s appropriate to speak of standardisation as an ‘ideology’, which they mean in the Marxian sense as ‘abstract and false thought’ in relation to ‘real material

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conditions and relationships.\textsuperscript{1} Standardisation comprises a ‘set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent’.\textsuperscript{2} Although the ostensible intention of the ideology is one of ‘functional efficiency’ – to create a community where everyone can ‘use and understand [a] language in the same way’ – as the Milroys warn, the ambition towards constructing a postmodern Tower of Babel comes at a price.\textsuperscript{3} Standardisation creates the conditions whereby language is perceived ‘as a relatively fixed, invariant and unchanging entity’ and ‘whatever merits there may be in it’ it leads to ‘over-simplified views of the nature of language, evidently held even by highly educated speakers.’\textsuperscript{4} The quintessence of standardisation is \textit{l’Académie française}, which was founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII’s First Minister. As its constitution asserts, the \textit{Académie} was formed to keep French ‘pure, eloquent and capable’, to compose ‘a grammar, a rhetoric and a poetics’ which, ‘imposed on everyone’, would ‘unite a nation with its language’.\textsuperscript{5} The \textit{Académie} came from the drive to centralise, to consolidate the power of the state by assimilating its various subnational entities. Chapter IV below touches on the ways in which Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) and his contemporaries were involved in promoting a similar development in English. John Guillory characterises the evolution of, from the early eighteenth century onwards, a form of

\textsuperscript{1} Raymond Williams, \textit{Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 128.
\textsuperscript{2} Milroys, \textit{Authority in Language}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., pp. 19–22.
\textsuperscript{4} Authority in Language, p. 22–26.
English we now know as ‘standard’ which was, ‘derived from its literary precursors’ via ‘an array of quasi-academic institutions.’\(^1\) Here,

the continuous correction of speech was undertaken [in] coffeehouses, literary clubs, and salons […] conceptualised from the language of the gentleman […] standardisation of speech does not come from the landed nobility but from a much wider and more heterogeneous group, which is beginning to recognize itself not as other than aristocratic but as part of a society of “gentlemen,” defined according to norms of behaviour and education rather than blood.\(^2\)

John Barrell describes this new model standard as the ‘universally intelligible’ or neutral form, ‘common’ in the sense that it was not a ‘local dialect’, but the lect of a peripatetic middle class.\(^3\) Cultivated as ‘Received Pronunciation’ and written Standard British English, this form was pervasive in the service of the British Empire, just as ‘International English’ is the medium of contemporary corporate globalisation.

It might be a truism to say that the standardised forms of experience which shocked Adorno into his analysis of the *Kulturindustrie* finds not only it’s lectical counterpart, but it’s very medium in the forces of lectical standardisation; a truism, but one hardly noticed. As we write the same way, we speak the same way, we

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\(^1\) John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 97. ‘The Queen’s English’ is thus a misnomer. It’s intriguing that the term ‘bourgeois’ now carries with it an academic cringe; this epitomises how ideology works in language. Raising the question of Standard English’s origins becomes comical: Shaggy Rogers unmasking the monster.

\(^2\) Ibid.

comprehend the same way. The caveat is that this isn’t true only of contemporary language as we know it: already, those with knowledge of programming languages are at an advantage, and governors of the code are no longer Samuel Johnson types, but Bill Gates types. As Slavoj Žižek succinctly put it in 1997, before his hyper-commodification, the ‘phantasmatic screen’ of late-capitalism’s cruel promise of freedom and diversity – the ‘hybrid coexistence of diverse cultural life-worlds’ – takes the ‘appearance of its opposite’, that is, ‘the massive presence of capitalism as [a] universal world system’ which ‘bears witness to the unprecedented homogenization of the contemporary world.’¹

The Milroys’ analysis owes much to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), whose theory of the dialogism colours much of the analysis of Gillis’s poetry below in Chapter IV. In the early 1930s, Bakhtin described the ‘ideology of standardisation’ (in a diachronic and culturally universal way) as ‘verbal-ideological centralization’ which attempts to shape a regime of ‘unitary language’ – that is, the hegemonic ““correct”” form of a language and its ‘officially recognised’ corresponding ‘literary’ form.² Bakhtin uses an analogy borrowed from classical mechanics to theorise standardisation/destandardisation: ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’ forces, the former moving towards a standardised ‘unitary language’ (orthodoxy) and the latter moving away from the hegemonic centre towards ‘dialogized heteroglossia’ (abundance).³ Put simply, this is a scale running from purity to diversity, death to life, boredom to creativity. The diachronic approach has

¹ Slavoj Žižek, ‘Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism’, New Left Review 225.1 (September-October, 1997), p. 46.
extra complications in the specific guise of English due to its multiple (supranational) hegemonic centres. Today we find these centres in universities and newspapers across the Anglosphere, in the public sectors of English-speaking nations, in the corporations which flail between nations where ‘Globish’ is the lingua franca, and – most incorrigibly – in the opinions and on the tongues of grammaticasters ‘High’ and ‘low’.

Helpful abstractions aside for a moment, validation of this intra-linguistic hegemony has been grounded in empirical enquiry which, far from being something intrinsic to the merely textual or cultural, belongs to a realm of collective experience wed to the material everyday. A 2002 paper by phonetician Orla Lowry shows the outcome of a study which analysed intonation patterns in the speech of twelve seventeen-year-old Belfast English speakers. The teenagers were recorded as they spoke to a group of Southern Standard British English-speaking peers. The hypothesis behind the investigation was that the intonation of peripheral Belfasters might ‘emulate the prestige variety of the language […] spoken in Southern England’.

The results show clearly the hypothesis to be correct, conclusively demonstrating a supra-lectical hegemony at play. Even at a level beneath or beyond the purely textual and phonemic, Belfast English speakers tonally ‘code-switch’ in order to imitate the prestige standard as an instinctual element of their social interaction.

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This may seem a superfluous inclusion in an introductory chapter for a study on poetry, but when juxtaposed with an excerpt by the late Scottish poet Tom Leonard (1944–2018), we’re able to bridge those ideologised gulfs between the socio-political and the cultural, between the local and the universal, through that magnanimous catalyst, irony. Leonard writes that if the assertion is that the 'language of [...] economically superior classes is aesthetically superior – then in the interests of “Beauty” and “Truth”, the regional and working-class languages [...] certainly aren’t capable, the shoddy little things, of great Art’. ¹

Dialect in Irish poetry today is only tolerable in small spurts or in a refracted form because of the manner in which it is received as unaesthetic (grotesque) by the logic of the canonical aesthetic. Although it embodies the prejudgments of the culturally hyper-centralised society from which it takes its subject-matter and through which it’s disseminated, we know from the Scots literary tradition that the predicament isn’t inevitable. This semblance of grotesqueness exists due to wider socio-aesthetic reasons, but as the northern Irish verse aesthetic transforms, so does its expectations, its canonical aesthetics. If Edna Longley is correct where she asserts that poetry ‘is always an outsider, always instead of Utopia’ then the beauty of it is its ability to repurpose society’s grotesqueries into stanzas, to harass infinitely obstinate ideological structures via its medium, and to tragically fail.² Whilst in a semantic sense poetry debases itself where it’s co-opted as propaganda, poetic form (the musical, supra-semantic aspect) has the ability to deride the ‘functional efficiency’ of contemporary utilitarianism.³

³ Milroys, Authority in Language, p. 19.
Aesthetic deliberation (in the widest sense, what people *like*), and the political factionalism which governs the structures of society, won’t divorce or amalgamate any time soon because aesthetic judgements are customarily infected with other predispositions based on experience. Such judgements are conglomerated where individuals are socialised; and where groups form, various political interests are necessitated. Leaders emerge, and where poetry is concerned, the immanent poets and critics write the code. Due to critical and public dissensus, the notion of an underlying (correct) aesthetic is objectively a nonsense. This isn’t to say that all aesthetic theories are invalid; but rather, they’re not universal.

A critic may appeal to our common sense where a line of poetry is discordant (rhythmically, semantically, phonemically), but contrary beings that we are, there’ll be another critic who earnestly disagrees. To complicate matters, a political statement within a work can be the very thing which makes it aesthetically valuable to the reader. Unlike music, where sonic differentiation is removed from semantics, making it infinitely adaptable – Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 being the clichéd example of formal appropriatablity – in terms of judgement and interpretation, poetry falls prey to its lectical medium. This isn’t to say that all poetry is propaganda, but that each poem is habitually categorised vis-à-vis the socio-linguistic context into which it’s read. The respected opinion (the critic’s louder voice) may force us to have another read, to listen more closely and reconsider. Edna Longley, responding to the ultra-commodifying effects of social media on poetry, writes that there’s a distinction – a useful distinction, which we seem to have lost – between “poetry” and “verse”. Or is that “elitist”? I am old enough to remember the 1960s moment of the Liverpool poets and, I think, to
recognise what survives of it. In those days they were much better known than “the Belfast poets”. One problem today is that, by a fallacy which stems from misreading the Romantics, a poem has come to be more closely identified with its author than is a play or novel. Thus, to dislike a poem, or fail to rate a poet, seems like disrespecting their gender or ethnicity rather than making a point about “art”, about “value”.¹

There may be a formal base-level to what makes a verse a verse; but defining ‘good’ poetry is troublesome. As we’ll see in Chapter II with Martin Mooney, ‘quality’ (which we may imperfectly apprehend in perspicacity) doesn’t always out.

Although informed by them, this thesis doesn’t prescribe to a theory of aesthetics in order to plead the case for ‘good’ poems, but endeavours to describe ‘underlying principles’ that govern a given poet’s lyrical practice.² Chapter I, for instance, makes the case that Joseph Campbell’s work meets a set of aesthetic requisites – principles, manifest in poetic form and theme – that warrant his inclusion in a northern Irish canon, even if history has tabooed his early-twentieth-century Irish Republicanism. The cultural institutions through which an imaginative estate might be accumulated don’t exist to provide us with beautiful things that might brighten our otherwise boring existence – but are involved in a host of other intrigues. This is a roundabout way of saying that art and its canons are impure – that they don’t always hold true to their own values. Aesthetic criteria outlined by poets and critics isn’t the only criteria for canonisation. Irish poets, as Keating points out, persist as technical ghosts in the work of successors – holding the tradition together, as we’ll see in

² OED.
Chapter I, with lexical and subnotional totems such as the leitmotifs of snow or mushrooms – but they also continue as ideological influences. This is especially in the north, where the liberalisms of MacNeice and Joyce inform ‘aesthetic’ practice and appreciation.

The two focal strands of this thesis on northern poetry, lyrical canon and uses of dialect, are to be understood as being governed by standards. Raymond Williams claims that ‘practical and [utilitarian] considerations’ and ‘aesthetic considerations’ are ‘elements of the same basic division’, yet it would be disingenuous to directly equate local and Anglospheric aesthetic standards (of the academic and cultural spheres) to which poets keep with socio-aesthetic standards (those of cultural cringe) and the pervading capitalistic ideology of standardisation.¹ Williams writes mournfully that the notion of ‘aesthetic’ has come to signify a symptom of our ‘divided modern consciousness’ concerning ‘art and society’.² As interventions to right this wrong are invariably driven by utilitarian imperatives, initiated unpassionately by the state on one hand and dispassionately by the culture industry on the other, academic and independent cultural institutions – unavoidably infected with ubiquitous ‘functional efficiency’ – remain the custodians of an aesthetic modus vivendi.³ Of course, academics have both challenged and preserved the contingent disunity between cultures and Culture. As Madelena Gonzalez puts it succinctly, for some time there has existed a tension within the humanities and more particularly within literary studies in English between those who are accused of assimilating or

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¹ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 28.
² Ibid.
reducing literature to politics and ideology and those who yearn for a return to “disinterested” enquiry, based on the notion of aesthetic value. The former are usually grouped under the umbrella heading of poststructuralist theorists, while the latter are considered as belonging to what could be called an anti-theory or post-theory camp which advocates a return to the aesthetic.¹

Beyond these ‘camps’, some academics have attempted to find a middle ground, whilst others have tried to supersede these stances entirely. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1930–2002) sociological approach to aesthetics claims to transgress the fundamental taboos of the intellectual world [by] relating intellectual products and producers to their social conditions of existence [thus defying] the laws of academic or intellectual propriety which condemn as barbarous any attempt to treat culture, that present incarnation of the sacred, as an object of science.²

Through its unequivocal terminology and merging of theory with empiricism (his ‘theory of practice’), Bourdieu’s iconoclastic work illuminated the academic emperor’s new clothes, drawing a clear, near-inarguable conduit between the structures of class and the strictures of Culture. But if we pit ‘science’ against ‘sacred’, we lose something of the personal relationship between art object and appreciator, enforcing binaries which can quickly metonymise into rational versus irrational or love versus practicality. Taking Bourdieu at his word, John Guillory

¹ Madelena Gonzalez and René Agostini, Aesthetics and Ideology in Contemporary Literature and Drama (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), p. xii.
writes that “‘aesthetic value’ is ‘nothing more or other than cultural capital.”¹ The main dispute we can have with this understanding of art is its dispensation of an agnostic truth in favour of a rigid, codified truth – the sociological boot goes through the sandcastle, so to speak, playtime is over and it’s time to go home.

Bourdieu offered the academy new ontologies and thus novel challenges, but in his quest to find the underlying fallacies of art, he bequeaths ‘High’ culture to the middle-classes and ‘lower’ forms to the masses. There are ethical issues here, but in keeping with the present thesis, we must point out that in a formal sense, beyond the Romantic or Dickensian exception, this rubric of proprietorship isn’t essentially true. Bourdieu writes that although middlebrow art such as ‘cinema, jazz [...] strip cartoons, science fiction or detective stories’ may be patronised by higher modes (associated with the ‘avant-garde’), in the final instance they ‘appear as what they are, simple substitutes for legitimate assets.’² This synchronic perspective however, this unclose reading, neglects the way in which ‘High’ culture consumes ‘novel’ lower forms in order to reinvigorate itself. This is typified by Wordsworth and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); it’s seen in how the culture industry appropriates classical music and architecture; or indeed, as we’ll see in Chapter IV, how Alan Gillis reinvigorates the northern canon with pop culture and local dialect. Although indispensable to any understanding of how art is commodified and regulated, the problem with Bourdieuan analyses, to use the *OED’s* definition of ‘aesthetic’, is that it addresses the ‘effect’ but not the ‘appearance’ of the thing: the context but not the text. It shies away from definitions of a directly poetic consequence. It’s not that aesthetic appreciation *needn’t* be defined in pecuniary terms, but that in the theatre of

¹ Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, p. 332.
² *Distinction*, pp. 87–88.
the day-to-day, it simply isn’t. The institution of the family isn’t reducible to domestic economics and Freudian dynamics – although important, these are secondary to the ‘flowery’, ‘sanctified’ notions of love and pain. A little girl from a Belfast council flat who has wandered into the Ulster Museum to find herself enthralled by an exhibition is not identifiable as a nascent social climber. Some knowledge of fine art might afford her cultural capital and make her upwardly mobile, but no survey can conclude how social conditioning defines why we appreciate a configuration of words, notes or colours. And at any rate, who’s to say that the gatekeepers and benefactors of art are the best equipped to appreciate their own ‘assets’?

In 2012, a French-polisher called Andrew Shannon caused public outrage when he walked into the National Gallery and put his fist through Monet’s *Argenteuil Basin with a Single Sailboat* (1874). Judge Martin Nolan, characterising the crime as “peculiar”, handed down a six-year jail sentence saying that although he ‘would not expect Shannon to know the value of the painting […] he must have known the painting was valuable and historic.’¹ As the media revealed however, Shannon was a prolific art thief with multiple prior convictions. Two years after his early release due to good behaviour in 2016, he received a two-year sentence after being convicted of being in possession of a Frederick Goodall (1822–1904) painting which had been stolen from a stately home in Co Cork in 2006. During proceedings, it emerged that Shannon ‘attends art classes on a regular basis.’² This tragicomic

story about the relationship between art and society defines poetic consequence. Wanton iconoclasm, criminality and Judge Nolan’s condescending assertion about Shannon’s knowledge of art aside, these news reports show how a piece can be so easily reduced to a historical object with a price tag. The irony here’s almost painful: the actions resulting from Andrew Shannon’s apparent obsession with art keeps Monet relevant. If the context overrides the text to the subject as per Bourdieuan analysis, then why does the French-polisher-cum-art thief attend art classes? Michael Pierse evokes Jacques Rancière’s (1940--) assertion ‘apparently contra Bourdieu’ that an appreciation of “High” culture has the propensity to be ‘liberating for aesthetes positioned at the lower end of the social order’.¹ Joseph J Tanke writes that for Rancière, ‘philosophy locks up the poor because it is interested in preserving its own purity’, which apparently extends to the philosophy of the state and the art world.² After Argenteuil Basin with a Single Sailboat was professionally restored, its price rose by €2 million.³

Despite Tanke’s insistence that his work is irreducible to an “aesthetic theory”, amid the difficult style of his sizeable oeuvre Rancière offers some modest ideas about how we might encounter art.⁴ ‘Artistic practices,’ as he sees it, are “ways of doing and making” that intervene in the general distribution of ways of

⁴ Tanke, Jacques Rancière, pp. 1–2.
doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.\textsuperscript{1} Since the ‘aesthetic revolution’ of early nineteenth-century Europe – which by no accident coincided with the Age of Revolution – there has existed an ‘aesthetic regime of art’, Rancière writes, which will usurp the utilitarian imperatives of the Platonic disposition (eradication of ‘art’ as a concept) and the Aristotelian disposition (art as a semi-autonomous \textit{mirror to society}) to liberate the medium of art to compete with politics:

The arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible. Furthermore, the autonomy they can enjoy or the subversion they can claim credit for rest on the same foundation.\textsuperscript{2}

Because its assumptions can’t be verified by a scientific method, Bourdieuan \textit{evangelists} might find Rancière’s model – which relies on a secular sort of faith in both art and society – unbearable. Rancière’s polemic rests on the existence of universal social equality (an unpotentiated \textit{dēmos}) which, although not immediately perceptible, can be made so through the practice and appreciation of art – at least under the auspices of the ‘aesthetic regime’, where art is made and appreciated as independent, not of society, but the strictures of political factionality. The present thesis follows in this spirit of inclusivity by offering meditations on the tendency to employ explicit dialect in northern Irish poetry – a medium yet to realise its aesthetic


\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, p. 14.
potential – and the legacy of two unappreciated northern poets who by the very standards of the ‘imaginative estate’, already have.
Chapter I

‘But he had been unfrocked’: Joseph Campbell and the Northern Lyric

There will be bright days for you yet, Joe [...] it will come full circle yet. Wait till you see, as they say in the North.

—Rutherford Mayne, 1942

In 1987, Poetry Ireland Review published the findings of a survey by John Montague which asked twenty-two Irish poets the following: ‘Who is Ireland’s most neglected poet?’ Micheal O’Siadhail’s answer was ‘Joseph Campbell’.¹ James Liddy’s reply, cheating the question, asserted that the ‘most neglected poet in Ireland are in fact two poets.

One living and one dead; one Protestant [sic.] and one Catholic; one lyric and the other polemical. They must be neglected because they come from one of the most forgotten, weepy, cities in the world. Joseph Campbell and Padraic Fiacc.²

This chapter takes as its subject the poetry of the former of these ‘neglected’ figures – an overlooked body of work which is ‘more than adequate’ and ‘more than minor’.³ Campbell epitomises the phenomenon, mentioned in the introduction, of how certain qualities of a poet’s work are overlooked by critics for extra-aesthetic reasons. Below we look at how this ‘writer of great gifts’ who had an ‘international

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
reputation’ up until at least the 1940s, is now misread and ignored, and makes a case for his recanonisation.¹

Joseph Campbell (1879–1944), the son of a Belfast road contractor, published a collection of song in collaboration with composer Herbert Hughes (1882–1937) in 1904, seven collections of unaccompanied verse between 1905 and 1917 and two plays, The Little Cowherd of Slainge (1904) and Judgement (1912). As James Quinn writes, Campbell inherited a ‘fervent nationalist politics’ from his father, and ‘from his mother, of mixed [sic.] catholic–presbyterian stock, a strong interest in Gaelic culture’.² He took over the family business in 1900 after the death of his father, but plagued by a nervous disorder, eventually left to dedicate his life to cultural and political concerns. As well as joining Conradh na Gaeilge, he was involved with Bulmer Hobson and David Parkhill’s Ulster Literary Theatre (1902–1934), taking the co-editorship of its short-lived journal Uladh in 1904.³ After a year working as a clerk at the Forestry Department in Dublin, Campbell took the position of secretary at the Irish Literary Society in London in 1906. Here, involving himself with various Revivalist and avant-garde cliques, Campbell wrote The Man-Child (1907), The Gilly of Christ (1907) and The Mountainy Singer (1909), collections which would establish him as a ‘poet of real stature’ in literary circles.⁴ Two years after returning to Ireland in 1911, he joined the Irish Volunteers; in the same year, he

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³ Campbell published under ‘Eosamh MacCathmhaoil’ and ‘Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil’ and the pseudonym ‘Ultach’.
⁴ Quinn, ‘Campbell, Joseph’, para. 3.
published *Irishry*, which was followed in 1917 with his final book of poems, *Earth of Cualann*. Serving as an intelligence officer for the IRB during the Rising, Campbell took office in the ‘alternative civil regime’, becoming a Sinn Féin member of the Republican District Court for East Wicklow (1918–20) and Vice-Chairman of Co Wicklow Council (1920–21).\(^1\) Taking the Anti-Treaty side during the Civil War, he was interned for seventeen months at Mounjoy then the Curragh by the Free State, an administration which he perceived as being ‘founded on dishonour’ and ‘built on corruption’.\(^2\) Upon his release from prison, unable to find employment, his political ambitions and marriage in ruin, Campbell immigrated to New York. Once again finding solace in culture, he founded the first School of Irish Studies in the US in 1925. After lecturing in Anglo-Irish Literature at Fordham University from 1927 to 1938, Campbell moved back to Ireland. Though appearing on Radio Éireann in the early 1940s to discuss his work and travels, he remained openly critical of the state for the remainder of his days, living as a ‘semi-recluse’ under the Wicklow Mountains.\(^3\) Upon Campbell’s death in 1944, an *Irish Times* frontpage notice defined him as ‘one of the best known of the present day Irish Poets’.\(^4\) Despite this notoriety, today Campbell’s poems are critically overlooked for a host of extra-literary reasons. He remains a ghost, to use Kenneth Keating’s Derridean parlance, who has all but been exorcised.\(^5\)

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1. Ní Chuilleanáin, ‘Introduction’, *As I was among the captives*, p. 4.
2. Campbell, *As I was among the captives*, p. 39.
3. Quinn, ‘Campbell, Joseph’, para. 5.
THE UNSUNG CAMPBELL

Despite being a significant voice in Anglophone poetry during and beyond the northern Revival, Campbell’s work – rarely anthologised in the contemporary era – has been largely disregarded, but not entirely overlooked, because although easily missed, he’s difficult to ignore.¹ Austin Clarke, in his introduction to The Poems of Joseph Campbell (1963), lauds the first Irish poet to ‘write free verse’ – the technical innovation which above all others changed utterly the aesthetic disposition of twentieth-century poetry.² As already noted, Campbell’s first book, Songs of Uladh (1904), is a collection of accompanying lyrics alongside traditional Ulster airs. The best-known piece from this collection, ‘My Lagan Love’, became a popular parlour song which has since been covered by a host of pop acts, from Van Morrison to The Corrs. ‘My Lagan Love’ brings the Revival aesthetic as close to a northern urban setting as the poet in his early career was willing to venture – that is, between Lambeg and Drumbeg, just south of Belfast:

Her father sails a running-barge  
’Twixt Leamh-beag and The Druim;  
And on the lonely river-marge  
She clears his hearth for him.³

This song has been (and probably still is) the most common introduction to Joseph Campbell’s writing, yet to most who know it the author remains anonymous.

¹ Campbell was however included in The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing (1991).
In November 1912, Campbell’s poem ‘The Piper’ was published alongside Harriet Monroe and Richard Aldington’s work in the second issue of *Poetry*.¹ Today synonymous with canonical poetry in English, this magazine had already published Ezra Pound in its first issue. Two years later, Campbell had poems published in the same publication alongside Wallace Stevens.² In 1920, Campbell’s work was anthologised in Louis Untermeyer’s *Modern British Poetry* and Yeats included him in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936).³ Far from the portrait which has been taken of him since, as a simple balladeer or a Yeats emulator, Campbell was being recognised during this period as a poet of the transatlantic verse tradition. Yet if one were to search long and hard, they’d have difficulty finding references to him as contemporary of Stevens. For most critics, only a few Irish poets of the time (Yeats being the key figure here) were able to transcend the parochialisms of the Revival and ‘go global’. In his monograph, *The Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (1941), Louis MacNeice writes how the minor Revival poets of Campbell’s generation were less conscious of being pioneers, wrote more naturally, looking less to the idealized Ireland of the past than to the everyday Ireland of the present though they could treat the latter in miniature […] Seumas O’Sullivan, Padraic Colum and Joseph Campbell did not copy the broad sweep of Yeats and their poetry lacks brainwork but they succeeded better than Yeats himself in some of the objects which he had proposed for Irish poets […] They] expressed much more truly than Yeats does the folk

¹ ‘The Piper’, *Poetry* (Chicago) 1.2 (November 1912), pp. 33–34.
² ‘The Puca’, *Poetry* (Chicago) 3.2 (November 1913), pp. 50–51.
elements of Ireland. Campbell’s short poems, fairly free from literary consciousness, are a matter of delicate music and vivid, simple pictures.¹

MacNeice, whilst artfully exalting the kind of discursive and discerning poetry which characterises his own, affords the simplicity of these *more Yeatsian than Yeats* poets a share in his axiological schema. But Campbell’s formal originality speaks for itself. Here’s the tenth stanza of his prose poem ‘The Dark’ (1909), which was published when MacNeice was two years old:

This is the dark that buried the rope that swung the sword that tracked the song was made to the breast that fired the love that followed the look the dreamer looked who dreamed the dream that came of the dark.²

With its repeating relative pronouns, this stanza bears a striking resemblance to MacNeice’s ‘Château Jackson’ (1961):

Where is the Jack that built the house
That housed the folk that tilled the field
[...] 
That wore the mats that kissed the feet
That bore the bums that raised the heads [...]³

Notwithstanding the younger poet’s deeply patronising assertions, Campbell was in fact a ‘conscious [...] pioneer’ when it came to, at the very least, the business of the rehashed nursery-rhyme.

MacNeice, writing in the 1940s, nevertheless offers a more nuanced analysis in comparison to some contemporary critics. Poetic-critic Justin Quinn writes how Campbell has been ‘justly consigned to the oblivion of literary history’ but doesn’t

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² Poems p. 84.
quite explain why.¹ This may seem unfair, but at least Quinn knows who it is he’s referring to when he mentions the name ‘Joseph Campbell’. Shane Murphy, in a discussion of Ciaran Caron’s poetry, cites the influence of the ‘digressive, convoluted oral narratives of Joseph Campbell from Mullaghbawn’; here Murphy is actually referring to John Campbell of Mullaghbawn (1933–2006), the celebrated Armagh storyteller.² Heather Clark writes that the first issue of the Belfast-based literary journal Rann (1948–1953) published ‘a piece entitled “Ancestral Voices”, which focused on the work of past Ulster poets such as William Allingham, Joseph Campbell, John McKinley, and Samuel Ferguson’; here Clark is actually referring to James Campbell of Ballynure (1759–1818), an early Ulster ‘Weaver’ Poet.³ In Edna Longley’s The Living Stream (1994), Belfast’s ‘Docker Poet’ John Campbell (1936–) is indexed under ‘Campbell, Joseph’.⁴ It would be gratuitous and quite silly to point out these trivial errors under any other circumstances, but here in the work of academics at the forefront of their field, they acutely demonstrate the critical disregard for Joseph Campbell of Belfast (1879–1944). Even James Liddy, as quoted above, when proposing that Campbell is one of the most neglected poets in Irish history, misidentifies him as a Protestant.

The general ignorance of Campbell’s work amongst critics and writers hasn’t been continuous however. In a memorial essay published in the third issue of the journal *Lagan* (1945), J.N. Brown writes how “[t]he genius of Joseph Campbell is incomparable – that is, if we are to confine our standards of comparison to the works of Anglo-Irish poets more or less contemporary with him.”¹ This, considering we include Yeats, is high praise indeed. Brown goes on to write that a ‘[r]ecognition’ of Campbell’s poetry ‘has been tardy’ and attributes this tardiness to the ‘nature of his genius’ which is ‘delicate’ and ‘fragile’.² Saunders and Kelly propose multiple extra-literary dimensions regarding this lack of acknowledgement – which, although mainly evidenced, occasionally slip into hyperbole. In agreement with Kirkland in *Cathal O’Byrne and the Northern Revival in Ireland* (2006), they write that a poetic audience in Belfast in the early twentieth century ‘hardly existed’, and that the poet found it impossible to find work ‘conducive to writing’ (presumably clerical work or teaching) ‘because he was a Catholic.’³ Campbell moved to Dublin in 1905, where he ‘found an audience, but as an Ulsterman he carried the stigma of second-class citizenship much as a Mancunian did in London’.⁴ Saunders and Kelly write how Dublin critics were ‘apathetic or hostile’ and that Æ ‘who befriended so many other poets, ignored Campbell’s efforts.’⁵ Perhaps too experimental in his practice and too urban in his mannerisms for Twilight sensibilities, Campbell wasn’t the Kavanaghesque ham-in-rags figure that Æ was keeping his eye out for. And if employment was to be found down at the Abbey, reverence wasn’t.⁶ In 1906, Yeats

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² Ibid., p. 68.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ This moniker refers to Campbell’s second collection *The Rushlight.*
(assuming the role of the haughty theatre director) wrote the following in a letter to Katharine Tynan:

‘The Rushlight’ man [Campbell] knows better than the others what a poem is, though not a very interesting sort of poem, but he has not written it yet […] P.S. I have plans for improving our new poets myself. I want to get them to write songs to be sung between the acts […] I hope to begin with two groups of songs – one selected from the ‘Rushlight’ man, Colum, and so on […] I will get them sung so as to make the words as expressive as possible.¹

Saunders and Kelly put Yeats’ lack of respect for Campbell down to his well-known ‘antipathy towards everything from Ulster’.² Although, as already noted, Yeats included his work in The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, ‘“The Rushlight” man’ was only allotted space for one poem, ‘The Dancer’, which is by no means the most representative, innovative or formally achieved work in Campbell’s œuvre.³

In Northern Voices (1975), Terence Brown describes Campbell’s poetic as one which ‘made the national mode a vehicle to express a coherent personal vision’.⁴ Brown goes on to qualify this however by describing Campbell’s ‘subject-matter’ and ‘manner’ as ‘conventional’, his ‘landscapes and descriptive passages’ as

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‘familiar’.\(^1\) Post Revival, these passages would be ‘familiar’ and post-Kavanagh they would certainly seem ‘conventional’. Ultimately, Brown’s reading of Campbell is favourable. He notes the employment of a skilful ‘verbal music’, and a sense ‘beyond realism or simple romanticism’ of ‘an individual interpretation of Irish experience.’\(^2\) He writes that Campbell’s poems of peasant life are [...] the emblems of a spiritual ritualising condition rather than the items of realism. Cradles, currachs, pots, straw crosses, crofts, trades, spells and rural magic, trout dreaming in the rivers [...] the substantial manifestations of his visionary sense of Irish life that show he learnt his symbolist techniques from Blake [...] His ideal Ireland is one that knows little even of mercantilism, let alone industry or the city[.]\(^3\)

**THE DISAPPEARING IMAGIST**

Brown uses ‘The Labourer’ from *Irishry* (1913) to corroborate his observation that Campbell directs ‘prejudice and incomprehension’ at the urban.\(^4\) ‘Bog wisdom’, he writes, ‘cannot survive the industrial ghetto.’\(^5\) It’s not difficult to see how that other Brown, J.N. Brown, comes to the conclusion that *Irishry* ‘marked the higher level of Campbell’s achievement’ given the breadth and depth of subject-matter and formal variation.\(^6\) The nomenclature of the title – equivalent to ‘Jewry’ – implies, in

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\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 74.
\(^3\) Ibid., pp. 74–75
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 75.
\(^5\) Ibid.
opposition to a civic idea of Irishness, an ethnicity. ‘Irishry’ evokes the word’s colonial, derogative usage for Gaelic natives from the Plantagenet period through to the reformation, whereon it was used to denote the ‘Catholic Irish [Gaelic and Gaelicised] as opposed to Protestant settlers’.¹

Each poem in Irishry forms a play on a type: the mother, the exile, the milk-boy, the Orangeman and so on, and each are titled thus accordingly. Terence Brown concludes with certainty that ‘The Labourer’ reveals Campbell’s ill will towards the urban with its ‘loud and drunken’ workmen, but the city represented in this poem isn’t so simple; Campbell, for instance, despite Brown’s assertion, does employ naturalism.² Whilst ‘The Labourer’ sympathises with workmen in their desperate lives, it also depicts one in an authentic light as not merely broken but also bitter and morally deficient:

Clodhopper, hireling: not content  
With the bothy built by Government—  
Two rooms, a sty—but he must drown  
All memory of it in the town.

Ploughed earth is drab, but Camden Street  
Is drabber: nothing clean or sweet:  
No stars, no silences, no dews,  
But pubs, and tick-shops run by Jews.³

The poet ventriloquizes the workman, revealing a common mid-twentieth-century prejudice: the anti-Semitic stereotype where the Jewish people are conflated with and come to represent the avaricious proprietor, the petty bourgeois. Thirteen years after another of Campbell’s poems from Irishry, ‘The Puca’, appeared in Poetry (Chicago), Langston Hughes published a series of blues poems in the same

¹ OED.
³ Ibid.
magazine. The speaker of ‘Hard Luck’ (1926), embodying the imperfect African-American voice of early-20s Harlem, engages in the same flagrant anti-Semitism as Campbell’s navvy:

Jew takes yo’ fine clothes,  
Gives you a dollar an’ a half.  
Jew takes yo’ fine clothes,  
Gives you a dollar an’ a half.  
Go to de bootleg’s,  
Git some gin to make you laugh.¹

Whilst these clumsy inclusions shouldn’t be glossed over, both Campbell and Hughes fall victim to the conflation of the fictive voice with that of the author, a phenomenon, as Edna Longley points out, less common in readings of fiction and drama.²

The distance between Campbell’s opinion and those of the navvy is achieved where the latter attacks the British Government for his poor accommodation. These are the sentiments of the speaker, not the poet. Campbell, an advanced nationalist by 1912, had his own grievances, but none of these were with the first Asquith Ministry (1908–15), the administration pushing for a third Home Rule Bill at the time *Irishry* was being edited for publication. Having worked for the family road-contracting firm, Campbell knew labourers and was familiar with their various struggles, economic and moral. Even if, as their boss, he at times contributed to said struggles, Campbell profoundly admired these workers due to his ‘socialist tendencies’.³

Saunders and Kelly write that it was during his two year period ‘working with

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³ Saunders & Kelly, *Joseph Campbell*, p. 64.
navvies and bricklayers’ that the poet gained an ‘understanding’ of the ‘underprivileged’.1 Speaking on Radio Éireann in the 1940s, Campbell reflected on his days managing the business, warmly recalling some of the characters he worked alongside:

Peter O’Toole I must name: he was bearded like a seaman, and, indeed must have spent some apprenticeship at sea, for his hobby, when not ‘ganging’, was to make rig model ships. Barney Rowan, too – clean-shaven, burly, with moleskins that were tidily patched and washed every Monday to the whiteness of snow. Tom Mullan of Nail Street […] Jack Halloran – a Limerick tramp, a follower of public works, pockmarked – forever craving drink […] These ‘untouchables’ of the lowest caste, grubbers in clay and rock, must be all dead now, and never ambitioned to have their humble personal entities extended this side of the Lethean River by such an ethereal ichor as wireless. But I salute them as brave souls, and my masters, for they taught me a great deal of my craft – and, particularly, its iron and integrity.2

The men described here are as imperfect as their typification in ‘The Labourers’ as bigots. We’re given no reason to assume, as Brown does, that the city plays a direct role in their tribulations; even if it did, who would deny that the city – especially those as troubled as the Edwardian city – does corrupt the lives of its poor? What’s more intriguing than any antimodernist sentiment on Campbell’s part (which is expected from a Revivalist) is his acute awareness of the intricacies of class (which is nary expected from a Revivalist). The life of the workman in ‘The Labourer’

1 Ibid., p. 17.
2 Ibid.
remains unromanticised. Unlike many of Campbell’s poems which reference figures from Hellenic and Gaelic mythology, this wretched figure inhabits a godless universe of which he has no part:

And late returning, halo-crowned,
With empty purse and sorrow drowned,
Bawls to the stars that silently
Spin in the shining Milky Way.¹

Between this final stanza and the fourth – where Camden Street has ‘nothing clean or sweet’ – we hear the echoes, are presented with a despondent inversion of that well-travelled sentiment from Wilde’s Lady Windermere’s Fan (1893) where Lord Darlington reminds Dumby (an English high-society type) that ‘we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars’.² The Labourer has no access to the stars; defiled, he hates.

Unlike elsewhere in Irishry where a landmark (often the River Liffey) locates the setting, the precise location of Camden Street in ‘The Labourer’ is left ambiguous. That the poem could be set in Dublin, London, Glasgow or indeed Campbell’s native Belfast is in keeping with the international theme (albeit one centred on the Irish diaspora) running through Irishry. One of the main mischaracterisations of Campbell is that his Gaelicism and Republicanism imbued in him socio-culturally purist ideals. During his time in the US however, he ‘argued for Irish Studies as a new internationalism’.³ John P. Harrington writes that Campbell’s curriculum for his school of Irish studies at Fordham ‘declared “A Non-Insular Policy” and argued for the relevance to his school of Irish studies of Ibsen, Handel,

¹ Poems of Joseph Campbell, p. 120.
² Oscar Wilde, Lady Windermere’s Fan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 44.
Wagner, and Debussy’.¹ He adds that this ‘vision for Irish studies was for an
ternational or transoceanic subject to accompany the growth of phenomena that we
call global history or transnationalism, terms that were not yet available.’² In 1938,
Austin Clark spoke on Radio Éireann about Campbell being ‘immensely interested
in every phase of modern poetry in England, America, and elsewhere.’³ Harrington
writes that some of the canonical ‘models’ chosen by Campbell (such as Kuno
Meyer) for his educational programme leant towards ‘ascendancy and Anglo-Irish’
intellectuals as opposed to ‘Republican[s]’ (presumably Seán Ó Faoláin and Frank
O’Connor), and he conjectures that this may have been a reaction to ‘cultural
directions’ back in the insular Free State of the 1920s.⁴ Yet Campbell’s political
idiosyncrasies were evident long before the Civil War.

Another poem from Irishry, ‘The Newspaper-seller’, is set in New York’s
Times Square at ‘about two o’clock on a winter’s morning’.⁵ The speaker, a native of
Ennis, Co Clare, bitterly recounts his story. ‘The Newspaper-seller’ problematizes
the perception that Campbell’s poetic relies on a faux-Yeatsian aesthetic where the
Irish experience is invariably romanticised. The newspaper-seller speaker is too
intricate a character to merely be a ‘type’ and only a ‘type’ where, in contrast to the
anti-Semitism of the ignorant workmen from ‘The Labourer’, he’s indifferent with
regards to his integration into New York life:

In a bakehouse. He was German, sir,
The boss; and Germans, mostly, mixed the dough,
And watched the fires. That’s how I came to know
The Deutsch. I speak it better than I used to do

¹ Ibid., p. 43.
³ Saunders & Kelly, Joseph Campbell, p. 72.
⁴ Harrington, ‘Joseph Campbell’, p. 41.
⁵ Poems of Joseph Campbell, p. 158 (Campbell’s italics).
The Gaelic at home.¹

What bothers the newspaper-seller more than the loss of his native tongue, scarcity and standing in the cold, is the emotional agony of his children abandoning him. Out of twenty, he curses them all but ‘poor Joe, who’s now in quod | For housebreaking.’² This ‘white sheep’ earned his father’s love after paying his rent when he was on the sick.³ In the same way that in the fifth stanza, Campbell rhymes ‘day’ with ‘Quay’ – which works in most west of Ireland accents – there’s a cuteness about the poem’s characters. Though some of the rural types in Irishry are idealisations, there’s nothing obtuse or superficial about the urbanised newspaper-seller. Where this downtrodden hawker profoundly misses his life on Cabey’s Lane back in rural Clare, Campbell deftly merges quotidian nostalgia with his ethically Hellenic vision of Ireland, where the ‘pensioner | [s]cholar, priest and labourer’ become imperfect ‘[s]ymbols of the god in man’.⁴ A kind of transmission occurs where, as readers, sympathising with the newspaper man, we long for Clare ourselves.

In the fourth stanza, we learn why the speaker emigrated:

Says she on the wedding night,
“You’re in a sorry plight
With me and the little ones. Let’s go away.”
“Where to?” says I. “To America,”
Says she. “This country is too poor and small
For us, and over there there’s work and bread for all.”⁵

¹ Ibid., p. 159.
² Ibid., p. 160.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. 107.
⁵ Ibid., p. 159.
Campbell manipulates pronunciation again where ‘away’ rhymes with ‘America’ (often pronounced in Hiberno-English as ‘Americay’). This is less stage-Paddy and more a dig directed at readers who know only standard forms of English. The realism and materiality of ‘The Newspaper-seller’ and ‘The Labourer’ stand in stark contrast to the abstractions of *Irishry’s* rural-set poems such as ‘The Mother’, with its ‘cuckoo’s cry in the meadow | the moon, and the early dew’. Campbell’s poetic isn’t the lyrically celibate, formally homogenous closed-off Irish *thing* which one might conclude it is at a glance.

Although Campbell’s use of free verse is often mentioned in passing, rarely does he receive credit for his pioneering technique. Alex Davis, noting how T.S. Eliot commended Campbell’s use of free verse in *Earth of Cualann* (1917), writes how the collection

fruitfully employs Imagist techniques that the Ulsterman had encountered in avant-garde circles in London in the first decade of the century, to which are conjoined assonantal patterns imitated from Gaelic models. Campbell’s work is admittedly mild fare besides that of F.T. Marinetti or Wyndham Lewis’s *Blast*; nevertheless[,] it exemplifies the fusion of nationalist politics and experimental poetics that had marked the pre-war European avant-garde.²

Reading Davis’s ambiguous account of Campbell’s encounter with the Imagists, one might conclude that the poet had timidly approached Ezra Pound hoping for a brief

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¹ Ibid., p. 108.
chat at a literary function. As F.S. Flint revealed however in 1915, Campbell attended the first meeting of the Imagists on the 25th March 1909:

> There were present, so far as I recall, T. E. Hulme, Edward Storer, F. W. Tancred, Joseph Campbell, Miss Florence Farr, one or two other men, mere vaguements in my memory, and myself. I think that what brought the real nucleus of this group together was a dissatisfaction with English poetry [...] We proposed at various times to replace it by pure vers libre; by the Japanese tanka and haikai [...] Campbell produced two good specimens of this, one of which, “The Dark,” is printed in “The Mountainy Singer”[.]\(^1\)

David Burleigh notes that despite ‘Campbell’s presence at the group’s inauguration, he is not included in any of the group’s anthologies, nor does he receive more than a passing mention in accounts of the Imagist movement’.\(^2\) Flint’s story of that fateful Thursday night in the Café Tour d’Eiffel in Soho, which the overwhelming majority of contemporary critics have either deemed unimportant or ignored, places Campbell not on the fringe, but at the centre of Davis’s ‘avant-garde circles’. Flint mentions by title two poems, T. E. Hulme’s ‘Autumn’ and Campbell’s ‘The Dark’.\(^3\) Pound, often purported to be the original ‘Imagist’ in English, didn’t join Flint’s group until a month later.\(^4\) Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby write that Pound was impressed by

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\(^3\) Flint, ‘The History of Imagism’, para. 2.

Campbell’s poetry and manner – referring to him as ‘the dark man from the narth’ and coveting ‘his voice’.¹

The year after the above excerpt from Davis’s chapter appeared in The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry, he revisited Campbell’s ‘mild fare’ to give a more detailed picture of the Belfast poet in ‘avant-garde circles’. Paraphrasing the Pound scholar J.J. Wilhelm’s account of a ‘dramatic reading at the Poets’ Club in London’ one ‘December evening in 1910’, Davis invokes the scene where Campbell “clad in bardic robes”, kilt and all, ‘more than matched his friend Pound’s Kensington wardrobe of velvet’ and ‘lapis lazuli’ as he read aloud the latter’s poem ‘The Ballad of the Goodly Fere’.² This more accurately puts Campbell not on the periphery, but at the centre of avant-garde literary London, perhaps for a short time (less than half a decade), but at a crucial moment for the development of Modernist poetry. Davis extols Campbell’s ‘Imagist’ technique and proposes that his formal digressions from an Imagist aesthetic towards a more thematically nationalistic poetry may have been because of the movement’s ‘avant-gardist muscle flexing’ – its shift towards fascism.³ Astonishingly however, through some critical manoeuvring, Davis is able to position Yeats in front of Campbell as the true source of Imagism in English. He writes of Ronald Schuchard’s observation that through [his lover and fellow occultist Florence] Farr, Yeats influenced the course of Imagist theory and practice, including the work of Campbell

³ Ibid., p. 151
[...] Schuchard’s crucial observation is that, with Hulme’s exchanging his literary for philosophical interests in late 1909, Yeats and Farr’s pressure on the development of Imagism would entail the centrality of rhythm or cadence, though not metre, to the movement’s attempts at self-definition in the manifestos of Flint and Pound in 1913.¹

It may be the case that in theoretical terms Yeats’ writing around a ‘rhythmic musical art’ impacted the philosophy of the London avant garde, but no poem in *In the Seven Woods* (1903) or *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) exhibits the sparseness, the *newness* comparable to Campbell’s proto-Modernist work in *The Mountainy Singer* (1909). Once again, the Father of Irish poetry receives the credit for calling men to arms, in this instance in the figurative sense.

‘A MONSTER! NOT QUITE’

As explored below in Chapter IV, critics of northern poetry take seriously the attitudes of eminent Irish literary figures whose social critique often fits an expedient ideology. And this phenomenon has damaged Campbell’s legacy. In 1912, in response to his struggle to get *Dubiners* published, Joyce had a broadside poem printed which satirised the publisher Maunsel and Co, the printer John Falconer, and the contemporary Dublin literary institutions in general. Quite rightly aggrieved about the hypocrisy of presses who’d already published work with references to social ‘deviancy’, Joyce’s first target in ‘Gas from a Burner’ is Maunsel’s publication of Joseph Campbell’s *Judgement* (1912), a play about peasant life in Donegal which includes a host of obscenities:

¹ Ibid., pp. 147–8.
To show you for strictures I don’t care a button
I printed the poems of Mountainy Mutton
And a play he wrote (you’ve read it I’m sure)
Where they talk of „bastard‟, „bugger‟ and „whore‟

Harrington suggests that the ‘obscenities’ of *Judgement* ‘brought […] the admiration
of the young James Joyce’, but surely ‘Mountainy Mutton’ – a take-up of ‘The
*Mountainy Singer*’ – throws such claims into doubt, especially given Joyce’s distain
for ‘Cultic Twalette’.²

In February 1996, Edna Longley was forced to resign from her seat on the
committee of the John Hewitt Summer School.³ A short media storm ensued, giving
rise to headlines such as ‘Wife of poet stanza alone after “putsch”’ and ‘Northern
literati at loggerheads’.⁴ Many writers, arts facilitators and academics wrote to the
committee and newspapers voicing their support for Longley. During the
controversy, a series of epistolary (Joycean?) poems satirising events were written.⁵

Affecting the voice of various poets (Siegfried Sassoon, John Keats, Rupert Brooke
and so on), these parodies were addressed to the Summer School’s chairman, Patrick
Clerkin. The main thrust of the invective was around what some of Longley’s allies
perceived to be the culturally insular outlook of the other committee members. It’s
unclear (and inconsequential) who wrote these poems – which, in being profoundly

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¹ James Joyce, ‘Gas From a Burner’, digitised collection items, The British Library (C.39.i.15.)
³ The summer school had been held in Carnlough, Co Antrim since 1987.
⁴ ‘Wife of poet stanza alone after “putsch”’, *Irish News*, 16 April 1996; ‘Professor Longley […] said
she was the victim of a “petty conspiracy”: Susan McKay, ‘Northern literati at loggerheads’, *Sunday
⁵ These remain unpublished but are available for consultation at the Rose Library, Emory University,
Atlanta, GA, MSS 746, Box 80, Folder 11 (‘Parodic poems’, 20 April 1996).
witty, replete with literary and historical quips, are worthy beyond their utility. The poem written in the voice of Joseph Campbell recounts how sixteenth-century Irish chieftain Shane O’Neill (1530–1567) was ingloriously slaughtered by the perfidious MacDonnell of the Glens after asking for their protection from the English:

We sent for flowers from Tamlaght,
  And pinned them on his coat.
  We flattered him
  And drank with him.
  And then we cut his throat.1

Here, O’Neill’s betrayal by the pre-Plantation ‘Ulster Scots’ is jestingly equated with Longley’s forced resignation by the Summer School committee.2 The choice of Campbell as the speaker of such a poem can only be taken as a comment on his Republicanism, his poetry’s inclination towards Irish history and Catholic mysticism, his aestheticization of what the poem calls zealous and violent ‘traditions’.3 This poem in a sense feeds into the stereotype of the ‘throat-cutting native’, a leitmotif of Irish literature which we’ll discuss below in Chapter III.

One rare post-1969 instance of Campbell’s work being anthologised is its inclusion in Frank Ormsby’s extensive volume A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles (1992). The first section of poems in this anthology, subtitled ‘In this Irish past I dwell…’, historicises the Ulster ‘Troubles’, each offering meditations on social divisions in the north. The first poem in the section, Heaney’s ‘Boglands’ (1969), opens with what has been a running theme in Irish culture, one which was identified above in Campbell’s ‘The Newspaper-seller’, that

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1 Ibid.
3 Folder 11 (‘Parodic poems’).
is, North America as the refuge for generations of Irish economic and political exiles.¹ ‘Boglands’ begins with a declaration that in Ireland ‘[they] have no prairies | To slice a big sun at evening.’² This poem is a perfect opening for a compilation of ‘Troubles’ poems. It looks at a virtually pre-sectarian Ireland, speaking in terms of environment rather than politics, where the ‘unfenced country | Is bog that keeps crusting | Between the sights of the sun.’³ The bio-topographical approach to one’s native place is then disturbed at the end of the poem:

Our pioneers keep striking
Inwards and downwards,

Every layer [of turf] they strip
Seems camped on before.
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.
The wet centre is bottomless.⁴

These lines move the reader’s attention away from the archaeological towards the pre-historic whilst addressing the notion that a tradition will inevitably fail any effort to close itself off to the rest of the world. Following Heaney’s reoccurring encampments, Hewitt’s ‘Once Alien Here’ (1945) acts as the colonial foil to ‘Boglands’, where the Ulster Planter moves in:

Once alien here my fathers built their house,
claimed, drained, and gave the land the shapes of use,
and for their urgent labour grudged no more
than shuffled pennies from the boarded store
of well-rubbed words that had left their overtones

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¹ This theme of American implications in Ireland’s history (and thus the ‘Troubles’) is continued throughout this chapter via Paul Muldoon’s ‘Meeting the British’ (a poem ostensibly about British colonialism in North America) and American poet Robinson Jeffers’ ‘Shane O’Neill’s cairn’: Frank Ormsby (ed.), A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Belfast Blackstaff Press, 1992).
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. 55.
in the ripe England of the mounded downs.¹

The poem preceding this Hewitt poem is Campbell’s ‘The Planter’ from *Irishry*, which begins:

The Celt, I say.
Has shown some artistry
In living; you, the Planter, none.
Under moon or sun
You are the same, a dull dog, countryless,
Traditionless and letterless;
Without grace or song
[…] The grey past is dead
For you, as Beauty is. Your head
Is but a block, your filmed eye
Blind to the vision and the mystery […]²

Though recent work has gone to great lengths to debunk the notion of Ulster Protestants as ignorant, uncultured philistines, the popular assertion remains, and undoubtedly will remain.³ Beyond sectarian manifestations within Nationalist ideology, this myth is sustained by some Ulster Protestant artists themselves. Belfast painter Dermot Seymour has said that ‘[b]eing a Protestant […] is like having no head, in that you are not allowed to think’.⁴ Kirkland calls Campbell’s ‘The Planter’ ‘uncompromising’ and offers the poem as an example of an ‘instinctive sectarianism’ typical of ‘Campbell’s later work’.⁵ This isn’t however a dehumanisation of Protestants, but an allegation of cultural philistinism directed

towards Irish Unionists, many of whom claim to be of ‘planter stock’. Campbell’s own mother was from a mixed Catholic-Presbyterian background. His relationships with northern Protestants such as Francis Joseph Bigger (1863–1926) are well documented.1 His sister, Josephine, married Presbyterian playwright Sam Waddell (‘Rutherford Mayne’). This brother-in-law remained one of Campbell’s closest confidants right up until his death, as the epigraph of this chapter evinces.2

‘The Planter’ bears a striking resemblance to the sort of attitude taken by some later poets who are themselves Protestant. The causticity of Tom Paulin’s poetry implicates not only political Ulster Unionism, but an obnoxious ultra-Calvinist theology as a root cause of recent political upheaval:

[...] the Word has withered to a few
Parched certainties, and the charred stubble
Tightens like a black belt, a crop of Bibles.3

If Campbell’s ‘The Planter’ is ‘uncompromising’, ‘Desertmartin’ is entirely obdurate in its convictions:

And now, in Desertmartin’s sandy light,
I see a culture of twigs and bird-shit
Waving a gaudy flag it loves and curses.4

Unequivocally, Campbell’s ‘The Planter’ is needlessly sectarian. But it at least laid the foundation for poets who might wish to address the legacy of the Protestant population’s dominance in Ireland and the social direction its leaders took at the time. Gerry Dawe has recently written how ‘The Planter’ and poems like it ‘give the whiff of supremacist rhetoric’, but it’s vital to remember the poem’s context in

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1 Ibid., p. 95.
3 Ormsby, A Rage for Order, p. 78.
4 Ibid.
supremacy terms: in 1913, Edward Carson’s Volunteers were arming themselves and planning insurrection.\footnote{Gerald Dawe, ‘Ethna Carbery in H Block’, \textit{The Wrong Country: Essays on Modern Irish writing} (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2018), p. 173.} Contextualised as it is in \textit{A Rage for Order}, ‘The Planter’ can only be read as informing Ormsby’s indictment on sectarianism – serving the same purpose as Kipling’s ‘Ulster 1912’, the sixteenth poem in the anthology – rather than a celebration of poetic talent. As much as it shouldn’t be read in isolation, wherever possible ‘The Planter’ should be read in its original context. Nine pages after ‘The Planter’ in \textit{Irishry}, another poem on the Irish other, ‘The Orangeman’, provides some antidote to its flagrant sectarianism:

\begin{quote}
A ginger-faced man  
With a walrus moustache  
His eyes, like his soul,  
Of the colour of ash

[…]

Damnation writ large  
On the walls of his home—  
Red brick in a back street;  
While the Ogre of Rome

Lives in beauty, with Venus  
And Psyche in white,  
And the Trojan Laocoön  
For his spirit’s delight.\footnote{Poems of Joseph Campbell, p. 152.}
\end{quote}

Although this poem’s opening is as scathing as ‘The Planter’, Campbell’s tongue is more unambiguously in his cheek at the end.\footnote{Ibid.} Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin describes \textit{Irishry} as ‘sharp, satirical portraits which were perhaps less attractive to contemporary poetry-lovers, but,’ she adds, ‘it may be worth pointing out that there
is a harsh, often comic note in much of the Irish verse of that decade’ such as ‘Yeats’s volume, Responsibilities’.¹ The speaker of ‘The Orangeman’ describes

A monster! Not quite,
As you guess from my song;
But clay marred in the mixing, —
God’s image gone wrong.²

Although this hardly neutralises the lazy sectarian posturing of ‘The Planter’, there’s a jocularity to ‘The Orangeman’, a sense of raillery in riposte to the graver business of actual contemporary ‘Orange’ infrastructure affecting the lives of thousands of people. Moreover, if admission to a canon was dependent upon some moral estimation then we wouldn’t read much. The contemporary Western academy would have long since boycotted Larkin for his palpable misogyny and racism, Yeats for his (albeit short-lived) enthusiasm for the Blue Shirts and Pound for his undisputed fascism.³ Where Campbell could simply romanticise rural life in Irishry, he creates a comprehensive world replete with fairies, anti-Semitic navvies, the hostile streets of New York, dirty Dublin and imperfect Orangemen. Protestant ‘types’ are integral to his synchronic vision of Ireland.

Terence Brown writes about the similarities between Campbell’s work and that of a later poet from Belfast, W.R. Rodgers (1909–1969), where both poets incorporate religious motifs into their work – specifically, how they depict Christ in

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¹ Ní Chuíleabhin, ‘As I was among the captives’, p. 3.
² The Poems of Joseph Campbell, p. 152
³ On the 23rd of July 1933, Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear: ‘The great secret is out – a convention of blue-shirts –“National Guards” – have received their new leader with the Fascist salute and the new leader announces reform of Parliament as his business […] Italy, Poland, Germany, then perhaps Ireland. Doubtless I shall hate it (though not so much as I hate Irish democracy) but it is September and we must not behave like the gay young sparks of May or June.’ Cited in Jonathan Allison, (ed.) Yeats’s Political Identities: Selected Essays (Chicago: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 36.
a way reminiscent of ‘medieval carol and iconography’. And affinities exist between Campbell’s poetry and a host of other northern Irish poets from later ‘generations’. In 1953, Belfast poet Robert Greacen observed the absence of a ‘middle generation’ between the northern Revivalist poets attached to the Ulster Literary Theatre and those who rose to local prominence in the late thirties. ‘Since the generation of Joseph Campbell and AE,’ he writes, ‘there was an almost complete blank in poetic utterance’. Whereas contemporary work on northern poetry tends to disregard Campbell, it’s intriguing that Greacen places him first in this instance (ahead of AE) so that the northern Revival coterie is named as Campbell’s. From this, along with J.N. Brown’s 1945 accolade cited above, we might conclude that Campbell has at some point in the past been discounted amongst the main figures in models of northern poetry’s ‘development’.

**NOT QUITE EXORCISED**

Seamus Heaney is the greatest poet to come out of the north. This is evident in book sales alone, if book sales are any sort of objective gauge. His name has come to be synonymous with poetry, not just in Ireland but everywhere. Yet beyond Heaney-as-commodity, the gravity of his ‘well-wrought’ poetry employs a materiality to language in a way that no other poet has. His reputation is well-earned, and though it’s beyond the remit of this chapter to outline precisely why, there’s an abundance of academic work on his oeuvre that does just that. Surely, some might say, this goes without saying. When it comes to aesthetics, it’s essential that we make the

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distinction between art and craft, flair and graft, aptness and output, but we must also give novelty its due. Heaney’s poetic continues the naturalism, following Kavanagh, which served to counter the sentimental simplifications characterising the work of some Revival writers (and which make up caricatures of the Revival in general). Once asked why he’d never dedicated any of his work to Kavanagh, given the profound debt he owes this forebear, Heaney replied: ‘I had no need to […] I wrote *Death of a Naturalist*.¹ Given the proximity of these poets’ native counties and their shared experience as the close descendants of peasants, that Heaney would have affinities with Kavanagh hardly came as a surprise. The work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Ted Hughes and Robert Frost are said to have been formative for Heaney’s acquisition of a poetic ‘voice’.² Despite there being much work on these influences, however, one would struggle to find anything more than a fleeting mention of Joseph Campbell’s impact on Heaney.³ One obvious affinity between the two is the use of ‘type’ poems. Written in 1962 and published in *Death of a Naturalist* four years later, Heaney’s ‘Docker’ is an Ulster Protestant type poem not unlike ‘The Orangeman’. Yet whereas Campbell’s proviso (‘A monster! Not quite’) serves as antidote to its sectarianism, Heaney’s poem relentlessly stereotypes early-sixties Protestant shipyard workers:

That fist would drop a hammer on a Catholic –
Oh yes, that kind of thing could start again.⁴

The poet’s own experience of the northern statelet (1922–72) – a regime Alan Gillis has characterised as ‘quasi-apartheid’ – was rural, yet acrimony here isn’t directed towards the Protestant farmer.¹ Thus we can say that ‘Docker’ isn’t just a tirade towards the urban Protestant shipyard bigot, but one which is steeped in other prejudices. These include a disdain for urban insalubriousness and the kind of stubborn Calvinist wretchedness which is sneered at in Paulin and Campbell’s work:

> Mosaic imperatives bang home like rivets;  
> God is a foreman with certain definite views  
> […]  
> Tonight the wife and children will be quiet  
> At slammed door and smoker’s cough in the hall.²

No-one in their right mind would suggest this poem written in the 1960s should warrant any kind of moralistic invective against Heaney. Although the type poem was hardly novel in the early 1900s, in terms of a specific tradition we can only credit the artist who brings a particular element to bear first. Heaney has other poems which owe a debt (directly or indirectly) to Irishry. In ‘Thatcher’ (1969) we see a further development of Heaney’s ‘type’ poems employing the writer-as-labourer figuration:

> he shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together  
> into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,  
> and left them gaping at his Midas touch.³

As with Campbell’s ‘The Planter’, this particular ‘type’ poem finds its strength is its unpredictable Hellenic reference. Another example of a ‘type’ poem from Heaney’s

² Death of a Naturalist, p. 30.
³ Door into the Dark, p. 20.
early work is ‘Navvy’ from *Wintering Out* (1972), which praises the road-worker ‘[w]aving you down’ in ‘the slow lane’, your

\[
\text{\[
\ldots\] \text{brother and keeper}
\]
\text{plugged to the hard-core,}
\text{picking along}
\text{the welted, stretchmarked}
\text{curve of the world.}^1
\]

Deference is directed towards these navvies in a way which we might chance our arm to call Campbellesque. The most conspicuous occurrence of Campbell in Heaney’s earlier work however is evident in two of his best-known poems from *Death of a Naturalist*: ‘Digging’ and ‘Follower’. Here’s an excerpt from Campbell’s ‘The Roader-maker’ (1913):

\[
\text{Father, to whose passion I}
\text{Owe my place in destiny.}
\text{\[
\ldots\]
}
\text{I am hardly of the trade}
\text{Thou and thy forefathers made}
\text{\[
\ldots\]
}
\text{I make roads for feet to tread}
\text{To the wonders overhead.}^2
\]

As Saunders and Kelly observe, this is a poem where the speaker’s ‘male forebears receive tribute’.\(^3\) Of his time running the family business, Campbell said: ‘I gained, from intimate daily contact with [the Falls Road navvies], experience that proved of more value to me than if I had spent this time in libraries, or aimless mooning about.’\(^4\) ‘The Roader-maker’ celebrates a labour heritage, whilst acknowledging that the bulk of the poet’s own work is of another order; this sounds deeply familiar.

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2 Poems of Joseph Campbell, p. 130.
4 Ibid., p. 17.
Adam Hanna, paraphrasing Terence Brown, writes of Heaney’s ‘guilt at his sense of separation from his male forebears’, and Hanna extends this observation onto Derek Mahon, writing that ‘both poets are separated from but haunted by the manual occupations of their fathers into which they could not follow’. 1 ‘The Roader-maker’ finds its analogue in the iconic lines,

[...] living roots awaken in my head.  
But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.2

Parallels between ‘The Roader-maker’ and ‘Digging’ surrounding the forefathers’ trade conceit couldn’t be clearer. Either Heaney tapped into some Irish lyrical Unbewusst or was recalling something from years before where he refers to ‘Digging’ as a ‘big coarse-grained navvy of a poem’.3

Though he was of the city, Campbell paved the way, wrought the road, for northern poets of the countryside such as Kavanagh and Montague. This pioneering is evident not only thematically but also formally. Citing Flint, Burleigh stresses the importance of ‘Japanese tanka and haikai’ to the Imagists.4 Looking through Campbell’s collected work, anyone vaguely familiar with Irish poetry would straightaway spot ‘Snow’ from The Mountainy Singer (1909) as oddly placed in a collection by an Irish poet at that time, or indeed, it must be noted, any poet writing in English at that time:

2 Death of a Naturalist, p. 4.
Hills that were dark
At sparing-time last night
Now in the dawn-ring
Glimmer cold and white.¹

This tiny poem, just three syllables off a passable haiku, seems incongruous next to poems in the collection such as the quatrains of ‘A Fighting-Man’, but Campbell’s interest in Japanese form isn’t some anomaly. Other short haiku-like poems in The Mountainy Singer include ‘Darkness’, ‘The Dawn Whiteness’ and ‘Night, and I Travelling’. Irene De Angelis’s The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry (2012), an ostensibly broad study, contains no mention of Joseph Campbell. She addresses contemporary northern poetry’s obsession with Japanese poetry by the likes of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) and Yosa Buson (1716–1784), an obsession at its most pronounced in Ciaran Carson’s Belfast Confetti (1989) and Derek Mahon’s The Snow Party (1975). Although Campbell’s haiku-like poems may seem incongruous for 1909, they aren’t incongruous in terms of northern Irish literary history. Although De Angelis’s main subjects (Heaney, Mahon, Carson, Thomas Kinsella, Sinéad Morrissey et al.) are poets emerging after the 1950s, her introduction traces the earliest interest in this Japanese effect by Irish writers back to the Greek-Irish essayist Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904). Wilde then, comes next in her chronology; she writes that ‘Orientalism provided him with a way out of a tired literary tradition and a further justification of his ideal of l’art pour l’art.’² After European Japanism, Impressionism and Aestheticism, De Angelis leads us to the ‘New Poetry’ which emerged under the auspices of the ‘Proto-Imagists’ of T.E.

¹ Poems of Joseph Campbell, p. 85.
Hulme’s Poet’s Club. De Angelis writes that it was after Pound ‘took over the leadership’ of the club that he ‘turned to Japanese poetry in his first experimentation with the famous “hokku-like sentence” written in a Paris metro station.’¹ Finding no early-twentieth-century Irish exemplar with regard to the Japanese effect in Irish poetry, De Angelis turns to London and the Imagists. It’s crucial to note that as well as Joseph Campbell attending Imagist meetings before Pound, his haiku-like poems from *The Mountainy Singer* (1909) predate Pound’s purportedly revolutionary ‘In a Station of the Metro’ (1913) by nearly half a decade. Pound was intimate with Campbell’s work. As Booth points out, it was he who sent Campbell’s poems to *Poetry* (Chicago) in 1912 and 1913.² In order to get back to Ireland from the Imagists, De Angelis invokes Yeats’ experimentation with the classical Japanese musical drama form *Nō*, citing his formal collaborations with Pound. She writes that ‘the three winters 1913–16 which Pound spent with W.B. Yeats in Sussex were fundamental to the evolution of both poets’ work.’³ Another signpost offered is the publication of two books, *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse* (1964) and the penguin edition of Bashō’s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1966), the popularity of which during the commencement of the globalised era, enables De Angelis an unassuming leap to Heaney’s generation of Irish poets. Burleigh writes that ‘despite Campbell’s presence at the Imagists’ 1909 ‘inauguration’, he’s been ignored by critical enquiry into the ‘influence of Japanese literature on literature in English’.⁴ Evidently, not much has changed in this regard in the past twenty-five

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¹ Ibid., p. 7.
² Booth & Rigby, *Modernism and Empire*, p. 78.
³ Ibid.
years. In Irish literary criticism, Campbell hasn’t received credit for being Ireland’s first lyrical Modernist and the first poet to bring Japanese literary form to bear in Irish poetry.¹

Heaney aside, we can see Campbell in the work of other contemporary northern poets. Burleigh notes the Modernistic formal affinities, ‘spare and imagistic’, concerning aspects of Campbell’s aesthetic and later northern poets Montague and Mahon, as well as thematic and lexical affinities.² With regard to the latter, he offers the example of how “light” and “darkness” are keywords in Mahon, as they were for Joseph Campbell, and how both of them make frequent mentions of the moon.³

Beginning with Joseph Campbell’s ‘Snow’ (1909), northern poetry has retained an obsession with the cold powdery stuff which falls irregularly from the sky in Ireland to the point where it has become one of a series of sub-notional totems, a means by which poets communicate in a kind of antiphony. These totems socialise the tradition in a refracted way, where a ludic prop (‘snow’, ‘mushrooms’ etc.) is flung back and forward between poetics.⁴ Looking to suggest a linage to the snow totem, one might roughly list MacNeice’s ‘Snow’ (1935), Mahon’s ‘The Snow Party’ (1975), Carson’s ‘Snow’ (1989), Leontia Flynn’s ‘Snow’ (2004), Michael Longley’s ‘Snow Water’ (2004), Frank Ormsby’s The Darkness of Snow (2017), etcetera. Longley’s The Ghost Orchid (1995) and Snow Water (2004) are replete with

³ David Burleigh, “Echoes Trickling in...”: Japan in the Work Irish Writers’, The Harp 8 (1993), pp. 34; 37. We might also observe how both Mahon and Campbell include images of the Irish Travelling Community.
⁴ Images of mushrooms form another of such totems.
references to snow, many of which hark back to earlier snow poems, possibly as far back as Campbell’s. *The Mountainy Singer* (1909) has other poems preoccupied with images of snow: ‘The postcar stuck in a drift of snow’; ‘And rivers leaped out of the snow’; ‘And the snow it nips so cold’.

Campbell’s ‘Snow’ is wed to Mahon’s ‘Snow Party’ by virtue of its ‘Japanese effect’, a leitmotif which permeates the cotemporary northern lyric. Sinéad Morrissey and Stephen Connolly’s anthology *The future always makes me so thirsty: New Poets from the North of Ireland* (2016) includes many poems riffing towards the totem, such as Padraig Regan’s ‘Tracks’, Paul Cunningham’s ‘A History of Snow’ and Adam Crothers’ ‘Come’. Of course, all of no one thing comes from one other thing. The final words of Joyce’s ‘The Dead’ (written around 1907) has also left an indisputable impression: ‘His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.’

And we can as easily include Robert Frost’s snowy New England as part of the same lineage. It’s worth bearing in mind however that Frost’s long poem ‘Snow’ (1916) comes seven years after *The Mountainy Singer*, and that Frost – who has this poem published in *Poetry* – would have encountered Campbell’s work upon reading the magazine.

In reference to its impact on future ‘revivals’, Kirkland writes that ‘the energy of the Northern Revival was typically potential rather than kinetic’ – adding

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the proviso that ‘nothing disappears without a trace’.¹ The examples he cites for such a trace are the ‘formal and stylistic continuities’ shared by Cathal O’Byrne’s *As I Roved Out* (1946) and the prose pieces from Carson’s ‘Question Time’ from *Belfast Confetti* (1989). Kirkland notes that ‘Carson has been explicit about the nature of his debt to O’Byrne’s work’.² Beyond their author’s ‘biographical similarities’, both being northern Catholics writing of or in West Belfast, Kirkland writes that ‘Question Time’ ‘inherits and deploys’ from *As I Roved Out* ‘forces of memory, cunning and abstention’ in reaction to the social mechanics of the Northern Ireland statelet (1922–72).³ There’s a similar stylistic and contextual affinity between Carson’s ‘Question Time’ and passages from Campbell’s essay *Orange Terror* (1943).⁴ Although hyperbolic in places, the latter details with statistics the social reality of Catholics living in the north at the time under the Orange system. In one passage, the civilian speaker recalls being stopped and harassed by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The policeman asks, “Where are you going?” And is given the reply, “Home.” “You live up there?”, the policeman asks, and with the reply of “Yes.”, he follows up with, “You seem to be in a big hurry, Jimmy. Got a meeting to attend? I.R.A., eh?” The interrogated speaker goes silent.⁵ In Carson’s ‘Question Time’, there’s a similar confrontation four decades later set in the same city. In this 1980s version however it’s a Republican paramilitary questioning a civilian: “*You were seen coming from the Shankill*, “*Who are you?*”, “*Where are you coming from??*” “*Why did you stop when you seen the car?*”, “*The car outside the Sinn Féin

¹ Kirkland, *Cathal O’Byrne*, p. 4
² Ibid., p. 7.
³ Ibid., p. 6
⁴ *This essay was written under the pseudonym ‘Ultach’.*
“headquarters”, “Where are you from?” 1 This isn’t an inversion of Campbell’s dialogue (which would be a civilian questioning a constable) but a perversion, a historicised transmission – of state harassment into paramilitary harassment – dramatizing the manner in which the violated becomes the violator, the full colonial consequence.

*The Irish for No* (1987) and *Belfast Confetti*, published after Carson’s hiatus from writing verse (1976–1985), invigorated the form of northern poetry with their long lines and narrative storytelling style appropriated, respectively, from American poet C. K. Williams (1936–2005) and Armagh storyteller John Campbell of Mullaghbawn (1933–2006). 2 As noted above, Campbell had read Walt Whitman, the poet who brought the long line into Anglophone poetry. In their both being securely canonical American poets as well as their being native to what is now called the New York metropolitan area, it’s inevitable that readers will automatically perceive Williams’ use of Whitman’s long line as a continuation of custom. In their both being Belfast Catholics and *gaeilgeoirí*, it’s surprising that Carson and Campbell aren’t recognised by critics more often as having formal affinities. Two poems from *Irishry*, ‘The Weaver’s Family’ and ‘The Aran Islander’, achieve similar effects as some of Carson’s long-line poems. ‘Dresden’, the opening poem from *The Irish for No* (1987), amongst other things, comprises a portrait of one Horse Boyle, a World War Two RAF veteran from rural southwest Donegal who lives in a caravan with his twin brother, Mule. This poem, challenging simplified notions of British and Irish identity, epitomises Elmer Kennedy-Andrews’ observation that Carson’s work

'radically undermines the idea of a centre capable of providing discursive unity and
fixity, and the claims of any culture to possess a pure and homogenous body of
values.'\textsuperscript{1} In the first of many digressions from the Horse Boyle tale, the poem
describes the quintessential Irish shop:

And as you entered in, the bell would tinkle in the empty shop, a musk
Of soup and turf and sweets would hit you from the gloom. Tobacco.
Bailing wire. Twine. And, of course, shelves and pyramids of tins.
An old woman would appear from the back — there was a sizzling pan
in there […]\textsuperscript{2}

‘Dresden’, via its ‘self-conscious checks and hesitations, tangential digressions and
elisions’, achieves the opposite of a stereotypical image of rural Ireland.\textsuperscript{3} Yet
paradoxically, the shop here – which could be anywhere where peat is burned – is
familiar, homely and for the most part sentimentalised. Campbell’s poem ‘The
Weaver’s Family’ is also set in southwest Donegal:

The door lay open, and I walked in: I could hear the clack of a loom
And the thin sound of a woman’s voice singing within the room […]\textsuperscript{4}

Both poems are written in the Whitmanian long line. Both have a mysterious female
figure and an inner sanctum. In ‘Dresden’, the old shopkeeper appears from ‘the
back’, and the speaker infers that ‘she has a daughter in there | Somewhere’.\textsuperscript{5} In ‘The
Weaver’s Family’, the weaver himself appears from an ‘inner room’ in ‘his bare
feet’.\textsuperscript{6} Both poems invoke the auditory and gustatory: Carson’s ‘tinkl[ing]’ bell and
‘musk’ of ‘soup and turf and sweets’ tickles our senses, especially a rural-Irish sense

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of nostalgia; Campbell’s ‘clack of a loom’ and the modest bowl of milk offered by
the hospitable weaver satiates the rambling speaker’s quest for an idyll. Neither poet
(assumedly, neither speaker) is native to the west of Ireland. Carson’s ‘Dresden’
offers a quasi-poststructural rejoinder to Campbell’s pursuit for a specifically Irish
rural idyll.

As we’ve observed, Campbell’s work is much more than a continuation of
Yeats. In the envoi of her introduction, De Angelis describes her book as an analysis
of the “‘post-Yeatsian Irish melody” composed in a Japanese key’, and she isn’t
alone in using this hallmark to categorise Anglophone verse after 1939. It’s
important to remember that Yeats doesn’t always appeal to the budding northern
poet. In an interview in 1979 with James Randall, Heaney said:

It was only when I started to teach Yeats after about 1966 that I began to
think about him and it was not really until 1970–75 that I confronted him
in any way. And as far as my, so to speak style is concerned, as far as my
ear was educated, it wasn’t educated by Yeats[.]

In terms of theme, it might be fair to say that Heaney’s early work is more involved
with an affinity with Campbell, with its labour heritage and type poems, than it is
with Yeats. The question of whether ‘The Mountainy Mutton’ directly influenced
later poets is irrelevant, but there’s certainly more going on here than mere
coincidence or parallelism.

As with the subject of the next chapter, Belfast poet Martin Mooney (1964–),
Campbell’s omission from anthologies and critical texts is a curious one, his work

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2 James Randall and Seamus Heaney, ‘An Interview with Seamus Heaney’, *Ploughshares* 5.3 (1979),
p. 13.
more than meeting the aesthetic and extra-literary canonical requisites. If a consensus could ever be reached regarding a northern Irish poetic canon – if such a thing in an increasingly globalised society is even still worth compiling – then Campbell must be in it, must receive acknowledgment for his formal contributions to the ‘imaginative estate’.
Chapter II

‘WHAT, AFRAID | OF CATCHING SOMETHING?’: MARTIN MOONEY’S ‘MINOR’ POETRY

Joe and I managed to find a couple of seats at a table. Across from us sat two well-oiled characters. One of them was a small man dressed in a coat too large for him ...

He looked like Boris Karloff with a hangover.


Despite its thirty-year presence in the literary world, with four collection titles behind it, it’s a rarity to see Martin Mooney’s name amongst the contents and index pages of critical texts. Coming from a substantial list of northern poets emerging from the late 1980s into the early 2000s who are yet to receive their share of academic attention, Mooney’s unwarranted obscurity, given the observable complexity to his oeuvre, is more astonishing in light of how he’s been received by other poets. ‘Gritty, disturbing, often uncomfortable, terse, controlled, aggressive […] Mooney,’ Sinéad Morrissey writes, ‘takes pleasure in unsettling a ‘linguistic “decorum” […] and leaves us the richer for it.’

Mooney speculates as to how extra-poetic concerns may have contributed to his work not receiving recognition. His engagement with poetry circles at Queen’s University in Belfast ‘didn’t really work out in the end’, owing to his ways, which were perhaps those of a ‘different English, a different life’. And there are affinities with Mooney and northern poets preceding him in this regard. He writes that Padraic Fiacc (1924–2019) has been ‘excluded’ because his poems aren’t “well-made”, but

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2 Correspondence with Mooney via email (23.5.2019).
also because he ‘couldn’t behave’ **properly** at literary functions.¹ Mooney’s association with James Simmons (1933–2001) through his teaching at The Poets’ House educational centre may have also contributed to the curious lack of interest in his work.² Terence Brown includes a chapter in his *Northern Voices* (1975) titled ‘Four New Voices: Poets of the Present’, where Simmons is perceived as a poet of an up and coming generation, but at some stage in the past forty years, he was in a sense erased from academic canons and ‘felt himself unjustly neglected or excluded’ by the literary establishment.³ ‘I hadn’t realised’, Mooney writes guardedly, ‘that I’d somehow chosen sides in a conflict I didn’t really know was happening.’⁴ The accuracy of Mooney’s suspicions around his involuntary involvement in literary factionalism are less important however than their impact on his practice. It’s oddly fitting that it didn’t ‘work out in the end’.⁵ Aligning himself in his later work to the ‘outsider artist’ and the ‘inorganic intellectual’, Mooney makes art from his art’s own exclusion.⁶ If Chapter I of this critical study is concerned with how a once-established twentieth-century figure’s standing has been virtually obliterated, the present chapter illuminates the work of a northern poet who was never canonised in

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¹ Ibid.
² Poets’ House was a writers’ retreat/creative writing school in Falcarragh, Co Donegal. Originally situated in Islandmagee, Co Antrim, Simmons was forced to move in the mid-1990s after a ‘planning row’ with the Larne Borough Council. Dick Grogan reported: ‘As a planning application by Mr Simmons was being discussed, a DUP councillor produced a copy of the poet’s latest published work, *Mainstream*, from a brown paper bag and alleged that it contained “filth”: ‘Hostility forces poet to quit Antrim coast’, *Irish Times* online, 5 October 1996 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/hostility-forces-poet-to-quit-antrim-coast-1.92701> (Accessed 28.7.19).
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid. (23.5.2019).
⁶ Ibid. (22.5.2019); my italics.
academic terms. Mooney is a ‘minor poet’, minor not by virtue of his work’s importance, but in a Deleuzoguattarian sense, by how his work is possessed with its own ‘minorité’ status.¹ The riches of his poetry warrant a monograph, but for now this chapter seeks to address three coalescent elements of his ‘minor’ poetic: (a) its engagement with Mooney’s ethno-political background which informs (b) the candid politics of his work, which in turn generates (c) the imperative to employ an aesthetic which is counter to that of his forebears. This chapter begins by defining ‘minor’ as it pertains to the poet’s social and (thus) literary context before moving on to look at his localised counter-aesthetic and preoccupation with the idea of the ‘minor’ poet.²

‘MINOR’ POETRY

In being published locally, chiefly by the Belfast-based Blackstaff and Lagan presses, Mooney’s work, in comparison to some of his canonical predecessors and successors, has had a relatively limited reach in terms of sales and (thus) readership; to define this work as ‘minor’ is in one sense a simple logistic description, but this condition of minority is no measure of lyrical success.

Spurred on by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure (1975), academic interest in ‘minority writing’ had its heyday in the 1980s and early ’90s with titles such as David Lloyd’s Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism (1987) and Gail Gilliland’s Being a Minor Writer (1994). Deleuze and Guattari outline a

² Correspondence with Mooney via email (22.5.2019); Mooney’s italics.
model for describing what they perceive as a form of politically and aesthetically radical writing called ‘minor literature’. For them, ‘minor’ isn’t simply synonymous with ‘obscure’ or ‘less important': if a body of work is to be considered valuable in a ‘minor’ sense, it must ‘deterritorialize’ language, connect ‘the individual to a political immediacy’ and assemble an ‘enunciation’ of the ‘collective’.¹ Because Kafka was born into Prague’s German-speaking Jewish community, Deleuze and Guattari contend that his writing is linguistically and literarily deterritorialized (in that it’s removed from ‘major’ German works and Bohemia’s vernacular Czech tradition). Because of these conditions, ‘the political domain has contaminated every statement’ in Kafka’s work, making it ‘necessarily political’.² A minor literature is one which produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows [them] all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility[].³

Deleuze and Guattari’s identification of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett as Irishmen who ‘live within the genial conditions of a minor literature’ is an overstatement, but it affords us a better understanding of their use of ‘minor’.⁴

Martin Mooney was born in Belfast in 1964 into what’s known in the north as a ‘mixed marriage’. His maternal family are working-class East Belfast ‘Protestants’, whilst his paternal family are Co Down ‘Catholics’. Mooney’s parents

¹ Deleuze & Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 18.
² Ibid., p. 17.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. 19.
settled in (predominantly Nationalist) West Belfast, where they lived until he was four years old. With the outbreak of the ‘Troubles’, the family moved to (predominantly Unionist) Newtownards, although Mooney spent much time with his grandparents in East Belfast. The poet describes his family at this time as ‘displaced persons, refugees, part of the huge population shift as the city formalised its sectarian geography.’

1 On the one hand, we might describe Mooney’s poetry, full of references to European art – from Andrea del Verrocchio (c.1435–1488) to George Grosz (1893–1959) – as being deeply involved with intellectualism; on the other, his renditions of fairy tales and eagerness to portray ‘low’ art as an integral part of the cultural picture could lead us to understand him, to use his own words, as a ‘pop artist’ rather than ‘visionary.’

2 Because of his unmerited obscurity, his complicated background, his complex outlook and the effects of his counter-aesthetic mode, Mooney’s work fits neatly into Deleuze and Guattari’s criteria for a ‘minor literature’.

There has been an emphasis in Irish literary criticism on writers’ ethnoreligious contexts with little thought afforded to the theology which underpins the religious elements of (often overstressed) ‘Orange and Green’ distinctions. Gail McConnell’s *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology* (2014) detangles the strands of theological ideology as evident in the poetry of Heaney (qua Catholicism), Longley (qua Anglicanism) and Mahon (qua Calvinism) in a way which goes beyond the merely biographical, unearthing a near-ineffable socio-cultural paradigm of trinities.

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But in terms of ethnonational and religious identity – the classic Irish distinctions of ‘Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter’ – what of a poet who claims attachment to, whose work shows signs of ascribing to, none-of-the-above? Though it’s unadvisable to take it at face value, in interview Mooney described how ‘in a religious sense’ he ‘was brought up in a healthy vacuum.’¹ And although he’s ‘hesitant’ to ‘describe’ himself ‘programmatically’ as the product of a “mixed marriage”, his poetry is suffused with references to northern tribalism. ‘I don’t consider myself to have a “mixed” heritage understood in sectarian or religious terms,’ Mooney writes,

I was brought [up] largely outside both ‘communities’ (though that weasel word wasn’t as common then.) I went to state schools and lived on a loyalist estate, so I was exposed to that more. But I don’t remember not looking at the local tribes as weird and hostile forces.²

It must be noted that despite these misgivings, the notion of occupying an ethnon-liminal space (usually via the claim to ‘mixed heritage’) has carried considerable weight in northern Irish poetry.³ Yet Mooney shuns the prospect of such designations, questioning their divisive logic.

Though we must remain ever vigilant regarding the excesses of ad hoc psychoanalysis, or indeed any psychoanalysis, there’s a valid argument that

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¹ Cited in Brown, In the Chair, p. 277.
² Correspondence with Mooney via email (4.6.2019).
³ For instance, in an article containing the notes from her interview with Ciaran Carson in 2009, Aida Edemariam writes: ‘Carson’s very name may embody a cross-cultural project (Ciaran is Catholic, Carson is Protestant; an ancestor enthusiastically converted), but when he was growing up there was no such mixing. The family lived in a space about a mile square, the boundary with the Protestant Shankill Road marked by graffiti’: ‘A life in poetry: Ciaran Carson’, Guardian Online, 17 January 2009 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jan/17/poetry-ciaran-carson-belfast-ireland> (Accessed 10.2.19).
Mooney’s own social marginality by virtue of his complicated background accounts for the imperative through much of his work where the socially marginal – the taboo thought, the ‘rent-boy’ punk, the ‘[un- and in]appropriate subject matter’ as Morrissey has it – are hauled into the foreground. Deleuze and Guattari write how ‘Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible – the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise’.\(^1\) Mooney hails from an undescribed minority. The ‘impossibility’ for his work is that of the intolerable, inconceivable hybrid because Orange and Green cultural heritages, within the rubric of Northern Ireland, remain mutually exclusive. Even if Mooney did claim ‘mixed heritage’, this demographic doesn’t, officially, exist. In Mooney’s ‘A Protestant School’ the speaker’s mother ‘lies’ on her application to get her son into a state primary school.\(^2\) ‘What shall we put him down as?’ one parent asks, and the other answers, with a deal of insouciance: ‘Presbyterian’.\(^3\) The poem’s epigraph, a quotation from an ‘Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form’, a local bureaucratic staple, serves as a clue to what this poem says about the indurate structural sectarianism of Northern Ireland. The form asks applicants to ‘please give the name of the primary/preparatory school you attended for the longest time’, to which Mooney might add, so that we may forever reify you, legally and statistically, as

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\(^2\) Mooney, \textit{Rasputin}, p. 35. Predominantly former Protestant church-ran schools, ‘state schools’ or ‘controlled schools’ in the north are those administrated by the local government via a board of governors.

\(^3\) Ibid.
'Protestant’ or ‘Catholic’.1 Such forms were introduced after Northern Ireland’s long-evinced history of employment discrimination, with the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. Mooney’s contestation however, isn’t with the ends but the intrusive and compounding means. ‘A Protestant School’ doesn’t offer an alternative, but rather underscores the inescapability of ethnoreligious tribalism.

Mooney’s early poem ‘The Time Machine’ is a natural departure for a meditation on the impact of his upbringing on his poetic practice. In being the first of a sequence in the anthology Trio 5 (Blackstaff, 1987) – the earliest of his work published in book form – this poem, which never made it into any subsequent pamphlet or collection, comprises an inauguration of his minor poetry. ‘The Time Machine’ opens with the boy speaker who, like a young Patrick Kavanagh or Ciaran Carson (as the trope goes), begins his career from the loft. The first stanza describes the ‘black iron bedstead’ in the boy’s urban Protestant grandparents’ attic; the second stanza describes spare bicycle parts in his rural Catholic grandparents’ shed; in the third stanza, these elements are gathered and assembled to form a time machine. On the face of it, this is a poem where the voracious imagination of a child is projected towards magic realism. In the attic, filled with quotidian sundry of ‘forties shortbread tins’ and ‘worm-perforated chairs’, the boy peeps out the skylight ‘like a head free of the vulva’.2 As well as an indication that this poetic will be one which values verbal permissiveness, here Mooney is emphatic: his grandparents’ ‘Protestant’ terrace house encompasses a poetic as well as a social provenance. The speaker describes the time machine, the fruit of his labour, as

1 Ibid.
A marriage mixed in more ways than the one, it was no simple thing to bring all this together. Distance was one factor, the sheer unsuitability of the parts was another, poorly-planned, ill-financed ... and yet when the time came the whole mongrel contraption rattled awkwardly into life[.]

The speaker imagines the logistical headache of transporting bicycle parts eight miles from rural Co Down to inner-city Belfast, along with the hassle of fixing them to the ‘iron bedstead’ to create his machine. Mooney’s use of the ‘machine’ is a curious choice providing a serendipitous segue from his work to Deleuze and Guattari’s infamously elusive ‘machine’ conceit. Though it’s impertinent to propose a direct influence, a Philosophy graduate writing in the 1980s, Mooney will likely have encountered these ideas. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) posits the notion that society and nature should be read as a series of interacting machines; anything which produces is a machine – from the anus, which ‘cuts off’ the ‘flow of shit’, and the mouth, which ‘cuts off’ the ‘flow of air’, to the disembodied ‘literary machine’ for ‘writing or expression’. Deleuze and Guattari use this ontology to depersonalise and degentrify our understanding of the cultural process. The industrial metaphor (which they insist is *only* a metaphor in lexical terms) is employed as a counter to the Freudian model (as they see it) where social

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1 *Kafka*, p. 27.
interaction is comprehended as ‘theatre’. *Anti-Oedipus* takes the example of D. H. Lawrence’s cynicism towards psychiatry:

[Lawrence’s] reservations with regard to psychoanalysis did not stem from terror at having discovered what real sexuality was. But he had the impression – the purely instinctive impression – that psychoanalysis was shutting sexuality up in a bizarre sort of box painted with bourgeois motifs, in a kind of rather repugnant artificial triangle, thereby stifling the whole of sexuality as production of desire so as to recast it along entirely different lines, making of it a “dirty little secret,” the dirty little family secret, a private theater rather than the fantastic factory of Nature and Production.¹

In ‘The Time Machine’, Mooney applies the same reconsideration of the familial as Deleuze and Guattari. As per most origin poems, we expect the solipsistic author, reclining on the *chaise longue*, to recount the drama of their primal scene – with ‘caring parents’ or ‘distant parents’ – but Mooney’s child is an engineer. His fictive machine represents the legal and ontological unviability of the poet. The ‘impossibility’ (to use Deleuze and Guattari’s phrasing with regard to Kafka’s background) of magic realism (time travel) is paired with the civic indescribability of the boy-speaker. In a society where virtually every interaction is imbued with sectarian logic (as late-twentieth century Belfast quintessentially was), natives who aren’t born into a ‘community’ must subscribe to one or be assigned. Running deeper than religion or political conviction, quite often, in a very real sense, it’s ‘impossible’ to be other.

¹ Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 49.
The poet describes his earliest experiences of ‘Protestant’ East Belfast in ambivalent terms. ‘My parents had their troubles’, he writes, ‘[so] I spent a lot of time during my childhood in the Kirkpatricks’ Victorian terraced house. I remember it as […] a safe house and bolt-hole.’ Another early anthologised poem from the late-1980s, ‘A Connswater Elegy’, looks back at the working-class lives of Mooney’s maternal grandparents. Far from the caustic verisimilitude of his later work, in its fifth movement, the poem evokes a benign, model-village community:

I imagined East Bread Street
full of the voices
of people who knew the two of you
in your day:
the girls from the ropeworks,
the post office
and shipyard workers,
the bakers.2

This contrasts with Mooney’s later poems which, picking up where Tom Paulin leaves off, deal directly with tribalism, the legacy of Ulster Unionism and the intricate intersection of class and sectarianism in Northern Ireland. As we’ll see below, this invective is achieved in a manner indicative of an insider’s familiarity: frank cerebrations from within, rather than the stethoscopic examinations from without – as with Joseph Campbell’s ‘The Orangeman’ (1913) or Heaney’s ‘Orange Drums’ (1966).3 Moorfield Street: Prose Fragments (2014), revisits the strained nostalgias of ‘A Connswater Elegy’ in a series of biographical sketches of East

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2 Trio 5, p. 29.
3 Heaney’s ‘Protestant’ poems in Death of a Naturalist have been characterised as ‘hard, cartoon-like renditions “from the outside” exhibiting ‘the unmistakable aggressiveness of a young man struggling for his own place in society’: Helen Vendler, Seamus Heaney (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 79.
Belfast at the beginning of the ‘Troubles’. In a short dialogue titled ‘Does he Know?’

Mooney’s maternal grandmother asks if young Martin is aware that his father is a Catholic.

Granny Kirkpatrick: Does he know?
Mum: Does he know what?
Granny Kirkpatrick: Does he know?
Mum: What, Mai?
Granny Kirkpatrick: About his Daddy?
Mum: What about his Daddy?
Granny Kirkpatrick: You know what.
Mum: What?
Granny Kirkpatrick: That he’s RC?¹

To Granny Kirkpatrick, having a Catholic father in early-1970s East Belfast is a social hamstring for a child, something to be hidden from the neighbours, a ‘dirty little [district] secret’ to rival the ‘dirty little family secret’ of sexuality that Deleuze and Guattari perceive in Freud’s over-domesticated model of emotional development. Along with everything else, the East Belfast primal scene is itself sectarianized.

**COUNTER-AESTHETIC**

Unequivocally autobiographical (even if fictitious), ‘Does he Know?’ evinces an almost perverse (likely cathartic) honesty about prejudices within the poet’s own family. Although his work shares with Simmons’ the inclination to divulge opinion, the latter has the tendency to obtusely over-divulge. In ‘Husband to Wife’ (1966), the tortured husband speaker confesses his jealousy around his wife’s sexual

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¹ Mooney, ‘Moorfield Street’, *Numero Cinq*. 
relationships before they met. The husband ‘wrestle[s]’ against his ‘pride’, imagining another man:

his rosy, swelling penis, in a sheath,
filling you up as it came in,
just as mine does, my bride,
just as mine does. […]

Some readers might find this poem objectionable, not by virtue of its vulgarity, but by virtue but its libertine proprietorship of another’s body and (that great lyrical sin) its lack of ironic humility. This proprietorship is offered as normal, public and pornographic. Mooney’s ‘Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife’ (2011), an ekphrastic sonnet on Katsushika Hokusai’s 1814 woodblock print of the same name, also deals in vulgar marital jealousy:

The fisherman’s wife’s licked out by one octopus
and French-kissed by another, a tentacle
gripped in a passionate fist. It’s just a dream,
she says, and not even a pleasant dream.

The fisherman speaker is as much annoyed by the ‘predictability’ of his wife’s ‘lust’ (the ‘human-marine genre’: ‘fish-porn’) as he is by her faux-infidelity in the dream; self-obsessed, he ‘can’t believe she loves him’ because her subconscious chose such a ‘tacky’ fantasy. The sonnet is saturated in ironic humility: challenging both marital proprietorship and aesthetic grandiosity with precision.

Mooney regards the northern lyrical aesthetic as one inculcated and/or governed by certain gentile ‘social acts and permissions’. His own practice has striven to transgress ‘the bounds of the expected’, to diverge from what he regards as

2 Ibid.
4 Ibid; my italics.
5 Correspondence with Mooney via email (23.5.2019).
predictable art where the reader expects to ‘get what she pays for’.¹ The most obvious manifestation of this localised counter-aesthetic is primarily observed in the uglier (cynical, visceral, blasphemous, scatological) side to his poetic which, as Morrissey observes, ‘extends the boundaries of what is and is not appropriate subject matter’.² Mooney’s counter-aesthetic mode allows a medium for the notion that ‘God’s a vicious cunt’; it drags up and dissects received truths, opening new vistas of subversion which extend beyond the bluntly political.³ Whilst Kafka’s prose deterritorializes language at an ethno-geographical level, Mooney’s poetry deterritorializes language at the level of social stratification – a process we might properly describe as the progressive ‘degentrification’ of language.⁴ An instance of this phenomenon can be observed in ‘Child Killers in Heaven’, originally published in the pamphlet Bonfire Makers (1995). This poem, forming a sardonic riposte to the notion of deistic absolution, is concerned with exactly what its title promises: a hypothetical situation whereby child murderers live on in a post-mortem paradise. The brutal final lines envisage ‘something | fragile and precious, | held at arm’s length like the gift | of a head, newly-severed.’⁵ Dark humour such as this, which may come across as needlessly effusive, has the propensity to be more politically charged than Mooney’s allusions to, and enunciations of, leftist thought – of which, we might add, there are many. His poetry is in the main too canny for proactive

¹ Ibid.
² Sinéad Morrissey, ‘Martin Mooney’.
⁴ ‘Progressive’ in the sense that whilst Mooney’s poetic delves into the gutter, it does so at the expense of gentile language, not people; it’s not to be confused with conservative language ‘degentrification’ of right-wing populism. The obvious analogy here is city planning: civic ‘degentrification’ (the antonym of civic gentrification) allows for the organic development of a community in a place, rather than architectural dilapidation.
didacticism however, to be ‘committed’ to any specific dogma. It works on its reader by means of a shrewd chicanery, patronising us, testing us, leading us as blind horses away from the water. In order to ‘degentrify’, Mooney’s poetry disrupts, undercutting its own lyricality, meeting its target in enunciation and form rather than some premediated party-political manifesto. The violence of poems like ‘Child Killers in Heaven’ shocks readers back to the social. Its child killers ‘gather sadly’ as children themselves

[i]n cliques and clusters
away from the saints and the forgiven,
in corners of the celestial
playground [...]  

And it takes an eternity to break the ice
custed over their longings
and crimes, the frozen I want
I want I want I want [...]\(^1\)

Their presence in this poem doesn’t strive to flippantly rehumanise monsters, but rather unites readers regardless of political persuasion around a universal evil in order to remind us that self-interest (manifest in murderous neurosis, or its social other: corporate greed) is the provenance of all human depravity.\(^2\)

Mooney’s understanding of the northern lyrical aesthetic isn’t one which he reads essentialistically into canonical poems, but a residual critical preference for the “well-made poem” after “Movement” sensibilities became the norm in northern poetry after the mid-1960s.\(^3\) Mostly set in the city or an abstracted nonplace,

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) This refracted radicalism, which relies on a meta-analysis of Leftism and shock tactics is in some senses summed up in the title of Mooney’s debut pamphlet, ‘Brecht’ and ‘An Exquisite Corpse’ (1992).
\(^3\) Correspondence with Mooney via email (23.5.2019). In interview, Heaney said: ‘We’re a school insofar as that original grouping was the first literary place; but I think that Mahon’s procedures,
Mooney’s poems also diverge from the northern bucolic imperative identified in the introduction via Gillis’s ‘The Ulster Way’. His poems are less concerned with the national narratives and mythical paradigms than those of his canonical forebears and peers.¹ He’s less inclined towards the adoration of certain words and etymologies than the ‘Heaney Generation’; nor does he include the kind of word games or obscure references common in McGuckian, Muldoon and Paulin’s work.² If northern poetry has been prudish towards distasteful language, the eminent example is the case of Mahon’s poem ‘Afterlives’ (1975). The fourth stanza of the poem, appropriately dedicated to Simmons, originally read:

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What middle-class cunts we are
To imagine for one second
That our privileged ideals
Are divine wisdom, and the dim
Forms that kneel at noon
In the city not ourselves.³
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In a later rewriting of this poem, Mahon imprudently toned down ‘cunt’ to ‘twits’ and then toned it up to ‘shits’ in a third version; the word is, as John Goodby notes ‘gentrified’ from its original context where it sang to Simmons’ ‘plebeian truculence’.⁴ There are recent and historical examples of degentrified poems from Longley’s procedures, my procedures, Simmons’ procedures are very different. I suppose we shared traditional beliefs about whatever good writing is – it wasn’t the let-it-all-hang-out school, it was the well-made school’: Frank Kinahan and Seamus Heaney, ‘An Interview with Seamus Heaney’, Critical Inquiry 8.3 (Spring 1982), p. 408.

² Ibid.
the north. For instance, Derry poet Eoghan Walls’ *Pigeon Songs* (2019) takes the *dirty* street pigeon as a symbol of human resilience and insalubriousness.\(^1\) Between this collection and Patrick Kavanagh’s *The Great Hunger* (1942) with its famous reference to masturbation and ostensible dispensation with a residual Victorian prudishness, there have been of course instances of degentrified language, but no other northern poet has pushed the bounds as dexterously as Mooney.\(^2\)

**REINVENTING WITH THE MYTH**

Connal Parr’s *Inventing the Myth: Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination* (2017) claims to have identified an obscured northern literary tradition in the work of Protestant ‘leftist’ writers such as Thomas Carnduff, John Hewitt, Sam Thompson, Stewart Parker and Christina Reid. If one were to read Mooney’s collections without the aid of extra-literary material, they might assign him by default if nothing else, as a ‘Protestant leftist’ northern writer. And Mooney, keenly aware of the prospective ‘red Prod’ literary lineage, toys with the idea throughout his oeuvre.\(^3\)

His first full collection, *Grub* (1993), dispenses with any timidity he may have had in the 1980s with regard to addressing the north’s socioeconomic and tribal

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3 The poem ‘Connolly Window’ uses ‘red Prod’ to refer to Irish trade unionist and Republican Winnie Carney’s husband George McBride (*Killysuggen*, p. 20). Parr identifies ‘the fallacy that the Protestant working class in Northern Ireland has no culture but the Orange Order and Rangers F.C.’; built within the academy and bolstered by journalism, he contends that this fallacy has resulted in ‘a skewed vision of [the community]’s history and potential’: Connal Parr, *Inventing the Myth: Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 1.
dynamic. Paraphrasing the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and mocking the old battle cry of Unionism, stanza one of the first poem promises a poetic ‘voice’ which isn’t afraid to open its mouth:

When all that was solid melted into air
[…]
to the insistent wheedling of gravity
their one reply was No Surrender.¹

‘Launching the Whaler *Juan Peron*’, a poem versifying the tragic deaths of Belfast shipyard workers, is an uncomfortable read. But this counter-aesthetic is necessary due to the gravity of its subject, namely, the selective civic history of Belfast’s shipyards. ‘Launching the Whaler *Juan Peron*’ had already been published as the final poem in Mooney’s pamphlet *Escaping with Cuts and Bruises* (1992). But his decision to open *Grub* with it won’t have been an easy one, as the poem effectively launched his career with a bronze ram attached to its bow.

Though it reads like a yarn dressed up as a mock-epic, ‘Launching the Whaler *Juan Peron*’ recounts actual events from the 31st of January 1951 when eighteen men who’d been fitting out a new ship at Belfast’s Harland and Wolff fell to their deaths when a gangway collapsed. Although a relatively recent event, the *Juan Peron* disaster remains but a footnote in another amusing anecdote. In the late 1940s, The Argentinian Fishing Company commissioned a 25,000-ton factory ship to be built at Harland and Wolff’s Musgrave Yard.² This whaler was to be named in honour of the Argentine authoritarian leader General Juan Domingo Perón who, by the ship’s launch in 1950, was halfway through his first term as president. The wife of this namesake, María ‘Evita’ Perón – glamorous actress and poster girl for the Perónist Regime – was invited to christen the *Juan Peron*. Citing political unrest,

Evita declined, so on the 4th of April 1950, a secretary from Harland and Wolff carried out the ceremony in her stead. Mooney exploits the irony of this aesthetic substitution (exotic-for-local):

The Latin beauty on the slips isn’t Evita but her stand-in, Irene McClurg, her skin almost the colour of shipyard tea […]

Ever willing to localise any gibe, Mooney takes the opportunity to censure the toxic cynicism of northern sectarianism:

to tell you the truth the yard is happier with this Protestant girl. No Taig queen could raise a cheer among these roughneck Islandmen like Irene does […] May God and Ulster bless her and all who sail in her.

‘Launching the Whaler Juan Peron’ builds towards the tragic ending of the Evita-does-Belfast anecdote, foregrounding the men who fell to their deaths ten months after the ship’s launch. Characteristically, Mooney’s graphic reimagining of the disaster doesn’t hold back on detail. ‘Their bodies rain down’, the speaker observes,

Some hit stone, others hit water and sink like rivets in the freezing channel.

The final line’s image where ‘[t]he tide brings eighteen caps upriver’ is devastating, yet the emotional thrust of this poem lies in frustration borne of a political consciousness rather than sympathy. Perhaps looking to Louis MacNeice’s public-facing Autumn Journal (1939), Mooney has said in interview that he believes poetry

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1 Mooney, Grub, p. 3.
2 Ibid., p. 4.
3 Ibid., p. 6.
has a ‘journalistic conscience’: that the poem should or can act as ‘an eye witness or bystander’.¹ MacNeice famously wrote that the writer

should be not so much the mouthpiece of a community (for then [s]he

will only tell it what it knows already) but […] its conscience, its critical faculty, its generous instinct […] the poet must refuse to tell lies to order.

Others can tell lies more efficiently; no one except the poet can give us poetic truth.²

To this we might add that each poet’s ‘poetic truth’ is unique, dependent on where they stand, and contingent on how they belong to a community. ‘Launching the Whaler Juan Peron’ elegises the eighteen shipyard workers who died, but rather than ritualise their deaths, Mooney brazenly scrutinises their predicament. The poem begins with the men falling in cinematic slow-motion, allowing them the time to think ‘backwards and forwards | unhurriedly seeking an explanation | for [the] casting-off of traces’.³ They search for some meaning to their untimely deaths and lament their deletion from a romanticised and evermore consumerized narrative.

George Legg opens Northern Ireland and the Politics of Boredom: Conflict, Capital, Culture (2018) with a compelling condemnation the Titanic Belfast museum, identifying it as an embodiment of the official shipyard story – a narrative seeped in what he calls the ‘politics of boredom’, that is, the process whereby we see a ‘withdrawal of meaning on one hand, and the apparent inability to restore it on the other’ – the capitalistic shift towards an ever more standardised and textureless civic

¹ Cited in Brown, In the Chair, p. 290.
³ Mooney, Grub, p. 3.
experience.¹ ‘Rather than acknowledge this site’s sectarian history’, Legg notes, ‘Titanic Belfast offers the glamour of an ever-changing veneer’.² As well as deleting an ethnoreligious past, visitors ‘learn very little about those who actually made the ship float’.³ Following on from Legg, we might describe this phenomenon as a form of *iconic taxidermy*, where the icon of the shipyards is drained of its blood (the lived experience of the shipyard worker) and stuffed with the rhetoric of the dominant order of the day.

This facile shipyard narrative has been both contributed to and challenged by literary figures over the past century. In many ways, ‘Launching the Whaler *Juan Peron*’ forms a riposte to Richard Rowley’s ‘The Islandmen’ (1918). Saccharine and fetishistic, Rowley’s poem reads like domestic Stalinist propaganda. Here, Harland and Wolff Workers, ‘proud to build and make’, surrounded by ‘iron’ and ‘steel’, are preposterously militarised and apotheosised.⁴ The poem’s final stanza reads:

> Terrible as an army with banners  
> The legions of labour  
> The builders of ships,  
> Tramp thro’ the winter eve.⁵

This poem does to the shipyards what Kipling does to the jungle. Coming out of the Great War, Rowley’s romantic figures marching in unison are understandable, but no matter how well-intentioned, by turning the workers into an army he depicts them as

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² Ibid., p. 1.  
³ Ibid.  
⁴ Richard Rowley, *City Songs and Others* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1918), p. 9. Rowley’s *The City of Refuge and Other Poems* (1917) are the earliest known poems taking urban Belfast as their subject, which is testament to just how *young* a city it is.  
⁵ Ibid.
uncomplicated and, to some extent, unhuman; this is precisely the opposite, as we saw in Chapter I, of how Joseph Campbell depicts workers in ‘The Labourer’ (1913). As well as preventable insufficiently-compensated industrial deaths, the history of the Belfast shipyards has been one of violent sectarianism. In 1864, 1886, 1893, 1912, 1920 and 1935 Catholics (and a smaller number of dissenting Protestants, or ‘Rotten Prods’) were expelled from Harland and Wolff and the smaller (‘Wee Yard’) site at Workman Clark’s.¹

It hardly needs to be said that when the Juan Peron disaster occurred in 1951, the overwhelming majority of shipyard workers were ‘loyal’ Protestants. The history of the northern labour movement is ideologically contorted and intricate, but one constant is the dominance of a Protestant majority. Emmet O’Connor characterises a ‘stasis’ within northern trade unionism in the early twentieth century as ‘not so much in divisions between Catholic and Protestants as in the conflict between labour and loyalist ideologies’, where trade unions had a ‘mainly Protestant, anti-Unionist leadership and a mainly Protestant, loyalist membership’.² From Northern Ireland’s founding in 1921, Catholics and ‘Rotten Prods’ – via the oxymoronic delusion of ‘Sinn Féin Bolshevism’ – were perceived by the Unionist establishment as a threat to the fabric and integrity of the state. Protestants could rely on shipyard employment,

¹ In 1920 ‘7,400 men and women, one-quarter of them Protestants, were forced out of their jobs’: Emmet O’Connor, A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-1960 (Dublin; New York: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), p. 176.
² O’Connor, A Labour History of Ireland, p. 173.
but as companies could always take their labour as granted, wages were lower than the industrial average in Great Britain.¹ The housing situation was equally dire for both working-class Protestants and Catholics, but Protestant upstarts who spoke out about this issue were deemed disloyal. Sam Thompson’s *Over the Bridge* (1957), a play which concerns itself with the tribalism and intra-trade union discord within the shipyards, takes its name from Rowley’s ‘The Islandmen’. It begins:

> Terrible as an army with banners  
> Through the dusk of a winter’s eve,  
> Over the bridge  
> The thousands tramp.²

*Over the Bridge* was an important play which quite literally brought sectarianism centre-stage; and thousands of workers flocked to see it. But for all that, its script has fundamental inconsistencies both aesthetic and political. The play centres round a cast of character types each showing a discrete and unwavering political temperament. On the surface at least, it comprises a phantasmagorical Queen’s Island where every individual is essentially ‘decent’ except for a few rotten apples: the money-grubber (George Mitchell) and his ‘she-devil’ wife, the dogmatic union delegate (Rabbie White), the overzealous born-again Christian (Billy Morgan) and the sectarian village idiot (Archie Kerr) – whose sectarian convictions, by the close of the play, have all but receded.³ No-one openly supports the Unionist status quo and the Green and Orange elephant in the room – the question of the northern constitutional question – isn’t raised once. In the end, when the faceless Protestant mob come to expel (the only Catholic character) Peter Boyle, messianic ‘Rotten

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Prod’ Davy Mitchell steps up to save him and is beaten to death.1 ‘Launching the Whaler Juan Peron’ diverges from Over the Bridge in that it doesn’t act out a cathartic Christian allegory – it doesn’t romanticise workers as Rowley does, or betray its own sense of unfamiliarity as in Heaney’s inaccurately-titled ‘Dockers’ (1966) – but leaves us with cold, insufferable facts. Mooney’s islandmen are both victims and the plebeian ‘crème de la crème, | [pathetic] lords of the kitchen house | and the frozen outdoor toilet’.2 In ‘Launching the Whaler Juan Peron’, sectarianism isn’t the problem but a symptom. Its worker subjects are too busy ‘talking wages, beer and football’ to foresee the disaster when the gangway drops, to foresee the city’s deindustrialisation, or indeed, the culmination of their support for Unionism which is the coming ‘Troubles’.

It might be said that Mooney, with his university education and scholarly leftist ideals, flies perilously close to condescension where he condemns worker ignorance. But as well as keeping in mind those parts of the poet’s own upbringing beneath the shipyard gantries, we should take heed of the ontological trenchancy of his poem’s manifold themes. Less than half a decade after World War Two and the disclosure of the Holocaust, Harland and Wolff commissioned a ship named for a quasi-fascist dictator and invited his wife to christen it. Mooney nods to this detail briefly in the penultimate stanza, alluding to the ‘rationing [still] in force and Brooke in power’.3 However, given the Perónista slogans of ‘Alpargatas sí, libros no’ (‘Shoes? Yes! Books? No!’) or ‘Haga patria. Mate un estudiante’ (‘Build the

1 Ibid.
2 Mooney, Grub, p. 5.
3 Ibid. Basil Brooke, 1st Viscount Brookeborough (1888–1973), Prime Minister of Northern Ireland from 1943 to 1963, was known for his flagrantly anti-Catholic opinions.
Fatherland: Kill a Student!’), perhaps these inconsistencies aren’t as incongruous as they seem.¹ In his famous speech against Perón, Jorge Luis Borges proclaimed that

dictatorships breed oppression [...] servility [...] cruelty; more loathsome still is the fact that they breed idiocy. [...] Fighting these sad monotonies is one of the duties of a writer.²

Borgesian and MacNeicean imperatives are kept in-tact in ‘Launching the Whaler Juan Peron’, where the official narrative (which perceives history not in terms of people but ‘civilisation’ and ‘heritage’) is put under scrutiny. Mooney offers no partisan way forward but a piece of art which can’t ignore material conditions. His poem confronts the reader (specifically the lyric reader) with its degentrifying counter-aesthetic – contaminating fatuous, sitting-room impressions of the Belfast shipyards with mucky boot prints. In achieving this, Mooney’s adaption of the Marxian adage in another poem from Grub is well-earned:

History repeats itself, the first time
as tragedy, the second
as farce, and the third, perhaps
as poetry, condensed to syntax –
a beading, a softening, a transformation,
wings in the pupa, bone under the skin.³

‘Launching the Whaler Juan Peron’ should be read in the context of the eighty-year anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic the year before Grub was published. The preserve of the history anorak (for the cynic, that ultimate symbol of hubris), the

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¹ Norberto Galasso, Perón (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2005), p. 351.
³ From ‘Charles Donnelly’, Mooney’s elegy for the political activist-cum-poet who fought and died in the Spanish Civil War (Grub, p. 28).
disaster holds a special place in the iconography of Belfast. Around anniversary years, the public’s fascination predictably grows, and invariably, this interest seeps into the arts. Drew Linden, the protagonist from Glenn Patterson’s second novel, *Fat Lad* (1992), returning home from England to Belfast to work in a bookshop, soon comes to the realisation that his home city is obsessed with the *Titanic*. Moving back from London to Belfast in 1992, Mooney would have heard of (but likely didn’t attend) *Titanic* commemoration events such as the founding of the Ulster Titanic Society in May of that year. In interview, the poet has insisted his shipping disaster poems are less concerned with humanity hubristically pitting itself against its own technology than the prosaic ‘criminal negligence’ they demonstrate. For him these are

man-made, acts of incompetence and – in contemporary jargon which
I’m not using flippantly – these are health and safety issues related to money. Events like these don’t go away. They resurface at inquests, not just as powerful visions of “death by water”, [but] because they have burrowed deep into the psyche.

‘Launching the Whaler *Juan Peron*’ is a work in the same vein as Stewart Parker’s droll and cerebral radio play *The Iceberg* (1975). Broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster in January 1975, it follows the ghosts of Hugh and Danny – two shipyard workers who

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3 Cited in Brown, *In the Chair*, p. 289–290.
4 Ibid.
died whilst working on the *Titanic* – who haunt the ship throughout its ill-fated maiden voyage.\(^1\) Marilynn Richtarik writes that

Parker got the idea for the play while reading the Irish socialist James Connolly, who made the point that while the world was shocked and horrified by the deaths of millionaires on board the *Titanic*, no one seemed to give a thought to the seventeen Belfast shipyard workers who were killed during its construction. [...] In writing *The Iceberg*, [Parker] rescues their deaths from inconsequence.\(^2\)

Another of Mooney’s ‘shipping poems’, ‘A Last Word from Roberto Calvi’, is set below the Thames aboard the *Marchioness*, a London pleasure boat which sank on the 20\(^{th}\) August 1989 after colliding with a dredger named *Bowbelle*. Fifty-one people, attending a birthday party aboard the steamer, died in the disaster. After the captain of the *Bowbelle* was acquitted twice from two charges of negligence, families of the victims sought justice for over a decade. In 2001, a special report found the captains and owners of both boats culpable.\(^3\) The eponymous second section of *Grub* comprises what we might describe as a novella in verse which follows a rough-and-ready cast of Belfast underachievers living in squalor in London. In ‘A Last Word from Roberto Calvi’, Mooney the Poet enters his own poem like Dante Alighieri to meet the ghost of his protagonist, an anarchist punk

\(^{1}\) Far from shying away from politics, Hugh and Danny discuss the 1912 Home Rule Crisis; the play, written during the 1974 Ulster Workers’ Council strike in a sense serves to book end two crises.


called Grub, and that of Calvi (1920–1982), the Milan-based financier (nicknamed ‘God’s Banker’ because of his ties to the Vatican) whose 1982 murder has been a conspiracy theory favourite. Grub and Calvi are ‘stuck’ with each other in this underwater ‘hell’.\footnote{Mooney, \textit{Grub}, p. 81.} Grub describes the \textit{Marchioness} Disaster as a ‘[f]ucking disgrace’ whilst Calvi, who calls Grub ‘the scum of the earth […] waste \mid Product of the social machine’ is more interested in giving a speech declaring the merits of finance and Catholicism. The poet doesn’t afford him the opportunity to finish this speech however, and in the final lines

\begin{quote}
The bulkhead gulps air and Calvi 
is wretched out into the stream, 
farting ‘capitalism’ and ‘propitiation’.\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}

‘Operation Sandcastle’, which was published as a separate pamphlet in 1997 and again as the final section of \textit{Rasputin and His Children}, continues Mooney’s fascination with corporate and governmental negligence. The poem’s title refers to the British military operation in the mid-1950s where munitions and chemical weapons were dumped into the sea. From the 1920s until the 1970s, over a million tonnes of military waste was dumped into Beaufort’s Dyke, a submarine trench in the Irish Sea between Wigtownshire and Antrim; in 2004, a former Royal Navy diver described the waste as ‘liable to go bang’ if it wasn’t removed.\footnote{Alex Kirby, ‘UK’s undersea “ticking timebombs”’, BBC News website (26 November 2004) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4032629.stm> (Accessed 9.2.19).} Though the gambit of ‘Operation Sandcastle’ is the ‘washing up’ of military equipment along the Antrim coast in 1995, the poem’s themes extend beyond the ecological (from Ireland’s relationship with Scotland to eighteenth-century French military engineers) into a manifold
manifesting in what might aptly be termed a lyrical discharge of discourse in eight cantos. The first canto (or ‘phase’), ‘Cairnryan’, is awash with the detritus of war – ‘[a]nthrax’, ‘[t]abun, a Nazi castoff’ and ‘Churchill’s | guilty conscience’ – beginning the long poem with a gusto reminiscent of Swift’s great indictment on the insalubriousness of modernity, ‘A Description of a City Shower’ (1710):

Tramp steamers, rust buckets, old tubs, death traps.  
An armada? No. A flotilla? Hardly. A beggars’ regatta, a flooded scrapyard, a once-and-for-all experiment in rust.¹

The third phase, a prose poem, quips that by the turn of the twenty-first century, the ‘submarines’ in the Irish Sea ‘outnumber mackerel’; the fourth phase brings the plastic-macabre image of a headless Barbie doll washed up in a pose that resembles a ‘petrified goosestep’ – playfully alluding back to the Second World War military waste.² Not content with problematizing the Belfast shipyard story, Mooney’s boundless cynicism pushes out towards the wider narrative of Western post-war ‘prosperity’ and ‘growth’, picking up threads as it goes. In the phase titled ‘Carrick Revisited’ – a nod to MacNeice’s ‘Carrickfergus’ (1937) and ‘Carrick Revisited’ (1948) – the speaker addresses his toddler son, evoking memories of the ‘Troubles’ which he hopes he’ll never ‘have to remember’.³ Here, amongst other martial paraphernalia – from ‘VE Day’ spitfires to ‘AKs and homemade submachineguns’ – ‘William of Orange’ the ‘Rastafarian dwarf’ looks down from his plinth as the iconography of the north’s histories collate and congeal.⁴ ‘Operation Sandcastle’ ends with the

¹ Mooney, Rasputin, p. 50.  
² Ibid., pp. 54–55.  
³ Ibid., p. 58.  
⁴ Ibid.
speaker on the beach building sandcastles with his child. In the closing stanzas, in a reverie which slips into magic realism, he imagines what it would be like to build the ‘sandcastle to end all sandcastles’.\(^1\) Here, a ‘sleepy [medieval] conscript’ who scratches his bollocks and stares dozily up at the windowless treasury, counts his own weight, his family’s weight, in gold.\(^2\)

Though we’re soon flung back into the unmagic real. In the final lines, the child wishes to ‘trample’ the sandcastle, to which – in one last rebuke of power, one last chance for iconoclasm – the speaker replies: ‘yes, trample it, | smash this bastion. | Walk it into the sand.’\(^3\)

One affirmative aspect of ‘minor’ literature is that its authors can’t rest on laurels which were never placed on their heads. If such a thing exists, the ‘minor’ virtuosity of Mooney’s poetic is found in its ability to consciously reinvent itself in terms of theme and form whilst (concomitantly) keeping true to its central aesthetic and ethical convictions. Mooney’s digressions are long and contorted (what do the London punk-metal scene, Grigori Rasputin and the Royal Ulster Constabulary have in common?), but always return home. ‘Spide’ from Blue Lamp Disco (2003) is, ostensibly, a skaz poem in the voice of a ‘chav’, a lower-class male.\(^4\) Because its

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Skaz is a ‘first-person’ mode where ‘narrative is to be understood as being “spoken” rather than written’, ‘non-literary or indecorous’: Chris Baldick, The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 309. The OED is predictably brief in its definition of ‘chav’: ‘a young person of a type characterized by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status.’ Lexico’s (formerly Oxford Living Dictionaries) entry for the northern Irish slag term ‘spide’ is: ‘[a]
speaker imparts some ingenious observations on identity through the medium of plain English, Mooney avoids the cliché – exemplified in the likes of *Good Will Hunting* (1997) – of the lower-order intellectual-as-exception. Mooney’s ‘spide’ isn’t some unfulfilled *sui generis* individual who might one day leave the slum behind forever – he’s happy where he is, Adidas tracksuit bottoms and all. After criticising Mooney the Poet for his erudite cosmopolitanism – ‘you’re soft’, ‘[y]ou have to live among your own’ – this ‘spide’ speaker reflects on the ethics of getting a tattoo, stating: ‘It’s a commitment, like a marriage. | It’s just like being married to yourself.’¹ There’s more to this than a poet’s playful self-rebuke of his own ‘getting on’ in an economic sense. Rather than the classic *Ars Poetica* (poem-as-meditation-on-composition), these lines consider one of Mooney’s enduring fixations: the northern Protestant identity which was (arbitrarily, as we saw in ‘A Protestant School’) thrust upon him as a child. Some of Mooney’s constellations – the shipyards, the Eleventh Night bonfire and King William of Orange – are staples of Ulster Protestant iconography. These are seductive subject matter for many northern writers wishing to conjure what Tom Paulin calls ‘a gritty | sort of prod baroque | I must return to | like my own boke.’² Placed, as it is, mid-collection, there’s an uncanniness in the subtext of ‘Spide’ which only reveals itself at the end of the collection.

CONJURING A ‘MINOR’ GHOST

The penultimate and final poems of *Blue Lamp Disco* certainly come out of the blue. Abruptly we’re presented with a translated fragment from humanity’s oldest known fictional story, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.¹ On the page facing ‘from The Epic of Gilgamesh: Enkidu’s Dream’ is a more modestly titled poem which cements the idea, and accosts any suspicion, that the ineluctable backbone of Mooney’s poetic comprises anxieties around his own status as a ‘minor’ poet and his obsession with northern labour history. This ‘first’ poem is then met with Mooney’s ‘The Last Poem’, which begins with characteristic hyperbole. The conceit here is that, as fate would have it, the last poem ever written is written in Belfast, but it’s

strangled at birth
with a cable stripped
from the last ship named
at Harland & Wolff.²

Mooney depicts Queen’s Island in 2003 as an industrial wasteland of ‘bankrupt shipyards’ and – amongst evoking again infanticide – raises the ghost of one of Parr’s northern Protestant leftist writers. Thomas Carnduff (1886–1956), who took the moniker of ‘shipyard poet’, is perhaps better-known amongst students of politics than those of literature. This poet-playwright was a Great War veteran, an Orangeman, an active trade unionist and a literary facilitator – whose idiosyncratic (broadly leftist and ostensibly incongruous) political convictions have made him somewhat of an enigma to scholars. As well as working as a printer’s helper and a butcher’s boy, Carnduff was employed by Workman Clark’s as a shipyard worker

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² *Blue Lamp Disco*, p. 63.
for over a quarter of a century. He spent his twilight years as the caretaker at the Linen Hall Library in Belfast – a posting which exemplifies the contemporaneous limitations for working-class writers. At a time when literary activity in the north had shrunk to virtual nonexistence, Carnduff formed the Young Ulster Literary Society (1936), which brought together writers of all classes, from students at Queen’s University to tram conductors.¹ His political ambivalence and ‘minority’ status make him a likely forebear figure for Mooney – though as with every aspect of his poetic, the latter doesn’t submit to this realisation without trouble. ‘The Last Poem’ comprises seven short-lined quatrains which, coming after the elliptical Gilgamesh fragment, seem straightforward. The speaker describes the ‘incompetent shade | of Thomas Carnduff’ who, dressed in his Orange Order collaret, is reciting ‘burly doggerel’ as he stands on the ‘Linen Hall roof’.² ‘Shade’ lends an ambiguity here – either the speaker is personifying the ‘shade’ as in the worst or ‘less praiseworthy features’ of Carnduff or Mooney is depicting Carnduff as an ‘inseparable follower or companion’.³ Of course, ‘shade’ here may well simply mean ‘phantom’ or ‘spectre’.⁴ Ill-contented with the ‘living ghost’ of Heaney (to use Kenneth Keating’s terminology, as referred to in our introduction), the father ghost of Yeats or whomever else may be offered from the canon, Mooney conjures his own ‘minor’ ghost in Carnduff.⁵ Mooney’s interest in the ‘shipyard poet’ likely stems from his

² Blue Lamp Disco, p. 63 my italics.
³ OED
⁴ Ibid.
interest in the ‘outsider artist’ and the ‘inorganic intellectual’ (those who ‘express something essential about their city, class or culture without being wholly of it, or organically connected to it’).

Mooney writes:

_Disco_ and _Resurrection_ have quite a few poems where oddball and eccentric artists and writers pop up. I don’t know how important they are individually, but that role – the outsider artist, the self-proclaimed poet or philosopher or guru – really engaged me.

These figures become central to Mooney’s later work. Not satisfied to merely write poetry in a mode differentiated from how he perceives the canon aesthetic, he questions said canon’s core axiology and his counter-aesthetic reaches crescendo.

Although we would whole-heartedly disagree with his assertion that ‘Last Poem’ is successful where it ‘fumbl[es] with the sense of fraudulence and incompetence that clung to any attempt [he] made at poems’, Mooney’s _aesth-nihilistic_ belief in ‘inevitable artistic mediocrity’ sings to Deleuze and Guattari’s observation about talent and ‘minor’ literature:

> [P]recisely because talent isn’t abundant in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individualized enunciation that would belong to this or that “master” and that could be separated from a collective enunciation. Indeed, scarcity of talent is in fact beneficial and allows the conception of something other than a literature of masters.

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1 Correspondence with Mooney via email (22.5.2019).
2 Ibid.
3 For instance, the eccentricities of Co Antrim outsider artist Moscow Joe McKinley (1931–2003) are immortalised in ‘The Ballad of Moscow Joe’ (_Killysuggen_, p. 14).
4 _Kafka_, p. 17.
Although Mooney subsequently published *The Resurrection of the Body at Killysuggen* (2011), a reader could get the impression that ‘The Last Poem’, being the last poem in *Blue Lamp Disco*, was intended as his final poem, his lyrical hara-kiri. Putting it next to ‘from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*: Enkidu’s Dream’ (an abstract from humanity’s oldest poem) suggests a tongue-in-cheek commentary on Mooney’s own unbounded importance.

The quintessential minor Belfast literary figure, if Carnduff is a poetic role model, he’s an ironically modest one. This ‘minor poet’, this ‘printer’s devil | turned Rotten Prod’ as ‘The Last Poem’ has it, gives Mooney some simple advice in the fifth stanza. In a version of Heaney’s famous ‘whatever you say, say nothing’, he entreats the younger poet to ‘bite [his] tongue’.¹ Whilst Heaney’s phrase warns the reader that if they want to survive in the ‘land of [the] password, handgrip, wink and nod’ they must equivocate, Mooney’s ghost-of-Carnduff demands a kind of silence, perhaps poetic silence.² ‘[P]hilosopher’ is an interesting choice of words for Mooney in reference to Carnduff, whose poem ‘A Worker’s Philosophy’ (1932) claims to ‘have done with’ reading literature:

> I am studying life, not by culture,  
> But meeting it face to face.³

Michael Pierse notes that Carnduff’s ‘sober, prolier-than-thou tone’ here is undermined by the fact that he is (quite preposterously) producing the thing he

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¹ Mooney, *Blue Lamp Disco*, p. 63.  
claims to be circumventing.¹ Mooney’s at home with this sort of non-sense however, proudly counting himself amongst those figures who ‘rarely make sense’ both ‘in their wider cultural context’ or ‘to other people.’²

The final stanzas of ‘The Last Poem’ reference the *Magheramorne Manifesto* (1905), a document written by the Irish liberal reporter Robert Lindsay Crawford (1868–1945) for the Independent Orange Order. Carnduff was a member of the IOO, which seceded from mainstream Orangism in 1903 under the leadership of the independent populist MP for South Belfast, Tom Sloan. S.J. Connolly notes that whilst the ‘independent order had the potential to develop in a liberal, or even secular labourist, direction, it remained fundamentally a Protestant movement.’³ Crawford’s *Manifesto*, which ‘indicted all forms of clericalism’ appealed to Irish Catholics and Protestants to ‘unite on the basis of shared nationality’ and whilst it ‘dismissed unionism as a “discredited creed”’, the document was later regarded an embarrassing memory for Orangism; most historians perceive it as a knee-jerk protest against the ‘social exclusivity and intellectual narrowness of early Edwardian unionism’ rather than a missed opportunity for working-class unity.⁴ Crawford was expelled from the IOO in 1908 for his pro-Home Rule stance; he would go on to *forsake the Auld Cause* and become what Eamon Phoenix calls a ‘Protestant Fenian’.⁵ The penultimate stanza of ‘The Last Poem’ insists that

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² Correspondence with Mooney via email (22.5.2019). His italics.


⁴ Ibid., p. 356.

The Magheramorne

Manifesto’s
as good as a nod
to the land’s minor poets
and major fools¹

the sense of which is only unattainable after several readings. Mooney betrays the
Philosophy component to his undergraduate degree here with this little riddle –
which, on the face of it, seems thematically incongruous in a lyric poem. But
incorporated into a poem as it nevertheless is here, the nomenclature of the
Manifesto is foregrounded. Mooney breaks the two words of this title across two
stanzas, isolating each, which is only permissible in the lyric form. The provenance
of ‘manifesto’ in a fin-de-siècle labourist context should need no explanation, but
‘Magheramorne’, a typically northern Anglicisation (from the Irish Machaire
Morna, ‘plain of Morna’), is today the name for a hamlet in Co Antrim where once
stood a Gaelic petty kingdom, the Tuath of Magheramorne.² Mooney draws attention
to the way in which the etymologies of proper nouns such as these can carry heavy
historical baggage, as he does in the second stanza, where the speaker refers to the
Belfast dockland place names ‘Garmoyle’ and ‘Dargan’ as belonging to a ‘dead
Island language’.³ In this ‘Last (ever) Poem’, the reference to the dead language
speaks to the poet’s first ‘major’ poem, ‘Launching the Whaler Juan Peron’, in how
it derides the iconic taxidermy of the Belfast shipyard story. The ‘nod’ to the ‘land’s

¹ Mooney, Blue Lamp Disco, p. 63.
² Patrick McKay (ed.), A Dictionary of Ulster Place-names (Belfast: Queen’s University, Cló Ollscoil
na Banríona, 2007), p. 104; Thomas Mathews, The O’Neills of Ulster: Their History and Genealogy
(Dublin: Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1907) p. 199.
³ Mooney, Blue Lamp Disco, p. 63.
minor poets | and major fools’ also does a lot of heavy lifting. This refers to the proverbial phrase ‘a nod is as good as a wink [to a blind horse]’, which can be taken two ways. One usage gives notice that *one needs only a small indication in order to understand something.* Using it in this sense, the speaker in ‘The Last Poem’ is suggesting that for those scholars trying to pin down Carnduff’s ideological position, the IOO’s unworkable declaration provides a clue. As Henry Patterson notes, the *Magheramorne Manifesto*

> was based on what can be termed, using an analogy with the history of the socialist movement, an impossible demand: that the [pre-1916] Catholic masses of the south withdraw their support from the political *entente* worked out between the Irish party and the Church on education.

In this reading (on the scale from ‘minor poet’ through ‘major poet’ to ‘major fool’), the virulently anti-clerical Mooney aligns himself to ‘the land’s minor poets’ – to Carnduff, whose ideological position doesn’t ‘make sense’.

The other, more literal, usage of the proverbial phrase is its use as an adage: *a wink or nod is inconsequential to the horse that can’t see,* that is, *some will only see what they want to see.* With this sense, the *Magheramorne Manifesto*, perceived as an attempt to find an ‘impossible’ common ground between Orange and Green factions is only inconsequential to those who want to see it thus. As his *skaz* ‘spide’ insists, ‘it’s a

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2 Patterson, ‘Independent Orangeism’, p. 22.

3 Correspondence with Mooney via email (22.5.2019).
life’s | work just understanding what it means | to be from here’.\textsuperscript{1} Because of his
ambivalent ethnoreligious background, Mooney’s radical sense of meaning is
entrenched with the ‘impossibility’ which Deleuze and Guattari ascribe to Kafka’s
work by virtue of his ethic background. In this ludic last hurrah, Mooney keeps his
powder open and his options dry. He ends ‘The Last Poem’ with one last gnome:

\begin{quote}
The choice, in Belfast
as elsewhere, ’s between
being made redundant
and downing tools.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

The speaker refers to the ‘neoliberal’ condition here. The ‘minor’ poet remains
significant by erratically abstaining from poetry, finding analogy and a kindred spirit
in the contemporary deindustrialised worker in their thankless precariousness, in
their production of the unvalued product. It doesn’t make a great deal of ideological
sense of course, but then again, it’s designed that way. It’s through the prism of this
feigned obtuseness and in-built ambiguity that we should always read Mooney’s
profoundly mischievous poetry.

Mooney’s counter-aesthetic mode isn’t some shock tactic attempting to
defamiliarise a readership; it forms instead a non-sense realism – a poetry for the
politically mature, where History is never merely a setting. There are no straight
answers, only proffered impossibilities, new stories. Carnduff’s ghost asks Mooney
to ‘bite [his] tongue’, but he can’t and never could, on and off the page. In order to
salvage language itself from what Legg describes as northern Irish civic ‘boredom’,
Mooney’s poetry draws historical narrative, biography and ideological logic into its
abominable ‘literary machine’.\textsuperscript{3} Out the other end comes a poetic ‘minor’ in status –

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid., p. 30
\textsuperscript{2} Mooney, Blue Lamp Disco, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{3} Kafka, p. 29.
but of the utmost importance – which slowly ‘slouches towards’ the imaginative estate.
Chapter III

‘AH’M HERE BECOS’ AH’M HERE’: NORTHERN POETRY AND NONSTANDARD ENGLISH

Because of history, an Irish poet, to realise [her]self, must turn the full attention of [her] imagination to the English tradition. An English poet committed to the same task need hardly give the smallest thought to things Irish. Every nightmare has its own logic.

—Brendan Kennelly, Cromwell, 1987

This chapter, building upon the introductory chapter’s suppositions around the dearth of dialect in northern poetic canons, comprises a concise but pointed survey of the development of Hiberno-English within northern Irish poetry. After a brief meditation on the roots of Irish literary stereotypes in general, our focus moves into the north to discover an uncounted dialect tradition. At home and abroad, literary images of Hiberno-English – from accurate to ludicrous – have been complicit in the dehumanisation of Ireland’s lower classes, but they have also given the Irish a material and distinctive fictive voice – one which has often had the capacity to signal a sapience to the reader, a mocking of the mocker, a means by which it transmits derision into dignity.

AUL’ MONKS & SOLDIERS

English, and thus deviations from the dominant form of English used by the higher social order in the south of England, hasn’t had a continuous presence in Ireland. But where it’s been used in literature, depictions of Hiberno-English have been entangled in the complex socio-politics of the island and its fraught relationship with Great Britain and Ireland’s own confluent history of social factionalism. The best-known tangle in this regard is ‘stage Irishism’, which in its many manifestations has fed off and nourished misrepresentations of the Irish as ‘garrulous, boastful, unreliable,
hard-drinking, belligerent (though cowardly), and chronically impecunious’.

Seamus Deane writes that one of the ‘features’ of early-nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish prose by William Carleton (1794–1869), Maria Edgeworth (1768 –1849) and their contemporaries ‘is the rendering of Irish speech as a mode of authenticity and as a claim to realism’. 2 ‘But whatever the fidelity of this rendering’, he writes, the function of dialect, most especially of a dialect that is marked by vigour, oddity, fierceness, malapropisms, grammatical fractures – is worth considering more closely than any dispute about its authenticity. Its claim to authenticity resides in its mere presence, not in its proximity or otherwise to the actual speech of Irish people […] The dialect [of servant characters] is, like themselves, inferior to the educated speech of their young masters.3

And indeed, such artistic depictions served to ossify and justify the modern ‘colonial stereotype of the Irish as lazy, indolent, sentimental, undisciplined, and incapable of self-rule.’4 Yet, as early as the comedy Captain O’Blunder or The Brave Irishman (c.1737), written by Jonathan Swift’s godson, actor and elocutionist Thomas Sheridan (1719–1788), Irish playwrights have sought to counter caricatures by depicting complex Irish characters, even if they spake not proper. George Bernard Shaw’s John Bull’s Other Island (1904) satirises this phenomenon; John Millington Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World (1907) attempts to address it by producing drama imbued with anthropological realism, an attempt which famously

3 Ibid.
raised its own ethical quandaries around national and regional characteristics. The success of the Irish Literary Revival and the contemporary commodification of the Irish and Ireland have given the ‘brand’ a paradoxical cultural standing where the island is commodified and its people, now disembodied, are both exoticized and lampooned. Ireland according to tourist boards is a green otherworld full of stout and ‘craic’.

Mark McGovern defines ‘craic’, as used in the tourist industry as a ‘richly diverse and almost indefinable explosion of human interaction’ but also writes that the ‘identity of Irish people’ is one of the things ‘being consumed’ by the tourist ‘who is invited to briefly escape the regulated and fractious condition of his/her everyday life and enter a land of conversation, song and slightly risqué (but ultimately relatively safe) new “romantic roguery”.

With the possible exception of greenness,’ David Lloyd famously wrote in 1993, ‘no quality has more frequently and repetitiously been attributed to Ireland than violence’.

The Irish are worldly, wild, wise, tough, modest, drunk, sexy, terrorists. Whilst these contemporary impressions pale in comparison, at least ostensibly, to dehumanising depictions such as those in Edmund Spenser’s A View of the Present State of Ireland (1596), they

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1 The Hiberno-English word ‘craic’ has come to embody both the plasticity of Irish commodification and how quickly words can move between dialects. ‘Craic’ is frequently and erroneously given as an example of a Gaelic-derived word in English. The word ‘crack’, the OED has it, ‘was introduced from Scots into Irish English via Ulster in the mid 20th century and subsequently borrowed into Irish’, ortho-Gaelicized as ‘craic’ then, evidently, reintroduced back into English. Entries in the OED include ‘craic’ (1972) and ‘crack’ (1968).


4 For more on negative Irish stereotypes, see Liz Curtis, Nothing but the Same Old Story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism (Belfast: Sasta, 1998).
lead to gross mischaracterisations of the Irish, by ourselves and outsiders. Hiberno-English, being the main identifier of difference, has received a share of the new cultural prestige outside of the Hibernosphere, for better or for worse. Yet within, dialect carries with it a burden of the reformed savage. More recently, Lloyd has written that the history of the Irish mouth ‘is that of multiple attempts to discipline it, taming its excesses and regulating its disrespect for the proper spaces and times of speech and performance, ingestion and utterance.’ One of the defining features of colonialism is how the host ingests false stories about itself. As noted in our introduction, sociolinguist Raymond Hickey perceives the disavowal and denial of Hiberno-English as a ‘post-colonial attitude’ tied to the loss of Gaelic. He writes that

Many Irish have an ambivalent attitude to English. […] There is a reluctance to give open recognition to this fact because national feelings demand that one views the Irish language as the [main] carrier of native culture.

As Hickey points out, there has been a certain degree of disjointedness to the evolution of Hiberno-English from the Norman conquest until the present day, ‘due to both the [discontinuous] settlement of the island […] and to the political

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1 We can see this in pop culture. Richard LaGravenese’s P.S. I Love You (2007) is a difficult film to sit through, and its faults are made worse by Gerard Butler’s attempt at an Irish accent; on the other hand, the faux-Hiberno-Irish singing voice of Shane MacGowan (1957–) is never questioned, certainly not by the present author.


4 Ibid. p. 22.
conditions in England itself.’¹ Yet as we’ll see below, where English has been Hibernicized in poetry, there are some prevalent trends.

Thought to be the work of a Franciscan itinerant friar, the Hiberno-Norman long poem The Land of Cokaygne (c.1330) is one of the earliest ‘Anglo-Irish’ texts available to us. Exhibiting elements of a nascent Hiberno-English orthography (reflecting its author’s nonstandard English inflected with characteristics of Gaelic) the poem is emblematic of intra-denominational discord within the Western Church in the fourteenth century. Angela M. Lucas writes how Cokaygne forms a satirical exposé of an immoral Cistercian monastic culture.² She writes how ‘the monasteries in Cokaygne are conceived so as to cause mirth against monks and nuns who, whilst vowed to lives of isolated piety, live lives of pleasure and sloth instead.’ The young monk who

[...] techith the nunnes an oreisun
With iambleue vp and dun.
The monke that wol be stalun gode
And kan set a-right is hode,
He schal hab, with-oute danger,
Twelve wiues euche yere,
Al throgh right and noght throgh grace,
For-to do him-silf solace.
And thilke monke that slepith best,
[...]
To be sone Uadir Abbot.³

¹ Ibid., p. 31.
³ My translation: ‘[The young monk who] teaches the nuns a prayer with their legs up and down in the air. The monk who’s a good stallion, and knows where to put his hood, can easily have twelve wives each year – by right, if not through grace, for to give himself pleasure. And the only hope [we have] is that the monk who sleeps the best […] is made soon the father abbot (Ibid., p. 54).
Cokaygne is a fictional otherworld of debauchery, yet Lucas points out that its author ‘had very real abuses, if not specific monastic houses, in mind’.\(^1\) Although similar texts are set in this otherworld outside Ireland, the poem resonates with the work of Gaelic *filidh* tradition, whose poets were known for their ‘reputation for biting wit’.\(^2\) Lucas notes the ‘penchant and peculiar aptitude of the Irish for satire may well have influenced the writer(s) of *The Land of Cokaygne*’, and – at the risk of coming across as essentialistic – this allows us to perceive the poem’s anonymous author as a precursor to the likes of Jonathan Swift, Paul Muldoon (1951–) and the transgressive autosatire, discussed later in this chapter, integral to the dialect poems of Francis Boyle of Gilnahirk (c. 1730–?) and William Dunkin (1709–1765).\(^3\) The use of *u* in place of *f* in ‘Uadir’ (father) and the use of *i* in ‘him-silf’ in place of *e* demonstrates the Irishness of the language against the orthography of English dialects across Great Britain at the time.\(^4\) Lucas also mentions the use of the word ‘capil’ for ‘horse’ in *Cokaygne*, which is likely derived from the Irish *capall*.\(^5\) For our purposes, the ‘Kildare Poems’ to which *The Land of Cokaygne* belongs are an invaluable artefact, allowing us to say with some confidence – if not a bit of facetiousness – that Irish poetry in English using nonstandard dialect predates Irish poetry in English written wholly in the dominant standard by centuries.

As well as ecclesiastical in-fighting, due to ongoing ‘tension between the ‘native’ Irish and ‘Anglo-Norman’ clergy, there may have been other motives beyond devotional correction to the satire of the *The Land of Cokaygne*. Although

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\(^1\) Ibid., p. 179.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 176
\(^3\) Ibid.
the Norman invasion predates the poem by almost two centuries, P.L. Henry writes of a residual ‘struggle’ in Ireland, where the ‘military, political and cultural […] overflowed into the monasteries’.¹ In the conclusion of his analysis, he writes that Cokaygne is likely to be aimed ‘at an Irish, rather than an Anglo-Norman Cistercian House.’² Thus we might describe Irish literature which employs elements of nonstandard English as being embroiled in sectarianism from early on. In this sense, Cokaygne foreshadows the later phenomenon, outlined below, where Hiberno-English is weaponised (in a quasi-military sense) against the Irish. The poem throws into question ideas around the rate at which the Anglo-Normans became Hibernicized – conceptions which conflate history and obscure the deleterious impact of the Normans on Gaelic culture. Cokaygne’s inclusion of dialect exhibits the confidence of a pre-Reformation vernacular English and an adjunct poetic tradition with its own orthography distinct from the contemporaneous London dialect which would in the succeeding century become the Chancery Standard.

Andrew Carpenter opens his anthology *Verse in English from Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (1998) with a much later poem incorporating Hiberno-English. The Williamite song ‘Lilliburlero’ (c. 1687) acutely illustrates how nonstandard language has been utilised in the service of derision as well as a demographic marker. Perhaps best known for its tune than its lyrics, the song is emblematic of the inauguration of a now familiar sort of Irish sectarianism. Carpenter writes that such poems aimed ‘to

burlesque or ridicule Irish attitudes’, relying on the ‘common view’ that ‘Irishmen were always about to massacre’ English settlers and colonisers:¹

Ho! brother Teague, dost hear de decree?
Lilli burlero, bullen a la;
Dat we shall have a new debittle,
Lilli burlero, bullen a la.
Lero, lero, lilli burlero, Lilli burlero, bullen a la.
Lero, lero, lilli burlero, Lilli burlero, bullen a la.

Ho, by my shoul, it is a Talbot;
Lilli, &c.
And he will cut all the English throat,
Lilli, &c. &c.²

Written by English aristocrat and playboy Thomas Wharton, (1648–1715), an early conspirator in the ‘Glorious Revolution’, the first ten stanzas of the ‘Lilliburlero’ comprise a dialogue between two Irish Jacobites applauding the arrival in Ireland of James II’s new lord deputy, Richard Talbot, Earl Tyrconnell (1630–91). Although there are multiple theories on the origin of the song’s obscure refrain – ‘Lilli burlero, bullen a la’ – given Wharton’s distance from Ireland (in more ways than one), it’s likely to be nothing more than mock-macaronic Gaelic gibberish.³ That said, in stanza eight where the Jacobites rejoice that Tyrconnell’s appointment will guarantee army officer ‘commissions’ to Catholics, Wharton shows that he’s informed enough

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² Ibid., p. 37.
³ This finds its contemporary analogue in Unionist MP Gregory Campbell’s ‘pidgin Irish’ from 2014. Addressing the Northern Irish Assembly, Campbell mocked the Nationalist members’ tradition of thanking the speaker in Irish (‘Go raibh maith agat, Ceann Comhairle’) with ‘curry my yogurt, can coca-coalyer’: see Liam Clarke, ““Curry my yogurt”: Gregory Campbell’s “pidgin Irish” just isn’t funny”, Belfast Telegraph Online, November 6, 2014. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/liam-clarke/curry-my-yogurt-gregory-campbells-pidgin-irish-just-isnt-funny-30721898.html> (Accessed 3.9.18).
about the language to use the word ‘gillore’ (galore) from the Irish go leor.\(^1\) The final two stanzas switch from faux-dialect to a recognisably seventeenth-century literary standard. Although this is intended as the rational denouement to the excitable ‘native’ Irish, these lines come across as flat in comparison to the livelier burlesque of the earlier stanzas: the speaker (Wharton himself?) calls Tyrconnell an ‘ass’ and his brother, Peter Talbot (1620–80), the Archbishop of Dublin, a ‘dog’.\(^2\) Wharton’s boast that the ‘Lilliburlero’ ‘sung a deluded Prince [James] out of three kingdoms’ had some truth, as the song became hugely popular with Williamite troops during the Jacobite War in Ireland. Due to this initial popularity, the ‘Lilliburlero’ became embedded irrevocably into Ireland’s song tradition.\(^3\) Its accompanying tune is still played throughout the marching season at Orange parades.

The image of the Irish as cut-throat rapparees wasn’t a new one as jolly Wharton sat down to compose the ‘Lilliburlero’. Mackmorrice, a captain in Henry of Monmouth’s army from Shakespeare’s Henry V (1599) is the best-known example of early stage Irishism in verse.\(^4\) Of the trio of ‘Celtic captains’ in the play, Mackmorrice is the most bloodthirsty. Expressing regret at how the day has gone at Agincourt, he says that had he been in command, he’d have ‘blowed vp the Towne’

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\(^1\) *OED.*
and, eager to get back into the fray, insists there are ‘throats to be cut’. Mackmorrisce takes umbrage with Welsh caricature Captain Fluellen where, amid a discussion about tactics, the latter inadvertently reminds the former where he’s from by describing Ireland as ‘your Nation’. Mackmorrisce reacts furiously:

[...] What ish my Nation?
Ish a Villaine, and a Basterd, and a Knaue,
and a Rascall.
What ish my Nation? Who talkes of my Nation?²

Fluellen attempts to placate the Irish officer, but to little avail. Requests for calm are met with ‘Chri shae me, I will cut off your Head.’³ Perhaps all too predictably, the English Captain, Gower, intervenes to bring order to the situation. It’s Captain Fluellen however, not Gower, who has the last word in the scene:

Captaine Mackmorrice, when there is more better oportunitie to be required, looke you, I will be so bold as to tell you,
I know the disciplines of Warre:
and there is an end.⁴

Unlike Scottish and Irish counterparts who speak in their respective faux-dialects, Fluellen, though prone to long digressions necessitating a special syntax, for the most part speaks in a manner approaching a literary standard. At a glance,
Mackmorrisce can be received as a bluntly Hibernophobic characterisation, yet he counteracts the pedantic, ultra-rationalist Fluellen, emblematic of what Shakespeare

² Ibid.
³ Ibid. There has been some debate over what Mackmorrisce is saying about his nationality. In his 1851 edition of Shakespeare’s histories, Charles Knight suggests that the above version, which is invariably the accepted text, is a misprint – and that originally Mackmorrisce said: ‘Who talkes of my Nation ish a Villaine, and a Basterd, and a Knaue, and a Rascall’ (*The Comedies, Histories, Tragedies, and Poems of William Shakspeare*, Vol. 3 (London: Charles Knight, 1851), p. 455.
⁴ Shakespeare, *The Life of Henry the Fift* [Act III, scene 2], p. 78.
perhaps perceived as Welsh national sycophancy. Mackmorrice then, embodies a different if no less problematic form of stage Irishism than those of nineteenth-century popular theatre by the likes of Dion Boucicault (1820–1890). Mackmorrice, an Anglo-Irish soldier, is insecure regarding his nationality. Critics have debated his historical and political import – usually his national liminality – which we have little room here to explore in detail.¹ For the purposes of the present thesis however, we must iterate that Elizabethan images of Hiberno-English don’t exist as mere passive indicators of historical attitudes. They have consequences for Irish writers today and have had for those writing in the interim. As we’ll explore in Chapter IV, Mackmorrice has been an important figure for Seamus Heaney’s interactions with identity and dialect. Act III, scene 2 of Henry V and other stage-Irish depictions contributed to the motif of the Irish-as-barbaric, a concept which finds eminent expression via Edmund Spenser, whose writings would influence English attitudes before the Tudor conquest of Ireland.²

**PADDYWHACKERY IN TILL AUTHENTICITY**

Tied up in the modern era with class antagonisms, the clowning of the Irish on stage and in literature has aided successive London-centred regimes in the subjugation of the island; and many forms of Hiberno-English have been fortuitously complicit. But as well as reinforcing social prejudices, these simulations offered alternative (if colonially contaminated) orthographies and syntaxes for Irish writers seeking to use nonstandard forms. The evolution of dialect used in Irish poetry in English

throughout the eighteenth century exemplifies a shift towards idiomatic uses – that is, poets employing vocabularies, grammars and orthographies becoming of their own speech – as had been the virtually continuous tendency in Scotland since John Barbour’s *The Brus* (c. 1377). The poetry of Jonathan Swift’s friend William Dunkin (1709–1765) remains a significant historical marker in this regard. Swift described Dunkin as a ‘Gentleman of much wit and the best English as well as Latin Poet in th[e] Kingdom’.¹ As Terry Eagleton laments however, Dunkin ‘is little known [today] even in Irish literary circles’.² His masterpiece, *The Parson’s Revels* (1770), recounts the festivities at a party thrown by a country squire attended by characters from various sections of contemporary Irish society – a ‘multicultural […] ideologically mixed bunch’, a social snapshot in burlesque.³ This social and religious ecumenicalism gives the poem, as Eagleton is quick to point out, a carnivalesque flavour. Dunkin’s provincial social position, the theory goes, enabled him to ‘back the lowly against the mighty’.⁴ Dunkin has a keen ear, and where his orthographies are phonemically inaccurate, they are ‘untrue’ at least in the service of verisimilitude rather than cheap mockery of the lower echelons of eighteenth-century Irish society. Dialect in *The Parson’s Revels* is usually, though not always, employed in the voice of characters rather than by the poem’s speaker.⁵ In the second canto for instance, the speaker uses ‘Cheeest’ for ‘Christ’, but images of Hiberno-English are mainly

⁴ Ibid., p. 2.
employed where Murphy (a harpist) and Father Fegan (a local priest) take up the conch. Murphy gets into a row with the sardonically-named dissenter landlord ‘Oaf’:

Quoth Oaf, I hate him and his Kin,
To hear his Music is a Sin;
For bringing such a Rebel in

Small thanks t’ye.

His Harp is hollow; so is he;
Both make one popish Jubilee:
What can he play, but Garran Buoy;

Or Planksty?

At this O Murphy, like a Nag
Spurr’d to his mettle, would not lag:
Quoth he, I am na Ribil Rag-

-Amuffin,

But ov dhe reight Hibarnian Seed,
Aldough mey Fadhir cud nat reed,
Nat lek yur black fanatic Breed,

You puffin […]¹

After this row initiated by Oaf, Murphy is compelled ‘against his Heart’ to play a Williamite ballad for his ‘black’ Protestant co-revellers.² So that we’re not under any allusions about his intent, Dunkin has Father Fegan get into a separate dispute with the other dissenter at the party (the Presbyterian stereotype Denison), where he curses ‘dhe Proshpiterians’.³ These images of ‘puffed-up professional Gael[s]’ are of course caricatures, but they’re too intricate and discrete to be read as mere types. Their ironies are considered and more compelling than they would be had Dunkin opted to voice them with a standard form of English. Dunkin surgically extracts the prejudices of his day and lays them out to bear in his long poem. Unsurprisingly, given how it illustrates the sectarian pecking order of eighteenth-century Ireland, the

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¹ Ibid., pp. 92–93.
² Ibid., p. 95.
³ Ibid., p. 76.
‘Oaf’ excerpt was chosen for the *Field Day Anthology*.¹ Eagleton champions Dunkin’s work as the ‘generically unstable, tonally ambivalent writing of [a poet from] a social class considerably less self-assured than [his] English counterparts’, yet the significance of Hiberno-English in the poem seems to elude him.² Eagleton describes Father Fegan as ‘a fleecer of his laity and phoney intellectual, who speaks an atrocious, well-nigh unintelligible Hiberno-English’.³ Even Terry Eagleton, that counter-statesman of the literary left, whilst finding (teleological) value in the liminal identity of the Anglo-Irish lower gentry, fails to see the potential subversiveness of nonstandard synthetic orthography in *The Parson’s Revels*. Unlike earlier texts like the ‘Lilliburlero’ and *Henry V*, Dunkin’s Hiberno-English speakers aren’t impulsive savages hell-bent on cutting English throats; and they’re more than the mere servant type of the big house novel. Where Dunkin describes these up-and-coming middle-class Catholics as being of ‘dhe reight Hibarnian seed’ he alludes to a notion of noble Celtic blood, and in this we might observe the embryo of the coming nineteenth-century Revival with all its exotifications. Although Murphy and Fegan are the butt of Dunkin’s joke, ridiculed with an elegance we now associate with Brendan Behan’s style, they aren’t alone, because the poem’s other eejits are anything but safe.

The common perception that the ‘Rhyming Weaver’ poets were inspired to write dialect poetry only after the commercial success of eighteenth-century Scots vernacular verse is thrown into question, as Frank Ferguson points out, by the work

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³ Ibid., p. 13.
of William Starrat of Strabane (fl. 1725) and Francis Boyle of Gilnahirk (c. 1730–?).¹ In the introduction to *Ulster-Scots Writing: An Anthology* (2008), Ferguson makes sure to highlight that Boyle had been composing poetry in dialect well before Rabbie Burns published *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786).² In *Northern Voices*, Terence Brown isn’t persuaded by John Hewitt’s supposition that the ‘Ulster bards were no mere derivatives but existed in their own right, within a sub-region of the same folk culture [as that of Scotland].’³ Hewitt’s analysis doesn’t fit, it would seem, into Brown’s picture of the stereotypical Planter-cum-weaver who at some point shunned the barbarous machinations of ‘commercial, military and religious concerns to a more inclusive, self-confident and cultivated form of life.’⁴ In some senses, Francis Boyle’s ‘Paddy’s Trip to North Britain’ (1811) problematizes simplistic notions around the northern planter class. The poem narrates the travails of one Patrick Brawney, a character who’s ran away from Crossgar in Co Down to Scotland after being called up to the local militia. On his travels, Paddy comes across a snake, a creature which – given its fabled eradication by his own saintly namesake – he’d not have encountered at home. The first adder he meets, he hits with his shillelagh, but another enacts revenge:

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Yon day as I sat down to sh[it]e
One of them thought my a[r]se to bite.
I jump’t in rage, and with the fright,
    As high’s the steeple;
These cursed things have all a spite,
    At Irish people.⁵
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² Ibid., p. 76.
⁴ Ibid., p. 9.
⁵ Cited in Ferguson, *Ulster-Scots Writing*, p. 80.
As Ferguson points out, Boyle was a conservative, an Old Light Presbyterian with establishmentarian politics. But unless Paddy Brawney is meant here as some elaborate jibe at Boyle’s ‘native’ Catholic neighbours – which is unlikely, given the orthographic similarities between the poem’s speaker and the protagonist – it offers us an understanding of (at least one) conservative Ulster Presbyterian’s perception of his own Irishness by the late seventeenth century. Although obvious phonetic affinities existed (and still exist) between Ulster-Scots and Scots speakers, Paddy in no measure sees himself as Scottish, even if he speaks ‘Scotch’. This irony wouldn’t have gone amiss with the shrewd Boyle; and neither would the uncanny cultural similitude of Scotland. In his ‘Address to the Cuckoo’, Boyle shows a propensity to employ the Ulster-Scots dialect in the service of a solemn (and romanticised) subject. Again, its political undercurrents are obscure. In similar way to how later poets such as James Orr and Samuel Thompson utilised Ulster-Scots diction and orthography to cloak their radical republicanism, Boyle uses his poems to push a reactionary agenda.¹ The third stanza of ‘Address to the Cuckoo’ sardonically praises George Washington for setting free the whipper-wills, a species of North American nightjar, the point being that some things, god’s things, are above the capricious politicking of mankind.² In their use of dialect and narrative structure, the formal affinities between ‘Paddy’s Trip to North Britain’ and Dunkin’s The Parson’s Revels are easily discernible, however with the former we can perceive the evolution of dialect’s role in the Hiberno-English lyric, that is, the synthesis of paddywhackery

¹ A full outline on how these poets’ radical politics informed their use of dialect is beyond the remit of this chapter. See John Hewitt, Rhyming Weavers and Other Poets of Antrim and Down (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974). Frank Ferguson writes that Hewitt’s own leftist politics had consequences for his Rhyming Weaver canon; see his ‘Ulster Weaver Poets’, Michael Pierse (ed.), A History of Irish Working-Class Writing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 96.
² Ferguson, Ulster-Scots Writing, p. 77.
and ethnic self-depreciation and agitprop into a kind of transgressive autosatire which, from then until now, has become the typical antidote to the simplistic stage Paddy.

William Starrat’s work came decades before Boyle’s. His mock-heroic ‘An Elegy on the Much Lamented Death of Quarter-master Brice Blare; who died at Strabane’ (c. 1734) satirises the drinking habits of a well-known Crown agent who died in 1722.¹

But he unwilling to oppress
His stomach, ay eat less and less;
And it was this, as most Foks guess,
    That wrought his Feed,
For he us’d neither Teeth nor [Arse]
    Lang e’er he Deed.²

Starrat’s use of dialect differs to Dunkin’s ethically wrought ventriloquizing. It shows a confidence in the dialectic mode’s aptitude for the kind of public verse we associate with the slur and badinage poetry (the modern senna) of Swift and Pope. Starrat’s Ulster-Scots verse is one of the earliest examples available to us. This work wasn’t written into a discrete tradition which habitually looked across the Irish Sea – as some scholars would have us believe of his Rhyming Weaver forebears – but spoke to Dunkin as well as other contemporary ‘major’ poets. That the fifth stanza of Starrat’s elegy to Blare references Swift’s satire A Tale of a Tub (1704), suggests that intertextual conversations weren’t merely gestural.³ As William Dunkin lived the last third of his life in Ulster (1746–65), employed as the headmaster of Royal Portora School in Enniskillen, he would have encountered dialect poetry in Ulster-

¹ William Starrat’s work predates Boyle’s and likely came from a wealthier background. According to Ferguson, the latter is thought to have been a weaver and the former a soldier.
² Cited in Ferguson, Ulster-Scots Writing, pp. 58–59.
³ Ibid., p. 57.
Scots.¹ Whilst there’s no doubt that Scottish poets of the era afforded a fresh confidence to their Ulster-Scots counterparts – indeed, supplied them with a framework for orthographising dialect – we can nevertheless conceive from Starrat and Dunkin (and from Dunkin to Boyle) a formal, and indeed national, conduit between canonical and non-canonical: between eighteenth-century Dublin-based Ascendancy poetry and the work of the Rhyming Weavers. These formal semblances show an ebb and flow of formal influence and permittance which gives the lie to static, lethargic models of northern culture as sitting betwixt two (or three) monoliths.

Ferguson’s Ulster-Scots anthology is comprehensive. His introduction offers a frank and balanced meditation on what the multivalent term ‘Ulster Scots’ can mean. For the purposes of naming his book, he writes that he uses ‘Ulster-Scots’ to refer to any literature in Ulster with an obvious Scottish connection.² Ferguson addresses how certain pervasive stereotypes have mischaracterised the Ulster-Scots dialect (and its literature) as a “DIY language for Orangemen”.³ His classification of this literature as that which has sat under a ‘double post-colonial condition […] subaltern to both British and Irish literary constitutions’ is convincing, especially in the case of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ‘Weavers’, but where he claims Ulster-Scots constitutes a ‘transnational cultural production’ his anthology’s remit, and indeed his notion of a distinct culture, fall victim to a stale categorisation where ‘Ulster-Scots’ is placed under a vesical piscis between Ireland and Scotland on a

² Ferguson, Ulster-Scots Writing, p. 2.
³ Ibid.
Venn diagram.¹ To suggest, as Ferguson does, that anything identifiably ‘Ulster-Scotts’ is made Ulster-Scots by virtue of its being from Ulster and its innate Scottishness does a disservice to the term and indeed the culture as a whole; in a sense, it defines its limitations which, in trying to encompass so much, loses its specificity. And for all of Ferguson’s remonstrations – his regret that ‘Ulster Scots’ is now used as a narrow signifier for ‘Unionist, Planter and Protestant’ culture set against ‘Nationalist, Republican, Catholic and Gaelic intellectual inheritance’ – his selections offer a predictable picture.² Selections can often speak louder than lyrics, and what Ferguson omits (whether by design or unawareness) is telling. Seamus Heaney is included but, a rare Catholic, his entry as a contemporary poet feels tokenistic. The absence of novelist Frances Molloy, whose work from the 1980s exhibits a compelling and imposing use of Ulster-Scotts-inflected dialect, is unfortunate. Although Ferguson does go to great lengths to allow for a broad variety of Irish Nationalist voices – even including a piece by Thomas Carnduff (1886–1956) on Irish reunification – there are writers ignored or missed who would fit the book’s remit more than those included.³ Although there is one poem by Moira O’Neill, other northern writers of the Irish Literary Revival are left out.⁴ The inclusion of work by Belfast poets Joseph Campbell and Padric Gregory (1886–1962), who both use dialect inflected with Ulster-Scots, would have given Ferguson’s assurance of inclusivity better immunity to criticism. In 1913, Gregory

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¹ Ibid., p. 3.
² Ibid., p. 2.
³ Ferguson took this piece, titled ‘I have faith in Ireland’ from Queen’s University Belfast’s Carnduff archive. Probably written in the early 1950s, it exists as a snippet from a newspaper which ‘cannot be established’: Ferguson, Ulster-Scots Writing, p. 496.
⁴ Ibid., p. 334.
published *Old World Ballads*, a collection with three sections in three different dialects: the first is in a form of synthetic Scots he calls ‘Scotch’ and is in the ‘manner of the old Border Ballads’; the second is in a form of Ulster-Scots and Mid-Ulster English which he describes as ‘Irish’; and the third is in English.\(^1\) Peculiarly, given his dislike of all things northern, *Old World Ballads* is dedicated to Yeats for his ‘kindly criticism’\(^2\). Gregory’s poem ‘Easter Week A.D. 1916’ (1920) in some senses embodies the aesthetic and political disunion between the Dublin-based Revival and its northern ‘branch’ via the use of dialect.

> An’ we all try not tae fret, John,  
> As we moil each dreich day thro’  
> But, ah, you’ll niver know how much  
> We all miss you.\(^3\)

This relatively obscure poem in the voice of an Ulster mother lamenting the death of her son, provides an apropos foil – both in its use of dialect and its empathetic but removed authorial stance – to the very *standard* public posturing of Yeats’s famous ‘Easter, 1916’:\(^4\)

> Too long a sacrifice  
> Can make a stone of the heart.  
> O when may it suffice?  
> That is Heaven’s part, our part  
> To murmur name upon name,  
> As a mother names her child  
> When sleep at last has come  
> On limbs that had run wild.\(^5\)

\(^4\) Yeats didn’t publish ‘Easter, 1916’ until 1921 in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, but wrote it in 1916.
Both poems address the Rising’s actants and political subjectivities, but whereas Yeats’ is involved with his own interactions with the signatories of the Proclamation (acting-out the role of the cultural guarantor), Gregory’s is concerned with unnamed victims; the former approximates standard English, the latter, a nonstandard Ulster form.¹ As Tom Paulin writes,

dialect is notable for its intimacy and for the bonds which it creates […]

Such words are local and “warm”, while their standard alternatives can be regarded as coldly public and extra-familial. Often a clash is felt between the intimacy of dialect […] and the demands of a wider professional world where standard speech and accent are the norm.²

Paulin goes on to localise this phenomenon where he notes dialect’s propensity to tie the familial to the subaltern, writing that

[f]or English people [standard and nonstandard] tensions are invariably a product of the class system, but in Ireland they spring from more complex loyalties (listeners to the 1982 Reith lectures will have noticed how Denis Donoghue’s accent oscillates between educated southern speech and a slight Ulster ululation).³

Whilst Paulin could be accused of a romantic exceptionalism here in terms of class in Ireland (or lack thereof), what he alludes to regarding regionality is illuminating. He points out the reality that the recognisably northern voice is subordinate to ‘standard’ Southern Hiberno-English (much in the same way, we might add, that the Dublin urban dialect is subordinate to middle-class Dublin English). Due to the

¹ A conversation with Dr Eamonn Hughes influenced this reading of the poem.
² Tom Paulin, Ireland & the English Crisis (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1984), pp. 187–188
³ Ibid., p. 188.
north’s protraction of tribalism, this power dynamic is often pinned to the question of the northern Irish constitutional question. The immanent example of the phenomenon in literature is from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), where Stephen Dedalus resents his fellow Jesuit schoolmate MacAlister’s northerness:

> The voice, the accent, the mind of the questioner offended him and he allowed the offence to carry him towards wilful unkindness, bidding his mind think that the student’s father would have done better had he sent his son to Belfast to study and have saved something on the train fare by so doing.¹

This acute consideration of the viscerality and involuntariness of prejudice, typical of Joyce in its surgical interrogation of human foible, unearths the ways in which slight differentiations in language can inform division – and in some senses, in the later era, ingrain partition. This famous instance speaks to what’s referred to in our introductory chapter as the socio-aesthetics around dialect; there’s a linguistic hegemony at play, and Joyce is taunting it. Padric Gregory’s ‘Easter Week A.D. 1916’ is virtually unknown in contrast to Yeats’ ‘Easter, 1916’ because it’s a less historically significant poem by a lesser-known poet (as all poets are in comparison with Yeats), but it’s an important poem. Its obscurity demonstrates how northern dialect poems have been left out of the Revival canon and how the Ulster-Scots dialect has been used by writers from across the whole political gamut in Ulster.

Gregory’s *Modern Anglo-Irish Verse* (1914), a comprehensive anthology of contemporary Irish poetry in English, includes work by Æ and Yeats as well as figures now deemed insignificant to retrospective canons. Although most of the poems are in standard written English, showing no obvious dialectal distinctiveness in their language regarding region, Gregory – perhaps keen to promote what is for him a favourite mode – dedicates a segment of his anthology to dialect. Section XIII has poems by Gregory himself, Co Antrim poets Moira O’Neill and Samuel S. McCurry, as well as Galway poet Francis Fahy. Quotations by Scots poets Burns and Robert Tannahil, which serve as epigraphs for the selection, reveal acutely how Gregory was cognisant of the Scots influence on Ulster speech and that he recognised dialect as a demountable mode from standard English verse. Here are lines two to four from Fahy’s song ‘Little Mary Cassidy’:

> And the raison that I am not now the boy I used to be;  
> Oh, she bates the beauties all that we read about in history,  
> And sure half the country-side is as lost for her as me.  

Fahy’s inclusion concretises an unavoidable cultural continuity from literature using Ulster-Scots to Western Hiberno-English. The issue with much scholarship on Ulster-Scots is that it attempts to either hermetically seal the areas of Down, Antrim, Derry and Donegal where the dialect has been traditionally spoken, and paradoxically align those *brogues* with Scotland. Gregory’s anthology expresses an alternative vision, where the Ayrshire of Burns’ speech swells into Fahy’s Galway swells into Patrick Kavanagh’s Monaghan into Heaney’s Derry into Paul Muldoon’s Armagh into Paula Cunningham’s Tyrone. And of course, all these poets swell in

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1 The title of this anthology refers to Irish poetry written in English, rather than the ‘Englishry’ in Ireland.
and out of standard English and sometimes Gaelic. No map, geographic or phonetic, will suffice for Ulster-Scotland affinities; attempts will end with rigid, reductionist cross-cultural schemes beholden to contemporary geo-politics. Ciaran Carson’s poem ‘Belfast’ from *Breaking News* (2003) suggests that the city, straggling Antrim and Down, embodies this invulnerable, mercurial hybridity. ‘Belfast’ depicts the ‘yellow | shipyard cranes’ and behind them the blackbird from the ninth-century poem ‘Int én bec’ in predominantly Protestant east Belfast; this image is juxtaposed with an abandoned ‘black taxi’ (that icon of the British city) rusting in a ‘field | of blue thistles’.¹ Here, industrial matter is sewn through with the threads of the archipelago’s flora and fauna, its ethereal and divisive symbolism.

From today’s viewpoint, J.M. Synge seems an odd omission in *Modern Anglo-Irish Verse*, especially as his *Poems and Translations* (1909) (posthumously published by Yeats) includes poems with dialect, albeit a synthetic, anthropologist’s dialect. Perhaps Synge was a victim of his own success in drama and deemed not a serious enough poet to warrant a presence. Debates around Synge’s anthropological approach exemplify ethical questions around the ownership of cultural characteristics and authorial authenticity. A contemporary of the northern Revivalists, Richard Rowley (1877–1947) wrote poetry which exemplifies how an ‘outsider’ can speak through a group in a manner which is neither condescending nor derisive (though his work is acutely sentimental). Like Gregory and Campbell, Rowley was from a middle-class background, and where those northern Revivalists appropriate the experiences of rural Ireland, Rowley’s *City of Refuge* (1917), *City Songs and Others* (1918) and *Workers* (1923) endeavour to capture images of the industrial lives of Belfast’s working-class. The range of voices on offer in Rowley’s

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dialect poems – reminiscent of T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ (1915) – inform a poetic analogue with L.S. Lowry’s (1887–1976) industrial northern England. As Brown notes, Rowley was one of the ‘first Irish poets to take the city as a subject’ and, one might add, perhaps the second, after Joseph Campbell, to write about its urban working-class. As noted in Chapter II, the third line of Rowley’s popular poem, ‘The Islandmen’ (1918) – ‘Over the bridge’ – was taken by Belfast playwright Sam Thompson for the title his controversial 1957 play. Rowley’s ‘The Mother’s Song’ (1918), shows affinities with Gregory’s grieving mother of ‘Easter Week A.D. 1916’. Here (instead of mourning) the speaker-mother dotes on her baby, in a poem which validates Paulin’s point about the subaltern familiarity of dialect:

He’s weeshy an’ wee,
But a day ’ull come,
When he’ll hear the trumpet,
An’ follow the drum.
Like his father afore him
He’ll leave my side,
An’ sail to the fightin’
Acrost the tide.

Outside of its First World War context, it’s understandable that some readers might find sentimental lyrics such as this sickly-sweet – some Belfaster readers might even cringe – but there’s value in this work beyond its themes and how it serves as a record of early-twentieth century peripheriat speech. Rowley’s poems create a new orthography for, and implement a grammar befitting, the urban Belfast dialect. More than merely affording his work an accentuated social verisimilitude, this Modernist-

1 Brown, *Northern Voices*, p. 76.
3 Ibid., p. 66.
inspired mode allows his poetic to break free from the graphocentrism (or text fetish) of his ‘major’ Anglophone contemporaries.¹

The poem ‘The Clerk’ (1918) gives the lie to characterisations of Rowley as a benign middle-class ventriloquist. Here, an invoice clerk on ‘Thirty bob | A week’ in a ‘good constant job’ bemoans – in his retained Belfastian – the mundanity of his office-work existence, despite its relative comfort:

I’m not a man, an American machine
Can figure as well as I do, an’ the boss
Would buy one, but he knows it ’ud be a loss,
He’s got me cheap. It makes you feel proud to feel
Your flesh an’ blood’s a cheaper thing than steel.²

The lower middle-class dialect employed here is closer to a standard form of written English than that employed in ‘The Mother’s Song’, which shows how keen a phonologist Rowley was. Germane to the example of Louis MacNeice in our introduction chapter, Rowley reminds us that most English speakers, not only those of lower working classes, speak in a form of nonstandard dialect.

We need only look at Ormsby’s Poets from the North of Ireland, which includes the work of ‘major’ poets ‘born since 1900’, as a measure of how small a role dialect has played in contemporary northern Irish poetry. As we have seen, the legacy of stage Irishism looms large, and undoubtedly accounts in part for this absence. With a legacy such as the one outlined above however, it’s curious that a mainstream ‘major’ dialect tradition never materialised.

¹ Words such as ‘said’ are textually realised as ‘sez’; often the suffixes and prefixes of words are omitted (<th> from ‘with’ and the <g> from ‘-ing’); for the standard ‘are’, ‘is’ is used, and so on.
² Rowley, City Songs, p. 57.
Richard Kirkland characterises the immediate post-partition literary mentality in the north as one obsessed with Irish history and its relationship to the south.¹ From the 1930s until the (re)internationalisation of Ulster poetry with the rise to prominence of the ‘Heaney Generation’ in the late-1960s, writers who perceived themselves in and of Northern Ireland felt a deep sense of provincialism which was always on guard to protect itself from accusations of the worst kind of regional insularism. The first post-partition northern poet of note to use dialect in his work was William Forbes Marshall (1888–1959), a Presbyterian minister from rural Tyrone. Benedict Kiely describes Marshall’s work as the ‘most effective’ of the ‘[l]esser poets’ who ‘applied themselves to the mixed speech of Ulster.’² Like Campbell, Rowley and Gregory, Marshall’s work speaks to a folk aesthetic as well as a ‘major’ Anglophone lyric aesthetic. Here’s an excerpt from his ballad ‘The Lad’ which, following what seems to be a common application of the dialectal mode in northern poetry at the time, tells a story the speaker’s foster son who has died in The Great War:

There were some that went that far as to say
He was sure to turn out wil’,
But the wee lad grew till he grew man big
An’ kep the heart of a chile.

[…]  

He’s sleepin’ now where the poppies grow,
In the coat that the bullets tore,
An’ what’s a wheen of medals to me

When my own wee lad’s no more?¹

Marshall was somewhat of an expert on dialect; his talks on the subject were broadcast by the BBC in 1935, and this shows through in his poetry’s vocabularic range: using ‘heered’ for ‘heard’, ‘stale’ for ‘stole’ and ‘quare’ for ‘very/much/good’ with great confidence.²

In October 1938, The Young Ulster Society released the debut issue of its magazine *Young Ulster*, the first literary periodical in the north since the Revivalists of the Ulster Literary Theatre launched *Uladh* in 1904.³ The editorial of the magazine set out its ambition to ‘encourage a greater knowledge of Ulster art, literature, and drama’ but there was a clear political function to the project:

We in Ulster realise the fact that, if we intend to keep our historical customs and speech from dying out altogether, we must remember that our literature, poetry and drama are Irish and should remain Irish. The moment we remove our provincial dialect from our Literature and drama, so soon will we develop into a second-rate English county […] One may wonder how the Six Counties retain even a semblance of Irish nationality. Isolated from political contact with the South, and deprived of the educational value of the Irish academical institutions, [people in Northern

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² Ibid.
³ The ULT was set up by the Protestant National Association under Bulmer Hobson and Lewis Purcell in 1902. For more on the ULT, see Chris Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 148.
Ireland] still stand aloof from English thought and literature, grimly clinging to their traditional speech and customs.¹

Provincial anxieties are raw here: partition is having a deleterious effect on local art, the editorial suggests, to the extent that Ulster is in jeopardy of losing its distinctive Irishness. We garner from this that the Society was broadly regionalistic and narrowly nationalistic in outlook. As we discussed in Chapter I, this was the normative mode of the Revival as it existed in the north before partition. As such, Malcolm Ballin’s characterisation of Young Ulster as ‘attempting to launch a cultural program in Northern Ireland that will create some equivalent to the Irish Literary Revival’ is anachronistic.² Ballin misinterprets the editorial where it calls for a new Ulster theatre to rival the Abbey and Gate theatres. ‘A nation’s culture should not be confined within the limits of any one city,’ the editor insists, adding the caveat that ‘[the] danger of two “National” theatres is the probable development of two national outlooks’.³ Ballin accuses the Society of ‘distancing [itself] from both Irish and English literary traditions’; however, it would be more accurate to describe the Society as feeling disowned by the constitutional arrangement.⁴ If they resent anything, it’s the Anglification of their vernacular culture and the cultural hegemony centred in Dublin. The distinctive Ulster Irishness is bound up, Young Ulster editorial claims, in ‘speech’ and ‘regional dialect’, which is why it’s unfortunate that the articles, stories and poems in the pages which follow are (in an orthographic and

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¹ The Young Ulster Society, Young Ulster: The Magazine of the Young Ulster Society 1 (Belfast, October 1938), p. 2.
³ Young Ulster 1, p. 2.
⁴ Ballin, Irish Periodical Culture, p. 120.
vocabularic sense) written in Standard academic English.\textsuperscript{1} It’s understandable that Ballin is confused by the editorial, as it is normatively contradictory. One could easily get the impression that it was penned by multiple people with conflicting political opinions. However, it’s more likely that it was written by one conflicted individual. A probable candidate is Thomas Carnduff, a figure we looked at in Chapter II. Carnduff, who is known for his unorthodox views, co-founded the Young Ulster Society in 1936. As noted above, Ferguson’s Ulster-Scots anthology includes an article by this socialist Orangeman in support of the reunification of Ireland. Reading the published poetry collections of Carnduff – *Shipyard and other Poems* (1924) and *Song of an Out of Work* (1932) – one might assume that aside from a few words here or there, his poetry is without dialect. Yet verse which appeared in newspapers but were never gathered in a published collection contradict this assertion. These poems follow Carnduff’s Ulsterman caricature ‘Larry O’Hooligan’, whose name plays on ‘hooligan’, a term which, though etymologically obscure, has a likely stage-Irish origin.\textsuperscript{2} Via this nomenclature, Carnduff Anglo-Hibernocizes (‘hooligan’ to ‘O’Hooligan’) the malapropism (‘Houlihan’ to ‘hooligan’) of an Anglicisation (‘Ó hUallacháin’ to ‘Houlihan’). Thus, the surname is a rebastardised bastard of a bastard, which lends an apt vacuousness to the character. In ‘Larry and the Elections’ (1923), O’Hooligan runs for a seat in local government: ‘Said Mister O’Hooligan — “A councillors Ah’ll be”: | So he looked round the city for a good

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{2} ‘The name *Hooligan* figured in a music-hall song of the eighteen-nineties, which described the doings of a rowdy Irish family’ (*OED*).
constituency’. O’Hooligan is a charlatan. The kind of person, we learn, who’s a teetotaller, but only to save money. His programme is populist and sectarian:

“Ah’m here becos’ Ah’m here,” says he, “an’ here Ah’m goin’ to stay; If the rent-man comes just tell him this—Ah told you not to pay; […]

“Ah’ll build ye lots iv houses, ye cain liv’ in them rent free; But first yer make a councillor iv O’Hooligan, thit’s me. Ah’m wan iv ye, yer wan iv us, we’r all th’ same ould gang; Ah’m a true an’ trusted member iv th’ good ould bogie clan.2

Although O’Hooligan has some support – standing on the back of a truck, he’s met with ‘hurricanes of cheers’ – he’s eventually confronted, pelted with a rotten egg and then, hilariously, a cat. Defeated, he decides not to run for election after all. It’s likely that this version of Larry O’Hooligan was based on Tommy Henderson, a Belfast city councillor who retained his seat for almost five decades. An independent Unionist, Henderson, who also served as an MP in the Northern Ireland House of Commons from 1925 to 1953, was prone to long rants in the chamber. One famous incident saw Henderson enter ‘Stormont folklore on account of a filibustering speech over a government finance bill which lasted nine and a half hours.’3 In A History of the Ulster Unionist Party (2004), Graham Walker writes how Henderson’s populist, combative style on matters like unemployment and workers’ welfare drew him close to Labour and even nationalist members of the

1 This poem is from a newspaper cutting scrapbook which is part of the Thomas Carnduff archive at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS21/12/4. According to Carnduff’s own caption, the piece was published on January 23rd 1923 in Ireland’s Saturday Night, a weekly sports newspaper from Belfast which ran from 1896 to 2008.

2 Ibid.

opposition. However, he essentially campaigned on an exclusively
Protestant basis, leading the periodic choruses of criticism from
disaffected Protestants about the poor performance of the government or
its neglect of the least well-off Loyalists.¹

Carnduff takes umbrage at O’Hooligan (Henderson) promising his own ‘gang’
(working-class Protestants) things which he cannot deliver; and rather than remaining
a one-off, his satire strikes a keynote in northern writing. The anti-Unionist poems of
Tom Paulin’s *Liberty Tree* (1983) and *The Strange Museum* (1980) deride figures of
the early-century ‘bogie clan’, and memoirist John Young Simms pokes fun at their
long but empty public rants:

> The fat man was standing on a horse-drawn brake. His voice was raised
> and there was perspiration upon his red face. “Vote for me and these
> slums will go […] No more water taps behind the front door […] these
> slums will come crashing down like the walls of Jericho when you give
> me your vote!”²

Given Henderson’s long career, ‘Larry and the Elections’ served merely as a cathartic
exercise for Carnduff. The line “‘Ah’m here becos’ Ah’m here,” says he, “an’ here
Ah’m goin’ to stay’” defines the working-class Ulster Protestant’s recurrent ethno-
ontological position, but it also foreshadows the musings of Irish First World War
tommies in Act II of Sean O’Casey’s Expressionist play *The Silver Tassie* (1928).³

¹ Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party: Protest, Pragmatism and Pessimism*
² John Young Simms, *Farewell to the Hammer: A Shankill Boyhood* (Belfast: White Row Press,
³ ‘[W]e’re here, because we’re here, because we’re here, because we’re here!’: Sean O’Casey, *Three
The fact that it feels crass to broach a reply to the question posed by O’Casey and Carnduff (*how did we end up in this predicament?*) tells us something of what can and cannot be said.\(^1\) Whereas in ‘Larry and the Elections’ Carnduff only implements dialect for O’Hooligan speech, a second poem, ‘The Fame of Larry’, is straight from the character’s mouth. Here O’Hooligan is a braggart who’s quick to use ethnic slurs as he boasts about his Army days:

```plaintext
Th’ “Fuzzy-Wuzzy’s” know me,
For A’ve travelled up th’ Nile;
A’ve crossed th’ Afghan border
With th’ Irish “rank an’ file”;
A’ve smelt th’ German powder,
A’ve been gassed, an’ bombed, an’ slain,
But they couldn’t snuff O’Hooligan—
One week, then back again.\(^2\)
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For reasons known only to Carnduff and his editors, the only book these dialect poems made it into was a school jotter in which the poet pasted newspaper cut-outs. Hardly lyrical masterpieces, they nevertheless add to the socio-political veracity of his oeuvre. It must be remembered that although it forms an invective against boastful veterans, the emulation of dialect in this poem approximates Carnduff’s own, making it part of an autosatirical continuum. The poetry of Alan Gillis, the subject of Chapter IV, has affinities with Carnduff both in how he weaponises language and mocks ‘his own’ (the Ulster Protestant) through dialect. Between Patrick Brawney from Francis Boyle’s ‘Paddy’s Trip to North Britain’ (1811), through Larry O’Hooligan in the 1920s, to Gillis’s recurring paramilitary character McCandless from *Scapegoat* (2014), we might unearth an untold tradition. These

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\(^1\) That is, the poor are easily exploited.

\(^2\) Thomas Carnduff archive at Queen’s University, Belfast (MS21/12/4). This poem is undated and unsourced, given it comes several pages after ‘Larry and the Elections’, we can assume it was published at some point in the early-1920s.
poems, with their dialect and unlikable yet pathetic caricatures usurp the notion of the lyric as a medium for the solipsistic author’s feelings. Each of these examples, forming a tragicomedy that serves to subvert conceptions of Irishness, has a clear target in the dominant public narrative – the near-ineffable socio-aesthetic code which guides not so much what we can say, but dictates the medium of how we can say it.

The second sizeable periodical in the north after partition was Lagan (1943–46). Edited by John Boyd and John Hewitt, this magazine was, in contrast to Carnduff’s Young Ulster, broadly nationalistic and narrowly regionalistic in its editorial outlook.¹ The debut editorial of Lagan by John Boyd builds upon the promises of Young Ulster six years before (and as we can see, partition has set in):

the common coinage of our speech is being so debased that serious writers either hesitate to use it or else avoid it entirely. And our idiom— one of the most evocative and pregnant in the English language—is difficult to use artistically, is worth of our greatest care, and must […] be revivified and used as the basis of a regional literature: and for their standards, our writers should recall what has already been accomplished in England by Hardy, […] in Ireland by Synge […] A]n Ulster writer cannot evade his problems by adopting either a superimposed English or

¹ This mid-century Ulster regionalism, due to the status-quo of partition, was perceived as a de facto Unionist project and would lend itself to a later Ulster separatism under the guise of figures such as UDA commander John McMichael, trade unionist Glenn Barr and once Lord Mayor Ian Adamson. Paulin describes this ideology as one which is a ‘response to the homeless or displaced feeling which is now such a significant part of the loyalist imagination’; it is an ideology which claims to support a ‘socialist politics’ to ‘replace the sectarian divisions of the past’: Paulin, ‘A New Look at the Language Question’, Ireland & the English Crisis, p. 190.
a sentimental Gaelic outlook. His outlook must be that of an Ulsterman. 

[...] Kitchen plays, kaleyard yarns, luscious lyrics are no longer wanted; any demand for them is artificially prolonged; and anyway the supply is decreasing.¹

That Synge is used as an example of a writer capturing the essence of the language of their ‘region’ gives us an impression of Boyd’s politics, but also his ignorance. Given how Hewitt would only invigorate an interest in the Rhyming Weavers after the 1950s, it’s possible that Boyd had yet to encounter them in any extensive way. It’s more difficult to conceive however that he would not have heard of Richard Rowley or Padric Gregory. The northern Revivalists who inflected their poetry with Ulster dialect were perhaps deemed problematic to a budding Ulster Regionalist. Dialect, as we’ve seen, has been misunderstood and characterised as overly familiar, casual and cutesy. It’s easy to see how one might associate a tendency to use dialect with the insular, the ‘backward’ or the reactionary. Poets of the 1940s, such as Roy McFadden (1921–1999) and Robert Greacen (1920–2008), were loath to use any dialect at all. It’s an oversimplification to suggest that in their Regionalist (thematic, as opposed to formal) modernism, these poets associated dialect with an Irish past they were trying to escape, much in the same way that Seán Ó Faoláin’s The Bell (1940–54) attempted to counter parochialism in the south. However, what they permitted in prose and poetry was different. The prose of the first edition of Lagan, stories by the likes of Michael McLaverty and Boyd himself, do deliver on the promise to use the ‘speech’ and ‘idiom’ of Ulster; however, not one of the poems

implements dialect.¹ This lends an irony to Roy McFadden’s poem dedicated to MacLaverty titled ‘First Letter to an Irish Novelist’, where he describes his friend’s prose as ‘unblemished idiom | Common as dolmens and the Easter whin’; it’s difficult to know if McFadden is aware of this irony.² For some reason, for this coterie of writers centred round Belfast in the forties, dialect was becoming of prose but not poetry. Writing about the contemporary perception of ‘Ulster Scots’ – and everything artistic, linguistic and political this term signifies – Frank Ferguson identifies a ‘cultural anxiety’ in the north ‘where individuals wish to be perceived as modern sophisticates rather than provincial cultchies, bogtrotters or mountainmen’³. If this is true, it’s easy to see how Rhyming Weaver verse, Carnduff’s dialect poems (which speak to a journalistic lampooning trend) and Marshall’s ballads (speaking mostly to a folk tradition) may have discouraged young poetic successors from the fin de siècle to the present. One could argue that Patrick Kavanagh’s use of dialect bridges, tangentially, a gap between the northern Revivalists and Seamus Heaney. Kavanagh brought a Modernist plainness to northern poetry, an appropriate colloquialism for his rural, earthly subjects; Heaney interrogated his own Derry speech – yet neither of these greats (though willing to use the grammar, diction and cadence of their native speech) develops a nonstandard orthography in any extensive way. This isn’t to say that where minimal dialect is used, it isn’t used to great effect,

¹ McLaverty’s regarded as one of Heaney’s mentors. He was principle of St. Thomas’ in Belfast when the young poet taught there. In ‘Fosterage’ (1975), a poem dedicated to the older writer, Heaney describes himself in 1962 as ‘newly cubbed in language’ – and how, ‘fostered’ by McLaverty, he went into the world with words coming to his ‘tongue like obols’: Opened Ground: Poems, 1966-1996 (London: Faber, 1998), p. 142.
³ Ferguson, Ulster-Scots Writing, p. 2.
as is evident in Kavanagh’s ‘Shancoduff’ (1937) where the poverty-stricken ‘cattle-drovers’ ask: ‘Who owns them hungry hills[?]’.¹ In the next (and final) chapter of the thesis, before analysing the uses and contexts of dialect in Alan Gillis’s poetry, we address the ways in which critical debates since the eighteenth century around language have played a role in how Northern Hiberno-English dialect has been perceived by critics.

Chapter IV

SWIFT, SKAZ, SLABBER, POP: DIALECT AND THE POETRY OF ALAN GILLIS

then crawling between the cement boots
of four-and-twenty Tipperary men
who heard the accent, saw the skinhead,
put two and two together and got Shankill.

—Martin Mooney, ‘The Kiss’, 1993

Across four collections, Alan Gillis (1973–) has a substantial corpus of poems which incorporate nonstandard English. Although these account for just over a fifth of his overall output, their presence is remarkable given that, as we saw in Chapter III, applications of dialect have been uncommon in northern poetry. This chapter will investigate how Gillis’s incorporation of nonstandard Hiberno-English diverges from the poetry of preceding canonical ‘generations’, the majority of which has stopped short of explicit renderings.1 Although other poets perceived to be of Gillis’s own big press ‘generation’ are generally not inclined to include or address dialect, there are some occurrences in recent work which suggest a (re)emergent interest.2 Below we’ll look at how Gillis’s interest in local subject matter and pop culture inform an ‘organic’ poetic, that is, one with an emphasis on poetry’s social integrality. Looking back to the eighteenth century, this chapter uncovers two intersecting trends in Irish verse, (a) poetry which interrogates nonstandard English, and (b) poetry which uses nonstandard English as a serious medium. It begins by

1 Verse, that is, which applies nonstandard phonemic orthography in addition to aspects of nonstandard syntax and vocabulary.
examining the quasi-academic, academic and lyrical contexts into which Gillis writes, before apprehending the politico-aesthetic function and consequences of his own dialect poems.

THE DEAN TO ‘JOHN PEPPER’

Chapter III posited the notion of a formal pedigree from the ‘Weaver’ poets, through William Dunkin and Thomas Carnduff to Alan Gillis. As well as practical, there are contextual affinities between Gillis and Dunkin in that both include dialect as part of their normal practice in contravention to their respective literary contexts. Academic attitudes towards nonstandard dialect, though ever-changing, have changed less than we might expect in two and a half centuries. Andrew Carpenter notes that amongst the eighteenth-century Irish poets he anthologises

all but a handful wrote in an English virtually indistinguishable from that used by others of their class and education in England. This is despite the fact that most of them […] presumably spoke with the famous Irish brogue. [Although, in the main, highly educated,] it is still surprising how little Hiberno-English is found in their work.¹

English in the eighteenth century was no *lingua franca*, but another European vernacular subordinate to courtly French, Liturgical Latin and Ancient Greek. London and Dublin thinkers of the day, among them some of Dunkin’s closest friends, were obsessed with an ambition of *refining* English into a standard national

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language, often to the degradation of canonical figures.¹ Swift’s *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712) spoke to the idea of ‘fixing our Language for ever’.² English to Swift and Thomas Sheridan had to be *fixed* in terms of rectification but also in terms of codification.³ Janet Sorensen describes Sheridan’s *British Education: Or, The Source of the Disorders of Great Britain ...* (1756) as an ‘actor-turned elocutionist’s alarmist critique of British education and British oratory’ hyperbolically concerned with ‘the languishing condition of the English language and the British nation whose political health depends on it.’⁴ Ann Kelly writes that Swift believed an ‘[i]mproved language and discourse would uncover the roots of many present evils’ and that ‘[o]nly by standardizing traditional English’ could ‘any social progress be made.’⁵ With some certainty, Tom Paulin asserts that

> [f]or Swift, a standard English accent is a platonic ideal which will give dignity and self-respect to anyone who acquires it. He is therefore rejecting a concept of “Hiberno-English” or “Anglo-Irish” and is advocating a unified culture which embraces both Britain and Ireland.⁶

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¹ In ‘Dryden’s critical essays […] the imperative to judge literary merit according to linguistic or even “grammatical” criteria vex[ed] the question of the relative merits of Jonson and Shakespeare’: John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 75.


⁴ Ibid.


In fact, it’s quite unclear how Swift’s ambivalent beliefs about language in general translate into attitudes about Hiberno-English. Rather, he and his contemporaries perceived English as a whole as in state of chaos, in the same way, as we’ll encounter below, that Paulin has perceived Irish English. Although he rarely dabbles with dialect in his poetry, Swift shows an academic interest in nonstandard varieties in the Irish context. The short pieces *A Dialogue in Hibernian Style between A and B* (n.d.) and *Irish Eloquence* (n.d.) for instance show a keen ear and a fascination with ‘unusual’ syntaxes, phonologies and vocabulary.²

The Dean’s popular reputation in Ireland and elsewhere as the caricatural embodiment of the early eighteenth-century Ascendancy has been complicated over the past few decades. Beyond his investment in the moderate (Anglocentric) patriotism popular amongst the Irish bourgeoisie of the era, Carole Fabricant points out that Swift’s ‘varied circle of friends’ during his thirty-year tenure at St Patrick’s, shows significant ‘links to [an indigenous] culture’, citing his relationship with his godson Sheridan as emblematic of this sociocultural ecumenicalism:

From a native Irish family of Protestant converts with strong Gaelic roots, Sheridan in many ways typified the kind of friends Swift surrounded himself with: of modest birth […], intellectually gifted […] identified with the country’s patriotic opposition to England’s colonial rule, and acutely conscious of the ambiguities of the (Hiberno-) English language[.]²

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² Ibid., p. 52.
Fabricant writes that ‘The Description of an Irish-Feast’ (1720), a poem which includes Hiberno-English, best exemplifies Swift’s ‘Irishness as a writer’.¹ In it, he rhymes the dialect word ‘ramping’ (‘romping’) with ‘stamping’ and includes Anglicised Gaelic words such as ‘usquebaugh’ – the Anglicisation of *uisce beatha* (*aqua vitae*: whiskey).² A loose translation of contemporary poet Aodh Mac Gabhráin’s (fl. 1720) ‘Pléaráca na Ruarcach’, the poem exhibits ‘the heteroglossic features of both spoken and written language in a multi-lingual culture’.³

Far from condescending to the forms of Hiberno-English in sardonic ignorance, Dunkin will have been well-acquainted with the sociolinguistic intrigues of his close friend Swift as he wrote *The Parson’s Revels*.⁴ Canto II for instance, describes Father Fegan’s voice as

> […] brazen, deep, and such,  
> As well accorded with high Dutch,  
> Or attic Irish, and his Touch  
> Was pliant.⁵

Whilst Sheridan and Swift dabbled, none of their attempts at writing in dialect delves into phonology in the manner of *The Parson’s Revels*. Employing the manifold textures of the spoken word – including nonstandard grammar and implementing new orthographies – Dunkin’s poem uses Hiberno-English as a serious medium, to the extent where it harasses the nascent standard endorsed by Sheridan and tepidly supported by Swift.

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¹ Ibid., p. 63.  
² Ibid., p. 64.  
³ Ibid.  
Despite artistic shortcomings with regard to a new dialectical mode, Swift and Sheridan began a trend in Irish literature: the obsession with sociolinguistics epitomised by works such as Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1913). Heaney’s work, in an unparalleled way in twentieth-century Irish lyric poetry, carries the torch for such a fascination. ‘Traditions’ (1972) opens with what is ostensibly a critique of Anglocentricism:

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Our guttural muse
was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition,
her uvula grows
vestigial, forgotten
like the coccyx […]
while custom, that “most
sovereign mistress,"
beds us down into
the British isles.¹
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In typical Heaney style, ‘bulled’ is multivalent here, relying on manifold Latin and Germanic etymologies. The ‘guttural muse’ can be read as having been stamped (in the papal sense), stomped upon or forced to mate with (in the bovine senses) the ‘alliterative tradition’: Anglo-Saxon verse. The right and will to write in Gaelic (later, Hiberno-English), has been forcefully cross-bred with and ‘made a fool of’ by English.² The line break at ‘grows’ means we read the ‘uvula’ as both enlarging and shrinking to insignificance (‘growing || vestigial’) simultaneously. The evolutionary pun on ‘coccyx’ plays with the notion that a customary disuse of Gaelic as a medium has become normalised to the point of natural. And with its velar fricative (as at the end of the Ulster ‘lough’), the word ‘coccyx’ spoken aloud by any reader becomes a materialisation of this ‘guttural muse’.

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² *OED.*
‘Traditions’ also picks a bone with Shakespeare over Mackmorrice. Opening a debate around how productions of *Henry V* contribute(d) to Hibernophobic sensibilities, Heaney has

MacMorris, gallivanting round the Globe, whinged to courier and groundling who had heard tell of us

as going bare of learning, as wild hares, as anatomies of death [...]¹

Where he names Mackmorrice, Heaney modernises the orthography of the name, opting not for the revised ‘Macmorris’ of moderner editions but the standardised ‘MacMorris’, which – highlighting the prefix – alludes to the name’s likely Anglo-Norman provenance (‘Fitzmaurice’), as well as giving it, in its 1970s context, a northern feel. Mackmorrice’s ‘gallivanting round the Globe’ puns the Elizabethan theatre against the Irish diaspora, but it points also to the normalisation of the stage Irish phenomenon and the irony of its role in promoting the Irish, laying the foundations for a highly-patronised cultural position. Evoking the insecure identity of an Irish captain in an English army would have been apt in the context of Operation Banner (1969–2007), which saw Scottish regiments full of Macs and Os deployed to the streets and lanes of the north. But as well as an invective against an imperial legacy, ‘Traditions’ comprises an admission of the prevailing cultural ties across the archipelago (and the Atlantic). It acknowledges irrevocable linguistic kinships between extinct British English dialects and residual forms of Hiberno-English, boastimg, not bemoanimg the conservatism of how ‘some cherished [Ulster] archaisms | are correct Shakespearean’.² As we’ll discover below, whilst Alan Gillis

¹ Ibid., p. 22.
² Ibid., p. 21.
inherits these obsessions, in the absence of a dialectical model, he appropriates the
tendency to forge form of Hiberno-English from elsewhere; as Bernard O’Donoghue
demonstrates in his monograph on the very subject, Heaney examines the textures of
his Derry English more often than he employs it as a lyrical medium.¹

During the 1970s and ’80s, journalist and novelist Fred Gamble (c.1905–
1986) published a series of books at the small Belfast presses Appletree and
Blackstaff under the nom de plume ‘John Pepper’.² With titles such as A Quare Geg
(1979) and Sez She to Me (1984), these works lampooned what Pepper called the
‘Disneyland of terminological delight’ that is northern Irish speech.³ Whilst these
sketches and vignettes reinforce perceptions of Ulster English as comedy vehicle,
beyond their cartoon illustrations they serve to record and celebrate a vernacular: a
dialect, a local sense of humour and world view. A less charitable observer,
however, might characterise them as parochial to the point of grotesque. Amongst
more serious linguistics texts, Tom Paulin read Gamble’s What a Thing to Say
(1977) whilst researching Hiberno-English for his A New Look at the Language
Question (1983).⁴ That ‘John Pepper’ was an authority on Ulster English at this time
speaks volumes. Whilst it must be added that Blackstaff published significant

[1994]).
² Gamble’s John Pepper column in the Belfast Telegraph was part of a tradition stretching back to
nineteenth-century Ulster-Scots satires in Co Antrim newspapers. See Richard Froggatt, ‘Frederick
Gamble (c.1905 - 1986): Journalist; author; humorist’, The Dictionary of Ulster Biography
⁴ Alongside Randolph Quirk’s Style and Communication in the English Language (1982), Peter
See Tom Paulin Papers, Rose Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, MMS Box 31, Folder 5.
academic work throughout the 1980s on the subject, barring a few debatable exceptions, the canonical poetry of the ‘imaginative estate’ from the 1960s through to the 1990s was largely barren in terms of dialect. ¹ One contemporary exception is Paulin’s own work, although this was limited to syntax and interpolated words from an inventory (‘word-hoard’).² In terms of lesser-known poets, Tom Morgan’s The Rat-diviner (1987) uses West Belfast nonstandard speech unselfconsciously. One reviewer noted that Morgan’s poetic owes much of its project and dialectical technique to Padraic Fiacc, who’d been employing images of Belfast urban English in his poetry since the late 1960s.³ If there has been a reticence around dialect in northern poetry, it would be unfair to place blame on the regional literary industry; Blackstaff (the north’s biggest press) published ‘John Pepper’, James Milroy and Fiacc through the 1970s and into the late ’90s.

Whilst there’s no logical explanation as to why a poet would resist employing the orthography or grammar befitting their own speech, as outlined in the introduction chapter, there are aesthetic, practical, economic and socio-political reasons why they wouldn’t. The global ideological trend towards standardising (everything including) language is concurrent with an irrational fear of the parochial because of a volatile utopia of the present, an ultra-cosmopolitanism which perceives the peripheral or subaltern mind as hardwired towards social conservatism, cultural insularism and ethnic purity.⁴ Given its ubiquity, the ideology of standardisation is

² See Liberty Tree (London: Faber,1983) and Fivemiletown (London: Faber, 1987).
⁴ Arjun Appadurai writes that the fear of homogenisation ‘subspeciates into either an argument about Americanization or an argument about commoditization’, and that ‘often the two arguments are closely linked.’ He notes, however, that proximity is key in understanding the complexities of
perhaps the easiest to identify, but there are deep-seated local reasons for the lack of dialect in northern poetry as well. The eminent example of self-censorship regarding dialect is Heaney’s decision against using ‘wrought’ (the Derry word for ‘worked’) in his poem ‘Follower’ (1966). Here ‘My father wrought with a horse plough’ was censored to ‘My father worked with a horse plough’. On this alteration Heaney candidly wrote that

once you think twice about a local usage you have been displaced [...] 

and your right to it has been contested by the official linguistic censor with whom another part of you is secretly in league. You have been translated from the land of unselfconsciousness to the suburbs of the mot juste.2

Heaney’s dilemma begs the question: who decides what the mot juste is? Are we our best wee readers? One might characterise the problem of dialect as socio-aesthetic in that it’s not so much that northern writers are consciously ashamed of their native speech or wish to maximise the value of their ‘well-wrought’ commodities, it’s that their own dialect doesn’t feel right when written. And moreover, formal precedents are rare. Whereas canonical Irish writing has largely been devoid of dialect, Scotland has had Rabbie Burns (1759–1796), Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978), Tom Leonard (1944–2018) and Liz Lochhead (1947–). From drafts of ‘Follower’, we can see that

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2 Ibid., p. 87.
Heaney had changed ‘wrought’ to ‘worked’ before he submitted the poem to Philip Hobsbaum’s ‘Belfast Group’.¹ After taking up a lectureship at the University of Glasgow in 1966, Hobsbaum went on to form another group with figures including Lochhead and Leonard. Scots Gaelic poet Aonghas MacNeacail (1942–) has spoken about Hobsbaum’s support for poetry diverging from standard English. ‘Philip’s advice was to “Write about what you know. Go back to your roots”, MacNeacail said in interview; ‘he did accommodate and encourage [...] Gaelic poets, as well as those writing in Scots.’² In 1990, Hobsbaum wrote a short paper titled ‘Speech rather than Lallans: West of Scotland Poetry’ which, according to Tom Hubbard, ‘exemplified an orthodoxy of the 1990s and beyond, pitting spoken Glaswegian against “Lallans”, a register which is better designated as Scots language reintegrated [synthesised] from various dialects.’³ Hobsbaum’s emphasis on poetry’s rootedness is certainly germane when it comes to Heaney; in the same way that it’s hard to gauge Hobsbaum’s influence on the aesthetic of ‘Anahorish, soft gradient of consonant, | vowel-meadow’, it’s unfair and anachronistic to deduce that the ‘official linguistic censor’ of Heaney’s conscience is a Leavisite or a New Critic.⁴ Chapter III explored how northern poets of the 1930s and ’40s went in fear of dialect, thus any attempt to track Hobsbaum’s critical approach back through F. R. Leavis (1895 – 1978) to John Crowe Ransom’s The New Criticism (1941) to claim there can be no ‘wrought’ in a ‘well-wrought poem’ would be a fool’s errand. In addition, the overemphasis on

¹ Michael Longley Papers, Rose Library, MSS 744, Series 8, ‘Belfast Group sheets’, Box 60.
⁴ Wintering Out, p. 16.
New Criticism’s specific role in what is lazily regarded as the ‘formalism’ of the ‘tight-arsed-trio’ (Heaney, Mahon, Longley) and its side-car, the obsession of determining the link between northern constitutional politics and degrees of ‘formality’, has rarely garnered a better comprehension of poems or politics.¹ As Gail McConnell writes, the ‘attempt to read Northern Irish poetry as an expression of political conservatism or radicalism is superficial […] because of the difficulty of defining “formal” and “formalist” poetry’.² As we observed via Mooney in Chapter II, these concerns are usually a manifestation of critical expectation rather than what might be found in already written poems.

**THE ‘LANGUAGE ROW’: ‘BROAGH’ VERSUS ‘BOKE’**

Although not as late as the present author, Scottish critic Willy Maley comes late to the ‘language row’ in 2002 with his *J’Accuse…!* directed at Irish reluctance to include dialect. Maley undermines Edna Longley’s notion that Heaney’s engagement with Ulster-Scots is adequate:

Longley considers Paulin’s version of Ulster Scots to be impoverished and she contrasts Seamus Heaney’s use of phrases like ‘the body o’ the kirk’ […] which strikes me as [more …] tokenistic and clichéd [than Paulin’s…] (Moreover, in an odd move, Longley appears to endorse Irish-language advocates who resist Paulin’s notion of Irish English,

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which they refer to scornfully as ‘the creole dialects of English’.) Well, double sore heart indeed. Hampered and askew, I ask you.¹

Although speech images are minimal in his work, Heaney’s early engagement with the nuances of his Derry dialect in some measure (to use a metaphor befitting him) turned the earth before the sow – posing an aesthetic challenge to immediate successors, particularly ‘Faber poets’ Muldoon and Paulin. During the decades preceding the Good Friday Agreement, the question of dialect in contemporary verse became one battleground of a wider rift within the Irish academy between the ‘revisionists’ and the ‘postcolonialists’ over the role of literature in society during a time of crisis. The broadly nationalistic ‘postcolonialist’ faction was centred around the Field Day Theatre Company directors Tom Paulin and Seamus Deane (1940–). Established in 1980 by playwright Brian Friel (1929–2015) and actor Stephen Rea (1946–), Field Day set out to create a ‘fifth province’, a cultural space apart from the bloody materiality of contemporary northern politics.² Edna Longley and Gerry Dawe were the central figures on the ‘revisionist’ side. Taking her cue from Yeats, Longley famously wrote that

[p]oetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated. And for the same reasons: mysteries distort the rational processes which ideally prevail in social relations; while ideologies confiscate the poet’s special passport to terra incognita.³

³ Ibid.
As Clair Wills points out, the similarities in the transcendental logic of a ‘fifth province’ and ‘special passport’ reveal a critical narcissism of small differences amongst ‘revisionist’ and ‘postcolonialist’ critics.¹ Both factions plead the case for artistic autonomy, in order to regroup and reconsider the ‘Troubles’ via art – the former through a nationalistic lens, the latter through a cosmopolitan prism. The revisionist-postcolonialist debate around the interplay between national identity and aesthetics is intertwined in utero with the debate about dialect and northern verse, but it was the postcolonialists (through Paulin) who appreciated the value in what is often misapprehended as a purely nationalistic concern. As Michael Longley has pointed out however, it’s astonishing that ‘Paulin allow[ed] the compendious Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing (1991) to omit […] all writing in Ulster Scots’ – an oversight which points to the broad range of opinion amongst the directorship, but also, ultimately, a lack of reverence towards Ulster-Scots.² In the first Field Day pamphlet, A New Look at the Language Question (1983), Paulin makes a case for – though abjures full commitment to – a standardised form of Irish English engineered from ‘the Irish, the Yola and Fingallian dialects, Ulster Scots, Elizabethan English, Hiberno-English, British English and American English’.³ Because Hiberno-English has no institutionally-backed written form, Paulin argues, it exists ‘freely and spontaneously’ as mere speech and this, he insists, makes it ‘impoverished as a

³ Ibid., p. 191.
literary medium’. Yet beyond lament for a diminishing source of artistic capital, it’s clear that Paulin’s call for standardisation finds its raison d’être not in the imperative to save the textures of discrete dialects (living speech) from mundane oblivion but to, somewhat puzzlingly, save a national language which doesn’t yet exist from a ‘state of near anarchy’. Far from a case of patriotic nostalgia from the intellectual side-line however, Paulin’s somewhat Swiftian proposal is an exercise in nation-building, a linguistic adjunct to the New Ireland Forum (1983–84). As well as Thomas MacDonagh’s proposal of a new ‘Irish Mode’ in poetry outlined in his *Literature in Ireland: Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish* (1916), Paulin takes inspiration from American lexicographer Noah Webster (1758–1843), whose project of orthographic reform for American English fused eighteenth-century rationalism with American post-Independence cultural separatism. The subtext of Webster’s own proposal comprised the new nation’s ambitious (and quite viable) arrogation of the English language, where it would be rechristened ‘American’ and extensively reorthographis(z)ed – instigating an eventual split in the dialect continuum – to

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1 Ibid., p. 186.  
2 Ibid.  
3 This think-tank, bringing together the three main parties in the Republic as well as the SDLP, promised a renewed effort to bring about ‘lasting peace and stability’ via ‘the democratic process’. In this process, ‘the cultural traditions in Ireland, North and South, would be guaranteed full expression and encouragement’. Seeking to end partition, the findings of the New Ireland Forum Report (2 May 1984) outlined the case for a unitary state, as well as the two compromises of joint authority and a federal/confederal British-Irish state. All proposals were famously rejected by Thatcher in her ‘out, out, out’ speech: New Ireland Forum, ‘Report’ (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1984), para. 1.1; para. 7.8.  
facilitate cultural and linguistic independence to parallel social and economic counterparts.

In 1985, Edna Longley published an erudite and witty rejoinder to Paulin’s pamphlet where she lambasted what she perceived as a new and dangerous form of cultural nationalism in literary figures associated with Field Day and the journal *Crane Bag*. ‘Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland’ opens hostilities in a critical spate often cited as the eminent debate on northern poetry and dialect. Longley flies to the defence of ‘Northern poets’ who’ve been ‘victims of improper “expectations”’, that is, the expectation to address the ‘Troubles’ in a discursive, non- or extra-poetic manner.¹ Although the article offers some accolades to Brian Friel’s *Translations* and Paulin’s use of satire, it mainly takes the form of a polemic where Field Day and *Crane Bag* are portrayed as sectarian projects, whilst writers who conflate the contemporary Irish experience with history are accused of ‘atavism’ which, repurposed from a pamphlet by Seamus Deane (1940–), becomes a byword for epistemological deception. In response to Deane’s claim that rationality ‘needs no encouragement to compete with atavism in the production of misery’, Longley mercilessly mocks his terminology. ‘Polemical indeed!’ she writes, ‘[d]id rationality or atavism, in its nationalist guise, setup the concentration camps? Rationalised atavism, perhaps. Deane’s own atavised rationalism betrays more clearly than usual the strains of reconciling Derry with Derrida’.² These critical *jeux d’esprit* exemplify Longley’s sagaciousness as a critic, yet here and throughout the article her use of the Nazis as a political benchmark renders virtually redundant claims that nationalism invariably gives way to the vilest human impulses.

² Ibid., p. 31.
Upholding a nascent ‘Godwin’s law’, in the name of historical revisionism, Longley characterises nationalism (in both political and cultural forms) as a monolith, not only in Ireland, but everywhere.\(^1\) Whilst the Field Day writers were willing to confess their alignment to Ireland in its broadest sense (even if this meant being allied to the Green side of the divide), Longley’s self-positioning as the cosmopolitan critic ‘correcting a false vocabulary, imagery, and consciousness’ affords her her own unwarranted ‘special passport’ to objectivity: an implausibly neutral stance. As Paulin reminds us, ‘[d]iscursive prose is always committed in some sense or other and it is dishonest to pretend that it isn’t.’\(^2\) The particulars of Longley’s politics are left unsaid, yet she’s happy to evoke MacNeice as a foil to factionalism. In riposte to Deane’s notion of ‘competing voices’, she quotes Canto XVI of *Autumn Journal* (1938) in support of what she regards as the gratuitousness of structuralism within an Irish context:

> And one read black where the other read white, his hope  
> The other man’s damnation: Up the Rebels, To Hell with the Pope,  
> And God Save – as you prefer – the King or Ireland.\(^3\)

The evocation of this analysis, written by little more than a holiday-maker in his native Ireland, becomes hopelessly ironic where Longley reminds us that because ‘Heaney, Deane and Paulin […] no longer live in Northern Ireland’ they’re susceptible to ‘the tropes of stylised retrospect’ with regard to lyrical depictions of

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home.¹ MacNeice presents the Northern Irish state (1922–) as a mere historical fact. The framing of the quotation would lead anyone unfamiliar with *Autumn Journal* to infer that the poet dons his Swiftian hat here to scold the Lilliputians and Blefuscudians – as the classic Liberal synchronic blind spot has it – to tell them they’re ‘both as bad as each other’. The subjugation of Catholics in the north becomes the social equivalent of *Slieve Donard is the biggest mountain* and via MacNeice it seems Longley, not Deane, is guilty of moral relativism. Today, the ideologies of Nationalism and Unionism are approaching a fleeting equilibrium; however, this wasn’t the case in 1985 and it certainly wasn’t the case in 1938. On occasional trips ‘home’, it’s unlikely that MacNeice was ever privy to the socioeconomic realities of Northern Ireland. The use of his *Autumn Journal* as a model of political objectivity may be preposterous and seeped in the kind of ahistoricism Longley accurately observes in the Field Day project, but it’s still common. The speaker in Gillis’s ‘Bob the Builder is a Dickhead’ (2007) decries the northern Irish political status quo, complaining that ‘although the war is over, | ‘The Party of Bollocks and the Party of Balls | are locked in battle for the City Hall.’²

The dangers of illiberal British and Irish state ideologies should be self-evident; but the problem with twentieth-century ‘Liberal’ positions taken by Joyce, Yeats, MacNiece and indeed Edward Carson (1854–1935) are that – extricated from the communal – they conflate individual freedom and competitive social mobility and pit them against social and economic justice; everyone listens, and it becomes normal. Longley rightly attacks Field Day for their blithe ‘rearguard’ approach to

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'the liberation struggles of Feminist and working-class writers’ ('socialist perspectives’ are ‘welcome’, she writes).\(^1\) Had Field Day been more inclusive from the outset, they might’ve had Longley, whose critical prose is unparalleled in the north and perhaps nationwide, as a formidable observer rather than a profoundly troublesome opponent. Yet regarding ‘working-class’ artists, Longley’s analysis conveniently overlooks two unlikely victims of Nationalist indoctrination – Field Day founders Davy Hammond, the Protestant son of a tram driver, and Stephen Rea, the Protestant son of a bus driver.\(^2\) Few northerners born into the labouring-classes on both sides of the ethnoreligious divide have lived through the socioeconomic realities of late-twentieth-century Ireland to then eagerly support a cultural form of Unionism.

Longley makes several observations on Paulin’s use of language, the first of which is the accusation that his poetry offers ‘cliched […] external impression[s] of the Protestant community’, which in effect denies him his Protestant identity.\(^3\) This wasn’t the first instance where Longley put Protestants in their place linguistically. In 1983, she reviewed Dennis Greig’s *Morning in Belfast* (1983) alongside Paul Muldoon’s *Quoof* (1983). Although credit is due to Longley for reviewing the lesser-known Greig, the piece takes up less than twenty percent of the review. ‘Denis [sic.] Greig’s “verbal Imram of my city streets” may not challenge comparison with

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Quoof,’ she writes, ‘but Morning in Belfast resists patronage as “working class verse”’.¹ Paraphrasing John Hewitt’s introduction to the collection, Longley gives us an insight into the prevailing attitude towards dialect at the time: ‘Greig writes not verse but ‘free verse. Nor does he unambitiously settle for the vernacular.’² Here ‘vernacular’ writing is unquestionably low – something instinctive to the worker to be shunned in favour of the more refined grammar and lexicon of the academy. If this isn’t a case of “working class verse” being given ‘patronage’, then what is? We must remember that this wasn’t only Longley’s opinion, but the virtually ubiquitous critical attitude of the day.

As well as adjudicating on levels of Irishocity, ‘Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland’ engages with a kind of presentism, a Trinity College rendition of Francis Fukuyama’s ‘The End of History?’ (1989):

Although ‘Irish Ireland’ won the social and political battle in the Republic, it lost the language battle, making literary partition and apartheid forever impossible. In default of Gaelic, Paulin opts for local English speech as the linguistic arm of his new Res Publica.³

Longley points out that Morning in Belfast ‘exaggerates [a] starry-eyed appropriation of Irish legend and language.’⁴ Although it’s noticeable that the collection comes from ‘the Ian Adamson stable [Pretani Press]’, a coterie which has used Gaelic myth in the service of Ulster Nationalism, the use of the Gaelic language (and Irish myth) in the poetry of a Protestant factory worker surely contradicts the notion that the ‘language battle’ has ended. Only one poem, ‘Dan Dan?’, in Greig’s collection uses

² Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 35.
Gaelic; a somewhat clumsy use, but a use. It’s pertinent that this poem, though difficult to comprehend, seems to be concerned with an acquisition of language, that is, the Gaelic language, but also the foreign jargon of mid-century technology: new terms, like ‘banfhili’, ‘mhacaoinmh mna’, ‘[t]ransistor’, ‘micro-chip’, the speaker states, ‘jump as mad electronic fianna’ and he can’t ‘plug’ them into poems about ‘bog, rock and grass’.¹ ‘Tom Patton: Shipyardman, Lord Mayor’ is Greig’s ode to an Ulster Unionist Party city councillor who rose, as the title notes, from skilled labourer to mayor. (The spiritual successor to Tommy Henderson – the politician lampooned by Carnduff as we saw in Chapter III – Patton was known for his malapropisms, once declaring to fellow councillors that the City Hall could do with a coat of ‘Durex’.)² Greig’s poem seems to take issue with Rowley’s ventriloquising in ‘The Islandmen’, where it speaks of a ‘voice which knows no workman’s song | Or morning talk rushed over bridges.’³ It’s relevant that Morning in Belfast includes more Gaelic than Belfast urban English. ‘Greenly My Days Are Fled’ exhibits one exceptional employment, where the ghostly speaker distances itself from the city’s new countercultures, its ‘alien young’ – ‘punk, mods’ – who ask ‘Wud ya luk at that?’⁴

In her review of Liberty Tree (1983), ‘Sweet Dreams or Rifles’, Longley takes issue with multiple aspects of Paulin’s language. She ridicules his emulations of Heaney and overuse of academic and foreign-language terminology, which she insists is self-indulgent. And she interrogates his authenticity:

³ Greig. Morning, p. 33.
[Paulin] longs to discard his learning and become one of the people. As *vox populi* he exploits local slang and macho monosyllables: ‘keeks’, ‘boke’, ‘pong’, ‘glup’, ‘chug’, ‘glumped’. [...] In England there are already ominous signs that [his] exiled exaggeration of his accent is being taken for the Real Thing.¹

The logic of the pre-1990s critical consensus was that working-class poets (such as Dennis Greig) shouldn’t resort to using native dialect – but aspire to something better; whereas middle-class poets (Paulin) shouldn’t resort to native dialect because they should know better.

By the early 1990s, Longley’s attitude towards dialect had changed. In *The Living Stream* she delights in the ‘succinct, defamatory, ironic qualities’ of Belfast speech.² She writes that ‘Belfast also belongs to [the ‘docker poet’] John Campbell, and John Campbell to Belfast, in the very different idiom of vernacular verse.’³ With its full rhyme and easy ironies, Campbell’s poetry doesn’t exactly meet or aspire towards the requirements of the contemporary Anglophone lyric aesthetic. Given the absence of an opinion on the absence of Belfast dialect in Belfast poetry however, we might assume that for critics, Campbell’s ‘very different idiom’ is Belfast speech itself which, having a place in prose and drama, still had no place in serious poetry. ‘[P]rose-writers’, Longley had written ten years before, ‘particularising character and scene, can perhaps do more than poets to preserve local words.’⁴ The suggestion here is that other genres can be sociological, but lyric poetry must be ‘High’, must seek

3 Ibid., p. 97.
what Longley calls ‘full human truth’; but this truth would surely incorporate the sounds that come out of full human mouths.¹

‘Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland’ is as much a piece of canon-forging as a criticism on language or politics. Nationalism is Poetry’s nemesis and its champions are MacNeice, Mahon, Muldoon and the parts of Heaney where he remains nationally impartial.² Longley writes that ‘since Yeats […] native dialect] has informed the practice of the best poets,’³ Though it’s left unsaid who these are, one of them is Heaney. We’re told that ‘throughout his work, Heaney reishes the whole heritage of Ulster English, graces with equal humorous affection Graeco-Latin “patriarchal dictum” and Scots “body o’ the kirk” (Contrast Paulin’s autarkic boke.)’⁴ In response to Paulin’s ideal of a New Irish English, Longley writes:

The natural spectrum of Seamus Heaney’s vocabulary shows the way that Paulin would harshly floodlight with academy or dictionary. Moreover, Paulin has invented a new form of poetic diction by sprinkling his poems with dialect, or would-be dialect, words [like …] keeks, glup, boke. If that’s meant to be Ulster Scots idiom, the implications are almost racist. A poet’s language derives from how he talks and what he hears[.]⁵

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⁴ Ibid., 34.
⁵ Ibid., p. 31.
Paulin’s ‘boke’ (the common word for ‘vomit’ in Ulster) and the rural Derry ‘Broagh’ (the eponymous town in Heaney’s 1972 poem) are unnecessarily pitted against each other. ‘Boke’ isn’t new slang or Ulster-Scots, but a residual standard word, usually spelt ‘bolk’.

1 Even if the charge of archaism stands, it’s impossible to see how Paulin’s ‘Off the Back of a Lorry’ (1983) could end any other way than with ‘boke’. Its speaker catalogues the cringe-inducing accoutrements of an insular Ulster culture, ‘tacky […] pured fictions’ which they’re drawn to nevertheless because they build a gritty sort of prod baroque I must return to like my own boke.  

2 There’s a perfect synthesis here between lyrical and ethnical accountability. Even for ‘strangers’ (as Heaney has non-natives in ‘Broagh’) ‘boke’ is apt. 3 After the evocation of whimsical gold-leaf imagery on ‘baroque’, onomatopoeia is rescued from redundancy where the lips part, then round, before the dorsum smacks the velum, cutting off the ball of air – ‘boke’, you say – and abruptly, the estranged ‘Prod’ speaker wins our empathy. This use of an ‘autarkic’ word is far from, as Peter McDonald puts it, ‘a wee bit wobbly.’


5 ‘To vomit; to retch, or make efforts as in vomiting. Still dialect’ (OED).

2 Liberty Tree, p. 33.

3 Heaney, Wintering Out (Faber, 1972), p. 21.
husband and her critical protégé (Gillis) took up the challenge of writing poetry which speaks to a received aesthetic and includes dialect. Maley censures Irish writers – traitors to the pan-Celtic cause – for acquiescing to cultural cringe (via the stage Paddy) and, on a personal level, cowardice and greed, but doesn’t deal directly with underlying ideology. Instead of lambasting Ireland for what it doesn’t have, maybe he should celebrate the little it has.

‘SLABBERS’ & BELFAST SKAZ

Since the founding of the BBC, Ulster English and Ulster political violence have been confluent in the public imagination. And when poets have been forced to address ethno-national division, they’ve resorted to dialect-as-realism. Short spouts of dialect exist throughout Fiacc’s oeuvre, but one of his most pointed uses is in ‘Enemies’. A clutch of ‘five-year-old’ Protestant girls encounter a crowd of Catholic nuns; one of the girls asks, ‘When are yez go’n to git | married?’¹ In Michael Longley’s ‘Wounds’ (1973), a paramilitary gunman shoots a bus conductor ‘through the head’ at his home; in the final lines, the pathetic ‘boy’-murderer speaks to the victim’s family. ‘To the children, to a bewildered wife, | I think ‘Sorry Missus’ was what he said.’² In congress with the themes already identified in Rowley and Gregory’s dialect poems in Chapter III, both ‘Wounds’ and ‘Enemies’ conclude with an image, an outspeaking of working-class Belfast dialect conveying a frenzied sense of ignorant culpability devastatingly confluent with youthful innocence.

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Despite Ciaran Carson’s obsession with colloquial language, unlike his Belfast predecessor Fiacc, his work – beyond a few important exceptions – is rarely written in his own English. As far as one might garner from typescript drafts, Carson has never attempted to create a new orthography (on the same terms as ‘Urban Scots’ poetry). Although there are instances of experiments in implementing dialect words and grammatical structures, these are present rarely in published collections. From its ‘pub’ setting and long lines, we might assume that ‘The Eclectic Bar’ was written sometime in the late 1980s, prior to Carson’s return to writing (after a hiatus from 1976 to 1985) with the formally ground-breaking collection *The Irish for No* (1987).

Asked in interview about this return, Carson said he wanted to colour his new poetry with a sense of the demotic via ‘bar-talk.’1 Because ‘[s]peech and slabber can be entirely odd’, he ‘wanted to get that into poetry’.2 The poem ‘The Eclectic Bar’, reposited at Emory’s Rose Library, uses words such as ‘slabber’ (‘chatter’; cognate with ‘slobber’) and ‘half-un’ (a measure of liquor).3 Another abandoned poem, ‘Firing Range’, uses the nonstandard ‘daren’t’ (‘dare not’) with the tense-defying lines ‘As he flexed his gun || Again and again. | I daren’t look back’.4 Lines within a folder titled ‘unidentified manuscript fragments’ further evince experimentation. Here, an orthography inflected with Ulster-Scots is implemented – ‘Hairy Mary, are ye dancin’, nah, nah, it’s jist the way | Ah’m standin’’ – to create an emulation of rural Antrim speech.5 This dearth of re-orthography and urban vocabulary in Carson’s published lyrics might find explanation in the cultural cringe outlined by

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1 Brown, *In the Chair*, p. 145.
2 Ibid.
3 ‘The Eclectic Bar’, Ciaran Carson Papers, Rose Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA: MMS 746, Box 17, Folder 24.
4 Ibid., ‘Firing Range’, Folder 37.
5 Ibid., ‘unidentified manuscript fragments’, Folder 36.
Frank Ferguson and Heaney. Overtly local words and phrases can feel in the last instance parochial or twee, even though they’re in common usage, especially in bar-room ‘slabber’.

Gavin Falconer writes that the ways in which the work of Heaney and Longley ‘stops short’ of a ‘full embrace’ of dialect is ‘paradoxical’ given their own Hiberno-English and tendency to experiment with, translate from, and comment on Ulster-Scots.¹ As with Carson however, where these poets do implement dialect, they implement it with profound consequence. In August 1995, Paulin published a diary in the London Review of Books recounting his visit back home to Belfast where he was ‘making a film about Ulster Scots for the BBC.’² Meandering towards the main subject of the piece, he mentions a poem packed with Ulster Scots words in Michael Longley’s new volume, Ghost Orchid. Maybe the poet is wanting to ruffle his deft parnassian or to raise certain readers’ hackles? For there’s a calculated over-determined quality to the language in the poem that makes it more like a piss-take.³

The following month, Longley responded with a letter to the LRB in which he wrote that in ‘The Ghost Orchid’ there are, in fact, two poems so “packed”, and a few others which use the dialect more sparingly”; and he noted that he hoped to ‘allay Paulin’s

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³ Ibid, para. 25.
apparent suspicions about [his] motives.'¹ Although Longley insists that ‘The Mad Poet’ is merely a take on the closing lines of Horace’s *Ars Poetica* – which references Empedocles flinging himself into Mount Etna’s lava to achieve immortality (in vain) – there’s a sense, given the heated critical context outlined above, that Paulin is being compared to this pre-Socratic philosopher-cum-‘head-the-ball’². One might even go as far as to read this as a love poem, where the poet perceives his wife as the victor in the ‘language row’, where – in the style of Muldoon – we must read ‘Edna’ for ‘Etna’.³ ‘The Mad Poet’ implements dialect words such as ‘cowping’ (‘falling’), ‘gulder’ (‘shout’), ‘mad-dog shite’ (‘nonsense’) in a manner not dissimilar to how Paulin uses them. And where Empedocles is compared to a hypercritical leech that ‘won’t drop off until he is boke-full of blood’, the use of ‘boke’ appears to be directed at Paulin.⁴ If not for the further use of dialect in *The Ghost Orchid*, ‘Phemios & Medon’ (the other poem mentioned in the letter), it would be easy to assume that Paulin is being mocked. Longley writes this poem follows

the scene in Book XXII of the *Odyssey* where Phemios the bard and Medon the herald beg for mercy from Telemachos […] By serendipity or subconscious design I was leafing through an Ulster Scots glossary, and

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² Longley, *Collected*, p. 229.
³ Ibid. Reading taken from conversation with Professor Fran Brearton in November 2015.
found that dialect from my region was making available to me the terror and comedy of this scene […] fresh sounds and suggestions.¹

One might entertain the possibility that in the midst of implementing Ulster-Scots in the composition of ‘The Mad Poet’ – initially in the spirit of flyting – Longley began to enjoy it.² Regardless, descriptions of Phemios and Medon as ‘[a]feared’ after lenient Telemachos gives them a ‘chance to wise up’ seem inarguably apposite – perfectly ‘aesthetic’ – uses of dialect in a collection backdropped by the 1995 IRA Ceasefire.

The root ‘slabber(-)’ carries a lot of weight in northern poetry. As a verb, ‘slabber’ can mean ‘excessive salivatat[ion]’; to ‘slabber at someone’ is to ‘provoke [them] verbally’; if a person is a ‘slabber’ they’re a ‘loudmouth’, a provocateur, a heckler.³ Surely the most apotheosised instance of Hiberno-English in European poetry is found in Carson’s The Inferno of Dante Alighieri: a New Translation (2002) where Cerberus, guardian of the third circle, ‘barks and slabbers at | the muck-bound prisoners’.⁴ Carson uses Belfast words such as ‘gub’ (‘mouth’) and ‘boke’, as well as ‘macaronic pseudo-Irish’ phrases, in order to reflect Dante’s “Tuscan vernacular” set against Latin, the fourteenth-century dominant Italic form.⁵

The Anglophonic hierarchy of dialects outlined in our introduction can only be defined as the underwriter of power via medium. What Mikhail Bakhtin calls

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² ‘Flyting’: ‘poetical invective’: ‘originally, a kind of contest practised by the Scottish poets of the 16th cent., in which two persons assailed each other alternately with tirades of abusive verse.’ (OED).
⁵ Ibid., p. 149; Neal Alexander, Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 203–204.
'verbal-ideology' (standardisation) is analogous to the culmination of machinations styled by Pierre Bourdieu as 'symbolic power': the form of 'power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it'.¹ For Bourdieu, the effect of dominant doctrine and opinion ('orthodoxy') is synonymous with 'symbolic violence'.² ‘So long as overt violence, that of […] the ruthless master’, Bourdieu writes, ‘is collectively disapproved of […] symbolic violence, gentle, invisible violence […] of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety […] presents itself as the most economical mode of domination’.³ Where Heaney writes of the shame in ‘think[ing] twice about a local usage’ (the betrayal of his native ‘wrought’ in favour of Faber-friendly ‘worked’), he observes the procedure of this violence.⁴ He describes a diminishment of his ‘right’ to transmit his own speech into lyric form by a ‘linguistic censor with whom’ part of his conscience is ‘in league’.⁵ Because of its lack of faith in the efficacy of Derry English, the ‘guttural Muse’ is forcibly propelled from naked ‘unselfconsciousness’ towards standard English, in keeping with the dominant Anglophone code (‘mot juste’).⁶ In a word, the poet’s torn – between speech and text, artifice and discourse, specific and general – between the safety of the parish and the anonymity of liberal humanism’s cosmopolis, its utopian

² Ibid., p. 165.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
present. Enkidu stands on the edge of the wilderness. That Heaney stressed and cringed over one word gives us some idea of the supremacy of standardisation and its symbolic violence: ‘aesthetic’ approval. Longley writes that because he ‘speaks fairly standard English’ he would ‘choose Ulster Scots words only when they set free a […] phrase […] otherwise’ inaccessible.\(^1\) In Hellenic and Renaissant themes respectively, Longley and Carson find a catalyst with which they can appropriately (‘aesthetically’) include dialect. This entails a thrice-removal from the lyric I – regenerificiation (lyric to epic), translation (Hellenic/Italic to Anglic) and reclamation (employing local dialect) – which short-circuits the logic of standardisation, concocting a literary \textit{anaesthetic} for numbing the effects of Ulster lectical cringe.

Gillis bursts through the aesthetic door left ajar by Longley and Carson, to challenge standardisation. His poetry exemplifies the heteroglot – where opposing genres, registers, voices and narratives synthesize – where the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth \cite{MikhailBakhtin}

Significant in its being the first in Gillis’s debut collection, ‘The Ulster Way’ diverges from standard English via three words: ‘burn’ (‘brook’), ‘ingleberried’ and ‘slabber(-)’.\(^3\) As already discussed in our introduction, through a polarity game the poem presents a herd of delirium-inducing cattle, which \textit{won’t} be ingleberried, haunching and haunting

\footnote{\textsuperscript{1} Longley, ‘Letters’, para. 3.}


\footnote{\textsuperscript{3} Alan Gillis, \textit{Somebody, Somewhere} (Oldcastle: Gallery, 2004), p. 9.}
with their eyes, their shocking opals
graving you, hoovering and scooping you […]\(^1\)

An ‘ingleberry’ is a northern dialect word for ‘a large wart-like growth’ (bovine papilloma).\(^2\) ‘Ingleberries’ thus, disassembling the bucolic quaintness as per Miriam Gamble’s assertion of the poem’s Romanticism, amplifies the monstrous, demented cattle, the ‘shocking opals’ represent history’s inexorable scrutiny – reminding us sooner of Yeats’ slouching ‘beast’ with its ‘gaze blank and pitiless’ – than Longley’s sterile freemartin from *No Continuing City* (1969) or Heaney’s ‘nervous Friesian’ from *Door into the Dark* (1969).\(^3\) With the Iraq War (global) and on-going intra-Loyalist feud (local) looming in the background, Gillis finds affinities with Yeats’s 1919.\(^4\) His mass of beasts afflicted with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), his imminent object, to use the Lacanian terminology, speaks to the fear of rebuttal from its own *Grand Autre*: the northern aesthetic into which it writes. The imagery is in conversation with other local cows, such as the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and the cow & Kalashnikov paintings of Dermot Seymour (1956–).\(^5\) As with Paulin’s ‘boke’, the lexical textures of ‘ingleberried’ communicates, whether or not we have it or know it.

‘The Ulster Way’ has no qualms about informing on its author’s pop cultural context. Again, with switched grammatical polarity, the second stanza ends on a psychedelic note, with

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Seamus Heaney, *Door into the Dark* (Faber, 1969), p.
As we saw in Chapter I, one of the ties that binds northern poetry beyond place is a set of notional totems around which lyrical voices congregate in antiphony. Lone dialect roots serve a similar function. ‘Slabber(-)’ is the most prominent of these. As we saw above, Carson uses it in his version of Dante’s *Inferno*. In *The Rough Field* (1972), John Montague describes the rain *getting in* through the ‘slabbery gaps of [a Tyrone] winter’.² Heaney uses ‘slabber’ in ‘Waterfall’ (1966) and ‘Gifts of Rain’ (1972) for images of unrelenting water conveying the inexorable force of nature. Heaney uses ‘slabber’ again in his humorous translation of the anonymous Middle English list poem ‘The Names of the Hare’ (1981) where, amongst ‘the rascal’ and the ‘scoundrel’, the charming, roguish hare is named ‘the slabber’, the provocateur.³ Paulin urbanises ‘slabber’ in ‘Pings on the Great Globe’ (1980) where it leans towards the scatological with the groaning drains’ ‘whoop and gritty slabber’.⁴ Carson’s use of ‘slabber’ in his version of the *Inferno* wasn’t the first time he used it to heighten canine imagery. His version of a Ştefan Augustin Doinaş poem, ‘Words’ (1996), forms a meta-linguistic meditation on the second-handedness of words where its opening sentence reads ‘Yes – someone lived here once’.⁵

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¹ *Somebody, Somewhere*, p. 9.
rough breath that slabbered’ is used in a conceit on the reverberations of language.\textsuperscript{1}

Amongst the Tom Paulin Papers at the Rose Library, there’s an inventory of Hiberno-English dialect words, one of which is ‘slabber’.\textsuperscript{2} In his notes for an essay on Heaney’s work, Paulin underlines ‘slobber’ on an annotated photocopy of ‘Death of a Naturalist’ (1966), and in the margin, corrects its orthography to ‘slabber’.\textsuperscript{3}

This lexical totem takes on a nodal function in Someboday Somewhere. After the ‘runnel’s slabber’, Gillis uses it four more times. In his translation of an Arno Holz poem, ‘Deep in the Coral Forest’, continuing Heaney’s usage (albeit set in a tropical otherworld), sea snails go ‘gruntslabbering’ over ‘bighilly waters’.\textsuperscript{4} In ‘Big Blue Sky and Silent River’, it’s used for ‘binged’ in reference to alcohol abuse, where the speaker reminds the lyrical subject how they once ‘slabbered on […] gritty Amaretto’.\textsuperscript{5}

‘Last Friday Night’, a skaz poem with dialect – indebted to the ‘urban Scots’ of Tom Leonard and the prose of James Kelman (1946–) and Irvine Welsh (1958–) – also has a ‘slabber’.\textsuperscript{6} ‘Last Friday Night’ is the only poem in Gillis’s oeuvre written wholly and explicitly in dialect, that is, implements a phonemic orthography across all stanzas; it’s likely the only true (ortho-phonological) canonical dialect poem in Belfast urban English since Richard Rowley. The skaz speaker, a young lower-class

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\textsuperscript{1} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{2} “‘A New Look at the Language Question,” research materials and notes’, Tom Paulin Papers, Rose Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA: MMS 880, Box 31, Folder 5.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., “Seamus Heaney I”, Box 39, Folder 5.
\textsuperscript{4} Somebody, Somewhere, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{6} Skaz is a ‘first-person’ mode where ‘narrative is to be understood as being “spoken” rather than written’, ‘non-literary or indecorous’: Chris Baldick, The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 309.
male who recounts a ‘lads’ night out’ in Belfast, uses historically defined local
dialect words as well as Anglospheric colloquialisms:

Anyway, wee Markie must’ve taken
a few a tha aul disco biscuits like,
loved up da fuck, goin like a mad yin
when some dicklicker came over like, for a fight.
Slabberin! So the fuckin lads go ‘right!’

Gillis uses ‘slabber(-)’, as Montague and Heaney do, in evocations of water in
nature; he uses it as Carson and Paulin do, in evocations of insanitariness. ‘Last
Friday Night’ defamiliarizes ‘slabber(-)’, imbedding it less conspicuously via an
emulation of Belfast English. The exclamatory fragment in the poem – ‘Slabberin!’
(‘provok[ing] verbally’) – encompasses Gillis’s own contribution to the imaginative
estate’s lexical totem.2

In the ‘The Illusion of Skaz’ (1918), the earliest essay on the mode,
Eikhenbaum writes polemically of the ‘battle between bookishness and the living
word’ – where skaz serves to liberate ‘verbal art’ from the standardising forces of ‘a
culture geared toward the written and printed word’.3 ‘The real artist carries with
[them] the primitive but organic forces of living oral narration’, he writes, ‘the living
word is characteristic of our insane, but […] creative era’.4 This liberation from text
destandardisation) for obvious practical (civic) reasons would never likely be
realised, but in Gillis and any work diverging from standard orthographies and
grammars, we see the signs of struggle – a rupture to what Rancière calls le partage

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1 Somebody, Somewhere, p. 27.
2 Macafee, Ulster Dictionary, p. 309.
4 Ibid., p. 235.
*du sensible*: the apportioning of ‘what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetico-political regime*.¹

THE LEONARDIAN HEANEYESQUE

The radical-aesthetic significance of literature implementing a phonemic orthography is its capacity to harass standardisation, to deride its inconsistencies and flaws on its own terms, its tenets of utility and practicality. Leonard’s ‘translation’ of William Carlos Williams’ canonical poem ‘This Is Just To Say’ is exemplary in this regard. Leonard implements humorous substitutions – or Glasgowisations – (Carlsberg Special Brew instead of ‘plums’, ‘the pahrti’ instead of ‘breakfast’) as opposed to simply grafting a new orthographic atop of Williams’:

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ahv drank
thi speshl兹
that wurrin
thi frij

n thit
yiwurr probbli
hodn back
furthi pahrti

awright
they wur great
thaht stroang
thaht cawld²
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Here the poet forbids his own (spoken) words’ codification or standardised spelling. On line three, ‘that’ remains the same, but Williams’ ‘which’ on line five becomes

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‘thit’ and his ‘so’ on the last lines becomes ‘thaht’ (presumably because ‘which’ and ‘so’ are deemed highfalutin by the speaker); because his orthography accounts for variation in stress and tempo, ‘that’, ‘thit’ and ‘thaht’ are able to exist in the same text.1 Gillis’s poetry shows signs of a similar phenomenon:

So there wi were like, on the fuckin dance
Floor an the skank was fuckin stormin like
[...]
An thighs, skirts wi fuckin arses man, tight,
that ye’d eat yer fuckin heart out fer.
[...]
Shame ye wernie there, ya nut.2

What would normatively be ‘we’ on line one here is written as ‘wi’ – pronounced /wə/ (with the same vowel sound as in ‘the’: schwa). Schwa is usually represented in standard English with the letter ‘e’ (e.g., ‘the’) or less formally with ‘-uh’ (as in ‘huh?’). Presumably, Gillis uses the letter ‘i’ because the /ɪ/ vowel (the vowel in ‘sit’ (/sɪt/), which is close to schwa, is normally represented in English with the letter ‘i’. In the case of ‘ye’d’ (near homophone of ‘yid’) ‘e’ must denote a schwa, given the ‘ye’ (/jə/) on the final line. As in Leonard’s poem, the difference in spelling between ‘ye’ (/jə/) and ‘ya’ (/jɑ/) on the final line of the above excerpt denotes tempo. In these instances, it’s clear that poems implementing a phonemic orthography can scrutinise standard forms, (re)discovering inconsistencies and inefficacies in their textual conventions. Intuitively we already know these inefficacies – though as with any form of dominant ideology, we act as if we don’t. ‘[O]bligation’ is an ‘economical mode of domination’.3 ‘Last Friday Night’ evokes the dilemmas –

1 Leonard, Intimate Voices, p. 37.
2 Somebody, Somewhere, p. 27.
3 Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, p. 127.
standard versus nonstandard, formal versus informal, colloquial or dialectical? – surrounding lects vying for prestige. The speaker refers to a woman’s breasts as ‘ditties’ (‘a woman’s breast[s]’) and refers to a man he has fought as a ‘tit’.\(^1\) Whilst stressing the linguo-patriarchal here, instances like these address how gender and class concerns are pitted against each other in a socio-etymological arena, where the lower-classed form of a word is normatively obscene. Leonard’s influence on Gillis isn’t to be understated. We could go as far as to say that ‘Last Friday Night’ is the Belfast sequel to Leonard’s Glaswegian ‘Yon Night’ (1975) where the speaker laments the ‘wee burdnma wurk’ (his female workmate) who ‘wuzny intristid’.\(^2\)

In ‘Laganside’ from *Hawks and Doves* (2007), the contemplative speaker walks along the riverbank playing the anti-Adam, emancipating sign from signifier. Having ‘never learned the [standard] name of anything’ he gives the flora random names ‘that [he’d] heard / to whatever [he] likes’.\(^3\) Of course, the declaration is an artistic one: language (the textures of the words on the page) must be given primacy over that to which they refer. Meditations such as this semiotical instance are central to Gillis’s project, where code-switching is regarded as a wholly commonplace (‘organic’) aspect of subjecthood. There are many spontaneous moments in his oeuvre where dialect words are interpolated – ‘snatters’, ‘banjaxed’ ‘ganch’ ‘cock-a-breeky’– to defamiliarising effect, but never merely, as Gamble puts it, to ‘link individual with locality’.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) *Somebody, Somewhere*, p. 27; *OED*.


\(^3\) Gillis, *Hawks*, p. 73.

\(^4\) Alan Gillis, *Here Comes the Night* (Oldcastle: Gallery, 2010), p. 17; *Somebody, Somewhere*, p. 34; *Here Comes*, p. 29; *Hawks*, p. 12; Miriam Gamble, ‘‘The gentle art of re-perceiving’: Post-ceasefire Identity in the Poetry of Alan Gillis’, *Irish Studies Review* 17.3 (2009), p 363.
And these words are never offered as objects of beauty, as mere fandangles working towards an aura. They always carry an air of perversion. In some instances, whole lines of dialect break in. In ‘Laganside’, the speaker lists what they imagine beneath the ‘bokey fudged mulch’:

English cocks and Irish Jocks, mutilated livestock, a timer’s tick-tock confused with the cistern’s drip-drop, keeping you up to panic at a midnight knock-knock, which is just a drunk neighbour who thought his missus must ive changed the front-dure lock.

The final line of this excerpt evinces the complexity of Gillis’s use of dialect: again there’s a connotation of belligerence, this time in the voice of a northerner, though not a native Belfaster (who’d pronounce door as /dɔː(ə)r/, /dɔər/ or /dɔəɹ/), but an accent retaining the Ulster-Scots diphthong /uə/ in realisations of ‘door’, that is, an intra-linguistic Other.²

Aside from ‘Last Friday Night’, three other poems stand out as departures from the standard northern lyric mode towards skaz. These are ‘Home and Away’ from Hawks and Doves, and ‘The Estate’ and ‘Scapegoat’ from Scapegoat (2016). Gillis’s poems usually link, often via pop culture references. One of the more humorous examples is seen in Hawks and Doves between ‘Carnival’ and ‘Home and Away’. As the title suggests, ‘Carnival’ toys with the Bakhtinian Carnivalesque – specifically the idea of misalliance, where antitheses temporarily (re)unite: ‘the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid’.³ ‘Carnival’ describes an Orangeman, and the accoutrements of an Orange march where ‘plain-

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1 Hawks, p. 74.
2 Milroy, Regional Accents, p. 108.
clothed police’ mingle with the ‘unwashed brethren’.\(^1\) The Orangeman is allotted his share of social standing for a limited time, after which he returns to a quotidian (daytime-TV) routine:

[...] blue bus home, content with your labours, to watch *Countdown* and your favourite, *Neighbours*.\(^2\)

Here ‘dialect’ is broadened beyond place or a group – Gillis speaks from and to a local discourse. The poem after ‘Carnival’ is called ‘Neighbours’ which, followed by ‘Home and Away’, puns on the popular Australian soap operas. The latter of these exhibits another way in which Gillis links otherwise discrete poems. The *skaz* mode implemented in ‘Home and Away’ is similar to ‘Last Friday Night’; the poem relies on colloquialisms, however a phonemic orthography isn’t prevalent. ‘Home and Away’ is suffused with the filler word ‘fuckin’ – the speaker’s overuse of which purposefully impedes our reading. As with ‘Last Friday Night’, there’s an anecdote being told, though here it’s shrouded in discursive ambiguity. Billy has returned home from prison and is attending the wake of Tony, a British soldier (or Loyalist paramilitary?), whose body is ‘wrapped up in a fuckin new | Union Jack’.\(^3\) Billy tells ‘wee Markie’, Tony’s son, that ‘he’d be fuckin proud if *his* Da had died’.\(^4\) Wee Markie is also a character in ‘Last Friday Night’, and it’s possible that he and two other characters from that poem (Victor and Johnny) are also part of the cast of paramilitaries in the second poem of *Somebody, Somewhere*, ‘12th October, 1994’.

A similar technique of fragmented world-building is employed in other poems from Gillis’s oeuvre depicting paramilitarism. In these instances, the poems’

\(^1\) *Hawks*, p. 38.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) *Hawks*, p. 40.
\(^4\) Ibid.
narratives seep into one another, lending verisimilitude. ‘Before What Will Came After’ from *Scapegoat* forms a prequel of the title poem. Set in 1984, the speaker recounts being attacked by an older boy named McCandless after he ‘flipped him the bird’.¹ By the time we reach the title poem, McCandless is caught up in paramilitarism and has become the eponymous ‘scapegoat’:

After a botched job
On Cliftonville Road,
[...]
McCandless, his first job as driver [...]
Is to hide on Scrabo Hill [...]

Gamble suggests that in his dialect poems, Gillis takes up the ‘baton’ offered by Paulin’s proclamation that there ought to be a ‘national literature [founded on Belfast’s] scuttling vernacular’.³ Here Gillis could be seen to be ‘giving back to his native city [...] its spiky dialect [...] bolstering its quiddity against the threat of [homogenising, standardising, forces of neoliberal globalisation]’.⁴ Gamble points out that the ‘voices to which Gillis gives airtime’ in these dialect poems ‘are the ghettoized poor [...] contemporary Belfast’s marginalia, both social and poetic, rather than the centrally printed text’.⁵ In the title poem of *Scapegoat* (2016), it would seem that Gillis takes up the ‘baton’ offered not by Paulin but by Gamble, as here the voiceless are brought out from the margin, at least in lyrical terms.

² Ibid., p. 63.
⁵ Ibid.
Collated from the four collections, these paramilitary poems form a series which always incorporates dialect and, as we’d expect, deals with violence. As with pop culture, Gillis has no qualms about including Loyalists. Everything for him, as Derek Mahon once said of his socio-poetic universe, is ‘part of the whole’.¹

‘Looking Forward to Leave’ from Here Comes the Night (2010) demonstrates how Gillis textualises this cultural holism. In the first two stanzas, a female British soldier in Basra thinks back to the night she met her lover at a Loyalist flute-band event. On the sixth line, amidst a standard orthography, the poem breaks into dialect:

There were sliced-beef brown-bread triangles, boys on one side, girls on the other side, […] beakers full of dull orange that dirty Chris gargled before nudging: which one ye goanna ride?²

The first two stanzas (back in Ulster) are then juxtaposed with stanzas three and four (at the warfront):

But on Basra’s streets there are no clear sides, Just dust and heat-hazed aftershocks […] […] I’m mostly inside The Warrior, or in barracks with hotheads blasting hardcore beats that would drill your head: hole in your head, in your mutherfucking head.³

The italics in the above excepts serve a coupling function where dialect is paired with lyrics from ‘Hole in The Head’ (1991) by Californian rap outfit, Cypress Hill.⁴

Yet again, as we saw in Chapter III, dialect is paired with disruption and violence. Gillis’s textualisation of the nonstandard utterance ‘which one ye goanna ride?’

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² Here Comes, p. 31.
³ Ibid.
unearths syntactical parallels between Belfast English and African American English. Both dialects share a ‘heavily stigmatized’ feature called ‘copula deletion’ where the verb ‘to be’ isn’t realised on the ‘surface’ (isn’t spoken): ‘which one [are] ye goanna ride?’; or to use a fitting and famous example by Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000), ‘We [are] real cool’.1 ‘Looking Forward to Leave’ doesn’t endeavour to simply link a masculine working-class Belfast with African American English – though social correspondences are apparent – but rather evinces a formal correlation between the value of ‘low’ culture and ‘low’ forms of language. Gillis remains unabashed by his poetic’s formal debts no matter whence they come, no matter what their normative ‘value’.

Paul Simpson observes the ‘implicit intertextuality’ between Heaney’s ‘Anahorish 1944’ from District and Circle (2006) and Barleycorn’s ‘rebel’ classic, ‘The Men Behind The Wire’ (1971). Here, the US Army stationed in Co Derry in 1944 is paralleled with the British Army stationed there in the 1970s. Barleycorn’s ‘Armoured cars and tanks and guns’ becomes ‘Armoured cars and tanks and open jeeps’ in what Simpson calls a ‘grimly prophetic allusion’.2 Simpon misses the way in which Gillis uses the same kind of intertextual conceit on the fifth line of ‘In a Glass Darkly’ from Here Comes the Night:

Hatchets, spanners, Stanley knives, claw hammers3

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3 Here Comes, p 48.
is a reworking of the phrase ‘hatchets and hammers, Stanley knives and spanners’ from a well-known fan song of Belfast’s unreservedly Loyalist football club, Linfield.\(^1\) Of course, the title of ‘In a Glass Darkly’ is taken from that of Sheridan Le Fanu’s *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) in turn taken from 1 Corinthians 13:12 of the King James Bible. Gillis’s poem adds a third, Freudian, aspect to the Gothic and Biblical, as the speaker becomes the moral guardian (superego) of the poem’s subject (ego):

\[
\text{I’m who people think you are, but you’ll never be me, so you’ll never ...}^2
\]

An anti-dialectic ensues here between ethnicity and self via dialect. The phrase tag (italicised above) is a commonly ridiculed feature of Hiberno-English commonly thought to be derived from the Irish. Versions of it – ‘so you are’, ‘so I am’ – occur four times in the poem. It’s worth noting, for reasons intertextual, that in 2007 Simpson wrote a chapter in defence of this feature, which he calls the ‘Hiberno-English Emphatic Tag’.\(^3\) ‘In a Glass Darkly’ looks back to Gillis’s *dinnseanchas* poem, ‘Killynether’ from *Somebody, Somewhere*, which ends with (and being the final poem, ends the collection with) the speaker ‘negotiat[ing] with the stranger in the mirror’.\(^4\) The recurrence of the emphatic tag in ‘In a Glass Darkly’ feels incongruous to the overall register, foregrounding its everyday function as a nonstandard semantic mirror, reiterating and interrogating the original utterance. The superego speaker verbally abuses the ego subject (perhaps Gillis himself?), but also

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2 *Here Comes*, p 48.
asks to be loved; it’s impossible to separate this fraught relationship from the echoes of the Linfield song of the first stanza (the inherited language of violent Unionism), given that (according to Freud) the superego is conceptualised as the ‘vehicle of tradition’ and the means by which ‘judgements of value […] pass] from generation to generation’. Gillis is repurposing language consciously here, dialogising and recontextualising inherited words, utterances and ideas without the need for anaesthetic. Northern culture – with all its petty squabbles of shibboleths – is at once interrogated and aestheticized as Gillis parleys with Heaney through form.

Simpson writes of an ‘antilanguage’ in ‘Last Friday Night’ where ‘concepts particularly relevant to an urban subculture […] are re-lexicalized’, citing slang such as ‘skank’, ‘disco biscuits’ etcetera. In *Stylistics* (2004), he defines ‘antilanguages’ as ‘semi-secretive languages born out of […] ‘antisocieties’ actively hostile ‘to the dominant social order’. We might take issue with how these dialect words are framed in terms of belonging to a distinctive ‘antisociety’ however, as its more likely they formed part of a wider 1990s working-class vocabulary. Simpson’s assumption that the words are part of a ‘criminal underworld’ cant or argot are given some credence by the fact that, as we’ve seen, the speaker is involved within, or has connections to, Loyalist paramilitarism; but the uses of these words aren’t coined by, don’t belong solely to, the characters of the poem. These lexemes aren’t entering the language via a process of ‘relexicalization’, they are already constituents of a living language; and via their incorporation into literature, they approach the academy, and

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thus the perimeters of standardisation. They are pre-lexicalised upon being commonly used. As Gamble puts it, Gillis lends his voice to the ‘the ghettoized poor’, but this is more complicated than it appears. Gillis doesn’t paint paramilitaries as ‘antisocieties’ in need of a political voice or as vanguards of the subaltern. As a history of state collusion and a (profitable) residual criminality attest, although most Loyalist paramilitaries are ghettoized, some Loyalist paramilitaries are more ghettoized than others; and the same can be said of Irish Republican counterparts. Gillis does foreground power structures at the decisive horizon of class, but his censure pushes beyond it, beyond Belfast, laterally downwards, towards the specific predicament. He includes paramilitaries because to exclude them would be to compose an inaccurate conception of a society apprehended in holistic terms as an imperfect writhing body of interdependent (often objectionable) organs.

Gillis’s attitude towards tradition and the origins of his poetic, due to its oscillation between earnest deference and sardonic playfulness, may seem odd, even ‘unaesthetic’. One line in his debut poem ‘The Ulster Way’ gives us a sense of how he perceives the appropriation of language as part of a holistic, inherently non-hierarchical, human culture. The second and third lines of the final stanza read:

- don’t walk away, in silence, under the stars’
- ice-fires of violence, to the water’s darkened strand.

It’s difficult to disassociate ‘don’t walk away, in silence’ from Joy Division’s 1980 single ‘Atmosphere’, although for some critics this may be painful. Even this poem’s seven-line stanzaic form (a nod to Chaucer’s rhyme royal) is in on the joke.

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1 Gamble, ““A Potted Peace/Lily”t”, p. 675.
2 Somebody, Somewhere, p. 9.
3 Joy Division, Substance (Manchester: Factory, 1988).
As opposed to being iconoclastic, Gillis’s poetic strives to contribute, to perform a synthesis between canonical imperatives and inheritances of dialect and pop. This is achieved not through bridging a gap between ‘High’ and ‘low’, but by making light of, and showing the fallacy behind, this ideological dichotomy. Anything can be aesthetic. This is often frankly put: the poem ‘Bob the Builder is a Dickhead’ challenges and is ‘High’ art.¹ Alongside pop references and socio-political narratives, Gillis’s application of dialect exhibits a confrontation of standards which, in Bakhtinian terms, comprises a curt reiteration of the ‘realities of heteroglossia’ where the already present processes of ‘centralization’ are brought to the surface and rendered absurd.² This informs a kind of negative symbolic violence directed at aesthetic and socio-aesthetic proclivities. Writing in the dominant language, Gillis resists the sort of codification proposed by Paulin. Challenging and tragically failing to surpass his mentor’s maxim – ‘[p]oetry and politics […] should be separated’ – his poems revitalise the imaginative estate by setting free like BSE-infected cattle a holistic conception of art in society in order to put standards to the test.³

¹ Hawks, p. 33.
² Bakhtin, Dostoevsky’s Poetics, p. 270.
Conclusion

PEEPING OVER THE IVIED WALL

The whole of language is a continuous process of metaphor, and the history of semantics is an aspect of the history of culture; language is at the same time a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and civilisations.

—Antonio Gramsci

Across four chapters, this study (a) illuminates the work of poets who’ve received less than their share of academic attention and (b) explores the uneasy relationship between nonstandard dialect and the northern Irish lyric. The lexicical, social and aesthetic standards described in the introduction are put under scrutiny through the chapters – and where poets are ignored, misread or ideologized, double standards emerge. Quite serendipitously, a Co Down or Belfast ‘counter-canon’ emerges, but we’d do such a pedigree of ‘minor’ poets and practices a disservice to disassociate them from already critically prominent writers of the imaginative estate.¹ As ‘[d]iscursive prose is always committed in some sense or other’, I’d agree with Tom Paulin that criticism ‘must start from a concept of civil duty’, but would disagree with his stipulation that the critic must find a ‘definite cultural affiliation’.² This critical study belongs to a larger project; owing to the strictures of time (three years), it has concentrated on two male Belfast poets and the history of Northern Hiberno-English in northern poetry, but there are other ‘minor’ mediums, and a there’s a

multitude of ‘quieter’ voices. To quote Alan Gillis, there are ‘other paths to follow’.¹ A longer project in the vein of this study could look at the contexts and subtexts of northern queer poetry, northern Gaelic language poetry or the canonical consequences of contemporary ascendant female poets.²

POETRY & POLITICS MUST BE...

After 1969 and the re-emergence of violent Nationalism, Joseph Campbell’s work was read biographically as one which merges ‘literature’ with ‘radicalism’. Due to his involvement in the Rising and the Civil War, alongside his inclusion in the mainstream transatlantic lyrical milieu, Campbell’s legacy embodies a northern Irish aesthetic conduit between the cultural nationalism of Yeats and the poetic projects of the signatories of the Proclamation. As such, it’s understandable that during the conflict and in this post-‘Troubles’ era, insecurities around this particular ghost proved uncomfortable for some northern sensibilities. Nevertheless, his omission from critical texts and anthologies has impacted the history of the development of Modernism in English, and hindered a fuller understanding of some of the central leitmotifs of northern poetry.

Martin Mooney’s poetry is less ostensibly controversial than Campbell’s, but its counter-aesthetic poses a challenge to northern poets who wish to address with

² For instance: rarely do studies of Padraig Fiacc (1924–2018) bring to bear his sexuality; there has been a dearth of work on the Belfast Gaelic lyric by the likes of Pól Ó Muirí (1965–); the work of Medbh McGuckian (1950–), Leontia Flynn (1974–), Sinéad Morrissey (1972–) and Miriam Gamble (1980–) will soon dominate discussions of northern poetry, which may in turn force a reconsideration of northern Revivalists such as Alice Milligan (1865–1953), Moira O’Neill (1864–1955) and Ethna Carberry (1864–1902).
candour the north’s contested history and the social structures which underlie aesthetic judgements and patronage. A poem briefly mentioned in Chapter II for instance, ‘from The Epic of Gilgamesh: Enkidu’s Dream’ (2003), exemplifies Mooney’s acerbic commentary on cultural hegemony. The translation retells how Enkidu the wild-man is sentenced to death by the gods for his part in the killing of the divine bull. In the epic, the wild-man dies soon after this dream and Gilgamesh, mourning his friend, embarks on a quest for the secret to immortality. Mooney rarely dates his poems, thus the date on this one is rather conspicuous. Set in ancient Iraq and dated ‘March 2003’, the conceit is made easy for readers. The ‘puritan eagle’ of the first stanza is the United States (the bald eagle), the ‘lackeys’ are the Allies (the United Kingdom, Australia and Poland) and the panicky Enkidu is the Ba’athist Republic of Iraq embodied in Saddam Hussein. The ‘bookkeeper’ of the ‘Queen of the Dead’ (who asked Enkidu his name and ‘scratched it into clay’ like cuneiform) is US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice (2001–2005), whose article in the New York Times, ‘Why We Know Iraq Is Lying’, leant legitimacy to the

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2 Inscribed at some point in the 2nd millennium BC, the epic recounts the tale of the cruel and despotic god-king Gilgamesh. Less than content about how Gilgamesh is governing the city state of Uruk (modern-day Iraq), the god Anu creates Enkidu, a wild-man – a bucolic other to the proto-urban Gilgamesh – who comes down from the wilderness too challenge the king. The pair fight, Gilgamesh wins, and afterwards they become friends and embark on an odyssey. See Andrew George (trans.), The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian (London New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

3 Blue Lamp Disco, p. 62.

4 Mooney’s choice of Mesopotamian mythology, looking beyond the canonical fondness for Hellenic myth, is itself informed by his counter-aesthetic. Damian Smyth’s Mesopotamia (Matlock: Templar, 2014) expands such a conceit.
claims that Hussein’s regime held weapons of mass destruction.\textsuperscript{1} As noted in Chapter II, the poem which faces ‘Enkidu’s Dream’, the more modestly titled ‘The Last Poem’, cements the idea that the ineluctable backbone of Mooney’s poetic is one which disregards the charge of Ulster parochialism and reproaches the prerogatives of the metropolis and its canons. Between the two last poems in \textit{Blue Lamp Disco} – the \textit{Gilgamesh} translation and the \textit{last poem ever written (written in Belfast)} – Mooney creates an eagle of his own, a doubled-headed one. The left-hand page looks east to current-day Mesopotamia, whilst the right-hand page looks to Belfast; the left takes its ‘universal’ subject matter from the Iraq War, reminding us of the contemporary realities of hegemony; the right addresses the northern Irish socio-cultural condition and the poet’s own canonical anxieties.

Gillis’s \textit{Somebody, Somewhere} (2004) shares affinities with \textit{Blue Lamp Disco} (2003) in how it resituates the ‘local’. Chapter I above briefly describes the notion of snow as a sub-notional totem around which northern poetic voices converse in antiphony. In Gillis’s ‘12th of October 1994’, the teenage speaker plays a US military themed videogame in an amusement arcade owned by fictional Loyalist paramilitary leader Frankie Fraser. Throughout the poem, as a host of American R&B, pop and rock classics play on the jukebox, various local characters with Hollywood mafioso-sounding nicknames act out dialogues. The poem’s title is the date of the Loyalist Ceasefire; Fraser affirms his dominance, turning to Victor ‘Steel Plate’ Hogg to tell him emphatically that ‘nobody’s going to fucking disband’.\textsuperscript{2} As well as apprehending – via shared Anglospheric colloquialisms – the dialectical


continuum of the English language as porous and excretory, the poem makes a
statement about American cultural hegemony. The lyric form lends itself to make
this point via various other mediums. Pop music (via the jukebox) and new media
(via the videogame) are immediately apparent, whereas acknowledgement of an
American inheritance in lyrical terms is obscured. Anyone familiar with Ciaran
Carson’s poetry would immediately associate the sprawling, long-line form of ‘12th
of October 1994’ with that which dominates his collections from The Irish for No
(1987) though to Opera Et Cetera (1996). As noted in Chapter I, Carson’s use of the
long line was influenced by C. K. Williams, who likely took the form after Walt
Whitman (who, as we mentioned in Chapter I, influenced Joseph Campbell).¹ The
final words of Gillis’s poem are ‘it looks like snow’ because the teenage speaker,
leaving the arcade, supposes that it might snow.² But this is also a reference to the
lineage of ‘12th of October 1994’, which makes Gillis’s poem look like Carson’s
‘12th of October 1994’ interacts with MacNeice’s ‘Snow’ where the medium of the
US Army themed videogame informs a subversion of MacNeice’s phenomenological
meditation on the plurality of matter:

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it
[...] There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.⁴

¹ Ciaran O’Neill, ‘Borrowed Lines? A Reading of Ciaran Carson’s American Influences’, Elmer
² Gillis, Somebody, Somewhere, p. 12.
³ Ibid.
Gillis expands this conceit out to the horizon of the socio-historical, showing us that whilst there’s ‘more than glass between the snow and the huge roses’, there’s also more than a shared interest in games between the paramilitary characters and the teenage speaker; there’s more than a glass screen between the arcade gamer and war; there’s more than a printed page between the 2004 reader and Coalition forces in the Middle East. Indeed, there’s more than intertextuality between Campbell, MacNeice and Gillis.

The most recent incarnation of the snow totem is Gail McConnell’s ‘Now’ from her forthcoming pamphlet *Fothermather*. The author of *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology* (2014), McConnell has a keen ear for the antiphonic. ‘Now’ speaks directly at MacNeice’s ‘Snow’ (1935), disrupting its play on phenomenology:

>`The room was suddenly you  
>and the great bay-window I pressed  
palms to as a child came whippling back  
beyond the spawning factory you started in  
your mother plump with eggs they counted out  
in snow and hush the embryos collateral [...]`

‘Now’ steals MacNeice’s conceit away from its man-in-the-world, lone-male-as-subject circumstance and applies it to the birth of the speaker’s new-born baby. Whereas MacNeice’s subject rejoices in the forms, textures and nuances of his own material reality (becoming ‘drunk’ on ‘things being various’), McConnell’s speaker bears witness to her own child – conceived with the aid of in vitro fertilisation (IVF) to same-sex parents – and becomes rapt, not in her own material reality, but in the child. MacNeice’s speaker’s universe, his experience of ‘pips’ on *his* ‘tongue’,

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1 To be published by Ink Sweat & Tears in autumn 2019.
2 Quoted with McConnell’s kind permission (15.5.19).
'roses’ on *his* ‘eyes’, ‘peel’ in the ‘palms of *his* hands’ are but trifles in comparison to McConnell’s baby *You*.\(^1\) An appreciation of material reality is momentarily relegated as the awestruck parents behold their new-born, ‘petal delicate pink-cheeked and damp between [their] hands’.\(^2\) MacNeice’s (ostensibly benign) solipsism, his *granted* reality, is nullified because love trumps the oneness of the Vedic present. A fresh axiology emerges, where normative ideas around formal and genetic descent are thrown into question. Far from ‘the factory [it] started in’, the ‘[end]lessly collateral’ snow totem founded by Campbell is ‘incorrigibly’ queered.\(^3\) Grandfather’s ulster isn’t merely tried on – it’s altered, taken in, worn seriously.\(^4\) There’s nothing controvertible about ‘Now’ until we consider McConnell’s context. Written into the last jurisdiction in the Archipelago where same-sex marriage remains illegal, its re-versing of MacNeicean lexicon and syntax heralds a new vernacular on the imaginative estate which is ‘more [righteously] spiteful and gay than one supposes’.\(^5\) Another poem forthcoming in *Fothermather*, ‘Untitled / Villanelle’, states the terms of this queer vernacular where it muddles the parental binary:

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\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Quoted with McConnell’s kind permission (15.5.19).
\(^4\) An ‘ulster’ is a ‘long, loose overcoat […] introduced by J. G. M’Gee & Co. of Belfast in 1867’ (*OED*). Although it speaks to the ‘Japanese effect’ via Derek Mahon, Carson and Morrissey, Padraig Regan’s ‘Tracks’ is possibly the first poem to enact a queering of the snow totem: see Sinéad Morrissey and Stephen Connolly (eds.), *The future always makes me so thirsty: New Poets from the North of Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2016), p. 19.
\(^5\) Ibid.
What am I to you? Mother? Father? Neither?
Like cells, names split & double, unified.
I have often longed to mother
mother father fother mather mather father fother mather

ANO’R JOUK AT THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

McConnell’s poetic nourishes northern poetry by bringing to bear a ‘new’ ontology, another life. Without the appropriation of ‘new’ experience transmitted into form, traditions become stagnant. With regards to dialect, the fact is that regional and lower-class English speakers – having the moral prerogative to appropriate technical and academic vocabulary and grammar from metropolitan standards (to appropriate upwards, so to speak), as well as adjacent organic variations – have access to a potentially richer variety of lectical formations than speakers attempting to approximate written standard English. For want of a better term, peripheral speakers are lectically wealthier than metropolitan speakers in having more variations at their disposal. Middle-class and/or urban poets such as Richard Rowley (1877–1947) and Tom Paulin (1949–) had no other recourse but to appropriate some forms of English which were not ‘their own’. One reason for the lack of dialect in Irish writing, Willy Maley supposes, is the legacy of the stage Paddy. Because of the example of Synge and O’Casey, Irish English founders. The language barrier is a class barrier, and a colonial one too. A double bind that ties the tongue, forks and forges it. Across the margins, language is always political, especially when it is poetic.

2 Ibid. p. 30.
As we observed in Chapter III, such controversial emulations of dialect were actually foundational to Irish literature’s now common mode of autosatire. In aesthetic terms, such lecical mimicry from the outside became fodder for inner creativity, a vernacular canon; in political terms, to use Clair Wills’ terminology, authentic images of dialect also became ‘instrument[s] of counter-hegemony’.¹

Where Paulin’s Field Day pamphlet argues that his proposed New Irish English would ‘exist’ alongside Ulster-Scots and Gaelic as a third ‘fully-fledged’ language of the Irish nation, he conflates two different imperatives.² This isn’t a case of apples and oranges but – in an unfortunate co-incidence of colour – apples, oranges and tangerines. Goidelic dialects (Irish, Scottish and Manx Gaelic) and Anglic dialects (standard English, Ulster-Scots) are far apart on the Indo-European dialectal continuum. Most Anglic dialects are for the most part mutually intelligible, especially those close to metropolitan English-speaking communities. A ‘language’, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, is a dialect that is ‘imagined’ as something else, and then written down (codified) in the service of an institution, usually a state. Oftentimes this institutional intervention becomes gratuitously tied to regional and class dynamics. In other cases, institutionalisation is necessary – as in the case of Irish Gaelic, which has been diminished because of a regional dynamic: Ireland’s relationship with the south of England. Colonial coercion devastated Gaelic, but soft power – the magnitude of the English language’s prestige and socioeconomic allure – also had a hand in its diminishment from the seventeenth century onwards.³

Metropolitan Englishes, due to their hegemonic position, form and inform other Anglic dialects. Gaelic must flourish, not only because it’s a national language or because it’s tied to a diminished Irish culture (although these are primary concerns to thousands of people), but because a living language is where and how literature is formed – in this sense, the forms, textures and nuances of a given dialect or national language encompass the site where culture meets Culture. If René Magritte’s *The Son of Man* (1964) was being slowly eaten by silverfish, the cost of salvaging it would be no issue. Describing himself emphatically as a literary historian, Frank Ferguson writes that the ‘controversy surrounding the construction and standardization of a synthetic Scots in the creation of the Ulster-Scots or *Ullans* language is a debate for linguists and sociolinguists’.\(^1\) Given that Ferguson portrays the ‘Ullans’ project ambivalently, if not positively, such a diktat comes across as disingenuous. Because the Ullans project is publicly funded, it remains to be seen how critics could let this question rest, how they could *lie down*.

As well as insisting that Ulster Scots culture isn’t a cultural phenomenon belonging solely to Ulster Presbyterianism and Unionism, Ferguson identifies another axis along which it has been received:

The mention of the epithet *Ulster-Scots* in some quarters is liable to generate a profound aversion, an Ulster form of cultural cringe. The Ulster-Scots language, with its rural heartlands […] and its divergence from standard BBC or RTE [sic.] English, its history of being classified as an uneducated mode of speech, presents a problem to an upwardly mobile populace, both Unionist and Nationalist, who do not want to be

considered as throwbacks to perceived uncouth antecedents or lacking cultural graces.¹

Yet this is by no means the full picture. As Ferguson writes, ‘[a]ctivists’ of the ‘Ulster-Scots language movement’ have been ‘industrious’ in promoting ‘new and familiar writers of the tradition’.² This movement, which describes Ulster-Scots as having ‘100,000 native speakers’, has proven to be expansionist and inseverable from the ideological structures of Ulster Nationalism and Scotocentrism.³ Ironically, because most of these 100,000 speakers (at least those wishing to label what they are speaking) are Unionists, Ulster-Scots is unlikely to take hold as a national or subnational language. In realist terms, the value of any dialect, especially one which aspires to the apotheosis of a national language, is found in the difference of its forms in juxtaposition with its neighbours, in its literary history and in its propensity to produce literature (that is, something lasting written in it). In this sense, the aspiration of Ulster-Scots as a national language suffers as Gaelic sometimes does, from its advocates’ own nationalistic, Websterian ambitions. Yet in how Ulster-Scots can move in and out of other Anglic dialects (metropolitan English and Scots), appropriating their lexicons and grammars, it has an entirely different relationship to English. Yiddish-speaking sociolinguist Max Weinreich once famously quipped that a shprakh iz a dialekt mit an armey un flot (a language is a dialect with an army and a navy).⁴ Ferguson in some senses is in the service of such an advance. As is easily discernible, his anthology conflates the idea of an Ulster-Scots national language and

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¹ Ferguson, Ulster-Scots Writing, p. 2.
² My italics. Ibid., p. 9.
³ Ibid.
the distinctive Ulster Scots culture; as the normative linguistic model would have it, Belfast urban English is a sub-dialect under the glossonym ‘Mid-Ulster English’, as such, in ending his book with Gary Mitchell’s urban Loyalist paramilitary play, *As the Beast Sleeps* (2001), Ferguson is unknowingly complicit in Ullans ‘language’ expansion.¹ It’s difficult to see how and where this play is connected to Scotland (the anthology’s declared purview) beyond its being about Ulster Loyalists. Admittedly, Rathcoole – the area of north Belfast where *As the Beast Sleeps* is set – isn’t far from the rural Co Antrim where Ulster-Scots has been spoken, but this play isn’t written in Ulster-Scots, nor is it a play about Presbyterianism. The blind spot here centres on a simple fact: not all Ulster Protestants or Unionists are of Scottish descent.

Whilst figures such as Ulster-Scots literary and linguistic figures Philip Robinson (1946–) and James Fenton (1931–) are earnest in their scholarship and writing and have produced a body of work which is of immense cultural interest, the Ullans project has engaged in a number of untruths in the service of a standardising imperative. It seeks to both forge a national language (of Northern Ireland) out of Ulster-Scots and paradoxically lend support for Scots as a national language (of Scotland) of which Ullans would be a regional dialect. In his essay ‘Language, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland’ (1999), the late Gaelic language activist Aodán Mac Póilín describes the standardisation of Ulster-Scots as one involved in maximal differentiation, where attempts have been made to make the orthography and lexicon of the dialect as ‘far removed as possible from standard English, and as incomprehensible as possible to English-speakers.’² Perhaps most significantly, it is

¹ Ferguson, *Ulster-Scots Writing*, p. 449.
often rendered itself ‘incomprehensible to [its own purported] native speaker[s]’.  \(^1\) Mac Póilín writes that in ‘vocabulary, this [maximal differentiation] has involved the use of a disproportionate quota of obsolete words and of neologisms’.  \(^2\) Ulster-Scots, then, exists both as an Anglic co-lect of English (as it exists in parts of northern and eastern Ulster) and as a government-funded synthetic written language (Ullans) with a contrived, obscurantist lexicon.

As detailed in Chapter III, debates around dialect in poetry usually fall along the fault-line of ‘authenticity’ versus ‘artistic freedom’. To create a poem from a synthetic form of Ulster-Scots, or indeed any dialect (one which appropriates elements from many sources, even interpolating wholly contrived elements) can be viewed as a form of literary Modernism, the value of which is found in innovation and the rupturing of language; whereas the ‘authentic’, idiomatic, use of dialect is more formally conservative – in that it refers to, and creates images of, society – and finds its value anthropologically in expressions of a particular cultural moment. In being a form of literary realism, the idiomatic use of dialect is tied to a specific region, class or other demographic group. The irony of this is that quite often – as is the case with the likes of Hugh MacDiarmid’s (1892–1978) synthetic Scots or the contemporary Ulster-Scots poets – synthetic dialect in poetry is accused of profiting from a set of cultural characteristics, even where it attempts (via its Modernist collages and pastiches) to speak for the cultural group these characteristics belong

\(^1\) Ibid., para. 16.
\(^2\) Ibid., para. 14.

Museum, 1999])
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/agreement/culture/support/cul2_c011.shtml>
to.\(^1\) Given the nature of language, the restrictions of the artistic medium, and indeed the unfixed realities of human culture, it's unlikely that anyone will ever encounter a socially ‘authentic’ piece of art. As we saw in Chapter III, ‘unauthentic’ emulations from outside have had major consequences for poetry said to be socially ‘accurate’ or ‘organic’, where it has contributed to an aesthetic morphology.

**A SHORT ENVOI ON ‘AESTHETICS’**

Jacques Rancière writes that art doesn’t become critical or political by “moving beyond itself”, or “departing from itself”, and intervening in the “real world”. There is no “real world” that functions as the outside of art. Instead, there is a multiplicity of folds in the sensory fabric of the common, folds in which outside and inside take on a multiplicity of shifting forms, in which the topography of what is “in” and what is “out” are continually criss-crossed and displaced by the aesthetics of politics and the politics of aesthetics. There is no “real world”. Instead, there are definite configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions and the field of our interventions. The real always is a matter of construction, a matter of “fiction” […] What characterizes the mainstream fiction of the police order [the hegemonic culture, the dominant narrative, mainstream consensus] is that it passes itself off as the real, that it feigns to draw a clear-cut line between what belongs to the self-evidence of the real and what belongs to

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\(^1\) For an in-depth analysis of these ideas see Matthew Hart, *Nations of Nothing but Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
the field of appearances, representations, opinions and utopias.

Consensus means precisely that the sensory is given as univocal. Political and artistic fictions introduce dissensus by hollowing out that “real” and multiplying it in a polemical way. The practice of fiction undoes, and then re-articulates, connections between signs and images, images and times, and signs and spaces, framing a given sense of reality, [it reframes] a given “commonsense”. [Affective critical art and political action are practices] that [invent] new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said and what can be done.¹

This assertion is germane to how this thesis addresses the employment and reception of local dialect in the northern Irish lyrical milieu. As outlined in Chapter IV, Gillis’s poetry is keenly aware of such a conception of art and action. In Chapter II, we saw how Martin Mooney’s ‘minor’ poetic relies on an artful diffidence towards aesthetic codes. Such axiological schemata, as we saw in our study on Joseph Campbell in Chapter I, can be (and often are) employed arbitrarily in critical contexts. Heather Clark’s assertion about MacNeice could well be applied to Campbell, or any poet: ‘it is not always the dead writer who maintains a hold over the living: in fact, it is quite often the other way around.’² And we can add to this, as with Mooney, they don’t even have to be dead.

The reception of MacNeice provides a canonical example for Rancière’s assertions about art and society. ‘Snow’ (1935), as we saw above, invites us to appreciate form, texture and nuance (aspects of a virtually common material reality


that we can frame as ‘aesthetic’), but the depressing fact remains that it takes a certain social context – the privilege of social stability – in order for a person to truly embrace ‘the fire flam[ing] with a bubbling sound for world’; a depressing fact which should always be behind any meaningful ‘intervention’, as Rancière puts it.¹

On one hand, ‘Snow’ is a poem about an up-and-coming twenty-eight-year-old lecturer’s frisson at being alive in his world; on the other, it’s a poem by a man surrounded by well-heeled leftists, confounded by what he perceives as simplistic idealism and hypocrisy. ‘The word Proletarian hung in festoons from the ceiling. And yet I felt that they were living in the study’, MacNeice later wrote of ‘Leftist’ intellectuals he’d encountered in the 1930s; ‘[t]he armchair reformist sits between two dangers – wishful thinking and self-indulgent gloom’.² James Matthew Wilson, citing Edna Longley and Heather Clark, notes the diverse ways that the politics in MacNeice’s writing has been interpreted by critics.³ ‘If the student started with ‘Snow’ and similar poems’, Wilson writes, they

might wonder how MacNeice could be considered anything but an heir to the Aesthetics movement; but if Autumn Journal [1939] was the starting point, the student would doubt whether if there was any poet of the period who more vividly engaged the ethical significance of fascism and Marxism, of Roman, Russian, and Spanish politics.⁴

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¹ Rancière, Dissensus, p. 148.
⁴ Ibid.
Edna Longley notes how MacNeice had ‘the unique double ideological pressure on his poetry from Irish Nationalism and English Marxism.’\(^1\) ‘MacNeice never became a communist’, writes Richard Danson Brown, ‘yet never felt the need to revise his anti-capitalist views’.\(^2\) Written a few months before ‘Snow’, ‘To a Communist’ (1933) takes the image of snow, in its ostensible homogeneity and impermanence, as a metaphor for English Marxist ideology:

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Your thoughts make shape like snow […]
Snow’s unity engrosses […]
But before you proclaim the millennium, my dear,
Consult the barometer –
This poise is perfect but maintained
For one day only.\(^3\)
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Danson Brown contends that ‘To a Communist’ speaks directly to the ‘communististic’ poetry of Stephen Spender (1909–1995).\(^4\) This is a convincing reading, backed up by MacNeice’s observation in *Modern Poetry* (1938) on his friend Spender’s use of ‘the word “snow” with its associations of hunger, universality and clarity’.\(^5\) However, where Brown writes that in ‘Snow’ (1935) the notion of ‘snow [itself] has ceased to be a political metaphor’, he underestimates the poem and the incorrigibility of language.\(^6\) Terence Brown writes that perhaps the poem is ‘simply [about] snow and

\(^3\) MacNeice, *Collected Poems*, p. 22.
\(^5\) Ibid.
roses'\footnote{1} But there is, as we observed above, more than phenomenology ‘between the snow and the huge roses’\footnote{2}. Although both are evanescent objects of beauty, snow and roses are differentiated by their respective (chemical) complexities. Roses, that is, all that’s ‘aesthetic’ (qua the socialistic bread and roses) wilt long after the inorganic snow (of contingent ideology) has liquefied. When we consider the influence that this short poem has had on later northern poetry – how it ‘invents new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said and what can be done’ – the speaker/author’s own debatable (and fleeting) politics becomes irrelevant.\footnote{3} If this late on we are to briefly broach a theory of the aesthetic, then ‘Snow’, arguably the most highly regarded poem on northern canons, affords us some invaluable insights on the perimeters of judgement. In Bourdieuan terms, we could reduce ‘Snow’ to a common but fetishized experience of material reality pushed through the lyrical die of estranged and ambiguous language. From such a standpoint, we could put the verity of such an experience as ‘common’ under scrutiny; this lyrical I can be certainly read as dubious, as we saw above with McConnell’s ‘Now’. We also could describe ‘Snow’ as Orwellian, in the sense that it dissents from the stultified Western European left from within.\footnote{4} Or more conservatively, we could apotheosise this poem by suggesting its popularity is due to some ineffable quality beyond our ken – and offer a few observations on its immediate effects and contexts. Regardless of how we

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
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receive or politicise ‘Snow’ however, the didacticism of this poem, we can all agree, is found in its deep appreciation of objects and compound words. Regarding the present thesis, its multivalence encourages us to read more attentively lesser-known voices, whilst its tragic ecology of fleeting things can persuade us to pay attention to other evanescent forms, textures and nuances, and the social universes they open up beyond the imaginative estate, such as those of peripheral forms of language. To use the demotic, what Rancière takes the longcut to say is that in order to be critical, art doesn’t have to turn round and say it. Indeed, as MacNeice observed in 1949, ‘I have been answering questions I was not fully aware of having asked.’

As this critical study has unfolded, critical conventions around standards – ‘standard language’ and ‘canonical standards’ – within the northern Irish poetry milieu have been apprehended and interrogated. Its four chapters have exposed the aesthetic logic of such standards (as requisites for admission to canons) finding them to be embroiled in a host of ideological intrigues beyond intellectual or academic consensus, and made a case for enlarging such canons both in terms of lyrical practice and its adjunct criticism.

Bridding 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 2016.¹

**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

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 ‘Haførz’ and ‘Mørl’ – 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. Take for example the previous sentence: *A’ indəvərd də mɛik thə grafeemz impřəʃənɪstek də Hæ_foren-
Ingleesh speekərz vr tho zə akwəntid wət ths dəəlækts.* 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 <Ø> in capital. Although starting out I wanted to avoid diacritics and double letters, this was inescapable in practical terms. The nomenclature of Shallow Eejit came as happenstance: ‘Shallow Eejit’ in Shallow Eejit is textually realised as ‘Shallow Eejit’.

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. 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 Eejit.
2 Unlike this example (which is a straight translation) following Leonard, linguistic environment is accounted for in Shallow Eejit. 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’, ‘ə’, ‘də’, ‘lə’ or ‘də’.
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 OED.
urban English vowel used in ‘gate’ (which might sound something like gee-ught to dialectical outsiders), I use <ėt>, with the dot over the <e> signifying an <ee>. In IPA terms then, [iə] is realised as <ėt>. 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 <ą> (the ligature for <a> plus <y>) for the Belfast urban English sound which is used for the pronoun ‘I’ – the diphthong [er] in IPA. With the addition of an <e>, I was then able to use <ęe> for the sound [ai], which approximates that most common of Belfast words, ‘aye’.

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

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1 A full list of the letters of Shallow Eejit are provided in Appendix 2.
dictionaries best serve the function of recording lexical history.\footnote{See Noah Webster, ‘An Essay on the Necessity, Advantages and Practicability of Reforming the Mode of Spelling, and of Rendering the Orthography of Words Consistent to the Pronunciation’ (Appendix to *Dissertations on the English Language*, 1789): W. F. Bolton, *The English Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966.), p. 157.} Shallow Eejit 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 Eejit 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 Eejit 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 Eejit 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’.\footnote{Willy Maley, ‘Ireland, versus, Scotland: crossing the (English) language barrier,’ Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth (eds.), *Across the Margins: Cultural Identity and Change in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 2002, p. 25.} Although I provide standard metropolitan English translations for the Shallow Eejit poems, in contrast to Maley’s observation that Irish writers use
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*. 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). Carnduff, who lived in the area for a time, wrote a poem called ‘The Song of the Hammer’ (1928). 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

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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.

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

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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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\(^3\) ‘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.⁴

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

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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.
NO ESTATES SANS SENSIBLE ESTATES

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.\(^1\) 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

\(^1\) ‘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

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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.

\(^4\) ‘Old Lodge Road Scenes: Revolver Firing and Stone Throwing’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 28 September 1920.

\(^5\) ‘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.¹ 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.\footnote{David McKittrick, ‘Loyalists in rooftop protest at high-security Belfast jail’, The Independent online, 8 July 1994 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/loyalists-in-rooftop-protest-at-high-security-belfast-jail-1412344.html> (Accessed 1.7.19).} 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 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’. The streets east of the swings and climbing frames eventually took this name.

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.’ 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. ‘There were numerous shops and […] meeting places such as pubs and halls’ but redevelopment ‘greatly reduced’ the number of

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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.

![Fig. 1: Streets Redrawn, Old Lodge District and ‘the Estate’](image)

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.

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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. \hfill \textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
conditions for a new form of 1990s ultra-paramilitarism. 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’.

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

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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

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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.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.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.

¹ BBC News, ‘Exodus caused by loyalist feud’, 14 September 2000,
² McKay, Bear in Mind, p. 190.
Appendix 2

Graphemic Variations of Shallow Ejit, 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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>schwa</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>glottal stop</td>
<td>button</td>
<td>’</td>
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<td>flap</td>
<td>body</td>
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<td>ə</td>
<td>nurse</td>
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<td>ei</td>
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<td>iœ</td>
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<td>œœ</td>
<td>cow, down, out,</td>
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<td>bother, got</td>
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<td>iœ</td>
<td>blame, spain</td>
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<td>boat, load, toe</td>
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<td>i</td>
<td>sick, shit, yip</td>
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<td>fee, free, deep</td>
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<td>oʊ</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, Micheál 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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