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BEYOND IRELAND:
RE-IMAGINING IRISH IDENTITIES
IN THE PLAYS OF SEBASTIAN BARRY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the performative nature of Irish nationalism and individuality through examining "meta-theatrical" moments in four plays by Sebastian Barry: *Boss Grady's Boys* (1988), *Prayers of Sherkin* (1992), *The Steward of Christendom* (1995), and *Our Lady of Sligo* (1998). Using as a starting point the plays of W. B. Yeats, the first three chapters demonstrate how Irish playwrights position themselves along the continuum of identity as interiority/exteriority in order to comprehend national identity. In addition, postnationalism is introduced to suggest that national identity can be "re-imagined" in such a way as to link marginalized individuals to a specific history and community.

Chapters four and five deploy a postnationalist reading to examine in Barry's plays the various ways in which culture, aligned with a nation-state, dictates individual behavior and establishes social norms under the rubric of "Irishness." These chapters scrutinize the importance that individuals invest in self-identifying with a nation-state, and also seek to understand the ways in which characters strive to reconfigure "Irishness" in order to incorporate themselves with it. Chapter four analyzes *Boss Grady's Boys* and *Our Lady of Sligo*. Paired together, these plays demonstrate the elusiveness of Irishness, especially to those who actively seek it out. Chapter five considers *Prayers of Sherkin* and *The Steward of Christendom*, showing how Barry reconstitutes and re-forms the subjective inconclusiveness
of Boss Grady's Boys and Our Lady of Sligo. In these plays his characters manage to negotiate with and claim "Irishness" for themselves through exploiting moments when individuals enter or acknowledge the "beyond," a space outside the socio-political sphere that enables identities to become fluid and thus able to be reconfigured.

The Afterword section reiterates that the key incidents of subjective metamorphosis—that is, the events in Sebastian Barry's plays which signal the emergence of a new form of Irishness—occur in what are termed meta-theatrical moments. That is, a reconfigured "Irishness" always appears when the text enacts a play-within-a-play scenario in which a form of performance creates subjective overlap. The implication here is that dramatic literature may serve a vital role in the "re-imagining" of "Irishness" in the socio-political sphere.
Aloha and Mahalo
For M&P
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was a difficult birth after a long gestation and one false start. At six pounds and over 270 pages (not counting introductory material), it cannot be said to be the product of a solitary mind laboring in isolation. The following list mentions all to whom I give profound and humble thanks.

To Sebastian Knowles for taking on the challenge of kick-starting a stalled dissertation, for inviting me into the fold of Modernists, for un-mixing my metaphors, for challenging my neologisms, Homerisms, and undocumented quotations; for making my use of foreign words and phrases regular and responsible, and for his good humor in the face of impending deadlines. I may never completely understand the interference he ran on my behalf with the graduate school, but I am convinced that without his intercession, his careful reading and his penchant for scheduling critical deadlines on memorable dates (the Ides of March, Halloween, the Feast of Saint Frances Xavier) this dissertation would never have been completed on time, or not at all.

To Chadwick Allen, Neo-Luddite, for taking time from his sabbatical to fine-tune the theoretical aspects of this dissertation. The notes for improvement he gave me were difficult to execute but entirely appropriate, and I shall be forever paranoid about affixing dates to books that I mention for the first time in anything I write hereafter. He will never know the errands I undertook to satisfy his critical eye, and at times my quest for
marginalia became downright Odyssean, but I never regretted the exercise. His careful
reading and suggestions reminded me that community construction is neither wholly
benign nor malevolent, but a complex mixture of both.

To the Edmistons, Brian, Pat, Michael, and Zoe, who welcomed me into their family. As an Irishman, Brian helped me see past my blind spots about Irish culture, since it is still in many respects new and startling to me. Pat directed me to the text of the 1998 Good Friday Accord, which greatly helped my research find grounding in immediate political imperatives. Michael and Zoe, as little Gyntish trolls, chess-mates, and card-playing buddies, reminded me to be young and inquisitive throughout the dissertation-writing process, even as my hair grows gray and my mind enfeebled.

To John Erikson for working through the early stages of this dissertation and the first years of my doctoral study. He introduced me to Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, and his suggestion to read Ernest Gellner was a crucial first step without which I would never have found my way to postnationalism. Some time ago he counseled that I shouldn't sweat the theory all that much, and coming from a theory man, that allayed my darkest fears about the dissertation ordeal.

To Joy Reilly for teaching the course on twentieth-century Irish drama that completely transformed the nature of my doctoral studies. By fluke of a wrongly entered course number I ended up in her class, and her amicable nature encouraged me to stay. Three months later I knew what I would be studying for the rest of my life. This dissertation is a direct result of her input.
To the music of Vangelis, especially the soundtrack to *Blade Runner* (1982) and bootlegged *Blade Runner* tracks lifted from the now-defunct Napster. Six years ago this music calmed me through my master's thesis, and during these past crucial months it carried me through the dark days of this doctoral dissertation, its ambient music helping me overcome writer's block and the doldrums of summer. Tracks titled "Dangerous Days," "Wounded Animals," "The Prodigal Son Brings Death," and "Tears in Rain" aptly describe the process of writing a dissertation and the hours spent in front of a computer. In the closing days of the dissertation I somehow switched over to *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and listened to "Hymn to the Fallen," "The Last Battle," and—most appropriately—"Defense Preparations." The music from *American Beauty* (1999) was also helpful, and tracks such as "Dead Already," "Structure and Discipline," and "Mental Boy" were appropriate subtitles to my own struggles with this writing process. With the final days of editing came, two tracks from Sigur Rós, "Viðrar Vel til Loftárása" ("Good Weather for an Airstrike") and "Ágætis byrjun" ("Good Start" or "A Promising Beginning"), kept me company through the late hours of the evening.

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STABILITY IN CHAOS

Although the universe is under no obligation to make sense, students in pursuit of the Ph.D. are.

Robert P. Kirshner

SERENDIPITOUS IRELAND

This dissertation is the result of my taking the wrong class.

Initially I had intended to write a critical history of fringe theatre in London, focusing on the Bush Theatre. However, as my research progressed I came to the sad realization that my years of research had been in vain: the Bush was not what it had claimed to be. On the surface the Bush appeared to be the archetypal fringe theatre: independent, edgy, working class, and dedicated to producing new playwrights. However, although it had produced such luminous playwrights as Lucinda Cox, Tamsin Oglesby, Naomi Wallace, Jonathan Harvey, and Philip Ridley, the Bush was not as “fringe” as I was initially led to believe. Though it had been conceived as a leftist theatre in 1972, through the Thatcherite 1980s the Bush grew to depend on corporate sponsorship, forging ties with such transnational conglomerates as Allied-Domecq and, later, Disney. Although its ostensible mission was to bring cutting-edge theatre to the working classes (it was situated
in the blue-collar borough of Hammersmith for just this purpose), the Bush's market research revealed that its audience was composed mainly of university students. Though the Bush occasionally accepted unsolicited scripts, I discovered that the bulk of its annual repertoire came from playwrights with a proven track record at other fringe theatres, mostly from the Peacock in Dublin and the Traverse in Edinburgh.

By the fall of 1998 my dissertation research was in tatters, and I sorely needed a new direction. In desperation I signed up for a course in the theatre department that I thought would introduce theories of found drama, and I imagined myself blissfully creating performance pieces out of soup can recipes and bits of Mahler. But when I showed up for the first day of class, I received a syllabus describing the course as a survey of twentieth-century Irish drama. I was crushed. Fortunately, I heeded my instincts and decided to stay on, at least until I could find a polite way to extricate myself; but in time I was hooked. As the quarter progressed I learned that Yeats had written plays (a fact never once mentioned in any of my literature courses), that the Abbey Theatre routinely alienated Ireland's foremost playwrights, and that the best place to see Irish drama was London, not Dublin. By the time I wrote my final paper on Sebastian Barry's *The Steward of Christendom*, shades of which appear in this dissertation, I knew I had found my dissertation.

What impressed me most about Irish drama was the brooding presence of "Irishness." Irish playwrights seemed consumed, implicitly and explicitly, with finding a way to describe the nature of national identity and its functions; and though some Irish playwrights had left Irishness altogether, they couldn't seem to leave it alone. I was especially interested in the riots that attended plays by Synge and O'Casey. Any culture
that cares enough about drama to destroy things, I thought, is worth a dissertation. At the
time I couldn't decide if I was noticing this pattern simply because the nature of the course
(it was, after all, centered on Irish drama) or if Irishness was truly a pressing issue; however,
I couldn't recall ever noticing the weight of Englishness in English plays or American-ness
in American plays.\footnote{I wanted to understand national identity, especially the Irish variety,
and yet the more I sought to define Irishness the more elusive it became.}

**AMERICANIZED ME**

The search for Irishness was, in truth, a proxy search for my own sense of national
identity, because I come from a complicated socio-cultural background that never melded
easily for me. My mother is Japanese. Her parents immigrated to Hawaii from Japan to
work on the sugar plantations; they met, married, and had twelve children. My mother,
the eleventh child, grew up bilingual, although until the day they died (her father in 1978,
her mother in 1992) neither of her parents spoke English. My father is half Hawaiian, half
Scottish. His father, a professional Waikiki beach boy, taught tourists how to surf in the
years before World War II, and his mother came to Hawaii from Washington state, her
grandparents having emigrated from Edinburgh, Scotland to the United States in the late
1800s. I was born in Provo, Utah, blocks away from Brigham Young University and in the
heart of Mormonism, the adopted religion of my parents. We eventually moved back to
Hawaii, and I grew up in a polyglot, multicultural environment where I learned to speak an
argot that linguists call Hawaiian Creole, but which the locals referred to as “pidgin.” A
combination of Asian and Polynesians languages, sprinkled with Portuguese and wrapped around English, pidgin was the vocabulary through which I learned to articulate the world.

Growing up on the North Shore of Oahu, I came to accept myself as an American, although I “belonged” in a country whose mainland sat thousands of miles to the east. My first family vacation to the contiguous forty-eight started at Disneyland; and though we also visited the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and the Redwood Forests, the Magic Kingdom’s cavalcade of pageantry, rides, and cartoons-made-flesh indelibly shaped my personal sense of American-ness. I pledged allegiance to the flag every morning as a kindergartener, joined the junior police officers in elementary school, and when I was five years old I duly celebrated the country’s bicentennial. In social studies I learned that Hawaii had once been a sovereign nation but at some point in the 1880s, roughly around the time my grandmother’s Murray and Conley ancestors were leaving Scotland, the Hawaiian monarchy had come to an end—the details were never made clear, especially to an eighth grader—and in time Hawaii “became a state.” More importantly, I distinctly recall that Hawaii’s acquisition by the United States was unambiguously a good thing—after all, America had Disneyland.

Throughout my formative years I never questioned my own construction of national identity; I had always assumed it was an a priori condition. Furthermore, because I was raised a Mormon, I was taught that the United States was a country that God had personally arranged to exist, and so it was in bad taste to question my belonging in it or His designs for it. Directly and indirectly I was reminded of just how lucky I was to live in America, where at least I knew I was free, not like the Russians, the Chinese, and especially
the English who, unlike the liberated Hawaiians, still had a queen. At field trips to the Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor, I was told to remember the lives that had been sacrificed for my own freedom, even though in 1941 neither of my parents had been born and Hawaii wasn’t yet a part of the Union.

Years later, however, I learned how to question the construction of my national identity. In time, I discovered that the takeover of Hawaii was an illegal act of aggression and that I would be denied land compensation from the US government because I was a quarter and not half Hawaiian. I found out about the internment camps of Japanese nationals and Japanese-Americans living in the States during the 1940s, and I discovered that for decades the law denied residents of Asian descent from becoming citizens. At some point I even realized that the Mormons had left the United States in the 1840s after President Martin van Buren refused to protect them from an extermination order issued in Missouri. Finally, after having lived on the “Mainland” for an extended period of time and finding myself the object of subtle forms of racial, ethnic, class, and social prejudice—in short, after a rigorous left-tilted educational awakening—I began to accept the contingent nature of my American-ness. Vague yet somehow important, it dictated my behavior, deducted money from paychecks, branded me with a Social Security number, and embossed me with a passport. American-ness warned me that I would be relentlessly prosecuted for betraying it, and yet I had to forgive and forget its many betrayals and atrocities that polluted its history. I learned not to take at face value the platitudes imprinted at the foot of the Statue of Liberty because American-ness was as much a matter of elbow room as lofty ideals.
Thus in the Irish I saw some parallels to my own condition. The playwrights I read, though they lived in a seemingly more culturally homogenous environment than mine, still needed to sort out the complicated cultural, social, religious, and political signs that all added up to this mysterious quality cathedged as Irishness. Like me they were sorting through a tangled morass of cultural signifiers to understand the nature of their national environment and their place in it. And although I was becoming increasingly aware that this is a situation experienced by many who live under the aegis of a nation-state but who feel literally or metaphorically displaced, Irish drama for me was the clearest lens through which I could identity the multitudinous intersecting axes of power and culture that swirled around the struggle to understand identity.

I find it fascinating that issues of national identity can remain invisible yet so potent, particularly in the United States. Except in times of war, crisis, or the Olympics, American nationalism hardly ever comes to the foreground. Quite the opposite is true of Ireland, however, not least because of its small population, its history of mass migrations, and its political and cultural domination by Great Britain. Irishness is a nationalist quantity that never quite solidified into the strict dichotomy of Irish/non-Irish because the Irish people have yet to come to terms Partition. According to Roy Foster, the sloughing off of the six Ulster counties that comprise Northern Ireland in some ways hastened a stopgap Irish nationalism (Paddy and Mr. Punch 95), but like a hastily constructed home there are still numerous unfinished areas that the wallpaper cannot completely conceal.

To me Ireland is an ideal case to examine how the normalizing tendency of nationalism can be analyzed because of the many forces challenging the stability of Irish
national identity. The signs of nationalism are found everywhere in the culture, making constant demands of its constituents, while simultaneously the myth of Irish cultural homogeneity is undermined everywhere, most evidently, according to Dermot Bolger in *In High Germany* (1990), in the international flavor of the Republic of Ireland's national football team. I was curious to discover how individuals make sense of national identity that simultaneously implodes and explodes, proclaiming its homogeneity even as it succumbs to heterogeneity. How does an individual find stability in such chaos?

**THE DISSERTATION: A VULTURE'S-EYE VIEW**

In the spring of 2000 I was directed to Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1982), an important starting point for understanding how nation-states form and how they interrelate. Gellner led me to Benedict Anderson, and Anderson led me to a wide convocation of theorists: Ernest Renan, Elie Kedourie, and Edward Said. Many of my discoveries were serendipitous: I seemed to have a knack for pulling random books and periodicals off the shelves of the OSU library and finding pertinent information (I found Mary Douglas' *How Institutions Think* [1986] this way). On a whim I purchased *W. B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage* by Roy Foster (1997), and Foster led me to the community of Irish historians, literary and political, revisionist and conservative, including Seamus Deane, Connor Cruise O'Brien, Colm Toibín, and Fintan O'Toole. It became evident that nationalist theory, Irish history, and Irish drama overlapped in many curious respects: nationalist theorists frequently referenced Irish history, Irish historians referenced drama, and the playwrights referenced history and nationalism. The more I read Irish drama the
more I understood that it is only comprehensible through an understanding of history; the
more I read Irish history the more I became of a deeply intertwined relationship between
twentieth-century drama and the creation Irish identity; and the more nationalist theory I
read the more I began to see the reciprocal link between culture and the artifacts it
produces, between history and theatre, and theatre and national identity.

This dissertation is an attempt to understand how these forces intersect in Irish
drama, and towards this end this study has two objectives. The first is to analyze the
representation of Irish national identity in four plays by Sebastian Barry: Boss Grady's Boys
(1988), Prayers of Sherkin (1992), The Steward of Christendom (1995), and Our Lady of Sligo
(1998). The second goal is to advance postnationalism as a viable critical reading strategy
for analyzing how national identity is created and deployed in literature. Accordingly, this
dissertation is written in two sections.

Part one, comprising chapters one to three, introduces the theory of
postnationalism as taken from political science and sociology. Chapter one details the
roster of major twentieth-century Irish dramatists and discusses the problems they have
faced in seeking to represent "Irishness" on stage. The chapter introduces postnationalism
and suggests how it can contribute meaningfully to a dialogue on the representation of
nationality and individuality, and it concludes with a list or "manifesto" of aspects
applicable to reading a text using literary postnationalism. Chapter two introduces various
theories of nationalism and shows how contemporary political theorists have re-envisioned
the nature of nationalism by proposing new ways of understanding how state and
individual interact to create individuality (i.e., through postnationalism). As
postnationalism is primarily associated with political theory and sociology, and insofar as it emphasizes the role of "institutions" (state, religion, and so forth), the third chapter broadens postnationalism's scope to include the concomitant role of the individual in participating with and influencing the workings of institutions.

Part two takes the principles of postnationalism and analyzes the aforementioned plays. *Boss Grady's Boys* and *Our Lady of Sligo* are grouped together as attempts to grasp the death of the "imagined" nation-state of a homogenized, culturally monochromatic Ireland; conversely, *Prayers of Sherkin* and *The Steward of Christendom* can be read as efforts to "re-imagine" a more inclusive, diversified Irish identity. Chapter four analyzes *Boss Grady's Boys* and *Our Lady of Sligo* as an elegy to a time of social and subjective fragmentation in Ireland following its independence from England. *Boss Grady's Boys* covers two days, or two time passages, in the lives of two elderly brothers that Barry modeled after distant uncles. Isolated from the world around them and unwitting casualties of an Ireland that has moved on without them, the brothers struggle inconclusively to find a place for themselves in a once familiar terrain. *Our Lady of Sligo* features another casualty of a changing Ireland: Barry's grandmother Mai O'Hara. She once flourished under the possibility of a modernized Ireland, but under successive de Valera administrations she found her avenues cut off, her life paralyzed by an idealized form of womanhood, imposed by church and state, that insisted she stay home and look attractive.

Chapter five considers *Prayers of Sherkin* and *The Steward of Christendom*, showing how Barry reconstitutes and re-forms the fragmentation he observed in *Boss Grady's Boys* and *Our Lady of Sligo*. *Prayers of Sherkin* portrays Fanny Hawke, another distant relative
who, as a member of a Protestant community living on Sherkin Island, defied the rules of her community and married an outsider, thus leading to her banishment. Her will to assume the means of her own identity production makes her a fitting test case to examine how identity can be successfully, though not entirely painlessly, re-imagined. In *The Steward of Christendom*, Barry writes about his great-grandfather James Dunne, famous for having handed over Dublin Castle to Michael Collins in 1922. *The Steward of Christendom* portrays an elderly man at the end of his life attempting to re-imagine himself, in contrast to *Prayers of Sherkin*, which derives much of its re-imaginative vigor from Fanny’s youth. *The Steward of Christendom* recounts a more complicated view of the re-imagining process, one that requires the individual to look back on a long life lived and soberly assess the retroactive cost of assuming a new identity.

For Sebastian Barry, identity is paradoxically both absent and startlingly present. His characters seek after the ephemeral comfort of an immutable Irishness, and though they may not achieve it, they do arrive at a contingent moment when they can rest from the pursuit. His three other plays, *The Pentagonal Dream* (1986), *White Woman Street* (1992), and *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn* (1995), also raise similarly complicated issues about the construction of identity; however, for reasons of space and sanity (mine as well as the reader’s), they were not included in this dissertation. All three involve other members of Barry’s family tree, all three investigate issues of identity, and all three come to tentative yet not entirely unambiguous endings. Identity is as much a process as a state of being; and as they learn to navigate identity, Barry’s characters come to accept that it is an obstacle course they must run blindfolded, the labyrinth concocted by unseen institutions that
constantly alter the configuration. Subjective ambiguity, therefore, is as much a defensive strategy as it is the ironic solution to the maze of identity. In seeking to re-imagine a contingent identity the individuals who populate Barry’s plays find themselves unwitting Absurdist protagonists, some of whom find a brief respite in their cultural comforts before they are compelled to retrieve the boulder rolling down the hill.

If there is a distinguishing feature to Barry’s work besides an overarching interrogation of identity, it is a sneaking sense of optimism, even in his bleakest plays. As an established poet, Barry uses a dense syllabary of poetry to counteract the inclination of his often-disheartening subject matter to overwhelm his characters. Praying over the dormant form of his feebleminded brother, Mick says, “thanks for my old sleeping brother, unbeaten, as quiet as an owl in our house here on a hill above a new flood. Let me stand between him and all harms, all human harms, if no one better’s to be found” (Boss Grady’s Boys 36). Fanny Hawke in Prayers of Sherkin, agonizing over her decision to abandon her community, calls Ireland “a bare stone cautiously marked with green life that is our blood and our dream” (104). Recalling the death of his wife Cissy in childbirth, Thomas Dunne remembers that she died at sunrise, “just as the need for candlelight fails, and the early riser needs no candle for his task” (The Steward of Christendom 275). In Our Lady of Sligo, Joanie, regarding the frail figure of her mother, asks, “Did every broken mother need a sheltering child?” (43) As these characters are silenced they lose hope; but as they speak they re-imagine. For Barry, Irishness is a form of poetics that is as much an enigma as its solution, the journey and the reward, the property that reveals momentary patterns in subjective chaos.
Moreover, Irishness is an attenuated term that is applicable contingently to all those who claim a connection or allegiance to Ireland, Irish culture, Irish ancestry, Irish territory, and so forth. The term describes claims and gestures towards the notion of identity connected with culture and does not imply any form of essentialist, \textit{a priori} individuality. Indeed, the very volatility and inconclusiveness of this term is the focal point of this dissertation: how it is used, manipulated, awarded, withheld, claimed, deployed, and mastered, what it implies, enables, empowers, and masks. Irishness therefore describes a collection of beliefs and practices that articulate a "state" of being tangible enough for others to see and hear—and so to a certain extent Irishness is an enunciatory signifier. Its power and elusiveness, as a signifier and as a central idea evident in Barry's work, is what drew me to his plays and which keeps me captivated.

\textbf{Note on Terminology}

Unless otherwise noted, whenever I refer to "Ireland" I mean specifically "the Republic of Ireland," which is a distinct entity apart from the six Ulster counties comprising Northern Ireland. I apologize in advance for any confusion that this elision may cause, as it is intended as a shorthand and should not be construed to indicate insensitivity on my part to the delicate issue of Partition.
NOTES

1 I recognize the political and cultural problems of referring to plays written in the United States by US citizens as "American" plays. "American-ness" and "American" are used as a form of shorthand to avoid less wieldy constructions such as "United States-ness," "United State-ian," "US-ness," or "US-ian." Although these forms avail themselves to interesting readings, these are issues I prefer to background at this particular moment.

2 Foster writes that the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is both the catalyst for solidifying Irish identity and also the barrier to its completion. The border represents unfulfilled aspirations, the "rank impossibility of a political 'solution'" (Paddy and Mr. Punch 95).

3 For example, Ernest Gellner cites examples from Irish history in Nations and Nationalism, and Edward Said, whose ideas did not make the final cut of this dissertation, spends some time analyzing Yeats in Culture and Imperialism (1993). Fintan O'Toole writes extensively on Irish history and is a drama critic. Historian, critic, poet, and novelist Seamus Deane is involved with Field Day, the theatre company that boasts the contributions of Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney, and Stephen Rea.
To be Irish is now to break away from the securities of parochialism and prejudice and instead to inhabit a new, decentralised and decentralized state where Ireland may be reconstructed. It is dream territory, a myth in the making [. . . ] It is not [. . . ] abolition of consciousness, so much as the evolution of a new consciousness whereby concepts of identity, home, and nation are dispersed into communal activity and a new discourse of pluralism.


GENERATIONS OF PLAYWRIGHTS

In “The State of the Play,” a broad overview of the thematic trends in Irish drama from 1899 to 1996, Christopher Murray notes four distinct “generations” of twentieth-century Irish playwrights, each generation roughly contemporaneous and responding to social conditions endemic to their times. In the first generation, covering roughly 1899 to 1964, he lists the major founders of Irish drama whose works are closely associated with the Abbey Theatre: W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, John M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, and Brendan Behan. The second generation, active from 1964 to 1989, represents writers who rejected the Abbey Theatre and worked through fringe and secondary theatres, including Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, John B. Keane, Thomas Kilroy, Hugh Leonard, Eugene
McCabe, and Stewart Parker. From 1989 to the present he cites Dermot Bolger, Bernard Farrell, Neil Donnelly, Graham Reid, Frank McGuinness, Tom MacIntyre, and Paul Mercier. Longest is his list of “fourth generation” playwrights whom he feels represent the vanguard of Irish playwriting in the twenty-first century: Sebastian Barry, Ken Bourke, Marina Carr, Anne Devlin, Michael Harding, Declan Hughes, Marie Jones, Gavin Kostick, Gina Moxley, Jimmy Murphy, Jim Nolan, Donal O’Kelly, Christina Reid, Billy Roche, Gerard Stembridge, Colin Teevan, Michael West, and Vincent Woods (13).

Murray’s list is not without its problems. For example, he excludes writers from the Ulster Literary Theatre, a pro-Union movement in the northern counties that formed in response to Yeats’ efforts in “Southern Ireland.” Also, although he is conscious to include the expanding list of contemporary female writers, with the exception of Lady Gregory he passes over many of the female writers who contributed plays to the Abbey in the 1920s to the 1950s. Furthermore, his “fourth generation” playwrights have been producing plays since the 1980s, so his criteria imply the need for a long, praiseworthy career before a writer can be considered part of any “generation”; thus the list unintentionally (or intentionally) excludes the dynamic work being produced by such theatre companies as Fishamble and Druid, whose playwrights tend to be young and unknown. In addition, because it was published in 1996, the list omits more recent playwrights such as Conor McPherson, Martin McDonagh, Roddy Doyle, Enda Walsh, Mark O’Rowe, and Ron Hutchison.

Despite its weaknesses, Murray’s list is useful to this project on two counts. First, it highlights the fact that Irish drama, as a distinctive genre extricable from the more
generalist and reductive notion of "British drama," is relatively young, its origins stage-managed by a close group of individuals in the so-called first generation who envisioned a particular socio-political and aesthetic role of theatre in the cultural development of the Irish nation. The irony is that the first generation pre-dates the existence of an Irish nation as an independent, autonomous entity. Indeed, the dramatic movement was formed as a vehicle of Ireland’s creation, and thus Ireland is unusual among nations as having a theatre movement partially responsible for its existence. Thus, in a broad sense twentieth-century Irish drama has been from its inception implicated in the coalescing and maintenance of national identity.

Second, the division of the list into four generations suggests specific, identifiable breaks or shifts in thematic content, presentation, and assumptions governing the production of plays, and further implies that these shifts coincide with specific historical events. Such shifts reflect, and in some cases have motivated, changes in the national consciousness and the terms under which the Irish understand themselves. For example, Murray’s first generation range from the formative years of drama under Yeats and Gregory until the production of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), and the plays tend to address Ireland as a formative nation attempting to understand itself in relation to itself. This time-span coincides with a broad stretch of events beginning with the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre (1899, later the Irish National Theatre, better known as the Abbey Theatre [1904]), the 1916 Easter Uprising, the formation of the Irish Free State (1921), the subsequent civil war (1921-22), the declaration of Ireland as a independent nation (1937),
and ending with the conclusion of the First Programme for Economic Expansion (1958-1963), which reversed protectionist policies and encouraged foreign investment in Ireland.

The second generation covers the rebuilding of the Abbey Theatre in 1966 (it burned down in 1951) rise of The Troubles (1967 to the present), Ireland’s entrance into the European Economic Community (1972), the 1980s, and ends with the election of Mary Robinson (1990), the Republic’s first female president. The reconstruction of the Abbey symbolically reflected a re-assertion of the theatre’s role in attempting to represent (although some would say “dictate”) the tenor of Ireland’s theatre tradition. This playwriting generation is dominated by the careers of Friel and Murphy, whose work reflects the anxieties of an Ireland in the process of redefining itself in terms of global socio-economic concerns. Coincidentally, Murray concludes this generation in the year that Friel’s Dancing at Lughnasa (1990) premiered, thus essentially making it the age of Friel.

The third generation coincides with the shift in Irish life to reflect a growing impatience with The Troubles, the 1993 Downing Street Declaration, increased openness of Irish society, referenda on divorce and abortion, a waning of the Catholic Church’s influence over public policy, and the 1998 Good Friday Accord. The playwrights in this category are enabled by a more open climate to question the powerful institutions of state and church that for many years remained untouchable subjects. In addition, dramatists such as Tom MacIntyre, Neil Donnelly, and Niall Williams had plays premiere at the Abbey, reflecting a rapprochement between the Abbey and controversial subject matters.
and signaling a growing comfort on the part of the theatre to experiment more frequently with contemporary work.

Murray’s “fourth generation” is a nebulous collection of playwrights, some of who have been writing since the mid-1980s and thus would technically situated themselves in the third generation (i.e., Carr, Devlin, and Barry). Having found critical and popular success in the late 1990s, these playwrights in a sense reflect a vision of Ireland that is situated enough to be able to reflect critically on the past and its own increasingly liberal, pluralist society. Coming into the mainstream are plays that deal with women’s issues (Devlin’s After Easter [1994]), homosexuality (Stembridge’s unambiguously titled The Gay Detective [1996]), immigration (O’Kelly’s Asylum! Asylum! [1994]), and representations of Ireland in popular culture and film (Jones’ Stones in His Pockets [1999], McDonagh’s The Cripple of Inishmaan [1996], and O’Kelly’s Capalita! The Movie [1995]). Ken Bourke’s garrulous melodrama The Hunt for Red Willie (2000) melds all the major themes of twentieth-century Irish drama and symbolizes it as a certain theatre mask, nicknamed “Red Willie,” that confers strange powers upon its wearer.

Irish drama, therefore, can be read as a gauge by which one can assess twentieth-century Irish society and politics, and furthermore drama is a viable space whereby the Irish can engage in a dialogue with social processes. Although Murray’s list implies an endowment from one generation to the next of specific thematic ideas, it does not signal causality—playwright A does not necessarily lead to playwright B—but rather a tangled stewardship of specific cultural artifacts or images (e.g., the poor old woman, the exile, the raconteur, the dream-vision) that reverberate through a century of plays and to which Irish
playwrights return, consciously or subconsciously, to explore. Both Fintan O'Toole and
Sebastian Barry have noted that the playwrights who appear in Murray's "fourth
generation" are notable in that their work references ideas prevalent in the first generation,
thus suggesting that a sort of modified Gaelic-Revival revival has taken place in the 1990s
(O'Toole, "Irish Theatre," 166; Barry, Inherited Boundaries, i).

Above all, Murray's list attests to the wide array of playwrights that have arisen as a
direct result of the efforts of the first generation to establish a distinctive playwriting
tradition distinguishable from British theatre. The exceptional range of plays, playwrights,
and subject matter seem fantastically out of proportion for a Republic with a population of
3.8 million living in a country with an area of 27,135 miles. However, it is important to
note that twentieth-century Irish drama was nurtured by centuries of conflicted
relationships with Great Britain, and indeed the genre is more accurately described as
"Anglo-Irish drama," since a distinct form of theatre performed in Gaelic, also
championed by the first generation, still survives. This influence notwithstanding,
twentieth-century Irish drama is, as Murray notes in the title of another book, a "mirror up
to a nation," revealing a diverse cultural solidarity that is at last comfortable enough to gaze
into its own reflection and witness the many faces of Irishness.

THE SEARCH FOR THE SOURCE OF IRISHNESS

For all the variety and acclaim attending twentieth-century Irish drama, its roots
were exceptionally inauspicious. In August 1897 at an estate office near Galway Bay, Lady
Augusta Gregory, W. B. Yeats, and Edward Martyn met together to discuss the formal
creation of an Irish dramatic movement dedicated solely to works by Irish authors and about Irish subjects, with a special provision calling for Irish drama written and performed in Gaelic. Throughout that year and the year previous a palpable sense of millennialism circulated amongst Yeats' and Gregory's close circle of intellectual friends, and this spirit manifested itself in heightened participation in the occult, vigorous involvement in politics, and renewed artistic output (Foster, W. B. Yeats, 162-163). Until the public issuing of the manifesto announcing this new "Celtic Theatre," Ireland had nothing remotely resembling a "national" playwriting tradition, let alone a formal national theatre. Those Irish who aspired to become successful playwrights shed their accents and backgrounds to seek their careers in London, and their numbers included writers who for many years were considered British: William Congreve, George Farquhar, Richard Steele, Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Sheridan, Dion Boucicault, Oscar Wilde, and G. B. Shaw. Few if any of these playwrights returned to Ireland, and most did not write plays about Ireland or Irish topics (Shaw's John Bull's Other Island [1904] is a notable exception).

Furthermore, when the Irish were portrayed on the British stage, the representation was hardly flattering, as they were frequently characterized as drunken braggarts: gullible, hot-tempered, superstitious, and untrustworthy. "All this Irish material was done," writes John Harrington in his preface to Modern Irish Drama (1991), "with an eye to export, usually to London." Thus, the disagreeable traits associated with the Irish were "exaggerated for recognition by a foreign [i.e., non-Irish] audience, and the result was a caricature known as 'the stage Irishman'" (xii). The public portrayal of Irishness was therefore an exportable commodity that bore little resemblance to the original and did
little to reflect responsibly its source material. The newly-constituted Irish Literary Theatre sought to reverse the negative stereotypes of Irishness and also staunch the flow of dramatic talent to England by supporting gifted Irish authors in Ireland, giving them a forum to present their work, and encouraging them to write plays that examined issues that directly impacted Irish life and portrayed a more "authentic" Irishness.

In broader terms, the Irish Literary Theatre's central goal was to establish in the local populace a cultural confidence in Ireland and Irishness, to cultivate a talent base that would energize a nationalist movement, and thereby to bring about a unified and ultimately independent Ireland. Yeats' 1923 Nobel acceptance lecture, which he delivered not on his poetry but on the "Irish Dramatic Movement," declared that the fall of Parnell in 1891 was a watershed moment for the Irish independence movement because it was then that the aggrieved Irish public lost confidence in politics and political solutions to address social injustice. As a result of Parnell's disgrace and untimely death, Irish artists, playwrights, and authors poured their efforts into movements that became known collectively as the Gaelic Revival, characterized by Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Yeats' poetry, and the Irish Literary Theatre. Eventually the Irish literary movement became synonymous with the Irish independence movement, and the Abbey Theatre, which in 1904 became the home base of the Irish Literary Theatre, assumed the mantle of cultural guardian.  

By asserting that a national theatre could participate meaningfully in the socio-political life of the Irish, Yeats advanced the notion that art, grounded in a cultural program based on an essentialist, nationalist awareness, could lead to a grassroots social
solidarity which in turn could create sufficient popular momentum to enact social changes that politics should have but failed to produce. In other words, in art and theatre he saw an aggressive populist tactic where others saw only an aesthetic mirror reflecting benignly and inerly the quaintness of Ireland. Although Yeats, wary of the vagaries of popular and political tastes, would later claim that his aims were always strictly artistic and apolitical, the Irish Literary Theatre would eventually become inextricably linked to pro-republican thought and action. The Irish Literary Theatre inspired numerous writers and offshoot theatres, some of whom viewed the Abbey as alternately too permissive or too restrictive; but in spite of the varied political positions Irish dramatists took, collectively their goals were the same: redefining Irishness in ways recognizable to the Irish and in doing so inspiring politicized and political action. Christopher Murray best detailed the connection between the Irish population, the art of theatre, and the cult of nationalism in Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to a Nation (1997). He writes that the “‘world’ of an Irish dramatist tends to remain in an orbit reasonably adjacent to that of his fellows, writers and audience alike,” and because of Ireland’s small size and homogeneous population “experience is both shared and limited, governed by conditions well within the range of the total population of only 3.5 million, 93 percent of whom are Roman Catholic and have uniform educational backgrounds” (163). He continues:

Since the government programme has failed to revive the Irish language, English forms the unquestioned vernacular for exploration of national identity. [. . .] Ireland’s unified audience is the result of the cultural revolution which created late nineteenth-century nationalism and its consequence, national independence. The Irish literary revival, including the Abbey Theatre as instrument, created not just images of historical self-appraisal and expressions of individual experience within an invented
community but also a habit of mind and a set of conventions and themes whereby the people might understand who they were. The close-knit nexus of artist and audience is, I believe, unique in the modern world. (163)

It is not surprising to recognize that a central issue that recurs in Irish drama is locating the source of Irish national identity as a conflict between individual and community, between communities, between individuals, and between the individual and the self. Yeats' ambivalence towards politics and the curious thematic evolution of his plays in many ways exemplifies the complicated issues relating to nation, exile, home, and identity that twentieth-century Irish dramatists have attempted to address. Indeed, fulminating beneath the surface of twentieth-century Irish drama are the volatile questions of national identity: how “Irishness” is created, organized, and maintained, who creates it, and how “Irishness” is used in various socio-political contexts, public and domestic. Above all, these plays wrestle with the question of how Irishness operates; in other words, these plays analyze what power or disempowerment Irishness confers on those claiming Irish identity and what Irishness means to the social cohesion of the Irish community in Ireland and abroad.

A cursory examination of Yeats' plays reveals his ongoing struggle to pin down precisely where “Irishness” as a state of being emerges, and his dramatic works continuously vacillates along a wide continuum that measures Irishness as exteriority—meaning that identity is a performative act conferred on an individual who “performs” the rituals and customs of a community and is thereby justified in claiming the rights and privileges of the community's protection—and Irishness as interiority—that is, Irishness as an immaterial, mystical, essentialist state that emanates outwardly from the individual into the
community. Throughout the twentieth century different Irish playwrights would attempt to describe the nature of Irishness along the interiority/exteriority spectrum using varied strategies, sometimes through political allegory, naturalism, magic realism, so-called “kitchen-sink” realism, memory play, parody, Absurdism, and so forth. In many respects Irish playwrights in the twentieth century telescoped hundreds of years of playwriting genres into a hundred years’ time, exploring the ways in which the representation of Irishness on stage could in effect provide a mirror by which the Irish could see the emergence of their own selves.

In the case of Yeats, his attempts to reconcile outward behavior with inward “essence” grew partly out of his desire to resolve his political philosophy, which emphasized action as a sign of identity (especially by way of his friendship with the Irish radical John O’Leary), with his obsession with the occult and its reliance on a hieratic view of existence that stressed the primacy of an individual’s “spiritual” identity. Furthermore, his attempt to redescribe Irishness can also be read as a drive to resolve the inconsistency of his populist views with his aristocratic tendencies, for although it is true that Yeats eventually emerged as a champion of Ireland’s independence from England, he was equally a champion of the privileges of the waning Protestant Ascendancy. By finding the source of Irishness Yeats believed he could put to rest social conflict arising over charges and countercharges of treason and “un-Irish” behavior—a goal he never, of course, was able to realize.

His early work clearly favored Irish identity as acquired through exteriority. Plays such as The Countess Cathleen (1899) and Cathleen ni Houlihan (1902) are among Yeats’ most
optimistic works, characterized by stirring calls to action and acts of desperate heroism culminating in triumph. This tactic was ultimately unsatisfying, partially because Yeats, although he enjoyed the rush of rousing a crowd to action, feared the mob mentality that often followed, and in the years after the 1916 Easter Uprising Yeats would wonder aloud if Cathleen ni Houlihan had been directly responsible for the carnage. Subsequently influenced by Lady Gregory's and his own folklore studies, Yeats' next stage was to define Irishness as a loyalty to a cultural and historic past—and through his Cuchulain plays, Yeats put forward the idea that the mythic Celtic past held the key to authentic Irishness. In such plays as On Baile's Strand (1905) and Diedra (1907) he continued to emphasize Irishness as externality, but these plays also contained an element of "Celtic interiority"; that is, a Yeats-configured Celticness (or Gaelicness, or Irishness, which for Yeats becomes three muddled terms for roughly the same kind of identity) as both a function of practice mingled with genetics. His final plays, among them Purgatory (1938), echoed the unsettling ethnocentric tone of his tract On the Boiler (1938) by seeking for identity in the blood of their characters. These works turned radically inward, elevating Irishness to a decidedly spiritual realm located outside the bounds of social custom and interaction.

Ironically, the deeper Yeats searched within the sancta of the occult and microbiology for Irishness the more sour his opinion about the intelligence and artistic discernment of the average Irishman and -woman became, and he made frequent allusions in letters that he intended his drama to antagonize spectators (Murray, Twentieth Century, 29). Yeats writes, sounding like a precursor to Jerzy Grotowski, "I want to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour
and never to many” (Explorations 254). Though these sentiments may primarily indicate sour grapes on his part for the poor attendance and negative critical responses to his Noh plays, his bitterness also reflected his growing despair that perhaps art indeed lacked the social relevance he once thought it had. Consequently, his final plays were obscure to mainstream audiences and portrayed such an esoteric interiority that some of his final works, including On the Boiler, reeked of eugenics and classism. Towards the end of his life he doubted whether his theatrical vision would survive after his death (Harper 38).

For many Irish dramatists, the impulse to locate Irish identity concretely as a function of either exteriority or interiority leads to the texts confounding themselves in a crush of uncertainty and mixed messages, for traits of interiority creep into the presentation of exteriority and vice versa. In certain cases, audiences reacted violently to these contradictions and to what they perceived as insufficient portrayals of Irishness, often objecting to offensive portrayals for a wide variety of reasons. One strategy deployed by Irish playwrights has been to make the exteriority and/or interiority of Irishness a function of political and social action, and thus the nature of Irish nationalist identity is measured against a standard of commitment either to the nationalist movement or the pro-Catholic factions in Northern Ireland. Playwrights such as Sean O’Casey and Brendan Behan kept their work strictly political, attacking social hypocrisies and foibles, but their critiques of Irishness often skirted uneasily between questioning the interiority and exteriority of Irish nationalist identity. Irishness in their works is a motley rabble of misshapen, ill-begotten recreants who violate a panoply of social norms and customs. Lady Gregory’s The Rising of the Moon (1907) and Friel’s Translations (1980), both pro-republican parables of the Irish
nationalist struggle, can be regarded as appeals for armed resistance against the British, the
former referring to the pre-Uprising occupation and the latter to the reclamation of
Northern Ireland. Irishness is thus measured by one's willingness to participate in social
causes with a commitment that borders on the suicidal. Other political plays call into
question the premises of Irish identity as social action, such as Synge's *The Playboy of the
Western World* (1907) and O'Casey's *Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), plays that so violated the
Irish's sense of identity that their premieres sparked riots and accusations of authorial
treason: *The Playboy* questioned the Irish penchant for making heroes out of outlaws and
proved too "real" for certain audience members, and *Shadow* lampooned the perceived
sacredness of armed struggle as a viable political tactic.

Another playwriting strategy deployed by Irish writers is to favor a definition of
Irishness that implies an inward, spiritual Irishness connected to land, history, and
religion. Irish interiority and exteriority are therefore defined as an expression of a
mystical Irishness that grows out of a connection to an indefinable Irish ideal. Yeats' Noh
plays, though resolutely apolitical, suggested that Irishness is a conglomeration of mythos
and genetics, implying that true Irishness can only be claimed by those with a direct blood
connection to an amorphous socio-political utopia that existed sometime after the Druids
and before Saint Patrick. On the other hand, Frank McGuinness' *Someone Who'll Watch
Over Me* (1992), set in a mid-1980s hostage holding cell in the Middle East, is an overtly
political play that questions in what ways Irish identity can manifest itself without the
benefit of exterior cultural markers. Brian Friel's canon contains a large selection of plays
that interrogate Irishness as emanating from a metaphysical realm, including *Philadelphia,*

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Here I Come! (1964), where the protagonist is divided between two actors, Public Gar and Private Gar; Faith Healer (1979), wherein Friel questions the extent to which faith can be an indicator of reality; Dancing at Lughnasa (1990), a play recounted in flashbacks that examines the overlap of Ireland’s pagan past and its Catholic present; and Wonderful Tennessee (1993), in which the main characters wait on a beach to see a magical island appear off the Irish coast.

Certain playwrights range widely between characterizing Irishness as action and Irishness as being, and their presentations of Irish interiority and exteriority alter accordingly. Tom Murphy, who like Brian Friel has one of the longest playwriting careers in twentieth-century Irish drama, is a case in point. Among Murphy’s first works are On the Outside (1959) and On the Inside (1968), in which Ireland is presented as a dance hall. A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer’s Assistant (1967) further complicates Irish identity by adding issues of paralysis, exile, and the power of the small town to enforce behavioral norms. Bailegangaire (1985), arguably Murphy’s greatest play, complicates Irish identity even further by making the repetition of past tragedy, often a touchstone to the mythos of Irishness, a ritual that can be transcended only insofar as the repetition finds a willing hearer who will follow the recitation to completion.

The wide range of Yeats’ dramatic work highlights another relevant pattern in Irish drama in the twentieth century: the tendency of playwrights to shift thematic tactics, often in response to the volatile nature of Irish politics and society. Indeed, it can be argued that Irish drama’s preoccupation with Irishness grows more insistent whenever Irish culture reaches moments of transition or crisis, such as the mid-twentieth-century mass emigrations
or the referenda on divorce and abortion of the mid-1990s. For example, Yeats' Cathleen
plays, written at the turn of the twentieth century amid the flourishing of the Irish Literary
Renaissance (c. 1880-1930), inspired intense patriotic fervor, and for years the rumor
spread (tacitly encouraged by Yeats himself) that the 1916 Easter Uprising insurgents at the
GPO died murmuring lines from Cathleen ni Houlihan (Maddox 352). The middle period
of Yeats' drama coincided with renewed public interest in Irish folklore, especially when it
became apparent to Yeats that patriotism was becoming synonymous not with Celticism
but Catholicism (Maud Gonne, his longtime infatuation and a resolute political agitator,
had converted in 1903, a move most regarded as a show of political solidarity with Irish
nationalists). Subsequently, Yeats shifted his themes to take advantage of the revitalized
interest in such Celtic mythology personalities as Cuchulain and Diedre. Hence, in an
attempt to keep the definition of Irishness as broad as possible, he was increasingly forced
to internalize its definition and set it further in the past, historically distanced from the
introduction of Catholicism to Ireland in the fifth century AD. The final stage of his
career is marked by extremist interiority and bitterness following the years when
government and religion closed ranks (a consummation complete by 1937), the Protestant
Ascendancy lost its power, and the Abbey was hijacked by the state to advance an agenda of
encouraging and representing cultural homogeneity.

Contemporary Irish playwrights have also tried to deal with the curious tendency of
Irishness to gravitate from a manifest exteriority to a complacent, if inert, interiority.
Compare, for example, Friel's Translations with Dancing at Lughnasa. Written for the Field
Day theatre company, Translations takes place amid the so-called hedge schools founded
across Ireland in the 1800s to educate Catholic children denied schooling because of religious discrimination. The plot centers on the British program in the mid-1800s of remapping Ireland by replacing Irish place names with Anglicized equivalents, and the portrayal of this linguistic and geographic acculturation is interspersed with scenes of a prototype IRA lurking offshore and inciting mayhem. The play ends apocalyptically with fire, the threat of death, and a sense of inevitable, wasteful destruction. Nearly a decade later, Friel wrote Dancing at Lughnasa, a play chronicling the lives of five sisters, one of their sons, and their brother. Although political issues are alluded to, the play largely sets aside politics to focus on internal issues: domestic problems, the life of a son without a father, and above all a sense of spirituality, for lack of a better word, that underlies the Celticism of Irishness. This notion is embodied in Jack, the elder brother, dismissed from being a Catholic priest in Africa because he too readily embraced the local polytheistic culture. His return from services openly questions the terms under which religious identity is unnaturally welded to national identity, and his presence serves to bring into focus the ways in which paradigms of identity must account for the internal life of the individual. As a result, each character is brought to re-evaluate her individual sense of Irishness on intangible levels.

A tighter shift, also moving from exteriority to interiority, can be observed in two plays by Anne Devlin. The first, Ourselves Alone (1986), set in Northern Ireland, revolves around the activities of young people connected in various ways to the IRA (“ourselves alone” is a rough translation of “sinn féin,” the name of the political party in Ireland closely associated with the IRA). At certain moments the play reaches histrionic
proportions, characters indignantly berating the audience for witnessing unmoved the melodramatic injustices. Although on its surface the play explores the function of gender in the republican cause, and though it obviously questions the costs of the struggle to sever the six Ulster counties from the United Kingdom, Ourselves Alone couches its examination in hoarse political monologues that question the propriety of Irishness as exteriority. A later Devlin play, After Easter (1994), covers similar thematic terrain, but it aims to explore the interiority of Irishness using a more studied, less hyperventilated discourse. After Easter focuses on three sisters, one who has lived all her life in Ireland, one who lives in England, and a third who has cultivated an American accent in order to succeed in international business. Greta, the ex-pat sister, has begun having visions resulting either from an impending mental breakdown or a significant religious revelation. Her return to Ireland sparks discussions on the interiority of Irishness, Ireland's spiritual links to its Celtic past, and a re-assessment of the political terms with which the Irish have come to define themselves. Coincidentally, both plays have as a centerpiece the intrusion of a home by British military forces searching for contraband; but whereas Ourselves Alone uses the scene as further witness to the brutality that has become commonplace, After Easter uses the same imagery to highlight the absurdity of lives lived on largely political terms.

These examples from the works of Yeats, Friel, and Devlin capture sentiments echoed by their playwriting contemporaries and the Irish public at large, and on a broader scale these works reflect a growing dissatisfaction with the cost of subjective homogeneity, a distrust of politics to address pressing social inequality, and a desire to understand the ontological issues attending a full comprehension of the nature of belonging to Irish
society and culture. Generally speaking, Irish drama from the 1890s to the 1970s is marked by an optimism (or at least a lack of pessimism) that Irish identity can be located within the folds of interiority or exteriority. Most striking about Irish dramatists emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, is their bitterness towards and disenchantment with political processes to resolve the pressing issue of defining Irish identity. The plays of Ron Huchison (A Rat in the Skull [1984]) and Enda Walsh (Disco Pigs [1996]), for example, are especially virulent, verbose, and sometimes vulgar tirades against suffocating notions of contemporary Irishness. Implicated as perpetrators of this issue’s intractability are religion, culture, and materialism, all of which have recently received harsh scrutiny on the Irish stage, particularly within the last twenty years.

In a 1998 article in The New Statesman, Conor McPherson relates an incident representative of this disenchantment and its effect on contemporary Irish drama. He tells of an incident where he and his father, driving through the heart of his hometown in Northern Ireland, were unexpectedly trapped in a traffic jam caused by a pro-republican parade. It was "marching season," and McPherson and his father were stuck in an intersection blocked by a coach. As McPherson’s father frantically tried to locate the driver, the scene became heated and claustrophobic, and young Conor started to panic:

To a child, all this seemed nightmarish. I was scared. But my father’s dismissal of the whole spectacle in his bid to find the driver also shaped the way I felt. His attitude was that it was nothing to do with us. All the more reason to be annoyed that we were hemmed in and couldn’t drive away. This was not anti-Republican. It was anti-The Whole State of Affairs, British and Irish. (41)

McPherson, himself a noted playwright, suggests that his father’s frustration is comparable to the feelings explored by young Irish playwrights towards the end of the 1980s, a resolute
rejection of "the whole state of affairs, British and Irish," an exhaustion with the regular rounds of politicking that had yielded few results and little social order, and an exasperated cry for a dialogue with a vocabulary of new ideas and fresh starts. Caught in the middle of sectarian violence and platitudinous statements about national identity are those like McPherson's father who simply want to get through the chores of daily living without arriving home too late. Such a frustration is born out of a growing suspicion that the political past is alien to the present, that the "whole state of affairs" has taken on a life of its own at the expense of ordinary Irish lives.

In the same article McPherson raises a more immediate issue facing contemporary Irish drama: the balancing of the historical weight of the past with the needs of the present: "Do we dwell on the great injustices they [i.e., the Irish of the past] suffered and become increasingly upset about something we can never really make right? Or do we simply embrace the future they've secured for us? Which is the best way to honour them?" (41) He notes that the central problem for Irish drama is deciding how and to what extent history impinges on the present and, by extension, the future. How much of the past can and should be forgotten in service of the present? What function is played by the "great injustices" in shaping and maintaining a present national identity?

McPherson belongs to a generation of Irish playwrights born decades after Easter 1916 who share either a tacit or explicit understanding that present concerns require a new dramatic palette. It is a movement, perhaps overly optimistic, that has in various ways felt the need to reinvent and in the process reinvigorate Irish drama with subject matter that looks past the sectarian violence of the present to re-examine Irish history in a more
complex, personal way. Among these writers, whose ranks include Billy Roche, Marina Carr, and Martin McDonagh, is Sebastian Barry, whose literary works include novels, poetry, criticism, and drama, beginning with *The Pentagonal Dream* (1986) and culminating with *Our Lady of Sligo* (1998). His playwriting career represents the shift in the shape and subject matter of contemporary Irish drama, drawing from the varied experiences of his family over the past hundred years, exploring new dramatic terrain through memory and personal history, and creating character studies that detail the toll that a hyper-politicized environment has taken on individual lives.

Interestingly, this sense of disenchantment mirrors the state of Irish arts that Yeats observed about 1880s Ireland in his Nobel Prize acceptance lecture. Similarly, in the 1980s and 1990s Irish playwrights grew weary of politically motivated writing and actively sought for new discourses to frame the pressing need to redefine Irishness in order to address the problems of Irish identity, the partition of Ireland, (post)modernization, and how to contextualize the growing momentum to unify Ireland internally and with the European Union. Irish plays written between 1980 and 2000 express a crisis of interiority and loss, as if to suggest that the institutions of Irish culture and politics have so focused themselves on matters of exteriority that the interior life of the Irish has eroded unnoticed, and that now the toll of that erosion is beginning to be felt. What differentiates plays written in the final decades of the twentieth century from those written between 1899 and 1980 appears at first profound: the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre wrote in pre-New Criticism times, whereas recent playwrights produce in a time of heightened awareness about the nuances pertaining to socio-political issues made glaringly apparent through the lenses of
postmodernism, poststructuralism, post-Freudianism, and postcolonialism. The issues, however, remain obstinately the same for Lady Gregory and Yeats as with Barry and his contemporaries: Irish playwrights must negotiate the ongoing conversation between interiority and exteriority in the hopes of edging towards a presumably more complex, diffuse definition of Irishness.

Motivating this study, therefore, are a host of issues relating to the portrayal of Irishness on stage. For example, how are the boundaries of Irish national identity portrayed in dramatic texts? How do they include or exclude given individuals or communities? How does twentieth-century Irish drama attempt to redefine Irishness? How permeable can the Irish nationalist identity boundary be without losing its coherence? Conversely, if a national identity remains unwaveringly fixed, does it create an untenable, unrealistic condition? If fewer and fewer people can rightly claim a nationalist identity because the terms of its definition are linked with the mores and social considerations of the time when the identity was established, who has to give ground: the individual or the community?

Inevitably each playwright brings to the playwriting process a predetermined notion of what Irishness is and how it functions discursively, and these notions can be analyzed to determine the underlying assumptions and anxieties related to the need (or lack thereof) for an interaction between an individual, a community, and a nation-state. A diachronic study of Irishness might sample plays appearing at significant moments in twentieth-century Irish history to examine how notions of Irishness mutate in response to shifting attitudes regarding identity. A synchronic analysis might take a particular time and sample
portrayals of Irishness from a cross section of contemporaneous playwrights. This
dissertation combines these two approaches into a more limited in scope. It concentrates
on the plays of one particular playwright writing during a period of tectonic shifts in Irish
society, from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, in order to analyze his complicated and
oftentimes contradictory presentation of Irishness as a response to social, economic, and
psychological pressures that demanded a revisioning of the terms upon which Irishness is
defined.

IN SEARCH OF POSTNATIONALISM: THEORY OVERVIEW

The need to account for a playwright's assumptions about individual, community,
and nation-state requires a critical lens equipped to smoothly modulate from foreground to
background, one that can analyze the microscopic and macroscopic, and one which can
contextualize the political, social, cultural, and subjective forces which all bear into the
creation of an individual operating within a specific nation and culture. In the context of
Irish drama, this lens must encompass history, art, politics, community formation, and
above all make allowances for subjectivity, in this case the strong emotional attachments
the Irish feel to their own constitutive identity. But underlying all considerations is the
central issue of how nationalism and national identity inform actions, inculcate behavior,
and authorize a particular sense of being without which individuals would have difficulty
assigning significance to their lives. From this vantage point it is clear that nationalism
influences dramatic representations of individuality and community, that individuality and
community give up autonomy in exchange for a place to identify with (whether it be
topographical [e.g., the island of Eire] or metaphorical [e.g., the mystical realm of Tir-na-nOg]) and that playwrights grapple with the codes of nationalism either to redefine or reinforce the power of this institution.

The postcolonial writings of Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha are useful starting points towards such a critical lens by describing current influential theories regarding the construct of individuality. Their work theorizes the volatile, contingent nature of individual identity as a composite of social needs and expressions linked to an active human agent attempting to negotiate communal organizations and avenues. Denying that individuality is an abstraction or a purely concrete manifestation, Hall and Bhabha recognize that the abstract must connect with the concrete on a meaningful, albeit subjective, level. Two points must be here established: first, a viable understanding of the nature of national community needs to be sketched out; second, a model explaining how the individual and community can interface must accompany this construct. Fortunately, Bhabha also writes about nationalism and national identity, so he provides a valuable bridge to the discussion of how individuality connects with communal identity, namely, by suggesting that a core impetus for heightened nationalistic fervor results from a collective sense of loss of individual identity.

Bhabha's theories lead to the question of nationalism and the loss for which it allegedly compensates. The discussion of the origin, function, and future of nationalism and national identity is divided into two starkly opposed camps: the first side is represented by Elie Kedourie and Kenneth Minogue, both of whom authored books titled Nationalism (1960 and 1967 respectively), and the opposing, offshoot camp focuses around Ernest
Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983). The crux of the discussion, and the point which generates the greatest tension, is whether the rise of nationalism and nation-states is simply a tactic of social regression to what are essentially better armed tribal formations or whether these represent truly "modern" institutions invented to address new needs and new situations. In other words, are nations retrogressive or progressive institutions?

Kedourie and Minogue hold the former view, suggesting that nationalism is best understood in relation to a nation's historical and cultural past. This view, especially as described by Minogue, views human communities cynically by suggesting that modern nation-states are little more than a disguise for the continuation of outmoded social collectives (*Nationalism I I*). On the other hand, Gellner and Anderson, while acknowledging the meaningfulness of history, insist that nationalism is at its core a forward-looking enterprise created for modernism that represents a civilized and civilizing presence. They claim that nationalism is unquestionably benign because it represents the height of rationality and that its wholesale adoption the world over is proof positive of its fitness to facilitate rational geopolitical exchanges. In recent times these two camps have sparred intermittently through competing books and articles issued by the main combatants, primarily Kedourie versus Gellner, the dialogue made more interesting by the fact that Gellner had once been a Kedourie protégé.

Since the early 1980s a third position has emerged in the discussion on nationalist identity. Typified by the writings of Eric J. Hobsbawm, Liah Greenfeld, and John Breuilly, this perspective asserts two important tenets: first, that nationalism can only be
understood as a merging of past and future imperatives (thus synthesizing Kedourie/Minogue and Gellner/Anderson), and second, that the age of nationalism has since given way to the age of postnationalism, a condition exemplified by individuals becoming aware of and seeking to reconcile multiple identities and community obligations. Equally important to the postnationalist project is the belief that nationalism at one time served an important function by checking the influence of European colonialism, itself a potent form of nationalism, and realizing the importance of regional, localized autonomy, but that in light of globalization, information technologies, and intractable conflicts over sovereignty and jurisdiction a revised understanding of nationalism must be formulated.

In relation to the discussion of Irish national identity, the Kedourie/Gellner debate highlights an issue reverberating throughout twentieth-century Irish plays: Are the roots of Irishness appropriately Druidic/Celtic/Gaelic, and thus only appropriately addressed and responded to as such (as Kedourie/Minogue would suggest), or is Irishness an invention of the nationalist intelligentsia around the turn of the twentieth century in response to British nationalism (which would properly be addressed by Gellner/Anderson)? In other words, should Irishness be defined synonymously with its tribal Celtic and Catholic past or should it be recast in a mold reflecting its national and global aspirations, replete with the ramifications of generations of Irish diaspora to the US and UK and emigration to Ireland from Africa and the Middle East? And furthermore, if the nationalist identity is located in the past, which past should it refer to? Pre-British invasion? Pre-Norse invasion? Pre-Catholicism advent? Pre-Druidic? If Irish national identity is assumed to be the result of the Industrial Revolution, how does one resolve the issue that Ireland had a problematic
arrival into the industrial world, remaining primarily agrarian well into the twentieth
century? And how to account for the fact that the Irish nationalist movement in the
nineteenth century was opposed by the Catholic Church and coordinated primarily by the
Protestant Ascendancy, an economic class often at odds with "traditional" Irish culture?23
Furthermore, how can one determine whether Irishness is a function of a metaphysical
interiority or a performative externality? Postnationalism alters the terms of this absolutist
debate by problematizing the very tactics of identity politics and nationalism, asking, for
example, the extent to which an émigré from Sierra Leone whose children were born on
Irish soil should be considered Irish, or how much more Irish is that offspring in
comparison to the great-great-grandchildren of an Irish couple who left the homeland for
the United States in the 1850s.

The necessity of a postnationalist discussion is evident here precisely because, in
Bhabha's terms, the dialogue must first agree on what is lost before the discussion about
what nationalism seeks to recover can productively continue. That is, the
Kedourie/Gellner divide in essence cannot agree on what is lost: is it Celtic Ireland,
complete with its language and values modified by Roman Catholicism (as someone
arguing from Kedourie's point of view would posit), or else agrarian values in favor of
industrialism (which is a position that would be taken by proponents of Gellner)?
Postnationalism frames the discussion differently, suggesting that the base assumptions
that combine to create a stable sense of individuality have been destabilized and therefore
must be redefined in relation to a more complex understanding of the permeability of the
borders surrounding cultures and nations. In other words, although nationalism forged
social unity with its attendant promises of socio-economic order, social justice, and a sense of belonging connected with a specific plot of land, the ability for the individual to reinvent the self or even to find complexity in individuality was forfeited and presumed lost. Outside the historical and political realm of nationalism, subjectivity was easily redefined, often out of necessity. Lines of national allegiance were routinely redrawn, emigration flourished and national borders fluctuated, and individuals were more flexible about realigning their own sense of cultural belonging. Presently, however, the terms upon which nationalism is based are now suspect. Postnationalism suggests that contemporary identity is both a gesture towards the past and future while concomitantly exploring avenues of subjective fragmentation that do not necessarily lead to anarchy (as nationalism would suggest) but rather to a more intricate sense of communal solidarity.

The stakes in this discussion go well beyond the simple ramifications of whether or not the Irish agree or agreed with their own representation on stage. According to Brian Friel, the theatre is the medium through which Irish people hears themselves speak: “We are talking to ourselves as we must” (Murray, Brian Friel, 86); therefore, the nature of nationalist identity necessarily dictates what they speak about and what they hear. Although all listeners may not agree on what they hear, it is clear that the stage represents a secular pulpit from which the Irish seek to explore how they see and speak about themselves. Friel adds that the dramatic conversation is not necessarily a private one (“if we are overheard in America and England so much the better”), suggesting that the presentation of Irish identity in Irish drama is as much subjective creation for the internal community as it is for the external observer. The postnationalist discussion enables a
conversation about Irish identity that cannot be enacted under either Kedourie/Minogue or Gellner/Anderson by opening up the discussion to the possibility that social fragmentation is not only a reality, but also a necessary condition. Furthermore, postnationalism opens for renegotiation the dialogue between subjectivity and objectivity that nationalism presumed to be a moot discussion. It calls for a reclassifying of individuality and a reassessment of the role of collectivity in creating identity. Finally, postnationalist thinkers contend that contemporary nationalism should combine the Kedourie/Minogue and Gellner/Anderson approaches in order to find ways “beyond” nationalism to both frame the issues pertinent to problems affecting modern nations and to posit potential solutions.

The most compelling issue that postnationalism articulates is a condition that Roy Foster describes as “dual allegiances” (“Varieties of Irish” 20). In discussing the multifarious issues appropriate to the “national question,” Foster notes that the central failure of attempts to quell the violence in Northern Ireland laid in the terms established by the nationalist vocabulary, the culprit premise being that one could only have allegiance to one nation-state. As a result, every solution was doomed to collapse because dominance of either interested state—the Republic of Ireland or the United Kingdom—is deeply noxious to powerful constituencies, and without mutual consent no lasting settlement could be ratified. Even the relatively novel solution of making Northern Ireland its own independent state offends Unionists and Republicans alike because it implies severing cultural allegiances to their respective nation-state of choice. According to the terms of nationalism, as assumed by the negotiating parties in this conflict, there can be only one
“state” per “people,” and the dichotomy of Ireland and Great Britain leaves two irreconcilable alternatives, not least over the stale arguments of attempting to define who is the legitimate “state” and who constitutes the legitimate “people.”

Here is where postnationalism meaningfully mediates the discussion. By insisting that the nationalist discussion lost its potency by the middle of the twentieth century, postnationalism suggests that a more fluid approach to national identity is needed to address what is common knowledge: that national borders are permeable, that national identity has become (or always has been) fragmented, and that people have always had to negotiate various allegiances to different communities (discourse and otherwise).

Postnationalism legitimates multiple facets of national identity by insisting that it is both regressive and progressive but, most importantly, necessarily both. That is, a postnationalist identity requires both grounding in the historical past, at least the recorded historical past, and acceptance of the fluidity of the present. True, national identity is a construct, as is a nation’s past, present, and future, and all these facets are therefore contingent, but postnationalism further accepts the meaningfulness of the contingency rather than quail at its uncertainties and instabilities. The 1998 Good Friday Accord is a significant gesture towards a postnationalist way of thinking about intractable political problems because it seeks to get outside the dichotomies of nationalism and create an identity that ratifies the complexities of history, political allegiance, and religion.

Here, ironically, is located ratification for the deeply felt emotions rising around the question of Irish national identity. Whereas nationalism demands a homogenous identity, postnationalism accommodates multiple nationalisms within a single national
boundary or in overlapping boundaries. Of course, nationalism has its place in the history of Ireland, for indeed without the drive towards homogenization it is arguable that Ireland may never have achieved sufficient social momentum to break from the United Kingdom. Gellner/Anderson provides the basis for understanding the modernist imperatives driving contemporary Irish nationalist identity forward. However, the momentum towards a homogenized Irish identity (in order to advance the case for social solidarity) was even at the time of the Irish Free State's formal creation considered contingent even by its proponents (and contested in a brutal civil war), and it was only later under the leadership of Eamon de Valera that what was once contingent became inflexible; that is, the identity that brought the Irish together devolved into stultifying public policy that precipitated diasporas in the 1950s and 1960s equivalent in scope to the one initiated by the Great Famine. This same intractability of identity also led to the so-called "Troubles" that arose in the late 1960s and plagued both Northern Ireland and England in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Gellner/Anderson cannot accurately describe this development (their brand of nationalism would have predicted that Ireland would have simply moved on, or else regained proprietary ownership of Northern Ireland through a pan-European or pan-Irish-British Isles state), whereas this devolution to tribalist tendencies is best understood using the Kedourie/Minogue model of nationalism. On the other hand, Hobsbawm/Greenfeld/Breuilly merges these opposing views to achieve this synthesis: the nationalist drive actuated the process of creating a popular moment, via social homogeneity, to establish the Irish Republic, and that movement of necessity drew on a historical past (albeit mostly fictionalized Celticisms) and a need to reinvent a "modern"
Irishness (for example, the merging of Irish Catholicism with the public education system and government).

In what ways can postnationalism be applied to reading literature in general and Irish literature, specifically Irish dramatic literature in the twentieth century?

Postnationalism as sociology attempts to understand nation-formation imperatives as a collusion and collision of a cultural past (including governmental forms, language, rituals, gender roles, and regulations of power—what will hereafter be described as the atavistic drive) and present needs (the requirements for new structures of power to account for growing literacy rates, expanding economic classes, greater social mobility, and so forth). An illustrative analogy is that postnationalism sees nation formation as an ongoing dialogue between the desire to change and the need to remain unmoved in a given community. What is more, postnationalism suggests that the paradigms of national identity, which for so long has been critical in maintaining a tentative sense of social order up until the middle of the twentieth century, are no longer adequate. Postnationalism therefore recognizes that a new threshold has been reached in terms of geopolitical processes and suggests that new paradigms must recognize the fragmentation implicit in contemporary understandings of identity. In other words, it must account for the divided allegiances that individuals feel, oftentimes precipitated in an atmosphere where allegiance boundaries become less visible and less potent.

Postnationalism as critical reading strategy looks at literature to uncover the assumptions that authors embed in the texts about national identity: how nationality is
created, maintained, defined, challenged, and redefined according to temporal needs. The specifics of postnationalist reading will be examined more thoroughly in the following chapters, but it is important to note here that such a reading works most effectively with writing that occurs during periods of cultural and social transition. Furthermore, postnationalism asserts that when a given culture is faced with a crisis of identity, the stability of identity crumbles, often with alarming alacrity, and harsh, oftentimes dramatic revision must take place. Postnationalism is especially useful in examining literature that attempts to reconcile or harmonize pluralistic societies, or those that must reconcile an otherwise monochromatic nationalist identity with its constituents' subjective diversification. Postnationalism, more than the atavistic or progressive schools of nationalism, accommodates the contemporary dialogue that seeks to bridge the numerous gaps between opposing sides of the discussion.

The following is a list of points of analytic departure that a postnationalist reading initiates. The particulars appertaining to each point will be discussed in depth in the following two chapters, but it is necessary to enumerate these ideas here to demonstrate the breadth of postnationalism's scope. The twelve points are divided roughly into three categories: points one through three discuss the position of the individual, points four through seven cover history, and points eight through twelve relate to community. It should be noted here that the list neither comprehensively nor prescriptively catalogues every facet of postnationalism as literary theory, but it demonstrates the main points of access that such an examination provides for discussion and analysis:
1) A postnationalist reading identifies ways that national identity is invented, preserved, challenged, abandoned, or redefined in dramatic texts. It questions the assumptions behind national identity construction and identifies areas where the construction of nationality fails to account for individuals under its zone of control.

2) Nationalism and individual identity invariably fragment, and thus a postnationalist reading locates and describes these subjective fissures. Because societies and individuality changes over time, cracks in foundational societal myths develop and therefore require reconstitution or replacement. A postnationalist reading identifies those cracks, suggests reasons for them, and observes ways in which individuals and institutions work to rectify those breaches.

3) Individual identity is a process that "stitches" together a constructed past and a wished-for future. A postnationalist reading examines attitudes about history, scrutinizing how individuals respond to the presentation of historical facts and mythologies, and searches out the mechanisms whereby individuals assume identities and histories to empower themselves in the discursive world.
4) A postnationalist reading unravels how history is treated, how historical events are prioritized, and how the so-called “lessons of history” are made either meaningful or hidden based on the demands of the nation-state.

5) Nationalism claims the past, reinvents it with the nation as the hero of the narrative, and deploys that narrative to create the illusion of social stability, thereby bringing individuals together under the aegis of the imagined community. A postnationalist reading questions the narrative and its formation, and seeks to identify how a social collective selects and champions a narrative “hero.”

6) A postnationalist reading examines the way time is portrayed in the text. Progressive, linear time indicates the nationalist strategy of imbuing the processes of history with causality and inevitability, progressions necessary to give credence to the myth of the nation’s identity. Problematic time reckoning, on the other hand, either through “fused,” “simultaneous” time or a combination of “homogenous, empty time” and “fused” time, suggests an attempt to resist the hierarchy of causality. Past and future impinge on the present, neither of which can claim priority, but both equally make demands on those living in the present.
7) A postnationalist reading locates moments of cultural amnesia (or in other words, postnationalism locates the facts about a social collective's history or construction which that community willingly ignores) and seeks for reasons why certain facts recede and others come to the forefront. Ernest Renan writes that nations "should have" held past and present as simultaneously remembered and forgotten, and a postnationalist reading seizes upon instances where narrative fluctuates between memory and amnesia and searches for the reasons behind these selections and omissions.

8) Twentieth-century nationalism blends an atavistic-regressionist drive toward tribalism with an impulse to create a new social system sufficient to comprehend and address contemporary socio-political needs. However, these two modes of thought clash over the exercise of political power, and thus a postnationalist reading uncovers how political power is acquired, maintained, and secured in the name of nationalist identity and social stability. Individuals, especially those not in positions of power, are often caught between these forces and either must sacrifice their own sense of self to appease the larger cultural identity momentum or find themselves outcast.

9) Nationalism is an "emergent phenomenon" best understood as an expression of its "unifying principle"—its raison d'être—which is unique for each nationalist.
A postnationalist reading uses the text to locate "unifying principles" and shows how they dictate societal formations.

10) Postnationalism assumes that nationalism as a means of understanding nation-state formations and individuality is now inadequate, a condition brought about by changes in technology, communication, transportation, warfare, and economic trends, coupled with the advent of globalization over the past thirty years. A postnationalist reading seeks for evidence of gestures towards new social formations and solidarities. Oftentimes such formations so greatly defy the logic of nationalism that they are opposed with vehemence and sometimes violence in defense of the old order.

11) Identity-creating institutions are necessary but problematic entities that create the epistemologies through which individuals make difficult decisions—necessary because without institutions there is no society, and problematic because the price of society is a loss in some form of autonomy and individuality. A postnationalist reading seeks to understand how nationalist culture forms and maintains desire, and it locates moments when institutional overlap (that is, the intersection of multiple, sometimes incompatible cultures in an individual, a geographical area, or a psycho-social space) creates cognitive dissonance.
In a postnationalist reading, the text either opens or obfuscates a "beyond" space outside the political sphere in an attempt to give articulation to voices that cannot speak in the political world. The "beyond" bridges discourses and creates a broader awareness of the polyphony of subjective voices.

Implications for Further Postnationalist Readings in Irish Drama

To demonstrate the usefulness of the postnationalist approach to literature, this dissertation focuses on Sebastian Barry, whose plays present a complicated sense of Irishness in an Ireland still in the midst of attempting to define itself in relation to its citizens and the geopolitical world. However, further work is needed to analyze the works of other Irish dramatists, especially writers whose works have appeared in the 1990s, especially since the 1998 Good Friday Accord. Readings of past playwrights can indicate how representations of the "state" of Irishness reflected attitudes about individuality and community. In addition, Ireland as a postnational work-in-progress and the protean nature of Irishness provide continual fodder for new playwrights seeking to understand the place of their nation and individual identity in relation to Ireland's past and future. Moreover, since the 1920s the Irish have considered themselves a partitioned national entity, and therefore Ireland's ongoing search to either unify itself or make peace with its uneasy state of division suggests that issues of nationality, individuality, and subjective fragmentation are constantly on the forefront of Irish consciousness. A postnationalist reading can illuminate the contemporary Irish playwright's struggle to understand how identity and subjectivity, particularly in relation to other established and emergent nation-states and
narrative traditions, are forever redefined and deferred. Other readings could be applied to Northern Irish plays, plays by ex-patriate Irish, and immigrant Irish writers. Indeed, the time will come when Ireland’s growing immigrant community will produce playwrights who will further complicate the definition of Irishness.

Postnationalism expands the concept of “Irish playwright” to consider works written by those who demonstrate a connection to Irishness, no matter how tenuous the link. Furthermore, “nationalist identity” can be expanded to include allegiance to a set of cultural norms regardless of sovereign borders, ethnicity, geography, or citizenship. This is perhaps the most troublesome and as yet untested frontier of postnationalism, taking the anti-essentialist argument to its potentially absurd conclusion, that insofar as nationalism is a convention so too is the taking on and putting off of nationalist identity in spite of the nation-state’s attempts to codify identity through passports, taxation, voting rights, and entitlement programs. The following two chapters discuss in detail how national identity, recast through a postnationalist perspective, can be understood as resembling playwright Dennis Johnston’s description of the Abbey Theatre as an old knife with four new blades and five new handles that somehow claims to be the original knife (O’Toole, “Irish Theatre,” 165): it is a useful but problematic implement for a world that still needs identities in order to function smoothly.
1 Carla J. McDonough notes, “Women playwrights are not scarce in Ireland, but they are scarcely produced, especially in the major, high-profile venues like the Abbey Theatre (179). Citing Claudia Harris, she further observes that in 1983 roughly 200 plays by women were submitted to the Abbey; however, McDonough points out, from 1984 to 1989 the Abbey produced only one play authored by a woman, “and not an Irish woman at that” (179).

2 Fintan O’Toole, writing in 1998, subdivides twentieth-century Irish drama into three phases (“Irish Theatre” 165-174). Like Murray, O’Toole places in the first phase Yeats, Gregory, and Synge. This phase ends in the 1920s when the Abbey refused to produce The Silver Tassie and The Old Lady’s Says No! His second phase, 1950-1989, includes Murphy, Friel, Keane, Kilroy, and Leonard. The third phase begins in 1990 and has yet to run its course; although he writes that the third phase is “too new to be defined,” he says it resembles the ideas and motivations of the first phase (166). Incidentally, six of the post-1990 playwrights—Barry, McPherson, Roche, Hughes, Walsh, and O’Rowe—were all introduced to the contemporary drama scene by the off-West End pub theatre The Bush. McPherson titled for a 1996 article he wrote in the New Statesman is telling: “If You’re a Young Irish Playwright, Come to London. If You Can Put Up with Being Defined by Your Nationality, the Opportunities are Huge.”

3 “Anglo-Irish” is a complicated term that refers to both a group of people (i.e., those who by ancestry or allegiance connected both to Ireland and England) and a genre of literature (i.e., works written in the English language by those of Irish descent).

4 In the manifesto, titled “The Celtic Theatre,” Yeats makes a curious distinction between “Irish” and “Celtic”: “We propose to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays” (Foster, W. B. Yeats, 184). It may be that Yeats was attempting to distinguish between plays written in English (which would properly be termed “Anglo-Irish”) and those written in Gaelic. Furthermore, “Celtic” implies a pre-English world that was also “mythic” and “epic” populated by heroic individuals endowed with an Irishness that was simultaneously strong, cunning, and autonomous. Foster notes that in time Yeats would rename the “Celtic Theatre” as the “Irish Literary Theatre” because he had become suspicious of the word “Celtic”: “WBY later realized that the concept of ‘Celticism’ was bogus through reading an article by Andrew Long” (571).

5 A forthcoming book, Irish Theatre: 1601-2000 by Christopher Morash (2001), argues for an even broader Irish drama tradition stretching back to the Elizabethan period. Although it is not the contention of this dissertation stretching back to the Elizabethan period. Although it is not the contention of this dissertation that Irish drama sprang fully formed into the twentieth century, the point being made here is that Irish drama was not formally
conceived as an instrument of Irish national identity until Yeats, Gregory, and Martyn collaborated on their manifesto.

6 Foster argues that social and political movements played a more important role leading to Irish independence than the artists and poets of the time were willing to acknowledge (see *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*). See also Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* for addition perspectives on the role of Irish drama, poetry, and athletics in bringing about the Republic of Ireland.

7 Yeats had a passing fancy with Jung and his theories of the collective unconscious (Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 463, 515; Maddox 5). Alluding to Yeats' Jungian proclivities, Foster, in "Varieties of Irish," writes: "It's possible that Yeats' reliance on the idea of an *Anima Mundi*, a common repository of world memories to which all mankind had potential access, was partly directed by his experience of a common cultural pool of identification in things Irish," a pool that was "heavily influenced by English literature and thought" (14-15). It is likely that Yeats may have been hoping to construct a theory of interiority as spiritual community, particularly in accordance with Jung's troublesome theory that nationalistic traits were ingested into social solidarities through their interaction with the land they lived on. Yeats' later dalliances with the Irish fascist movement, the Blueshirts, and his meditations on eugenics in *On the Boiler* give his career an unseemly taint of racism. His attention to matters of race and miscegenation may not entirely be out of keeping with his times, but in retrospect these preoccupations implicate a more sinister side to Yeats which few Yeats scholars are comfortable discussing. A notable exception is Conor Cruise O'Brien, whose essay "Passion and Cunning" sparked a firestorm of criticism from the Yeats studies community when he frankly analyzed Yeats' attraction to fascism and racism.

8 The authorship of Yeats' plays has become increasingly problematic. Recent scholarship has shown that like Brecht Yeats collaborated with women throughout his playwriting career and without exception took credit for their efforts. Mary Lou Kohfeldt's *Lady Gregory: A Biography* sums up the case that Lady Gregory, not Yeats, was primarily responsible for *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, which she referred to in her diaries as *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. Lady Gregory wrote the text, Yeats the chants, and after Lady Gregory had typed the entire manuscript Yeats put his name as sole author (146). When asked by her family why she never asserted authorship, she replied that "she could not take from Willie what was after all his only success" (151). Even so, her participation was well enough known by her contemporaries. Declaiming the criticism of *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) at its premiere, Yeats prefaced his angry rant with, "The author of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* addresses you!" In his diary Joseph Holloway found the statement ironic as he assumed everyone knew that Lady Gregory was the true author (194). She also worked with Yeats on *The Pot of Broth* (1929)—which he also took credit for—and she wrote the crucial Fool/Blind Man scenes of *On Baile's Strand* (1905) (165). In addition, her research of the Cuchulain myths
was the uncredited source texts from which Yeats wrote his six Cuchulain plays (Skene 13). Furthermore, in George’s Ghosts: A New Life of W. B. Yeats Brenda Maddox reports that Yeats’ wife George was the original source, and not merely the conduit, for the occult principles underpinning A Vision (1925) and which in turn became the underlying philosophical model for the final Noh plays.

9 On 22 June 1897 Yeats accompanied Maud Gonne as she headed an anti-Jubilee rally in Dublin. Although he thrilled at the growing rage of the crowd, he panicked when the enraged masses began rioting, whereas Gonne seemed comfortably in her element. To his consternation she accused him of cowardice, noting that whereas she was “born to be in the midst of a crowd” he was not suited for “the outer side of politics” (White and Jeffares 72-73, emphasis added).

10 The influence of Cathleen ni Houlihan on sectarian violence (in 1916 and the present “Troubles”) in Ireland is an ongoing controversy. Roy Foster and Denis Donoghue claim it had little or no effect; Robert Tracy and Declan Kiberd believe it had a profound effect (Maddox 351-352).

11 Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), the noted Polish director and experimental theatre artist, was notorious for demanding the right to select his audience, sometimes rejecting people standing in line before they could enter his performance space.

12 Paul Scott Stanfield, in Yeats and Politics in the 1930s (1988), clarifies that Yeats’ preoccupation with eugenics had little relation to the political philosophies in the Continent that would eventually devolve into the genocide of the Second World War. He writes that Yeats did not “derive his sense of the approaching apocalypse from eugenics. Rather, he adapted the ideas of the eugenicists to fit an apocalyptic vision that was very much his own” (164). Stanfield later elaborates: “Eugenics [for Yeats] served as support for long-held convictions of his having to do with modern degeneration and the importance of birth and family [...] Who, finally, was most responsible for the very rightness of those genes? The artist, who by holding to men’s eyes things and beings that did not exist brought a pressure to change on things and beings that did exist, who by invoking the intangible transformed the tangible” (183). Yeats’ strategy could be rightly called “eugenic art” in that he hoped that his contribution to the stage, and more importantly Irish identity, would be an interventional art that could meaningfully transform Irishness into a modern entity worthy of entering the geopolitical world. (See also Grene, The Politics of Irish Drama, 174-177.) Maddox suggests that On the Boiler was focused more on issues of class than race (337).

13 Highlighting the confused protests over The Playboy of the Western World, Roy Foster notes in the first volume of his biography of Yeats that on the third night of the play’s run a
“claque” of rabble-rousers, apparently led by Lady Gregory’s nephew, rose up and howled out a drunken rendition of “God Save the King” (360). That the British national anthem should be sung at the emotional apex of a controversy over a play that, for the anthem’s singers, represented an assault on the heart of Irish cultural and national identity—in this case, the sacred west of Ireland and the Irish peasant—implies that more than just a disagreeable performance was at stake. True, one reads of the de facto objections to the (perceived) glorification of parricide, the stereotyped portrayal of the Irish as unwitting dupes, and the scandalous reference to “shifts” (women’s undergarments); but these are criticisms that, given the mores of any time, always greet controversial material. Crucial to the *Playboy* riots was an element peculiar to Ireland in the early 1900s and the volatile political climate. To Synge’s opponents, *Playboy of the Western World* was nothing less than an argument against Irish nationalism and independence (certainly Synge’s and Yeats’ Ascendancy background did not help dispel this assumption) and a blow to Irish individuality by classifying the peasantry and, by association, the entire populace as gullible, drunken rioters who lionized murderers. Synge’s proponents, notably Yeats, viewed the play as a legitimate critique of the failings of Irish cultural construction. Rushing back to Dublin from England upon hearing news of the riots, Yeats took the opportunity to harangue the audience from the stage and later wrote in the *Evening Telegraph* on 29 January that the “people who formed the opposition had no books in their houses.” A few days later, on 4 February, Yeats sponsored a well-attended and contentious debate at the Abbey about the merits of Synge’s play, and he opened his remarks by asking the audience, “What is a good Irishman?” The question, of course, was aimed both at defending Synge against charges of cultural treason and opening up for dialogue the facets of Irishness that Synge allegedly violated. That a play could arouse such alarm (riots also followed performances in the United States in 1911) attests to both the visceral nature of the “national question” debate and the position that many felt that art played in the public discourse negotiation to define Irish identity and the terms upon which that identity could then be construed either to endorse or ridicule republicanism.

*Of late* *Translations* has received especial scrutiny for its alleged distortion of the effects of the British Ordnance Survey of Ireland in the 1820s and 1830s, which is presented in the play as an act of cultural violence. In “Notes for a Future Edition of Brian Friel’s *Translations*” (1992), J. H. Andrews offers twenty-nine corrective notes challenging Friel’s representation of the Ordnance Survey in an attempt to counteract what Andrews sees as the tendency of critics, readers, and audiences of the play to take the play’s portrayal of historical events at face value. For example, as early as 1366 laws were passed in England calling for the Anglicization of Irish place names; the Ordnance Survey thus could be seen as a simple codification of practices already centuries old. The controversy has yet to be resolved.
A Rat in the Skull deals with the issues of IRA terrorism and Irish cultural solidarity, questioning issues of allegiance, civil liberty, and social accountability. Disco Pigs employs a hybrid dialect of Cork Irish and, for lack of a better description, baby talk to give a forum for contemporary angst that certain young Irish feel about the socio-political issues that affect them but which they believe they have no power to influence. Here is a typical line from Disco Pigs: "No one gis a fuck about dem norisy bas-turds. Way boddar? News a da wek is let dem do each odder in!" Enda Walsh creates for his characters a nearly impenetrable argot that reflects the equally confused, solipsistic nature of Irish society and the "national question." Walsh is as contemptuous of Irish politics and theatre critics: "Those people have sort of decided that myself, Conor McPherson and a couple of fellow Irish writers are like—are'n we fab? [. . . ] They've decided that Ireland is hot stuff. I think we're OK. But I don't think we're the bees' knees or anything" (Donnelly D7).

McPherson's assumption is that in writing and producing drama Irish playwrights are by default seeking to honor those who lived and presumably suffered in the past. This position is even more complicated by the fact that earlier in his article McPherson observes that as an Irish playwright living and working in London he was taken aback by how often theatre critics interpreted his plays to be about Ireland simply because of his nationality: "Although I had never set out to write consciously about my country, my work seemed to suggest Irish issues to certain critics" (40).

Kedourie and Minogue hold that nationalism is a manifestation of atavistic tendencies in humans. As will be elaborated in the following chapter, they see the formation of nations as a regression to tribalism, albeit with more advanced technology and weaponry. See Kedourie, Nationalism (fourth ed., 1993) and Minogue, Nationalism (1967).

In opposition to Kedourie and Minogue, Gellner and Anderson assert that nationalism is a rational outgrowth of human progress, and that its existence is proof positive that nationalism is an intrinsic component of the evolving social structure. See Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (1983) and Anderson, Imagined Communities (1983).

Gellner is particularly incredulous towards Kedourie's insistence that nationalism is a "by-product" of Enlightenment thought and thus an "ideological accident" (Gellner, Nationalism, 10).

In the preface to his final book Nationalism (1997), Gellner acknowledges his indebtedness to Kedourie but has this to say of his former mentor's theoretical posture: "Nationalism is not just an erroneous theory that can be disproved and discarded; it was and is an inevitable part of the modern world" (viii).

See, for example, Fintan O'Toole's amusing article "The Man of Your Dreams" in *Lie of the Land: Irish Identities* for a monograph on the growing population of non-white Irish in the Republic of Ireland.

It is tempting to regard the whole of the English-Irish conflict as a fight over religion, but the vastness and wide historical swath of the controversy suggest otherwise. In his collection of polemic essays *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*, Roy Foster strives to establish that the imbroglio between Ireland and England has always been a cultural one, and that religion was only one of many factors, not the primary factor. He notes that once the dust had settled following the 1916 Uprising, "the Catholic Church could claim (or had contrived to create) a history of popular identification; it was not tainted with pre-revolutionary elitism or collaborationism" (93). Ireland's problematic relationship with England can be traced as far back as the twelfth century, pre-Reformation times, when Dermot McMurrough, king of Leinster, sought military assistance from the English king Henry II. In 1170 the army of Richard Fitzgilbert de Clare, earl of Pembroke, under the direction of Robert de Barry, landed and took advantage of McMurrough's invitation to establish an English military and cultural presence. The ensuing cultural overlap caused sufficient consternation to English lawmakers that they established the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366) which forbade intermarriage and trade between Irish and English and imposed the first officially sanctioned requirement that Gaelic names be replaced by Anglicized equivalents. Suppression of Irish culture took on religious dimensions when Henry VIII declared himself head of the English church and converted England to Protestantism, and the resulting friction with Ireland reached a low point in 1641 when a massive uprising of Irish Catholic dissidents slaughtered hundreds of Protestants on the grounds that they were ridding Ireland not just of Protestants but more importantly English parvenus. Following the deposition of Charles I, Cromwell's notorious 1652 Act of Settlement banished Catholics to the western province of Connaught and installed Protestant landlords in vacated properties. Although Charles II in 1660 later mediated the effects of this displacement by returning a handful of properties to their Catholic owners, after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, where Catholic monarch James II was defeated and William III asserted himself the Protestant king over Ireland, Protestants solidified their grip over Irish land and culture. In 1695 the Penal Laws, a worsening of the Kilkenney Statutes, further ordered Catholics to subdivide property among all married children, thus diluting their inheritance and power (Sebastian Barry's *Boss Grady's Boys* [1988] explores the aftereffects of this policy on Irish culture in the early twentieth century). The careful attention that both the Kilkenney Statutes and the Penal Laws give to forbidding intermarriage, the suppression of Gaelic language and culture, and the prohibition of horse ownership by the Irish, and the fact that these codes were on the
whole unenforceable, bear witness to the complexity of maintaining a clear division between notions of Irishness and Englishness. (See Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*.)

24 Nationalism, according to Greenfeld, is a phenomenon of both time and space. In *Nationalism, Five Roads to Modernity* she suggests that notions of modernism arose in Elizabethan England, and that subsequent variations of nationalism appeared as other European states copied England’s lead and exported the template of nationalism to their colonial possessions. The irony here is that ideas of nationalism were initially used to maintain colonial dominance (“We are Gauls, and our ancestors were Gallic” was a phrase memorized and recited by Vietnamese schoolchildren under French occupation), but was later deployed to resist colonialism and bring about independence. Hence, although nationalism can be considered an institution roughly four hundred years old, its widespread influence comes into play most prominently in the early decades of the twentieth century as old empires dissolved and the global economy became more complex.

25 “Mythologies,” as used here, should not be construed to imply that history is false. The term appears here only to indicate any story or anecdote, regardless of veracity, which has a significant impact on the way an individual or community conducts behavior, desire, and social interactions. To a certain extent this definition draws from Roland Barthes’ concept of myth as “message” and “mystification.” See Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (1991).

26 Both “fused, simultaneous time” and “homogenous, empty time” are taken from Benedict Anderson and are elaborated upon in chapter two. Either reckoning of time can be used by a culture as a colonizing weapon or defense against an encroaching culture or epistemology. Imposing a foreign time reckoning system or “resetting the clock to year zero” are two ways in which powerful ideologies or cultures can impose their worldviews on others. For example, it can be argued that the controversy between science and religion, particularly science and Christianity, centers on competing concepts of time. Ironically, in the Middle Ages Christianity took the side of “fused” time and science that of “homogenous time.” Nowadays, with the advent of Big Bang cosmology, which suggests that the universe is born and reborn in cycles, and the rise of millennialism, with its attendant apocalyptic endtime visions of the world ending in fire and rapture, the positions have reversed. Conversely, indigenous cultures, many of which previously subscribed to “fused” time structures but under duress had to conform to “homogenous” time imposed by incoming cultures, have used the arguments of “homogenous” time to assert the legitimacy of their culture and nationhood in the courts of their colonizers.

27 See Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” Renan’s ideas are covered in chapter three.

28 The atavistic-regressionist position is isolationist in that it draws stark boundaries between the community and those social groups exterior to it. The more progressive drive seeks to broaden social boundaries and communicate across communal lines.
"Emergent phenomenon" and "unifying principle" are concepts derived from Liah Greenfeld's *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. They receive a more detailed analysis in chapter two.

This does not mean that nations will cease to form, or that nationalism will no longer arise among social collectives, or even that nationalism is no longer a potent force in world politics. Gellner points out that not all nations arrive at equal rates to equivalent states of nationalism, and that new formations will continue to appear and disappear, to the delight of cartographers everywhere. Postnationalists such as Hobsbawm and Breuilly suggest that up until about twenty years ago, when the study of nationalism reached fruition under the leadership of Gellner, Anderson, and others, the condition of nation-statehood was considered by scholarship to be the highest, most advanced and most desirable level for a social collective to attain, the best of all possible worlds. Such a view of the world and geopolitics was heavily influenced by the events of the twentieth century, as political boundaries, especially in Europe, were solidified and similar order was imposed on the Middle East and Africa by the West. Inevitably, such a view of the world takes on a distinctively Eurocentric perspective of the geopolitical stage, and the consequences have been decidedly mixed: for example, nationalism has brought about improved standards of living for Arab states and also conflicts arising in Rwanda, Tanzania, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, and elsewhere. Since the time Gellner and Anderson touted the glories of nationalism, a more sober, complicated perspective has emerged. Postnationalism asserts that nationalism is not the end of a social collective's being, that in fact there are more complex, subtle configurations that can still appear that are able to address problems and resolve conflicts that the vocabulary of nationalism is incapable of treating. Postnationalism neither implies a strict chain of evolution nor a unidirectional movement from one stage to the next (say from agrarian to feudal to pre-industrial to industrial to national to postnational)—it is possible for collectives to sidestep a nationalist phase, for example, and begin life as a postnationalist state. The implication here is that because of globalism nations will eventually have to come to terms with the fact that nationalism is no longer a simple matter of drawing a tight imaginary line between themselves and others and hope that the line remains firm and unbreached. Thus, although postnationalism does not deny that new nations and forms of nationalism will continue to appear, it does open up ways of understanding social configurations as they seek to branch out beyond the training-wheels of nationalism to more complex social formations.

The "beyond," a term taken from Bhabha, signifies a subjective space that is efficacious within a give social solidarity but which the solidarity insufficiently accords meaning. Bhabha is discussed in chapter three.
CHAPTER 2

FRAMING THE FIELD, PART ONE:
POSTNATIONALISM AS LITERARY CRITICISM

Every scrap of matter and energy bears traces of its history, if only we can learn how to read it there.

Timothy Ferris, The Whole Shebang

Since the founding of the Irish National Theatre, Irish drama has been inextricably linked to the issues of establishing a formal Irish identity for the Irish community and the geopolitical world at large. For a dissertation examining the nature of Irishness as expressed in drama, a theoretical reading strategy needs to be deployed in order to bridge theories of the individual with theories of the community. Stuart Hall's work on fragmentation in postcolonial subjectivity lends itself to a reading of Ireland and Irish literature as a problematic response to cultural colonial pressures most forcefully from England but also from continental Europe and the United States as well. Postnationalism, a theory guiding contemporary understanding of how nations and nationalism operate in the postmodern, post-World War II era, explains how modern political processes and nationalism function to create complex, fragmented yet collective
social identities. Postnationalism identifies the structures of national identity creation and the identity gaps which nationalism seeks to elide.

Postnationalism is an advantageous critical reading strategy with which to approach Irish literature, because Ireland is in many ways a model postnational entity. If what postnationalist theorists claim is true, namely that the world now exists in a postnationalist environment, then any and all nation-states could equally lay claim to being postnational by the simple fact that they exist in the present. However, as Gellner points out, not all nations progress at similar paces, nor do they exhibit similar traits simultaneously; consequently, neither do they necessarily avail themselves readily and willingly to a postnationalist reading. Ireland, however, is one of the many exceptions because its process of becoming a nation has been recent, volatile, and it is as yet unresolved.

Ireland is a nation-state that has never comfortably fit into the nation-state mold, and this ill fit is a condition that postnationalism as a reading strategy can gainfully analyze. Ireland's ongoing national becoming lays bare the painful yet often ignored or metaphorized ordeals that social collectives routinely endure on their way to joining the community of nation-states, and therefore an analysis of Irish literature through a postnationalist perspective can reveal much of how individuals and individuality weather the vagaries of large-scale, and frequently violent, social revamping. Moreover, the pressing issues relating to Northern Ireland have demanded a wholesale rethinking of the terms under which national identity is created and perpetuated. In an effort to shape a public policy that reflects the tangled, multi-layered texture of Irish identity, the British and Irish governments have rejected notions of absolutist identity in favor of a more nuanced,
postnationalist position. Article one, section six of the Good Friday Accord, officially titled The Agreement, signals this postnational position when it announces that the British and Irish governments have consented to

recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland.

This passage reads remarkably like a paragraph from Roy Foster or Eric Hobsbawm. Asserting multiple allegiances, the primacy of autonomy, and permeability of national boundaries, the Good Friday Accord represents an acknowledgment by two nation-states that they have entered a new era of postnationalist politics.

This chapter will outline how postnationalism represents the merging of two major theories of nationalism that have dominated political theory over the past thirty years. The first theory, proposed by Elie Kedourie and Kenneth Minogue, claims that nationalism is a reconstitution of tribalist instincts sanctified by an eighteenth-century philosophical tradition of self-determination, social contract, and state sovereignty vested in the "people" (as advanced by Kant, Rousseau, and others). The second theory, advanced by Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, argues that nationalism is not a regressive condition but instead the result of economic necessity brought about by the industrial revolution, the "Mamluk-ization" of socio-economic roles, increased social mobility, and the breakdown of age-old modes of tribal identification. Pursuant to a reconciliation of these two camps is an emerging school of thought, reflected in the writings of E. J. Hobsbawm, Liah Greenfeld, and John Breuilly, which blends the Kedourie/Minogue and Gellner/Benedict
positions by theorizing that nationalism depends on an uneasy negotiation between contemporary and historical social imperatives.

STUART HALL: IDENTITY DYNAMICS

“Identity” is frequently defined as a mask or persona, a function grounded in appearance that enables the wearer to action. Stuart Hall reverses this causality by re-forming “identity” as action itself. According to Hall’s prolix definition of identity, “By identity, or identities, I mean the processes that constitute and continuously re-form the subject who has to act and speak in the social and cultural world” (65). Identity, for Hall, is not a state of being or an essentialist condition, neither mask nor persona; it is rather a dynamic process marked by continuous interaction and “re-formation.” Identity is, paradoxically, a communal activity that responds to the discursive needs of the individual and an individual “becoming” that refines the social collective. By immediately locating identity in action and speaking, Hall denies that identity is an *a priori* condition. By suggesting that identity, as a dynamic process, resists attempts to crystallize it, Hall can thus claim that identity can only be comprehended synchronically, not diachronically. He explains that identity is the “necessary fiction of action,” meaning that only through identity can individuals ratify action, and therefore action and identity are symbiotic processes, each legitimizing the other, but that in either case both are contingent and illusory.

He elaborates further: “Identity is the meeting point, or the point of suture between the ideological discourses which attempt to interpellate [with its attendant
meanings of "to call" and "to name") or speak us as social subjects, and [. . . ] the psychological or psychical processes which produce us as subjects which can be spoken” (65). The "present," under Hall's scheme, is preciously evanescent, a temporal point at which the larger fabrics of past and future events are stitched together. That such a fabric apparently rolls unidirectionally in four-dimensional space is surely not lost on Hall, but his point is that both the present and the future are fuelled by present processes that subsume and are subsumed by the interpellated individual. The individual is thus a nexus of competing “becoming” processes that attempts to speak and interact with and within the socio-political world. The implication here is that identity rightly arises outside the socio-political sphere in the antipolitical realm; in other words, identity inhabits a psychosocial space neither created by nor specifically articulated for the discourse of political culture. However, identity can and is significant enough of a concept that in order to assume legitimacy political discourse must incorporate, or at least presume to incorporate, issues of identity creation and maintenance, and Hall would agree that the power of identity-creation is significant enough that the socio-political world continuously attempts to usurp the formation process from whichever locus it springs from. But whereas that locus is quite obviously beyond the socio-political grasp, the socio-political world nevertheless responds by making dubious and usurping claims for identity creation.

The pressing issue of nationalism focuses on the role autonomy, if it exists at all, plays within the interplay of socio-political forces. The *ad absurdum* conclusion might be that only socio-political forces exist and thus individuals are doomed to unwittingly serve institutions and not themselves, a sentiment implied by Mary Douglas, who observes that
all decision making relies on prepackaged cognitive resolutions that institutions provide (4). What Hall brings to the subjective discourse is the notion that identities (as the individual is a composite of multiple-layered subjectivities), though concrete, are best understood as "points of suture," or more specifically "points of temporary attachment." Identity merely creates temporary alliances of subjective influences to initiate "personhood," but it is neither the alliance itself, nor the producer, nor the product of the alliance. Autonomy thus derives from the points of suture, or more precisely the act of suturing, the temporalities, which engage with institutions in a multifarious dialogue. Hall explains that identities, not individuals, have histories, although individuals obtain or attain history insofar as they assume a certain identity (or identities) at any given time. Hall compares identity to a bus, "not because it takes you somewhere but because you can only get somewhere by getting on." Thus, individuals and autonomy exist, but the individual can exist and act only through the agency of identity, over which institutions (communities, nations, and so forth) claim a monopoly by virtue of claiming the political field.

This definition of autonomy can be applied equally to one person as it can to a collective (in the case of this study, a nation): identity enables individuals and nations to action. Such a construct is consistent with cultural theory as outlined by Thompson, Grendstad, and Selle, in that this theoretical construct, like fractal geometry, can describe both larger cultural operations and smaller, individual formations. The relation, responsibility, and reciprocity that hover between an individual and the social collective to which one belongs represent a dynamic system that masquerades as a static system. Hall reassures us that the dynamic flux that courses between individual and collective is an
ongoing but necessary exchange wherein individuals are allowed, indeed empowered, to
shift identities and self-definitions as the interpellative need dictates, and those
redefinitions are an integral part to the individual condition. Hall’s definition is useful
because it describes how collectives and nations can deploy identity to control individual
behavior, a project that dictates a static form of discursive identity.

Hall’s construct of individuality lends an important insight into the Irish identity
question because it recognizes identity as fluid. A more daring extrapolation, advanced by
Roy Foster and other so-called revisionist historians, is the opportunity for multiple
allegiances to multiple sovereignties. “The very notion of indivisible sovereignty is now
being questioned,” Foster writes in his essay “Varieties of Irishness”; “feasible or not,” he
continues, “the concepts of dual allegiance and cultural diversity are surely associated” (19-20).
Foster’s call is simply to acknowledge what is in his mind already a reality, which is
the emergence of postnationalist states, or rather a state of postnationalist awareness—what
he refers to as a “new nationalism.” In such a state the fragmented individual would be
allowed access to a wealth of various identities and, in Hall’s term, histories. From the
perspective of literary criticism, a postnationalist reading of twentieth-century Irish drama
would therefore look for the ways in which identity coalesces according to social pressure
in relation to the culture around it (and in doing so critique that culture) and how, under
certain circumstances, that identity fractures or where the fracture lines can no longer be
hidden. Such a critique would be a literary equivalent of “bus-spotting”: seeking out the
stops, routes, and destinations of individual identities as they negotiate the cultural terrain
they inhabit. Implicit in this examination is the primacy of place the autonomous entity
holds, that particle operating in the discourse field whose location, vector, and velocity are always uncertain.

**Nationalism, Part One: Kedourie, Minogue, and the Tribalist Past**

To understand precisely the foundations upon which postnationalism is based, it is necessary to understand the bases for the Kedourie/Minogue-Gellner/Anderson debate over the nature of nationalism. As mentioned in the first chapter, postnationalism is best understood through the intersection of positions articulated by Kedourie/Minogue and Gellner/Anderson (a hybrid stance taken by Hobsbawm, Greenfeld, and Breuilly), in terms of how they inform an understanding of how art contributes to the ongoing process by which individuals delineate their individuality (or, as McKim Marriott would say, their "dividuality" [Thompson, Grendstad, and Selle 12]). The postnationalist conversation convenes over the question of negotiating the relationship between nationalism as a "regression to atavistic irrationalism" (that is, a wholesale and sophisticated return to tribalism) or "a necessity of humane and rational modernity" (meaning an industrialist construct that works because, by self-definition, it has worked so far). In the postnationalist discourse these competing theories overlap and conflict, particularly over the contradictory roles that individuals and institutions play in instructing a group of people as to who they are, how they should act, the values they should cherish, and the way they should think and conduct themselves (se conduire, as the French would say: "to drive oneself"). The essential point here is that nationalism has a tendency to overstate benefits
of community and to obscure the potential harm that such processes as social
homogenization can introduce in order to induce social order.⁵

The first perspective on the origin of nationalism is the "atavistic regression"
model, best articulated by Elie Kedourie in Nationalism (1960).⁶ For Kedourie, nationalism
is foremost an ideology wholly apart from constitutional politics because "ideology" is
concerned with the theoretical motivating and organizing principle of social solidarities,
whereas "constitutional politics" is involved with the practical, quotidian management of
social and public policy. He locates the origins of nationalism in nineteenth-century
Europe, following the upheavals of the French Revolution, as a response to the increased
feeling of alienation the governed felt towards the governing, a time which saw "humanity
naturally divided into nations which were, which had to be, the proper unit of political
organization" to bring about "perpetual peace" (xvi). Kedourie is especially fond of Kant
and quotes him at length, especially passages from Critique of Practical Reason (1788) and
Perpetual Peace (1794), two works that spanned the French Revolution and its aftermath, to
establish the foundation for the Western investment of sovereign authority in the
individual will and in the "people." Under this construct nationalism is a "secular modern
movement" that is atavistic because it presupposes an inherent rightness for its ability to
order the geopolitical world, as if to suggest that one finds in the present model of
nationalism the best of all possible (that is, achievable) worlds.

Kenneth Minogue's Nationalism (1967), elaborating on Kedourie's theory by adding
a cynical overlay to the purposes and motivations of modern nationalism, contends that
nationalism is a contemporary reality that must be endured because the next possible step—
not socialism but rather globalism—is a worse creature. "Nationalism, as the story is
generally told," Minogue begins his Nationalism, "begins as Sleeping Beauty and ends as
Frankenstein's monster" (7). "The state is a monster," he writes in a more recent essay
titled "Does National Sovereignty Have a Future?" (1996). Without reservation he declares
the nation state a "vile old brute." But, he adds, "It is our monster, in the sense that it
must endure some sort of accountability, in democracies, to us" (38). Minogue finds a
cultural analogue to nationalism in Romanticism, owing to the time of their arrival (late
eighteenth century, early nineteenth, the same span that Kedourie chooses) and the
protean journey in which Romanticism and nationalism bounded from the blissful
philology of the Grimms straight into the Flanders trenches. Nationalism is therefore the
best of all possible nightmares because it solves the immediate problem of preserving a core
identity and mobilizing resources while avoiding the larger problem of either too little
decision making or too much, even as all those objectives comes with the collateral damage
of human lives and human rights. By dividing emergent nationalist identity into three
phases (nationalist theorists tend to favor three-stage processes of all sorts)— "stirrings,
"struggle," and "consolidation"—Minogue opts to view nationalism as a doctrine that
depends on linear progression for validation, but he tinges each step with foreboding, and
he implies that German National Socialism and European Fascism were both natural and
unavoidable outgrowths of this inexorable procession. In contrast to Kedourie and in
consonance to his own wry outlook, Minogue's view of Kant's contribution to Western
thought and the nationalist mindset is considerably less sanguine. For example, he notes
dryly that Kant convinced people that since war was a problem, and since kings and
aristocrats were responsible for war, the solution was to eliminate kings and aristocrats
(“Does National” 38)—what Minogue refers to as a “dead-fish solution.”9 Reason and
power, invested in the droit du peuple, did not necessarily solve anything so much as it
brought new ways of envisioning social solidarities that cancel out less desirable traits of
consolidation. What replaced feudalism is essentially the same kind of tribalism that
nationalism originally sought to overcome, only on a more sophisticated scale.
Nationalism, according to Minogue, is therefore an updated “primitive tribalism” that, for
all its failings, preserves a rough form of global sovereign diversity that suppresses worse
scenarios.10

Reading twentieth-century Irish literature in general, and drama in particular, with
the Kedourie/Minogue view would seek to identify traces of tribalism, a strained sense of
desperation in individuals and groups laboring under pressure to formulate social identity
as a way of achieving the highest principles of Western thought (Kant’s “perpetual peace”).
Ironically, twentieth-century Irish drama, like twentieth-century Irish history, could thus
actually be read as a Sisyphean drive towards this ideal, that perhaps Ireland (or Irish
drama) has not sufficiently “atavistically regressed,” and is therefore an entity unable to
bring itself to the proper stature to allow it to resemble the other great nation-states.
Ireland’s failure to achieve perpetual peace, even through the agency of its “own beast” (the
Irish Free State and later the Republic of Ireland), is indicative of its overall inability to
come to terms with its own nationhood. The drama of playwrights from Yeats to Friel
would thus betray a struggle for the Irish to conform to broader, if indefinable, principles
with which to realize its indivisibility and, presumably, to reintegrate Northern Ireland into
the fold. The "atavistic regression" aspect of Kedourie/Minogue is a useful tool to analyze Yeats' drama, because he sought to stabilize Irish identity by reaching back to his idealized version of Irish history, the Celtic Twilight. Indeed, playwrights such as O'Casey and Murphy were criticized for being too atavistic, their work, like Joyce's, expressing a brutal vision of the Irish nation as an implacable sow devouring her farrow. From this perspective, Irish subjectivity is symbolically invested with the drive to establish self-determination through reconnection with an ethereal communal ideal drawn from the historical past and suffused with Enlightenment philosophy; in Ireland's case, successful nationhood resides in it being able to process Celtic (or Catholic) mythology or the mythology of the Irish nationalist struggle, with its archetypal O'Connells, Parnells, and Pearses, into the broader Western philosophical and political tradition.

Attractive as this reading is, Kedourie/Minogue maps out a needlessly prescriptive path, implying that all successful nations follow the same course to self-realization and self-determination. For Kedourie/Minogue, nationalism is a one-way process, an embryonic value slowly accreting political, social, and ethnic communities into larger formations that acquire sovereignty through reconfiguring older modes of social solidarity—tribalism and religions, for example—and investing the "people" with authority previously reserved for the elite classes. They cannot account for fragmentation, nor do they leave space for marginalized groups to successfully transcend (or transgress) strictly drawn nationalist boundaries.11

What does pass muster, however, is their insistence that tribalism exerts a subtle pressure on the way present communities attempt to confront their differences and
regulate their social norms, and Kedourie’s reach is sufficiently strong that his ideas crop up easily in subsequent books on nationalism, even if the citation or allusion appears for purposes of refutation or redefinition. Although Minogue’s sense of inevitability is often questioned, his cynicism has also transferred to postnationalism in the form of the ambiguity with which many theorists regard nationalism. Kedourie/Minogue therefore only answers part of the question regarding the origin of nationalism by defining nationalism as an atavistic impulse recurring throughout human society and not simply a function of capitalism or modernism.

NATIONALISM, PART TWO: GELLNER AND ANDERSON IN THE RATIONAL PRESENT

Ernest Gellner responds to the Kedourie/Minogue camp by insisting that nationalism is a necessary factor in rational human progress, and therefore it progresses rather than regresses through history. In Nations and Nationalism (1983), Gellner posits, contrary to conventional thought, that an atmosphere of nationalism precedes the nation, not vice versa (55). Rather than an ideological principle, nationalism is instead a pragmatic strategy requiring that “the political and national unit should be congruent” (1). He denies Weber’s definition of the state as the entity which maintains the monopoly of “legitimate violence,” arguing that the modern nation interpellates itself by organizing and sustaining social order, a condition whereby the institutions of order have “separated from the rest of social life” (4). According to Gellner, all societies must progress through similar steps towards realizing nationalism (an idea consonant with Kedourie/Minogue), but not all social solidarities complete all the steps or arrive at nationhood at the same time. In
addition, these steps necessitate a clear break from agrarianism to industrialization, from centralized labor (i.e., fixed occupations) to decentralized labor (i.e., mobile work force), from a closed to open political system, from what he calls "fused" labor to specialized labor (what Marx would describe as the factory replacing the atelier). The state becomes the protector of culture (110) and the economy (112): "culture needs to be sustained as culture, and not as the carrier or scarcely noticed accompaniment to faith" (142). Therefore, the push towards nationalism can be seen as a rational by-product of the Industrial Revolution, a social ratification of homogeneity in a quest for rational order (64). Gellner reads history as a composite of disaffected groups gravitating towards a political center, assimilating themselves into larger and larger entities, and nationalism is simply a symptom of this impetus: "Nationalism, as such, is fated to prevail, but not any one particular nationalism" (47).

Gellner's most important contribution to the study of nationalism is his observation that the processes of industrialization and modernization radically altered the system whereby institutions claim the allegiances of individuals. He shows that during the critical periods of social transition—from agrarian to industrial, and industrial to nationalist—social solidarities invest their loyalty into new governing forms. "Atavistic" forms of social-order regulation such as monarchy, apprenticeships, gender-role assignments, and education restricted to "clerisy" and aristocracy are no longer metaphors that appropriately describe lived experience. In regards to a society's transition into nationalism, the rise of universal education, mass urbanization, and the decline of religious observance create a workforce dissociated from traditional roles of labor division,
identification with place of birth, and reliance on long-established methods of perceiving the outside world. Consequently, the newly empowered populace, invigorated by what Gellner calls the "Mamluk condition," reassigns their allegiance to a specific culture, and that culture, Gellner asserts, becomes the consolidating force of nationalism. Thus, nationalism seizes upon "culture or cultural wealth" and selectively employs or alters it to suit the nationalist agenda: "the cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any one shred and patch would have served as well" (56). He adds parenthetically, "The cultures [that nationalism] claims to defend and revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition." Allegiance to this pastiche of symbols, performances, rituals, songs, dress, and manner signifies the truly modernist nature of nationalist mores.

In response to Kedourie's definition of nationalism, Geller writes, "Nationalism is not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force. [...] It is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state" (48). That is, cultures and political entities exist, and for the most part they rarely coincide or provide an index to help regulate each other. For Gellner, the genius of nationalism is that to bring politics and culture together nationalism provides the appropriate epistemology to create new cultural-political units that are not revisions of older formations. In response to the claim that nationalism is reconstituted tribalism, Gellner retorts: "Nationalisms are simply those tribalisms [...] which through luck, effort or circumstance succeed in becoming an effective force under modern circumstances. They are only identifiable ex post factum. Tribalism never prospers,
for when it does, everyone will respect it as true nationalism, and no-one will dare call it tribalism” (87). Gellner may be disingenuous here, but the jab at Kedourie and Minogue is unmistakable.

In contrast to Minogue, Gellner finds nationalism a neutral entity, a disinterested socio-political plane to which all social solidarities are progressing or aspiring. Nor does he share Minogue’s fear that the homogenization process will eventually lead to a stultifying global culture. Gellner notes that although a global nationalism could theoretically arise, it has not yet (at least as of 2001, all notions of “global village” notwithstanding) and most likely will not arise because of the staggered arrival of industrialization across the planet. “The differential timing of [industrialism’s] arrival divided humanity into rival groups very effectively,” Gellner observes, pointing out that in the nineteenth century “internationalism” (his 1983 term for “globalism”) was predicted but instead nationalism appeared (52).

Still, Gellner is not unmindful of the real possibility that, left unchecked, modern nationalism may at some point blend into a totally homogenized world culture, a development that he views with a slight hint of alarm. In the chapter titled “Social Entropy and Equality in Industrial Society,” he describes how new nationalities must subvert and contain the homogenization process by permitting “entry-resistant” traits within the society to persist; in Girardian terms, Gellner allows for societies to create their own scapegoats against which they can define themselves. This is the most explicit Gellner gets to finding a place for culturally marginalized individuals and groups, though he neglects to elaborate further on how, if ever, they can or should integrate into the broader
cultural field. He does, however, agree with Kedourie (or more precisely, with Durkheim) in one major respect by conceding that nationalism is in some sense religious observance sanitized and camouflaged as "social self worship," and thus it retrospectively mirrors rather than reproduces older, tribal social formations.

Benedict Anderson, whose observations on nationalism are often linked with Gellner's, describes modern nations as "imagined communities" that rise out of the peculiar Western innovation of "print-capitalism." He writes in Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (1983) that nations are "limited sovereign communities," where "limited" means a formation with distinct, physical borders (worldwide religions, on the other hand, are examples of nation-like formations that have no delineated borders), "sovereign" implies the post-Enlightenment, post-French Revolution political entity that derives power from secular (as opposed to hieratic) claims; and "community" suggests that "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). Such a formation is imaginary, of course, because it exists as a contractual notion in the minds of community members, but it is also imaginary in the sense that it "images"; that is, it creates a holistic vision that may be blurry on details but nonetheless presents a complete metaphor for conduct, interaction, and being. The imaginary community legitimizes itself around certain overarching narratives, created and endorsed by the collective, which are created as backformations for the expressed purpose of legitimating the status quo. Thus Anderson gives weight to the notion that narrative production, whether historical, literary, dramatic, or otherwise, is tantamount to nation production, and by extension "individuality production."
He further details his important claim that an inseparable development of the contemporary "limited sovereign community" is a cognitive shift in the way time is understood, and that it is only after understanding how previous political entities conceived time that one can properly apprehend how modern nations (and also contemporary institutions with claims to identity-creation) create and maintain power. Prior to the advent of the nationalist entity, time was conceived in "simultaneity," which Anderson defines as "past and future in an instantaneous present" (24). The relationship of past, present, and future co-exist in "prefiguring and fulfillment," the present being merely an iteration of things gone and things to come. Time, divorced from notions of linearity, presents itself not simply as cyclical or in gyres but translucently overlapping, not as a palimpsest but as a constant rewriting and reliving. Thus, medieval figures of "historical" scenes could be contemporaneous, even anachronistic, and not disturb the viewer because at the time there was no referent—indeed there was no need for a referent—to what the authentic past was.

In contrast, print-capitalism introduces the notion of "homogenous, empty time" marked not by "prefiguring and fulfillment" but rather through "temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (24). For example, Anderson notes how the introduction of the broadsheet replaced the balladeer as the source of reliable news by replacing retooled songs announcing localized news (simultaneity) with depersonalized information about nationwide and worldwide events (homogenous, empty time). For Anderson, this transition created a wide-ranging epistemological shift in the way that news-hearing populations understood the import and quality of information. The spread of
printing created two dramatic social effects that altered the way (Western) society perceived itself. The first and most obvious result was more knowledge to more people, the spread of literacy, and the wider storage and retrieval of information. A second, less obvious but no less profound effect is that printing created the sense that time (or more precisely, history) progresses linearly, and that society perceives events occurring not as prefigured cause-and-effect but rather as disjointed random happenings that have meaning only as they are juxtaposed on the front page of a newspaper. Daniel Boorstin notes a similar shift in temporal understanding in The Discoverers (1983), wherein he observes that the encroachment of ever more accurate chronometers transformed Western society's relationship to nature, time, and the way they interpreted their surroundings by making precise measurement an end rather than a means of living.13

Brought together, Gellner's and Anderson's interpretations of nationalism create a vision of the historical process that is progressive, contingent, and (for better or worse) inevitable. Reading twentieth-century Irish drama from this perspective opens up much more promising possibilities than Kedourie/Minogue because Gellner/Anderson extends linearly towards the future rather than in a retrograde motion towards the past, and this forward motion is more easily comprehensible to most people. In the context of Irish history, the Gellner/Anderson approach means that before the Irish nation could exist someone or some institution had to construct a salient vision of Irishness out of current social needs and desires persuasive enough to galvanize popular support for independence and republicanism.14 Prior to the convulsions of 1916 in Ireland, the British occupiers presided over this metaphysical terrain, not least by absorbing talented Irish writers and
playwrights (e.g., Swift, Goldsmith, Boucicaut, Sheridan, Shaw, Wilde, and others); and with the exception of Shaw's *John Bull's Other Ireland* (1904), few of the transplanted playwrights addressed the "national question" with any degree of seriousness. Still, according to Gellner's thesis, a concrete, persuasive, if contingent, definition of Irishness should have predated the formation of the Irish Free State—and one of the most obvious location points for that formation is the collaboration between Lady Gregory and Yeats and their drive to create a national Irish theatre movement. This kind of drama should show signs of a cultural system attempting to merge with a political system, identities attempting to move from "fused" definitions to "specialized" definitions (to borrow Gellner's terminology), and a secularization of previously hieratic forms of social solidity.

Subsequently, plays produced around and after the declaration of the Irish Republic would show traces of Gellner's cultural-political "unity," and this can indeed be found everywhere, in the theatrical texts and in the theatre itself, particularly in the ways the Irish government attempted to appropriate the Abbey—particularly by appointing the execrable Ernest Blythe, Finance Minister and former Blueshirt Fascist, as the Abbey's artistic director for over two decades. But the real proof of the validity for a purely Gellner reading of twentieth-century Irish drama is demonstrated in the triumph of homogenization with its attendant proviso for small "entropy-resistant" social segments occasionally troubling the quiescent social field. Here Gellner is trying to account for marginalization without allowing it to taint the more optimistic features of modern nationalism, and this is one of the major weaknesses in his and Anderson's perspective.
Applying Anderson's notion of the cognitive-temporal shift reads Irish drama as a theatre of time reckoning; that is, Irish drama can be analyzed on the basis of how the characters, and perhaps playwrights, deal with the ways in which their community instructs them to perceive and account for the passage of time. Control of time reckoning, therefore, can be an indicator of both the power of institutions and their preferred cosmology to invest individuality with meaning. Furthermore, a reading using Anderson's concepts of time and epistemology can uncover how plays that attempt to present time as "prefiguring and fulfillment" are actually works that only further participate in the broader momentum of advancing "homogenous, empty time." Reading Yeats' drama under this scenario reveals that his use of folk culture, Cuchulain, and Noh drama could be understood to represent his desire not to establish a new Irish nation but instead to re-establish an old, mythic one.

The subjective collage that postmodernity enables suggests the tantalizing possibility that the self can liberation from the confines of politics and institutions; however, a contemporary inflection of simultaneity properly acknowledges the artifice of history and the naked politicization that exists in every (dramatic) act. Most relevant to this inquiry is Anderson's examination of how social solidarities appropriate narratives and reconfigure them to place the nation as the hero, a tactic that lends historical weight to the imagined "limited sovereign community." Because of Irish drama's close proximity to the Irish nation-building process in the early decades of the twentieth century, one can clearly see the links between drama digesting narratives to form individual and collective identity and Irish nationalism in turn devouring drama to form its own version of individual and
collective identity. Once again, Yeats is demonstrative here because he routinely populated his poetry and drama with concepts and characters derived from local history and folklore, from his involvement with the occult, and from the women of letters he associated with to construct his drama of national destiny. Whether he embodies Ireland in the old women, the hero, or the ruined great house in the background, Yeats' strategy can be seen as a bold attempt to position the nation as hero long before it was national or heroic.

Although both Gellner and Anderson present persuasive arguments about the constructs, assumptions, and processes of modern nationalism, their primary weakness is that they rely heavily on the presumption that because the contemporary geopolitical world revolves around nationalism it naturally follows that nationalism is a progression both rational and "rooted in human nature." In other words, instead of questioning the legitimacy of nationalism, Gellner and Anderson begin by accepting the cause as the fruition of natural social processes (perhaps in the same way Marx envisioned socialism to be the Hegelian apotheosis of social thesis and antithesis) and then work backwards to find the appropriate historiographical threads to justify its success. Moreover, Gellner's assertion that the social benefits of homogeneity override individual concerns for loss of personal distinctiveness unnecessarily trivializes a difficult process; indeed, he cannot properly account for exactly how desires are formed and exercised, let alone realized, through homogeneity. The best he can theorize is that the need for order supercedes the need for individuality, a simplistic strategy that ignores contemporary understandings of social entropy and subjective fragmentation—Gellner's perspective is simply too utilitarian and not objectivist enough. Indeed, much of *Nations and Nationalism* revolves around
theory and little space is dedicated to actual application of the theory to real-world conditions. Hobsbawm even goes so far as to suggest that the simple fact that nationalism can be analyzed at all, especially in numerous books that have appeared within the last twenty years, indicates that nationalism has passed its prime efficacy and is now in a new, postnationalist phase: "The owl of Minerva which brings wisdom, said Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that is it now circling round nations and nationalism" (192). Even so, Gellner and Anderson bring an important perspective to the debate about the origins of nationalism, which is that understanding nationalism is impossible without taking into account the fact that social and technological progress demands a re-visioning of social order and power relationships.

POSTNATIONALISM: BREUILLY, GREENFELD, HOBSBAWM, AND THE END OF NATIONALISM

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the fusion of East and West Germany, and the Balkan wars of the 1990s caused many writers on nationalism, with few exceptions, to revisit or revamp their earlier work. Kedourie was finishing the fourth edition of his Nationalism when he died in 1992; Gellner, who died in 1995, essentially rewrote Nations and Nationalism as a book simply titled Nationalism, published in 1997; Anderson amended Imagined Communities in 1991; Minogue, on the other hand, revised his Nationalism in 1970 then moved on to writing about other political topics. It seemed that the near simultaneous break-up of one nation into sixteen smaller nations, the fusing (or re-fusing?) of two German nations into one, and the re-Balkanization of the Balkans could not be easily explained by atavistic tribalism or necessary humane and rational modernity. Three
writers, two of whom also issued second editions of their works in the early 1990s, bring both ends of the tribalism/modernity debate together by deploying the chic postmodernist strategy of declaring that nationalism is neither and both of these perspectives, vacillating uneasily and oftentimes unevenly between these two polar extremes. Collectively, John Breuilly, Liah Greenfeld, and E. J. Hobsbawm form a bloc of thinking that has been termed "postnationalist" by Richard Kearney because they subscribe to the notion that the era of nationalism is over, that nationalism is no longer sufficient to account for geopolitical processes, and that contemporary political theory must better account for the rise (or the acknowledgement) of subjective and social heterogenization.

John Breuilly's *Nationalism and the State* (2nd ed., 1994) defines nationalism as a conscious, pragmatic exercise of political will by a social collective. Breuilly opens by undercutting Kedourie/Minogue and Gellner/Anderson by announcing that nationalism neither expresses "deeper" motivations of class or social goals nor does it arise from "some sort of national identity [or] a search for such an identity" (1). He counters: "To focus upon culture, ideology, identity, class, or modernisation is to neglect the fundamental point that nationalism is [. . .] about politics and that politics is about power," and thus "the central task is to relate nationalism to the objective of obtaining and using state power" (1). Though he accepts that many of the principles of modern nationalism draw on traditions of state-power management from classical Rome and the Middle Ages (372), Breuilly is adamant that nationalism can only be understood in the modern context—that is, in a post-Enlightenment, post-French Revolution, post-Industrial Revolution world (366). Furthermore, although he accepts Gellner's contention that nationalism provides a
stable sense of cultural identity for individuals during times of rapid social change, for
Breuilly constant social upheaval is synonymous with nationalism, whereas for Gellner this
kind of change is merely part of a transition from the agrarian to the industrial and thence
to the securely nationalist phase, and thus has an end (416).

In *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1992), Liah Greenfeld asks, “do the origins
of a nationalism which define its nature [. . . ] also completely shape its social and political
expressions? Is the conduct of a nation [. . . ] determined by its dominant traditions?” (25).
Her answer is “no”: “Society is an open system, and whether or not the existing
potentialities are fully realized depends on many factors entirely unrelated to the nature of
these potentialities.” That is, she accepts that a country’s nationalism may have roots in
historical processes and precedents, but those roots are useless to account for how that
nationality operates in contemporary times (7). In bringing together Kedourie/Minogue
and Gellner/Anderson, Greenfeld even strikes a temporal middle-ground when she locates
the historical source of nationalism in late sixteenth-century England, earlier than any
other theorist, and her book traces how those philosophical traditions influenced
American, Russian, and French nationalism in the eighteenth century and German
nationalism in the nineteenth century. Greenfeld brings to the postnationalist discussion
the notion that nationalism is an “emergent phenomenon,” arguing that nationalism is
“determined not by the character of its elements, but by a certain organizing principle
which makes these elements into a unity and imparts to them a special significance” (7).
She elaborates this concept by noting that an “emergent phenomenon”
cannot be reduced to the sum total of its inanimate elements, it cannot be explained by any of their properties; it is the relationship between the elements, unpredictable from those properties, which gives rise to it, and which in many ways conditions the behavior of the elements the moment they become elements of the emergent phenomenon. (493)

In essence, she claims that theorists of nationalism fare well at identifying the “elements” or essential components of nationalism, but they are for the most part unable to account for how or why the parts come together. The challenge of nationalism, therefore, lies in locating definitively the “unifying principle” that brings the various ingredients of nationalism together to form the collective sense of identity. Greenfeld accepts that in the biological and other natural sciences locating the “unifying principle” may be too abstract, but she contends that in the sociological field such as politics and nationalism “text” provides the concrete material from which to draw inferences requisite to establish a given “unifying principle” (494).20 Such a position bodes well for applying postnationalism to literature and drama, two intrinsically “textual” media.

Eric Hobsbawm describes nationalism as a mollusk hiding in the shell of the nation-state. Extract nation from nation-state, he claims, and one finds nationalism a gelatinous gastropod “in a distinctly wobbly shape” (190). In Nations and Nationalism Since 1780 (2nd ed., 1992), Hobsbawm goes about demonstrating that the criteria for “nation” are “shifting and ambiguous,” and at any rate the age of nationalism has transubstantiated into postnationalism in the past twenty years whilst most theorists were busy writing about its ascendancy and triumph. He is suspicious of a priori and a posteriori definitions of nationalism, especially that subcategory of nationalist theorists who claim that a nation exists insofar as people believe they belong to one or are aware of belonging to one
What skeptics of Gellner's model, such as Hobsbawm, doubt is the "irresistibility of the desire to form homogenous nation-states and the usefulness of both the concept and the programme [of nationalism] in the twenty-first century" (187). For him, nationalism is best understood not as how it comes together but how it is used or operates in the political field, and he speaks of "recognitions" of nationalism, which he claims in an essay titled "Some Reflections on Nationalism" (1972) can only be comprehended a posteriori (387).

Building on Gellner's assumptions that nationalism is the confluence of political and cultural aims, and that national identity is essentially a decontextualized collage of cultural artifacts, Hobsbawm insists that Gellner, Anderson, and others failed to account for nationalism as a dual phenomenon: one constructed from "above" (meaning the elites) as well as from "below" (meaning anyone else who did not own a castle, a title, or who could corner the market of writing and maintaining history) (10-11). He further accuses Gellner of being too "top" oriented in his analysis of nationalism, and he proposes that nationalism be viewed (a posteriori, of course) as top and bottom, elites and masses, a social dialogue converging at a middle point, the mollusk shape of the nation-à-l'état, and that convergence passes through three distinct phases: first, cultural, literary, and folklore nationalism; next, militant or pioneering nationalism; and, finally, mass nationalism. However, the problem with realizing the balancing of top and bottom, Hobsbawm notes, is that whereas the "tops" left copious records of their thoughts on the subject, marginalized groups and the under-classes were less assiduous about preserving their sentiments on nationalist identity. Presumably, this is meant to draw attention to Gellner's shortcomings
as well as ratify the work of folklorists and pop-culture critics whose work seeks to illuminate the unstudied corners of social production left behind by non-elite classes. Hobsbawm also alleges that the progress of widespread nationalist conscience is neither linear nor absolutist, and that the common mistake made by nationalist theorists is to overestimate the weight that social solidarities assign to nationalism (130).

Hobsbawm asserts that nationalism arose in four distinct historical phases, three of which spanned the twentieth century. The first, what he terms "popular proto-nationalism," coincides roughly with Greenfeld's assertion that Elizabethan England was the crucible for modern notions of nationalism. The second phase, the "transformation of nationalism," occurred between 1870 and 1918, when the ideas of nationalism melded with industrialization to give nationalism its distinctly modern aroma. Following World War I and an injection of the competing Wilsonian-Leninism dialogue of national destiny into the nationalist discourse, the "apogee of nationalism" arrived in the period 1918-1950, creating a momentary crystallization of nationalist aspirations and political realities. Thereafter a shift in social realities has encroached on nationalism's claim to finality, what can be termed the pre-postnationalist period. Although Hobsbawm attributes this shift and decline to a number of forces, the primary agent of change was the recognition that "ethnic and linguistic nationalism [were on] divergent routes, and both [were] losing their dependence on national state power" (162). Indeed, he even doubts the validity of Gellner's claim that nationalism secures economic stability, especially now that economic power resides more heavily in corporations that transcend national boundaries and loyalties.
Although he never uses the term, Hobsbawm is describing a postnationalist environment where identities, allegiances, and affinities become fluid, fragmented, but are no less potent in the socio-political world. In fact, he claims that the last twenty years have been particularly postnationalist, as geopolitical and socio-political maps have had to be continuously redrawn to reflect emerging and converging social solidarities. As proof of the postnationalist condition in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Hobsbawm specifically highlights Ireland and its troublesome "national question," contending that the nationalist agendas pursued by opposing sides insufficiently address what the problem is now (as opposed to when the problem first arose, whether that be 1170, 1366, 1641, 1652, 1695, 1798, 1800, 1916, 1922 or 1969). Although he was (re)writing in 1992, Hobsbawm correctly predicted that any rapprochement between Dublin and London would come through the acceptance of a complex form of multiple-allegiance, multiple-sovereignty constructs, a configuration that would have been unthinkable under prior dueling nationalist agendas. He takes note of how Irish citizens already enjoy commonwealth-like privileges in England, and he speculates that Northern Ireland might be best served by becoming an independent entity with rights of citizenship in both England and Ireland.

Breuilly/Greenfeld/Hobsbawm establishes that nationalist identity can only be understood through modern political imperatives, that it is constantly in flux, and that because nationalism is an "emergent phenomenon" one must go beyond identifying its component parts to locate the unifying principle, which is manifestly different for each given nationality. Postnationalism further gives space to interrogate the claim, made by Foster and others, that Irish nationalism can best be understood as growing out of British
nationalism because it is a sentiment garnered from the British themselves, primarily throughout the middle nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It may even allow a different perspective into examining the Irish diaspora in its many incarnations, including the Famine years, Partition, the mass migrations in the 1950s and 1960s, to the mass return of Irish expatriates in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Most important, Hobsbawm's division of nationalism into distinct phases ironically (or fortuitously) overlap three phases of Irish drama outlined by Fintan O'Toole: phase one runs from 1899 to 1920 (Yeats, Gregory, Synge, and O'Casey), then a lag time until the late 1950s (early Friel and Murphy), then another transformation in the late 1970s and 1980s, roughly about the time Hobsbawm recognizes postnationalism coming to the forefront. Examined from this perspective, for example, Yeats' drama corresponds to Hobsbawm's "transformation of nationalism" phase, and thus expresses the exuberance of nationalism overlapped by the anxieties of industrialism. And in fact many Yeats critics have seen in the Cuchulain plays a concern about a new, necessary political order, embodied in Conchubar, paralyzing and killing the heroic past. Nationalist transformation, as expressed in a postnationalist reading of Yeats, is seen as violent, Machiavellian, and a betrayal of cultural morals in the name of political expediency. Similarly, postnationalism permits analysis of twentieth-century drama as attempts to reconstitute Irish identity by pushing at the borders of Irish nationality definition to incorporate the numerous communities and individuals left stranded and effaced by the institutions of religion, government, and culture. In addition to foregrounding the visceral emotional center of the "national question" and Irish identity construction as interrogated
through drama, it further allows access to previously negated histories and ratifies heretofore-unpermitted grief.

Despite the differences that separate the Kedourie/Minogue and Gellner/Anderson camps, they share in common a pressing need to metaphorize the nation-state. Indeed, Ireland is a perfect example of the numerous ways in which a nation-state is conjured through metaphor. If the emergence of a nation (and nationality) is compared to a violent, wounding process of becoming, then the nation itself is a wound that has not yet healed properly. If nation-state formation is equivalent to a metamorphosis, then the nation-state is an insect untimely ripped from its cocoon, the process of its formation still evident on its body politic (or what the poet Tom Paulin cynically refers to as the “cadaver politic” [Foster, “Varieties,” 22]). For Minogue the nation-state is a monster (“our monster”), for James Joyce it is a sow devouring her own farrow, for Conor Cruise O’Brien it is a beast that “mauls.” Even the postnationalists, for all their pretensions to postmodernism, frequently resort to metaphor—most notably Hobsbawm’s relatively benign description of the nation-state as a mollusk.

What becomes abundantly clear is that, to borrow yet another metaphor from Wallace Stevens, the nation-state is the “vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X” that continuously evades description. “Vital” because the nation-state promises its constituents the power of mobility and access to resources, “arrogant” because the nation-states claims to preclude all other systems of social organization, “fatal” because, as Mary Douglas points out, the nation-state as an institution dictates desire, including the deathwish in its own defense; and a “dominant X” because the nation-state is so unavoidable and yet so
indefinable. It is and it is not. It represents a powerful yet contingent entity that permeates the deepest fissures of subjectivity yet it remains a component of identity that remains largely unnoticed except in times of crisis or triumph.

Postnationalism, however, seeks to avoid falling into the metaphor trap and instead attempts to gauge precisely how these metaphors of the nation-state function in the discursive world. Drama is one of the many cultural formations that deal in metaphor, not least because performance itself is a kind of metaphor. Furthermore, in instances of metatheatre, when in a performance another iteration of performance enters the stage (i.e., the so-called “play within a play”), one is able to more clearly isolate the metaphor to understand its functions and the assumptions embedded within it. Thus, a postnationalist examination of Irishness and Ireland concentrate not on what these entities “are” but rather what they “do,” how they function discursively, and how they are claimed and counter-claimed by powerful interests.

These are only a few of the ways that postnationalism can be harnessed to read Irish drama. So far, this discussion has focused on the ways in which national identity as a collective enterprise can be analyzed. Still lacking from this discussion is an account of the ways that postnationalism can be further attenuated to reveal broader assumptions about the construction of national identity on an individual level. The following chapter introduces concepts from cultural theory that broaden the scope of postnationalism by making it applicable to explicating the issues of national individuality that arise in texts.
NOTES

1 Roy Foster, citing Elizabeth Bowen's concern over extricating the cultural signifier “England” from “Britain,” argues that the two terms should not be interchangeable when applied to issues of cultural influence. In such cases, Foster argues, “England” should take primacy to indicate the overwhelming hegemony that England exercises in the cultural realm, as opposed to “Britain,” which implies a distinctly political hegemony. “Am I not a person for whom places loom large?” Foster quotes Bowen (Paddy 102). (See also Kiberd 364-379.)

2 Gellner uses the Mamluk as a metaphor for the modern condition of labor and national identity. Referring to the Arabic slave-warrior class, Gellner uses Mamluks as an example of a social condition whereby people (mostly men) broke out of received patterns of occupation, limited education, and pre-ordained allegiances and entered the work force based on their abilities and learning rather than on social class or regionalism: “The Mamluk condition has become universal” (36).

3 It is worth re-emphasizing that institutions resist this kind of subjective liquidity by asserting the aprioristic nature of identity.

4 Although Foster writes specifically about Ireland as an emerging postnationalist state, his comments can apply equally to any nation-state that must answer to and placate its diverse population, a population whose allegiances are divided not only between themselves and other nation-states (as the case would be for immigrants both legal and illegal, expatriates, and resident aliens), but also between various creeds—religious, cultural, local, and so forth—that have equal, if not greater, force in directing action and desire.

5 This is not to imply that all forms of homogenization, social or otherwise, have only negative consequences. The pervasiveness of cultural homogeneity bespeaks its advantages: social order, a well-defined individual identity, and a clear protology and eschatology for constituent members. The point here is that nationalism is a construct that for its own self-defense will cloak its sins through such heady concepts as patriotism, eminent domain, and sovereign immunity. Theoretically, postnationalism breaks open the assumptions governing attitudes such as patriotism to examine what patriotism enables and obscures, and perhaps also to broaden how the term can be applied (for example, can a person's actions favorable to a nation-state be construed as patriotic if the individual is a non-resident alien?).

6 Kedourie opens his book with this quotation from Yeats' “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” (1928):

   We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
   And planned to bring the world under a rule,
   Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

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The periodical this article appears in, *The National Review*, reveals much about Minogue's political slant. The article's central purpose is to argue against the global reach of the United Nations—the pseudo-doctrine sometimes referred to as the "New World Order." "We should be particularly critical of the assumption that small problems agglomerate together into One Big Problem which requires One Big Solution and consequently, One Big Solver [sic]" (36). Minogue’s apocalyptic vision of a postnationalist global community is imagined as a mega-United Nations that transforms Plato’s idealized rule-by-philosopher-king into rule by "philosopher-committee." He proposes that the world draw a line at the present geopolitical nation-state configuration and resist the urge to relinquish any part of local sovereignty in exchange for membership in a trans-nationalist governing body.

Reading Yeats through the lens of Minogue would thus incorrectly conclude that Yeats’ attraction to Irish Fascism was somehow inevitable. The core weakness of Kedourie/Minogue is the insistence of inevitability of certain processes. Postnationalism prefers to view social processes and movements as more problematic entities that derive from complex human needs and emotions.

In his opening paragraphs of "Does National Sovereignty Have a Future?" Minogue tells the anecdote of Charles II’s challenge to the scholars of his time to propose solutions as to why a dead fish weighs less than a live fish. Numerous ingenious solutions were presented to him, but as Charles knew all along, and announced to the court, a dead fish does not in fact weigh less than a live fish (34).

"Tribalism," as it is used in the Kedourie/Minogue position, can also be referred to as "clannishness," meaning the tendency to draw the communal circle around a tight group of similar looking, similar believing people who often, but not always, inhabit a particular geographical site. Equally, "tribalism" implies the willingness on the part of an observer to consider other social groups in those starkly defined terms. The term therefore refers to the tightness of communal boundaries, although it does carry connotations, however unintended, of small-mindedness and provincialism. The term of course derives from the notion, as borrowed from anthropology, of small social groups bound together by familial ties and a common troth of protection and loyalty. It should be noted here that the Kedourie/Minogue "tribalism" is not necessarily limited in scale, time frame, or organizational complexity. As Kedourie/Minogue view all forms of communal organizations as variations on the theme of tribalism, the question asked of all social solidarities is not "Are you tribalist?" but rather "How tribalist are you?"

Kedourie may have been seeking to account for nationalist fragmentation, especially in the wake of the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the dismantling of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, but he died in 1992 before he could completely edit the fourth edition of *Nationalism*, so it is possible that he could have further reconfigured his theory.
12 He mentions law enforcement and military institutions (especially standing armies) as examples of how nationalism invests in institutions the explicit rather than symbolic role of maintaining social order.

13 An example of this “homogenous, empty time” juxtaposition would be to note that Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism*, Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, and Boorstin’s *The Discoverers* all appeared in print in 1983, implying that something in the water that year drew these three writers to contemplate time and historical progression.

14 From a historian’s perspective, one ironic conclusion, now widely accepted, is that the British unwittingly gave the finishing touches to Irish identity creation in 1916 with their brutal execution of Uprising leaders, thus giving a cogent narrative to the separatist struggle and transforming an apathetic Irish public into sympathetic supporters of the failed coup.

15 It seems plausible that Absurdism, as defined by Martin Esslin, harkens back to Anderson’s notion of “simultaneous time.” Using Anderson as a guide, one can unmask plays advancing pretences of Absurdism and so-called well-made plays that actually conform to principles of Absurdist theatre.

16 Scholars for years have had to accept the uncomfortable fact that Yeats hoped that the “new,” independent Ireland would include a revamped Protestant aristocratic ascendancy and a government at least partially run by elite senators hand-picked by the elected executive official.

17 Bhabha is most forceful in his objection to this notion, arguing that assuming linear and rational causality implies that the political naturally arises from the personal, whereas postmodernism asserts a more problematic relationship of influences. Bhabha sees weakness in Anderson’s theories because they cannot properly account for the persistence of marginalized groups in what should theoretically be a happy, functioning social homogeneity. The presence of marginal groups either means that, contrary to Anderson’s social construct, certain social formations regress or else that his construct inadequately describes the nature of social solidarity. Bhabha, of course, prefers the latter.

18 *Nations and Nationalism* spans a very succinct 143 pages. Gellner’s specialty is Islamic cultures, and most of his examples are drawn from Arab, Bedouin, Byzantine, and Ottoman cultures. However, the brevity of his analysis, whether by design or accident, leaves him with little practical material from which to base his cogent observations. At one point he even resorts to analogy to illustrate a point instead of drawing specific examples from world history (see, for example, his parable of Ruritanians and blueness in chapter six of *Nations and Nationalism* [63-87]). In contrast to Gellner’s paucity, Greenfeld’s *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* runs a hefty 491 pages. Of course, this is not to imply that prolixity is a measure of intelligence or stature—only that in comparison to Gellner
Greenfeld is able to elevate her observations on nationalism beyond grand, generalized pronouncements, instead populating her theoretical structures with examples from England, Germany, France, and Russia.

Greenfeld here poses a solution to the perplexing nationalism problem of the American Revolution. "If Americans were loyal and proud Englishmen, why did they seek independence from England?" Answer: "Because their nationality was English." That is, she points to a lingering ("inherent") cultural pattern in England to champion secessionist sentiments, an ever-growing momentum to decentralize authority founded in its Protestant tendencies. Using this novel interpretation, nationalism as secessionist tendency, it may be argued that the secession of the southern American states was in keeping and consistent with similar impulses that led to the American colonies' withdrawal from the British Empire. Thus, the triumph of the North over the South could be ironically viewed as a reining in of nationalist impulses in the service of an even greater nationalist entity, the conglomeration known as the undivided United States. Perhaps it is no historical accident that the southern states maintained close cultural and economic ties with Britain during this period.

In relation to biological sciences, Greenfeld's "unifying principle" may hint too strongly of Aristotle's final cause, whereas in the humanities such a concept can rely on text and the illusion of explicit intent or produced meaning to guide inquiry.

The Good Friday Accords read like a postnationalist manifesto, with references to identity, history, and hybridism. Excerpts from the official text follow. From Annex B, articles two and three:

It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage.

It is the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island. Until then, the laws enacted by the Parliament established by this Constitution shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws enacted by the Parliament that existed immediately before the coming into operation of this Constitution.
Derrida gives example of this iteration effect in his book *Limited, Inc.* (1989) when he plays with the notion of quotations of quotations of quotations *ad infinitum*, burying the original wording deeper into a haze of quotation marks. His point, which applies in this situation, is that each act of iteration further isolates the original words and highlights its "difference." In the case of metaphors of nation-states and meta-theatricality on stage, the more a metaphor is invoked or the more a performance is iterated on stage the more visible its inner workings (or lack thereof) becomes manifest.
CHAPTER 3

FRAMING THE FIELD, PART TWO:

INSTITUTIONS, THE BEYOND, FORGETTING

Roland had learned to see himself, theoretically, as a crossing-place for a
number of systems, all loosely connected. He had been trained to see his
idea of his "self" as an illusion, to be replaced by a discontinuous machinery
and electrical message-network of various desires, ideological beliefs and
responses, language-forms and hormones and pheromones.

A. S. Byatt, Possession

In Cultural Theory as Political Science (1999), Michael Thompson, Gunnar
Grendstad, and Per Selle illustrate the utility of cultural theory as a supplement to political
theory by appropriating the beer slogan "Heineken refreshes the parts other beers cannot
reach." Like Heineken, they write, cultural theory "refreshes" rather than replaces a given
political theory by illuminating areas that it either overlooks or purposefully ignores (14).

Calling their application of cultural theory "the Heineken principle," Thompson,
Grendstad, and Selle demonstrate how the writings of such theorists as Mary Douglas
improve understandings of everything from environmentalist politics, anarchy, and
political party preference to the tensions between high and low church cultures. In the
context of a literary-political theory such as postnationalism, the Heineken principle

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facilitates the interaction of smaller, complementary ideas with larger critical apparatuses without compromising the integrity of the central perspective.

The previous chapter demonstrated how postnationalism combines past and present historical pressures to form a contingent, postmodernist position regarding nation-states and the political process. The "refreshing" aspect of cultural theory, as suggested by Thompson et al., is that it helps identify how preferences are formed and how, if at all, autonomy interacts with institutional pressures attempting to influence behavior and belief. This chapter covers three crucial points of "refreshment" borrowed from cultural theory to accent postnationalism by providing a fuller understanding of how social collectives and individuals interface with each other.

First, cultural theory helps postnationalism more clearly define the nexus between nation-member and nation-collective. In the absence of such an understanding, it is still possible to comprehend hierarchical structures, processes of social influence, and genealogies of power structures, but the link between the individual to those social structures is inadequately defined. Second, political or discursive margins, studied in isolation, have internal structures of influence modeled after the larger discourses they supplement. Cultural theory highlights the function of these margins, suggests ways in which the dominant and subordinate discourses resemble each other, and posits ways in which marginal discourses can interface with those cultural fields outside their own circumference. Third, these theories highlight the cultural amnesia that result from the creation of nationalities and identity histories. By explicating the social forgetting process, cultural theory opens discomforting aspects of history and identity construction that can
then be integrated into the wider historical scope by examining which facts are remembered or forgotten and why they are remembered or forgotten. Postnationalism describes the breakdown of nationalism and nationalist identity; the inclusion of cultural theory at these three points clarifies at which critical seams nationalism breaks apart when pressure is applied. This chapter discusses the importance of these points and shows how cultural theory can assist a postnationalist reading to uncover critical assumptions about identity and nation.

MARY DOUGLAS AND CULTURAL THEORY: THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE POSTNATIONAL

In A Theory of Justice (1971), John Rawls compares the conceptual frameworks guiding the two most widely held concepts of community construction. The first model sees community as a solidarity governed by self-interested motivation wherein the communal good relies on individuals achieving personal goals. The second model, what Michael Sandel calls the “sentimental concept of community,” asserts that people act cooperatively for communal good out of reverence for the group’s ideals. Throughout his discussion of the function of justice in community construction Rawls fails to question a key assumption, which is that both forms of solidarity he describes require independent motivation from their constituents that is unencumbered by the specter of institutional guidelines for making choices.

Sandel, critiquing Rawls in Liberalism and the Limits of Justice (1982), points out a third alternative to Rawls’ dichotomy, what Sandel calls “the constitutive conception,” which argues that “community describes not just what [people] have as fellow citizens, but
also what they are, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an
attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity” (150).
Thus, Rawls could only conceive of individuals operating in a social field independently
and autonomously as free agents, whereas Sandel reforms that notion to suggest that
individuals can only move according to the dictates of the social field. In responding to
Rawls, Sandel problematizes the notion of free will by arguing that human agency depends
on a formative epistemological framework in order to exercise itself; that is, there is no
such thing as preference without a concrete index of items to choose from. The
pervasiveness and implacability of that social field is the subject of current sociological
debate and addressed in Mary Douglas' *How Institutions Think* (1986).

Thompson, Grendstad, and Selle emphasize that cultural theory focuses on “the
process by which preferences are formed”; thus, instead of saying that “people act in their
own interests,” a cultural theorist attempts to get at the heart of why people want what they
want, even when what they want runs contrary to their own expressed self interests (6).
Douglas’ outline of the relationship between individuals and institutions shows
distinctively how Hall’s concept of self interacts with the Breuilly/Hobsbawm/Greenfeld
construct of postnationalism to give a persuasive overview of why and how people want
what they want—in this case, why they seem to move towards fragmentation. Basing her
construct on the sociological work of Emile Durkheim and Ludwik Fleck, Douglas asserts:
“true solidarity [i.e., community] is only possible to the extent that individuals share the
categories of their thought” (8). Like Sandel (and expanding his observations), Douglas
denies two widely held notions about community construction. First, she rejects the idea,
expressed most notably in utilitarianism, that individuals make social choices based on
rationality and personal interest because, as mentioned above, she notes that people
frequently choose courses of action contrary to self-interest (such as altruism). Second, she
breaks with Marxist thought by suggesting that institutions or classes cannot “think”; they
can provide choices for their constituents, she notes, but they cannot process and express
thought as if they were organic entities. Instead, Douglas claims, individual choices are
derived from the “thought style”—or, as she would put it, epistemologies—of the prevailing
institution:

Individuals in crises do not make life and death decisions on their own. Who shall be saved and who shall die is settled by institutions [. . .] Individual ratiocination cannot solve such problems. An answer is only seen to be the right one if it sustains the institutional thinking that is already in the minds of individuals as they try to decide. (4)

Douglas details how institutions arise out of a community’s need to create social order out
of the belief that without “sameness” entropy would eventually destroy human community.
Social order may begin as a set of conventions, but for a convention to turn itself into a
legitimate social institution it needs a cognitive parallel to sustain it (46). For example, for
a particular labor division to solidify, the collective must seek a correlative apparatus
operative in the natural world, and this natural metaphor—whether it be the hierarchies of
the veldt or apiary communality—legitimizes a way of constructing the world.

Next, Douglas insists that institutions control thought styles, and thought styles, by
extension, manage what communities remember and forget (74). Institutions guide social
memory to bring together the appropriate social “founding myths,” assembling disparate
facts, stories, anecdotes and informational quanta that resolve into a patchwork quilt of
social identity. For Douglas, determining what a society remembers is indicative of the underlying forces meant to keep a solidarity together: “Public memory is the storage system for the social order. Thinking about it is as close as we can get to reflecting on the conditions of our own thought” (70). Institution-guided thinking also inspires appropriate social amnesia: “When we look closely at the construction of past time, we find the process has very little to do with the past at all and everything to do with the present. Institutions create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen and no questions asked” (69).

In conjunction with creating the appropriate breaches in public memory, that which is remembered and the founding social metaphor are both sacralized: the founding principles are made dangerous (i.e., if it is profaned the world will collapse, thus the offender must be destroyed), attacks on the sacred must be vigorously and publicly defended against, and founding myths must be invoked explicitly through words, deeds, and totems to make the sacred tangible. The sacred defends the classification order and the division of labor, and in turn the order defends the sacred: “The sacred makes a fulcrum on which nature and society come into equilibrium, each reflecting the other and each sustaining the known” (112). Institutions “remember” their constituents as they sacralize the founding metaphor, and the remembered are endowed with social power, mobility, and a sense of stability in an otherwise threatening environment.

Douglas is careful to point out that her construction of institutions and individuality does not necessarily lead to moral relativism. Thompson, Grendstad, and Selle point out that even though the line between the personal and the political is socially constructed, it is not a relative boundary because values must be shared between at least
two people, and thus relativism is contained, or at least restrained, albeit potentially on a
very microscopic level (1). That mutable boundary, alternating between the personal and
the political, individualism and communalism, establishes social order not because it is in
the best interest of the individual, but because it is the medium through which the
individual can assert choice. Here autonomy is located and articulated in the process of
negotiating this complex system of boundaries. Douglas moves the discussion about
individuality away from the problematic (and, in her mind, shortsighted) project of
brooding over the nuances of choices and towards "a different kind of moral philosophy
[. . . ] centered on the conditions of self-knowledge" (127). Self-knowledge is not simply an
inert property circulating in the social field; rather, it is an act of intervention.

Douglas, Thompson, Grendstad, and Selle's contributions are important to
understanding Irish drama because through the "refreshment" of cultural theory
postnationalism focuses on an essential problem that playwrights such as Sebastian Barry
contend with: the struggle to assess a system of self-knowledge and self-discovery when the
very institution that should guide individuation is dramatically in flux. Quoting Sandel,
Douglas notes: "the human agent is essentially one who needs to discover (not choose) his ends,
and that the community affords the means of self-discovery" (127, emphasis added). But
when, through its construction or its constituents, the community fails to incorporate an
individual, that person cannot "discover" her or his "ends."

It is true that Michel Foucault, in The Order of Things (1971) and other writings,
demonstrates the overwhelming power that institutions have to guide thought patterns, but
Douglas and others attempt to show that institutions can also be malleable, that though
they cannot be replaced, they can be modified to account for the changes that come to the founding metaphors through technology and division-of-labor shifts that Max Weber describes as “a pragmatic, means-ends, market oriented type of rationality” (Douglas 108). When institutions change or are sufficiently challenged, the process opens possibilities for communities to rearrange the institutions that have guided their “thought style”: “First the people are tempted out of their niches by new possibilities of exercising or evading control. Then they make new kinds of institutions, and the institutions make new labels, and the labels make new kinds of people” (108). The crucial point is where and what the “new possibilities of exercising or evading control” are, how they come about, and how they then lead to “new kinds of people.” In the case of Irish playwrights and postnationalism, the act of writing can be viewed as an attempt to exercise or evade control, to reify or re-visualize institutions, and silence or reintroduce marginalized individuals into Irish society.

OUTER PERIMETERS OF SUBJECTIVITY: BHABHA, RENAN, AND THE ANTIPOLITICAL BEYOND

Two additional ideas need to be amplified: Douglas’ “shadowed places” of cultural amnesia and the functions of cultural margins. Essays by Homi K. Bhabha and Ernest Renan refresh the refreshers by adding insights to how cultures treat individuals and historical facts that do not harmonize with official versions of subjectivity and history. The first insight, from Bhabha, addresses the areas of the cultural-national framework that resist easy codification or hierarchization. Postnationalism and cultural theory, as most postmodernist theories do, allude to gaps or breaches brought about by overlapping identities, identity claims, or subjective fragmentation, what postmodernist discourse refers
to as margins, interstices, and liminal-spaces. In relation to postnationalism, such undefined areas take on added significance because they refer not to theoretical fissures but actual socio-political null regions containing groups and individuals who are either ignored or punished for not conforming to nationalist norms. Moreover, although nationalist marginal spaces produce and are produced by conflicts of space and economics, at the core of the controversy are divisions over allegiance and identity, issues that are not easily remedied by simple redefinition, reinterpretation, or restructuring. True, to Greenfeld “identity is perception” and for Anderson communities are “imagined,” but in the political world perception and imagination mobilize real resources and services. Postnationalism, thus refreshed, seeks to identify (in the sense of finding and giving identity to) and reintegrate the socio-politically marginalized individuals and groups and work them into the broader definition of and participation in the socio-political world.

In The Location of Culture (1994) Bhabha discusses the failure of cultural theory to properly assess the relationship between dominant discourse and the spaces of subjective overlap or liminality, and he proposes remedies contingent on a recognition that a distinct facet of identity lies beyond the discursive world’s ability to appropriate it. “In the fin de siècle,” Bhabha begins, “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1). Bhabha here alludes to a number of postmodernist strategies, including the merging of temporal contingencies, which suggest a return to what Anderson would call “simultaneity.” Bhabha urges contemporary theorists “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or
processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (1). That is, the question should not be “What is the origin of identity?” Rather, it should be “What identities emerge as a result of cultural overlap?” Like Greenfeld, Bhabha devalues the nationalist motivation of seeking cause and effect and instead calls for the examination of cultural formations, expressions, and identities as “emergent phenomena.” Conscious of the “exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other” as a barrier to understanding postnationalist liminalities as emergent phenomena, Bhabha outlines a strategy whereby issues of contemporary subjective fragmentation can be theorized, analyzed and blended into the overarching socio-cultural construct.

Bhabha, of course, finds the center of culture enfolded within its own margins, the “interstices” or medians of political and social discourse. In a passage dissecting Benedict Anderson’s inability to organize a convincing link between socio-economic structures and social hierarchy, Bhabha writes:

The great connective narratives of capitalism and class drive the engines of social reproduction, but do not, in themselves, provide a foundational frame for those modes of cultural identification and political affect that form around issues of sexuality, race, feminism, the lifeworld of refugees or migrants, or the deathly social destiny of AIDS. (6)

That “foundational frame,” for Bhabha, exists in the realm he calls the “beyond,” a supra-temporal, extra-subjective space that co-exists in parallel to the political world, and even influences it, but rests beyond the political world’s manipulative grasp. “Being in the ‘beyond,’” he writes, “is to inhabit an intervening space [. . . ] But to dwell ‘in the beyond’ is also [. . . ] to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity [note the refining of Anderson’s terminology]; to touch the future
Thus, "the intervening space 'beyond,' becomes a space of intervention." Smader Lavie and Ted Swedenburg refer to the temporal qualities of Bhabha's "beyond" as "third time-space," whose subjects are fragments of "collectivities-that-were" and who, according to Trinh Minh-ha, "return to a derived identity and cultural heritage" (187).

That the "beyond" is essential to "return" is a concept that seems more at home with science fiction than postnationalist literature, and though Bhabha's "beyond" takes some finessing to comprehend, it is not a koan. The notion of the "beyond" stakes out, at least in broad strokes, the central claim of this chapter, which is that Irish drama in the twentieth century can be read as various attempt to address this "third-time space" and reassess notions of "home," "return," "exile," "identity," and "Irish." For some playwrights this reassessment may lead only to a reassertion of the status quo; for others it implies a radial reshaping of the assumptions governing the definition (or definitions) of Irishness, even broadening the term to reclaim individuals cast out of the community by the gerrymandering of cultural margins. Indeed, a reductive conceptualizing of "beyond" is to equate it with "cultural margins." Such a definition implies that the margins are the true center of subjective discourse, and thus it is possible for the discursive margins to reclaim or assert political power over the dominant center.

The danger here, however, is that by conceiving the "beyond" in political terminology, or in the milieu of political questions and issues, one can only comprehend the "beyond" in terms of the very theoretical construct that prefers to eliminate all traces of margin or other—in other words, all traces of the "beyond." Because the "beyond" inhabits
a space outside the geopolitical sphere, any attempt to define it in political terms effectively nullifies its potency to describe its nature, for if the “beyond” is defined in political terms, politics can in turn dictate the terms by which it is understood and deployed. The beyond would have to speak the language of the political, wear its clothes, and conform to its idioms. In order to avoid such effects “beyond” is best aligned with a less constrictive term which can be described as “antipolitical,” a notion that overlays and rests outside the political sphere and which requires the selection of an alternative reading of the morpheme “anti.”

“Anti” comes to contemporary discourse meaning “against” or “contrary to,” and thus the term “antipolitical” under this interpretation contextualizes itself as a concept existing in the political world, beholden to contemporary political notions of time (for example, Anderson’s homogenous, empty time), and therefore subject to the rules of discourse shaped by the political sphere in favor of the political sphere. A secondary definition of “anti,” consistent with its Greek origin, means “reflection of” or “emulation of,” which accordingly establishes “antipolitical” as a reflection of the political.1 The advantage of this redefinition is that it places Bhabha’s “beyond” outside the scope of political discourse but still in contact with it. Most important, it places the “beyond” properly outside “homogenous, empty time” and squarely within the “simultaneity” that Anderson describes. Political and antipolitical, or better yet political and “beyond,” interact and intercede with each other, but do so virtually, in the imaginary.

Augmenting the notion of the “beyond” bringing identity together with itself or its “return,” Franz Fanon writes that since history ratifies identity, “lost histories” must be
retrieved, even though he also recognized that the fetish of identity potentially leads to the pitfalls of romanticizing the past and homogenizing the present. Bhabha, acknowledging these concerns, incorporates Fanon's concept of "negating activity," which is the act of establishing a "boundary" (also referred to as a "bridge") that allows one to recognize a sense of displacement where there should only be a sense of location (i.e., the unheimlich). Through the negating activity one accepts the displacement and explores the opportunities it offers, and Bhabha notes, "In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (9). A conscious recognition of one's dislocation, the fundamental step of realizing that even in the imaginary the border becomes the bridge, ironically, is the precursor step to dissipating the permeable membrane that divides the dichotomous halves of self and other, public and private, and indeed nationalist and individual. Thus, Bhabha's "beyond," to which we link through Fanon's "negating activity," opens up a new terrain of unexplored possibilities wherein is located both culture and individuality, a theoretical space that encapsulates the antipolitical. This is where Stuart Hall's concept of identity arises and takes shape preparatory for speaking in and to the political sphere.

The second important point to elaborate centers on Douglas' "shadowed places" in collective memory, a negative space created by institutions to ease the consolidation of sanctioned history and install the institution as the hero if its own founding myth. Ernest Renan, in his influential lecture "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" ("What is a Nation," originally delivered at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882), notes the central importance of forgetting
in the creation of a nationalist identity: "Forgetting, and I would say historical error, are essential factors in the creation of a nation, and therefore the advancement of historical research is often dangerous to nationality."² Ironically, according to Renan, the quest for history is contrary to the nationalist cause, and thus what a nation needs is not empirical fact so much as it needs an institution to collect, collate, and refract relevant facts from history and assemble them in such a way as to invent a national identity appropriate to the needs of the present community. He later elaborates in a passage that is here presented in the original French and my own translation:

Or, l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de chose en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des chose; [ . . . ] tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle. (892).

[Now, the essence of a nation is that all individuals should have many things in common and also that they all should have forgotten many things. All French citizens must have forgotten Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre and the Albigenses Crusades in the thirteenth century.³]

This translation highlights important ambiguities in the original text that other interpretations smooth over. Renan uses the subjunctive mood to emphasize that individuals “should have many things in common” and “should have forgotten” many things. Some translators prefer the modal “must have all things in common” and “must have forgotten many things,” but “must” obscures the close construction of Renan’s grammar. The wording precisely asserts a form of nationality that may or may not currently exist. Other readings, such as the “must” translations, interpret Renan as suggesting requirements for the nationalist condition. The “must” formulation implies preconditions, and therefore suggests that since nations existed at the time Renan wrote
this essay, by definition they did in fact have "numerous things in common" and "had forgotten many things"—a case that may or may not be true. The reintroduction of the emphatic use of subjunctive in this case shows Renan appealing to a non-existent form of nationalist construction, one that may only stand in its Platonic ideal form. Perpetually hovering over the semiotics of "should have," the translation remains in constant flux between the actual and the ideal, forming the precise notion that Renan was most likely attempting to capture, which is the contingently imprecise precision that attends an understanding of nationalism formation.

The critical section of the Renan passage cited above asserts that a community "should have all things in common," "things" here referring to a shared, mutually acceptable understanding of cultural artifacts and the historical past. Furthermore, the community "should have forgotten" (i.e., "doit avoir oublié") key events from its past, especially acts of violence that nevertheless are crucial to the given nation's founding. "Doit" is the third person conjugation of "devoir," which is a complex verb analogous to "to must" (once again that queer modal verb which eludes concrete definition). The above translation renders "doit" as "should have," although "has to have," "obliged" (in Anderson's translation), and "is required to" are other possible meanings that reverberate throughout "devoir," and this multiplicity of meaning is key to understanding Renan, Bhabha (who, incidentally, approved of Renan), and the formation of Irish identity in Irish drama. "Should have forgotten" implies that the present must invariably and simultaneously link and unlink itself to the past. This concept coincides with Douglas' assertion that institutions guide public memory, although here Renan suggests that the
people must remember and forget as many things as possible. Renan's clever construct aims to avoid the fetishization and moralization of history by contemporary society while at the same time making a claim for the presentness of past events. At a certain historical point (Renan is silent on exactly when this should occur and what appropriate amount of time should elapse), the nation must collectively forget—or more precisely, unremember—the divisive events of its past (and no past is without its divisiveness) for the sake of the collective order. Whether or not this forgetting is truly the best course for a social solidarity—especially a modernist, nationalist solidarity—is beside the point. What is important, at least at this juncture, is that forgetting plays a role, that it occurs frequently (pejoratively called "cultural amnesia"), and that its function can be explicated through the postnationalist scheme.

In the case of Renan's "doit avoir oublié," essential to French nationalism is a systematic remembering and forgetting of such past indignities as the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Huguenots and the massacres of Albigenses heretics under the authorization of Pope Innocent III. In both cited examples Renan concentrates on instances when French "citizens" (as they can be loosely defined according to medieval and Renaissance standards) committed acts of atrocity against their "own" in the name of religion, as opposed to fixating on atrocities imposed upon the French by the "other" external forces (and Renan himself wrote extensively on the paradoxes of Christianity, particularly about the ways its history conflicted with its ideals). "La Saint-Barthélemy" and "les massacres du Midi" therefore embody the aphorism that greater differences exist within the circumference of a social solidarity than between the solidarities themselves,
what Andrew Sullivan calls "the narcissism of small differences." It may be of the highest irony that in invoking these two massacres Renan is actually introducing or remembering these events to many of his contemporaries and readers for the first time (the lesser known Midi massacres more than the Saint Bartholomew's Day killings), and thus inducing the very remembering/forgetting function he encourages all to have. Whatever the case may be, Renan's bringing together of these two events highlights the fact that oftentimes the worst injustices are inflicted between groups who are most similar to each other, and that therefore a cultural mechanism must be applied to retain the impact of such happenings without raising the visceral emotions that accompany them. Renan does not propose a crude "forgive and forget" or "forgive but never forget" approach to history. Rather, he calls for an attenuated balancing act that holds in delicate tension the outrage of past injustices that fray the edges of an otherwise carefully woven historical tapestry and a willingness to frame such occurrences as distant acts that deserve detached analysis and assimilation. In attempting to explain the power of the past to encroach on the present, Renan competes directly with social memory, which for certain cultural groups runs long and deep. Rather than suggesting criteria for what should be forgotten and what should never be forgotten (good versus bad cultural amnesia), Renan posits that as much as possible should be remembered and forgotten at the same time.

The applications to Irish history and literature are apparent everywhere here. A culture (or cultures) that parades and riots over the Battle of the Boyne, fought in 1690, but cannot determine an appropriate public commemoration for the 1916 Easter Uprising; a nation that divides itself over diametric secondary colors; a citizenry who nine decades
after World War I cannot without deeply troubling emotion agree upon the semiotics of
the poppy; an academic and political community which, according to Roy Foster, must cite
long tracts of Irish history before pronouncing their position on contemporary political
and socio-cultural matters; such a constituency is ripe for the kind of
remembering/forgetting faculty Renan abstractly describes. Take his "doit avoir oublié"
citation and replace "la Saint-Barthélemy" and "les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle" with
"Bloody Sunday" and "Omagh" and one can see the intense emotions Renan seeks to
account for in his theoretical superstructure. A postnationalist reading would seek to
identify how writers and dramatists attempt to deconstruct this very framework, categorize
what they elide and what they include, and expose how they attempt to reconcile memory
and amnesia to service a culture as riven as Irishness is with so many stark examples of
injustice.

POSTNATIONALIST TRANSITIONS AND TRANSMIGRATIONS: READING IRISH DRAMA

The friction between a complex Irish individuality and a reductive Irish
nationalism requires an equally complex perspective to unravel productively. Hall reminds
us that identity is a vehicle for the individual both in the real and metaphorical sense of
"containing" and "moving." On the other hand, nationalism, as a form of communal
construct that exists as a secularized form of religion, claims to be the possessor and
distributor of all available discursive keys that permit individuals to exercise power; but
nationalism, as discussed in the previous chapter, is also defined as immobility, and thus
the keys it purports to distribute lead not to passages and corridors but to prison cells of
subjective identification. Douglas further notes that institutions keep their constituents in place by binding them to concrete symbols and places in order to regulate desire.

Most significant, nationalism claims power over the measure of time and the terms under which history is defined, thus further investing itself in the need to maintain stasis. Like Tony Kushner's angel, nationalism enunciates an anti-migratory epistle, insisting that institutions and identity must calcify if they are to perpetuate themselves for the collective good. Though social constructs vary according to Douglas' model, the underlying truth remains that the political sphere claims preeminence in the discourse it creates for itself. In practical terms, this means that any discussion of identity in relation to the political community and conducted in terms of political discourse polarizes into one of two categories: the pro-nationalist text or the revisionist-nationalist text. Nowhere is there any suggestion that an alternative to the politicized interpretation of history and identity has place, and here postnationalism enters the dialogue. The appropriately postnationalist solution to this discursive labyrinth, according to Bhabha, is to locate identity (and by extension culture) outside the norms of political discourse, to the "beyond" space that hovers in reflection of the political world. This antipolitical, or more accurately postnational, frame connects to the political world through history by combining two dislocating strategies: Fanon's "negating ability" (whereby the subject recognizes its dissociation and "un-homed" nature) and Renan's "doit avoir oublié" (whereby history is simultaneously remembered and forgotten).

Postnationalism, "refreshed" with cultural theory, reads Irishness as a conflict between the tendency for individuals to transition and transmigrate and the tendency for
institutions to impose stasis on their constituents. The prism of postnationalism can be used to illuminate a complicated cauldron of nationalist anxieties simmering under the surface of plays throughout the century. As the very writing of a play calls into existence Irish individualities, since characters and the situations attendant to them harbor multiple layers of identities that interact with the broader socio-political sphere, and because enacting these texts constitutes an act of social intervention, a postnationalist reading can reveal much about the ways these works attempt to intercede in Irish culture.

With postnationalism thus grounded in cultural theory, it can now be applied to the plays of Sebastian Barry. The following chapters are textual readings that invoke at various moments the aspects of postnationalism detailed in chapters two and three and which are outlined at the conclusion of chapter one. These textual analyses do not necessarily touch upon all twelve points of the "postnationalist manifesto," as some aspects are more relevant than others when applied to a given play. However, these readings at their core foreground issues of national identity and the individuals who struggle to re-imagine themselves in connection with it. The discussion of Boss Grady's Boys, for example, centers around four "intrusions" into the non-linear time of the play by dreams or visions that interrogate the ways in which the dynamic process of identity is calcified by unseen institutions. For the analysis of Our Lady of Sligo, on the other hand, four aspects of the notion of "home" are examined for the numerous ways in which the term is made synonymous with "nation," "house," "family," and "body." As mentioned in the preface, these two chapters form a brace of plays in which the characters are unable to re-imagine
Irishness sufficiently to incorporate themselves within its boundaries. In the next two analyses, however, Barry's characters are able to renegotiate the terms of their Irishness, although in the process they must leave behind or, in the case of Thomas Dunne, mask over substantial aspects of their former identities. The assumption here is that the re-imagination of self involves, at the most basic level, a simultaneous rejection of self. The exploration of Prayers of Sherkin interrogates the interrelated function of text and textile insofar as they both have implications for the assumption of nationalist identity. Finally, the image of a suit in the analysis of The Steward of Christendom is used to amplify the foregoing discussion of text and textile, demonstrating how Thomas Dunne subtly undermines his own acculturation into the supposedly "new" Irish identity.
NOTES

1 The OED's entry 2a under the heading "anti-" (prefix') gives the closest approximation of this definition, noting its use primarily in the physical sciences and citing as examples "anti-proton," "anti-matter," and "anti-neutrino." However, the "antipolitical," unlike "antimatter," does not result in a catastrophic explosion when coming in contact with its opposite. Luce Irigaray's intractable *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1990) gives exhaustive discussion on how the reflected and reflector do not naturally resolve into dominant and subordinate positions.

2 The original text: "L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation, et c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger." The translation is my own.

3 The Albigensian Crusade was led against the Cathari, a heretical sect in southern France who taught that "the material universe was the creation and tool of Satan: hence they condemned the use of all things material, prohibited marriage, encouraged suicide, and in general stood for a morality that strangely combined asceticism and immorality" (Bokenkotter 118). The ignoble legacy of the crusade against these heretics was the formation of the juridical body that Gregory IX in 1233 would formalize as the Inquisition.

4 Gellner quotes Oliver Wendell Holmes' infamous remark, "To be a gentleman one does not need to know Latin and Greek, but one must have forgotten them" (72).

5 Sullivan uses this phrase in his review of James Carroll's book *Constantine's Sword* (2001) in the 14 January 2001 issue of the *New York Times Book Review*. Sullivan, clarifying a point made by Carroll, notes that one reason that Judaism and Christianity never quite got along from the early stages is because the two religions were so similar, based as they were on a common scriptural, geographical, and cultural heritage.
CHAPTER 4

"ANOTHER IRELAND ALTOGETHER":

BOSS GRADY'S BOYS AND OUR LADY OF SLIGO

Q: How can you tell an Irishman in heaven?
A: He wants to go home.

Traditional Irish joke

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Before becoming a playwright, Sebastian Barry (b. 1955) had already established himself as a poet and novelist. His three volumes of poetry, The Water-Colourist (1983), The Rhetorical Town (1985), and Fanny Hawke Goes to the Mainland Forever (1989), received nominal acclaim, although the reception of his first major novel, The Engine of Owl-Light (1986), an attempted homage to Finnegans Wake, was so dismal that he abandoned fiction and dedicated himself full-time to playwriting. (His return to novel writing, The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty [1999], received a considerably warmer welcome.) That same year he edited and published The Inherited Boundaries: Younger Poets of the Republic of Ireland, selections from the works of major contemporary Irish poets, and he included himself in that number. His first play, The Pentagonal Dream (1986), was a middling effort that
Christopher Murray described as “a highly experimental one-woman play of undisguised obscurity” (“Such a Sense” 243). Subsequent Barry plays demonstrated his ability to fuse his inflected poetic dialect with the lives of various members of his family tree, creating a theatre best described as verse drama in prose, a new literary dramatic voice reminiscent of Synge and Yeats’ work during the early years of the twentieth century.

His next two plays, Boss Grady’s Boys (1988) and Prayers of Sherkin (1990) were staged at the Abbey’s adjunct theatre, The Peacock, and earned Barry a wider following in Ireland and England. As a result of those successes, two years later Barry was commissioned by the Bush Theatre in London to write White Woman Street (1992), which played to packed houses and glowing reviews. In 1995 Barry managed a rare feat, writing two plays that appeared on the West End simultaneously, one receiving near universal acclaim and a handful of Olivier Award nominations, the other vilified as one of the worst plays of the year. The former, The Steward of Christendom, was directed by Max Stafford-Clark and successfully toured England, Ireland, Australia, and the United States. The latter, The Only True History of Lizzie Finn, managed to eke out a half-hearted run before disappearing from the stage. His seventh and to date most recent play is Our Lady of Sligo (1998) which premiered at the Royal National Theatre in London (also directed by Stafford-Clark).

But despite his acclaim in the Ireland, Britain, the United States, and Canada, Sebastian Barry has not yet received serious coverage in scholarly journals and articles. Excepting the numerous play reviews and the odd newspaper interview (mostly with periodicals in Ireland and Great Britain), only about a half a dozen articles about Sebastian
Barry's plays have appeared in critical literature. The earliest article, "'Such a Sense of Home': The Poetic Drama of Sebastian Barry," appeared in the *Colby Quarterly* in 1991. Written by Christopher Murray, the article presciently notes Barry's promise as a major upcoming playwright and reviewed the themes of home and exile in *Boss Grady's Boys* and *Prayers of Sherkin*. Murray is the first to note a connection between Barry's plays and Beckett's. He also observes of Barry's work:

> All is connected, past and present, the human voyage and the flotsam of history. All is fuelled by a common concern which has its goal in spiritual destiny. Out of such unlikely material Sebastian Barry creates a drama, his dream of a new Ireland. (247)

Seven years later in the same journal Jim Haughey's "Standing in the Gap: Sebastian Barry's Revisionist Theatre" reads Barry's plays as "an implied criticism of nationalist and revisionist history/mythography" and as a "reconstruction of Irish history" designed to create a new "narrative": "one aimed at truth and reconciliation" (291).

Haughey's deliberate use of the phrase "truth and reconciliation" is intended to draw comparison between the Irish national question and the then socio-political climate in South Africa to address publicly the history of atrocities while maintaining a spirit of healing without recrimination. Furthermore, Haughey compares *The Steward of Christendom* and other of Barry's play to the prevailing assumptions of Irish identity to demonstrate how Barry's family members/characters resist easy classification; Barry's work, Haughey writes, "redefines our understanding of what constitutes Irishness" (294). This brilliant and succinct article points out that Barry's corpus "exposes the inadequacies of defining Irishness along the usual political and sectarian guidelines, [and] also suggests how..."
many Irishmen and women actually determine their identity through a 'form of genealogical and territorial insistence’” (295). Haughey points out that Barry navigates a tricky terrain by denying historical absolutes, his plays implying that creating portraits of historical events and people in stark black and white commits an injustice to the past and the present. Tellingly, the only article explicitly referring to Sebastian Barry in Haughey's works cited is Murray’s Colby Quarterly article.

Two others articles appeared the same year as Haughey’s, coinciding with the success of The Steward of Christendom and the premiere of Our Lady of Sligo. Emile-Jean Dumay published an article in GRAAT: Publication des Groupes de Recherches Anglo-Americaine de l'Université François Rabelais de Tours titled “Passé et passage dans le théâtre de Sebastian Barry.” It is a remarkable article that surveys Barry's plays from Boss Grady's Boys to Our Lady of Sligo (The Pentagonal Dream is conspicuously absent from any formal discussion of Barry’s work) and applies a complicated reading based on the many meanings of the French words “passé” and “passage” as they relate to Barry’s use of time, history, past, and present. The article suggests that Barry's skillful use of “double reality”—meaning his ability to overlap time periods to indicate not simply two separate events but rather simultaneous temporal occurrences—implies a “passing” between present and past that allows for a transcendent reparation of past wrongs. Dumay's “Ouvrages Cités” refers only to the plays cited therein and to no scholarly articles whatsoever. The second 1998 article was written by the prolific Roy Foster, “Lost Futures in Sebastian Barry’s Our Lady of Sligo,” a short piece that describes Barry’s major theme, reminiscent of Hall’s theories of
identity, as “recovery—stitching back into the torn fabric of Irish history the anomalous
figures from an extended Irish family” (23).

Foster’s article is cited in a more extensive and thoughtful treatment, Scott T.
Cummings’ “The End of History: The Millennial Urge in the Plays of Sebastian Barry,”
which was initially presented at a 1999 Indiana University conference titled “Nationalism
and a National Theatre: 100 Years of Irish Drama.” Cummings sees in Barry’s plays a
“millennial urge” that seeks to overcome the tragedies of the past with an all-cleansing, all-
renewing, redemptive reconstitution of history:

To the extent that [Barry’s characters] are identified as creatures of
independent Ireland, death represents not only an end to earthly suffering
but also a release from national history and, conceivably, the dawn of a new
era. The plays insinuate a national eschatology, not the end of the Irish
state but the end of the beginning of the Irish state—that is, the period
encompassing the birth of the nation and a subsequent, insistent
nationalism which takes precedence over less patriotic concerns. (295)

Cummings sees in the conclusions of The Steward of Christendom and Our
Lady of Sligo a
confirmation of Thomas and Mai’s apotheosis: “they are thrice redeemed, first from
whatever guilt they feel for the suffering of others, second from their lot in the new Irish
nation, and third from the pain of consciousness itself” (297).

Barry’s work is mentioned in passing in Christopher Murray’s “The State of the
Play: Irish Theatre in the ’Nineties.” A broad survey of thematic trends in Irish drama
from 1899 to 1996, Murray’s article posits that the Dionysiac “savage god” of Irish drama
unleashed by Synge had become “domesticated and tamed” through the plays of Sebastian
Barry, Bernard Ferrell, and Billy Roche (10). Later, in more thorough paragraphs, Murray

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goes on to elaborate on what he sees as Barry's significant contributions to Irish drama and the representation of Irishness on stage. He praises Barry for his optimism, noting that he "has none of the angst which haunts the drama of the previous generation [i.e., Irish plays from 1964-1989]" (16). He concludes:

There is an extraordinary purity in Barry's world (one might even call it innocence) which is impervious to the dangers surrounding it. He cannot bear to conceive of evil dominant; he must, like a born-again Shelley, have a world sustained by love. As a visionary poet, Barry has, like his heroine Fanny Hawke, a sense of home, a sense of Ireland redeemed. This makes him the most unusual, most out-of-step playwright working in Ireland today. (17)

A final notable article, which is also cited in Cummings, discusses Brian Friel's *Making History* and Barry's *Prayers of Sherkin* as two works that envision Ireland as overcoming its nationalist tendencies in favor of a more complicated identity for its citizens. In "'Homesick for Abroad': The Transition from National to Cultural Identity in Contemporary Irish Drama," Jochen Achilles claims that in "colonial times" (a term he uses, apparently, to indicate a time before the advent of the "postcolonial" mindset) "nationalism" implied progress for Ireland, but that in the "postcolonial period" nationalism has become more of a hindrance than a help. Hence, Ireland's proper course is to move towards "cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism," which for Achilles means, in consonance with Ernest Gellner, that the Irish must transform their identity from a nation-oriented allegiance to a culture-oriented paradigm he calls "culturalist," a construct that sounds remarkably like postnationalism (435).
In addition to advancing the utility of a postnationalist reading of (dramatic) literature, this dissertation is in part an attempt to rectify the dearth of critical analysis of Barry's work and to expand a field that to date has remained only briefly explored. To that end the following chapters examine four of Barry's plays as critiques of Irish nationalism, its advantages and, more importantly, its disadvantages. The two plays, Boss Grady's Boys and Our Lady of Sligo, are linked in order to demonstrate the notion of Ireland as an unrealized, imperfectly imagined community. More specifically, to borrow a concept from Achilles, nationalism had a distinct and important part to play in the formation of Ireland as an imagined community, but that functionality has become obsolete, or is rapidly becoming so. Boss Grady's Boys and Our Lady of Sligo detail the effects of the end of nationalism on those individual Irish for whom the process of nationalism either overlooked or effaced. The subsequent examinations of Prayers of Sherkin and The Steward of Christendom read these texts as suggesting how the end of the nationalist state can be transformed into a more inclusive, "culturalist" environment that peaceably admits all who wish to claim the mantle of Irishness. The following chapters employ at key moments the tenets of postnationalism as outlined in the previous chapters to demonstrate how Barry's work is indicative of a growing trend to re-imagine the individual's relationship to the nation-state it invariably must define itself with and against.
The second of Barry’s seven plays to date, *Boss Grady’s Boys* is comparable to *Waiting for Godot* for its structure (in *Boss Grady’s Boys*, as Vivian Mercier said of Godot, “nothing happens, twice”), absence of linear, causal plotline, and the two main characters’ dependence on language to assert their existence. Furthermore, their otherwise uneventful days are interrupted by fanciful intrusions that are as cryptic and amusing as Pozzo and Lucky and which may only represent fanciful inventions on the part of the two brothers. Christopher Murray also likens *Boss Grady’s Boys* to *Waiting for Godot*, adding, “Like Didi and Gogo, Boss Grady’s boys achieve a victory over entrapment” at the plays conclusion for choosing to defy the claustrophobia and stagnation of their lives even though they may not be able to overcome those obstacles (“Such a Sense” 245). Dumay calls Barry’s work “beckettienne,” whereas Scott T. Cummings is more explicit, noting: “History is Barry’s Godot and his characters’ ambiguous antagonist. If, in Beckett, Godot is a mysterious and unknown future that never arrives, in Barry, ‘History’ is an intransigent and all-too-well-known past that will not go away” (293). Speaking generally of all of Barry’s plays, Cummings concludes:

Like Didi and Gogo, Barry’s characters are constrained to a condition of waiting, and, while waiting, they go about their daily routines or look back (not altogether willingly) over a life marked by brief moments of glory followed by prolonged periods of frustration and disappointment. (293)

Like most Absurdist plays, *Boss Grady’s Boys* has no discernable conflict other than the Sisyphean labor of surviving the day, but unlike Absurdist plays its existentialism is suffused with an optimism that relies on the interaction with the non-material world for
continuance. That is, *Boss Grady's Boys*, like Barry's other plays, suggests that a moral and ethical material world is inseparably connected temporally and physically to a beyond, that this beyond is a speculum of the material world, and that both frames are connected through the familial bond. In this sense, *Boss Grady's Boys* also links thematically with Yeats' *Purgatory*, except in Barry's case, although sterility is triumphant, there is no apocalyptic cataclysm, the great house survives, and the cycle of life continues.

Set on a hill-farm on the Cork/Kerry border, *Boss Grady's Boys* follows two (not necessarily sequential) days in the lives of two aged brothers, Mick and Josey Grady, the former a tailor of straightjackets for the local asylum and the latter a simple-minded homebody who tends to the household chores. The twenty scenes comprising the play, some conducted completely wordlessly, are dominated by transitions of light, either from day to night or night to day, and the dreamlife is frequently intermingled with waking time, allowing the characters to modulate seamlessly between past and present, fantasy and reality, interior and exterior. Throughout the play the brothers enact the rituals of their day, watching time pass, reminiscing, and narrating the state of their lives, frequently interrupted with memories, dreams, and visions refracted through the light of the passing day. The dead and the past insistently encroach on Mick and Josey's solitary lives, most forcefully their deceased parents, the imperious father and the mute mother who died young from tuberculosis. The events are presented more as a series of impressions rather than a linear plot, and in this sense Barry can be said at this stage of his writing career to be testing the boundaries of temporal reckoning, allowing time to become elastic on stage.
Boss Grady’s Boys (1988) is Sebastian Barry’s earliest attempt to explore the trajectory of twentieth-century Irish nationalist identity creation, a process that resulted in a problematic Irishness imposed by the political elite on the Free State of Ireland in the 1920s. Once Ireland declared its autonomy from the United Kingdom, state and church seized the reins of culture, codified mores, cultural signifiers, and practices, and attempted to impose a homogenized identity on the Irish populace. For those like the Grady brothers, however, this situation created intense internal conflict because although they conformed to the external definitions of Irishness— they lived within the boundaries of the Irish Republic, they have ancestors who have lived within Ireland’s boundaries and intermarried for an extended period of time, and they were loyal citizens of the Irish state, or in the least guilty of no treason— the promised rewards for their fealty had not devolved to them. Ireland remained economically destitute and politically isolated, Dublin remained one of the bleakest cities in the world to live in, and the new government could not staunch the flow of emigrants heading for America and England. In other words, the newly imposed Irishness gave a new face to business as usual.

In a sense, Boss Grady’s boys Mick and Josey represent an unusual kind of cultural orphan. In post-1922 Ireland, the Irish government dictated Irish culture with the assistance of the Catholic Church, the two institutions slashing and burning the delicate cultural ecosystem in favor of expediency and order. The Grady brothers are therefore casualties of circumstance rather than agency, once connected to the cultural mainland by a thin isthmus of familial ties, local language, and common religion that has since been cut
off by the rising tide of the reductionist, isolationist social policies of de Valera. The only
consolation is that Josey is too feebleminded to understand the gravity of their paralysis,
although Mick is far too aware. Since the Grady boys cannot or will not consign
themselves to an “authorized” Irishness, they instinctively seek avenues to re-invent or re-
imagine themselves. Within the text of Boss Grady’s Boys four visitations or intrusions
signal Mick and Josey’s gestures towards identity re-creation: the occasional visitations of
the long-dead Grady parents, Mick’s conjuring the memory of Michael Collins, a brief
vision of a chorus line, and the sporadic appearances of an enigmatic Girl. Each intrusion
represents a meta-theatrical moment—a theatricalized event within a theatrical event, a play
within a play—invoking variant forms of Irishness that are more real, more immanent, than
the Irishness the Grady boys are asked to submit to by an Ireland which has become
altogether foreign to them.

**INTRUSSION ONE: PARENTS**

Sebastian Barry’s plays represent identity as a “suturing” between a remembered
past and an idealized future. In terms of Boss Grady’s Boys, past identity comes in the form
of the agrarian lifestyle: rural values reinforced by the daily routines of turf cutting,
farming, courting, and churching. But the past is also the realm of very present, interactive
ghosts: Josey speaks fondly of dead pets as if they were still alive and Mick replays in his
mind an amalgam of the numberless poker games he has played with his widower and
widow friends. The very widowhood of his associates bespeaks a happier past, one that was
once secure in the rituals of society and church but now long since evaporated. The future identity is a complex texturing of what-ifs mingled with could-have-beens taunting the boys with ignominious death and forgotten burial. Indeed, in this world the dead are not truly dead until they are forgotten.

Unfortunately for the Grady boys, their present is without progression; in fact, like Tolkien’s ringwraiths, Mick and Josey live one unending day stretched over many years. Although they have long since died, Mother and Father Grady (their names are never revealed) exist in the synchronous time that governs the temporal affairs of Grady farm life, and Barry uncannily creates a situation where the dead exist simultaneously in past and present. Unlike Yeats' cursed family in Purgatory (1938), whose miscegenate debauchery is relived like a deteriorating silent film, or Michael Mundy from Friel’s Dancing at Lughnasa (1990), whose personal recollections situate the grown-up Michael in his past as a passive observer, the Grady brothers interact with the memories of their parents as if the events are concurrently unfolding. Meta-theatrically, Mick and Josey are both in the scene and outside it, participating and commenting on the action, and through this interaction they preserve and re-enact for themselves a retrogressive Irishness.

Generally, the scenes with the parents, particularly the mother, are idyllic. However, the memories of the father (who, incidentally, is never referred to in the text as “Boss Grady”) are more problematic. His moments of caring are more than offset by his murderous rage. During the belabored exchanges with the father, the presence of the dead becomes oppressive—says Mick, “I will not live here with [ . . . ] our father’s shadow, and I
expect I will” (16)—because the brothers can only recycle images of the past, and this
reconstitution is insufficient to propel the brothers towards a progressive future. They
wish to enter mainstream time and history, but their feelings towards their father harden
in proportion to the degree that they realize that his policy of familial containment has
doomed them to lives of sterility. They cannot progress, and all that is left for company are
the dead and memory (nostalgia, a pejorative term for the Greeks), the two quantities which
continually retain them in a negative feedback loop of reliving the sad events of the past.

Insofar as the brothers can maintain the memory of parents and past through a
meta-theatrical resurrection of their parents, they can sustain the illusion that their (the
brothers’) identities are stable. However, the remembered father talks back; he is
autonomous and authoritative, not static. When, for example, Josey announces that he
never trusted the path his father used to go to the usual fishing spot, the father retorts,
“There’s no path that I know of” (17). The conventions of regularity and ritual are
undermined once the memories talk back and correct the rememberer. A similar
condition of “pathlessness” is visible in the microcosm of the Grady farm, where the
presence of the dead reflects in numerous ways how Mick and, to a certain extent, Josey
view their condition in their Ireland. Encoded in the brothers are two kinds of stases:
Josey is feebleminded, his life an unending present tense, whereas Mick’s stasis is
stagnation, his life an ongoing series of dashed hopes and stalled progression. Yet no
matter how aware one is of the lack of escape, the reality remains that the socio-cultural
borders designed to keep Irish culture and identity intact is an emerald curtain that leaves
individuals cut off, isolated, and weakened.

**INTRUSION TWO: MICHAEL COLLINS AND THE DRY MAN WITH RESPONSIBILITIES**

By the time Michael Collins signed the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1921, Ireland had been
devastated by a hellish year's worth of retaliatory killings, martial law, and a siege mentality
that put the noncombatant Irish in the unenviable position of being victimized
alternatively by the IRA and the British occupying force. Collins was an enigmatic figure
whose campaign of terror represented either the apotheosis of social chaos or social
stability. At the time of the treaty, and in the years following Collins' assassination, the
"state" of Ireland was in continual flux: de Valera had not yet consolidated his power and
the ensuing civil war threatened to dissolve what remaining unity remained among the
Irish. For Mick, who recounts a chance meeting with the IRA leader, Collins is the man
who best embodied the stability of a re-imagined Irish identity that would remove the
stigma of provincialism from the island and imbue it with a progressive, modernist
identity. If an identity based on parental memory is insufficient to sustain the boys' sense
of self, then surely the absent presence of Collins should be able to endow Mick and Josey
with a militant, less sentimental Irishness.

In Mick's memory, he recalls finding Collins and a few IRA soldiers drinking at a
local pub. Recognizing Collins ("It was the way [he] looked, the way he stared about him
like a tiger, that I admired" [20]), Mick first attempts to ingratiate himself by pointing out
the similarity of their first names, and then, sensing the awkwardness of the situation, he somewhat drunkenly offers his services: "I was to make everything watertight for Collins, and be a decent man in my own district" (22). That is, Mick views his allegiance as a commitment to a political figurehead and a code of moral social conduct, an ironic sentiment since up until the time he traveled to London to sign the Anglo-Irish treaty Collins was better known for discriminate killing.

In Mick's ideal Ireland Collins would "build up everything again, and put the good man in a big house, and leave the mean man to himself" (21). For Yeats, the "big house" symbolized the Protestant Ascendancy and the values of cultural refinement, society, and prosperity. Mick invests "house" with the same lofty values, but these homes are inhabited by simple country folk instead of Ascendancy Protestants or Castle Catholics. Collins is the messenger of a new ascendancy, one predicated on social justice and equanimity. Mick's ulterior motive for supporting Collins lies in his belief that Collins is a kindred spirit of the countryside, the antithesis of the urbanite, Dubliners politicians; and in fact Mick harbors hostilities towards the city Irish for their contempt for the so-called country Irish. Under Collins, Mick hopes, "we wouldn't be fodder for books again, [ . . . ] we wouldn't be called peasants in a rural district, and be slipped into the role of jokers by the foreigners from the city" (20). Mick envisions Ireland not as a unified whole but as a confederation of smaller states in which those coming from the populated cities of Ireland are in fact "foreigners." In retrospect, since Collin's Ireland is an unborn Ireland, Mick's Ireland is nothing more than an unfulfilled wish suspended forever in his memory.

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This image of "foreign Ireland" versus "countryside Ireland" resonates throughout *Boss Grady's Boys*. During one of Mick's remembered poker games, his friend Mr. Reagan refers to a thoroughfare as "the new road" because "heretofore we were not in contact with the mainland, as we dubbed it, though we are not an island" (12-13). He later clarifies his use of the term "mainland" by characterizing Ireland as a series of landlocked islands connected to the mainland of Dublin. Mrs. Swift, another of Mick's poker companions, rhapsodizes on the superiority of country air to city air and how glad she is to be "so giving to the foreigners, with our air" (14). Only later does it become clear that she is not referring to tourists but to the city Irish who holiday in the countryside to breathe "the famous Irish air." Later on Mick notes a sense of strangeness and apartness even amongst neighbors in rural Ireland: "The people in this valley are as far away from each other as old ships in a fog in an old sea-story. There's a fog of rain that keeps them apart" (31). Even religious observance to Mick reeks of alienation because he cannot envision God as anything else but "an English lord" gracing his subjects with his presence and occasionally dispensing social justice and nifty presents. "I won't talk to glass windows anymore," he growls dismissively, "Away up the road with you, you foreigner you!" (15)

To Mick, God is a fragmented pane of colorful glass, bright but cold, and the Irishness He represents is suffused with a humiliating servitude. On the other hand, Irishness refracted through Collins countermands this fragmentation, according unfiltered light and vision because he represents an Irishness that emanates from the margins of Irish society to the center rather than through the agency of the scrubbed politicians back
towards the countryside. Collins links a tribal Irish past with a modernist Irish present, the fusion of which would constitute “another Ireland altogether,” in Mick’s words (20). This “another Ireland” Mick is completely “other” from the Ireland Mick knows, but he can only describe it in vague terms because he can only hazily imagine a place that satisfies his desire for respectability; Collins, he believes, would have provided the specifics. Ireland would be a nation of rapprochement between the “islands” and islands of Irish, “a nation I would be a citizen of, an honoured ordinary man” (21). Best of all, the unity would create a subjective euphony: “the world would hear of us, and wish to be near us.”

Despite his own retroactive optimism at the thought of a Collins-inspired Irishness, Mick is unsure if Collins is a genuine article or a construct, a creature of politics and persona or presence (20). That is, Mick is keen enough to recognize “Michael Collins” as a performance by a man named Michael Collins, but he is not sure if by accepting “Michael Collins” he is at all approaching Michael Collins, hence his giddiness at the prospect of meeting and serving “Michael Collins”/Michael Collins. Whatever the case may be, Mick revels in his over-simplified view of Irishness. Under a Collins Ireland “I was never, myself, to stand carelessly in the rain again,” he reflects. “I was to be a dry man with responsibilities” (22). “Collins” was supposed to lift the fog and rain, remove the barriers imposed by nature and culture, and unify Ireland. Instead, Collins’ death resulted in a paralyzed Ireland, one in which the rain falls continually and without the prospect of abatement.
In this sense the ubiquitous rain of *Boss Grady's Boys* comes to represent not
maternity and fertility but drowning, isolation, and thirst:

That we could be men of our country was all my wish, that we might have a
country that would nurture us, a spirit to get us up the road and out of the
rain. How is it that after every change and adjustment I still stand here in
the same rain on the same mud, with the same sun laughing at me? (21)

It is unclear precisely how far Mick intends to push the weather metaphor here, for it is
uncertain if he truly expects that someone like Collins could alter the political
precipitation in a meaningful way if, as he observes, no matter how things change he, Mick,
remains stagnant. However, it is evident that any Irishness—whether the Collins or de
Valera Irishness—promised what it could never deliver: a change in the (metaphorical)
socio-political climate. The Grady boys, and those like them, are effectively effaced from
the social landscape by the downpour of urban Irish nationalism. The combination of de
Valera's anti-materialism, ultra-conservatism, and his flirtations with Fascist Europe,
although a forward-looking tactic that unified a badly fractured Ireland, nevertheless
plunged Ireland further into its past by perpetuating such debilitating social practices such
as statutes limiting women's participation in society and government.

Thus, the desolate liminal space that Josey and Mick Grady inhabit appears because
past Ireland and future Ireland are insufficiently stitched together by the fabricators of
official identity, and thus the boys' space of habitation opens a temporal breach into which
they are lost. Unrecoverable by history, the brothers find themselves incapable of living
meaningfully; they simply exist. Mick presumes that Collins could have done a better job
fashioning the present out of past and future by acknowledging (rather than homogenizing)
the “islands” of Ireland and bridging them, but in the absence of such a leader they are forced to re-imagine him as a savior-figure without the promise of a second coming. The meta-theatricality of Collins’ appearance, his movie star turn in Mick’s memory, fails to liberate the boys from a restrictive Irishness, and they are left with only shadows to contemplate.

INTRUSION THREE: THE CINEMATIC MIRROR WORLD

Near the middle of the second act, as the brothers reminisce about their mother (“Silent all her life, except for peculiar grunts”), Josey brings out a fiddle and begins playing on the “untuned strings” a “scraping with the occasional notes.” Mick, either too gentlemanly to point out the cacophony, or perhaps too caught up in the moment to notice, judges Josey’s music to be “Good. Lamentable but good” (34). At that moment the scene darkens, and the stage directions indicate the entrance of four cloaked women, their backs to the audience. Stepping in time to the lamentable but good tune, they mimic a dance move Josey performs off-handedly at the beginning of the play, an awkward movement of splayed hands, extended foot, and twirl akin to a tap dance. Briefly they turn towards the audience, revealing “the costumes of chorus line dancers, glittery,” then the women turn away and dance off, the lights returning status quo ante.

The fiddle, in this case, is a communicator that evokes the meta-theatrical world; but whereas for Yeats and Lady Gregory it conjured ballads of political resistance or the Celtic past, for Mick and Josey the fiddle signifies community brought together by memory,
nostalgia, and pop culture (Mick calls fiddles “TV aerials” [31]). Insofar as the music continues, regardless of the quality of the performance, the fiddle arouses feelings of wasted innocence and youth, so much so that Mick notes ruefully that in their abandonment by family, society, and culture, “a music has died in my hands and Josey’s[. . .]

. . We danced to his [i.e., their father’s] tunes, like fools of lambs. What’s the silent tune we dance to now, the rain’s hammers?” (35)

This small scene invokes the pervasiveness of US cultural influences in Ireland, in this case through film. It is cinema as meta-theatre once removed: in his mind Josie recalls images of movies based on Vaudeville productions conflated with his own anxieties about women. Periodically the text alludes to the frequency with which the “boys,” Mick at least, attend the cinema. However isolated the brothers might be in relation to the rest of Ireland, the influence of Hollywood and American cinema is not far from them, and Mick and Josey seem perfectly willing to incorporate imported notions of identity into their own panoply of subjective signifiers. At times it appears that “foreign” media culture has an even more profound effect on how they identity themselves than the local culture around them, the implacability of de Valera’s Irishness notwithstanding. Throughout the play Mick and Josey invoke the Marx Brothers film Duck Soup (1933), Charlie Chaplin’s The Kid (1921), and the American West as reconstituted through uncounted westerns to enrich their singular, lonely lives, and in turn these images give Mick and Josey points of subjective reference that become more meaningful and real to them than the cultural sops forced upon them by their own fellow-citizen “foreigners.”
The cinema is Mick and Josey's hyperreal world, defined by Umberto Eco in Travels in Hyperreality (1995) as the imitation that is more authentic, better than the original (18-19). In its moving images they see metaphors for Ireland as they would have liked it to be: comedic, lively, adventuresome, and escapist—the country they believed they were promised but never realized. Similarly, film provides them with the metaphors of family both real and ideal. Josey fancies himself the little boy in The Kid, abandoned by a single mother, cared for by a tramp, surrounded by a flock of angels, and soon to be rescued, happily ever after, by a Dickensian twist of good fortune. "I was always very like that boy that roomed with Charlie Chaplin," says Josey, "I might have been the boy" (33). What is unclear here is whether Josey fantasizes replacing the cinematic boy or else being the actor in Hollywood playing the role of the boy. Nevertheless, Josey cannot fail to see the connections with his own life—right down to the flock of angels in the form of the presence of the emanations of his parents—with the exception of the ex machina ending, the fairytale denouement he and his brother wait patiently for.

In Josey's mind there is no "fourth wall," either between life and death or life and cinema. Chaplin's tramp is aware of Josey's presence and responds accordingly ("Now how did he know I was there to see him, to give me that laugh?" [32]). Furthermore, he dreams of himself, "like Chaplin," stepping in concrete, "laughing with a jerk at me in the cinema" (32), the film-house connecting the idealized world of movies with the Grady boys' uninspiring Ireland. Josey's inability to comprehend the physics of cinema resembles the famous mirror scene in Duck Soup where three Marx brothers, all dressed alike, mistake a
doorway for a mirror and mime each others actions, passing through the purported mirror's plane without sensing the incongruity of their actions. The imagery of Duck Soup, in fact, provides the boys with a touchstone to their own existence: brothers miming each other in farcical parody of their desperate situation.

Duck Soup, the Marx brothers' final picture for Paramount Studios, is a political allegory set in the fictional Balkan state of Freedonia, where the government, facing a budgetary crisis, agrees to make Groucho Marx prime minister/dictator in exchange for a cash infusion from a wealthy heiress. Groucho's incompetence as a leader precipitates an unintentional war with neighboring Sylvania, and wackiness ensues. What makes Duck Soup especially pointed (Mussolini banned the film in Italy) is the way in which the rituals of nationalism are exposed for their lack of substance that nevertheless potently marshals public sentiment in favor of senseless causes. One scene in particular near the film's conclusion highlights the vacuousness of the nationalist contract between state and citizen. During a protracted battle scene, Groucho unintentionally begins firing on his own troops, and when an aide points out the error Groucho nonchalantly hands him a five-dollar bill and tells him to keep quiet.

The film interfaces with Boss Grady's Boys on a number of subtextual levels, particularly in that the Grady boys see themselves as the troops in the trenches being fired upon by their unfeeling political leaders. Although "A Soldier's Song," the Irish national anthem, is never sung in the play, Josey intermittently breaks into "Hail, Freedonia!," the boisterous Freedonian national anthem. In a moment of reflection, Josey considers, "I had
no other hope in life than to be a Marx brother, a worthy ambition I should think" (32).

Josey sees in the comedic Marxist nonsense a reflection of his relationship with his own brother (ironically, *Duck Soup* is the last film in which all four brothers appear), not least in the way he addresses dead and gone pets in the tropes of a Marx Brothers routine. Yet although Mick may resist Josey's attempt at Marxisms, he unwittingly alludes to Harpo Marx's penchant for slicing things with a huge pair of shears when he muses out loud how he can escape the confined world of their homestead: “That I might find the big scissors that would cut this farm in two” (32).

*Duck Soup*’s opening image resonates in Josey’s memory and throughout the play: “I loved the ducks, in the pot, with the steam, but the ducks were all right” (7). Josey’s fondness for the ducks belies the scene’s implicit menace: four ducks float in a pot resting on an open flame, the ducks seemingly oblivious to the precariousness of their condition. Though the film clearly seeks to connect the ducks with the Marx brothers, Josey see in it a reflection of his own condition with his brother: both he and Mick are simmering in a nationalist pot destined to make soup out of them, and they are in the midst of a system that seeks to consume them as “fodder for books.” The incongruous image of boiling ducks comes straight out of an Ionesco play: noncontiguous images set in a semiotic collage to make a pointed commentary about the illogic that follows. Josey reinterprets it as the triumph of good humor over adversity.

Furthermore, *Duck Soup* gives Mick and Josey the template for the appropriate object of sexual desire: Margaret Dumont’s Gloria Teasdale. Dumont’s infatuation with
Groucho’s Rufus T. Firefly provides ongoing fuel for his riffs as he parries her constant plays for his affections with insults. With Dumont’s ample figure in mind, Josey praises her as a “woman of a sort you won’t see often in Bantry, unless she’s a foreign woman staying in the big hotel” (7). Her American-ness is exoticness incarnate, and she is more desirable than the women he finds around him, perhaps because Dumont’s cinema image is more easily accessed than the bodies of the women among which he lives. Eventually his fantasy gets the best of him, and Josey envisions being surrounded by a multitude of Margaret Dumonts so infatuated with him that he would need to escape: “We could lie on them and pray for help. The Yankee horses would come streaming up the track, with a pretty clatter, and rescue us” (7). It is this kind of ample-figured woman that Mick, less fanciful than Josey, describes as his idealized American wife, the woman he would have married had he emigrated to the States as he had planned (32).

*Duck Soup’s* Freedonia is a bizarro Ireland, a funhouse mirror magnifying the imperfections of the boys’ homeland and giving them perhaps the most solid purchase to understanding the absurdity of their own situation. Freedonia, ruled by a cigar-chomping dictator, encumbered by meaningless social rituals, and roused to military action with a Busby Berkeley-esque showstopper “The Country’s Goin’ to War,” is a stylized re-imagining of the strange country they find themselves in, a country ruled by a prudish, American-born, half-Irish half-Spanish dictator, encumbered by the rapid Catholicization of social morality, and roused to pro-Axis neutrality with a national anthem titled “A Soldier’s Song.” Tossed in the middle of these farcical, chaotic worlds are sets of brothers, oblivious
to the gravity of the situation around them, playing inane mirror games while the country hurtles towards fragmentation. For Freedonia the result is a devastating war; for Ireland it is ennui.

Another looming presence in Mick and Josey's life is the mythos and romance of the American Western. Although no specific films are mentioned, their discourse is seasoned with references to Yankees, cavalry, wagons, and "injuns." The play's concluding lines are spoken as the brothers imagine their farm surrounded by hostile Native Americans:

**MICK**

We're surrounded. The Indians. [. . .] Is there no sign of them bloody horses?

**JOSEY**

There is. There is every sign. (48)

Though allusions to Westerns may seem out of place on an isolated Irish farm, Fintan O'Toole notes that for many years the American West has held an important mythic position in the minds of many Irish. The connection between Irishness and American-ness, he writes, "is itself an aspect not so much of modernity as of nostalgia, a part of the dynamics of memory and displacement, of exile and yearning" (*Lie of the Land* 32). In the Western, according to O'Toole, the Irish could re-imagine their own oppressed condition with a patina of rugged individuality and reify the feelings of exile from one's own country
by fashioning from the cowboys-and-Indians mythology a displaced homeland, an Americanized Tara, an Ireland bigger, wilder, and more romantic than the original.

O'Toole adds, "America and Ireland represent not opposites, not a dialogue of modernity and tradition, but a continual intertwining in which [. . .] America can constitute Ireland's past and Ireland can invent America's future" (33). That is, the American West represented for many Irish an important part of an imagined cultural heritage, a heroic past that symbolized autonomy, progress, and continuance. For Mick and Josey, their farm is momentarily transformed into a homestead perched on the frontier between civilization and the Indian territories, besieged by enemies, with rescue immanent. Josey's concluding line—"There is every sign"—is as hopeful as the play allows itself to become, salvation coming at the hands of a phantom cavalry of which Josey, but not Mick, can see the signs.

All romanticization aside, for Barry the American West holds a deeper, darker significance as well. In White Woman Street (1990) Barry sets an entire play in Ohio during Easter of 1916—as romantic, west, and American as he can imagine. The play's protagonist, Trooper O'Hara, an ex-pat Irishman hired by the Union Army to hunt down and exterminate Native Americans, admits to his travel companions that he never personally shot or killed anyone during his stint. He claims that he feels a stronger innate connection with the natives rather than the American settlers. "Ever see an Indian town—the tent towns?" he asks. "Put me in mind of certain Sligo hills, and certain men in certain Sligo hills. The English had done for us, I was thinking, and now we're doing for the
Indians" (144). Thus, Westerns allows the Irish to see a modicum of their own victimization by the English, the west of Ireland becoming synonymous with the prairies of Oklahoma. Though they eventually side with the Yankees, through their re-enactment of the American West Mick and Josey “perform” themselves in ways more typical of “injuns”: they are the mythologized indigenous, noble savages fighting a losing battle against alien colonizers.

INTRUSION FOUR: THE GIRL

On three occasions, a young woman, simply referred to as “The Girl,” enters the stage, her successive visits becoming increasingly more surreal. In each of her meta-theatrical appearances, for each entrance is a separate “performance,” she interacts only slightly with her audience (i.e., the boys), her imperious attitude rendering her impervious to their solicitous attempts to communicate with her. She embodies the hierarchy of the stage where performer and audience are powerfully divided by the proscenium arch. At first she seems to be a “real” person either remembered by the boys or a present neighbor. However, by the third encounter it becomes clear that she is an abstraction, the locus of anxieties that the boys nurse about their relationships with women, their place in the local community, and their Irishness in “modern” Ireland.

In the first scene, occurring early in the second act, Josey steps outside to urinate, and in the midst of yellow and green light he sees the girl, “morose, off-putting.” He extends his arms to her, but she ignores whatever it is he attempts to communicate.
Without warning he pounces on her, flattening her to the ground, and then rolls off. The Girl, nonplussed, walks away as if nothing happened (29). The stage directions then indicates a sudden lighting change, signifying a transition either of location or from fantasy to reality, a change which is further complicated when it becomes clear that Josey is indeed fallen on the ground and has wet himself. This small scene, an uneasy conflation of violence and humiliation, is made all the more puzzling by Josey's playful demeanor and the fact that he seems unaware of the crassness of his behavior.

The second "performance" covers similar thematic territory but is more pointed and bitter. Under similar lighting as the first scene, the second encounter, this time between the Girl and Mick, is a monologue of frustration that degenerates into sexual rage. In a series of interrogations reminiscent of God's responses to Job, Mick's anger rises in proportion to the graphicness of his descriptions: "[D]id you never lie in dirty sheets, gripping yourself like a lever you could use to drive out along ploughland?" he demands of her. He continues: "Did you never have to stop in the street crippled by your own blood, your poker jammed in your trouserleg, in such a manner as was plain to the every passer? [ . . . ] Did you never pray under soaking leaves, and wipe warm, white seeds in a cloth of jelly off your gansey?" (37) Mick's gendered tirade—he describes episodes of sexual humiliation that could only happen to a male—is the thundering of a powerless critic or audience member attempting to enter into a dialogue with a powerful performer. Her appearances demonstrate the elusiveness of the Irishness Mick and Josey so desperately seek because that identity is, ironically, so foreign, so unreachable to them.
On the surface, Mick's vehemence towards the Girl is delivered on behalf of Josey, but by the end of his rant it is clear that Mick is speaking equally for himself: "Do you not see that, if he was unsuitable, I would do, as much for you as himself, if you were generous, and could see me in this matter?" (38) Here even Mick's sexual frustration is impotent, unable to break through his reticence to confront the Girl outright, as "see me in this matter" is the only way he can bring himself to complain about the fact that his sexual life has been unfulfilling. Furthermore, this scene demonstrates that Mick sees his relationship with Josey as subjectively interchangeable, the frustration of one being the frustration of both. Indeed, similar to Friel's subdivided Gar into Public and Private, Barry has divided a single character, the atavistic "Boss Grady's boy," into Mick and Josey, and thus one is synonymous with the other.

But no matter which Grady boy confronts her, the Girl, as in the scene with Josey, is unmoved, and responds to Mick's every question by saying, "Out of my path and let me home." The Girl's second visit invokes a well-covered Irish dramatic trope: the quest for home. It is clear that in each manifestation the Girl is on her way home, and Josey's attack and Mick's demands momentarily prevent her from arriving there, but their attempts at interactive meta-theatricality fail them. The boys obviously are not "home," at least in the broad metaphorical, nationalist sense. In a way this scene illustrates the vast semiotic divide between home and "home," and between Ireland and "Ireland," and the failure of nationalism to close the gap between the two notions. The physicality of place poorly fits the broader symbolic role it is called on to fill, and the ensuing discrepancy creates the
dissonance that Josey and Mick experience as rejection and sexual humiliation from the
Girl. Their semiotic displacement further fuels the despair that they try to keep at bay by
recounting the past, and yet those memories, the reminiscences that frequently return
accompanied by a visitation from the Girl, only work to heighten their sense of loss.

These scenes illustrate the twisted interweaving of sex and sterility prevalent in the
Ireland of their times and in *Boss Grady's Boys* in general. Josey's childlike tackling of the
Girl is indicative of a stunted masculinity without restraint or sense of consequence.

Gender relations in this imagined Ireland are everywhere arrested by a combination of
outmoded sexual norms amplified by isolation. In Mick's dreamtime poker game, he
remembers his crony Mrs. Swift needling Mrs. Molloy, a fellow widow, for her "attraction
to men," as if sexual desire, even in its repressed state, is unforgivable. Mrs. Swift notes
that she only permitted her husband to touch her with his mass gloves on, "the touch of a
living man's hand on my person [. . .] gave me the chills, such as was not to be
countenanced" (13). Mrs. Molloy is equally suspicious of physical or sexual contact,
referring to sexual intercourse as an event wherein a man "murders his joke into you" (12).
"Don't be a girl ever, in a boy's world," she adds darkly (14). In the world of Boss Grady's
boys' Ireland, the girls are frigid and the boys are impotent. Yet later these women
contradict themselves, Mrs. Swift hoping to be married to a "traveler"—"commercial not
tinker"—and Mrs. Molloy, when asked by the men at the card table to suggest a new game
to play, suggests they play "house." "I am a very soft person [. . .] that might be sunk into,
with profit," she adds (14-15).
The result of this repression is a class of middle-aged Irish who Mick calls “shadows”: the sexually incompetent, incontinent shells of a once virile generation. *Boss Grady’s Boys* plays out the crippling sexual and social paralysis that wrought havoc on a society that, following the desolations of the 1920s, could ill afford to sustain any further fragmentation. Mick describes living on the Grady farm as being “fish” (28). Josey states: “You were always stymied, weren’t you? Stymied was your tune” (41). The poker game itself becomes an erotically-charged representation of the gender games Mick and his friends are forced to play, the times being as they are, and the institutions governing their desires allowing no other alternatives than, in the words of St. Paul, to “burn” privately. Ironically, “poker” is also Mick’s phallic euphemism in his complaint to the Girl (“your poker jammed in your trouserleg”), thus giving the “poker game” an even richer psychoanalytic dimension. Irishness therefore, at least in this context, imputes an ironic legacy of sterility and stagnancy at a time when the prevalent stereotype of the Irish was that of fecundity and uncontrolled growth. Nor do the participants in the cycle of barrenness know how to transcend the confines of their imprisonment. Towards the end of the poker game, Mrs. Swift reveals that from the start she had a poor hand. “Don’t you know you can stop?” asks Mrs. Molloy. “Of course,” Mrs. Swift replies (16). It is not simply the bull-headedness of the players in the face of an unachievable quest that makes *Boss Grady’s Boys’* Ireland tragic, but the awareness of the participants that they can somehow arrest the cycle but choose not to that makes their Irishness the epitome of absurdity. The Girl concurs, noting, “There were lights, there were lights to find me,” as if
to suggest that somehow in the haze of institution-directed desire the Irish could have found their way to a utopia of unbridled sexual congress (38).

Yet because they are unable to recognize the lights or stop playing with a bad hand, the Irish of the play remain cut off from each other, physically and emotionally. The physical separation of genders and the confusion of gender roles leads to a curious configuration: a homosocial society where brothers sleep in marriage beds and consider themselves a betrothed couple: “We are like married people. We sleep in the same bed like the wed. It is like a marriage” (31). The sacrament of marriage is thus parodied because it cannot be achieved. Even Jesus Christ takes on the characteristics of ambiguous gender when Josey, in a moment of lucidity, calls him “a lovely man he was, with a skirt” (41). In a reminiscence of his father, Josey recalls being told that in his sons the Father divided a masculine and feminine essence, animus and anima, and that Josey received the women’s part: “[It was] the best half of me,” the Father claims, “the half of me I killed in myself always” (20). And when Josey recovers from his second visitation from the Girl, he tells Mick, “I dreamed I was a girl [. . . ] I was miserable” (47). Although it is unclear whether Josey identifies with the Girl or considers the state of bondage to be tantamount to being a girl, his performance in the feminized role complicates his gender assignment in terms of his relationship with his brother, with his society, and his individuality, and also set him in the intriguing position of possibly being the Girl he tackles and by whom he is later imprisoned. Ironically, though Josey has crossed the meta-theatrical divide of audience/performer—he recognizes that in some fashion he has become “the Girl”—he is
unable to ascertain that he has in fact reached a stage of hermaphroditic Irishness. His role-playing within the play of Boss Grady’s Boys signals the potential transformative and transgressive play of meta-theatricality, but neither Mick nor Josey understands how play can culminate in a radically new kind of Irishness.

This Joycean conflation of Platonic metaphysics and Catholic dogma reaches its apotheosis in the Girl’s third visit, where Josey, lying down to rest, believes himself bound by an invisible force and unable to stand or move (reminiscent of the second act of Waiting for Godot when the four characters are fallen and can’t get up). To Josey, too involved with trying to release himself to pay the Girl any attention (“Tell me what keeps me”), she outlines the problem with Irishness:

We are all here, all of us, the sinners and the saints and the mixtures, inside the wooden church, and the rain is falling on us. On the mass. [. . .] We huddle in the porch. The whole townland almost in the one porch. Not much of a place if we are all there is to it. We’ve bred no one of any repute that I know of. It is not a world. (46)

Ireland, incarnated as a wooden church, is imagined as a purported bulwark against the ubiquitous rain permeating the landscape of the play. The chapel of Ireland becomes the embodiment of claustrophobia, amassing people tightly together but preventing them from interacting with each other. The result is that no one breeds, at least in the Girl’s estimation, and the “world” supposedly created for social security becomes a muted threat to continuance.

In this third visit the Girl as interrogator/narrator/performer reiterates the paralysis leitmotif—“It is very difficult to understand [. . .] How you are to have hope, and
then no hope, for the rest of the stint"—and offers a cryptic solution: "Did you ever notice how much improved the countryside is in a good summer—how the place looks very much another place? And gives you different hopes" (45-46). On one level she advances the notion that the Irish must physically remove themselves from the land in order to re-imagine themselves. Furthermore, "hopes" are connected to "place," and the variable in this equation is the presence of a "good summer" which turns the given place into "another place." Once again, the Girl intimates that a solution to the problem of paralysis and constrictive Irishness is somehow presently accessible. In the tradition of twentieth century Irish drama, the Girl is a variation of Cathleen/Kathleen, the young girl with "the walk of a queen" who is idealized womanhood and thus idealized Irishness. She has no interior life outside her mission to impart nationalist wisdom to those she meets, and her pronouncements are often laced with the heavy sorrow of Irish history. Barry's Girl (who in the original production was played by future playwright Gina Moxley) is an interior presence, not so much a physical manifestation as a psychological one. Fittingly, her pronouncement is not a battle cry like Yeats' Cathleen; instead it is a call to re-imagine the community.

*Boss Grady's Boys* signals the death of the imagined community under the weight of stilted nationalism, and the visits by the Girl, coded as the enunciatory call to imagination, are greeted with perplexity and, in the end, hostility because she represents an ideal that cannot be realized, let alone approximated. In a way the Girl's emaciation contrasts with the voluptuousness of Margaret Dumont, although both women are equally inaccessible.
However, Mick and Josey obviously prefer Dumont because she is so foreign. The Girl is a reminder of the fierceness and bitterness of Irishness; the boys would much prefer the Junoesque American forever panting over an inaccessible Groucho Marx.

In the process of re-visualizing Irish nationalism, the de Valera government took from the community the right to reinvent itself in exchange for providing a stable society, a Faustian bargain the weary Irish public was either too weary to challenge or too battle-scarred to care about. It may be that the machinations of the mid- to late 1920s over the terms of Irish nationality were intended by the principle combatants—the Catholic Church, the IRA, various nationalist and fascist groups, artistic collectives, Fenians, O'Learyites, Protestant Ascendancy interests, and so forth—to be only provisional decisions. Conor Cruise O'Brien writes that Protestants were willing to throw their support to the Catholics because they hoped in vain that once the dust settled they would be returned to their former positions of influence. However, when at last the time came to codify Irish nationalism in constitutional form, Catholicism managed to extract sweeping legislative concessions against divorce, contraception, and in favor of censorship, seizing from Protestantism the moral high ground in the eyes of the Irish public (35-36). Protestants, believing they were acceding to the bourgeois and conservative values of a modernist nationalism, instead got Catholic hegemony disguised as nationalism designed to absorb all incoming iterations of Irishness and thus the Church secured for itself its own perpetuation.
Boss Grady's boys inhabit a null world of pseudo-nationalist identity, forever badgered by the presence of the Girl who taunts them with the intimations of a nationalist immortality they might have enjoyed had de Valera been executed alongside Patrick Pearse, had Collins not gone to Cork, or had Boss Grady better prepared his boys for the crushing realities of the outside world. Her intrusion does not call to action; it reassures paralysis. She is the anti-Cathleen and the boys her impotent audience. The meta-theatrical moments the boys perform for each other ultimately fail because they are inadequate bridges to link them to the other "islands" of Ireland; instead, they serve merely to reinforce the barriers that cut them off from the other. Indeed, alterity in the Grady boys' dream world is always estranged and irreparably severed from them. They suffer from a subjective schizophrenia where, in the words of John Guare in Six Degrees of Separation, "what's in here doesn't match up with what's out there" (34). For Mick and Josey, "in here" is the interiority of their farm and dream world, and "out there" is the Irishness that left them behind. Abandoned by their own culture, they are left forever to re-theatricalize their predicament whilst surrounded by imaginary enemies, waiting for the cavalry that will never come to rescue them.

OUR LADY OF SLIGO: THE FOUR GREEN FIELDS OF HOME

Our Lady of Sligo, Barry's most recent work, focuses on the reminiscences of his maternal grandmother Mai O'Hara, who died before he was born but whose life was recounted to him by his mother, the actress Joan O'Hara. Incapacitated by years of
alcoholism and domestic abuse, and haunted by the flashbacks of marital infidelity, Mai languishes in a nursing home, alternatively begging for and vituperating her only visitors, her husband and daughter. The play is essentially a static production, relying primarily on the strength of the actress playing Mai to carry the weight of the text's emotional impact. In her few lucid moments Mai attempts to reconstruct the tortured path of her life that led her to this pass, but her happy memories are so buried in the past and with the dead—with her father, with whom she was close, her sister who died as a young girl in a distant boarding school, and her son who died of crib death—that she finds herself incapable of transcending her own misery to find redemption in the metaphors that have traditionally comforted the Irish.

Central to the Irish mythos of identity is the sanctity of "home," whether it be the literal four-walled structure or the country of Ireland. As another O'Hara said to his daughter, "Do you mean to tell me, Katie Scarlett O'Hara, that Tara, that land doesn't mean anything to you? Why, land is the only thing in the world worth working for, worth fighting for, worth dying for, because it's the only thing that lasts." Although these words are spoken over a mythic southern plantation, Gerald O'Hara in Gone With the Wind echoes a prevalent attitude that the Irish, both exiles and those that remained, perpetuate about the home country. Fintan O'Toole relates an anecdote about an old woman's visit to the Irish Fair in New York City in 1897 that exemplifies this reverence of land. Prominently on display was a contoured map of Ireland spread out on the floor and divided into thirty-two parts analogous to the thirty-two counties. The singular attraction
of this map was that each county was covered in soil taken from its environs, “duly attested as truly genuine.” The old woman in question paid her entrance fee, found her appropriate home county on the map, and knelt to kiss it (Lie of the Land 160-161).

Our Lady of Sligo interrogates this myth of land as home by first examining it in the light of its sanctified prominence, Mai O’Hara praying, “Our Lady of the Damned, comfort me. Our Lady of Africa, heal my pain. Our Lady of Omard, enfold me. Our Lady of Strandhill, dance for me. Our Lady of Galway, remember me” (55). Ireland is the terrestrial manifestation of salvation, the metaphors of worship coterminous with its geographical points. Like Thomas Dunne in The Steward of Christendom, the Sister who tends Mai also sees God in Irish topography: “in the high waves of a September tide [...] and in the big veins of gold that burst out under the clouds in a good Midlands sunset, and in shop-bought flowers” (34).

From this point Our Lady of Sligo explodes the fiction of home by undermining each facet of the Irish myth of nation-state as home and place of refuge. Instead, it is a place of muted terror that creates periodic mass diasporas, ejecting those whom it should be protecting. Like the Ireland of Boss Grady’s Boys, the Ireland of Our Lady of Sligo is a sterile environment of unrealized promises and empty platitudes. But whereas for Mick and Josey Ireland is relatively indifferent to their existence, for Mai O’Hara the country is a malignant creature, a sow that devours not only its offspring but its ancestors, its history, and ultimately itself in a mindless feeding frenzy. Ireland is unfulfilled desire, a longing for a security that is imperfectly realized, or more specifically unevenly distributed. Our Lady of
Sligo demonstrates that Ireland could only function as a nation insofar as it could successfully consolidate and solidify the metaphors of "home"; but in reality, the semiotic gap between the metaphor and the metaphorized is so vast that the connection collapses.

Emblematic of the sanctity of land and connected to the idea of the home-ness of Ireland is the notion of the séan bhéan bocht, the poor old woman of Irish folklore who wanders the countryside questing for adventuresome patriots who will fight for her "four beautiful green fields." Yeats and Lady Gregory memorialized her as Cathleen/Kathleen ni Houlihan and the Countess Cathleen, her mission being to free the four provinces of Ireland, Ulster, Meath, Leinster, and Connaught from the ravages of invaders. Mai O'Hara is a variant of the séan bhéan bocht, but the four green fields she laments are four specific metaphors or "fields" of "home": home as Ireland (in the dual sense of the nation-state and the land), home as house, home as family unit, and finally home as body (the house of the soul). "Field" in this case indicates as much a plot of ground as a medium in which a particle or wave can propagate itself. In agricultural-political terms, the fields of Ireland thus represent its political autonomy as well as its connection to history, place, and self-sufficiency. In postnationalist terms, "fields" refers to the discourses in which nationalist and individualist identities operate.

In each of the four instances of "home" in Our Lady of Sligo there is a clear "ideal" tenuously hitched to a faltering "real," and with each variant of home the play shows how the juxtapositions initiate a friction that ultimately undermines the linkage between sign and signified. The problem here is not that "home" is at all deployed, nor is it that the real
can never match up to the ideal. Rather, the problem is that the relationship between the
real and ideal of “home” is too inflexible, in Mai’s words it is too “fixed.” It is a state
which Annie Dillard refers to as “the fixed that horrifies us” (67): “the fixed is a world
without fire—dead flint, dead tinder, and nowhere a spark. It is motion without direction,
force without power, the aimless procession of caterpillars round the rim of a vase” (67-68).
Worst of all, for Dillard the fixed is strangely tantalizing: “I hate it because at any moment I
myself might step to that charmed and glistening thread.” The fixed, in short, is Ireland,
and its lure is grounded in the powerful sense of home it embodies but which, in the world
of Our Lady of Sligo, it cannot in fact deliver.  

HOME AS NATION-STATE: THE FIRST GREEN FIELD

It is undisputed that Ireland in the 1920s threatened to dissolve into anarchy.
However, as the killing subsided and the initial influx of capital and rule of law permeated
the island a cautious optimism momentarily overtook feelings of despair. The homeland
promised to once again shelter and nourish those who for so long had been outcast and
neglected. In Our Lady of Sligo, Mai explains that she once viewed the tumultuous times
leading to the new Irish Republic as a chance to rewrite a vision of home that was once
considered set in stone, an opportunity to re-imagine Ireland in modern(ist) idioms. As
Greenfeld points out, human society cannot simply reinvent itself out of whole cloth; it
needs a template. At moments of social crisis, when it becomes apparent that the terms of
societal order are up for renegotiation, the collective must look to nature or some other
construct in order to find the appropriate metaphors and structures to create the requisite "symbolic order" (to borrow from Max Weber) that in turn brings about new social order. Greenfeld argues that "ressentiment"—"a psychological state resulting from suppressed feelings of envy and hatred (existential envy) and the impossibility of satisfying these feelings" (15)—is often the core motivation behind a society's desire to restructure itself. In the case of Mai O'Hara, as it is with Mick and Josey Grady, the new symbolic order, the creator of new desires and new paradigms, is the glamour of Hollywood.

Jack, Mai's husband, notes that in Mai's early years the promise of progress liberated a life that for her would otherwise have been doomed to a pre-fabricated course of child rearing and squalor:

> Before her was a vague but brilliant road of life and excellent years. We were going to make our mark in that new world of Ireland. [... ] There was no lid on anything. Freedom, they called it, and I suppose freedom excites the young. (21-22)

He notes that in her hometown Mai was ostentatiously progressive, being the first woman to wear pants, "a fashion that leached into Sligo from Hollywood," and that "she never was the second woman to sport a style of dress." In addition, although she was prodigiously talented, able to sight-read difficult music and play tennis (21), her liberation is expressed through her adoption of Hollywood as her source of identity; and in fact the opening stage directions indicate that "old thirties film music" should be playing prior to Mai's first lines of monologue.

The new medial culture becomes a new religion for Mai and her family, and even in the throes of her present misery she continues to speak of the cinematic world as if it
was her cathedral sanctuary. “Didn’t we haunt the Gaeity cinema, you and me, and went to all the lovely films,” Mai tells Joanie. “Shirley Temple, Judy Garland and her haunted face” (44). The stars become household names, the cinema a surrogate home. In a sense the cinema represented “the refuge of hopeful humanity,” making visible a brighter, more optimistic world untouched by the sorrow of war or of economic depression, whether through the tyke antics of Shirley Temple or Judy Garland’s escapist desire to be over the rainbow. The “talkies” import a new registry of saving saints to sketch blessings on the masses and bestow promises of redemption: “St. Clark Gable, bless us,” Mai implores, “Pray for us, St. Fred Astair” (40).

The lives of these new-and-improved saints give the O’Haras a bold sense of subjective security in a rapidly modernizing world, and both Mai and Jack emulate the kind of beauty, romance, and adventure they see portrayed in the dark cinema houses. “As handsome as any of your Californian stars” is how Mai remembers Jack in his younger days (26-27). In another instance, when comparing the good looks of her husband to that of a movie star (“he knew he looked the part, the film star” [13]) Mai corrects herself: “I would never normally have thought of such a thing, but then, normal times themselves were far in the past. Visions were the order of the day, unbidden, peculiar, out of the way” (13). In other words, the world she lives in now is one lacking vision, one that regressed from the cinematic world back to the claustrophobia of Victorianism. “Normal” times, for Mai, are the pre-modernist years where life for a woman in the British Isles had little promise of
progressivism. However, as she contemplates her life in her hospital bed, Mai realizes that times have been reverted to a "pre-cinematic," pre-vision era. 

In one of Mai's feverish reveries she recalls her Dada setting up the dichotomy of life as seen through the religious metaphor and life defined through the consumerist model: "Father Dillisk said that life was only a vale of tears, and I whispered down to you that life was two shillings a quarter and a boon to the widow. Boon, like the noise the heron made in the shilling-coloured river" (55). On one side is set the belief that life is suffering, and therefore to see it any other way is to infuse a dangerous, narcotic fiction into what should properly be an un-anaesthetized study in silent theodicy. On the opposite side is placed the belief that material culture can address social injustice, and that through the idioms of media-inspired profligacy one can relieve suffering. The essential conflict, therefore, is not if there is suffering in the world but rather whether the appropriate metaphor for the re-invented Ireland is Catholicism or consumerism (consumerism being understood as synonymous with Hollywood).

The merits of either vision of Ireland as home are not so much at issue—both have a legion of positive and negative connotations. The most evident difference between the two is that, in Mai's mind at least, the Hollywood-ization of Ireland was motivated from the Irish non-elites, from consumerism, and from a faith in technology and rationality. Wholesale Catholicization, on the other hand, represents for her not merely a cessation of progress but a categorical denial that any social progress had taken place. This is a home of aperture, finding security in the influx of difference, of multiplicity and variety. De Valera,
obviously, saw things differently. In Catholicism he found a stabilizing force that would put the brakes on materialism and social decay at a time when Ireland still threatened to collapse into warlord-led factions and leave the populace victims to unscrupulous industrialists. He too saw his version of Ireland as a non-elitist paradise instilling order and peace, but it was a home of closure guarded by security fences, triple locks, and morality wolfhounds patrolling the gates. At stake was which vision would prevail, and for a moment it seems to Mai that Ireland would inexorably go the cinematic way. However, the cold reality of the political world is that although democracy allows for multiple visions of society, only one vision can be enacted at any time—that is, a Hollywood and a Catholic Ireland could not, under the terms of nationalism extant during the 1920s, co-exist. Thus it was by quirk of events and an assassin's bullet that brought de Valera to power and signaled the triumph of his vision of Ireland that would persist until the middle of the twentieth century.

The reality of the “new” Ireland is much bleaker than Mai’s vision of a post-Edwardian feminist home. The stirring promise of a renewed Irish brotherhood devolves into murderous factions, high unemployment, and cronyism (Joanie to Jack: “You never bought a car except off a crony and you never owned a car that went properly” [57]). In Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity (1999), Theodore K. Hoppen notes a similar lack of improvement in Irish society: “as the labour movement had been vampirised by the republicans so republicanism itself was ‘tamed by the men of substance almost from the start’” (114). That is, whereas the republican movement had appropriated the labor
movement on order to give itself enough political credibility, so too did the powerful elite in Irish society hijack republicanism in order to make sure that things remained exactly the way they were before the change of government. In other words, the address may have been different, but the household management was still the same. “Under the guise of insurrection,” Hoppen writes, “Ireland had in truth awarded itself little more than a rearranged continuity” (115).

It comes as no surprise that, according to both Jack and Mai, the primary culprit responsible for destroying the promise of a reformed Ireland, the serpent in garden so to speak, is de Valera. Jack characterizes his anti-intellectual influence over Ireland as “deadening, deficient,” isolating a country that was already an island. Mai agrees, pointing out that he “didn’t want to dilute Catholicism in Ireland” (48); which is to say that instead of reinventing, or re-imagining, a new Irishness to meet the challenges of modernist Europe, de Valera regressed, re-inscribing the same kinds of proto-nationalist notions that modernism had already shown to be insufficient. In outlining his agenda for a new Ireland, de Valera stated that his goal was “to free Ireland from the domination of the grosser appetites and induce a mood of spiritual exaltation for a return to Spartan standards” (Foster, Paddy, 94). Foster adds, sarcastically and parenthetically, “It was considered an appropriate way to frame a political agenda.” “Dev,” as he was called familiarly, lorded over Ireland in a patriarchal, patrician manner that seemed to many more like the ministrations of an authoritarian parent than an elected politician.
The cumulative effect of de Valera’s homogenized Ireland was not so much that it was unusually oppressive towards women, intellectuals, and progressive politics, but simply that it was dull: “the sheer boredom of Ireland, the sheer provincial death-grip [that] lies upon the land” (23). In a 1998 interview Barry expressed his view that de Valera was in effect a “sentimental Stalin”: “Stalin was so evil, there’s something tremendously interesting, at least. But de Valera was a kind of twopenny-halfpenny version of that” (Cunningham 14). In such a state, overseen by such a politician, a woman like Mai, “with ideas and notions,” could not flourish. “Maybe there were other women like her in the other small cities of Ireland,” Jack offers, “seeming cosmopolitans that the capital would have erased. As it is doing now” (23). When Mai confesses to her friend Maria, “I am a lost woman,” she is admitting to both her impending abandonment of her husband and her own dislocation as an individual in a society that rejects progressive women.

Embittered, Mai characterizes the new Ireland thus:

Did you ever hear of the Republican itch? That came from hiding gunmen on the run in your house. [...] Every child in the house would have to be washed, three times over. That’s the Fianna Fáil crowd as would be now. I don’t know if their hygiene has improved. But it was always safer, and cleaner, to vote Fine Gael. (29)

Here the nation is interpreted as a home infested by the vermin of republicanism afflicting the children and requiring a resolute disinfection, and there is unvarnished classism evident in Mai’s rant as she compares political philosophies to personal grooming habits.

At one point Mai eventually expresses utter disdain for Irish culture in general, calling Gaelic “that filthy old language of Irish” (9). Though understandable and clearly abetted
by her dependence on morphine, Mai’s outbreaks reveal that perhaps her own ideal Ireland may also have worked only re-inscribe past notions of hegemony and oppression.

The cruelest joke played on the Irish, according to Mai, is that in the years leading up to total Irish independence there seemed to be a promise of economic mobility for women and men, which is equated with conspicuous material consumption. By the time the transition was complete, however, Republican Ireland was only a man’s Ireland. With the patriarchy of the Catholic Church officially inscribed in the institution of the constitution, women were effectively cut off from government, business, and all other forms of social power and mobility. Hoppen notes that although sexual equality was part of the initial republican platform, and though women played significant political roles symbolic and legislative in the Irish independence movement, they were systematically eliminated from the civil service sector, no women serving in Irish government between 1922 and 1979 (242).

Men like Jack, on the other hand, could rise on no other merits than their gender and their cronies. Mai notes a particularly stinging irony:

At least Jack turned himself into the thing he had admired in Sligo as a child, those Midletons and Jacksons and Pollexfens, big-house Protestants who would never have spoken to the likes of him. And by the time he did that, those people were gone. [...] Jack tried to turn himself into a sort of British gentleman but by the time he achieved it, death and independence had erased his template. There were no posh Protestants left in Sligo to notice the Catholic butterfly painfully emerged from the dank caterpillar he had been. (48-49)

The “template” she refers to is the image of social respectability encoded in the visible consumption and high social station of the Protestant Ascendancy. Under British rule,
Ascendancy comforts were the standards against which all social progress was measured. The venerable surnames Mai lists are actual Sligo families, most notably the Pollexfens, who were W. B. Yeats' maternal relations. In material progress Mai sees the bridging of two distinct Irish cultures, the Protestant "big-house" caste and blue collar Catholics, a rapprochement enacted as much by an increase of wealth as an erasure of class lines.

However, in the ensuing transition of British rule to home rule the Protestant Ascendancy was driven out, their houses burned, property confiscated, and many families emigrated. In an instant Jack's upward mobility was rendered indefinable; in deconstructionist terms, Jack suddenly lost the entity against which he could defer and differentiate himself against, and rather than find uncertain security in the ability to continually defer his definition, he was rendered unaccountable. He simply had no referent in the reconstituted Ireland because those who would appreciate and welcome—or envy—his advancement were no longer there to observe. The Catholic caterpillar had metamorphosed into a butterfly only to find himself in a world where iridescent wings were no longer appropriate.

When at last material consumption is deadened by the austerity of the de Valera years, Jack and Mai turn to alcoholism, but it is only after the doldrums of de Valera's Ireland have driven Jack to drink and financial ruin does Mai finally take up the bottle herself: "I though if I was to live [. . . ] in the world of Jack I had better have some form of anaesthetic, and why not the same one he used" (32). The "Ireland" that Jack and Mai aspire to was non-existent. "Ireland, where is that country? Where are those lives that lay
in store for us, in store like rich warm grain?” (22) The grain, apparently, was distilled into liquor, and Jack and Mai are reduced to celebrating the stillborn Ireland’s wake, both of them tearing into each other in the process. Reflecting upon the ruin of her unfulfilled life, Mai cannot help but invoke a land-related metaphor to describe her desolation: “The river silted up for lack of dredging and so did I” (12).

“Ireland daunts your remembering soul,” Jack tells the nun tending his dying wife, and indeed memory is one of the many casualties of the social upheavals that resulted in the Irish Republic (24). Collective amnesia, so essential to Renan’s vision of the nation, is played out in Mai’s capacity to selectively remember the events of her tortured past. Frequently, and often with her husband and daughter present, she vehemently denies being married and sometimes only selectively remembers the happier times from the past. “Those are other days,” Joanie wearily tell Mai after one particularly heartbreaking series of remembrances. “Oh, other days, indeed,” Mai replies. “Days of happiness, would you say?” It is Joanie’s turn to revert to selective amnesia: “I don’t know, Mammy” (9). Ireland as home is also home as nepenthe, a narcotic that eases suffering but dulls awareness.

HOME AS HOUSE: THE SECOND GREEN FIELD

Yeats frequently equated the manor house with the stability and prestige of the Protestant Ascendancy, and apparently so did the IRA, whose campaign of terror included torching stately homes across Ireland (significantly, Lady Gregory’s home Coole was spared from arson, although later it was demolished because the Irish government at the time
refused to preserve it as a national monument). Yeats wrote that the "big house," the castle (in Gaelic "thoor" or "tur," that is, "tower") was synonymous with marriage, and in preparation for his own marriage he spent inordinate time seeking out the proper medieval tower to purchase as his first home (Maddox 23). Moreover, in his drama the best way to gauge his temperament about the proceedings and the state of things is to observe the condition of the home or house either in the principle set or in the background (Purgatory is the best example of this tendency). Christopher Murray, among others, addresses the prevalence of the notion of "home" as a significant factor in Irish drama, adding that the converse theme of exile has lately been deployed to explore issues of exile within the boundaries of the home ("The State" 13).

In Our Lady of Sligo home, which in the parlance of Irish nationalist and dramatic mythology is the hearth around which the family gathers for warmth and storytelling, is transformed by the de Valera era into a site of dread and confinement, the manor house morphed into the prison house. Dada reminds Mai, "A fine house keeps the wolf of Ireland at bay" (54). Though on the surface he may be saying that Irish wolves are kept from threatening a family protected by a home, he is also saying that a housed family can be sheltered from Ireland as a wolf. "But that," Dada warns, "requires sobriety and sense," both of which the play demonstrates is lacking in the post-constitution doldrums. Mai transforms the image of home further using similarly lupine imagery, "Home is the hunter" (4). No longer the sanctuary, the home stalks the individual, confines her and consumes her. Home as predator, not protector, is a sentiment echoed by Joanie, who recalls a
teacher beating her when she appeared tired in class and refused to say why—she is too
fatigued and too embarrassed to admit that her parents' constant fighting has prevented
her from studying or sleeping properly. “Nil aon tinteadn mar do thintedín féin,” her teacher
intones mantra-like as she subjects Joanie to a hail of corporeal punishment. “There's no
hearth like your own hearth” (42).

In a brief dialogue, Mai and Maria characterize the rise of Irish nationalism in
terms of alcoholism and the loss of houses. Maria begins by noting that Mai's grandfather
“drank away three beautiful farms, and a fine house in each one” (18). After praising Dada
for his fortitude and hard work, which won him the right to purchase the beautiful house
Mai grew up in, Mai notes, “It's not so hard to drink a house. Jack drank Grattan house
and I suppose that's a terrible thing when you think it was my father's house.” Four
generations and four historical stages are expressed here in terms of home ownership and
loss. First is the age of Patrick Kirwin, the romantic lead of Prayers of Sherkin, and his hard
labor that translates into three farms and houses. He embodies the family's mythic past
because by Mai O'Hara's time Patrick's eloping with Fanny Hawke had become the Eden
myth of the Kirwin clan. From thence came the dark days of the fall of Patrick's son,
Dada's dada, who squanders the family fortune and pointedly loses the farmhouses.
Dada's hard work as a scrivener and landowner, therefore, comes to symbolize for Mai a
rebirth, a reconfiguration of the oppression of drink and hegemony, a legacy that should
have been passed onto her husband, like the house he inherited. Instead, Jack falls into
the same self-destructive pattern. It is as if history, and nationalism, is incapable of rising above the horrifying lessons of past error.

HOME AS FAMILY UNIT: THE THIRD GREEN FIELD

If the vagaries patriotism, civic duty, and national pride are insufficient to create identity and social solidarity, or if the foundations of a solid harbor house are lacking, then the bonds of family ties could instill the same sense of social security by mere fact that Ireland's insularity creates for itself a relatively tight group of individuals related by blood. Barry notes wryly, "There is no one you could fight in this country who could not be yourself, or a friend, or a brother" (Meany 16). In Our Lady of Sligo Maria, Mai's closest friend, echoes this idea, observing that through marriage and descent she is related to both Mai's father and mother, "and that's not unusual in Ireland" (17). Theoretically, then, family in Ireland should represent a refuge of interpersonal relations in the absence of any formal institutional-imposed order.

Mai idolizes and idealizes her deceased father, whom she refers to, even in her advanced age, as Dada. Her first lines recall how her father used to wake her every morning when she was a little girl, his gentle reveille "seem[ed] to tear me gently from the dreadful realm of monsters and hags that sleep was" (3). His skin reminds her of a "continent," "the spreading Australia of it," "a naked country" that provides her a terrain of safety more sure and proximate than Ireland itself. In a way, Dada is the idealized Ireland: patriarchal, yes, but also reminiscent of a more settled time when silks hats were de

Yet inasmuch as Dada represents the old, tribalist past, he also represents for Mai the power to redefine the self and overcome personal tragedy. In one spectral appearance Dada narrates how he overcame class barriers and an oppressive family life (his father, it is repeatedly mentioned, lost three family farms to drink) to work first as a scrivener and then later ascending the ranks of his profession to become a respected insurance man. Dada makes clear that his hard work and success had a singular goal in mind: "With my eyes fast on the lines of figures, like a rope of rescue, I strove to make good my father's destruction" (20). Dada embodies rescue from decay and ruin, but the price is seeing the world, as Dada does, as a menacing conglomeration of competing tribes. Mai, noting Dada's suspicion of her dating Jack, says, "I suppose Dada was horrified that his daughter was getting mixed up with such a crowd, dwarves and drinkers and such. Tribes, he called them, and he didn't mean the Tribes of Galway, of which he claimed to be a part" (47).

Regardless of its drawbacks, Dada's worldview looks comparatively better than the world in which Mai now lives. In Our Lady of Sligo the Irish family is simply another institution lauded by state and religion that in practice lies in ruinous decay, and with the advent of de Valera the "family" of Ireland begins a tragic cascade of events, the supposedly protective home of community undermining itself. Mai recalls that at the outset of her decades-long drinking binge the local grocery man, a certain Mr. Kennedy, tacitly abetted her decline by secretly delivering two bottles of whiskey daily and underhandedly adding
the expense onto the weekly bill (52). Eventually the O’Haras can no longer maintain the
fiction of family unity demanded by their community and the marriage descends into a
free-for-all melee of drunken fights—Mai recalls running into the streets naked, chasing Jack
in a murderous fury, “whipping and cutting and slashing” him—and day-long stupors.

From that point onward their capacity for vitriol and betrayal is no longer
restrained. When their son Colin dies of sudden infant death syndrome, Jack accuses her
of infanticide, “with your drinking and your filthiness and your slime” (36). Ultimately,
Mai trumps Jack’s cruelty by spontaneously having sex with Dr. Bird, the principal at
Joanie’s school and the husband of Joanie’s teacher, when he stops by the house to inquire
as to why Joanie has missed so much school. Ironically, this is the same doctor who
previously had comforted Mai immediately following Colin’s death with, “it was all in the
intentions of God and that [she] must accept it.” Worst of all, in the height of her
drunken, passionate fumbling with Dr. Bird—“it was bloody awkward”—she realizes that
young Joanie has witnessed the entire spectacle. Summing up her ignoble transformation
from mother to monster, Mai notes, “I became a devil in my own house and the soul was
gone out of me and my child was afraid of me” (33).

Now that she is incapacitated by liver disease and the ravages of old age, Mai is in
no position to even sustain the pretense of maternity and home. She herself is confined in
a parody of home, a hospice that tends to her and protects her for a price. Joanie, who
now only occasionally visits her mother to offer what assistance she can, reflects on the
reversal of parent-child relations, in this case the child as protector of the parent.
Deploying the terminology of Irish mythos—in this case, the warrior guarding the tomb of Maeve in Knocknarea—Joanie asks, “Did every broken mother need a sheltering child?”

(43) It is during this monologue that Joanie symbolically canonizes Mai as “Our Lady of Sligo”:

> And in the church where I went to say things to God there were pictures, old oil pictures there were in niches, of Our Lady of Sorrows, and sometimes it was Our Lady of Budapest. And in the end I knew that you were Our Lady of Sligo except you had lost your little boy and instead you had the sliver of your tattered girl, a coin of fear and sleeplessness in the palm of your hand. (43)

Joanie dismantles the dichotomy of protector and protected, highlighting the curious relationship between the saint who imparts and the supplicant who receives. The “old oil pictures” must be preserved in niches, the images unable to physically tend to themselves, but in being sheltered thus they are capable of blessing those who request their aid. This interplay closely resembles Mary Douglas’ description of the “sacred” as a founding societal myth that is the custodian of social order but which also requires vigorous defense by the community (112). Mai is Our Lady of Sligo because, although she is a wounded protector in need of protection, she is also curiously sanctified in her suffering. The safe haven that is home therefore emerges as a function of interrelationships rather than a state of being, a convention that can only be legitimized by a shared bond of understood and mutually accepted role-playing.

Jack longs for a future state of a reinvented self and reclaimed home, a time that he contextualizes in terms of familial interrelation as redemptive faculty. He hopes that in the future their “children’s children might look at our photographs and have some pride in us
simply as people that had lived a life on this earth and were to be honoured at least for that” (62). Of course, these are lines written by one such “children’s child,” Sebastian Barry, by whose efforts Jack and Mai’s portrayal illuminates lives who struggle vainly to detach themselves from their signifiers and simply be. But no life in any communal construct can be revered for just being; a life can only be validated insofar as it actively conforms to the behavioral norms of that community. As long as individuals are imagined in communities, they are subject to the dictates and judgments of the overseeing institutions. Thus, the best that Jack can hope for is to imagine “a blessed acre” where “all the fog of life [is] dissolved” and he and his restored wife can be “two lovers together in a better guise” (62).

HOME AS BODY: THE FOURTH GREEN FIELD

A fourth state of home is located in the body, and Our Lady of Sligo has numerous instances where clothing and nudity open up ways in which the various characters seek protection and a sense of grounding. Indeed, Mai’s fixation on clothing and uniforms as an index of power and social mobility is indicative of her culture at large. She and her sister were famous around their hometown for the matching blue coats her mother would have them wear while shopping on Galway: “I think they thought our mother had done a great thing in producing us, not to mention knitting us out in such dapper coats” (31). Her mother is thus admired both for her ability to produce children and her skill at “fabricating” them properly for polite society. Jack notes that the real indicator of her
father's authority was not his profession but the fact that he wore silk hats (5), Dada himself calling era a time "when top hats were the thing" (54).

An emphasis on clothing marks the new cosmopolitanized Ireland, the Ireland so full of promise that is eventually brought low. Mai remembers a favorite dress, one made in Dublin according to a French design that was taken from a photograph of Gary Cooper's wife. Mai calls it "a French dress by way of Paris by way of Hollywood by way of Sligo. A sort of translated dress, like an Irish song at school" (12). Couture indicates Ireland's stepping into the wider world of interconnectivity without the Continent and the United States, and Mai's dress represents the overlay of cultural influences flowing into Ireland through fashion magazines and film. New clothes imply new identities, new accommodations for new bodies, and Mai unabashedly embraces this reformation of subjectivity.

However, Our Lady of Sligo also demonstrates how the power and symbolism of clothing can be abused. Jack uses the authority of his merchant marine uniform to convince Mai into marrying him. Conscious of her father's objection to his desire to marry Mai, and equally aware of her fascination with dress and out appearance, on one of their first dates he casually shows her a photograph of him in his navy uniform (27). When Jack enumerates his service career in the British Merchant Navy, he carefully points out to Mai that all his actions were all done "in a British uniform" (22). Eventually, however, although it lures Mai into marriage, the uniform becomes a liability, for upon returning home to a liberated Ireland—"there I was, an Irishman in a free Ireland"—his service is
transformed into betrayal. "De Valera had decreed that an Irishman, fighting for Europe, couldn't wear his British uniform on bloody Irish soil. It was the word British that was a dirty word for de Valera" (48). Words, in this case, are made flesh through the fabric of a uniform, and Jack is therefore forced to change his uniform on the boat crossing over. By rendering Ireland's sumptuary vocabulary devoid of non-Irish influence de Valera can dictate the terms by which the Irish can define themselves, so even the terms of their own adornment are under his control. Their bodies are no longer their own, the final recourse of subjective annunciation is made mute. Eventually Mai chooses to reject the persona of his uniform: "I did not rise in the world," Jack notes, "The buttons on my major's uniform shone in the officer's mess. But she doesn't want me to rise. She won't let me take the good jobs" (57). The connotations of his service are now unacceptable to her.

The same de Valerian Ireland that refuses to acknowledge Jack's uniform also swathes itself in clothing that Mai finds unutterably dull. Whereas she once found herself clothed in the latest fashions soon discovers herself in a "new" Ireland that lacks "style." "I wanted style," Mai announces. "Where was it to be found? In clothes on appro from Dublin, in hats, in American trousers [...] I thought we'd have style once, yes, dancing style, like those Europeans in European towns, Monte Carlo, Vienna, Sligo. [...] And the death of a notion like that can kill you" (48). To embrace any progressive movement, be it epistemology, ideology, or clothing style, is to take an inexorable step forward, and in Mai's view the de Valera years halted all forward movement and retraced what small progress had been made: clothing as home is now a field mined with liability.
In contrast to the presence of clothing and uniforms is their negation, nudity. For the most part, nakedness is associated with terror and insanity, as if to reinforce the notion that clothing is the civilizing factor that brings order to social chaos. Mai describes “drinking, running into the streets naked, and whipping and cutting and slashing at Jack like there was no tomorrow” (32-33). And indeed, because of her inability to find clothing sufficient for her individuality, “there was none.” In a related instance, she characterizes her naked flights of fury out of the house thus: “I disrobed in the hallway like a butterfly tearing off its own wings” (62). Clothing endows the wearer with the power of movement, but more accurately it can be said that clothing embosses the wearer with the stamp of mobility within the social solidarity; and hence in her rage at Jack she strips herself of her prescribed cultural constraints and unleashes her rage at her husband.

Yet even the in the nakedness of the body, in the place where social inscription has the least hold, Mai sees traces of communal control. In conversation with the Sister, Mai refuses to look at her body while she is being washed. “I’ll hate what I see,” she says (28). When the Sister points out, “we’re all made in God’s image,” Mai responds, “To begin with, maybe. I doubt God would be happy with this.” She concludes, “Just when you need a decent figure to cheer yourself up, you look down and someone has attached a frightful old hag to your bones, when you weren’t minding” (29). Mai reduces the physical, non-political body to her bones, and the combination of skin and exterior signifying “old hag” has been applied by an unseen force to give her significance in her community. The pervasive hand of communal control leaves her without even the comfort of her own
nakedness to indicate to her the sphere of her own autonomy. There is nowhere left for Mai to hide, no home she can run to.

Naked in her bed, Mai as séan bhéan bocht is incapacitated and appropriated instead of mobile and inflammatory, her role as liberator stripped down to a paralyzed symbol of submissive maternity. Ironically, her vital powers have been sapped from her not by invaders from without but from conspiracy within. Hoppen notes that as its role in Irish society and the nationalist movement grew, the Catholic Church appropriated the séan bhéan bocht image to its own ends, placing itself a maternal role in the lives of the Irish and effectively tying Irish identity to its institutions (161).

THE FIFTH GREEN FIELD?

In his chapter titled “The Fifth Province: Between the Local and the Global,” Thomas Kearney suggests that “it is possible for Irish people today—indigenous or exiled—to imagine alternative models of identification” (99). For Kearney, this new identification is connected with the myth of the immaterial “Fifth Province,” a concept derived from the notion that ancient Ireland was “coiced,” or divided into five portions: four physical provinces and a fifth which somehow mystically incorporated all the others but was itself a singularity:

Although Tara was the political centre of Ireland, this fifth province acted as a second centre, which if non-political, was just as important, acting as a necessary balance. [. . . ] The obvious importance of the various political attempts to unite the four geographical provinces [would] seem to warrant another kind of solution. . . . [sic] one which would incorporate the ‘fifth’
province. This province, this place, this centre, is not a political or geographical position, it is more like a disposition. (qtd. in Kearney 100).

He further describes this province as “a network of relations extending from local communities at home to migrant communities abroad.” “We are speaking not of a power of political possession but of a power of mind,” he concludes. “The fifth province can be imagined and reimagined; but it cannot be occupied. In the fifth province, it is always a question of thinking otherwise” (100).

Kearney's description of the “fifth province” resembles in many respects the “beyond” that Bhabha attempts to articulate, the antipolitical sphere that is a function of movement, diaspora and exile in contrast to the fixity of polities and geographies. It is entirely possible that embedded within the text of *Our Lady of Sligo* are gestures towards this fifth green field, a fifth concept of home that somehow connects to but is entirely separate from the four other fields. Kearney notes that the fifth province is the non-material meeting point that defies spatial boundaries and limitations and which furthermore resists the unidirectional flow of time from past to present.

It is important to note here that the prior discussion of nakedness only described adult nudity: the disempowerment and rage that comes with drunkenness, age, and shame. However, Mai relates one instance of child nakedness that contains nothing of the horror and decay of adulthood. She recalls that her sister Cissie was notorious in the neighborhood for removing her clothes and walking in the garden in the backyard of their home: “Mam was never too exercised [sic] about Cissie’s nakedness, though she might have to dress her ten times a day. [. . .] And the garden was our paradise” (31). The parallel to
the Garden of Eden, the primeval home, is unmistakable, even a touch heavy handed here. In this instance nudity invokes images of innocence, a time less complicated when clothes, like identities, could be shed at will. This is the significant thematic river that runs through Eve and Adam’s paradisiacal null space: if the innocence of Cissie’s nakedness can be commodiously recirculated back to Mai, and by extension the fields of Ireland, then Mai can find refuge in a home that is untouched, untouchable, and revivifying.

Cissie’s garden is therefore a promising candidate for Kearney’s Fifth Province. This is a place that is constantly imagined and reimagined, but it is impossible to occupy—neither by de Valera, nor Collins, nor any other nationalist entity—and thus remains beyond the power of political discourse to infect or influence. It is a place always thought of as and in terms of “otherwise,” Cissie’s memory held in counterpoint to the anger, violence, and cruel nakedness that afflicts Mai daily and in her reminiscences. Mai zealously guards this terrain by keeping it secreted in her special box of mementos, allowing her younger sister the power to remain liberated from clothes and conventions, from history and homogenous time. In all her love of pampered blue suits, Cissie in her childlike way prefers the freedom of nakedness; and it is that freedom, and its association with a time when the constraints of community could at least be stripped off in the privacy of one’s personal garden, that Mai embodies in her sister when she mourns: “it was the closing of paradise when she died” (31). Cissie’s death was also the clothing or cloaking of paradise, rendering inaccessible Mai’s own sense of subjective ownership.
Thus, the fifth province can only be glimpsed in its unfiltered form only for an instance, which is why it must constantly be re-imagined. Mai, in remembering her sister, allows herself the cold comfort that somewhere is the home in which she can potentially seek refuge, but that refuge is repeatedly deferred away from her. Most tragic, because every iteration of home has been acculturated away from her, Mai cannot find a way to unhome herself and by doing so extricate herself from the claustrophobia of an unwelcome home. In this sense paradise is not so much lost or deferred as it is masked over. It is barely recognizable, and has been transformed into a place less freeing and more conventional. Even Mai’s concluding lines, which she utters upon being visited by the apparition of her father and a young girl (her sister, or perhaps the angel of death), she can only repeat the word “blue,” the color of the girl’s dress. Even in death, or a vision of the afterworld, her beloved sister is clothed in the outfit that her mother constructed for her. The ultimate “unhoming” of death leads only to another set of stitched conventions. The text of Our Lady of Sligo can intimate the strong possibility that a fifth green field exists, but it cannot detail precisely what it is or where it is to be found.
To date there is no extant review of the play's initial, albeit brief, run in February 1986 at the Damer Hall, nor is there yet available a text of *The Pentagonal Dream*; however, Barry has made allusions to it as a precursor to *Our Lady of Sligo*. In the author's note to the Methuen edition of *Our Lady of Sligo*, Barry writes of the play's protagonist Mai Kirwin: "If she is the darkest person I have written about, she is also the one I have thought about the longest—when I sat down to make a play in 1986, I thought it was going to be this one" (i). If Murray's description is accurate, then *The Pentagonal Dream* indeed resembles a prototype *Our Lady of Sligo*.

Dumay explicates these terms to include "past," "passed," "passage" (as in a corridor, a journey, and a fare), "passing" (in the sense of being ephemeral, being in perpetual motion, dying, and also "surpassing" or "overcoming"), and even "Passover" ("Pâques"; i.e., Easter). The other remarkable aspect of Dumay's article is that it is written in French whereas all the in-text citations are presented in English.

Anthony Roche, in *Contemporary Irish Drama* (1995), advances his theory that Beckett and Yeats were closer in theme and worldview than most would suppose. In his chapter titled "Beckett and Yeats: Among the Dreaming Shades," Roche writes that although Beckett left Ireland, Ireland never completely left Beckett. His article suggests that although Beckett may have had a greater personal affinity for Jack Yeats than for his older brother W. B. (however much affinity Beckett could muster for another living human being), and though he may have outwardly ridiculed W. B. for his mythologizing of Ireland, in fact Beckett was deeply influenced by Yeats' poetry and Noh plays. Roche painstakingly compares Yeats' *Purgatory* with *Waiting for Godot*, and notes that Beckett's tramps come from a time-honored line of stage tramps that populated Irish drama before him (e.g., *The Pot of Broth*). Of their curious interrelationship, Roche writes: "Yeats was one of the singing-masters of Beckett's soul" (35).

In the article "Travels in Hyperreality" Eco notes that Americans yearn for authentic history and culture, but either because they instinctively recognize that the signifiers of refinement and culture are located elsewhere (i.e., in Europe or in Asia), or perhaps because they secretly envy the art and culture of Europe, they create for themselves a "hyperreal world" of wax museums, dioramas, and replicas: "The [hyperreal] philosophy is not, 'We are giving you the reproductions so that you will no longer want the original,' but rather, 'We are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer feel any need for the original'" (19). In fact, the doubling and replacement of originals is designed to be even better than the original, "more real" (18). He adds, "the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, [the imagination] must fabricate the absolute fake; where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred, the art museum is contaminated by
the freak show, the falsehood is enjoyed in situations of 'fullness,' of *horror vacui*" (8). Granted, Eco's commentary on American culture may just be an overgenerous way of gloating that Europe has all the cultural goods that Americans, poor rubes, crave. Nevertheless, his description accurately describes the American preoccupation with cinema, which can be read as an extension of the desire for hyperreality, for a reality that is better lit, better costumed, more wittily scripted, and ends more happily than real life. Moreover, like the cinema the theatre is not just the double of life or vice versa, it is instead the metaphor for life iterated several times over.

5 In a 1998 interview Barry noted, "A game is played with our history and our society of cops and robbers, goodies and baddies. But there is no such thing. There is no one you could fight in this country who could not be yourself, a friend, or a brother" (Meany 16).

6 Barry complicates the word "fix," using it alternately to imply mobility and stasis, progress and paralysis, and also sterility. "I seem fixed like a nail to Sligo," Mai complains (49), and her friend Maria observes that her grandfather was "fairly well fixed," meaning well off economically. In encouraging Mai to leave Jack, Maria invokes another form of "fix," as in to prepare for departure: "So fix your boat, Mai, and think of your father that you loved so well" (50).

7 Greenfeld credits her definition of "ressentiment" to Nietzsche and Max Scheler.

8 Unlike Mai, Thomas Dunne in *The Steward of Christendom* is unaware of the influence of motion pictures. When Smith, his minder, appears dressed as Gary Cooper, Thomas displays his media illiteracy by asking, "Is that the Coopers of Rathdangan?" (291)

9 Murray also points out that since Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert* (1983) "Irish drama has pointedly set the action away from the traditional home" ("The State" 16).
CHAPTER 5

PRAYERS OF SHERKIN AND THE STEWARD OF CHRISTENDOM: RE-IMAGINING IRELAND

We are very much equal under the clothes that history lends us.

Sebastian Barry,
The Only True History of Lizzie Finn

PRAYERS OF SHERKIN: TEXT AND THE SINGLE GIRL

Sherkin is a sliver of island three miles long and a half-mile wide situated in Roaring Water Bay off Ireland’s southern coast. One mile oversea from Baltimore, Ireland, Sherkin and its island neighbors Bere, Cape Clear, Dursey, Garinish, Heir, and Whiddy form the southern fringe of Ireland, territory traditionally noted as the last strip of Europe that westbound sailors and emigrants would see before heading into the unforgiving North Atlantic Ocean. For centuries before the European conquest of the New World, Ireland was considered the edge of the earth, the leftmost border of the open book of the world. It was not so much an interstitial margin between columns of text (i.e., the gutter) as it was the geographical equivalent of the space between place and no-place (topos and utopia), between the anchor of Europe and the monstered periphery of the unknown. Unlike the Aran Islands, in which the Irish invest the spiritual heart of their
culture, the southern islands are associated with practical matters of provision, transportation, mercantilism, and prayers for safe return. Commensurate with commerce at the border between old and new worlds, Cape Clear and nearby Sherkin Island evolved into a beyond space in which unconventional communities cobbled together from a pastiche of nationalities, religious allegiances, and economic classes settled. "This is the strange marge of everything here," Fanny Hawke observes of her adopted home (104).

To this marginal island cluster Sebastian Barry's ancestor Matthew Purdy brought three families from Manchester, founded an ascetic Protestant sect, and patiently awaited the second coming of Christ; and here Barry's Prayers of Sherkin plays out a political allegory of Ireland through the story of an island community faced with redefining itself in order to meet the social and political demands of a new century: "the uniformity of island life [in Prayers of Sherkin] stands as a microcosm of the life of the [Irish] nation" (O'Toole, "Irish Theatre" 72). The play is preoccupied with the forms of community construction, and within its structure is found the basic tenets of how communities are formed and fall apart. However, in contrast to Boss Grady's Boys and Our Lady of Sligo, Prayers of Sherkin offers the possibility that the constraints of debilitating community can be transcended insofar as new social formations can be "re-imagined," which according to Benedict Anderson means roughly "to be agreed upon" or "to be renegotiated." Greenfeld goes further, suggesting that communities and nations are brought together, imagined and re-imagined, through "a certain organizing principle" whose trace can be found in "text" arising in key moments of historical transition (494). Although such an observation may not seem especially ingenuous to members of the literacy criticism community, particularly the New Historicist
tribe, Prayers of Sherkin plays with the notion of relevant "text," inviting a freer form of analysis. In this play two texts predominate: a traditional book, Revelation from the New Testament, and the textiles of Pearse's General Store in Baltimore, geographically and metaphorically across the bay from Sherkin Island. The former is an interior, spiritual, and archaic document filled with visions of the future, the latter is exterior and "material," and present with links to a cultural past.

To uncover the postnationalist ideas in Prayers of Sherkin is it necessary to examine the functionality of both these texts as they govern the terms by which the Sherkin community defines itself. Text and textile interact on multiple semiotic levels, and in their interrelation is woven the tenuous strands of community that bind the family to each other and to the island they live on. In addition, an understanding of these texts illuminates precisely the ramifications of the crisis facing the community, which is the immanent departure of Fanny Hawke forever to the mainland, and the relative stoicism with which the Sherkinites accept the dissolution of their communal structure and, consequently, their own identity.

Revelation: Light and Stasis of New Jerusalem

The Sherkin community of the play is the remnant of an exodus of three families from Manchester in the 1790s, the Hawkes, the Smiths, and the Purdys, led by their founder and forefather Matthew Purdy. Every night after dinner the family, led by John Hawke, the nominal patriarch of the (numerically significant) seven remaining family members, reads from Revelation, particularly the passages referring to the Millennium and
the Second Coming of Christ. The Book of Revelation and the descriptions of New Jerusalem provide the Sherkin community with a template to govern their communal construction and interpersonal relations within and without the community. As members of a dwindling apocalyptic congregation, they eschew frivolous entertainment, preferring the austerity of Bible reading and likening the world of patriarchs and prophets to their own times and conditions. The Sherkin community and the description of New Jerusalem interface at six crucial points: physical location, concept of time, the function of light, the construction of social gate-keeping mechanisms, the preferability of stasis, and the persistence of absence, each point highlighting how scriptural and physical text provide a comforting, albeit manufactured, sense of subjective security.

Physicality and Geography

Although much of the imagery in Revelation is considered by most Christian denominations to be at least metaphorical, New Jerusalem is not. It is a physical city descending readymade from heaven after the final, cleansing destructions of Armageddon. However, amid Revelation's resplendent cataloguing of New Jerusalem's fineries, St. John neglected to mention the precise location of its terrestrial touchdown, and Protestant denominations have been free to situate it wherever they wished, terrestrially or celestially. Depending on the predilections of the sect in question, New Jerusalem was expected to appear in such diverse places as Rome, the New World, Jackson County, Missouri; or, as famously postulated by William Blake, England. Despite the differences in geography, what mattered most is that New Jerusalem does not have to be built by or fought for by true believers—it appears on its own volition and timing. Therefore, although the righteous
must endure hardships, their primary duty is to wait and, it seems, keep reproducing so that there will be faithful left on Earth to welcome the arrival of the Holy City. New Jerusalem therefore contains a hint of passivity and inevitability, traits that the Sherkin community embraces in their daily routines.

Sherkin itself is a liminal island in many respects. “You can walk around this island in a fifth of a day,” comments John. “You may see the part ruined by the great force of the Atlantic, and by the channel sheltered you may see the hopeful farms. The strand is peaceful this evening, but the Atlantic is broiling far out. Nothing breaks the wild surface of the storm there but dolphins and angels” (115). A thin strip of land, Sherkin is neatly divided into two strips of landscape, the ravaged windward side and the more agreeable lee side, with the ruins of a fifteenth century friary standing in between. It is an elegant metaphor of the old social stability maintained by the Church balancing the fears of the tenant farmers against the uncertainty of nature. Sitting as it does on the edge of Ireland and Europe, the island is obscure enough that even today fewer than a hundred people live there fulltime.

Eoghan, a fisherman from Cape Clear and a self-styled “foreigner” to Sherkin, catalogs Sherkin thus:

A land with a little hotel. There is no high path to the farms, no green road to the middle farms, no metalled road to the school. There is no beach of large round stones with ragged children. There is no brace of soldiers walking redly. There is no kirk. [ . . . ] But it’s a simple yellow land with some peace attached to it. (92)

Eoghan describes Sherkin primarily by what it is not, a study in contrast to the mainland that, presumably, is laced with roads, soldiers, and the prominent display of ecclesiastical
power. Jesse, however, is less optimistic; or perhaps simply more practical. As the “clipped” visionary, Jesse describes Sherkin also by what it is not: it “is not a holidaying island. [. . .] I suppose we put a bend in most things” (96). Fanny, however, chooses to see Sherkin as a nexus where worlds overlap:

Sherkin my home is near, where the pollen flits, where each plant talks to the next with pollen, and the webs and the messages of lives run over the night lanes, and across fields under curious clouds. We are people for this place now right enough, we are caught in its purpose, a small manufactory that makes and unmakes, a bare stone cautiously marked with green life that is our blood and our dream. (104)

A field of meaning clinging for life on a barren rock, Sherkin easily stands for Ireland itself, where the people are not indigenous but rather simply “people for this place right now enough.” Fanny’s description of Sherkin-ness as a temporary claim reveals the slim fissure between a nationalist identity and the terrain that it claims connection to.

The Sherkinites put themselves in the curious bind by attempting to align themselves with purist (as opposed to Puritan) Christianity, which they associate the image of “nature,” even as they try to maintain a studied distance from the worldwide community of Christians. Set in opposition to nature is the evils of urban life, the archetypal evil “city.” Matt Purdy, in his vision form, relates that the reason for leaving Manchester was because of its industrialism and crime—its “chimneys and black moon,” “rainy roofs,” “tumultuous graveyards,” the factories, child labor, and policemen (54), images not unlike Blake’s vision of the “dark Satanic mills” polluting England’s green and pleasant land. Sherkin Island was the remotest corner of the then British Isles where Purdy and the families who followed him could wait, ironically, for the “city of light” that would usher in Christian millennial peace. One hundred years later John Hawke expands Purdy’s
definition to mean all cities, including even their beloved Baltimore ("all present cities and
towns are dark things, which light cannot alter" [83]).

The Purdy-led community, though physically in Ireland, choose to cut themselves
off from extraneous contact. Jesse is unable to pronounce the names of local towns (74);
nor is he familiar with simple household items such as vinegar (79). Fanny demonstrates
her inability to speak or understand Gaelic (93). "[Gaelic] is just an old tongue," Eoghan
tells Fanny, "It isn't so great in the world as your own babble [i.e., English]. It's a creaking
tongue, spoken by a rusty people" (102). It is "a language of voyages, and of fighting,"
Fanny concurs. For generations, their isolation from the outside world is a badge of pride
for the Sherkinites. Stephen, making conversation with John, mentions perhaps the
biggest news event of the 1890s, the "South African War" as he calls it ("a very strange
affair now, in Mafeking, out beyond there, in Africa"), but John gives him a blank look
(102). The Boers, Africa, Valparaiso, even Manchester, are all signs lacking a signified.
"We never see newspapers," Jesse tells Patrick proudly. Fanny, seeking to mollify Jesse's
brusqueness, adds, "We never have news." "There's no good use to them," Patrick offers
(77). This is the attempt by the Sherkin community to maintain a sense of simultaneous
time and avoid the epistemological wrenching attending a cognitive shift to homogenous,
empty time—to keep themselves beyond the reach of newspapers, news, and the
"foreigners" around them. Thus, Patrick the lithographer symbolizes by his very profession
the leap into the causal daisy chain of time that print-capitalism represents.

And yet for all the uncertainty and contingency of their island life, the Sherkin
Quakers are convinced that they are at "home." Although it is tempting to see in the
Sherkinites an allegory to the Irish Protestant Ascendancy, they, like Patrick, stand in for the patchwork of identities that constitute Irishness. By even the most liberal standards the Sherkinites should be considered Irish, although they are still branded outsiders by the inhabitants of Baltimore. Having resided on Sherkin for over a hundred years as English Protestants, the community has a right to claim a certain level of Irish nationality. Fanny tells Jesse, "we are not from here and I have such a sense of home [ . . . ] it is the site of our New Jerusalem" (61). That she should doubt the right to claim Sherkin as home indicates how insecure she feels about the validity of her own declaration of a national identity. The Sherkinites might assert the right to have no nation, but that assertion does not necessarily relieve the anxiety of those who feel the need for cultural/national ties to supplement their understanding of themselves, if for no other reason than to help the individual decide who is a member of the home and who is a foreigner.

Fanny's exchange with Eoghan complicates the foreigner/home resident dichotomy in a scene infused with a postnationalist undertone. Eoghan, the kindly fisherman from Cape Clear who often stops at the Sherkin pier to clean his nets, claim to be a foreigner on Sherkin territory:

FANNY

You are not a foreigner.

EOGHAN

I am a foreigner on Sherkin. That's why I like it.

FANNY

And myself?
You are a foreign woman at home. (94)

The southern Irish islands, it seems, is the geographical equivalent of the contiguous islands that the Grady boys imagine mainland Ireland to be. Apparently one only feels at home, or at one with self, when one is a foreigner, or more precisely when one acknowledges the simultaneity of home-ness and foreignness; for when one is in the context of being “away” from home, “home” of necessity must be far away for it to have meaning. Ironically, home is therefore the place where one is unheimlich or “un-homed”; stability is only maintained in the presence of motion, and ironically it is in stasis that one is alienated. The question becomes not how to avoid foreignness but rather how to maintain foreignness in the face of home.

New Jerusalem represents the home that the righteous have never been to, a place both familiar because of its prominence in apocalyptic literature and foreign because it exists exterior to any but the chosen few who have seen it in vision. The same can be said of Sherkin and indeed of Ireland, or more precisely “Sherkin” and “Ireland.” Greenfeld says, “If a particular identity does not mean anything to the population in question, this population does not have this particular identity” (13). Hence the notion of “Sherkin,” as opposed to the actual physical locality, is home insofar as the Sherkinites can superimpose their notion of New Jerusalem on it; it is foreign inasmuch they bind themselves only to the New Jerusalem paradigm and not to the locality, to Sherkin—hence Eoghan’s appropriate description of Fanny as a “foreign woman at home.” The same holds true for “Ireland” and Ireland: for the Sherkin Quakers Ireland is merely a geographical place and
“Ireland” a concept they cannot relate to within their New Jerusalem scope, hence it cannot operate for them as a component of their identity.

Concepts of Time

John Hawke calls St. John, author of the Apocalypse, “the blessed islander” who “has shown that for us surely the New Jerusalem is by” (55). That St. John was an “islander” allows the Sherkinites to more easily identify themselves with the prophecies they study nightly, as the Revelator’s marginal status of island prisoner reflects their own isolated state. Furthermore, his phantasmagoric description of the end of time speaks from an era when nation-states were overwhelmingly agrarian and time reckoned loosely in simultaneity. That the Sherkinites prefer Revelation to other texts indicates that they strive to maintain a “pre-print-capitalism” condition of simultaneous time, removing themselves from the tumults of the exterior, political world.

As is characteristic of pre-industrial time, notions of past, present and future are fused into a cyclical present tense. The book of Revelation is inconsistent about keeping time and narrative linear, its prophesies frequently doubling back on themselves, time expanding and contracting, a thousand years passing away in a single verse (e.g., “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” [Rev. 4:8]). The Sherkin community draws its expectations of time and progress from Revelation even though they are increasingly beset on all sides by the impinging of progressive, political, homogenous time. The nuns in Baltimore, although inimical to the Sherkin creed, represent the ideal form of static time for John Hawke, since their community “is
something from a medieval world," John notes approvingly. "Among nuns you may be in
the twelfth century still. [ . . . ] They are opposite of women of fashion. And yet they are
highly fashionable among the scattered people" (82). The nuns keep what is called
"chronometric time"; that is, they measure time according to their own reckoning and to
the exclusion of all other systems.

Thus, when the past encroaches on the present, as happens frequently when Matt
Purdy interacts with his descendants, the islanders have little trouble folding the experience
into the overall framework of their worldview. However, individual time frames never
overlap; instead, they are juxtaposed in brief moments of "vision" where communicants
can see into the time-field of the other. Thus, time is a quantity that can and cannot be
transgressed: "He stepped in his own time, and was not for you, it seems," says John to
Fanny (83). Such an understanding is agreeable to the temporal schematic of Revelation,
wherein St. John is allowed to view past and present and communicate with the time-
traversing messengers without disrupting the fabric of the vision's continuity.

In his poem "Fanny Hawke Goes to the Mainland Forever," the source text for
Prayers of Sherkin, Barry illustrates in fuller detail the schematic of Sherkin's fused time and
the perpetual present that the vision of Matt Purdy denotes. The unnamed speaker
addresses Fanny Hawke at the moment of her debarkation from the Sherkin pier:

Look at your elegant son, an improved Catholic,
squaring up landscapes in his future
to paint them as they are like a Quaker.
There is your other son, a scholarship painter,
a captain in a war, asthmatic, dying young,
all happening even as you set out. (Fanny Hawke 55)
That is, her setting out immediately and presently enables a future that is present to her, and for that instance she can “see” the scholarship painter and the improved Catholic son (the latter makes a cameo appearance in The Steward of Christendom). Ironically, this vision occurs at the moment she abandons fused time for homogenous time, so therefore even this view of the future is tainted with loss of the past.

John Hawke himself is a relic of past, present, and future. When Stephen Pearse refers to him as “a bear” (“in compliment only,” he clarifies), he invokes an image that is subtly referred to in other contexts throughout the play. On the surface, the bear denotes strength and surliness (Stephen duly cautions Patrick to beware John’s grumpy nature when the latter considers asking to marry Fanny). However, earlier Stephen mentions the discovery of “the bones of an old animal, maybe there [a] million years, and they are the poor withershins of an old bear” (74). As steeped as he is in the past, John Hawke is a pragmatist, producing the candles the light the better part of Baltimore; as the member of an apocalyptic religion, his every action is conducted with the threat of the end of the world approaching ever nearer. Like the nuns in Baltimore and the fossilized bear under the sod, John Hawke is a xenolith of fused time lodged in a field of homogenous time.  

Relativity of Light

A related instance of bears appears in the after-dinner stargazing of Fanny and Jesse. Pointing out Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, the siblings discuss the nature of stars and their relation to the terrestrial world. In a bid to impress his sister, Jesse says, “The stars are as flowers to us [because] of their great distance from our concerns [ . . . ] this is science [ . . . ]
to see their relative positions” (62). Fanny, unimpressed, creates her own constellation out of the lights of the Cape Clear lighthouse, the Hawke household, and “your own evening star.” Constellations, like the starlight that composes them, is entirely dependent on the proclivities of the observer, making what appears to be an absolute simply another factor in the relativity of the phenomenological world.

Light plays a major thematic and theological role for the Sherkinites and the book of Revelation. New Jerusalem is an archetype for the Christian utopia, the crowning achievement of God’s victory over darkness and Satan, quondam Lucifer, “light-bearer.” Traditionally New Jerusalem is envisioned as the ideal city: bathed in celestial glory, numerically perfect (twelve of everything abounds), and populated by shining, happy people. The only thing surpassing the magnificence of its bejeweled city gates and gold-paved streets is the ubiquitous light: “And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (21:23). Divine presence, coupled with the abundance of righteous souls and precious metals, provides an eternity of light, happiness, and warmth as a reward for lifetimes spend in an Ireland of darkness, misery, and cold. In anticipation of this luminous city, the Sherkin community enacts their ritualized simulacrum of New Jerusalem by manufacturing candles and selling them to the harbor city of Baltimore. John Hawke: “It is often with an uneasy hand that I mete out my candles to Baltimore. Am I not bringing little bundles of light to a place that light cannot feed? But contrariwise, the town needs light, and my poor trickle of it” (83).
Furthermore, “light” is equated in the play with offspring: “a child is light” (83). Candles represent the individual families members, presumably those citizens of the “city on a hill” that occasionally light a world of darkness. John’s suppertime prayers are full of supplications for children as light to oppose the darkness of the outside world: “Send us increase. May you not leave one of us alone here since all around are the darkness of the Catholics and the strangenesses of the higher Protestants” (55). In their cosmology, the Sherkinites situate themselves in a Christianity border-world, wedged between dueling orthodoxies; and yet by the terms of their own construction they are the originators of light, symbolized by their providing Baltimore with Hawke’s Ideal Candles (88). “Of course we light the town,” John tells Sarah, “It is very good to stand on the pier and look over at Baltimore in the night and see the lights” (59). Sarah agrees, “It is a great thing to light a town.” The victory of light over darkness can only be viewed from a distance, in the same way that Fanny and Jesse admire the stars from afar. Yet John recognizes that darkness needs light, or rather light needs darkness in which to shine: “As long as there is dark there must be candles” (65).

In a different context, Mr. Moore, seeing the northern lights, calls “that wonderful sheeting of light” “veins” (69). Light therefore acquires the added meaning of “life,” continuance, and security. In his chandler’s shop, as he forms each candle, John “coats” them for each family member in the sense of providing them warmth. When he runs out of family members for candles, they stand for unborn progeny: “Who these others are I do not know. I do not suppose you know yourselves! I will give you coats anyhow. For it is such weather” (66).
Unavoidably, light and candles symbolize equally loss, distance, void, emptiness, and the lack of children. The vigils the nuns keep with the gold- and lapis lazuli-laced Easter candle is as much a celebration as it is a confession of emptiness, John’s meticulous naming and clothing of candles is conducted in an atmosphere of barrenness, and Jesse’s astronomical observations simply marks time that irreparably slips away without the promise of amelioration. Like starlight, the light of Sherkin is at once bright but cold and distant, reaching across the length of years and imparting a sense of stability and direction even as they rotate obliviously above. Similarly, New Jerusalem is tantalizingly close but unnervingly indifferent to the patience of those waiting for its arrival.

Communal Boundaries

Perhaps most reassuring to embattled Protestant sects like the Sherkin community is the enticing undefinedness of New Jerusalem. Aside from certain vague statements in the New Testament about how sheep would be divide from goats, wheat from tares, and how only the “righteous” would enter the New Jerusalem, the canonical text is mute on the exact criteria for inclusion and exclusion. All vagueness aside, it is abundantly clear that the selection criteria is strict, the Old and New Testaments being replete with images of burning sulfur and endless torment for those not qualified to enter New Jerusalem. However, the scriptures, especially the New Testament, are equally full of parables and teachings emphasizing that many who believe they belong to the saved group are actually in the fold slated for burning. For Calvinists and Puritans the doctrine of election sidestepped this thorny issue by having God pre-select the good from bad anterior to moral
existence, but other Protestant denominations, lacking the guidance of a centralized 
exegetical apparatus, were able to construct the communal boundaries of New Jerusalem as 
befitted their worldview.

Similarly, the Sherkinites characterize New Jerusalem, and by extension their own 
community, as all-inclusive and yet also tenaciously exclusive; evangelist but not 
evangelical, they are enunciatory but not proselytizing. True to their Calvinistic roots, they 
hold to the doctrine of election, thereby placing communal inclusion and exclusion in the 
hands of the divine, the gatekeeping maintained by the obscurity of their location and 
narrowness of their entry criteria (all new members must come from Manchester), which 
leads people on either side of the strait to refer to the Sherkinites as a “tribe.” John prays, 
“Keep us ready for to be the tribe you mention, and let there be others still in Manchester 
though we have heard nothing of them for many a year” (55). Meg agrees with John’s 
description of the Sherkin community as a tribe. “They are tribalists,” she tells Patrick, 
“they keep all as it was before cities and such [. . .] it’s a dark and difficult faith they have, 
and there’s no real amplitude in it. The tribes of Israel were never so odd” (88). Once 
again, Barry assigns Meg the awkward terminology, in this case “tribalist.” Later, she asks 
Patrick, “Aren’t you a type of tribalist yourself, Mr. Kirwin?” “Aye, aye, so I suppose. If I 
let myself,” he replies (89). And yet Meg is willing to consider even herself and her cultural 
norms as similarly tribalist. When her husband Stephen notes, “There’s no marrying 
outside for them, is there Meg,” she notes, “No more than ourselves” (90). “Tribalist,” at 
least in the way she sees it, cannot be negative, although it appears to be. Nor does she use 
the more regional term “clannish” to describe the exclusionary practices of the island.
All tribalism aside, however, the rigidity of the gate of Sherkin/New Jerusalem fluctuates. On one hand, John Hawke seems to allow that the Baltimore nuns will stroll the boulevards of New Jerusalem: “It might be that we would meet them in any New Jerusalem, since they are happy nuns.” Fanny observes, “They will look strange in the bright new streets.” To which John replies: “Strange women enough, but an adornment” (82). Sarah and Hannah even theorize that their chickens will probably be welcomed there as well “because they get in everywhere else” (109). Hannah further complicates notions of community by referring to the dead as “the people”: “I do not like to leave the people long without flowers” (68). Her terminology suggests that the dead still belong to the living community; they are “the people” in the sense that a nation is a people, an aggregate of humans that collectively draw up the boundary lines differentiating the central community from others. On the other hand, when dealing with the Catholics on the island and the mainland, John Hawke in particular seems more rigid. Faced with the prospect of his daughter leaving Sherkin, John becomes even more intractable about the rules of communal inclusion and exclusion.

Regarding Fanny’s wish to leave, John notes, “I have no permission to give. [. . . ] ‘He that leaves the families must be outcast and outlaw, and shunned of the tribe’” (103). It is as if he is citing scripture, although he is only citing a dictum from Matt Purdy, the implication being that he is quoting from a closed text. Here John vaguely gestures to his own ability to renegotiate the terms of communal inclusion even as he is aware that the community itself came together based on consent and not executive fiat. The rigidity of the community is attributed to Matt Purdy who, although a “soft man enough,”
nevertheless is consumed by the insistence of his “pre-Satanic vision,” as John calls the motivation behind the century-long vigil on Sherkin (103). He adds, “We are not imprisoned, why that would be the opposite of what Matt Purdy wished,” yet though there are no walls or bars around Sherkin, John later characterizes the island as having doors that, although open, still connote a sense that barriers have been built around the community despite John’s protestations to the contrary.

Nevertheless, at a key moment John does apparently create an extra-canonical doctrine when he promises his family: “if it is unto the fourth generation that we are to abide here for the city of light, then he will come surely” (85). The “he” is the mysterious brother from Manchester who they are waiting to arrive to marry Fanny and continue the family line. Should Fanny have offspring, they would be the fourth generation from Matthew Purdy and thus inaugurate the final generation before the coming of New Jerusalem. However, at no point in the scenes where Matt Purdy appears does he indicate to the audience or Fanny that her children would usher in the arrival of New Jerusalem. In fact, Purdy’s one dramatized conversation with Fanny explicitly permits her to leave the community and found her family outside the confines of Sherkin. In other words, John Hawke has created his own doctrine, which ironically is perfectly consistent with the founding principles of his community. Equally ironic is that Fanny’s vision is also valid under the principles of the community, and John Hawke is prescient enough later on to admit to the predominance of her revelation over his.

Still, the apparatus of community is not so easily dismantled, even when there are mechanisms within that community that allow for its dissolution. When John tells Fanny,
"There is nothing to keep you with us," he is only partially correct (85). The force of kin as community is so ingrained in Fanny that until the visit from Matt Purdy she cannot contemplate departure: "I am not a woman to go. We are very established religious people here. You cannot imagine what holds me here. It is my life but also other lives. I am bound to this place by family willingly" (99). The imagined community, it appears, cannot be imagined out of unless the founding imaginative moment is revived—in Fanny's case, direct instruction from the non-corporeal world. In the absence of such intervention, the Purdy community can bind its members not by chains and shackles but by creating a situation where desire is so regulated that the individuals cannot or will not leave, if for no other reason than that the person's departure somehow irreparably injures family members. "You are speaking to a woman quite given over to this other existence," she tells an importunate Patrick, "It is not a life as you follow it" (100). Patrick, as a comparatively free agent, can little appreciate the demands of a community that regulates to the minutest detail the lives and desires of its members.

Meg outlines the outsider's view of the Sherkin community. "They are not of your allegiance?" Patrick asks her. She replies: "They are some of those people that in English cities concocted new religions. I suppose they were types of the times. Previous times, since the heart is gone out of their movement. I have heard them described variously. Prelapsarians, Millenarians" (88). Her choice of words are revealing here. It is uncertain exactly what Patrick means by asking Meg to differentiate her "allegiance" from those of the Hawkes, except on broad religious difference. Yet the concept of New Jerusalem is not unique to evangelicals or Catholics; indeed it is a doctrine shared by most Christian
denominations. Nor can there be any question as to an allegiance to the central symbols of Christianity: Christ, the Bible, or prayer. Patrick's question is necessarily one of government: to which canonical authority does Meg pay homage in contrast to the Sherkinites. From this vantage point the fulcrum of Patrick's question gains leverage. The concocting of religions, to borrow Meg's wording, in the English cities was in a sense in the tradition of the earlier Anglican secession, which is to say that it decentralizes ecclesiastical authority. Meg, a Catholic, gives her allegiance to priest and pope; the Sherkin Quakers, however, localize their allegiance to the figure of Matt Purdy.

Liah Greenfeld would see nothing unusual in the drive to decentralize and secede from larger communal systems, particularly as this drive is found in the Sherkin community. In fact, what would surprise Greenfeld is why it takes so long for Fanny to decide to leave, because ironically if she were true to the Purdy imperative she would have left much sooner and with less trepidation before the visitation from Matthew. Greenfeld locates a secessionist drive "inherent" in English nationalism; so in her terms, Matthew Purdy was simply enacting his nationalist coding by leaving Manchester and, in a way, colonizing Ireland. Moreover, the problematic blending of the Sherkin colony into the Irish social fabric, troublesome as that process is, is a type of the overall problem of the English presence in Ireland. Irish historians such as Foster and Hoppen painfully point out that although the drive for Irish independence was a victory for Irish nationalistic ideas, the primary motivators for secession were Ascendancy Protestants with close cultural ties to England. In other words, they were enacting their own English nationalistic tendencies through the Irish cultural framework. The Sherkin Quakers are therefore a
fragmentary emergence of this same tendency that eventually stalled as the generations passed on the island.

Furthermore, Meg's characterization of the Sherkinites as "Prelapsarians" and/or "Millenarians" even more demonstrates the perilous balancing act of a religious community stitching together a past and a future in an attempt to secure a present. "Prelapsarians" are those preoccupied with invoking a world similar to the paradise before the fall; "Millenarians," on the other hand, prepare themselves for the second coming of Christ when the world will be made paradisiacal again. Meg's conflation of the two ideas, both of which are present in the Sherkin community, allow for the possibility that prelapsarianism and millennialism are essentially indistinguishable. Prelapsarianism is Millenarianism when time is considered simultaneous and not homogenous.

"Ours is a bitter creed," John admits, "And yet it is based on kindness, on family and hope" (104). Patrick, who in Fanny's words "likes to play [ . . . ] in words" (84), concurs with John's definition, noting that the etymology of "kindness" is rooted in "kin": "kindness means in the original use, matters of family" (86). Thus, when Jesse or anyone else announces, "She is not your kind," he is differentiating her from Patrick in terms of temperament (kindness) and family (kin-ness) (97). Matt Purdy recognizes the sinister side of a creed so dependent on "kin-ness": "Our friend was the full of time, our foe the slight nature of our numbers," Purdy narrates. "What was to be if ever there were none to marry? That was the dark figure in my dream. [ . . . ] Ye little islands, lend us the future of children" (67). The unfortunate upshot of kin-centric policy is that to seek matrimony within kin is to threaten extinction, either as the Sherkin community observes with the
dwindling of numbers or the darker path of in-breeding. "Kin" and "kindness," therefore, take on ambiguous meanings, neither convincingly asserting the virtues of family bonds or moral and ethical treatment. As Hamlet is quick to point out, matters of "kin" do not always correspond with being "kind."

Fanny is both the "kind" and the "kin" link between the community and New Jerusalem. The two aged aunts are beyond child-bearing years, Jesse, for all his youth and vigor, will not likely marry because the community waits for a man, not a woman, for "brothers," not sisters, to come from Manchester and revive the community's gene pool. Her departure signifies the end of their community; ironically, her staying also signals the end because, as it becomes increasingly apparent, no one is coming from England to Sherkin. The community depends on prophesy, and it is certain that, because they do not correspond with the outside world, any believers coming to Sherkin from Manchester would have to have the exact same vision as Matthew Purdy did and the same fortitude to carry out the journey. A community determined to maintain stasis must rely on the willingness of others to resist their own stasis to come to Sherkin and re-inscribe the stasis of home. The Manchester doctrine is unwavering on this point. "There will be no city for us without it," John says (84).

Thus, as a template for assisting the Sherkinites to decide who belongs to them and who stands outside, the image of New Jerusalem presents a definitive but ultimately unsatisfying, unquantifiable property. The more John attempts to conform to what he perceives are the dictates of its entrance requirements, the less able he is to define precisely what those qualifications are. Conversely, the more Fanny aligns herself with the founding
principles of her community, that of a social solidarity being a constantly re-imagined quantity, the closer she comes to recognizing that the logical next step is to leave. Far from being a symbol of relativity, New Jerusalem instead comes to stand for the ongoing evolution of the epistemological function of text not to dictate social formations but rather to facilitate its perpetual re-imagination.

Stasis and Transgression

Another relevant feature of New Jerusalem is the stasis of its future inhabitants:

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God" (Rev. 3:12, emphasis added). Because New Jerusalem arrives after the destruction of the world, it is the only standing city for refuge and community. Consequently, all journeys, all progress, all drives to improve achieve apotheosis in the arrival of this most perfect and beautiful of all cities. Hence, because of its magnificence and proximity to God, its inhabitants have no need to leave the confines of its lavish walls encrusted with multitudinous semi-precious stones. Thus New Jerusalem embodies the fullness of progress, a cessation of movement; it is the teleology of migration.

The uneasy tension between stasis and movement is summed up in Sarah and Hannah's description of the yew trees spread across the family cemetery in Baltimore, their roots crawling across the gravesites:
SARAH

A yew will walk yards from its place.

HANNAH

I must pull [the offending root] out.

SARAH

You will not pull that root out.

HANNAH

How hard they hold.

The trees embody paralysis—they do not move—and progress—the roots reach out and consume the graves. Movement and stasis also come together in Patrick’s lithography stone, quarried from German limestone: “these are little creatures held forever in this stone. Sea creatures the size of your nails, little fishes. In the quarry, on the big stones, they sometimes find an old dogfish!” (77) Patrick can even spot the fossils in the walls of his hotel room on Sherkin Island: “There are fish in the mortar of this wall and they are not fossils. It is that damp, they’re swimming around in it” (97).

These are not the only instances in which movement is closely associated with death. “The Atlantic here is a huge muscle, a huge bearer,” Fanny Hawke observes of her surroundings, “it could easily carry a person to America with ease, but not living” (104). Here Fanny articulates the tacit fear that movement is equivalent to death, while stasis equates life, or at least safety. Fanny enacts the dangers of progress when in the lithograph shop a bee flies in and menaces her, Jesse, and Patrick. Jesse counsels stasis, “If you stand
perfectly still you are safe" (78). Fanny tries to do just that, but is startled enough that she brushes the bee away and it stings her. "It will die now," she mourns, "It was my doing." Movement results in death, in this case the death of others.

And yet there is a queer romance about the act of transition: "Do you not feel that this island is moored only lightly to the sea-bed, and might be off for the Americas at any moment?" (61) The possibility of movement seems oddly exhilarating for one dedicated to a life of stasis, but Fanny's conflictedness is typical of the Sherkin community overall. Even John Hawke, in an unguarded moment, expresses envy at the possibility that his daughter might leave Sherkin for good: "Walk away out if you wish or must. Ah, you could not return from such a voyage, but it would be a true voyage and your own" (85).

Mr. Moore, the ferryman who Charon-like transports goods and people between Sherkin and Baltimore, is also admired for his travels. According to John, Moore is "the paradigm" because he is "a man that can sing the song of Valparaiso and he knows he has been there. He can see the streets of Valparaiso in his old head when he signs his song. It is not just a name" (60). Valparaiso, the far-off coastal city of Chile, is synonymous with the Antipodes, a strange foreign city that for most Irish exists only within the confines of snatches of song (e.g., "Tháinig long ó Bhalapéso" ["A Ship Came from Valparaiso"] sung by Mr. Moore [81]). His travels, and the fact that he makes his living transitioning between cities, make him the source of wonder and exoticism because he can assign physicality to abstract notions of place.

The act of "crossing" between worlds is literally and figuratively transgressive. Sarah, contemplating a crossing to Baltimore, confesses, "I do not like to cross without
purpose. [. . .] The wicked thing is I love to cross. I dream of crossing. I am too attached to the town. I dream about the material in Pearse's. Wicked" (56). Mai O'Hara, contemplating suicide in Our Lady of Sligo, concurs with Sarah, "I could not cross over. It was the clear horror of death that prevented me" (63). Although the contexts between Mai and Sarah are different, the concept is the same. Sarah, locked in her "spiritualized" island, frets about passing over the channel to the "material" world; Mai's trajectory is different, from material world to otherworld. Even so, movement is once again comparable to sin and death.

To John, Fanny's potential choice to leave Sherkin represents not simply a change of geography but also a change of physicality, what he calls "condition": "She would have to suffer a change to have him. She would cross from one condition to another" (103). Meg agrees with this assessment: "Wouldn't Fanny Hawke have to make another thing of herself for [Patrick], and how would that please anyone?" (89) Meg suggests that a self-created person is anathema to all communities, not just Sherkin or Ireland. She can only be acceptable if she is made a "changeling," in Meg's word, with its attendant implications of abduction, doubling, and transformed personality. Sherkin is Eden and Patrick Kirwin is either Eve or, more likely, the serpent tempting Fanny to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Elsewhere he describes departure as a "tearing": "To marry such a foreign sort, you would need to embrace more than him, you would need to loosen us from your arms, and embrace his beliefs" (84). When Fanny eventually does imagine herself away from Sherkin, she transforms the metaphor of death into sleep; "I will go from my family like a dreamer, and wake in the new world," she informs Patrick (110).
Transition is equivalent to escape, and escape implies that one has evaded a law, thus making the escaper an outlaw, a person outside jurisdiction and of dubious allegiance. Eoghan plays with Jesse's name, comparing it to Jesse James—yet another subtle reference to the romance of the American West informing the escapism of the Irish. "Some say they're in Mexico, and some others say they're in South America," Eoghan says. "They main thing is [. . . ] they're alive. They got away" (95). Escape, movement, mutability, is life.

"Valparaiso," Mr. Moore adds. In The Only True History of Lizzie Finn Barry highlights the romance of Frank and Jesse James and the other outlaws of the American West mythos:

[Frank] robbed great gobs of gold off trains and rode hard through the days with his brother Jesse. He's a man to like. Robert, who is a scholar, says Frank James never did write any book and [his purported autobiography] only says he did to make you believe it's the plain truth. I believe Robert, and I believe the book. It's wild and exciting, with guns and good times and running from the law. (223)

Escape or outlaw ruptures the comforting fiction of the immutability of "law," whether it be natural law (which any scientist will confess are convenient conventions for the sake of communal sanity), national law, or—in the case of the Sherkinsites—God's or Matt Purdy's law. Fanny Hawke therefore takes upon herself the multifarious titles of transitioner, escapist, and outlaw, hardly the titles in harmony with the dictates of New Jerusalem citizenship. However, the text makes clear that she is synonymous with New Jerusalem, "arrayed as a bride," heading away from the community that is her home.

Prayer and Absence

Mr. Moore discourses on the nature of sailors' prayers directed to Cape Clear: "It's odd to think of all those heartfelt prayers directed there, by sailors growing lonely. And all
unknowing the people in the houses. [. . . ] Go dhugadh Dé stamina abhaile sinn [May God bring us safely home]" (80). Moore's statement highlights the ambiguity with which prayer is treated in Prayers of Sherkin, for in a certain sense prayer is the heartfelt expression of deep faith, and in another sense it is an admission of absence and powerlessness in a God-created and, it appears, God-abandoned world. Mr. Moore is pragmatic enough to recognize that the prayers addressed to Cape Clear descend on a slice of real estate that can neither hear the supplications nor effect any real change for the sailor's welfare. In other words, that which in the grand scheme of Christianity is to bring the more assuring comfort, prayer, is acknowledged to be nothing more than a rabbit's foot or a security blanket. But Mr. Moore is far from being a cynic, for as a "paradigm" Catholic he should buy into the efficacy of prayer. Moore's Catholicism is tempered by his catholicism, his worldwide-ness, and thus he is savvy enough to allow that at the edge of the Western world the force of his religious culture recedes at the margin. Mr. Moore adds, "I suppose in their time a few prayers have missed Cape Clear and washed against Sherkin. The prayers of Sherkin would be firewood of that sort" (80-81). That some of the prayers to Cape Clear wash up on Sherkin's strand suggests that prayer of all sort eventually becomes the driftwood for other believers, that in their turn the prayers of the islanders, though sincere, wash up on equally disinterested shores.

New Jerusalem embodies the deep sense of loss and promised fulfillment that the Sherkin community craves in the form of prayer. The post-apocalyptic world of Revelation is filled with praying elders, beasts, and saints (4:8-11; 5:13; 11:16-17); incense is identified as symbolic of the prayers of the faithful rising sweetly heavenward to the throne of God.
Prayer in the time when there is no time is considerably different that prayers conducted before the coming of New Jerusalem, however. In post-New Jerusalem prayer is conducted in the presence of God or the Lamb, and are thus filled with praise and acknowledgement of actualized blessings, praise, and unending declarations of "holy, holy, holy." However, one example of a pre-New Jerusalem prayer recorded in Revelation is considerably grimmer: "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge out blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (6:9-10) Here prayer takes on a plaintive quality, an acknowledgement that the social justice promised by God (in Revelation?) is still to come, and that the faithful are impatiently waiting for the realization of divine vengeance. One of the last words uttered by God in the Bible are: "Surely I come quickly," an often-repeated phrase in the Bible's final book, and promise for swift return and retribution against the oppressors of the faithful (22:20). Prayer is thus connected with waiting for the "quick" return of Christ and the appearance of his Holy City; the expected return has been prepared for and awaited by each succeeding Christian generation, like each generation of the Sherkinites, expecting the advent to be just around the corner.

Predictably, Prayers of Sherkin is filled with various forms of prayer for safety, security, and prosperity.\(^4\) The dinnertime prayer in the Hawke home consists of a recitation of the community's history ("Once there were three families, Lord"), a request for "plain" spouses for the remaining Hawke children, and a reminder that New Jerusalem ought to be fast approaching. The prayer is an articulation of stasis, the evening prayers.
being concluded not with “Amen” but “We do abide.” Fanny’s personal prayers are less
dynamic, describing rather than narrating, pleading for peace to the new and old worlds via
the “marge” of Ireland by asking for peace on the rivers Ganges, Amazon, and Shannon.
Prayer epitomizes acknowledged loss and absence because its imperative words are directed
at an unseen presence. Further, it is a reinforcement of the community’s own passivity,
prayer being in this instance a request for intervention and providence beyond their own
ability to procure. Prayer announces the nexus of past and future in the present: a
reminder to God of the community’s dedication and a subtle yet insistent reminder of
blessings that the community expects to be filled in good time (“quickly”). That these
words are addressed to a presumably omniscient being suggests that the recitation has more
significance to the mortal speaker and those present to hear the words.

TEXT IN TEXTILE: PEARSE’S GENERAL STORE AND THE TEXTURE OF DESIRE

In the harbor town of Baltimore is Pearse’s, a general store filled with the goods
from around the world. In its own way it symbolizes the nascent global culture created
through industrialization, capitalism, and improved transportation. Mrs. Molloy in Boss
Grady’s Boys, a shopkeeper’s widow, remembers of her husband’s store: “there were too
many items from India” (11-12). The increased in the amount of goods available is
accompanied by a proportional rise in anxiety for the women of Sherkin because material
things, especially the garish bows, ribbons, and, of course, material in Pearse’s goes against
the Quaker testimony of all things done in plainness. And yet Sarah, Hannah, and Fanny
can scarcely suppress the eagerness of visiting the shop and handling the merchandise;
Sarah especially is troubled by the expectation she feels for seeing bolts of cloth, and calls herself "wicked." Once in the store, her hands stray into the ribbon barrel and all but fondles the array of fabric that Meg Pearse displays for her. Her reaction to the material is a study in repression: anxiety, anticipation, and craving surrendering to guilt (she doesn’t buy anything). Thus, the text of the textiles contained therein reveal a layer of erotic desire present in the women of the community but which otherwise remains hidden. Moreover, the textiles of Pearse’s denotes the constructedness of desire and identity, a point that hits home to the Sherkin community when with the departure of Fanny they must reassess both their own desires and the ending of their own stable identity.

Sarah reveals her "literacy" of the textile by her ability to read the national origin of each swatch and the corresponding nationalist temperament of its makers. In proclaiming a certain fabric from England, "It is lighter and yet stronger than an American," she could as well be judging the national fiber of people rather than cloth (72). "Fashion" is tied to "foreignness," to notions of alterity and otherness. Meg tempts Sarah with the bows in her store by telling her, "This is the pinnacle of fashion. A stranger would speak French to you, if you wore this on your head" (73). Clothing bestows an aura of exotica on the wearer, making them strange, creating an identity that, ironically, like the Greek’s persona reveals the desires of the wearer. In the case of the Sherkin women, they strive to disguise the passions they harbor inside, and the “extravagant” textiles would unnecessarily reveal their hunger for things outside their humble existence. In the absence of foreign textiles and ribbons, however, the Sherkin women cannot resist adorning themselves with items from the island itself in order to confer identity on themselves. Sarah recalls that Charity,
Fanny's mother, would collect seashells from the strand and call them "fingernails" denoting that her family was from Sherkin (114). In a sense, nationality is itself a kind of fabrication, a confluence of text strands brought together to enclose the individual and channel desire into acceptable expressions.

Even so, the text delineates between the artifice of national boundaries as imagined by humans and ignored by nature and inanimate objects. Jesse notes that their pig ("The skeleton of a pig is similar to a man's" [57]), who they nourish as a family member, would never know the difference if they moved from Ireland, only that "the weather might change, and he would freckle" (61). Sarah and Hannah, discussing cloth, observe the same tendency of "material" to be unawares of the vagaries of geopolitical borders: "The cloths don't seem to know they've passed the wild Azores. The cloths think this is New York here" (72-73).

The codes of desire are not just limited to clothing and adornments, however. Hannah, preparing Fanny's hope chest, reveals a secret vanity of Fanny's mother, a mirror. "The river of light flows despite many a curiosity," she vouchsafes. "That is your mother's mirror, Charity's mirror, and it is a plain thing enough for a vademecum" (116). As the Sherkin community takes pains to surround themselves with "plain" and "sober-dyed" things, the presence of a mirror reveals an undercurrent of forbidden self-absorption and self-analysis equal to Fanny describing her mind as a raucous cancan stage. That the women keep this mirror secret from the world of men reveals the sub-community of Sherkin women who outwardly conform to the Puritan strictures of the community but
inwardly are preoccupied with the “material” world. It is desire most base, and therefore
desire that must be most hidden.

The mirror as vademecum is especially meaningful because Fanny's passage from
the island connotes her entrance into the world of processural time. The mirror, like
Patrick's lithograph stone, is a diary, an engagement book recounting the progress of
homogenous, empty time, whether it be in the creases of age on the gazer's face or the mere
framing of the world within the confines of the mirror's borders. Vanity, according to the
definition of the Sherkinites, is to acknowledge the meaningfulness of time, or "fashion,"
which is subject to change and the vagaries of public taste. Nature, captured, reproduced,
and reflected back to the observer is anathema to a community set on denying that the
material world is meaningful, let alone worth reproducing and observing.

Individual desire is best exposed and disguised in the marriage contract; and thus
Fanny's willingness to marry Patrick, against the wishes of her family and community,
exposes a willful desire that in any other textual context but the Sherkinite would probably
lead to mayhem and death. The solemnity and ceremony associated with marriage belies
the fact that the ritual is a socially sanctioned delay of sexual congress. Furthermore, the
founding of a union between two people, like the founding of a nation, is a disruptive act.
An established community (i.e., family) is sundered by an outsider intent on reshaping the
communal configuration and creating in essence a competing social entity, one that
promises continuance but also a potential rival for resources. This drama of secession is
especially haunting in the case of Irish history because under British rule the Catholic
marriage was configured by the Protestant authorities to be a act of genocide. Inheritance
laws applicable only to the Catholic population of Ireland ordered them to divide their land holdings among all married children. The Irish penchant for large families (coupled, of course, with the Catholic proscription against family planning) thus created an untenable situation as landowners found their property subdivided into obscurity as children married and generations progressed. The only alternative, as Hoppen observes, was for the Irish restrict marriage to only one or a few children, and to have those marriages take place late in life (106). The remaining children either forfeited connubial bliss to work on the estate as free labor or emigrated. Thus, the fate of many resembled that of the Mick and Josey in Boss Grady's Boys: families desperate to hold onto their land with surviving siblings past marriage eligibility and procreation years.

Although the Hawkes of Sherkin do not have land holdings to lose, their stake in Fanny remaining on the island is played out in similar terms because she represents the advent of New Jerusalem, a much more resplendent piece of real estate than an average Irish farm. The community would prefer a "brother from Manchester" because he would theoretically be a visionary like their forbearer Matthew Purdy: he would needs have received a similar vision, possess identical drive, and present himself as an insider fully ready to incorporate himself into the extant fabric of the Sherkin community. Ironically, the community's fear of the disruptiveness of marriage is potent enough to drive them to prefer the security of cultural "inbreeding" (the Manchester brother) to the strangeness of a "foreigner" like Patrick.

Compared to the stereotypes of the nineteenth-century Irishman, Patrick is outside the mainstream. His mother was a Jewish woman from Portugal who "spoke three
tongues, the Portuguese, the Hebrew, and the Cork" (79), and in recognition of her cultural ambiguity he carves for her gravesite a star of David superimposed over a cross. He is unsaddled by place or kin, holding no allegiance to a birthplace or immediately family. His life resembles that of Matt Purdy in the sense of his reverse migration from city to country, relocating his lithography practice in Baltimore to flee from the squalor of Cork—"Too many murders, a surfeit. [. . .] A famine of charity" (87). Neither is Patrick beholden to church or state. He admits to Meg, "I don’t care for bishops. Bishops are just government. And I don’t care for that either" (89). To Patrick government is "just government," political gestures located outside the realm of actual human interaction. His iconoclasm, as troublemaking as one can be in West Ireland in the 1890s, extends even to his willingness to transgress the boundary between Baltimore and Sherkin to confront "the bear" John Hawke. Even amongst his fellow Catholics the Pearses he is considered an outsider: "We like you," Meg tells Patrick on behalf of her and her husband, "though we hie to different churches" (89). In this case Meg cannot mean simply Catholicism. The definition of "different churches" must expand to cover an entire network of meanings and ideas, allegiances and attitudes, which inform the identity of the speaker. Here "churches" refers not simply to an individual belonging to an institution but, taking into account Patrick’s rejection of episcopal supremacy, an individual paying fealty to an authority figure within that institution.

Barry’s Fanny is equally iconoclastic compared to the norms of her social context. She enjoys transgressing to the mainland, she willingly interacts with "foreigners," and she articulates desires that her fellow islanders would scare admit to having. She confesses to
Jesse that her mind is a stage with a chorus line of dancers, “and they are not speaking English.” She continues, “They are lovely big women with mad dresses, and whup, when they all kick their legs up [. . .] they are wearing nothing beneath” (61). These terms are the closest she or anyone else in her context can come to admitting to erotic desires, although Sarah comes close with her fetishistic obsession with the bows and “material” of Pearse’s. Furthermore, her chorus line closely resembles Josey Grady’s: big women dancing in a row, “mad” costumes, and flashy maneuvers, its carnivalesque atmosphere sedulously guarded by Fanny’s sober exterior—even her exchanges with Patrick are studies in Vermeer-like stoicism. John recognizes in Fanny the undercurrent of the drives, which he calls euphemistically “the gazelles of life,” compelling her to leave. “It is the spirit of your children, and they are as eager as you for the earth of Sherkin” (85). Obviously her exteriority is convincing enough to placate her community and cast doubt in Patrick that she even has physical appetites: “She is an angel maybe, and sees no desire,” he notes, expressing his hope that she remains outside the regulation of any institution to dictate her desires (88). Ironically, in Baltimore Fanny dances for Patrick in his store, “a religious dance” that Patrick hopes will be “a blessing for my new life here in the shop” (78). The meta-theatricality of Fanny’s interior life will eventually match her future exterior life, when in his proposal Patrick informs her that their future home in Cork is adjacent to a theatre (“If you don’t mind comedians and risky [sic] dancers too much we might stick our sign beside such light and splendour” [110]).

When Patrick soliloquizes, “Maybe it is wrong of me to take a visionary child away from her island, or seek to. But I can do no other thing,” he alludes to a complex network
of competing institutions guiding his and her desires and, above all, restricting him from creating what will essentially be a new institution (98). He surely can do some other thing, but in order to enable him to see a different solution he must somehow transcend his context, which as the play makes clear requires the introduction of the aforementioned and undefined new institution. Ironically, he is caught in a bind where his desire is permitted and denied at the same time. According to his religious context, he can only take Fanny to wife insofar as she permits herself to be transformed. According to his political context, which is made clear to be entirely progressive, he senses that only through free will and choice can he properly ask a woman to marry him.

Patrick catches a modicum of the thoroughly contingent nature of his social context when he realizes: “Maybe she’s a ghost. A sort of vision, in her terms. I think maybe Baltimore’s a vision too. A hellish one. Of course it is myself that is the vision. Of misery” (98). However, there are limits even to the realization that most if not all things are conventions: noting the dismal conditions of his hotel room, Patrick laments, “The fleas are taking great nourishment from a vision none the less.” If contingent reality is based on the acceptance of a vision, which itself is also entirely contingent, then the “making and unmaking” of a community, like Seamus Heaney’s notable line of a tree “leafing and unleafing,” is a cyclical (simultaneous) process open to re-imagining. Reality and consciousness, Patrick comes to realize, is a matter of construction, both on the part of the visualizer and also based on the instrument with which the vision is seen. Patrick’s lithography stone is a seer stone, not unlike the prophetic visions of Matthew Purdy, but it operates in opposition to the Sherkin prophet. Where Matt Purdy sees the lights of New
Jerusalem, Patrick sees “a hundred thousand impressions of murder.” “The world sees it, the world understands the look of murder” because of his art, “It isn’t a gentle craft, that newspaper craft” (77).

However, the act of social re-vision is unclearly defined, and “vision” and “visionary” are terms applied to the unexplainable individuals. Matt Purdy is described as “visionary”; Jesse is also visionary, but he is “clipped down to earth” (84). Patrick calls Fanny “a visionary child” (98). In an appearance to Fanny, Purdy himself declares, “I am not a vision for thee, but out of my dead heart I bear for thee a kindly speech” (84). Owing to what we know from Patrick’s wordplay, “kindly” is interchangeable with “familial,” and thus Purdy brings to Fanny a “familial speech”; hence, out of the visionary comes the “kindly.” Evidently, is all goes back to sex and procreation.

The notion of “vision” and community or nation (re)building is thus connected to clarity and light, which are two prominent images circulating through Prayers of Sherkin. “You are a clear person,” John tells Fanny (83), and to Patrick Meg asserts, “We like you, Mr. Kirwin, because you are clear” (89). The play shows that clarity only appears at the margins, in this instance at Cape Clear, when the contrived comforts of community are stripped away and the sailor must acknowledge that the trappings of so-called civilization are merely blinders keeping at bay, like Hrothgar’s Heorot, the horrors and uncertainty of nature. Similar to the Greek notion of ekstasis, clarity can only be reached after the gates of chaos have been breached. So when Fanny says of Patrick, “He was not like us. But I knew him” (84), she is claiming that she and Patrick essentially belong to a similar community, that of the “clears,” the visionaries: those who can see, those who do not
merely reproduce light but are in some broader senses originators of it. Patrick echoes this
sentiment when to Fanny he declares, “I’ve been peering out my while life for the familiar
face” (99). Had he said “kind face” he would have been no farther off the mark.

Her “expulsion” from paradise mirrors closely the dilemma of expressed female
desire presented in the Adam and Eve story. Specific laws are in place for two
contradictory systems of desire regulation, and the individual must resolve the competing
dictates of each schema. The implicit understanding here is that both systems are
beneficiary but inherently nullify each other; somehow, the individual must accommodate
both worldviews by either defying both, violating one in favor of the other, or finding a way
of bridging the two. In the case of the story from Genesis, on one hand are the theoretical
foundations of the community—in the case of Adam and Eve obedience to God is a
condition of remaining in the Garden of Eden. For Fanny Hawke it is the condition of
Matt Purdy, “our perfect father” in John’s words, that the Sherkin community marry only
those whom God leads from Manchester to the west of Ireland. On the other hand is the
contrary instruction to continue the community through procreation. For Adam and Eve
the commandment to “multiply” is contravened by the instruction not to acquire
knowledge (via the forbidden fruit); for Fanny, the imperative to marry and produce the
fourth generation is thwarted by the reality that in over a century no one has come from
Manchester. For the fourth generation to arrive she must marry outside of the community,
but because of the constraints of the Sherkinites her extra-communal children will not be
the millennium-bringing generation. Her “transgression” effectively nullifies the core
imperative of the Sherkinites while at the same time extending them.
William Blake, whose ideas permeate *Prayers of Sherkin*, is here instructive. Blake suggests that the loss of innocence is a necessary step into the world of experience, but that the world of experience is not the climax of a life's journey. In a process that Benedict Anderson might call a return to fused time, Blake claims that the individual must return to a state of "experienced innocence," in essence existence in paradise with knowledge of good and evil, which can only be achieved through the intervention of "Imagination." The imaginative faculty, for Blake, comes not from an internal rearrangement of current cognitive paradigms, but rather a direct intervention from the divine, an exogenous influence that instructs the individual to configure the present situation outside the confines of the contemporary epistemology. In the case of Fanny Hawke, "imagination" comes in the shape of Matt Purdy. His final instructions to her outlines that continuance of the line is important enough that she defies the community's interdict and leaves. "I saw a vision in time that will not serve me outside time," he tells her (105). "There are lives that are waiting to be made in a black century, and though they will see suffering, yet they will value their lives." He therefore instructs her to go into "that Catholic darkness, into a century of unlucky stars" (106). What is curious here is that whereas a Blakean intervention would have come in a form altogether foreign to the receiver of instruction, Fanny's vision comes to her clothed in the cultural forms of her community, in this case an appearance by the sect's founder. Whether her encounter is "real" or not, its format authorizes her action because it is encoded within the fabric of her community, creating a space for her to enact her desire where previously there was none.
Produced at the Royal Court in 1995 by Max Stafford-Clark's Out of Joint theatre company, *The Steward of Christendom* is the fifth of the six-play cycle covering the marginal members of Barry's family tree. *Steward*’s central character is Thomas Dunne, Barry’s great-grandfather (whose real first name was James), who was Dublin’s last Metropolitan Police chief under the British government and who handed over Dublin Castle to Michael Collins in 1922. Wasting away in a retirement home/asylum in Baltinglass and declining into senility, Thomas is haunted by the memories of his past glories and the swift change in the political landscape that transformed him unawares from loyal civil servant to traitor of the Irish people. The primary action of *Steward* occurs in Thomas’ mind as he remembers how his country and family collapsed as a result of the social and political instabilities of the 1920s. Interspersing his reveries are intermittent visits by two asylum employees, Smith, who as Thomas’ bane constantly needles him about his service in the DMP, and Mrs. O’Dea, a kindly woman who sews Thomas a suit.

Thomas’ life is a case study in how seemingly concrete nationalist concepts such as patriotism and loyalty, linchpins in the establishment of political identity, are in fact unstable terrain that can shift under their adherents and undermine their social, political, and psychological security. Furthermore, Thomas’ decline into feeblemindedness demonstrates how in the age of nationalism the displacement of national identity is tantamount to a loss of personal identity, and that until a sense of that identification is restored the individual is, to himself and other, a non-person. What connects *The Steward of Christendom* with *Prayers of Sherkin* and contrasts it with *Boss Grady’s Boys* and *Our Lady of
Sligo is that Steward, as a parable of Irish nationalist identity construction, suggests ways in which the imagined community can be re-imagined sufficiently to expand the borders of a national identity and bring it to the level of the postnationalist. Moreover, whereas Prayers of Sherkin presents an image of an idealized nationalist condition, Steward applies more directly to the immediate to the conditions that so complicated Irish society and politics throughout the twentieth century.

As is the case with Our Lady of Sligo and Prayers of Sherkin, in The Steward of Christendom identity is metaphorically woven for the wearer by his cultural community. As the play progresses, Thomas Dunne finds himself stripped of his clothes and measured for a suit that will make him conform to the dress code of the retirement-home/asylum he now lives in. But the more his suit progresses, and the more his external identity conforms with the demands of his community, the more he comes to realize that the outward demands of society cannot completely eliminate his interior identity. The Steward of Christendom, like many of Barry's play, has no obvious conflict requiring resolution; instead, Barry highlights the complexities of an evolving social identity as it puts pressure on individuals to mold themselves into acceptable citizens. In this context there is no struggle between individual and collective; the pathos of the play comes out of Thomas' acceptance of the identity manufactured for him. Not that he is resigned to being cast into the role his community has designed for him; instead, by the play's conclusion he realizes the artificiality of its manufacture and finds refuge in a wider vision of communal construction, one based on what Thomas Dunne calls "the glittering face of a well [that] is betrayed by an emergency" (301).

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ERRORS IN JUDGMENT

*The Steward of Christendom* is a tragedy of contingent identity. If tragedy can be said to hinge on an error in judgment, which is one definition of the troublesome Greek term *hamartia*, then Thomas, as the tragic hero, had committed an error so sweeping and yet so subtle that it consumes his identity unawares. Indeed, Thomas has been compared to a King Lear, though most critics have characterized him as a post-heath Lear full of clarity and renewed vigor. Closer to the truth is that Thomas is still in the vale of madness, and his rest at the play's conclusion is Lear's comatose slumber after the storm. Thomas' error in judgment can be characterized in numerous ways related to identity, but the two ways that stand out center on his stewardship of Dublin Castle.

His central error is an inability to appreciate how political tides can redefine concepts like "steward" from one of loyalty to betrayal. In his worldview the external (that is, political) world is static, and thus identity, whether it be in the form of a "steward," "father," or "patriot" is also static. Under such a construct definitions of words do not change, political identity never modifies, and rewards for jobs well done are secure. He fails to appreciate that in fact he lives in a world where external reality is forever in flux, a world where political definitions suit the party in power. Thus, as long as England holds sway over Ireland, Thomas' identity remains intact, but as soon as power transfers to home rule, all claims to stability are forfeited. Like Lear, who in the storm cannot tell where land ends and water begins, Thomas Dunne cannot descry where his own political stability ends and the chaos of revolution begins. He can only hopelessly cling to his pre-de Valera
definitions of who was “good” and who was “bad.” To Mrs. O’Dea he defends the much-maligned DMP:

We were mostly country men, and Catholics to boot, and we loved our King and we loved our country [. . .] We did our best and we followed our orders. Go out to Mount Jerome some day, in the city of Dublin, and see the old monument to the DMP men killed in the line of duty. Just ordinary country men keen to do well. And when the new government came in, they treated us badly. Some said we had been traitors to Ireland [. . .] We were part of a vanished world, and I don’t know what’s been put in our place. (245-246)

Thus, to Thomas “king” and “country,” two seemingly benign terms, suddenly become fraught with uncertain political meaning. Whereas “king” before the uprisings implied stability and goodness, post-1916 the term officially implies tyranny. Thomas invokes the term “country” twice, once to refer to the political entity of England-Ireland and once to imply bucolic simplicity; and though it is uncertain where one meaning bleeds to another, it is clear that Thomas believes that the terms are interchangeable. Whatever the case may be, he is cogent enough to realize that both England-Ireland and bucolic simplicity belong to a now “vanished world”; that to him the upheaval of the Irish secession has taken away a vital touchstone for his own sense of internal identity, and thus his sanity ebbs away.

The second and most tragic error is Thomas’ inability to foresee the damning effect his service in the DMP has on his children. Thomas is clearly a family man, loving to his children and devoted to his wife, who died in childbirth delivering Dolly. It was his hope that his ascension up the DMP ranks would lend his family respectability, a financial future, and social mobility, but the events of 1916 onward made those aspirations look like Macbeth-like ambition. Annie, who appears both in corporeal form and in Thomas’ memory, is a hunchback spinster, loyal to her father but unable to provide for him because 228
his pension for forty-five years of service is so abysmally small. His other two daughters
have abandoned the family, Maud to a distant marriage and Dolly to America (she
emigrates to Cleveland, Ohio), partly due to the fact that they are despised wherever they
live and cannot find suitors. And then there is young Willie Dunne, who joined the army
because “he was too short to join the [DMP],” and is killed in World War One. Willie
represents Thomas’ greatest failure, because Ireland’s participation in World War One was
seen as just another example of England using Irishmen for cannon fodder, and thus
politic ally Thomas is not allowed to grieve. Instead of being an honored war death,
Thomas’ son is a non-entity buffeted by the shifting winds of political definitions, and in
the process Willie becomes a double casualty: once to German bullets and second to Irish
indifference. Willie loses a life and an identity.

It is important to note that Thomas is not a political creature, at least not
consciously. For him the world doesn’t revolve on abstract concepts of geopolitical
squabbles. His world revolves around his family, the only concrete concept to him.
Ironically, his children, unlike him, are all too aware of the political danger of their
situation. Annie, harboring no illusions about titles and goodness warns her father of the
inconstancy of symbolism prior to the change of power, and she is adept enough to see
how terms like “disloyalty” and “betrayal” are fluid enough to be thrown at anyone, but
Thomas is oblivious, holding erroneously onto the hope that “universally” held truths will
preserve his reputation, his identity, and his pension—neither of which is the case. Yet
ironically, under Barry’s skillful and poetic hand Thomas is a potent call for a reassessment
of the cost of the political battle waged over Ireland’s past, present, and future. Indeed, he
is Barry's very clear message stating that political thinking has been responsible for more
damage that is purports to solve, and that which is most damaged are Irish families.

Thomas' former identity as the steward of Dublin Castle and revered patriarch
connects him with a matrix of signs suturing him by proxy to the British Empire. When he
tells the DMP recruit, "I was a young recruit myself once. I know what this means to you,"
and the young man replies, "The world, sir, it means the world," his joining the
metropolitan force literally means "the world," a socio-political domain that covers a third
of the globe and upon which the sun never sets (252). Thomas himself was born into a
world of inheritance, titles, and august institutions of medieval origin dusted off and given
a new coat of paint for the new century. "My father was the steward of Humewood, and I
was the steward of Christendom," he recites, pointing out that his ascension to DMP
supervisor allows him to consider himself, by extension, guardian of the Christian world
entire (248).

The difficulty for Thomas is that as long as Ireland was under British control he
could pledge his allegiance to a concrete symbol of nationalism: neither a religion or a
piece of land, but the person of Queen Victoria. "I loved her for as long as she lived,"
Thomas says of her, "I loved her as much as I loved Cissy my wife, and maybe more, or
differently" (250). He goes on to note how she had "built everything up and made it
strong, and made it shipshape." He admires the trains that run on time, the harbors, and
the order she created. "Her mark was everywhere," even on his policeman's uniform:
"Among her emblems was the gold harp, the same harp we wore on our helmets." "Ireland
was hers for eternity, order was everywhere, if we could but honour her example." More

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tellingly, he says of his relationship with her, “She loved loyalty, of steward to Queen, she was the very flower and perfecter of Christendom.” Although Thomas can never feel the same sense of passion for her successors Edward and George, he still appreciates the order they represent, and he feels secure transferring his allegiance to subsequent monarchs understanding all the while that although the body has changed, the “emblem” of monarchy continues on, and those vestments of authority will continue to enjoy his fealty.

Thomas’ reverie here is deeply problematic. His vision of national identity is a thoroughly medieval one wherein the nation is co-equal with the body of the monarch, as if issues of ethnicity, geography, or even citizenship tied to nationalism had not yet evolved. And of course, “she” didn’t build any harbors or trains nor did her physical presence create any social order. It is the notion of sovereignty and its corollary of loyalty—which again borrows more from medieval theories of government than the more complex notions of nation that emerged in the early twentieth century—that Thomas cannot think beyond, thus condemning him to persistently misunderstand the gravity of his situation as persona non gratis. Even his insistence on referring to the world as “Christendom” reflects his medieval worldview that the entire world was the domain of Christianity to crusade, conquer, organize, and enlighten. As its steward, then, Thomas is more the guardian of the notion of British-imposed order than any real butler to the houses of the great and good.

In contrast to the gray eminence of Victoria is the gatecrashing Michael Collins, to whom Thomas must surrender his keys to Christendom. To Thomas Collins represents everything that is antithetical to the cosmic elegance of the venerable queen, his Kali to her
Skiva: he destroys while she maintains order, and yet they are emanations of the same principle of government. Whereas she has the precedence of time-honored tradition, Collins is an upstart crow; she is respected because of her station, but Collins has made himself feared and respected. "He looked to me like Jack Dempsey," Thomas recalls, "one of those prize-fighting men we admired" (285). He elaborates: "He had glamour about him, like a man that goes about with the fit-ups, or some of those picture stars that come on the big ship from New Your, to visit us, and there'd be crowds in the street like for royalty" (286). This Michael Collins is in keeping with the Michael Collins of *Boss Grady's Boys*: part celebrity, part savior, he is both a physical presence and an idiom. But whereas the Michael Collins of *Boss Grady's Boys* is noted for the social change he can enact and the resources he can theoretically mobilize, the Michael Collins of *The Steward of Christendom* is noted for his star power, his symbolic presence. More notably, Thomas considers Collins not an Irishman but an American on account of his stature (like Americans, he is "twice the size of any Irish person" and looks as though he is one "fed those many years on beef and wild turkeys") and his gregarious nature, stark contrasts with the unapproachable, diminutive *regina*.

For a brief moment at the handover ceremony Thomas catches a glimpse of what the new order represents in Collins: a world of celebrity where government is by popular acclaim rather than by fiat. "Today," he announces to his daughters as they prepare his uniform for the transfer of power, "is [. . .] symbolical. Like those banners in the Chapel Royal for every lord lieutenant that has ruled Ireland. It's a mighty symbolical sort of a day, after all these dark years" (277). He is willing to transform Collins into a light-bringer
by virtue of the popular support he has managed to muster, but on a less optimistic note
Collins is also the nightmare envisioned by Plato wherein government operates through
passion and politicking rather than the magisterial if glacial hand of heredity. Noting the
devotion Collins inspires in his followers, Thomas remarks, "I felt a shadow of that loyalty
pass across my heart. But I closed my heart instantly against it" (268). "We were to have
peace," he adds, and although he is willing to grant Collins the monarchical role of
peacekeeper, Thomas reserves the right to attach his allegiance to the symbols of empire.
At least, he reasons, Collins is Irish, and that must account for something.

But when Collins is killed in his home county (home is not even safe for the great
Collins), the last vestiges of what might be social or cosmic order is swept away from
Thomas. Inasmuch as Edward VII and George V were poor late editions to the chronicle
of Victoria’s monarchy, de Valera, who took over Ireland after Collins, was the final sour
pulp. Even Mrs. O'Dea calls him “King De Valera,” observing that he is “As much a
foreigner as the King of England ever was” (262). Gellner writes that one important aspect
of monarchy in medieval Europe was that in general the ruling house was an alien house,
thus establishing at least the appearance of judicial impartiality to mediate the internecine
baronial feuds. In England, the last truly English king was Harold I, who was swiftly
dispatched by the Normans, who themselves were of Scandinavian stock, not Gallic even
though their home turf was the northeastern coast of France. Victoria’s son and grandson
were of the House of Saxe-Coberg-Gotha, a miserable sounding hyphenate that was
changed to “Windsor” partly to distance the royals from the Kaiser after WWI, but also to
disguise the obvious fact that the monarchs of England were Germans.

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Collins as an Irishman broke the precedence of foreigners governing Ireland by placing an Irish face on an Irish government. His replacement, Eamon de Valera, represented a travestied version of alien rule. De Valera was a half-Irish half-Spanish American who came to Dublin to participate in the political agitation and found himself part of the Easter Uprising of 1916. Taken prisoner by the British, his life was spared, ironically, because he was a US citizen. The ensuing chain of events leading to his ascension as ruler of Ireland, complete with the backing of the Catholic Church and his imposition of political isolation and social ultra-conservativism, sets up a virtual neo-medieval island kingdom off of Europe's western border. Thus, if George V represented medievalism and Collins represented a form of modernity that Thomas was willing to entertain, de Valera with his urbanity and cultural difference marked a return to the past without the pay-off of order, meaningful symbolism, or clear-cut sense of sovereignty that merits loyalty.

Equally damaging to Thomas' sense of order, as promised by the symbols of empires, is the war on the Continent. When Annie touts her father as a man "whose son gave his life for Ireland," he corrects her by saying, "Willie gave his life to save Europe, Annie, which isn't the same thing" (254). In other words, Willie's death cannot have been on behalf of the island of Ireland because Ireland as a "country" worth dying for exists only insofar as it is attached to the greater entities of Great Britain and Europe. Here Thomas makes his own distinction between Ireland and "Ireland"; and in this instance "Ireland" is worth the price of a son, not Ireland. However, Willie's letter home exposes the war and its implicit promise of order creation as an illusion. Writing of the cold and mud, he says,
“It made us remember that all hereabout was once farms, houses and farms and grass and stock, and surely the farmer in you would weep, Papa, to see the changes” (292-293). Empire has not led to more order, only entropy, decaying down even to the mixture of once arable dirt and water. “Ireland” is an incapable container for the lofty morals Thomas and his superiors would have it hold.

Furthermore, the death of social order brings with it the end of people being able to recognize who is their “own” and who is the enemy in a sea of strange faces. Old loyalties are invalidated—Thomas, for example, cannot collect the pension he carefully accrued during his years of service (271). Later, as a guest of the asylum, Smith lashes out at him for being “a big loyal Catholic gobshite killing poor hungry Irishmen” (243). A woman on a public tram assaults Dolly for seeing the British forces off as they leave following the changeover. As it happens, the conductor is an Irishman who fought alongside the British in France. “It was painful, the way she looked at him,” Dolly says, “as if he were a viper, or a traitor” (265). The once venerated veteran is now of suspect motives. In a darkly comic moment, Annie even accuses Maud’s date Matt Kirwin, whom she invites without warning to dinner, of being a foreigner, “And with a foreign accent” (288). “I’m from Cork city,” he protests, but to Annie Cork is as foreign as Madras or Bangkok. Finally, the desolation of an Ireland without order consumes the loyalty and order of Thomas’ own family. Individually his daughters move away and in time refuse to see him. Dolly goes so far as to sell the ruby bracelet she inherited from her mother to pay for passage to America, where she eventually settles in Cleveland, Ohio as an indentured servant (294).
The collapse of all systems of peace and order suggests to Thomas that he cannot have faith in any system, neither past nor present containing the symbolism to which he can attach his allegiance. In the end, the dichotomy he thought he recognized in the contrast between Collins and kings was purely a cosmetic one. Annie says as much when she rebukes her father for his lighthearted attitude on the day he loses his job: “Collins is no king [. . .] And that King [i.e., George V], for all his moustaches and skill on horseback, has betrayed us” (278). Thomas, however, goes even further: “The great appear great because we are on our knees,” he realizes, “Let us rise” (299). Although Thomas is sufficiently self-aware to recognize the contingency of authority, he is still incapable of formulating an alternative social scenario that could satisfy his need for cosmic order and familial stability.

Initially, Thomas attempts to retreat from the impinging political (dis)order by returning to Wicklow, their county of origin. Whereas the city, “full of death,” implodes on itself, he believes his family will be safe in a romanticized country house surrounded by loving relatives, the security of family replacing the lost stability of empire. “Elysium,” he declares, “It is paradise [. . .] We’ll be happy there” (290). “In Wicklow,” he says later, “we will be among our own people” (294). Dolly, however, is more practical, and recognizes that city life has rendered them incapable of ever comfortably adjusting to, let alone enjoying, a rural lifestyle. She points to a frightening mirror of she and her sisters, the country version of Maud, Annie, and Dolly: “the Dunnes of Feddin, three wild women with unkempt hair and slits on the backs of their hands from ploughing” (294). The real Wicklow is a parody of paradise, natural but wild, a step into a past devoid of the comforts

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of modernity. Where Thomas sees progress and rest, his daughters see regression and hardship, and in the end they abandon him for the uncertainty of urban life. Thomas mistakenly believes that identity can be easily transformed, but the metaphors of uniform and paradise only go so far. He fails to understand that the individual without the sanction of state or cultural power has little say in the creation of his or her national identity.

TEXT AND TEXTILE, REDUX: THE GOLD-THREADED SUIT OF IDENTITY

Clothing is the wherewithal by which a person in the world of Steward signals identity and is permitted to function in the political world. However, national identity is not simply the pronouncement of one's allegiance to a particular nation or government system; it is an acceptance of behaving and desiring according to the dictates of the nation-state in exchange for the individual being permitted to identify him- or herself with the aureate values of that system. Therefore, in donning a particular form of dress, or in any way encircling the individual amongst the trapping of nationalist sartorial symbolism, the person is attaching the self to, or is attached to, a vast network of historical interpretations, value systems, and cosmologies predetermined by the social collective to be necessary for the its own continuance. As The Steward of Christendom demonstrates, the fight over suits both old and newly-tailored crystallize the broader issue of Irish national identity and questions the portability, re-manufacturability, and permanence of any form of subjective connection to the social solidarity.
Uniforms and suits are shown to be the essence of the person inside it. Indeed, the person wearing the uniform seems to be no more than stuffing and animation for yards of fabric invested with authority and meaning. When Thomas laments the disbanding of the Dublin Rifles and the Dublin Fusiliers, he mourns not for people but for "all the lovely uniforms," because vested in them are "all the long traditions" (263). As repositories of culture and the past, uniforms outlive people and thus confer on subsequent wearers the insistent look of the preserved past. The loss of the uniforms, "broken up and flung out, like so many morning eggs onto the dung heap," implies both just the passing of an obsolete Irish identity and the erasure of those who once wore them.

The same can be said, in more human terms, of Thomas' only son Willie. He was a young man when he left Ireland to fight for the British in World War One, but when he appears periodically to Thomas he is a thirteen-year-old boy in an army uniform. After he is killed, his body is not returned to Thomas. "All I got back was your uniform, with the mud only half-washed out of it," Thomas recalls. "Why do they send the uniforms to the fathers and mothers? [. . .] I cried for a night with your uniform over my head, and no one saw me" (283). As a man of the uniform himself, Thomas accepts in theory that the uniform is symbolically invested with the aura of authority, but when faced with the reality of a lost human being, his own son, he cannot accept this metonymy. The disconnect between fabric and person is brought home to him so forcefully in the farce of a returned uniform that the best he can hope for is his own nullification by draping the soiled uniform over his head and weeping. In essence, what the British government sent back to
Thomas was not individuality but nationality itself; and he is being asked to mourn not the person but the sacrifice done in the name of preserving the integrity of nationalism.

Neither is Smith, Thomas' erstwhile tormentor, immune from the lure of exterior dress to impute identity to the wearer. In his pre-suited form, Thomas is derisively canonized into the pantheon of saints by Smith as "Saint Thomas, that knew kings and broke Larkin" (248). "You look just like an old saint there, Mr. Dunne," Smith chides, "an old saint there, with your spoon." Later, Thomas hands the spoon off to the police recruit of his imagination "as a token of our good faith," authority, faith, and saintliness transferred symbolically (252). But this is a sinister sainthood, a conflation of Catholic sympathy and royalism, for Smith a paradoxical state. "What was the name of the patriot was killed years past in Thomas Street outside the church of St. Thomas, in the city of Dublin?" he asks Thomas (249). Smith refers to Robert Emmet, the Irish patriot and martyr, and throughout the play he accuses old Thomas of being complicit in the murder of his own countrymen by his association with the British legal system. Saint Thomas, of course, is the problematic apostle known chiefly not for his pseudepigraphical gospel but for his famous doubt. Ultimately, this elevation of Thomas is yet another travesty of identity. When Mrs. O'Dea finally brings in the new suit the pretense is up. When she instructs Smith to wash Thomas again, he growls, "He may be St. Thomas, Mrs. O'Dea, but I'm not Jesus Christ, to be washing his hands and feet" (284).

Near the play's conclusion Smith enters Thomas' room to tend the scrapes the old man incurred during a manic frenzy. Smith, on his way to a costume party, is incongruously dressed as Gary Cooper in complete cowboy regalia:
I could be a man war-wounded.

SMITH

You could. Or the outcome of a punch-up in a western saloon. (290)

On one level this exchange demonstrates the omnipresence of the western in the Irish psyche and Barry’s plays as was previously discussed in the chapter covering Boss Grady’s Boys and Prayers of Sherkin. On another level, it demonstrates the authority that Smith, as a state employee, has over Thomas to rewrite the latter’s history and identity. Lamenting Smith’s brutal scrubbing of Thomas at bath time, Mrs. O’Dea compares his violent act to erasure: “Didn’t you wash him yesterday? Do you want to rub him out?” (259) Smith does not so much kill or hurt the old man as he is wiping clean a subjective tabula rasa. Prior to the cowboy suit scene, Smith administered yet another round of beating and restraint on Thomas; the wounds he attends to are those he has inflicted. Hence, in cleaning up Thomas he recasts the events leading up to the beating not as a war, the way Thomas would prefer to remember it, but as a stylized saloon brawl. Violence is transmuted to comical cinema, the wounds of the present the result of play, not performance. In a similar way Thomas sees that the violence of Ireland’s brutal beginning is in the process of transforming from a grueling campaign of terror into a harmless game of cowboys and Indians.

Thomas’ daughters stake out their positions on nationalist identity around the subject of clothes, hats, and style. In one protracted scene near the end of the first act, Annie and Dolly argue about the future of Ireland now that Michael Collins is about to
assume control of the government (263-265). Dolly wants to go clothes shopping while
Annie, sitting on a three-legged stool, darns socks. It is a classic scene of past and future
colliding in the present, Dolly setting out to see what new identities have been imported
for the new times while Annie angrily mends the subjectivities of the past which have been
ground down in daily wear. At the moment of social transition neither sister can
formulate the proper response and instead revert to arguing over the morality of material
(Annie: “What’s civil unrest to Dolly and her shopping?” [263]) to articulate the substance
of their disagreement.

Annie is furious with Dolly’s preoccupation with clothes and hats; she even
derisively nicknames her sister “Dolly of the hats” (263). “The like of Collins and his
murdering men won’t hold this place together,” she growls, “They haven’t they grace of the
style for it. So you needn’t mourn your shoes and hats and haircuts, Dolly Dunne—they
won’t be there" (278). Annie perceptively argues that Collins and his gang lack not just the
ability to govern; they lack the outward awareness to construct the proper suture of past
and future sufficient to secure the present identity of the Irish. They lack the “grace” and
“style” to manage the sartorial demands of government, let alone the pressing duty of
creating a stable Irish subjectivity. But Annie further points out that the present identities
will be radically altered by whoever takes political power. True, Dolly’s hats, shoes, and
haircuts will not be around, but a new set will appear, ready to assume the identities of new
wearers (as is seen in Our Lady of Sligo). However, even Annie, the most cynical sister,
cannot resist the vocabulary of clothing when it comes time to comfort Dolly: “We’ll put
on our aprons and get the tea. We’ll go on ourselves as if we were living in paradise” (265).
The uniforms and ritual of tea become the ceremony wherein Dolly can imagine that the external changes occurring in the nation around them; the Britishness of the service obliterating, at least for the moment, the infringement of an alien Irishness to their household. Furthermore, Annie’s reference to “aprons” recalls Adam and Eve’s vain attempt to pretend nothing has changed, post-fruit-eating, by sewing themselves “aprons” of fig leaves to disguise their just realized nakedness. Later, however, Annie again criticizes Dolly for her obsession with fashion. “There’s your father struggling to put a brave face on this day [. . .] and you’re worrying about hats.” Dolly responds weakly, “Hats are more dependable than countries” (285).

Hats take on a more sinister tone when Smith brings up the subject of “pitch caps” to Thomas, torture devices placed on the heads of priests into which was poured hot tar or pitch. “I suppose you never put a pitch cap on anyone,” says Smith, “They weren’t in fashion in your time” (250). Clothing thus takes on the menace of correction and violence, like the straitjackets Smith uses so liberally on Thomas. These hats, having the power to enforce behavior when the influence of abstract nationalism is insufficient, are indeed more dependable than countries.

Like the clothes and hats in Dublin that so tempt Dolly, vision and history—future, present, and past—are all tailored for the observer. In a crossover scene reminiscent of the parent/child interactions of Boss Grady’s Boys, Thomas meets, or recalls meeting, his son-in-law Matt Kirwin. Matt, a painter, has accompanied Maud for a visit to the “retirement home,” and in the meantime he is painting landscapes. The meeting occurs somewhere in between the past and present because although this meeting has clearly already taken place,
Thomas speaks to Matt about the problem of his new suit. Matt, for his part, talks to Thomas about the difficulty of finding the proper perspective from which to paint.

MATT

I thought I might capture a water-colour while I waited.

THOMAS

You might, like a man might capture a butterfly. [. . . ]

MATT

In a minute, when I decide the view I want. The painting itself will only take a moment. (266)

Matt notes that the details of the perspective are subordinate to the selection of the parameters that will define how the world is viewed. Moreover, Matt's use of the word "capture" implies a form of violence thrust upon the exterior world when a frame is mounted and an image transformed through a medium. The force of an individual's presence in a community is articulated through his or her ability to capture a frame, as it were, and synthesize history and memory to concede to the shape of its field of observation.

Here the limitation of the future-past suture process is laid bare, particularly in relation to the fragility of the identity-construction process. In a letter to Thomas, which Smith calls "an historical document," Willie writes his father, "I wish I could tell you that I am a hero, but truth to tell, there are few opportunities for valour, in the way we all imagined when we set out" (293). The stories of battlefield glory which undoubtedly motivated Willie and his compatriots are revealed to be narratives constructed for the
defense of national identity. In contrast to ennobled heroics, Willie is faced with the indignities of trenches, rats, and mud. As for acts of valor, they are more the result of fortuitous timing, luck, and foolhardiness than they ever were about agency. The role of identity-creating institutions is to take those contingent strands and "capture" them through a frame of reference in order to give death and valor meaning, to create templates and role models, and to confer upon the community a mythic status of continuance based on individual actions.

In an attempt to reconcile the raggedness of history, those in the present are often forced to concede that the wool of the past is not as properly carded, spun, and woven as would be hoped for, nor does it cleanly link to the present. The failure of his memory prompts Thomas to question not his sanity but his identity. When he recounts for Matt his duties in Dublin Castle, Thomas suddenly stops and asks, "It was me, wasn't it Matt? I held that post?" (268) In recalling the memory of Michael Collins, to whom Thomas as warden handed over the keys of Dublin Castle, all he can say is, "I remember the sorrow but not the name" (262). In the unraveling of identity, the action becomes divorced from the actor; the suit, as it were, detaches from the suited.

In a moment of private reverie, Thomas reflects on his being placed in the asylum and the attendant reformation of his identity. Upon hearing news of Collins' assassination, Thomas breaks down and destroys the contents of a room with his ceremonial sword. The collapse of Thomas' sanity is precipitated by a scene where he surveys his own condition and realizes that there is no identity that fits his frame now that Ireland has passed from British to Irish rule. At first he imagines that he and Annie will
return to Wicklow and live peacefully. "And we will cut a fine figure," he reassures his daughter, not unlike Lear to Cordelia when the end is near (296). Annie, ever the cynic, disagrees with the terms of dress as enabler: "Papa, you know country life better than me, but you are not suited to it" (298, emphasis added). At that moment he either hears or imagines the murmur of a mob outside the house, and in his panic he begins to strike his sword on anything within reach.

It is also at that moment that Thomas recognizes that as a man without a state he is a man without a self. The pervasiveness of the dogma of nationalism is such that in its absence, or in its transformation, the individual is thrust into a subjective limbo that can only be resolved once the incoming institution is able to grasp the strands of narrative, history, and memory from the previous institution and impose an orderly identity on the people who claim membership therein. Thomas articulates his own dislocation thus:

I knew suddenly in the car coming here what had happened, but at the time, at the time, I knew nothing, or I knew something else. And it was the gap between the two things that caused me to cry out in the car [...] and no one in the world to look at me again in a manner that would suggest that Thomas Dunne is still human, still himself. (252)

The loss of his cultural footing plunges Thomas into an abyss that does not so much annihilate him as fragment him. In stating, "I knew something else," Thomas suggests that his epistemological frame becomes unhinged from the view it once held, and the ensuing crises causes him to virtually step outside of himself, past unstitched from present, and view what remains of him from the perspective of one more culturally and subjectively grounded. This bifurcation nullifies his cohesion because an "individual" remains as such.
only insofar as they are not-dividable and that indivisibility depends on an institution for
the attendant framework.

However, once in the asylum Thomas, realizing that his interpretation of history
does not mesh with what he is told is "true," refuses to further attempt to reconcile his
own vision with that of his community. "Let them come and kill me if they wish," he
grumbles, "But I know my own story of what happened, and I am content with it" (246).
In other words, he attempts to recombine his sense of identity not with the demands or
fabrications of the "institution" keeping him but rather through an identity of his own
manufacture. The only thing he regrets is not history but "things of my own doing," which
for him clearly falls beyond the realm of recorded history. In some cases, as with Maud
inventing memories of her mother, a re-created past has to serve those for whom an
unknown past leaves too many unanswered questions and too few comforts (255).
However, Thomas' acceptance of Mrs. O'Dea's suit at least initially indicates his failure to
make up his own identity; in the end, it seems, all people must be connected to some
community identity.

Once he is confined to the asylum, Thomas seeks initially to reject his former life
and identity by giving his well-tailored Harrison suit, which he calls "a nice civilian suit"
and Mrs. O'Dea laments as "a lovely bespoke suit," to a fellow inmate, one Patrick
O'Brien: "a tall yellow streak of a man now, that thinks he is a dog" (244). The suit
represents the transfer of authority, or in this case the authority of sanity, Thomas giving
over the suit because he recalled Patrick's greatness at sport and thus "couldn't refuse him."
Yet Patrick intends not to wear the suit but to plant it in the ground and "eat it, piecemeal,
as the spirit [takes] him" (244). Mrs. O'Dea, alarmed, declares, "There must be a year's eating in a man's suit" (245). Though she is referring either to the cost of such an outfit or being facetious, there is a hint that she concedes to the convention of suit as identity, and thus the "year's eating" she mentions is replete with implications of employment, social mobility, and the inevitable wearing out of that currency (only one year's worth, by which time the fashion will have changed).

Thomas' hope is that without the suit—that is, without the toxic identity that has followed him since the day he handed over Dublin Castle—he will be left alone or at least treated with indifference. It is the highest irony that he attempts to meet his tormentors by stripping himself of his armor and hoping they will not notice him. Even his flights of infantilism—the baby talk, the regression—at certain moments appear to be only fabrications designed to draw attention to the fact that he is "unsuitable." It is perhaps an even higher irony that Thomas is right about identity evasion: he cannot be addressed until he is dressed. Neither history, his memories, nor his keepers will permit him to remain unsuited for long; indeed, they can only address him, afflict him, treat him insofar as he is suited. He is a mollusk seeking a shell, and until that shell is constructed for him he is an unknown, undefined quantity. Even in his unruliest moments Thomas is suited, in one instance a straitjacket, which is only scant degrees away symbolically from the suit being constructed for him elsewhere in the asylum (281).

Ultimately the cost of living suitless is too much for Thomas. Nationality and community demand exteriority for currency, and realizing this Thomas scrambles to suit himself up. At first he goes into the field outside the asylum in hopes of finding Patrick
and getting his old identity back; "They are tormenting me with dark cloth, and I hope you will give [the suit] back to me," he tells the figure he meets there (266). When the person he addresses turns out to be his son-in-law, Thomas abandons the security of past identity for the one being made for him if it means he is "suitable" to interact with his family again: "they'll make me another [suit], and then maybe you will bring my grandsons again to see me" (268).

Thomas is fixated on gold as emblematic of permanence, paternity, and social position, and he is adamant that his new suit contain a touch of gold, even if it is only the unseen stitching hidden beneath the seams. In his first monologue he declares, "Da Da is golden, golden, golden, nothing that Da Da do takes away the sheen of gold" (241). Gold is to be worn as a form of social currency, and for Thomas the wearing of gold is equated with legitimization and continuance:

The boy that sings to me betimes wears gold, and I have a hankering now for a suit with a touch of gold. There was never enough gold in that uniform. If I had made commissioner I might have had gold, but that wasn't a task for a Catholic, you understand, in the way of things, in those days. (245)

The boy he mentions is the apparition of his son Willie who comforts Thomas in his dreams and sings to him. "That uniform" refers to Thomas' DMP accoutrements that were never decorated in gold because the corresponding high rank was available only to Protestants. Gold therefore signifies loyal service and reward: "I had risen as high as a Catholic could go," Thomas remembers, "and there wasn't enough braid, in the upshot" (286). That is, he believes, or makes himself believe through the metaphor of insignia, that he could rise no higher than steward of Dublin Castle because there was no more braid to
signify higher succession. Here clothing obfuscates anti-Catholic prejudice with a veneer of inevitability. Smith, however, sees in "braid" the trappings of elitism, hypocrisy, and betrayal. When Smith accuses Thomas of being a traitor, it is because duplicity is "in your braid" (243). He accuses Thomas of being a "Castle Catholic," meaning he is a Catholic who threw his lot in with his oppressors, accepting their braid, and is thus deserving of humiliation.

This is not the only time gold is equated with the DMP and the British occupation. At one point, Thomas recalls showing a young DMP recruit a large book "bound in gold" containing the register of names of men who "served the crown" (251). Here is a clever exploitation of synecdoche: thin lines of gold binding directly referencing the gold of the "crown" the men serve, as if to suggest the mystical transfer of authority and majesty from sovereign to servant. Gilt binding legitimizes service, and ironically it is the only kind of "gold" acknowledgment a Catholic can achieve as a policeman. In this context gold further represents loss, an unachievable state that is tantalizingly dangled in front of those who will never attain its status. Like faded afternoon light reflected on the water's surface ("the sun herself brought gold to the river's back" [248]), gold is the manifestation of faded memories imperfectly remembered of actions ennobled for being performed in the name of the nation.

Perhaps in recognition of this lack and nostalgia, as he is being measured for his suit Thomas asks that section of black fabric be sewn together with "a bit of gold or suchlike for thread" (241). Mrs. O'Dea agrees, but as gold thread would be prohibitively expensive, and since the sutures will for the most part not be seen anyway, he settles for
yellow: “Yellow thread, Mr. Dunne. I can only stitch the sections together with yellow,” Mrs. O’Dea tells him (260). Thomas replies, “Oh, it’s very sunny.” Even in the fantasy of his suit construction Thomas cannot attain the warmth and legitimization of gold on his person, and instead he is forced to accept a substitute that essentially invalidates the purposes of his initial request.

The final stage of Thomas’ outfit is the selection of proper fitting shoes, however Mrs. O’Dea is hard pressed to find him an appropriate pair. When Thomas is finally shod, it is with the shoes of a dead man, in this case those of the insane Patrick O’Brien, to whom earlier Thomas had given his good suit to be buried and eaten. Thomas is aghast: “You must take them for another man. I’d never fill them” (295). At first Thomas’ refusal appears to be the pinnacle of modesty in deference to a man he admired; however, in the context of nationalist identity creation, his rejection of the shoes is a rejection of the totality of identity he is being asked to submit to. The significance of the shoes is in the fact that earlier Thomas refers to the hand-me-down shoes of the dead as “coffin shoes,” and at the point when Thomas receives Patrick’s shoes the suit Mrs. O’Dea has sewn for him has been completed, the shoes being the final touch to an identity carefully measured and woven. By accepting the shoes Thomas would be giving in to the demands of his socio-political institution, legitimizing the process of identity re-assignment, and allowing his reading of history, his place in his family, and his understanding of himself to rest entirely in the hands of the tailors of subjectivity. Acceptance would constitute the death of his inner life, and therefore by conceding to the entirety of the suit he risks surrendering whatever is left of his autonomy.
However, in rejecting the shoes he allows for the meeting of constructed identity and the autonomous self that dwells inside the exterior shell of external subjective performance. Ireland is an asylum stitching suits for its inmates, and Thomas, whether he is aware of it or not, is frantically trying to resist the normative power of subjective tailoring. Like Mai O'Hara, Thomas works against "the fixed that horrifies us," the terror of regularity and periodicity. "Fixed" does not necessarily imply immobility, but it does create a condition whereby set protocols of behavior or custom prevents the individual or the community from adapting to shifting exterior conditions. In homogeneity is the safety of familiarity but there is also the danger of this "fixed" condition. Like the deliberate imperfections of Hopi weaving, Thomas' unfinished suit, by his own design, announces the simultaneous reception of the dictates of the community with the proviso that the interior self is allowed participation in a discourse of identity. His rejection of totality is an attempt to articulate a position that refuses to allow the body to be wholly owned.

Ironically, complete ownership of the body by either the individual or the social solidarity prevents either from contributing productively to the social collective (the assumption here being, as Thomas Dunne deeply desires, that living in a social solidarity is preferable to complete isolation). In Steward the lack of clothing is equated with invisibility, ephemera, and instability. The unsuited are worse than dead, as in Boss Grady's Boys they are "shadows." "I must not speak to shadows," Thomas reminds himself, both for the implications to his waning sanity and the fact that the shadows, as unsutured beings, lack cultural context, and thus are devoid of socially contingent meaning (252). Thomas fears a similar fate for himself. He relates to Annie a remembered passage from
Tom Sawyer: “They are lost in a cave together, two boys, and the poor bit of a greasy candle they have is burning lower and lower, and the demons of the dark are surely approaching. [. . . ] I feel I know that cave” (270).

Even Thomas’ being stripped near the beginning of the play, like Lear’s own disrobing in the storm, is pathetic both for the spectacle of a nude body that cannot be fetishized for its exposition of beauty and youth and the worrisome prospect that as one unclothed he cannot be observed without being a reminder of how necessary clothing has become to shielding humanity from the scent of mortality (242). Unattended, unclothed, and lacking the bravery of finery and the finery of bravery, the “bare forked animal” shivers in the cold of an all-seeing gaze that sees every wart and imperfection. But as Thomas’ refusal of Patrick’s shoes demonstrates, neither is complete clothing in the raiment of national identity acceptable either; the totality of the fabrication constricting the wearer to the point of social suffocation. The body, therefore, is the site where nationalist identity must constantly be negotiated, and thus the body thereby becomes the source of ongoing dialogue between the individual and the community; but it is not a battleground as much as it is a field of discourse. Yet no matter how the dialogue is conducted over the site of the body, at no time can the body be revealed, for to do so would expose the fragility of mortality, the thinness of the barrier—of clothing—between warmth and destitution, and also of the ephemeral nature of the discourse itself.

The point here is not that identity creation is inherently debilitating, or that the artifice of manufacture is somehow inferior to a more “authentic” form of identity creation. Instead, what Thomas Dunne provokes by his refusal to wear shoes is an
acknowledgment that the individual's participation in the identity dialogue is potent but also contingent, as well as the tailor's participation. He accepts that he lives in the material world in the same way he accepts that he lives in the Collins-less Ireland of de Valera. He accepts that his loyalty to king and crown was transformed into treason at the formation of the Republic. He even accepts, in a moment of clarity, that the behavior leading to his incarceration—the violent tantrum with his sword—was intolerable by community standards. What he cannot accept, however, is the invalidation of his feelings for his dead son and distant daughters. The problem with the totalizing Irish identity he has long refused to wear is that it demands he denigrate his son's death in the Great War and allow his daughter's rejection of him on the grounds that he was not authentically Irish.

**DARNING THE IDENTITY: EVIDENCES AND RECONCILIATION**

Thomas seeks reconciliation or restitching of his past and present in order to restore himself to a state of subjective equilibrium. There must be a mechanism to rejoin a sense of self to the individual, to re-fuse Thomas with "Thomas," to reunite the dead with what he calls "the hearths and niches of their youth." "It's a cold wind that blows without forgiveness," he reminds himself (282). To Smith Thomas says, "No man is beyond redemption," and agrees: "If men were beyond redemption, Thomas, what would we do in Ireland for Presidents?" (291) In a moment of meditation he asks an unseen presence first for "starch" and "spit" for his imagined uniform, until realizes the emptiness of clothes. Recalling the textiles of the past would be to put new wine in old bottles, and the resulting disconnect would enforce greater harm than good. He then asks for his children, but
rejects that solution because he desires a return of his children as children, not grown up adults. Their youth and his authority over them are irreparably gone. Next he prays for the restitution of British rule, the ceremony and pomp, but that too he has to accept is gone. Furthermore, he suspects that historical progress, like entropy, wastes far too much energy to reverse. He briefly turns to the solace of music, "the song in the mouth of the beggar" and "the rat-tat-tat of the tattoo," but even those comforts cannot return for him. Music is nostalgia invoking sadness and absence. Finally, not even the vastness of nature has the resources to repair his sundered individuality. All he has left are memories bracketed by the recollection of candlelight to guide him like Diogenes through the ruins of his remaining life.

Ironically, it is this candlelight that proves the link necessary to recombine Thomas' past, present, and future in a way that satisfies the broader nationalist community imperative and also preserves his power to signify his memories and history. By the play's conclusion Thomas is able to make peace with the fact that he must wear the suit made for him and also mediate the presence of his past in such a way as to balance out the benefits of homogeneity with the necessity of a detached interior life of history and memory. In doing so he is thus able to reconnect himself to a contingent history and, subsequently, to a mediated form of national identity. Three monologues map out the issues attending this complex reconfiguration and show how ultimately Thomas can literally and figuratively rest from the trauma of being suited for the new Ireland that he has so long resisted. The first two monologues, recollections from his youth and told to the apparition of his son Willie, illustrate the polarizing issues of communal betrayal and forgiveness. The third monologue
recounts an event from his adult years and shows how Thomas’ vision of candlelight allows him to come to a contingent resolution of the dissonance between himself and his community.

In the first story, Thomas recounts how when he was a young boy he discovered a “red fire engine,” a Christmas present from his mother that she had hidden in the hayshed. He takes the toy and plays with it as if it were a decorative skateboard, violently riding across the farmyard and ruining it beyond repair. When his mother discovers what he has done, she rebukes young Thomas by wordlessly shoving the fire engine into a large dunghill. In reprisal he imprisons her prize hen under a “yard-bucket,” leaving her unattended for a week: “the poor hen’s wits had gone astray from hunger and darkness and inertia. Nor did it ever lay eggs again that quickened with chicks” (282). Needless to say, the relationship between son and mother was understandably strained for a long time afterwards.

The Christmas toy story is significant because it comprises the issues that fester under the insoluble issues of Irish identity: the paralysis of social roles and the inescapable cycle of revenge. Portrayed here is the clash of two individuals playing out their predetermined cultural roles. Thomas, as the child whose knowledge of the geography of his farmyard leads him to find the hidden gift, behaves the way his community would expect him to: mischievous, inquisitive, and infantile. His mother, on the other hand, enacts her own role according to communal dictates: she is “maternal” (providing gifts) and “corrective” (punishing a wayward child). Neither is her choice of punishment necessarily outside the bounds of her assigned role; after all, she is merely showing the boy the ad

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result of his treatment of the toy. Neither, however, is Thomas' response beyond the rules of the role he plays; his revenge on the innocent hen is something that anyone would reasonably expect from an annoyed child. The tragedy here is that as mother and son play out their community-dictated roles the collateral damage spreads beyond the confines of their conflict and becomes unnecessarily destructive.

In this anecdote Thomas plays out the cycle of revenge that wracked Ireland in the 1920s and indeed continues to plague contemporary Ireland. Wrongs pile upon wrongs, and the upshot of the process is sterility and insanity, personified in the body of Thomas. Left unchecked such a negative feedback loop eventually consumes the individuals and the community containing them. Especially troubling is that this system contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction, role assignments that although satisfying for the continuance of the community leaves the individuals wounded, bitter, and bent on inflicting the same torments as was administered on them. Understandably, Thomas prefers an alternative to this kind of "suiting."

The second story, the play's concluding monologue, is a narrative about Shep, the family dog who was taken in as a stray, found by Thomas to have killed an ewe on a winter's afternoon. Viewing the carcass, Thomas recognizes it as the family's because "I saw my father's blue sign on the wool" (300). "The loss of an ewe was a disaster [...] there'd be pounds of money gone into her," he tells the apparition of Willie. Knowing that the dog will be killed, the boy Thomas first tries to find it a home, but the neighbors refuse to take into their home a sheep killer. At wit's end, Thomas takes Shep into the forest and hides with him all night in the cold and snow. In the early hours of the
morning, he hears the sound of people closing in, and, realizing the mob headed by his father, Thomas rouses himself to face his father’s anger and his beloved pet’s death. When they meet up, Thomas and his father hardly recognize each other: “It was as if I had never seen him before, never looked at him in his entirety, from head to toe” (301). But the expected retribution from his father does not come. Instead of murderous anger, the father rejoices for the safe return of his son: “And he raised his own face to the brightening sky and praised someone, in a crushed voice, God maybe, for my safety, and stroked my hair.” More surprising, neither is there anger towards Shep, “the dog’s crime was never spoken of, but that he lived till he died.” Thomas supplies his own moral to this story:

And I would call that the mercy of fathers, when the love that lies in them deeply like the glittering face of a well is betrayed by an emergency, and the child sees at last that he is loved, and loved and needed and not to be lived without, and greatly. (301)

In this story Thomas sees a corollary to his own situation. At the play’s beginning he refers to himself as “a dog that won’t work without using his teeth, like a dog under sentence” (240). The parable strikes at the heart of the term “betrayal,” next to “treason” the most insidious epithet thrown about during the turbulent years. The dog has committed an egregious crime that strikes at the family’s economical (political) well being, and by all accounts it should be destroyed. But because young Thomas recognizes Shep as a family member, he cannot bring himself to destroy it, and by staying all night with the dog in the cold he earns his father’s mercy towards himself and the dog. In addition, he is able to re-see his son, to be illuminated by an understanding that his son is merely playing out his own role. Thus in the same way that Patrick Kirwin can say of Fanny Hawke in Prayers of Sherkin, “I’ve been peering out my while life for the familiar face” (99), so can
Thomas' father be said to have found in his young son a level of subjectivity beneath the role-playing, suit-wearing community member.

"Betrayal" thus becomes a moot point because familial ("kind") love reaches out beyond political justice and justifies the errant family member. That Thomas' father is able to overcome the dictates of his community-assigned role because of his willingness to "betray" the intractable dictates of being the "corrector" is a brilliant act of poetic reversal. Thomas deploys the term "betrayal" in a completely different sense in his final speech, showing that inasmuch as love can sometimes harbor deep anger, the reversal should be equally true: that overwhelming anger can be "betrayed" by a parent's love.

It is significant that both the stories involving Thomas' parents involve judicial processes, parents weighing the application of retributive justice against a child, because in the same sense similar kinds of judicial decision-making is enacted between the individual and the nation. Irish culture is seen by the Dunne family as equally retributive, allowing little room for justification, individuality, and "kindness." In this anecdote Thomas sees the hopeful possibility that communal, juridical authority can at a certain point "betray" itself, to reveal in the face of an emergency that "glittering face of a well," which indicates a revelation of the brilliance of interiority. In other words, Thomas is calling for a re-imagination of the community, for a paradigm shift that broadens the borders of Irishness to include him and the members of his fractured family.

Whereas the first story presents the problem and the second suggests what the solution should entail, the third anecdote, a recounting of the birth of his youngest daughter Dolly, gives a more detailed description of how Thomas envisions the new
Ireland to be configured. He describes a moment where he has to leave the house because of the intensity and pain of his wife's labor. Reflecting on his family, Thomas comes to a moment of epiphany:

It was a moment in your life when daily things pass away from you, when all your concerns seem to vanish, and you are allowed by God a little space of clarity and grace. When you see that God himself is in your wife and in your children, and they hold in trust for you your own measure of goodness. And in the manner of your treatment of them lies your own salvation. I went back to the house with a light heart, a simpler man than the one who had set out. (274)

The irony of this realization is that upon his return Dolly has been born but his wife Cissy is dead, his endowment of a perspective into interiority accompanied by gain of future and loss of past. In referencing "God" in his wife and children, Thomas is both regressing to the vocabulary of religion to reify the ineffable quality of interior life as well as redefining the terms under which he expresses his attempt to re-imagine his community. Moreover, in accepting that "in the manner of your treatment of them lies your own salvation," Thomas is calling for a reassessment of the kind of retributive justice he characterizes so negatively in his previous anecdotes. Again, in using the term "salvation" Thomas borrows from the language of religion to name the state of continuance he believes national identity should ensure. The complexities of exteriority are manageable if underlying it is the simplicity of the interiority, subtly interfacing and constantly interacting with the outward, political, judicial world. Thomas is therefore looking towards a more complex form of Irishness that is, oddly enough, simpler in its construction than the one hastily cobbled for him by the institutions guarding him.
Like the story of Shep, the account of Dolly's birth contains a moment of vision where an individual catches sight of the complexity of interiority, the facile nature of exterior identity construction, and is moved from that moment to re-vision the nature of the processes governing the present community. Thomas' revelation is akin to Fanny Hawke's: he acknowledges that at a certain point the confines of social homogeneity must enable an elasticity that permits the previous identity to be superceded by a more refined social solidarity that takes into account the needs of an evolving geopolitical environment.

Thomas concludes the narration of his vision: "And that was just as the need for candlelight fails, and the early riser needs no candle for his task" (275). Candlelight, as presented in Prayers of Sherkin, is equated with children, and in The Steward of Christendom Thomas expresses his belief that in his descendants are the requisite restitching of past and present that will help him overcome his subjective decline: "My two bonny grandsons would cure me" (282). The terror of his condition is that he must first submit to being "re-suited" by Mrs. O'Dea at the behest of the "institution" before he will be allowed to see his family, but in being contained in the new identity he may not be recognizable, either to himself or others. His rejection of the coffin shoes therefore serves as his small rejection of total re-suiting in an effort to complete his own self-structuring.

The point of contact between past and future, then, comes in the moment of re-imagination, where the need for candlelight, that is, the pressing need for continuance through offspring, is at last recognized to be the by-product of an even greater need to continually view the position of the interior life as co-equal and not subordinate to the exterior. Under that configuration the nation becomes a postnation, the borders of
community retain their power to preserve continuance while simultaneously permitting the individuals therein widest subjective latitude.
NOTES

Barry’s use of the esoteric word “marge” in favor of the more commonplace “margin” is rich with implications. Its earliest usage relates to the border between land and ocean or bankside and river. For example, Spenser in The Faerie Queene (1596) writes of a “flowrie marge/ On a fresh streame I with that Elfe did play” (4.8.61), and Michael Drayton in his lugubriously written Poly-Olbion, or a Chorographicall Description of Great Britain (1612) makes mention of land situated near “mighty Neptune’s marge” (2.25). Later poets followed suit, most notably Wordsworth in the 1805 Prelude (“the western marge of Thurston-mere” [7.459]) and Matthew Arnold, who praised “the ivy-wreath’d marge” of a cup in “Strayed Revellers” (1849). Later, “marge” comes to refer to the more text-based notion of a margin (Tennyson in Vivien [1859] mentions a page of a book that has “an ample marge” [519]). Alternately, but perhaps less probable, “marge” may also be defined as a colloquialism for “margarine.” Joyce employs the term in Ulysses (1922)—“Potatoes and marge, marge and potatoes” (150)—as well as numerous times in Finnegans Wake (1939). Fanny Hawke could thus be dually commenting on the strangeness of their marginal position as well as the peculiarity of local condiments to appropriately season the surroundings to any recognizable taste. The ramifications of “marge” for Irish literature remain as yet fully untapped.

See the discussion of Fanon and Bhabha in chapter three. In The Location of Culture Bhabha speaks of “the people of the pagus—colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities—wandering peoples who will not be contained within the Heim of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation” (164). In explicating the unheimlich as those outside the mainstream discourse of national identity, Bhabha overlooks the possibility that the Heim could be as much a transitory function as it is clearly a static quantity. It is thus a Heimlich maneuver of sorts to reposition what is generally accepted as a fixed “state” into a constantly redefined sense of stability realized in various iterations achieved through flux. Fanny Hawke and the Sherkin community are an unusual twist on the unheimlich theme because they are voluntary exiles who are never quite fully detached from the Heim in order to fully qualify themselves as the sort of detached, anthropomorphized metaphors of the un-homed that Bhabha expertly analyzes. The fact that even someone like Eoghan, who by most definition is Irish, delights in defining himself a foreigner in his own “land” implies that the Sherkin community a site of iterative un-homing; that is, it creates homes within homes and exile communities within exile communities, and homes in exiles and vice versa. It is as if Sherkin is a hall of mirrors, forever reflecting subjectivity in and out of a stable setting. Thomas Dunne in The Steward of Christendom makes another interesting case study because he is an alien in his own home; but in contrast to the Sherkin community,
the terms of his Heim have been renegotiated out from under him, and that which was once familiar is made strange only because his national community tells him that he is strange to them. Moreover, although he is “fixed” in his hospital room, he is unheimlich in the sense that he ranges freely within his mind and in the shifting of his own temporality. Although it is true that Thomas is slowly becoming unhinged mentally and physically, it is more accurate to apply notions of unheimlich to his perceptions rather than his reality. Of course, unheimlich also carries connotation of “other,” and in this sense Thomas Dunne is again a fascinating case study because he has always lived a tenuous existence between being the subject and the object of the Irish nationalist identity discourse.

A xenolith is a term taken from geology and refers to traces of one kind of rock found inside another. The most common case is a chunk of sedimentary rock found in a bed of igneous rock, or sedimentary or igneous rock found within metamorphic rock. A xenolith is often the result of a portion of rock incompletely transformed by heat or pressure. In this case, the nuns represent a pocket of untransformed fused time in the midst of geological-like pressure (chronological pressure, perhaps) to convert to homogenous time.

The “prayers” of the title can refer to both the “invocations” of Sherkin and also the community members themselves, since they are “prayers” in the sense that they pray. That the individuals are synonymous, indeed actuated, by their actions is a notion consonant with Stuart Hall’s insistence that identity is a function of performance.

Marvin Carlson in Theories of the Theatre (1993) discusses the problems of translating hamartia. There are two competing theories for defining this term from Aristotle’s Poetics: tragedy as a result of a moral flaw in the individual, the so-called “fatal flaw,” and tragedy as “an error in judgment or a mistaken assumption” (19). Carlson notes that traditionally the preferred reading of hamartia has been the “fatal flaw” (translators of the Gospel of John have often rendered hamartia as “sin”). The point of difference between these two terms is how one views an individual’s capacity for moral agency. If hamartia stems from a faulty character, then a given person is destined to commit a preordained set of catastrophic deeds. If, on the other hand, hamartia is an error in judgment, then tragedy occurs due to miscalculation, misrepresentation, or miscommunication. In relation to Thomas Dunne in The Steward of Christendom, if his tragic condition is due to a fatal flaw, then it must be argued that his loyalty to the British Empire was somehow inherently wrong. However, to impose such a reading on his service requires convicting him of wrongheadedness ex post facto—since his service is “wrong” only after the British leave—and also asserting that the end of British occupation was pre-ordained. According to the theories outlined at the beginning of this dissertation, neither of these premises is acceptable. Conversely, if Thomas’ condition is attributed to an error in judgment, then his situation is more clearly defined. He has erred in believing that the world as he had known it would continue to function, and when it crumbles under him he refuses to acknowledge the precariousness of
his situation, choosing instead to cling onto the vanished values of a long past Victorian worldview.

6 Joan Fitzpatrick Dean’s review is typical. She writes, “Like Lear, Dunne devotes himself to maintaining power and order but now finds himself powerless, teetering on insanity, haunted by the past” (235). She adds that Barry “finds in Shakespeare a rich, highly allusive counterpoint for a modern, distinctively Irish story” (235). Barry’s two favorite works happen to be the *Aeneid* and *King Lear* (Meany 16). (His most recent novel is *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, a variation on the themes of the *Aeneid* and a story of exile, identity, and forgiveness.) Emile-Jean Dumay also notes the connection between *The Steward* and *King Lear*, observing that Thomas Dunne is “naked as King Lear on his land swept by the winds of insanity” (67). Dumay also cites a critic who writes, “*Steward* tells so lyrical a ‘Lear’-like tale [sic] that it has immediately placed Barry among the top rank of his nation’s dramatists.” This quotation, however, is uncited. Significantly, Dumay prefers to connect Thomas Dunne not with Lear himself but with Edgar’s doppelganger “Poor Tom.” See also Fintan O’Toole’s “An Unaccommodated Man” in the 9 May 1995 *Irish Times.*
META-THEATRICAL OF THE DREAM WORLD

Listen
There ain’t much of a difference
between a bridge and a wall.
Without me right in the middle, babe
you would be nothing at all.

“Tear Me Down,” Hedwig and the Angry Inch

It is interesting that none of the main protagonists of any of the four plays, Boss Grady’s Boys, Our Lady of Sligo, Prayers of Sherkin, or The Steward of Christendom, refuses or rejects Irishness. They insist on claiming Irishness for themselves and those closest to them, despite its instabilities and contradictions. For reasons as different as the characters themselves, the Grady boys, Mai Kirwin, Fanny Hawke, and Thomas Dunne find value in the suturing their identities to a distinctive cultural formation, even as that formation seems designed perpetually to exclude them. Such a conclusive pattern may be regarded as a blind spot on the part of Barry, for it could be interpreted to mean that the author himself is incapable of envisioning a world without debilitation, reductive Irishness, that in
fact he cannot resist the siren song of unambiguous identity and thus he condemns his characters to re-inscribe the errors of the past within their own subjective selves.

Not surprisingly, postnationalism is able to process this proclivity to desire a nationalist identity—although postnationalism would suggest that Barry's strategy is, of course, more postnationalist than nationalist. That is, although the central characters of his plays indeed crave union with the notion of Irishness, they aim for a self-imagined, self-defined Irishness. Such a claim on identity does not initially depend on the ratification of some larger institution, nor does it depend, at least at the outset, on external verification. That is, whereas nationalism depends on certain markers set down by the institutions of the nation-state—that is, "top-down"—postnationalism evens out that causality by suggesting that "top" and "down" possess equal force in redefining the terms of one's identification with a culture, a nation, and a state. In terms of Sebastian Barry's plays, this suggests that the institutions that govern identity respond to the re-imagination of identity that is conducted on the individual level, and in fact something akin to this occurs at the conclusion of *The Steward of Christendom*.

Smith, the de facto representative of the institution dictating Irish identity, helps Thomas read a letter sent from the Western Front by his deceased son Willie. By this point the venomous atmosphere between the two adversaries has evaporated, especially when Smith confesses that he too lost a first cousin in World War I. The staggering loss he can only describe in terms of absence: "A lot of men went out," he says, eliding the fact that few came back (291). At that moment Smith acknowledges that individual loss is collective loss, and he legitimizes, perhaps unawares, Thomas' claim to Irishness at the
moment that Thomas is preparing to put on the suit made for him. Upon Thomas’ insistence, and perhaps encouraged by the sharing of private grief, Smith reads the letter aloud. “It’s an historical document,” Smith opines, to which Thomas chuckles, “Oh aye. Historical” (292).

What is significant here is not so much the content of the letter, although it contains a moving description of the desolation visited upon the vasty fields of France, but the fact that in speaking Willie’s words Smith in essence becomes Thomas’ son. “I have not seen the enemy,” Willie notes, telling his father that the only way he and his comrades can tell that German soldiers are in the far trenches is because they sing a shared repertoire of “risky” songs. By extension Smith as well has not seen the enemy; although he mercilessly hounds Thomas, it becomes clear that Thomas is not the enemy, only the shadow of the things Smith fears. In observing that the wastelands were once “farms, houses and farms and grass and stock,” Smith describes both the battlefields on the Continent and the destructions that followed the Irish civil war that had yet to be completely healed. When he reads, “I know you are in the front line there, Papa, so keep yourself safe for my return, when Maud will cook the fatted calf” (293), Smith momentarily inverts the power relationship he has with Thomas: Thomas becomes the soldier on the front line and Smith assumes the role of the prodigal son, longing for redemption and the comforts of home.

When Willie concludes, “in my dreams you comfort me, and keep my spirits lifted”—a line that Thomas repeats—Smith invokes nothing less than the powerful image of the dreaming back that dominates Irish literature from the aídings (or dream visions) to
Yeats' metaphysics to *Finnegans Wake*. The dream-time, analogous to Bhabha's "beyond," is the supra-temporal space where the rules of diurnal rationality give way to the nebulous play of transgressed boundaries, inchoate signifiers loosed from signifieds, and language run amok. This is the interstitial space wherein the Irishness that Smith represents and the Irishness that Thomas attempts to construct come in contact, synthesize, and give a momentary vision of what a postnationalist identity might look like (Bhabha: "to touch the future on its hither side"). Moreover, as Bhabha notes, the "beyond" acts simultaneously as a bridge and a newly synthesized locus; it is a crossover point emerging from the melded Irishness of Smith and Dunne. Homogenous, empty time is momentarily suspended as the fused, simultaneous time of Smith-reading-Willie enunciates what Bhabha refers to as "the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (9).

Furthermore, in the instant that Smith reads the letter he enacts a meta-theatrical moment; Smith the actor reading lines penned by Willie to the audience of Thomas is an event bounded within the confines of an actor portraying Smith reading a letter to an actor portraying Dunne to an audience in a theatre or reading the text. The effect of this meta-theatricality is to draw attention to the fact that subjectivity is, as Hall suggests, performance, and moreover that identity as an imagined quantity can be thus re-imagined within the theatrical sphere. Hence, theatricality is a re-engagement with history, as it in essence re-tells a historical event in a discrete, confined arena, the theatrical space.

Similar meta-theatrical scenarios appear in *Boss Grady's Boys*, *Our Lady of Sligo*, and *Prayers of Sherkin* and likewise indicate moments of temporal, subjective overlap that
attempt to give voice to emergent forms of Irishness. For Mick and Josey Grady, such
instances occur during their dreams and in their daily visions, but especially when they re-
enact their cowboys-and-Indians vignettes. For Mai Kirwin meta-theatricality appears
whenever she retrieves objects from her box of memories, the artifacts therein becoming
scripts from which she can re-constitute the emotional moments from her past. For Fanny
Hawke, the epiphany of Matt Purdy is a meta-theatrical incident because it performs a
"modern-dress" version of the celestial visitations recorded in Revelation.

What differentiates the experiences of Thomas Dunne and Fanny Hawke from the
Grady brothers and Mai Kirwin is that the moments in Steward and Prayers of Sherkin are
hermeneutical. Peter Brook, in The Empty Space (1968), points out that theatre at its most
essential requires an actor (performer), an audience (non-performer), and a delineated
space for the two to meet (1). Brook sees no implied hierarchy in this arrangement because
in his mind the theatrical moment invokes a communicative event that courses between
the two parties and not unidirectionally from performer to audience. In other words,
Brooks suggests that theatricality, and by extension meta-theatricality, cannot occur in a
vacuum because theatre involves a transfer of information. From this perspective the
performer is the ἄγγελος ("agkelos," from which is derived "angel") or messenger, and it is
thus essential for this transfer to occur, and such moments do occur in The Steward of
Christendom and Prayers of Sherkin.

However, the meta-theatrical moments of Boss Grady's Boys and Our Lady of Sligo are
solipsistic, completely devoid of the hermeneutical. True, Boss Grady's Boys is suffused with
the "intrusive" moments of family, history, cinema, and the Girl (and each "intruder"
could be considered "agkelic" in its own right, but each one of these occurrences lacks the crucial transfer of information and the subsequent subjective metamorphosis. It is possible to regard the Gradys as a community of two their own self-contained performer/audience configuration; and thus they produce and verify enough of an identity between them to sustain subjective equilibrium. However, it is telling that at least Mick desires to connect subjectively beyond the perimeter of his homestead. Furthermore, *Boss Grady's Boys* concludes with the Grady brothers waiting for the arrival of a cavalry that, at least within the scope of the play's action, does not appear. The same shortfall can be said of Mai Kirwin's meta-theatricality. From her collections of memorabilia Mai is able to summon visions of her past in an attempt to theatricalize and give order to her subjective chaos. The appearance of her father and the girl in the blue dress, invoked by the text of "textile" (that is, her memory of her father's clothes and hat and Cissie's childhood clothes), do not so much transfer information about subjectivity as they reinforce Mai's withdrawal into her self and her past. In this instance meta-theatricality is not a bridge but a narcotic, and *Our Lady of Sligo* concludes with a palliative retreat rather than a transfer.

Regardless of the outcome of these meta-theatrical moments, it is a significant feature that they do not last long. Typical of the evanescent nature of meta-theatricality is the aforementioned exchange from *The Steward of Christendom*, when at the conclusion of the reading Smith proclaims the letter "a memento," calls Thomas a "good man," and then he locks the door behind him after he leaves. All the former power structures return: Smith is the man with the key, Thomas is the inmate; Smith dictates the terms of the suit, Thomas must wear it; Smith returns to his extra-asylum world of costume parties, Thomas

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returns to his memories. The difference, however, is that now Thomas "is" a good man in the sense that the guardian institution, embodied in Smith, has proclaimed him such. The overlapping of Smith/Willie has given the institution leave to budge, to allow Thomas the requisite space he needs to articulate his conception of Irishness. He can thus wear the suit with the hidden yellow thread and dream of the reconciliation of himself, the family dog, and his father as Willie sings him to sleep.

The similar scenes of détente found in Barry's other plays reinforce the notion that a re-imagined Irishness is a result of incursions by the dream world into the waking world. These are the moments of re-imagining to which Benedict Anderson refers when he calls for social solidarities to think themselves into social formations that best address the imperatives of their contemporaneous time. As Barry's characters re-imagine themselves they coax Irishness into an evermore-waking world that arrives "just as the need for candlelight fails."
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