

***Envoy: A Review of Literature & Art and Post-War Irish Culture***

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## **Declaration**

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Conor Linnie

## Summary

This thesis examines the Irish literary and visual art magazine *Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art* (1949-1951). It establishes the magazine as a key post-war site of transnational aspiration and activity at the beginning of a period of transition in Irish society toward greater international involvement and integration. The thesis argues that *Envoy* significantly contributed to the development of a range of cross-border, archipelagic, continental, and transatlantic connections and networks that variously stimulated, challenged, and ultimately expanded the dimensions of Irish cultural discourse and production. The mid-twentieth century has been conventionally circumscribed by a narrative of stasis, stagnation, and insularity in the field of Irish Studies, with this generalised view sanctioning the lack of serious academic engagement with the period to date. My study challenges this critical commonplace, establishing the immediate post-war years in particular as a decisive moment when Irish literary and artistic life was becoming exposed in new ways to a range of international developments and influences. In line with methodological practices established with the rise of periodical studies over recent decades, the transnational perspective adopted by the thesis is governed by a historicizing and materialist approach that looks to embed *Envoy* in a ‘thick’ description of the contexts and complexes of its time. *Envoy* typically portrayed itself in autonomous terms as a magazine exclusively concerned with and devoted to literature and art. However, this study reveals the extent to which the magazine’s cultural project was shaped by the social, political, and economic contexts of the period. Guiding this materialist approach is the extensive archival research that underpins the thesis, drawing from a range of public and private archives across Ireland, Britain, North America, and Canada. My interdisciplinary focus encompasses the range of genres in *Envoy*, with specific attention to the two major editorial preoccupations of the magazine: poetry and visual art. The generic diversity of the magazine’s external relations similarly establishes the importance of an



eclectic range of secondary textual sources to the study, including non-fictional, journalistic, and commercial sources, combined with the impact of different media such as radio. Part one of the thesis considers the magazine in the marketplace. Chapter one establishes the significance of *Envoy*'s association with an embattled international tradition of 'little magazines' in bolstering its editorial voice in the face of material adversity and in encouraging its receptivity to non-commercial overseas writers hitherto obscured by the conservative conventions of the Irish publishing scene. Chapters two and three situate the magazine at two key transnational intersections of art and commerce in post-war Dublin, the city's rising commercial gallery trade and its developing status as a cultural tourist destination, revealing the extent to which these market influences impacted upon the magazine's cultural project. Part two shifts its material focus to *Envoy*'s central conflict with institutionalised cultural nationalism in poetry and visual art. Chapter four examines the magazine's adversarial relationship with neo-revivalism and its privileged institutional position in mid-century literary society, while chapter five considers the extent to which the magazine's transnationalism encouraged the development of coherent aesthetic and ideological responses to the typically restrictive terms governing official cultural discourse in these years. Chapter six assesses the contribution of *Envoy*'s art writing to the radical transformations in Irish art practice and promotion during the 1940s along new independent and internationalising lines.

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## Introduction

‘The windows had been flung open and, intellectually speaking, people were breathing again.’<sup>1</sup> John Ryan’s feeling of optimism as a twenty-five year old aspiring painter in post-war Dublin registered the emergent possibilities of a newly expanded cultural domain. Ryan was the son of Tipperary-born parents Séamus and Agnes Ryan, whose prosperous Dublin chain of cafés, restaurants, and bakeries, the Monument Creameries, had established them as one of the city’s most prominent commercial families by the 1930s. Agnes had herself harboured ambitions of working as an illustrator in her youth and encouraged her son to take classes at the National College of Art.<sup>2</sup> It was during the war years when Ryan became immersed in the eclectic ‘company of writers, musicians, poets, artists or, lacking these avocations, the bizarre, the unorthodox or the innocent visionary’ that gathered around the apartment rooms on the top floor of the Monument Café at no. 39 Grafton Street.<sup>3</sup> These rooms would eventually be used as the offices for his first literary venture, as Ryan recalls, ‘I got this idea that what was badly needed was a magazine in which we could all put all our thoughts about art, literature, poetry, and all that sort of business’.<sup>4</sup> The youthful earnestness with which this magazine, *Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art*, would launch in December 1949 with the intention to ‘not simply occupy the vacant structure which its predecessors have left behind, but build a new one; not close an epoch of emptiness but inaugurate a new one of life and promise’ testified to the enlivening inchoate atmosphere of the immediate post-war years, whereby independent cultural activity was quickened by significant changes in the

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<sup>1</sup> John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (New York: Taplinger, 1975), p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> John Ryan, ‘An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen’, *The Journal of Irish Literature*, vol. 27, no. 1 (January 1988), 5-14 (p. 6).

<sup>3</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 61

<sup>4</sup> Ryan, ‘An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen’, p. 7.

social and political life of the country and the broader prospect of new involvement in a recovering international sphere.<sup>5</sup>

Frank Shovlin has drawn association between the ‘belief in youth and a new order’ that would imbue the nascent editorial identity of Ryan’s magazine with the time and context of its launching in 1949 at a ‘key moment in the nation’s political metamorphoses’.<sup>6</sup> The formal establishment of Ireland as a republic and consequent departure from the British Commonwealth in 1949 followed in the wake of what Diarmaid Ferriter has described as the ‘the ultimate expression of Irish independence’ during the Second World War with the state’s commitment to a policy of neutrality, representing both a defiant expression of sovereignty against the demands of its former colonial ruler and in a wider international context as a small European nation determined to maintain its autonomy within a rapidly intensifying theatre of war.<sup>7</sup> Yet, if these combined events can be said to have signalled the nationalist ‘apotheosis’ of the post-Independence decades, they in fact occurred at the outset of a broader period of European integration that would ultimately render untenable the cornerstone protectionist policies upon which this apotheosis had been conceived and achieved.<sup>8</sup> For Terence Brown, it was, paradoxically, the cohesive ‘emotional experience of neutrality’ and the solidifying sense of national identity it ascribed to the twenty-six counties of the Free State that actually made possible and initiated this ideological transition over the following decades.<sup>9</sup> ‘The twenty-six counties had become an entity in a new way in those years, one that its citizens had been prepared to defend in arms’, Brown writes:

The period 1939-45 had given Irish men and women to understand that it was possible for the twenty six counties of Ireland to be a nation-state without the distinguishing marks of language and a hermetically sealed national culture. In such knowledge was the ground

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<sup>5</sup> John Ryan, Valentin Iremonger, J. K. Hillman, ‘A Foreword to Vol. I. Number I’, *Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949) 7-8 (p. 7).

<sup>6</sup> Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923-1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 135; p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2004), p. 388.

<sup>8</sup> Joe Cleary, ‘Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology’, in *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2006), pp. 156-177 (p. 157).

<sup>9</sup> Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, 2nd edn. (London: Harper Perennial, 2004; first published Fontana, 1981), p. 204.

prepared for a determined impulse to adapt to developments in the contemporary world to take root and flourish.<sup>10</sup>

The progression towards such adaption in the post-war period was, of course, seriously retarded by the social and economic malaise that had come to characterise mid-twentieth-century Irish life, and compounded further by what Brown identifies as the marked ‘hesitancy and uncertainty’ that dogged governmental policy and reform in these years.<sup>11</sup> The first decades of independence had been largely directed by a policy of autarkic development that was most vigorously pursued by Éamon de Valera’s Fianna Fáil government from the 1930s onwards. Fianna Fáil’s economic nationalism was founded upon the erection and maintenance of high-tariff walls with the intention of establishing national self-sufficiency through the growth of native industries and the encouragement of private investment. While critics such as Joe Cleary have importantly cautioned against the tendency towards ‘caricatured’ retrospective evaluations of this policy as merely ‘a kind of sulkily puritanical retreat from the world’, the extent to which it had ultimately mired Irish society in economic stagnation by the 1950s confirmed ‘the ignominious failure of this particular modernization project’.<sup>12</sup> The most damning statistics were related to Ireland’s mass-emigration crisis over these decades, with four out of every five children born in Ireland between 1931 and 1941 emigrating in the 1950s, and more than a half a million people leaving the country between 1945 and 1960.<sup>13</sup>

State protectionism combined with the supreme authority of the Catholic Church over what represented a homogenously Catholic and predominantly rural people to condition a mid-century society that was at root restrictive and conservative. What Roy Foster has termed

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>12</sup> Cleary makes the valuable point that Fianna Fáil’s protectionist policies were not merely exclusive to the Irish experience but formed part of broader international economic trends in these years, observing that the strategy of ‘national political and economic self-sufficiency was a perfectly orthodox one in the period between the world wars. Attempts to realize different versions of that ideal were made in many places in the last century from the United States to the Soviet Union, as well as in many emergent postcolonial states such as India’. Cleary, ‘Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology’, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 379.

the prevailing ‘constricting pattern’ of Irish life in these years weighed most heavily upon writers in the form of a draconian censorship policy.<sup>14</sup> Appointed in 1930, the Irish Censorship Board reached peak levels of banning in the late 1940s and early 1950s in spite of mounting opposition, with one thousand books and eighty periodicals prohibited alone in 1954.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, *Envoy* may have proclaimed itself in editorials as the ‘the first organ of expression in this country which is free, in which no writer’s say is twisted or sub-edited to fit any procrustean bed’, however, Ryan’s private literary correspondence reveal his more anxious concerns in relation to the publishing of potentially obscene material.<sup>16</sup> ‘As regards the obscenities, it is rather difficult for us to know, down here, just where we stand in regard to the censors’, he wrote to one prospective contributor to the magazine in December 1949, ‘and for the moment, at any rate, we are threading [*sic*] gently in this respect’, before advising on keeping to ‘a minimum of balls, homos, and erections’.<sup>17</sup> What compounded the sense of restriction experienced by writers and artists in these decades was the pressure to conform to and aspire toward inherited essentialist conceptions of Irishness and national identity. De Valera’s nationalist vision of a frugal, self-sufficient, rural Irish people had resulted in the sanitisation and incorporation into the conservative state apparatus of the radical legacy of the Irish Literary Revival. Gregory Castle has examined how the elevation of literature and art as a transformative force in Irish society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries testified to the vitalising energy of an ‘ethnographic imagination’ that was both culturally redemptive and creatively enabling, through which the loosely associated groups of writers, artists, activists, and organisations that became identified with the Revival movement ‘strove to relocate Irish folk culture in an Irish context and to create new, affirmative, and liberatory

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<sup>14</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin Books, 1989; first published Allen Lane 1988), p. 577.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Adams, *Censorship: the Irish experience* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1968), p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 14 (January 1951), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> John Ryan to Gerard Keenan, 13 December 1949, Carbondale (IL), Southern Illinois University, Morris Library, Special Collections Research Centre, *Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art Records*, 1/4/MSS 043, Coll. 43/7/4.



anthropological fictions of their own'.<sup>18</sup> However, what had in this earlier period of revolutionary ferment and upheaval represented 'an activist, institution-building, reasonably broad-based counter-hegemonic cultural movement affiliated to an insurgent Irish nationalism', was by the mid-1920s 'already being assimilated into the institutional cortex of the new Free State'.<sup>19</sup> While for a poet such as W.B. Yeats the mining of the native imaginative resources of the country, its folktales, fairy lore, and legends, empowered the declarative force and communalising sweep of his early collections in proclaiming both to 'Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways' and to prophetically illuminate 'the dim coming times', the transition of this veneration of folk culture by the mid-twentieth century into institutional channels saw it come to underpin and sanction the prevailing conservative state ideology.<sup>20</sup> 'What had once been the dynamo of the imagination', David Cairns and Shaun Richards note, 'was now becoming the brake on its development as what was essentially a literary trope became a cornerstone of cultural and economic policy'.<sup>21</sup>

It would not be until the late 1950s and 60s and the remarkable 'economic *volte face*' in Irish politics with the launching of the First Programme for Economic Expansion when the protectionist policies that had characterised the foundational decades of the state began to radically change.<sup>22</sup> The new Taoiseach Séan Lemass under the guidance of Department of Finance secretary T.K. Whitaker worked to open up the Irish economy to foreign investment and European integration in a manner that would eventually lead to Ireland joining the European Economic Community in 1973 and the establishment of new free-trade agreements

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<sup>18</sup> Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1; p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Joe Cleary, 'This Thing of Darkness: Conjectures on Irish Naturalism' in *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland*, pp. 85-137 (p. 107).

<sup>20</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', from *The Rose* (1893), in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. by Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 100-101 (p. 101); W.B. Yeats, 'To Ireland in the Coming Times', *Ibid.*, pp. 137-139 (p. 139).

<sup>21</sup> David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 133.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 202.

with Britain. Such epochal societal transformations remained only a distant possibility in the immediate post-war period. However, that these earlier formative years could nonetheless be quickened by a sense of ‘a rapidly changing Ireland’ and the prospect of a nation becoming ‘part of a broader European community’ for young men such as John Ryan testified to the significant national political volatility of the time.<sup>23</sup> The general election of February 1948 marked a landmark occasion in the political life of the state, with the poor performance of Fianna Fáil resulting in the failure to secure a majority vote after sixteen years in office. Taking its place was an interparty government led by John A. Costello comprised of an eclectic representation of parties from all shades of the political spectrum and appointing new dynamic ministers to office such as Clann na Poblachta’s Seán MacBride and Dr Noël Browne.<sup>24</sup> These national developments were joined by the major international event of Ireland’s application to the United States government for Marshall Aid and subsequent entry into the European Recovery Programme in 1947. Though initiated by de Valera, it was as Bernadette Whelan notes under the direction of the Costello-led interparty government ‘that Irish involvement in the Marshall Plan unfolded’, with the ERP ultimately facilitating the state’s expenditure of over \$140 million in counterpart loan and grant funds in the late 1940s and early 50s.<sup>25</sup> As F.S.L Lyons has observed, the integration of Ireland into the Marshall Plan and membership of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation saw the new republic become ‘inexorably caught up in the machinery of European economic reconstruction’.<sup>26</sup> The new comparative relation of Irish society within this European economic sphere was both ‘a chastening and exhilarating experience’, Lyons describes, with the OEEC reports revealing the dire state of the national economy compounded by levels of productivity and efficiency that were among the lowest in Europe, while at the same time providing the prospect of the injection of capital and greater integration that might begin to

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<sup>23</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 299.

<sup>25</sup> Bernadette Whelan, *Ireland and the Marshall Plan, 1947-1957* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana Press, 1985; first published Fontana, 1963), p. 589.

ameliorate these conditions.<sup>27</sup> It was, in many ways, this simultaneous experience of depression and expectation that aligned the Irish experience with the broader atmosphere of the recovering post-war world, what Tony Judt has characterised as a global society pitched between ‘the sheer scale of the European calamity’ and the ‘new opportunities’ that the reconstruction process and a vastly refiguring economic landscape would initiate.<sup>28</sup> Ireland’s assimilation into the European Recovery Programme in these years saw it become in this way part of the turbulent dualities of the ‘historical moment’, whereby national political volatility was set against the wider international backdrop of ‘a world rebuilding itself after total war and veering between austerity and consumerism, grim fatalism and giddy optimism’.<sup>29</sup>

In his foreword to the 1987 reissue of Ryan’s memoir of mid-twentieth-century cultural life in Dublin, *Remembering How We Stood*, J.P. Donleavy captures the oscillating emotional complex of the immediate post-war years, where the apprehension of the ‘hopeless present’ was experienced alongside a new ‘sense of carelessness’ amidst the ‘celebratory air’ of the thronged public houses in the city.<sup>30</sup> It was in this heightened atmosphere that Ryan set upon launching a new literary magazine. ‘The best thing I really did was when I formed the team at the beginning’, he has recalled, and in choosing Valentin Iremonger and James Hillman as his associates he was equipping *Envoy*’s editorial board with two figures who respectively encapsulated the emergent energies of 1940s Irish cultural life and the invigorating potential of new foreign arrivals to the post-war city with the relaxation of wartime travel restrictions.<sup>31</sup> Iremonger had been involved from his early twenties in Dublin’s

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 590.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005), p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Gerald Dawe and Darryl Jones, and Nora Pelizzari, ‘Introduction’, in *Beautiful Strangers: Ireland and the World of the 1950s*, ed. by Gerald Dawe, Darryl Jones, and Nora Pelizzari (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 1-6 (p. 4).

<sup>30</sup> J.P. Donleavy, ‘Foreword’, in John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1987; first published Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp. vii-xi (p. vii).

<sup>31</sup> Ryan, ‘An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen’, p. 8. Michael Heron joined the magazine as associate editor from issue number thirteen, while Owen Quinn also joined from issue number sixteen.

nascent ‘little theatre movement’ through his association with the New Theatre Group.<sup>32</sup> Centred around a small group of professional and amateur dramatists who based themselves in various ‘improvised’ spaces on Charlemont Road, Rutland Place, and Baggot Street, the NTG exemplified the ‘dynamic and multifarious theatrical activity’ in Dublin throughout this time, blending artistic experimentalism with a social activist spirit and staging the works of a range of international playwrights including W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Maxim Gorky, and Clifford Odets.<sup>33</sup> Iremonger was involved with the group variously as an actor, producer, and designer, while he became editor of the NTG’s monthly bulletin, *Surge*, between 1941 and 1943.<sup>34</sup> A ‘little neo-styled magazine’, as Iremonger described it to playwright Sean O’Casey, produced through the cheap duplicating method of a wax stencil cut by a rowel tipped pen for the text on each page which was then printed and staple bound to form a pamphlet, *Surge* at once embodied both the limited means and boundless ambition of the NTG, with its characteristically declarative editorial tone and the international sweep of its critical and creative content undeterred by the magazine’s low production standards.<sup>35</sup> The January 1941 issue edited by Iremonger, for example, opened with an apocalyptic vision that unabashedly inflated the artistic mission of *Surge* to that of a defiant ‘warden of the human values’:

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<sup>32</sup> As Lionel Pilkington has charted, the ‘little theatre movement’ was born out of ‘the extraordinary porous boundaries that existed between amateur and professional theatre’ in mid-century Ireland, characterised by the activities of eclectic independent cooperatives organising plays and cultural events in temporary venues including city-centre basements and apartment rooms. This ‘club’ format, with its small seating capacity and inexpensive production encouraged the staging of more experimental theatre than was possible in the major venues of the Abbey and Gate Theatres, so that the movement became associated with ‘modernist experimentation and with an anti-authoritarian avant-garde’ that was typically Left-wing in character. Lionel Pilkington, ‘The Little Theatres of the 1950s’, in *Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, ed. by Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 286-303 (p. 288).

<sup>33</sup> Robert Greacen, ‘Writing in Emergency Dublin’, *Irish Times*, 6 April 1976, p. 8; Pilkington, ‘The Little Theatres of the 1950s’, p. 287.

<sup>34</sup> The rare surviving copies of *Surge* are held in the New Theatre Group Archive in the private possession of Michael O’Brien. The archive contains a diverse array of material relating to the NTG including extensive theatre notes of individual productions; playbills and photographs taken of various productions; business and personal correspondence; records of the group’s general meetings and official documents detailing its establishment, membership, and expenses.

<sup>35</sup> Valentin Iremonger to Sean O’Casey, 15 June 1941, Dublin, National Library of Ireland, Manuscript Collections, Sean O’Casey Papers, MS 38,053/2.

The ever-widening whirlpool of War touches new lands, sucks down human lives at a hundred places on the earth that had given its richness to nourish them. [...] At this tense moment, another issue of *Surge* appears. Are we, then, fiddling while Rome burns? Emphatically, no. Our little magazine is a warden of the human values which must be kept alive if the bombers are not to obliterate history.<sup>36</sup>

*Surge* featured literary and theatre criticism along with short stories and poetry, and Iremonger's own early poems published in the magazine sustained the portentous blustery tone of his editorials, with 'The Dead' envisaging the human carnage of foreign battlefields where 'The dead men of Europe are turning their broken faces | outwards and upwards to a sky of equal blue'.<sup>37</sup> The following years would see Iremonger increasingly turn from the theatre to poetry, and he carried on the independent publishing ethos and hyperbolic tenor of *Surge* with publications such as the 1943 pamphlet *On the Barricades*.<sup>38</sup> Printed from Iremonger's family home at no. 135 Tritonville Road in Sandymount through the publishing company he established with Belfast poet Robert Greacen, New Frontiers Press, *On the Barricades* featured the poems of the two friends along with Greacen's fellow Northerner Bruce Williamson.<sup>39</sup> The inflammatory note printed on the pamphlet's folded inside cover announced that its authors 'give proof of a new vitality in Irish writing, a vitality the older generations will not acknowledge' and the contributed poetry of Iremonger and Greacen is marked by a youthful imperative voice and the earnestness to imaginatively engage with the European conflict. Iremonger's 'Evening Storm – Coming Up' casts an anxious seaward gaze out toward the 'visible snarl of wind, horizon's disintegration | the glower and sharp glint of a tired gaze', while Greacen in 'Written on the Sense of Isolation in Contemporary Ireland' asserts the significance of the Continent as an imaginative and intellectual resource,

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<sup>36</sup> 'Editorial', *Surge: New Theatre Group Magazine* (January 1941) [unpaginated], Dublin, New Theatre Group Archive.

<sup>37</sup> Valentin Iremonger, 'The Dead', *Surge* (March 1941) [unpaginated], New Theatre Group Archive.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Greacen, Bruce Williamson, and Valentin Iremonger, *On The Barricades: Poems by Robert Greacen, Bruce Williamson, Valentin Iremonger* (Dublin: New Frontiers Press, 1944).

<sup>39</sup> For Greacen, 'the word "new" seemed obligatory at that time' in the formation of such literary ventures and New Frontiers Press echoed the title of the New Theatre Group in its emphasis on the contemporary moment. Robert Greacen, *Brief Encounters: Literary Dublin and Belfast in the 1940s* (Dublin: Cathair Books, 1991), p. 25.

concluding with the emphatic statement ‘So now in days of fevered fret and stress | Let Europe measure out our Irishness!’.<sup>40</sup> Iremonger’s fervent independent literary activities in these years were followed in the post-war period by his rising career in the civil service, joining the Department of Education in 1946 before being drafted as a secretary into Seán MacBride’s Department of External Affairs following the electoral success of the interparty government in 1948. There he joined a young Conor Cruise O’Brien who became his ‘friend for life’, and who has recalled in his memoir the liberal eclectic atmosphere of the assembled department that in many ways captured the initial atmosphere of excitement in the wake of the change of government:

The younger officials, my own contemporaries, were – to use a vocabulary that later became familiar to me in South Africa – *verligte* rather than *verkrampste*: this is, relaxed and enlightened rather than stiff and suspicious. I think several of them rather admired me for the openness of my defiance of Church authority, and felt encouraged by the fact that I had got away with this, to the extent that I had.<sup>41</sup>

Iremonger joined *Envoy*’s editorial team along with the Atlantic City born James Hillman, who was introduced to Ryan through his fellow American friend Donleavy. Like Donleavy two years before him, Hillman came to study in Dublin in 1948 through the Service Man’s Readjustment’s Act. Known informally as the ‘G.I. Bill’, the law facilitated the payment of academic tuition and living expenses for any veteran who had served a minimum of ninety days. Hillman had worked in the United States Navy Hospital Corps from 1944 to 1946 before moving to Germany where he was employed as a newscast scriptwriter and correspondent for the American Forces Network. In 1947 he enrolled at the Sorbonne in Paris and in the following year, at the age of twenty-two, he moved to Dublin to study Mental and Moral Sciences at Trinity College. In his autobiographical writing and reminiscences, Hillman has associated his arrival to Dublin with a time of creative awakening, recalling that

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<sup>40</sup> Valentin Iremonger, ‘Evening-Storm Coming Up’, in *On the Barricades*, p. 36; Robert Greacen, ‘Written on the Sense of Isolation in Contemporary Ireland’, in *On the Barricades*, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Memoir: My Life and Themes* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1999), p. 111.

‘I couldn’t really think of writing itself until I got to Dublin. Or maybe that’s why I went to Dublin. They psyche picks its geographies’.<sup>42</sup> For Hillman’s biographer, Dick Russell, ‘A sense of liberation had materialized for [him], in its fullest expression, in Ireland’, and it was in the pages of *Envoy* where he would publish his own first short stories, articles, and reviews.<sup>43</sup> At his most rapturous, Hillman described his youthful experiences among the literary and artistic crowd that gathered around the magazine as ‘a beautiful mixture of literary, philosophy, society, English girls, Irish poets, fantasy, drinking, that was something else. It was beautiful. Beautiful’.<sup>44</sup> It was Hillman’s brash confidence that convinced Ryan of his editorial worth to the magazine, remarking that he picked him ‘because I needed a man who could get things done. He didn’t know what shyness was’.<sup>45</sup> Hillman duly performed an important overseas promotional role during *Envoy*’s first few months of publication, canvassing and securing various orders for the magazine to distributors across Britain, France, Germany, and the United States.

Composing the opening editorial for their new magazine, Ryan, Iremonger, and Hillman looked back to the recent termination of the major Irish periodical of the 1940s, *The Bell*, and further to the early twentieth-century international tradition of ‘little magazines’ in recognition of the challenges they faced launching an independent literary venture at the mid-century in Dublin. ‘No bombastic manifesto heralds its arrival’, the draft opened, wistfully recalling ‘that aggressive device of the 20’s, whose purpose, like the artillery barrage, was to soften up the potential resistance and prepare the mind to receive the message’.<sup>46</sup> The 1920s had indeed seen such infamous publications as the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* that formed

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<sup>42</sup> James Hillman, *Inter Views: Conversations with Laura Pozzo on Psychotherapy, Biography, Love, Soul, Dreams, Work, Imagination, and the State of Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 98.

<sup>43</sup> Dick Russell, *The Life and Ideas of James Hillman: Volume I: The Making of a Psychologist* (New York: Helios Press, 2013), p. 217.

<sup>44</sup> Hillman, *Inter Views*, p. 106.

<sup>45</sup> Ryan, ‘An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen’, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Typescript draft entitled ‘A Foreword to Volume One Number One’, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/1/2.

part of the ‘frenzy of forms and artistic energies variously expressed and variously justified’ across the tumultuous first decades of the twentieth century, solidifying the manifesto form as the epitome of modernist avant-garde statement and action.<sup>47</sup> Aware of the comparative lack of a singular launching aesthetic or even defined artistic group at the outset of their own literary venture, Ryan, Iremonger, and Hillman recognised the necessity in establishing along broader lines what Ezra Pound had famously termed the ‘binding force of some kind of agreement, however vague or unanalyzed, between three or four writers’ that was vital to the ‘positive achievement of various impractical publications’ he referred to as ‘small magazines’.<sup>48</sup> What provided this compelling ‘binding force’ for the three editors and the artistic milieu that came to gather around *Envoy* was not an aesthetic but an aspiration, a shared commitment that while at once less immediate and tangible than a declared practice or coterie, was no less pertinent and potentially radical in the context of the challenging socio-cultural conditions in which they found themselves.

‘A literary magazine, to be worthy of the name, must be something more than a periodical anthology of short stories, essays, poetry and criticism’, the published foreword to the first issue would eventually assert, ‘it must in fact have a central purpose and an aim; it must be a focal point of literary activity and not merely a distributive agency for literature,

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<sup>47</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ‘Movements, Magazines and Manifestos: The Succession from Naturalism’, in *Modernism, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 192-205 (p. 199). Surrealism in literature and art developed around the charismatic figure of André Breton in Paris during the 1920s and 30s. Underpinned by the belief in the revelatory nature of the unconscious combined with the methods advocated to facilitate psychological exploration, the movement aspired towards ‘the medium of trance’ through techniques such as automatic writing and clairvoyance. The first *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924 established ‘the omnipotence of the dream’ as representative of the ‘real functioning of thought’, namely, the true imaginative faculty of the individual unrestrained by external controlling social, cultural, or political conventions or forces. The creative expression in literature and art of the ‘disinterested play of thought’ unbound by rational, moral, or aesthetic prescriptions, Breton argued, could be realized through practices such as ‘automatism’, the act of writing or painting without exerting conscious control, and in the chance association and defamiliarising juxtaposition of objects and images. André Breton, ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010; reprint of 1st edn. Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1972), pp. 1-48.

<sup>48</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Small Magazines’, *The English Journal*, vol. 19, no. 9 (November 1930), 689-704 (p. 703; p. 696).



and since it is not by nature creative, it must inspire creation'.<sup>49</sup> As a magazine launched at a period of social and cultural change in Irish society and a post-war atmosphere quickened by the prospect of increasing international integration and involvement, *Envoy* was uniquely committed to expanding the conception and scope of this 'focal point' beyond the conventional national parameters of mid-twentieth-century Irish cultural discourse. By 'serving abroad as *envoy* of Irish writing and at home as *envoy* of the best in international writing', its editors aimed to establish their magazine as a dynamic transnational 'meeting place' of cultural production and exchange in post-war Dublin.<sup>50</sup> Over the course of its twenty issues, it was this ambition to 'act as an ambassador in both directions and serve a dual function' that would most distinguish the magazine in mid-century Irish periodical culture and by which it hoped to generate new aesthetic and ideological strategies for an emergent literary and artistic generation.<sup>51</sup> Terence Brown has broadly identified in the immediate post-war years the 'signs that a new Ireland, an Ireland less concerned with its own national identity, less antagonistic to outside influence, less obsessively absorbed by its own problems to the exclusion of wider issues, was, however embryonically in the making'.<sup>52</sup> This thesis considers the extent to which *Envoy*'s transnationalism can be said to have encouraged such a platform for its writers and artists, uncovering and assessing the impact of the array of cross-border, archipelagic, continental, and transatlantic connections, networks, patterns of affiliation and influence that animated its pages across a period of three years from 1949 to 1951.

### *A transnational perspective*

The consideration of *Envoy* throughout this study is guided in its general perspective by the burgeoning critical field of transnational studies in history and literature. For Akira

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<sup>49</sup> Ryan, Iremonger, Hillman, 'A Foreword to Vol. I. Number I', p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8; p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> 'Foreword: "Oh to be in England now that Spring is there"', *Envoy*, vol. 2 no. 5 (April 1950), 9-11 (p. 10).

<sup>52</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 214.

Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier in the introduction to *The Palgrave Dictionary of*

*Transnational History*, the ‘transnational approach’ is best defined as ‘an angle, a perspective’ that focuses on ‘the flows of people, goods, ideas or processes that [stretch] over borders’:

We are interested in links and flows, and want to track people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between polities and societies. Among the units that were thus crossed, consolidated or subverted in the modern age, first and foremost were the national ones.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly emphasising this perspectival approach, Sven Beckert in a key panel discussion on the nature and function of transnational studies proposes it as a ‘way of seeing’ between and beyond the conventionally dividing political, cultural, or economic boundaries of national territories, so that it is in its broadest sense to be viewed as a practice centred upon ‘uncovering connections across particular political units’.<sup>54</sup> Transnational history ‘takes as its starting point the interconnectedness of human history as a whole’, Beckert argues, ‘and while it acknowledges the extraordinary importance of states, empires, and the like, it pays attention to networks, processes, beliefs, and institutions that transcend these politically defined spaces’.<sup>55</sup> For Isabel Hofmeyr, meanwhile, the purpose of inquiry of the transnational scholar is not merely to identify and detail such connections but to dynamically establish the extent to which transformative socio-cultural ideas, products, and practices are more precisely formed within and by these movements:

The key claim of any transnational approach is its central concern with movements, flows, and circulation, not simply as a theme or motif but as an analytic set of methods which defines the endeavour itself. [...] The claim of transnational methods is not simply that historical processes are made in different places but that they are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier, ‘Introduction: The Professor and the Madman’, in *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, ed. by Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xvii-xx (p. xx; p. xviii).

<sup>54</sup> C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, ‘AHR Conversation: On Transnational History’, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 111, no. 5 (December 2006), 1441-1464 (p. 1454).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1459.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1444.

The growing influence of transnationalism in Irish Studies was marked in 2012 with the launching of the Transnational Ireland Network. Drawing together a diverse range of core members and participants with research interests in political, social, and cultural history, the aim of the network and its accompanying online database is to ‘investigate the challenges and benefits of transnational methodologies and locate Irish experience within broader international and global contexts’.<sup>57</sup> Over the last number of years, the Transnational Ireland Network has organised various workshops, lectures, seminars, and conferences, and most recently has coordinated the publication of a special issue of journal *Éire-Ireland* in 2016, which draws together various historical and literary transnational perspectives in a collection of essays. Writing in their introduction to the issue, Enda Delaney and Ciaran O’Neill argue that ‘the history of modern Ireland has typically been studied, written, and taught within national confines’, so that ‘this has left us with a narrow interpretation of an island that was far more open in the modern period than is generally admitted: culturally, economically, and socially’.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, for Delaney and O’Neill, ‘so many aspects of Irish Studies are ripe for transnational exploration or are in fact inherently transnational’, noting the ‘perceptible rise’ since 2008 in published monographs and overviews employing ‘transnational approaches’, from the biographies of individual figures to studies in areas as diverse as terrorism, education, diaspora, and migration.<sup>59</sup> One of the key recent critical works in history and historiography in this regard is the collection of essays *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*.<sup>60</sup> Following on from Iriye and Saunier in taking the transnational ‘as a

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<sup>57</sup> ‘What is Transnational Ireland?’ <<https://transnationalireland.com>> accessed 16 August 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Enda Delaney and Ciaran O’Neill, ‘Introduction: Beyond the Nation’, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 51, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2016), 7-13 (p. 9).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Other important recent studies in transnational Irish historiography include *Ireland in the World, Comparative, Transnational, and Personal Perspectives*. Published in the ‘Routledge Studies in Modern History’ series along with *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*, the collection of essays examine ‘Ireland’s place in the wider world’ since the eighteenth century through the global process of migration, encompassing a range of diverse geographical locations from Britain and the Americas to the Pacific and Australasia. Angela McCarthy, ‘Introduction: Ireland in the World, Comparative, Transnational, and Personal Perspectives’, in *Ireland in the World, Comparative, Transnational, and Personal Perspectives* (New York & Oxford: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

perspective, rather than a new historical paradigm or master narrative’, the collection gathers together a diverse group of scholars and subjects tracing the social, cultural, and commercial links and networks that variously connected Ireland to the wider world from the eighteenth century to the present day, complicating conventional historical conceptions of various diasporic communities and migrations and uncovering new challenging international dimensions to central events in Irish history such as the Great Famine and the Easter Rising.<sup>61</sup> In his introduction to the collection, Niall Whelehan argues that transnational history represents a ‘means to challenge impressions of national uniqueness and exceptionalism, to transcend the borders of the nation-state and trace connections and parallel developments between multiple territories’.<sup>62</sup> In this, Whelehan echoes Hofmeyr with the assertion that in charting the ‘movement of people and ideas between Ireland and other territories’, the transnational researcher must establish how and to what significance distinctive forms and practices are constructed in the process of such movements:

At the same time, the approach requires more than simply describing the existence of cross-border movements and connections. The burden of proof for the historian rests on how flows, circulations, parallels and exchanges are productive, how they lead to transformations and tensions, or why they fail to do so.<sup>63</sup>

Whelehan distinguishes transnational historical engagement from its broader ‘international’ or ‘global’ counterparts, with international history conventionally associated with the relations between nation-states, diplomacy, and institutions, and global history more typically encompassing vast continental developments and processes.<sup>64</sup> The transnational, by contrast, is immediately more ‘modest’ in subject and scope, primarily considering the cross-border movements of and exchanges between particular people and groups within the context of two

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<sup>61</sup> Niall Whelehan, ‘Introduction’, in *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*, ed. by Niall Whelehan (New York & Oxford: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Niall Whelehan, ‘Playing with Scales: Transnational History and Modern Ireland’, in *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*, pp. 7-29 (p 9).

or more territories.<sup>65</sup> It is through this focusing on particular connections and networks whereby transnational research can provide new perspectives on how ‘large-scale processes played out in small-scale case studies’, while at the same time in more practical research terms maintaining a ‘[safeguard] against broad generalisations and [allowing] the researcher to work closely with primary sources’.<sup>66</sup> For Whelehan, the value of such new perspectives to Irish Studies is in their potential ‘to radically rethink central questions and breathe new life into insular debates that have often characterised modern Irish history’:

It allows us to challenge issues of critical significance by simultaneously considering differing scales of analysis, ranging from the local to the global. This enables us to reconstruct a more complex picture of modern Irish history by placing developments in wider contexts, by looking at a tangent on issues usually discussed in the national frame, by identifying reciprocal influences between Ireland and other locations, by revealing the impact of transnational flows and movements in Ireland, by integrating Irish history with that of its massive diaspora, and by drawing instructive parallels between disparate cases.<sup>67</sup>

The ‘transnational turn in Irish Studies’ encouraged by the rise in publication of historical and historiographical overviews, monographs, and biographies has been accompanied in recent years by similar and overlapping developments in literature, whereby the ambition to identify and establish the significance of Whelehan’s ‘reciprocal’ influences and exchanges between Ireland and the wider world have been more specifically directed towards Irish writers and literary texts.<sup>68</sup> *Where Motley is Worn: Transnational Irish Literatures* establishes ‘transnational Irish literature’ as ‘writing that places Irish identity in dialogue with other cultural, national, or ethnic affiliations’, displaying the capacity of this dialogue to shape and complicate questions of race, gender, sexuality, and class across a range of essays spanning a broad geographical range including Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Whelehan, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Whelehan, ‘Playing with Scales: Transnational History and Modern Ireland’, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Amanda Tucker and Moira Casey, ‘National and Transnational Irish Literatures’, in *Where Motley is Worn: Transnational Irish Literatures*, ed. by Amanda Tucker and Moira E. Casey (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), pp. 1-25 (p. 13).

America from the nineteenth century to the present.<sup>69</sup> For Tucker and Casey, transnational Irish literary texts are fundamentally ‘invested in the multiple points of identification and belonging that result from a writer’s commitment to Ireland, to other countries, and to the world at large’, and the collection is notable for its wide range of authors and contexts considered from representations of Irish and Latin American culture in Joseph O’Connor and Colum McCann to situating the writing of Maria Edgeworth in the wider socio-economic arena of the growing British empire.<sup>70</sup> More specialised recent studies such as Emily C. Bloom’s chronicling of Irish literary broadcasting in the British Broadcasting Corporation and its significance as a platform for Irish modernism from the 1930s to the 1960s, conceives of the challenging transgressive potential of the radio medium at the mid-century within the context of ‘transnational models of circulation in which texts, bodies, and technologies move with increased rapidity across national borders’.<sup>71</sup> For Bloom, focusing on ‘the transnational publics’ shared between the United Kingdom and the emerging Republic of Ireland and, ‘specifically, examining Irish broadcasting on the BBC’s national service’ shows how radio became ‘a site for forging new Anglo-Irish relations’ for writers such as Louis MacNeice and Elizabeth Bowen over these decades.<sup>72</sup>

Writing in the recent special number of *Éire-Ireland*, Niall Carson draws similar attention to the literary magazine as a key site connecting mid-century Irish cultural production and exchange with Britain and the wider world. For Carson, transnationalism presents a ‘fruitful seam for Irish literary studies to explore’ in that by considering writers and artists in new archipelagic, transatlantic, or globalised contexts critics can ‘paint a broader picture of the ways in which writers and artists have engaged with the world of their time’.<sup>73</sup> Carson’s essay focuses on *The Bell* based on the premise that ‘one of the most obvious ways

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Emily C. Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931-1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 15

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> Niall Carson, ‘Transnationalism, Ireland and *The Bell*’, *Éire-Ireland*, 171-191 (p. 172).

in which the transnational in Irish literature can be examined is through the burgeoning area of periodical studies':

Literary periodicals, or little magazines, are transnational in composition and identity by their very definition. They are often "worldly" in their outlook, co-created by writers from across the globe, and engaged in debates around art and culture that traverse national boundaries; they offer the ideal format for study of the transnational within Irish literature.<sup>74</sup>

Carson situates *The Bell* within a vibrant network of literary crossovers and relations connecting Dublin, Belfast, and London during the war years, examining how O'Faoláin's special 'Ulster issues' of the magazine in 1941 and 1942 provided an important Southern platform for diverse Northern cultural, religious, and political voices that served to complicate questions of national identity during a time of calcifying geo-political divisions on both sides of the border.<sup>75</sup> Carson progresses from an assessment of the significance of *The Bell* as a literary platform for Northern poets such as W.R. Rodgers and John Hewitt to consider the relationship between O'Faoláin's magazine and Cyril Connolly's London-based *Horizon*, highlighting the importance of Connolly's special 'Irish issue' of the magazine in 1942 as well as addressing the crucial mediating role played by individual figures such as the press attaché at the office of the United Kingdom's representative in Ireland, John Betjeman, in encouraging cross-channel literary relations between both islands.<sup>76</sup>

This thesis follows Carson in establishing *Envoy* as a key site by which we can begin to '[trace] the transnational element within Irish letters' in the immediate post-war years, similarly aiming to chart 'the current of ideas, writers, and debates that flowed across borders within this publication'.<sup>77</sup> Over the course of six chapters, the study uncovers the diverse extent and varying scales of *Envoy*'s transnational engagement, establishing both its cultural

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 172-173.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

and economic impact upon the magazine itself, its emergent milieu of writers and artists, and the broader conditions and conventions of mid-century Irish cultural life. In this, the study's overarching aim is, to return to Whelehan, to arrive at a clearer understanding of 'how flows, circulations, parallels and exchanges are productive, how they lead to transformations and tensions, or why they fail to do so'.<sup>78</sup> The opening three chapters that comprise part one consider the magazine in the marketplace. Chapter one examines the influence of Connolly's *Horizon* on *Envoy's* nascent editorial identity formation and how this drew it into association with a wider international modernist tradition of 'little magazines', bolstering *Envoy's* editorial voice in the face of material adversity and encouraging its receptivity to non-commercial writers hitherto obscured by the conservative conventions of the Irish publishing scene, most notably, that of the Paris-based Samuel Beckett. At its most explicit, the editorial invocation of this embattled tradition of 'little magazines' pitched *Envoy* in a classic adversarial cultural position to the challenging national and international market conditions of the immediate post-war period. However, *Envoy's* commercial role was ultimately more complex and involved than such confrontational editorial posturing often suggested. Chapter two and three thus situate *Envoy* at two major transnational intersections of art and commerce in post-war Dublin: that of the city's rising commercial gallery trade and its developing status as a cultural tourist destination. Chapter two considers how *Envoy's* relationship with the international art dealer Victor Waddington saw the magazine become a key print platform within the broader commercialisation of modern Irish and international art in the 1940s and 50s, while chapter three interrogates the magazine's more complex and conflictual marketing role in relation to the influx of North American literary tourism to Ireland in the immediate post-war years.

Part two of the thesis, meanwhile, shifts its material focus to *Envoy's* central conflict with institutionalised cultural nationalism in mid-twentieth-century Irish society, assessing the

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<sup>78</sup> Whelehan, 'Introduction', p. 1.



extent to which the magazine's transnational aspirations and activities succeeded in expanding what Tom Walker has identified as the largely 'restrictive terms of Irish critical debate' that persisted into the 1940s and 50s, and whether they encouraged the development of alternative critical and aesthetic procedures by which Irish writers and artists could begin to challenge inherited forms of cultural identity.<sup>79</sup> Key to understanding the pressures of the 'constricting pattern' of cultural nationalism upon Irish writers and artists in these years was its continuing privileged status and mass mediation through institutional channels during a period of severely limited alternative public platforms and opportunities provided for the arts in Ireland.<sup>80</sup> These circumstances conditioned the typically inflamed terms of debate in a magazine such as *Envoy*, so that questions of aesthetics were inextricably tied to the wider material contexts governing literary production and promotion. Chapter four thereby assesses the magazine's conflict with neo-revivalism in the context of its perceived privileged status within the national broadcasting service, Radio Éireann. *Envoy*'s challenging of the cultural essentialism continuing to be promoted in neo-revivalist discourse was significantly exacerbated by the anxious recognition of the 'central authorial occupation' in Irish literary life that the radio medium afforded to figures such as Austin Clarke and Robert Farren throughout the 1940s and 50s.<sup>81</sup> *Envoy*'s key developing ideological concept of 'incidental nationality' emerged primarily from and in response to this conflict with neo-revivalism, and chapter five considers how this encouraged across its poetry section the development of a range of generative transnational poetic connections and networks, most significant of which was the cultivation of British and Irish poetic relations during a period that remained fissured by socio-economic anti-colonial tensions.<sup>82</sup> Chapter six extends the consideration of these

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<sup>79</sup> Tom Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 109.

<sup>80</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p. 577.

<sup>81</sup> Eileen Morgan-Zayachek, 'Frank O'Connor and the Literary Development of Radio Éireann', *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Autumn 2009), 57-73 (p. 54).

<sup>82</sup> Gerry Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 118.

issues to visual art and the transformative decade of the 1940s in modern art practice and its public reception in Ireland. The chapter examines how *Envoy*'s art section was shaped by the radical overhauling of the institutional and nationalist conventions governing artistic production and exhibition in Dublin during the war years, assessing the magazine's contribution to the elevation and maturation of standards of art writing in the city and the interpretative means by which both contemporary Irish and international artists could be considered within the contexts of visual modernism. If, as Walker observes, the 1940s and 50s were marked 'by growing unease about the restrictions imposed by the prevailing pressure placed on Irish culture to display its identity', then the second part of the thesis ultimately looks to evaluate the extent to which *Envoy* provided a generative transnational platform for the cultivation of alternative models, influences, and practices by which Irish writers and artists could begin to detach themselves from what he identifies as

the obligation to adhere to and create a national identity through the display of a connection with place, the embodiment of national character, the performance of a national style, or the fashioning of myths of historical continuity.<sup>83</sup>

While *Envoy*'s international engagement was largely conceived and promoted in positive terms across its twenty issues, the thesis is at the same time alert to the danger identified by Whelehan in the uncritical reduction of 'transnational history' to mere 'feel-good history', with the belief that 'movement across borders is in itself [...] a positive thing' leading to blanket the characterisation of 'border crossings, entanglements, mobility and exchanges as a history of success'.<sup>84</sup> As such, the study is not only preoccupied with the positive 'transformations' of *Envoy*'s transnational engagement. Rather, it also looks to uncover the unforeseen and often implicit 'tensions' that are themselves illustrative of the nascent character of the magazine's international relations and affiliations in the newly

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<sup>83</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>84</sup> Whelehan, 'Playing with Scales: Transnational History and Modern Ireland', p. 12.

expanded dimensions of post-war life.<sup>85</sup> These tensions emerged most acutely in *Envoy*'s conflictual involvement in the rapidly developing literary tourist trade to Dublin in these years, whereby the magazine looked to exploit the commercial opportunities of this lucrative market even as it was aware of and critiqued its ultimately damaging impact on living writers in the city such as Patrick Kavanagh and Brendan Behan. To return to Carson, by uncovering the web of international influences at play in *Envoy*, we can arrive at a more dynamic conception of the magazine and its milieu as not merely located on 'an island on the periphery of Europe and outside the metropolises of London or Paris', but rather situated at the 'centre of exchange in a nexus of ideas and texts – one of many nodes in a transnational interchange of artistic expression'.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Rewriting the conventions of mid-twentieth-century literary and artistic culture***

The uncovering or, more precisely, recovering, of the variegated transnational affiliations, relationships, and networks that shaped and stimulated cultural production and exchange in mid-twentieth-century Ireland is particularly necessary in countering the persistent stereotypical image of the period in both academic and popular culture as overwhelmingly 'insular and dour'.<sup>87</sup> For Alan Gillis, the unenviable position of the 1930s following the aftermath of the revolutionary fervour and artistic heights of the Literary Revival has led to its reductively negative characterisation as a decade of socio-cultural stasis that has in turn discouraged the cultivation of scholarly interest in the period:

In Irish literary history, the 1930s are overshadowed, and almost eclipsed, by the previous three decades. After the creative booms and imaginative highs that helped drive Ireland towards Independence, the 1930s seem an almighty comedown. Indeed, the decade seems to inaugurate a form of cultural meltdown, as Irish society is increasingly infected by isolation,

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<sup>85</sup> Whelehan, 'Introduction', p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Carson, 'Transnationalism, Ireland and *The Bell*', p. 172.

<sup>87</sup> Alan Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1.

conservatism, censorship, stagnation, and sanctimoniousness.<sup>88</sup>

The damaging impact of such generalising ‘retrospective’ images of the time is in the extent to which they obscure the vitalities and complexities of the contemporary moment, serving ultimately to ‘muzzle the range and achievement of Irish writers wielding manuscripts’ in these years.<sup>89</sup> The continuing reduction of the 1930s to a shorthand of stagnation and insularity has in turn sanctioned what Gillis argues as ‘Irish criticism’s lack of interest in the decade’, combining with the similar critical neglect suffered by the 1940s and 50s to establish ‘the implicit message of the bulk of Irish literary studies [...] that Irish history ended in 1922, and did not begin again until either the opening-out of the economy in the late 1950s, or else the resumption of the Troubles’.<sup>90</sup>

For Gillis, the persistence of this critical bias in Irish academic discourse into the twenty-first century is a testament to the continuing influence of major publications such as the landmark five-volume anthology of Irish writing coordinated by the Field Day project under the general editorship of Seamus Deane.<sup>91</sup> Originating with playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea in Derry in 1980 as a cultural response to the political crisis in Northern Ireland, the Field Day project set out initially to identify and develop new audiences for Irish theatre before expanding into the realm of literary publishing, producing a series of pamphlets, essays, and individual works, and ultimately organising the publication of the first three volumes of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1991. Spanning in its entirety the sixth to the twenty-first century, Deane’s opening introduction situates the anthology in the context of the contemporary ‘political crisis in Ireland, precipitated in 1968, but in gestation for many years before that date’, in a way that frames its subsequent focus on the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> Seamus Deane, general ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vols. I-III (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991); vols. IV-V (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).

tumultuous intersection of cultural and political spheres across 1,500 years of Irish writing.<sup>92</sup> For Gillis, the anthology's historicization of Ireland's long colonial past and post-colonial present 'from the vantage point of the Troubles' results in the editorial privileging of the revolutionary decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at the expense of a comparably serious and sustained engagement with mid-twentieth-century culture, with 'the disenfranchisement and oppression of Catholics in the North logically [finding] their historical model of significance in the nationalist drive towards independence'.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the generally subordinate status of the wider body of Irish writers, poets, and dramatists active between the 1930s and 60s in the anthology's third volume is signalled in a variety of ways, but most emphatically so in the editorial arrangement of its opening sections. Here, the 143 pages allocated to nineteen selected literary figures grouped together under subheading of 'The Counter-Revival: 1930 – 1960' in criticism, poetry, and drama are bookended by the far more prominently represented individual figures of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett in a way that immediately relegates their significance. While the volume's opening section on Joyce extends to eighty-six pages of analysis and excerpts, and the Beckett to a similarly considerable seventy-nine, poets such as Kavanagh and Clarke are contrastingly portioned merely four and seven pages respectively. Even allowing for the far greater national and international reputations of Joyce and Beckett in comparison to the represented mid-century cast, their remains the sense, as Edna Longley observes, that the anthology merely 'gestures at the textual and political complexities of the post-Revival period' in its preoccupation with the real action occurring elsewhere.<sup>94</sup> The damaging effect of such a bias is in the way in which it encourages the kind of uncritical generalisations of the period as identified by Gillis. This is most explicitly evident in Declan Kiberd's introduction to the 'Contemporary Irish Poetry'

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<sup>92</sup> Seamus Deane, 'General Introduction', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), vol. I, pp. xix-xxvi (p. xx).

<sup>93</sup> Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s*, p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> Edna Longley, 'Introduction: Revising Irish Literature', in *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), pp. 9-68 (pp. 43-44).

section of the volume, which opens by asserting the ‘sense of anti-climax [that] pervaded the Irish scene’ during the mid-twentieth century in the wake of the deaths of Yeats and Joyce.<sup>95</sup> The loss of these two major figures was so overwhelming for their contemporaries that ‘only a sense of emptiness remained’, a sweepingly nullifying judgement that subsequently sanctions Kiberd’s own emptying of the 1940s of all its vitality:

Ireland during the years of World War II became a provincial and introverted place, its stasis manifest not only in the political failure to join the fight against fascism, but also in the growing popular contempt for modern art. A reproduction of Manet’s *Olympus* was denounced when Victor Waddington put it on display in a Dublin gallery; jazz was banned for a time on Radio Éireann; and Dublin Corporation voted to refuse a gift of Rouault’s *Christ Covered with Thorns*. In such a claustrophobic atmosphere, Irish artists lost touch with European colleagues, critics and audiences.<sup>96</sup>

Such a generalising reaffirmation of the narrative of stasis, insularity, and conservatism is characteristic of what Lucy Collins has observed as the tendency among critics in Irish Studies to pass over the complexities of ‘the larger cultural dynamic’ of mid-twentieth-century literary and visual culture.<sup>97</sup> Kiberd’s grim diagnosis of the decade on the basis of two individual public controversies in visual art is in itself manifestly misrepresentative of the broader field of cultural activity in Dublin at this time, with the 1940s in fact signalling the transformation in the public reception of modernist Irish and international art. As we will examine at various points in this thesis, Victor Waddington became the central influence in the city’s rising commercial gallery trade in the 1940s and 50s, initiating a new period of optimism in Irish art whereby a range of emerging and established Irish painters and sculptors benefited from new levels of opportunity and promotion. Gillis’ assertion that ‘there is surely a problem with *Field Day*’s lack of an adequate contextualisation for the mid-twentieth century’ is exemplified in such generalising instances, ultimately reinforcing the perception

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<sup>95</sup> Declan Kiberd, ‘Contemporary Irish Poetry’, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. III, ed. by Seamus Deane, Andrew Carpenter, and Jonathan Williams (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), pp. 1309-1316 (p. 1309).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Lucy Collins, ‘Editorial: Reading Irish Poetry Cultures, 1930-1970’, *Irish University Review*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 1-5 (p. 1).

that Irish cultural history ‘slumbers into a deep sleep in 1922 and wakes up again in 1968’.<sup>98</sup>

The continuing influence of this critical view has been more recently noted by Tom Walker, who reaffirms Gillis’ earlier claims concerning the 1930s with the accompanying assertion that ‘the two decades that followed have also often been depicted, in all-too-broad brushstrokes, as part of a mid-century cultural mire’.<sup>99</sup> While, as Walker notes, ‘the difficult social, economic, and political pressures experienced by mid-century writers cannot be denied’, he importantly cautions against the critical tendency to allow these conditions to dominate considerations of the period, it is, on the contrary, crucial that ‘they should inform rather than subsume the terms of analysis’.<sup>100</sup> Fintan O’Toole has similarly argued for a more dynamic reading of the 1940s and 50s that could contain both its trials and energies, thereby developing a more complex picture of the period as one of ‘paradoxical narrowness and fecundity, philistinism and creativity’ from which emerged much significant work and animated among its concentrated literary and artistic milieu a ‘peculiarly lively kind of bleakness’.<sup>101</sup> Playwright Thomas Kilroy confirms this view in his recollection of mid-century Dublin in the recent collection of essays *Beautiful Strangers: Ireland and the World of the 1950s*, arguing as with Walker and O’Toole against the ‘standard reading of the 1950s’ as merely a time ‘of stifling repression, of sapping emigration with social and economic misery’.<sup>102</sup> Kilroy counters that ‘like all such generalisations, however, it doesn’t quite catch the complexity of the time’, recalling the local liveliness and international influences that more accurately characterised his early experiences amidst the city’s theatre scene:

In my own experience Dublin theatre in the 1950s was very much alive and it was possible to see more professional productions of European and American plays than is true of Dublin

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<sup>98</sup> Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s*, p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Fintan O’Toole, ‘Irish culture in 1945 was both lively and bleak’, *Irish Times*, 16 June 2015, <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/irish-culture-in-1945-was-both-lively-and-bleak-1.2235899>> accessed 2 February 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Kilroy, ‘A Memoir of the 1950s’, in *Beautiful Strangers: Ireland and the World of the 1950s*, ed. by Gerald Dawe, Darryl Jones, and Nora Pelizzari (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 7-19 (p. 9).

theatre today, plays by Ugo Betti, Pirandello, Genet, Anouilh, Sartre, William Inge, Lillian Hellman and so on.<sup>103</sup>

The immediacies of personal experience and recollection provide a window into the lived complexity of a period that has too often been generalised through a cursory retrospective gaze. Indeed, it is the resilient liveliness of the post-war years that immediately resonates in the surviving literary correspondence and published memoirs of the *Envoy* milieu, challenging the conventional reduction of the period to what Brian Fallon described in his important early survey of mid-century Irish cultural life as ‘a kind of levelling monochrome’.<sup>104</sup> While, as we will see, the economic adversity experienced by *Envoy* was a constant concern for its editors and indeed shaped the magazine’s embattled editorial identity, that these material anxieties were at the same time shot with the youthful exhilaration of launching a new literary magazine is evident in both Ryan and Hillman’s early correspondence. Ryan’s expressed excitement, for example, at the magazine’s ‘splendid start’ following the launch of its first issue in December 1949, with ‘bookshops within our immediate area of operations report selling out twice and even three times on the same day’, was similarly expressed by Hillman writing home to his parents in the United States.<sup>105</sup> As Dick Russell writes, by early December Hillman’s ‘enthusiasm seemed boundless’, writing that ‘*Envoy* was distributed yesterday and sells fantastically well. We printed two thousand five hundred and it looks like we shall sell for cash well over half! I am blossoming forth into the literary world’.<sup>106</sup> Even as the magazine’s financial situation gradually worsened over the following months, its offices on the top floor of no. 39 Grafton Street appear to have retained this sense of attraction and excitement for emerging writers and artists in the city. As poet and

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> John Ryan to James Patrick Donleavy, 18 January 1950, *Envoy Records*, Coll. 43/7/3.

<sup>106</sup> Russell, *The Life and Ideas of James Hillman*, p. 233; James Hillman to Julian and Madeline Hillman, 2 December 1949, quoted in Russell, *The Life and Ideas of James Hillman*, p. 233.



critic Anthony Cronin, who would establish himself as one of the most prominent voices in the magazine over the course of its twenty issues, has recalled:

In those days the *Envoy* office in Grafton Street was a great place of resort. You climbed up a stairs beside a fish shop (there was always a faint smell of fish hanging about) and eventually you came to a room where galley proofs hung on the wall and there were bundles of the magazine on the floor. There was nearly always company and attendant possibilities, whether for monetary advancement or amusement or both. There were occasional visitors from abroad, writers or aspirant writers. There might be an American girl or two.<sup>107</sup>

The recovery of this sense of the ‘attendant possibilities’ experienced by writers and artists is crucial to rewriting conventional conceptions of mid-twentieth-century Irish culture. This thesis thereby locates its primary subject matter in the wealth of archival material and ephemera that has survived from the period but which to date has remained almost totally unexamined. In this way, the thesis aims to extend Gillis’ assertion of Irish poets of the 1930s into the following two decades, that ‘taken collectively, their work presents a kaleidoscope of style and substance that creates an alternative view of the time, indicating that Irish culture was, in fact, a vivid and mutating arena’.<sup>108</sup>

It is surprising given the seismic global events of the 1940s that the decade and its impact upon Irish cultural life remains a largely neglected area of research in Irish Studies. Two major recent publications in the field of cultural history have however laid the foundations for a change in these circumstances and the stimulation of more specialised avenues of research. In the seminal wide-ranging study of Ireland during the Second World War, *That Neutral Island*, Clair Wills allots a ‘distinctive role to cultural and artistic expression’ in her history precisely because of the intensification of activity in literature and visual art in these years.<sup>109</sup> Contrary to Kiberd’s earlier casual reduction of the period to a

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<sup>107</sup> Anthony Cronin, *Dead as Doornails: a chronicle of life* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1976), p 78.

<sup>108</sup> Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s*, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Clair Wills, *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p. 11.

static, ‘provincial and introverted place’, Wills in fact uncovers the extent to which the exceptional conditions of wartime actually concentrated literary and artistic activity in neutral Dublin:

The growth of a confident, independent Irish cultural sphere which went beyond the GAA and official Irish-language concerns such as the publishing house An Gúm was one of the most striking outcomes of the Emergency. *The Bell* became well known, partly because of Seán O’Faoláin’s liberal take on Irish affairs. But it was not a lone star. Small publishing houses, magazines, amateur theatre, Irish-language presses, art exhibitions, film-making, all testified to a new vitality in Irish culture. Wartime censorship had kept rival material out; writers and artists needed new markets because London and Paris were closed to them.<sup>110</sup>

Wills furthermore explores the paradoxical circumstances by which Ireland’s neutral status actually saw it become exposed to new international influences in ways that were both invigorating and challenging. So that rather than representing a cultural nadir point, the 1940s and the war in Europe instead ‘gave new impetus to Ireland’s internal battles over culture’ whereby the competing claims in favour of self-sufficiency and internationalism saw writers and artists become engaged in ‘an urgent battle over Ireland’s European identity’.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, ‘given the vociferous complaints about isolation’, Will’s continues, ‘it’s easy to overlook the fact that Dublin’s [...] status of European cultural capital was in some ways given a boost by the war’, and a key aspect of her study is in the detailing of the array of foreign émigré and returning Irish writers and artists who were attracted to and gathered together in the neutral capital following the outbreak of war.<sup>112</sup> ‘Writers, artists and musicians who might once have gravitated towards London now chose Dublin as their cultural metropolis’, she describes, so that ‘an international atmosphere was fostered by genuine refugees, conscientious objectors,

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 425. Deirdre Brady has more recently examined Dublin’s independent wartime publishing culture in greater detail in the context of Cecil and Blánaid Salkeld’s Gayfield Press. An experimental printing press specialising in limited ‘deluxe editions’ and broadsheets, The Gayfield Press ran its operations from the Salkelds’ family home at no. 43 Morehampton Road from 1938 to 1947. Printing eight books and a series of broadsheets over the course of this period, the press featured the work of both popular and emerging Irish writers and poets, with accompanying art reproductions and illustrations contributed by Salkeld and other artists including Jack Butler Yeats. Deirdre Brady, ‘Modernist Presses and the Gayfield Press’, *Bibliologia: An International Journal of Bibliography, Library Science, History of Typography and the Book*, vol. 9 (2014), 103-118.

<sup>111</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 263.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

artists and musicians’.<sup>113</sup>

Guy Woodward has similarly uncovered how the cultural life of Northern Ireland was vitalised by a new concentration of literary and artistic activity in the province during the Second World War. Echoing Gillis, Woodward argues that the mid-twentieth-century cultural history of Northern Ireland has been generally ‘obscured, overshadowed, or displaced by that of the Troubles’ and through the towering international fame and accomplishments of Northern poets emerging in the 1960s such as Seamus Heaney.<sup>114</sup> *Culture, Northern Ireland, and the Second World War* importantly retrieves a sense of the diversity of literary and artistic activity in these years and the extent to which ‘the province became more susceptible to international pressures and influences at this time, from its involvement in the war itself, and from the influx of foreign troops and refugees’.<sup>115</sup> Chapters on poetry and visual art for example reveal how emerging poets such as Roy McFadden and Robert Greacen, and painters such as Colin Middleton and Gerard Dillon, found new stimuli, contexts, platforms for their work against the enlivening backdrop of wartime, with artistic activity concentrating in Belfast around key magazines such as the Queen’s University-based *The Northman*, independent gallery spaces as well as the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, and popular social focal points such as Campbell’s Café opposite the City Hall. Woodward’s conviction that the war years provide a means by which to consider the province in ‘more expansive terms’ beyond the familiar circumscribed ‘topographies of partition and sectarianism’, meanwhile, opens up his study to the diverse range of cross-border, archipelagic, continental, and transatlantic influences that impacted upon Northern Irish culture in these years, from the contentious and conflictual influence of British poets such as W.H. Auden and the Belfast-born Louis MacNeice, the increasing application among Belfast painters of styles and practices associated with the major developments in continental visual modernism, and the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 281-282.

<sup>114</sup> Guy Woodward, *Culture, Northern Ireland, and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p 31.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

attraction particularly in the late 1930s and early 40s for a number of writers to the political ideals of international socialism.<sup>116</sup> In this Woodward proposes the more fluid image of the wartime province earlier advanced by Edna Longley in her collection of essays, *The Living Stream*, namely, of a literary and visual culture that ‘overspills borders and manifests a web of affiliation that stretches beyond any heartland – to the rest of Ireland, Britain, and Europe’, and of a province that functions as a ‘frontier-region, a cultural corridor, a zone where Ireland and Britain permeate one another’.<sup>117</sup>

Wills and Woodward have laid the crucial ground for more specialised research explorations into mid-twentieth-century Irish culture, of which this thesis forms part. While it importantly draws from the variety of literary and artistic networks, events, and debates uncovered and detailed in these studies, however, the thesis at the same time aims to redress the distinctly terminal cultural atmosphere that marks their respective conclusions in the aftermath of the Second World War. Wills’ closing summation that Dublin’s ‘cultural activity was to fade in the post-war years’ is echoed by Woodward in his assertion that ‘the vibrancy of the wartime community of artists and writers in Belfast faded after the war’.<sup>118</sup>

Undoubtedly, the ending of the conditions of wartime led to the dispersal of various groups and movements that had become uniquely concentrated in these years. However this sketched narrative of cultural decline with ‘the dissipation of the wartime atmosphere’ at the same time fails to capture the extent to which many of the transformative cultural energies, tensions, and transformations of the war years in both Dublin and Belfast actually gathered pace and evolved into the post-war period, and which were channelled through a magazine such as *Envoy*.<sup>119</sup> Ryan’s optimistic feeling that ‘the windows had been flung open’ with the cessation of hostilities and the gradual relaxing of wartime travel restrictions registers little sense of this

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; p. 29.

<sup>117</sup> Edna Longley, ‘From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands’, in *The Living Stream*, pp. 173-195 (p 195).

<sup>118</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 425; Woodward, *Culture, Northern Ireland, and the Second World War*, p. 177.

<sup>119</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 425.

purportedly dissipated atmosphere. Indeed, Ryan would draw enough confidence from the wartime developments in Dublin's independent exhibiting scene to first begin exhibiting himself in these years, while it was in the immediate post-war period when the Belfast artists that Woodward establishes as central to the earlier flourishing of artistic life in the province began to fully establish their reputations across Ireland and internationally.<sup>120</sup> The prominent position of Colin Middleton and Daniel O'Neill among *Envoy's* represented 'younger generation' of painters testified to their increasing prominence in Irish art in these years through the promotion of Victor Waddington and the increasing all-Ireland influence of the independent organisations such as the 'Irish Exhibition of Living Art'.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the increasing prominence of modernist styles and practices in the public sphere into the post-war period placed new pressures and tensions on the nascent terms of critical debate surrounding Ireland's European cultural identity that Wills identifies during the earlier war years, whereby the competing rhetorics of internationalist support and nationalist opposition at their most acute became polarised along 'nativist-versus-cosmopolitan lines'.<sup>122</sup> In this, the challenge faced by a new youthful magazine such as *Envoy* was in translating what Terence Brown has termed its 'rather self-conscious Europeanism' into a more critically interrogative transnational forum for literature and art.<sup>123</sup> Reviewing the magazine's June 1951 issue, the Catholic weekly *The Standard* observed that 'there is a Latin Quarter tilt to its hat that would not surprise in St. Germain de Pres (where I believe it is quite popular), but is very irritating in the more contemplative and conservative atmosphere of Ireland'.<sup>124</sup> Such a comment should not only be viewed within the nationalist editorial context of the weekly itself, but at the same time identifies the propensity of *Envoy's* earnest openness to external international influences to descend to mere unadulterated Europhilic appreciation and the belief that, as

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<sup>120</sup> Woodward, *Culture, Northern Ireland, and the Second World War*, p. 131.

<sup>121</sup> John Ryan, 'Patrick Swift: An Introductory Note', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 56-57 (p. 56).

<sup>122</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 284.

<sup>123</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 215.

<sup>124</sup> F.F., 'On the Importance of Being Earnest', *The Standard*, 29 June 1951, p. 6;

Wills writes, ‘being cultured was all too often synonymous with being Europeanly sophisticated, more at home in Montmartre than Killiney or Sandymount’.<sup>125</sup> This was a challenge, as we will consider in chapter six, that was particularly pertinent to the promotion of modernist Irish art during the immediate post-war years. Given, then, the extent to which the recent cultural historical research into the impact of the war years on literature and art both north and south of the border has yet to be translated into a comparably cogent sense of its post-war legacy, a central preoccupation of this thesis is to chart this progression into the late 1940s and early 50s through the prism of *Envoy* and its milieu.

### ***Mid-century modernist legacies in Irish culture***

The internationalising impact of the war years on Irish culture marks the 1940s as a key decade in the context of the reception of literary and visual modernism in Ireland. As a magazine launched at the turn of the mid-twentieth century, *Envoy* was uniquely positioned to critically assimilate and assess these developments while providing a contemporary platform by which they might evolve into new strategies of expression and forms of identity adequate to the experience of post-war life. A concern of this study in examining *Envoy* as a site of transnational aspiration and activity in Ireland during the immediate post-war years, thereby, is the magazine’s engagement with the legacies of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century international modernism in literature, visual art, and in relation to the modernist tradition of ‘little magazines’ of which *Envoy*’s editors felt part. In this, the thesis aligns itself with major recent publications in Irish modernist scholarship that have contributed to the broader transformation of the critical field since the 1990s with the advent of what has been popularly termed ‘the new modernist studies’.<sup>126</sup> As Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz have

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<sup>125</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 285.

<sup>126</sup> Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘The New Modernist Studies’, *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 3 (May 2008), 737-748 (p. 737).

charted, the establishment of ‘the new modernist studies’ across Anglophone modernist scholarship over the past three decades has resulted in the radical methodological expansion of the field in a series of definitive ‘temporal, spatial, and vertical directions’, extending its traditionally circumscribed periodization between the late nineteenth century and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939; challenging its hegemonic concentration in the metropolitan centres of Paris, London, and New York; and interrogating the hierarchal processes by which certain works and authors have previously dominated the critical field by resituating modernist literature and art within the material contexts of its production, transmission, and reception.<sup>127</sup> For Mao and Walkowitz, these developments have conditioned the decisive ‘transnational turn’ in the critical field in recent years, geographically extending the Western European and North American coordinates that have typically defined modernist terms of reference to focus on hitherto marginalised regions, nations, and territories, thereby implicating the name and nature of modernism to a greater and broader extent than ever before in the ‘interrelation of cultural, political, and economic transactions’ that flowed ‘within and across national spaces’ throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>128</sup>

It is this broadening and deepening of the critical field that has stimulated recent advancements in Irish modernist scholarship, with the landmark *Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism* aiming for example to uncover a wider and more complex understanding of Irish modernism beyond the traditional focus on the achievements of its three most distinguished national and international figures: W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. Writing in his introduction to the collection, Joe Cleary observes that ‘it is arguable that precisely because they were so remarkable, the achievements of Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett have ultimately contributed to an attenuated conception of the history and

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 739.

achievements of Irish modernism more broadly'.<sup>129</sup> While the *Companion* does not in any way look to detract from the enormous impact of these writers on the course of twentieth-century literary and artistic culture, it is nonetheless guided by the ethos of 'the new modernist studies' in the ambition to develop alongside and in dynamic relation to their canonical works and influence a broader more diverse picture of the field of Irish modernist activity, driven by the recognition that 'the history of Irish modernism in the wider sense is still, for all the attention devoted to Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett, in its early stage and tentative'.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, a central achievement of the *Companion* is in the extent to which it establishes a new 'expanded frame' by which to consider modernist production, transmission, and reception in Ireland and internationally, supplementing the traditionally dominant literary focus with an impressive generic diversity that takes in the visual and plastic arts, music, cinema, and architecture, while drawing important attention to the extended network of mediators involved in and often indeed central to the creation, production, and reception of modernism, from publishers, patrons, and editors, to art dealers, curators, and directors.<sup>131</sup> As such, Cleary envisages the volume as encouraging a new recognition of 'the tangled roots from which Irish modernism grew and to acknowledge the capillary and often surprising route along which it was later to evolve and accrue social meaning'.<sup>132</sup> This more expansive research remit is combined with the *Companion's* 'capacious' understanding of the term 'Irish modernism' itself, where the concentration on Irish artists and sensitivity to local conditions and circumstances is at the same time always aware and indeed looking to trace the international connections and networks that were essential to modernist production

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<sup>129</sup> Joe Cleary, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*, ed. by Joe Cleary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



throughout the period, based on the awareness that ‘however, defined it was from the outset a decidedly transnational phenomenon’.<sup>133</sup>

An important aspect of this new ‘expanded frame’ of modernist research and which is most pertinent to our study of *Envoy* has been the growing recognition of the mid-twentieth century as a key early period in the reception of and engagement with the legacies of modernism in Irish culture. The need to arrive at a more complex understanding of what Cleary identifies as ‘the vagaries’ of the Irish critical reception of modernist practices and styles in literature and art has been importantly advanced through two recent essay collections: *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics* and *Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture*.<sup>134</sup> Published in 2010, *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics* marked the first interdisciplinary volume to present a sustained examination of the emergence, reception, and legacy of modernism in Ireland. ‘In the early twentieth century, Ireland emerged as a significant crucible of literary modernism’, editors Edwina Keown and Carol Taaffe state, ‘However, while Irish modernist writers quickly won international acclaim, the broader impact of modernism on twentieth-century Irish culture has attracted relatively little attention’.<sup>135</sup> Focusing on the material dynamics of production, promotion, reception, and the marketplace, the collected essays share a common ‘historicist focus’ in attempting to ‘create a material basis for a fresh exploration of modernism in Ireland’.<sup>136</sup> In this, essays we will return to in the thesis such as Róisín Kennedy’s consideration of the White Stag Group reveal how the dynamic independent exhibiting practices and promotional print culture developed by the eclectic international group of wartime émigrés dramatically propelled expressionist and surrealist art forms and ideas into the Irish public sphere.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>135</sup> Edwina Keown and Carol Taaffe, ‘Introduction’, in *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, ed. by Edwina Keown and Carol Taaffe (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

<sup>136</sup> Keown and Taaffe, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Róisín Kennedy, ‘Experimentalism or Mere Chaos? The White Stag Group and the Reception of Subjective Art in Ireland’, in *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, pp. 179-194.

*Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture*, meanwhile, takes as its starting point the mid-twentieth century in exploring ‘the manifestations of the themes, forms, and practices of high modernism in Irish literature and culture produced subsequent to that cultural movement’, considering how Irish artists from mid-century onwards have engaged with modernist legacies not only among literary genres but in practices such as dance, publishing, design, and film.<sup>138</sup> As with *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, the collection adopts a wide-ranging interdisciplinary and materialist approach in developing a ‘thick’ description of the cultural history of modernism in Ireland, taking in literary and visual culture perspectives as well as exploring the independent and institutional contexts of modernist production into the second half of the twentieth century. The collection’s distinguishing sensitivity to the complexities inherent in the periodization of the critical reception of modernism in Ireland and how ‘distinctive temporalities define modernism in different fields’, meanwhile, is discussed by Lucy Collins in her essay on Irish women poets of the 1940s.<sup>139</sup> For Collins, ‘the term “modernist afterlife” brings into sharp relief the complex question of literary temporalities’:

The difficulty in establishing a chronology of modernist writing inevitably troubles our evaluation of its legacy, our ability to tell its ‘life’ from its ‘afterlife’. In different geographical settings, as well as in different art forms, various patterns of formal development and thematic preoccupations can be traced, yet even within these situations there are multiple modernisms, rather than a single, coherent movement.<sup>140</sup>

It is this movement away from what Peter Nicholl’s has similarly identified as ‘the one-dimensional view of modernism’ which ‘is with us still’, namely, that of a ‘monolithic ideological formation’, that guides this study in its assessment of the extent to which *Envoy*’s transnational aspirations and activity saw it become engaged with various modernist legacies

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<sup>138</sup> Paige Reynolds, ‘Introduction’, in *Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. by Paige Reynolds (London & New York: Anthem Press, 2016), pp. 1-11 (p. 1).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>140</sup> Lucy Collins, ‘“I Knew What It Meant / Not to Be at All”: Death and the (Modernist) Afterlife in the Work of Irish Women Poets of the 1940s’, in *Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture*, pp. 23-34 (p. 23).

in literature and art.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, Peter Brooker's echoing belief that we have to recognise a 'plurality of modernisms' can be joined in this sense with the necessity of recognising the pluralities inherent in its mid-twentieth century reception.<sup>142</sup> The assertion in *Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture*, that the varying extents to which modernist practices, movements, and ideas resonated with Irish writers and artists into the mid-twentieth century was contingent upon distinctive temporal and situational circumstances, is crucial to our understanding of how the legacies of modernism diversely registered and influenced a magazine such as *Envoy*.

A consequence of the limited scholarly focus on *Envoy* to date has been the simplification of the relations between the magazine and modernism. Tom Clyde, for example, in his landmark history and bibliographic guide to Irish literary magazines, inevitably relies upon the one-dimensional view of modernism and its impact as a 'monolithic ideological formation' within the brief space allocated to his description of *Envoy*. Characterising the magazine as the "younger", trendier relative' of *The Bell*, he states that '*Envoy* takes one aspect of *The Bell* (its coverage of modernism in the arts, with an openness to outside influences) and makes an entire magazine out of it'.<sup>143</sup> A full-length study contrastingly enables us to arrive at a more complex understanding of how *Envoy* more accurately registers, to return to Cleary, the 'tangled' and 'capillary and often surprising [routes]' along which various modernist legacies were 'later to evolve and accrue social meaning'.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, while *Envoy* as a magazine characteristically pitched itself in emphatic oppositional terms against the inheritance of the Revival and contemporary neo-revivalism, the extent to which literary and visual modernisms provided alternative viable aesthetic or ideological strategies was far from wholesale. They were in fact subject to a range of temporal

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<sup>141</sup> Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. vii.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Brooker, *New York Fictions: Modernity, Postmodernism, The New Modern* (Harlow: Longman, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>143</sup> Tom Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), p. 46.

<sup>144</sup> Cleary, 'Introduction', p. 15.

and situational contingencies that propelled certain practices and elements to the fore while consigning others to the margins of cultural debate. For example, as we will examine in chapter one, the publication of an extract from Samuel Beckett's *Watt* in *Envoy*'s second issue represented a major moment for the magazine's associated milieu of writers and artists (and, indeed, representing a significant moment in Beckett's own Irish publishing history) in that it restored the Paris-based writer to a generative position of influence for a new generation of Irish contemporaries after a decade of absence, anticipating the remarkable transformation of his national and international reputation into the 1950s with the subsequent success of his trilogy of novels and the staging of his first play. The extract's comic attack on logical thought and rationality in many ways refigured in prose the modernist '[rupturing] of the lines of communication' that Beckett had earlier demanded of Irish poets in his 1934 essay 'Recent Irish Poetry'.<sup>145</sup> However, even as *Envoy*'s young poets such as Anthony Cronin and Valentin Iremonger marvelled at Beckett's prose in the magazine's Grafton Street offices and found in its disrupted narrative form an emblem of the existential disquiet of post-war life, *Envoy*'s poetry more generally over the course of its twenty issues reveals the extent to which the emerging contemporary scene had shifted from the original geographical and ideological coordinates by which Beckett had conceived of this rupturing and had notoriously divided Irish poetry between 'antiquarians and others'.<sup>146</sup>

'Recent Irish Poetry's' assertion of Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey as 'without question the most interesting of the youngest generation' of Irish poets was sanctioned by their affiliation to Francophone modernist poetic culture and figures such as Tristan Corbière, Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue, and movements such as surrealism, emphasising the extent to which contemporary Irish poetry of the 1930s had 'found a common intellectual and

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<sup>145</sup> Andrew Bellis (Samuel Beckett), 'Recent Irish Poetry', *The Bookman*, vol. 86, no. 515 (August 1934), repr. in Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983), pp. 70-76 (p. 70).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

aesthetic focus in the cosmopolitan cultural life of Paris'.<sup>147</sup> While an extract from Devlin's late work *The Heavenly Foreigner* would notably feature in *Envoy*, what emerges more broadly from the magazine is the condition by which the major transnational network of connection and affiliation for the arriving Irish poets of the 1940s and 50s had definitively shifted from France to Britain, with the major figures associated with the British 'Thirties generation', namely, Louis MacNeice and W.H. Auden, becoming established in the magazine's publishing life as post-war poetic exemplars.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, *Envoy*'s cultivation of British-Irish poetic relations during a period riven by anti-colonial separatist rhetoric in Irish culture and politics stands arguably as its most significant transnational achievement in these years. Through this vital cross-channel network, 'communication' becomes in fact a fundamental aesthetic criteria for *Envoy*'s associated poets, with the development of a lucid and responsible post-war poetic evolving in distinctive ways from the various commitments to realist and documentary styles that characterised British and Irish poetry during the 1930s and 40s.<sup>149</sup>

Conversely, that it is in the visual arts where continental modernism registers most emphatically in *Envoy* is again predicated upon the divergent temporal and situational contingencies that mediated modernist reception in mid-century Ireland. What S.B. Kennedy has identified as the 'watershed' decade of the 1940s for Irish art saw modernist painting and sculpture promoted in the public sphere on an unprecedented scale and diversity, headed by the innovative independent activities of artist groups such as the White Stag and the 'Irish Exhibition of Living Art' and commercial dealers such as Victor Waddington.<sup>150</sup> It was the gathering momentum of these developments into the post-war period that saw *Envoy*'s art

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<sup>147</sup> Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis, 'Introduction', in *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s*, ed. by Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 1-23 (p. 1).

<sup>148</sup> Robin Skelton, 'Introduction', in *Poetry of the Thirties*, ed. by Robin Skelton (London: Penguin, 1964), pp. 13-37 (p. 14). Devlin was featured in *Envoy*'s March 1950 issue. Denis Devlin, 'Two Extracts from The Heavenly Foreigner', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950), 23-24.

<sup>149</sup> Valentin Iremonger, 'Book Reviews: *Collected Poems, 1929-1948*, by Louis MacNeice', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), 78-84 (p. 79).

<sup>150</sup> S.B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1991), p. 90.

section become a site variously for post-Impressionist, expressionist, surrealist, and cubist influenced painting as it manifested in Ireland and internationally. The extent to which this growing confidence and momentum fastened a sense of connection between *Envoy's* artistic milieu and the Continent in these years was captured by the prominent art critic Edward Sheehy in his reflections on the transformative impact of the war years in the magazine itself:

It may even appear contradictory; but it seems to me that our very isolation created here a feeling of individuality and self-confidence; or alternatively and perhaps simultaneously the very precariousness of our chosen isolation demonstrated even more strongly than involvement that we were part of modern Europe, and not, as some would pretend, an exotic and miraculous survival from a Celtic Middle Ages. At any rate the result was that Ireland, for the first time in her history, developed a body of painters comparable to their contemporaries in Europe and America.<sup>151</sup>

### ***The literary magazine as a scholarly resource***

Periodical culture has emerged as major new area of academic research over recent decades. In this, the advent of 'the new modernist studies' has again been central, advancing the significance of the 'little magazine' to practices of cultural production and exchange in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while also establishing key methodological practices by which to examine the sub-genre. Though recognised as being generally 'diverse in size, agenda and longevity' over these decades, the 'little magazine' tradition has nonetheless become classically associated with certain generic characteristics that distinguish it within the broader modern periodical culture of which it forms part.<sup>152</sup> Typically set up by small independent groups or coteries and fraught with financial difficulty, the 'little magazine' establishes itself as a fleeting platform for new and often challenging writing and art, unmotivated by and often in direct confrontation with the conventions of the wider mass-

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<sup>151</sup> Edward Sheehy, 'Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950', *Envoy*, vol. 3 no. 10 (September 1950), 45-52 (p. 46).

<sup>152</sup> Adam McKible and Suzanne Churchill, 'Little Magazines and Modernism: An Introduction', *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism and Bibliography*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2005), p. 3.

market. In their seminal early synoptic guide to international modernism, *Modernism 1890-1930*, editors Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane asserted that the plethora of magazines produced by individuals, coteries, and movements across this period should be viewed as key frames of reference amidst the ‘frenzy of forms and artistic energies variously expressed and variously justified’ that propelled literary and artistic activity from the end of the nineteenth into the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>153</sup> Magazines represented in this way ‘a crucial part of the literary scene’, inspiring a heightened, though typically short-lived, sense of cohesion and purpose among writers and artists that was vital to the creation, transmission, and reception of new work, styles, and ideas. The inevitable financial constraints that typically curtailed their longevity and reach belies the importance of their function as alternative platforms for often challenging and subversive material, as Bradbury and McFarlane write:

It was largely through such magazines that the evolving works of Modernism achieved their transmission, sought out their audiences, as *Ulysses* did through the American *Little Review*. And, gradually, it was the self-consciously small paper, in an era of large publishing ventures, that began to take over not only the localized work of particular movements but the larger tasks of cultural transmission. Such papers, with a limited but distinctive readership, specialized and usually advanced in taste, disposed (often) to bring the various arts together, became the primary expressions of new talent.<sup>154</sup>

With the new concentrated focus on the material sites of cultural production and distribution in the wake of ‘the new modernist studies’, the magazine has become a central resource for scholarly research into the period, variously described as ‘the quintessential genre of modernist publication’ and the ‘crucible of the historical avant-garde’ in recent studies.<sup>155</sup> The Oxford Modernist Magazine Project has been at the forefront of these

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<sup>153</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ‘Movements, Magazines and Manifestos: The Succession from Naturalism’, in *Modernism 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 192-205 (p. 199).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Mark S. Morrison, ‘Nationalism and the modern American Canon’, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, ed. by Walter Kalaidjian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 12-36 (p. 18); Eric B. White, *Transatlantic Avant-Gardes: Little Magazines and Localist Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 1.

developments. Comprising three substantial published volumes of multi-authored essays, the project ‘[ventures] out into the hinterland of British and Irish periodicals’ and beyond over the course of its second and third volumes across North America and Europe.<sup>156</sup> Each volume is divided into chronologically and thematically ordered sections progressing from the 1880s to the 1950s, combining contextualised editorial overviews with chapters that locate specific magazines within the wider social and cultural conditions from which they emerged. With nearly three hundred periodicals discussed throughout, the project achieves a greatly expanded sense of the role of the magazine in ‘servicing new writing, introducing readers to new movements in the arts across different continents, engendering debate, disseminating ideas, and challenging settled assumptions’.<sup>157</sup> In accordance with Bradbury and McFarlane, editors Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker situate the magazine alongside the cafés, small presses, and salons as ‘belong[ing] to the institutions that sustained and promoted modernism’.<sup>158</sup> Together, these independent outlets and venues formed an ‘urban network across which individual writers and artists moved or formed groups or associations’, representing creative locus points ‘at the heart of an internally variegated and often internationally connected counter-cultural sphere’.<sup>159</sup> For Brooker and Thacker, there remains however much scholarly work to be done in order to uncover the full extent and nature of the relationship between magazines and practices of cultural production and exchange during the twentieth century. ‘For the most part’, they contend, ‘it would be fair to say that magazines have represented an unexplored place on the map, or more prosaically the library shelves and basement archives of modernism, rather than a new intellectual territory busy with students and researchers’.<sup>160</sup> The first volume duly attends to this perceived critical oversight through

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<sup>156</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, ‘General Introduction’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume I, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-26 (p. 4).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



its enormous scope and eclectic approach, moving beyond well-known London-based magazines such as *BLAST* and *The Criterion* to the less explored publishing enterprises that simultaneously enlivened literary and artistic life in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The ‘different geographical inflections’ given to these magazines and the ways in which they complicate our sense of the period, the volume argues, ‘have not been sufficiently studied as part of the story of modernism in Britain and Ireland’.<sup>161</sup>

The contributor of the chapter dealing with Irish literary magazines in the volume, Frank Shovlin, has been along with Tom Clyde at the forefront of advancing the value of periodical culture in opening up similarly new fruitful avenues of research in Irish Studies, asserting the literary magazine in particular as ‘a powerful means of understanding Irish cultural and historical trends’.<sup>162</sup> In his seminal 2003 study, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923-1958*, Shovlin addressed the ‘general charge of neglect’ of literary magazines and the mid-twentieth century more generally as an area of study in Irish Studies, constructing a ‘detailed cultural history of the period’ through the lens of six major periodicals over the course of three decades.<sup>163</sup> For Shovlin, the magazine represents more than simply the site of publication or a platform for the launching of young writers’ careers, but rather establishes itself a ‘crucial [influence] on the development of those careers and on the ways in which writing was interpreted’.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, the Irish literary magazine becomes in these decades a vital forum for the formation and challenging of national cultural identity in a way that continuously draws questions of aesthetics into the public political sphere, as he describes, ‘Irish magazines in the same period had the task of questioning issues of identity, of

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>162</sup> Frank Shovlin, ‘From Revolution to Republic: Magazines, Modernism, and Modernity in Ireland: *The Klaxon* (1923), *The Irish Statesman* (1923-30), *The Dublin Magazine* (1923-58), *To-Morrow* (1924), *Ireland To-Day* (1936-8), and *The Bell* (1940-54)’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume I, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, pp. 735-758 (p. 737).

<sup>163</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 1; p. 4. Shovlin examines *The Irish Statesman* (1923-1930), *The Dublin Magazine* (1923-1958), *Ireland To-Day* (1936-1938), *The Bell* (1940-1954), *Envoy* (1949-1951), and *Rann* (1948-1953).

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., pp.

attempting not just to uncover new talent or to set the artistic tone, but to define the culture of a new nation'.<sup>165</sup>

Tom Clyde's ambitious bibliographic and historical reference guide of Irish literary magazines spanning the eighteenth to the twentieth century was published in the same year as Shovlin, similarly asserting 'the wealth of the Irish Literary Magazine as an important resource' for scholars of Irish Studies in a way that has laid foundations for more specific critical explorations into the field.<sup>166</sup> For Clyde, the essential 'currency' of the magazine is in its capacity to function as 'the training ground for new writers, a forum in which established writers have license to experiment', while at the same time representing 'a sounding-board for whatever issues – political, ethical, artistic – agitated sensibilities at the time'.<sup>167</sup> As with Shovlin, Clyde also recognises the Irish literary magazine's central role in debates surrounding questions of national cultural identity in these years, drawing from Benedict Anderson's theory of the 'imagined political community' in his classic study of the development and nature of modern nations and nationalism.<sup>168</sup> For Anderson, the communal identity that binds individuals together within the circumscribed borders of a nation is an 'imagined' construct because 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.<sup>169</sup> Print culture, and particularly the rise of the daily newspaper, was an essential medium through which this condition emerged and was sustained, enabling 'rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways'.<sup>170</sup> As Anderson writes, the powerful sense of shared experience that develops between groups of individuals habitually reading the same texts

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<sup>165</sup> Shovlin, 'From Revolution to Republic: Magazines, Modernism, and Modernity in Ireland', p. 736.

<sup>166</sup> Clyde, 'Introduction', in *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography*, pp. ix-xvii (p. x). Clyde focuses exclusively on English language magazines printed in Ireland dating from 1710 onwards.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>168</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edition (London & New York: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

contributes to ‘creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of the modern nation’.<sup>171</sup> With this in mind, Clyde emphasises the dynamic importance of Irish literary magazines both as vital sites of independent communal literary activity and of evolving and contested concepts of national identity, contending that they are ‘not just an accidental by-product of that imagining, but a key mechanism by which it takes place, and at the same time a forum *for* and an embodiment *of it*’.<sup>172</sup>

*Envoy* ranged across these local and global magazine traditions that have emerged as such an important new area of focus in both Irish and wider Anglophone literary studies in recent decades. The magazine’s sense of itself within the wider international tradition of ‘little magazines’ mapped by the Oxford Modernist Magazine Project was essential to fortifying its editorial identity in adversity as an independent platform for new and challenging writing unmotivated by the commercial conventions of the literary market. Yet *Envoy*’s transnationalism at the same time forms part of the ‘imaginings of Irishness’ that Clyde identifies as the central preoccupation underpinning Irish cultural production during these years.<sup>173</sup> The desire to extend the Irish literary and artistic domain beyond the typically circumscribed critical boundaries of cultural nationalist debate in the mid-twentieth century was in itself a manifestation of the magazine’s ‘hoped for New Irelands’ that Clyde traces more broadly across the Irish literary magazine tradition, with *Envoy* advancing an expanded conception of ‘community’ marked by its permeability and openness to external international influences.<sup>174</sup>

Clyde and Shovlin have laid the essential foundations for the present and future development of the field of Irish periodical studies. However, that literary magazines and particularly lesser-known publications nonetheless still represent a ‘relatively unexplored

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Clyde, ‘Introduction’, in *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography*, p. xii.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

place on the map' is exemplified by the fact that both their works remain among the primary published critical engagements with a magazine such as *Envoy* to date.<sup>175</sup> Clyde's establishing of the basic bibliographical and reference details relating to *Envoy* has been more recently supplemented by the valuable generic perspectives provided by Malcolm Ballin in *Irish Periodical Culture, 1937-1972: Genre in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland*. Ballin situates *Envoy* within the counter-cultural sub-genre of the 'little magazine', with its characteristic adversarial cultural stance one of 'intellectual defiance' in the face of material adversity.<sup>176</sup> *Envoy* similarly satisfies Ballin's distinctive virtue of the 'little magazine' in the 'nurturing of creative potential and its role in facilitating dialogue between writers'.<sup>177</sup> Shovlin's *Envoy* essay in *The Irish Literary Periodical*, meanwhile, remains the most substantial published examination of the magazine and its milieu.<sup>178</sup> In its situating of the magazine within the challenging socio-economic and political contexts of the immediate post-war period, its illustration of the significance of *Envoy*'s international outlook and promotion of individual writers such as Patrick Kavanagh, Shovlin's essay provides the launching platform for this thesis.

Apart from these critical considerations, *Envoy* has been typically considered within the broader critical contexts of cultural historical studies as well as in an array of theoretical, generic, and biographical scholarly publications. A shared characteristic across this eclectic group of texts is the consensus of *Envoy*'s distinctive significance as a literary magazine, though the limited space provided for its consideration generally curtails any extensive level of analysis. Terence Brown's identification of the magazine's importance in his social and cultural history of twentieth-century Ireland has been echoed by Brian Fallon in his

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<sup>175</sup> Brooker and Thacker, 'General Introduction', p. 3. A complete index to *Envoy* has been compiled by Michael O'Neill. Michael O'Neill, 'Indexes to *Envoy*' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, Queen's University Belfast, 1987).

<sup>176</sup> Malcolm Ballin, *Irish Periodical Culture, 1937-1972: Genre in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 96.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>178</sup> Shovlin's essay builds from his earlier consideration of *Envoy* among various other mid-century magazines in 'Between the Sheets: Material Production and Cultural Politics in the Irish Periodical Press, 1922-58, in *New Voices in Irish Criticism*, ed. by P.J. Matthews (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 197-205.

revisionary survey of mid-twentieth-century Irish culture, citing *Envoy* as one of the ‘major literary magazines’ of the period – albeit within the generally appreciative and praising tone that characterises his study.<sup>179</sup> For Fallon, the value of the magazine was in the way it provided a new platform for a young emergent group of writers and artists that had become disenchanted with older established periodicals such as *The Dublin Magazine*, arguing that *Envoy* ‘spoke for the generation which Seumas O’Sullivan had notably failed to attract’.<sup>180</sup> Gerry Smyth similarly identifies the importance of *Envoy* for a new generation of post-war literary and artistic voices in his meta-critical study of the effects of colonisation and decolonisation on the construction of Irish identity in literature. ‘Published in the bohemian quarter of Dublin and commissioning the more innovative and daring writers, *Envoy* possessed all the attractions of the new kid on the literary block’, he states, drawing attention to difference both from *The Bell*’s ‘progressive nationalism’ and inherited conventions of Irishness, attracting new writers in its editorial assertion that ‘literary affiliation took precedence over any kind of sectional or national affiliation, and ‘literature’ needed no qualifying adjective to make it valuable or interesting’.<sup>181</sup> While Irish literary periodicals such as *The Bell* have benefited from monographic studies in recent years, *Envoy* remains among a significant group of magazines yet to receive adequate critical consideration.<sup>182</sup> Remarking on this ‘lack of scholarly scrutiny’ in a recent review, Shovlin has identified the need to deepen our understanding of the field of mid-century periodical culture beyond its most well-known titles, arguing ‘is it not time we had a book-length study on, for instance, *Envoy* (1949-1951), *Hibernia* (1968-1980), or *Ireland To-Day* (1936-1938)?’<sup>183</sup> This thesis works towards filling such a lacuna in Irish periodical studies.

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<sup>179</sup> Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960*, p. 13.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>181</sup> Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*, p. 118.

<sup>182</sup> Kelly Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity: Opening Windows* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012); Niall Carson, *Rebel by vocation: Seán O’Faoláin and the generation of The Bell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

<sup>183</sup> Frank Shovlin, ‘Book Reviews: *Periodicals and Journalism in Twentieth Century Ireland: Writing Against the Grain*’, *Media History*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2015), 497-499 (p. 499)

### *Materialist methodological approach*

A significant achievement of the Oxford Modernist Magazines project is in its consolidation of a defined methodological practice in engaging with periodical culture. Drawing attention to the recent ‘materialist turn’ in the field of periodical studies, Brooker and Thacker advance in their introduction the value of a ‘historicizing and materialist approach’ that can situate the magazine within the socio-economic contexts of its production.<sup>184</sup> In contending that ‘the physical material of the magazine itself is, therefore, a crucial factor in understanding the texts and images found within its pages’, Brooker and Thacker importantly draw from the work of editorial theorists such as Jerome McGann.<sup>185</sup> In *The Textual Condition*, McGann asserts the necessity for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literary works that will ‘demonstrate the semiotics of the text as that has been the subject of attention of bibliographers, sociologists, economists, and tradespersons of various kinds’:

We must turn our attention to much more than the formal and linguistic features of poems or other imaginative fictions. We must attend to textual materials which are not regularly studied by those interested in “poetry”: to typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral to “poetry” or “the text as such”.<sup>186</sup>

As a means of critically engaging with these different textual elements, McGann proposes a view of the text ‘as a laced network of linguistic and bibliographical codes’.<sup>187</sup> In the literary magazine, then, the linguistic codes designate the actual words of the text, ‘the verbal outcome at every level’, the individual letters and words that build up into the complex rhetorical structures of the articles, poems, and prose that are typically presented as ‘the main

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<sup>184</sup> Brooker and Thacker, ‘General Introduction’, p. 5; p. 9.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>186</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 12-13.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

textual event’ of the magazine.<sup>188</sup> The bibliographic codes, meanwhile, are those material elements that package and convey the prescribed contents, and also include a variety of additional linguistic elements traditionally considered ancillary to ‘the main textual event’. As McGann lists above, the bibliographic codes comprise all aspects of the magazine’s material production and design including paper quality and size, typography, layout, illustrations, and advertisements. For McGann, every ‘bibliographical aspect of a literary work is meaningful, and potentially significant’ and the recognition of their importance in dynamic relation to the linguistic codes is essential to the study of texts and textuality.<sup>189</sup> This consideration of the way in which a magazine’s materiality contributes to its meaning enables a deeper understanding of what Ian Willison describes as the ‘sociology of the text’, providing an insight into the relationship between a magazine and its external environment in a way that is not necessarily conveyed by its ‘linguistic codes’ alone.<sup>190</sup>

The value of a ‘thick’ description of the literary magazine that can situate it within the complex material contingencies of its production is similarly emphasised by Shovlin, observing that such an approach provides an ‘effective mechanism through which something as amorphous and diffuse as a literary magazine can be examined’.<sup>191</sup> By drawing in the external relations of a magazine’s production, transmission, and reception, the scholar can begin to ‘[locate] the genre within a material history of the country’, thereby illustrating ‘the unique usefulness of the literary journal for a more profound understanding of changes and developments in twentieth-century Irish culture’.<sup>192</sup> The capacity of this methodological approach to uncover new and challenging textual interpretations is particularly evident with a magazine such as *Envoy*. *Envoy*’s linguistic codes typically foregrounded its cultural project in autonomous terms, from the oppositional editorial stance taken against the commercial

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>190</sup> Ian Willison, ‘Introduction’, in *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*, ed. by Ian Willison, Warwick Gould, Warren Chernaik (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), pp. xii-xviii (p. xii)

<sup>191</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 10.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

concerns of the mass-literary market as a magazine dedicated to ‘*Literary value*, literary *value*’, to the declaration that *Envoy* is solely ‘interested in all that is vital and creative in the world of art, and is, in the most complete sense of the word, disinterested in either politics or polemics’.<sup>193</sup> Such editorial pronouncements however belie the extent to which *Envoy*’s cultural project was in fact embedded in the socio-economic conditions and contexts of its time, and which a materialist reading of the magazine can begin to dynamically uncover. Archival research has emerged as central to this methodological approach in periodical studies and consequently underpins the practice and findings of this thesis, bringing together over the course of its six chapters a range of archival material from collections across Ireland, Britain, North America, and Canada. Most important to considerations of *Envoy* are the records of the magazine held at the Southern Illinois University. This vast collection consists of all the surviving published and unpublished manuscripts and letters related to *Envoy*. The array of business and literary correspondence, manuscript drafts, scrapbook clippings, and legal documents provide an invaluable insight into the daily running of the magazine. It is the wealth of this archive combined with significant findings from various other collections that provide the primary platform for each chapter, and by which the thesis aims to uncover the connections, networks, and movements that linked the magazine and its milieu to the wider world.

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<sup>193</sup> ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), 7-8 (p. 8); ‘Foreword: Oh to be in England now that Spring is there’, *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 1 (April 1950), 9-11 (p. 10).



**Part One**

**The Marketplace**

## Chapter One

### ‘The only surviving literary monthly in the West European Islands’:

#### The legacy of the ‘little magazine’

On 5 October 1949, a week before the first issue of *Envoy* was scheduled to go to print, John Ryan wrote to J.P. Donleavy expressing his concern at the prospect of losing his friend’s earlier proposed financial investment in his new magazine. ‘I haven’t seen you for so long that I am beginning to get worried as to whether or not you are still interested in the magazine’, Ryan began, before outlining the considerable expense he had himself already incurred in preparing *Envoy* for publication:

I have had to pay out of my own pocket almost £100 to meet our commitments and am feeling the prospect of having to pay out another £260 before the first issue comes out. The two subsequent issues will need £160 apiece bringing the capital which this company must have on hands within the next three months to £500. This is a hell of a lot of jack as you can understand and as time is running on I would be grateful if you would let me know soon if you are still willing to put up the amount which you mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

It was to Donleavy who Ryan had first expressed his intentions of launching a new Irish literary magazine while on an early post-war trip together in Paris.<sup>2</sup> Ryan’s family allowance crucially enabled him to inject these initial funds into the venture, however, the ultimately finite extent of this investment saw him look in these early months to his friends and associates for the necessary extra financial support.<sup>3</sup> Donleavy’s initially enthusiastic promise to provide such assistance appears to have gradually diminished as *Envoy* neared publication and its financial demands became more acute. ‘When I asked you had you any plans as

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<sup>1</sup> John Ryan to James Patrick Donleavy, 5 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan reminded this to Donleavy in their subsequent correspondence together, recalling in January 1950 how ‘On reflection it occurs to me that you were the first person with whom I discussed the possibility of starting the magazine. Much vapourized stout has been belched in John McDaid’s since that memorable day (in Paris I think) when the thing was originally mooted, and it would be a queer sort of kettle of fish if you weren’t to be in at the kill. John Ryan to James Patrick Donleavy, 18 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan was aided most substantially in this regard by his associate editor James Hillman, whose own substantial family allowance enabled him to contribute one hundred pounds to the magazine. The total estimate of Ryan’s investment by February 1950 amounted to two hundred and sixty-five pounds. John Ryan to James Patrick Donleavy, 7 February 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

regards the magazine I meant were you prepared to fling yourself into its working and invest a more substantial amount than £15', Ryan continued, 'I understood that you intended to put in £100 with the possibility of another £50 at a later date'.<sup>4</sup> Donleavy proposed somewhat flippantly in response that Ryan might employ more 'prudence in spending money' in order to minimise costs, to which Ryan angrily replied:<sup>5</sup>

You advise prudence – believe me, Mike, its my money and I don't exactly have it to throw around. My prudence, if you like, has saved an additional expenditure of God knows how much. I, myself work for nothing, I supply an office rent free together with a typewriter and all equipment (electricity, heat and charwoman do cost money) [...] Launching this venture and trying to prevent it from making me completely bankrupt is a task of such magnitude that I have small time to indulge in the luxury of making enemies or estranging friends.<sup>6</sup>

This financial precariousness even before the publication of its first issue set *Envoy* on what Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker have termed the classic 'perilous course' of the late nineteenth and twentieth-century 'little magazine' in the marketplace, whereby its editors had to contend at every point with the realities of their 'economic and cultural plight [...] at once dogged by the costs of production, haunted by the threat of censorship, at loggerheads with more conventional publications, and at war with the philistinism of a prevailing business culture'.<sup>7</sup> The difficulties posed by *Envoy*'s limited investment were compounded in this regard both domestically and internationally by the restricted socio-economic conditions of the recovering post-war literary market. The British Board of Trade enforcement of an official ban on the importation of books and periodicals into the United Kingdom from Ireland was a condition of the Anglo-American Loan Agreement of 1945, limiting cross-channel circulation access to direct subscription orders until the eventual lifting of the embargo in April 1950.<sup>8</sup>

'While most literary magazines at some point in their existence find themselves appealing for

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<sup>4</sup> John Ryan to James Patrick Donleavy, 7 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

<sup>5</sup> James Patrick Donleavy to John Ryan, 6 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/4/3.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan to Donleavy, 7 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

<sup>7</sup> Brooker and Thacker, 'General Introduction', p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> The limited extent of *Envoy*'s early circulation in Britain under the restrictions of the importation embargo is revealed in the magazine's business correspondence, with Hillman, for example, writing to various English bookshops in early 1950 stating that they it is only 'possible to make shipments in parcels of three or six copies'. James Hillman to Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford, 18 February 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/1.

financial assistance’, Frank Shovlin has observed, ‘it is significant that *Envoy* found itself having to do so from the outset’.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, even as *Envoy*’s editors boldly declared that their new magazine ‘will not simply occupy the vacant structure which its predecessors have left behind, but build a new one, not close an epoch of promise but inaugurate a new one of life and promise’, they recognised the serious material challenges faced by the magazine in sustaining itself.<sup>10</sup> ‘*Envoy* has, at this stage, another and an equally arduous function, that of distributing and selling itself, and in this it must look to its readers for help’, the opening editorial conceded, before explicitly referencing the difficulties imposed by the British trade restrictions:

These are days of high prices and no patronage and our best overseas market (Great Britain) is denied us by a ruling of the British Board of Trade which prohibits direct sales, but allows for mailed subscriptions. *Envoy* will have a trying journey from writer to reader unless its public – and by that we mean all those who have at heart good writing in general, and good Irish writing in particular – is eager to give it the help and encouragement which we feel confident the magazine will justify.<sup>11</sup>

The acute sense with which Ryan, Valentin Iremonger, and James Hillman recognised their ‘arduous function’ as editors of a new Irish literary magazine in December 1949 testified to the impact of the recent suspension of two of the decade’s most prominent monthly literary magazines in Ireland and Britain: *The Bell* and *Horizon*. Writing to the Belfast poet Roy McFadden in September 1949, Valentin Iremonger had expressed his concern ‘that living or attempting to live on 26-county sales alone is at best a hand to mouth existence’, registering a lack of confidence in a domestic literary market that had already proved unsustainable for what has been regarded as ‘the most influential and important Irish literary periodical of the twentieth century’.<sup>12</sup> Only two years after having taken over editorial duties of *The Bell* from Seán O’Faoláin, Peadar O’Donnell was forced to announce in April 1948 that ‘a very gallant

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<sup>9</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan, Iremonger, Hillman, ‘A Foreword to Vol. I. Number I’, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Valentin Iremonger to Roy McFadden, 22 Sep 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4; Shovlin, ‘From Revolution to Republic: Magazines, Modernism, and Modernity in Ireland’, p. 755.

effort has been halted' with the suspension of the magazine's publication.<sup>13</sup> Earlier, in the December 1947 issue, O'Donnell had notified his readers that 'the life of this magazine is in jeopardy' with the stated increase of seventy pounds per month in the printing costs placing unprecedented strain on *The Bell's* financial solvency.<sup>14</sup> Kelly Matthews has identified the impact of the British Board of Trade embargo on the magazine's declining state of affairs, cutting off the 'significant share' of its British-based readership.<sup>15</sup> O'Donnell consequently emphasised the importance of expanding *The Bell's* national readership, estimating that a thousand extra monthly readers would soon be necessary to free the magazine from 'the difficulties dragging us down'.<sup>16</sup> The significant difficulties mounted against achieving this goal however ultimately resulted in the magazine's closure only a few months later. Though O'Donnell concluded on the hopeful note in his final editorial that *The Bell* would 'resume publication by Autumn [*sic*]', the magazine would not ultimately return until November 1950.<sup>17</sup>

Muriel Mellows has observed in her introduction to the landmark reference guide *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984*, that 'as a whole, the postwar years were more notable for endings rather than for beginnings', and the sense of a vacuum in Irish cultural life in the wake of the suspension of *The Bell* was similarly experienced in Britain the following year with the closure of *Horizon* in December 1949.<sup>18</sup> Launched in January 1940, Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* established itself over the course of the decade as 'the most influential literary review of its time', exerting a key influence over Irish literary magazines throughout the period including *The Bell* and *Envoy*.<sup>19</sup> While it peaked at a substantial

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<sup>13</sup> Peadar O'Donnell, 'The Bell Suspends Publication', *The Bell*, vol. 16, no. 1 (April 1948), 1-4 (p. 4).

<sup>14</sup> Peadar O'Donnell, 'To Our Readers', *The Bell*, vol. 15, no. 3 (December 1947), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> O'Donnell, 'To Our Readers', p. 1. Matthews has estimated the *Bell's* peak readership at approximately 5,500. Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> O'Donnell, 'The Bell Suspends Publication', p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Muriel Mellows, 'Introduction', in *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984*, ed. by Alvin Sullivan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. xv-xxx (p. xxiv).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Shelden, *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of Horizon* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989) p. 2.

estimated readership of approximately 10,000 in 1945, the immediate post-war years brought increasing material challenges that contributed to *Horizon*'s gradual decline.<sup>20</sup> 'A decade of our lives is quite enough to devote to a lost cause such as the pursuit and marketing of quality in contemporary writing', Connolly conceded with a note of bitterness in *Horizon*'s penultimate issue in November 1949, 'In the end, despite all the good will in the world, the public gets the magazines it deserves'.<sup>21</sup> Along with the difficulty in sourcing new material for publication and an admitted dissipation of editorial enthusiasm, *Horizon*'s waning fate was compounded by unmanageable rising costs in production and a decreasing readership. As Connolly outlined, 'The cost of printing *Horizon* has risen steadily since the war while the circulation remains static':

We have no way of recovering this expense since the public would not pay more than half-a-crown for *Horizon* nor can we afford a large campaign to make people buy it. For the last three years we have watched a slow fall in the English sales of *Horizon*, fewer subscribers, more returns, increasing apathy.<sup>22</sup>

The terms and tone of *Envoy*'s developing cultural project were shaped by the magazine's complex and conflictual relationship with the marketplace. *Envoy*'s protest against the uncongenial commercial conditions governing literary production both at home and abroad, combined with the determination to navigate and overcome the material challenges it faced, manifest across the magazine's twenty issues as a tension between commercial opposition and opportunism that is strikingly illustrative of the predicament of the post-war literary magazine in a newly reconfiguring domestic and global economic sphere. As we will examine in chapter one, a distinguishing empowering feature of the magazine's transnational outlook was the extent to which it encouraged the editorial invocation of an embattled tradition of modernist 'little magazines' in reaction to the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*, vol. 20, no. 117 (November 1949), 285-286 (p. 285).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

increasing challenges of what Malcolm Ballin has observed as ‘the weak market for cultural productions’ in mid-century Ireland.<sup>23</sup> In the terms of cultural critic Pierre Bourdieu, *Envoy* drew significant ‘symbolic capital’ from its identification with major periodical predecessors such as *Horizon* and their mid-century inheritance of a modernist magazine legacy, stimulating a defiant oppositional editorial voice to mass-market literary forces in a way that was vital to maintaining a sense of the validity of the magazine’s artistic mission in the face of rising material adversity.<sup>24</sup> In their seminal 1946 bibliographic and historical study of twentieth-century Anglophone ‘little magazines’, editors Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich defined the sub-genre in terms of its adversarial market stance. Existing ‘in a kind of private life of their own on the margins of culture’, these magazines were ‘little’ insofar as they typically appealed to ‘a limited group of intelligent readers’ that consequently pitched them in opposition to the commercially driven interests of the larger ‘money minded periodicals or presses’:

Little magazines are willing to lose money, to court ridicule, to ignore public taste, willing to do almost anything – steal, beg, or undress in public – rather than sacrifice their right to print good material, especially if it comes from the unknown pen of a Faulkner or Hemmingway. Such periodicals are, therefore, noncommercial by intent, for their altruistic idea usually rules out the hope of financial profit. No doubt little magazine editors would welcome a circulation of a million or two, but they know that their magazines will appeal to only a limited group, generally not more than a thousand persons.<sup>25</sup>

Cyril Connolly would later theorise the traditionally volatile relationship between the avant-garde artistic aspirations of the modernist ‘little magazine’ and the conventions of its wider commercial milieu through the categorisation of the ‘dynamic’ magazine type.<sup>26</sup> ‘Dynamic

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<sup>23</sup> Ballin, *Irish Periodical Culture, 1937-1972*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods’, in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 74-111 (p. 75).

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> Cyril Connolly, ‘Little Magazines’ (first published 1960), in *The Evening Colonnade* (London: Dave Bruce & Watson, 1973), pp. 414-427 (p. 414).

magazines usually start with a fixed amount of money to lose and lose it', he stated,

'contributors are often unpaid and "names" are not sought for to increase circulation':

Dynamic magazines have a short life and it is round them that glamour and nostalgia crystallise. [...] The dynamic editor runs his magazine like a commando course where picked men are trained to assault the enemy position.<sup>27</sup>

The 'dynamic' modernist magazine was exemplified for Connolly by early twentieth-century publications such as Wyndham Lewis's London-based *BLAST*, a magazine that was centred around the short-lived vorticist movement in literature and art and running for only two issues in June 1914 and July 1915. Expressly setting out 'to be an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that could reach the Public in no other way', *BLAST*'s provocative title printed diagonally in large black capitals across a brash puce cover represented a 'visual radicalism' that set it apart from the standard design practices of its contemporary literary periodicals and established the confrontational artistic tone that would define its editorial identity.<sup>28</sup> The combative avant-garde editorial persona of the 'dynamic' magazine was most explosively assumed in Ireland during this period by *The Klaxon: An Irish International Quarterly*, which ran for only one issue in 1923. Tim Armstrong has referred to *The Klaxon* as the 'Irish Blast', with its angular capitalised title font printed diagonally above a geometrically rendered urban scene clearly mimicking the brash typography of its London predecessor.<sup>29</sup> Founded by writer and later *Envoy* contributor A.J. 'Con' Leventhal primarily so that he could independently publish his defence of *Ulysses* following its earlier rejection by *The Dublin Magazine*, *The Klaxon*'s articles more generally struck out against the inherited legacy of the Literary

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 414-415.

<sup>28</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Long Live the Vortex!', *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex*, no. 1 (June 1914), 7-8 (p. 7); Andrzej Gasiorek, 'The "Little Magazine" as Weapon: *BLAST* (1914-15)', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume 1, Britain and Ireland*, pp. 290-313 (p. 296).

<sup>29</sup> Tim Armstrong, 'Muting the Klaxon: Poetry, History, and Irish Modernism', in *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s*, ed. by Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 43-74 (p. 43).



Revival and the intellectually degrading forces of ‘Commercialism [that] swings its iron hammer on all things’ in the name of an emergent internationalist bohemian counter-culture:<sup>30</sup>

We are the offspring of a gin and vermouth in a local public house. We swore that we were young and could assert our youth with all its follies. We railed against the psychopedantic parlours of our elders and their old maidenly consorts, hoping the while with an excess of Picabia and banter, a whiff of Dadaist Europe to kick Ireland into artistic wakefulness.<sup>31</sup>

*Envoy*'s editors were very much aware of this broader international tradition of modernist ‘little mags.’, as the foreword to its August 1950 issue described it, both in the preparation stages of their magazine and throughout its publishing life.<sup>32</sup> We will first consider how the association played a key role in bolstering *Envoy*'s editorial voice and what Shovlin has observed as the ‘adopted tone of embattlement [that] gave the magazine a focus which set it apart from contemporary journals’.<sup>33</sup> *Envoy* self-defensively cultivated a ‘dynamic’ editorial persona towards the mass-market publishing and media forces that dominated literary life in Ireland and which formed part of the wider economic transformations of a globalising post-war international literary sphere, combatively pitching the magazine against the commodification of the Irish literary market and the ‘moguls of big business’ that it accused of marginalising independent literary ventures.<sup>34</sup> Whereas in an Irish magazine such as *The Bell*, its similar critical confrontations with the literary mass-market did not ultimately compromise the fidelity to the popular journalistic forms of literary representation that underpinned its sociological and documentary ethos, it is in *Envoy*'s editorial anxiety towards and conflict with commercial publishers, the national press, and indeed *The Bell* itself, whereby the strains between perceived high and low cultural values in the magazine become most acute. The oppositional market posturing that formed a key aspect

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<sup>30</sup> Laurence K. Emery (A.J. Leventhal), ‘The Ulysses of Mr. James Joyce’ *The Klaxon: An Irish International Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1923-4), 14-20 (p. 15).

<sup>31</sup> L. K. E., ‘Confessional’, *The Klaxon*, 1-2 (p. 1).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth’, *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 9 (August 1950) 5-7 (p. 6);

<sup>33</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 152.

<sup>34</sup> John Ryan, ‘Foreword: Envoi’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 7-9 (p. 8).

of *Envoy*'s editorial voice in turn heightened its distinguishing sense of itself in mid-century Irish periodical culture as a 'serious monthly magazine of contemporary literature and art', fortifying the status of the magazine as an autonomous artistic platform privileging 'Literary value, literary *value*' in contrast to such profit driven concerns.<sup>35</sup> If such a position could at its most embellished lead *Envoy* into a reactionary and polarising 'cultural élitism' in the marketplace, then the magazine's counter self-image as a platform for non-commercial 'serious' literature at the same time more positively encouraged the promotion of key literary figures struggling to establish themselves in the conservative Irish publishing scene, most significantly in the second issue with the publication of the Paris-based Samuel Beckett.<sup>36</sup>

Even as *Envoy*'s editorial voice invoked the 'dynamic' spirit of 'little magazine' culture, however, it was at the same time aware of its essential distance at the mid-century in Ireland this earlier period of international modernist literary and artistic activity. The ambiguity of this position was captured in the early typescript draft of *Envoy*'s opening editorial which summoned the embattled oppositional rhetoric of the 'little magazine' in the mass-market even while acknowledging its contrasting lack of the kind of centralising manifesto or defined coterie that had compelled early twentieth-century modernist magazine culture.<sup>37</sup> The concession that 'No bombastic manifesto heralds its arrival', for example, is blamed upon the degraded literary conditions of an 'indifferent' commercialised world 'where optimism is vanishing and slick salestalks butter no literary parsnips'.<sup>38</sup> That this ambivalence is reflective of a particular condition of the mid-twentieth-century literary magazine and the

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<sup>35</sup> James Hillman, 'Foreword: Being Young and Foolish', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950), 9-11 (p. 10); 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), 7-8 (p. 8).

<sup>36</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 139.

<sup>37</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane have outlined the centrality of the manifesto form to modernist literary and artistic production, arguing that the 'little magazine' itself represented an 'analogue or extension of the manifesto formula'. With its origins in revolutionary upheaval, the rhetoric of defiance that defined the manifesto form became a key mechanism by which a 'dynamic' magazine announced itself to the world, establishing its central protagonists and external enemies, its binding aesthetic, aspirations, and points of attack. Bradbury and McFarlane, 'Movements, Magazines and Manifestos', p. 203.

<sup>38</sup> Typescript draft entitled 'A Foreword to Volume One Number One', *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/1/2.

legacy of modernism has been explored by critics in recent years in relation to Cyril Connolly's *Horizon*. For Brooker and Thacker, *Horizon* was 'pitched between worlds' as a magazine that romantically looked back to a receding heroic period of early twentieth-century modernist activity while at the same time more implicitly responding and adapting to the rapidly transforming cultural and commercial conditions of wartime and the immediate post-war years.<sup>39</sup> Connolly himself conceded in his later survey of the 'little magazine' that *Horizon* ultimately 'had to be eclectic to survive' in the challenging socio-economic conditions of the war years, a characteristic he distinguished from the classic antagonistic exclusivity of the 'dynamic' magazine in the way it involved a more flexible and inclusive editorial ethos both in terms of prospective contributors to the magazine and also in enabling a more open relationship with the marketplace.<sup>40</sup> For Sean Latham, it is precisely the oscillation between these two impulses within *Horizon*, between the 'dynamic' and 'eclectic', that captures the essential 'ambiguity' of its position at mid-century 'caught as it was between the decline of modernist aesthetics and the radical expansion of the mass media'.<sup>41</sup> So that Connolly in his role as editor 'sought to lend the authority and even mystique of the "dynamic" "little magazines" to a publication which, from the first, sought the substantially larger audience of an "eclectic" publication'.<sup>42</sup>

These critical readings not only provide us with a deeper insight into *Horizon* but also lead us into a consideration of the way in which a magazine such as *Envoy* inherited and in turn navigated these complexes within the context of the post-war Irish literary scene. While, as with *Horizon*, *Envoy*'s editorial voice cultivated 'the mythology of the "little magazine"' in the invocation of its own 'marginal, even bohemian status' in the marketplace, this tendency similarly belied the ultimately more extensive and engaged nature of the magazine's

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<sup>39</sup> Brooker and Thacker, 'The Call to Criticism and Modernist Destinies: Introduction', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, pp. 827-833 (p. 830).

<sup>40</sup> Connolly, 'Little Magazines', p. 347.

<sup>41</sup> Sean Latham, 'Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940-50) and the End of Modernism', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, pp. 856-873 (p. 863).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 859.

relationship with the marketplace.<sup>43</sup> If the romantically expressed affinity to a tradition of ‘little mags.’ invested *Envoy*’s editorial voice with a fortifying ‘symbolic capital’ in response to material adversity, then the actual sustaining of the magazine over the course of its twenty issues necessarily involved a more opportunistic and even exploitative commercial involvement than its oppositional editorial market posturing often makes clear. Chapter two and three thus progress from the opening consideration of the prominence of *Envoy*’s ‘dynamic’ editorial voice to uncover the more complex ‘eclectic’ reality of its engagement with Dublin’s mainstream commercial life – both in terms of the local business culture of the magazine’s Grafton Street milieu and the broader globalizing international market influences and opportunities to which the post-war capital was becoming gradually exposed. In his ‘Diary’ contribution to *Envoy*’s April 1950 issue, Patrick Kavanagh dramatized his disillusionment as an Irish writer confined to ‘the bohemian jungle on the perimeter of Commerce’ in a way that resonated with the expressions of marginality voiced in the magazine’s editorials.<sup>44</sup> However, while the material difficulties and privations faced by *Envoy* were many and considerable, to maintain such a purely dichotomised viewpoint when examining the magazine and the marketplace overlooks the significance of its advancements in from this perimeter and how they in turn impacted upon its cultural project.

In their preface to the first published volume of the landmark five-volume series, *The Oxford History of the Irish Book*, Brian Walker and Robert Welch point to the need to stimulate a new critical focus in Irish Studies on the relationship between the text and its material environment. Drawing from the bibliographic theory of D.F. McKenzie, whose advancement of the ‘sociology of texts’ advocated a more dynamic approach to textual studies that considered ‘the human motives and interactions which texts involve at every stage of their production, transmission, and consumption’, Walker and Welch argue:

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 860.

<sup>44</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Diary: A Play’, *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 5 (April 1950), 78-86 (p. 78).

Until recently, there has been very little sustained attention given to the Irish book as an object situated in an environment of complex contingencies. This world of the book, is concerned not only with individual endeavour and cultural formations in society, but also with power, money, trade, and communications.<sup>45</sup>

It is the ultimate aim of the first part of this thesis to contribute to this ongoing scholarly development by situating *Envoy* within the ‘complex contingencies’ that conditioned its commercial environment. Indeed, a new more complex understanding of the ways in which *Envoy* engaged with its commercial milieu situates the magazine at a series of dynamic transnational intersections of art and commerce in post-war Irish culture, ranging from its involvement in Dublin’s developing visual art market to the globalising commodification of Irish literary pub culture. In this way, we can begin to uncover the network of socio-economic pressures and opportunities that impacted upon the magazine’s ‘thrust towards involvement in a wider international context’.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Envoy and the ‘high venture’ of Horizon***

Malcolm Ballin has observed that ‘the extent to which Irish periodicals echo the preoccupations of their British contemporaries makes it easier to see them in the context of the wider cultural and intellectual history that both groups of publications inhabit’.<sup>47</sup> Recent studies have begun in this context to trace the wide-ranging impact of Cyril’s Connolly’s *Horizon* on Irish periodical culture of the 1940s and 50s. Kelly Matthews identifies the importance of Connolly’s magazine in serving as a ‘blueprint’ for *The Bell* in terms of production, design, and arrangement.<sup>48</sup> O’Faoláin, Matthews notes, was ‘keenly aware of *The*

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<sup>45</sup> D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1999), p. 2; Brian Walker and Robert Welch, ‘Preface’, in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Volume III: The Irish Book in English 1550-1800*, ed. by Raymond Gillespie and Andrew Hadfield (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. vii-xi (p. vii).

<sup>46</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 136.

<sup>47</sup> Ballin, *Irish Periodical Culture*, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 14.

*Bell*'s native and foreign literary predecessors' throughout his editorship.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, he drew parallels between *Horizon* and *The Bell* in editorials during the war years as representing a fellow 'secular monthly magazine', describing *Horizon* in general terms as *The Bell*'s 'London counterpart' in 1944 and seeking to emulate for an Irish audience its wide-ranging cultural scope and significance.<sup>50</sup> *Horizon*'s resilient transnational influence during a decade hedged with overseas travel and circulation restrictions was exemplified by the sheer 'diversity and internationalism of its contents', drawing in a remarkable roster of major and emerging literary figures from across Britain, Europe, and America.<sup>51</sup> So that, for example, the poetry of W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, and prose by George Orwell was promoted alongside translations by Franz Kafka, poems in French by Louis Aragon, and fiction by Truman Capote. This international dynamism similarly imbued *Horizon*'s visual arts coverage, with the wealthy art collector and patron of the magazine Peter Watson 'encouraging *Horizon* to look beyond British art and particularly to Paris', featuring painters such as Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud alongside commissioned articles by continental artists as various as Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Henri Matisse, and Alberto Giacometti.<sup>52</sup> While O'Faoláin looked across the Irish Sea to Connolly and *Horizon* for inspiration for his new magazine, Connolly similarly looked to Ireland to develop cross-channel cultural relations and to furnish *Horizon* with new talent, publishing a special 'Irish number' of the magazine in January 1942.<sup>53</sup> The issue showcased what Connolly declared in his editorial as the 'signs of a new cynical generation growing up' in Ireland, 'who care little for Irish nationalism or the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Sean O'Faolain, 'On Editing a Magazine', *The Bell*, vol. 9, no. 2 (November 1944), 93-101 (p. 96).

<sup>51</sup> Latham, 'Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940-50) and the End of Modernism', p. 872.

<sup>52</sup> Adrian Clark, *British and Irish Art 1945-51: From War to Festival* (London: Hogarth Press, 2010), p. 76.

<sup>53</sup> Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon*, vol. 5, no. 25 (January 1942), 3-11 (p. 3). Antoinette Quinn has identified the importance of writer John Betjeman as having 'largely masterminded' the publication of *Horizon*'s Irish number, initially arranging for Connolly to visit Dublin and recruiting the various writers that would eventually comprise the issue. Betjeman was the press attaché at the office of the United Kingdom's representative to Ireland and the issue formed part of his broader 'mission to foster good cultural relations between wartime Britain and neutral Éire'. Connolly himself foregrounded this aim in his editorial, attempting to assuage British hostility to Irish neutrality by outlining the real material hardships of rationing, scarcity, and poverty that existed in the Free State despite the relative security of its neutral status. Antoinette Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2001), p. 183.

pride and discomfort of *Autarchy*', publishing for the first time an excerpt of Kavanagh's epic long poem *The Great Hunger*, titled 'The Old Peasant', as well as featuring critical essays on Irish literature by O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor.<sup>54</sup> An advertisement for *The Bell*, meanwhile, was prominently printed on the issue's back page, encouraging British interest in the magazine with the added incentive of free posting for annual subscriptions.

John Ryan similarly looked to *Horizon* as a model in the production and arrangement of *Envoy*, with Shovlin noting how 'both magazines are published in the same bibliographic format, both stress the need for international exchange of ideas, both carry the subtitle on their cover pages: 'A Review of Literature & Art'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, *Envoy*'s editorial correspondence reveals the extent to which Connolly's magazine was in the minds of its young editors in the autumn of 1949, with both Ryan and Iremonger keen to draw associations between the two magazines in their letters to various literary figures, publishers, and distributive agencies. Writing to Faber editor Peter du Sautoy, Iremonger insisted that *Envoy* would in fact be 'better than *The Bell* and will correspond rather more to *Horizon*', while Ryan similarly stressed to the London-based Continental Publishers in January 1950 that now that Connolly's magazine 'has ceased to exist, there should be a good demand for a literary magazine like ours'.<sup>56</sup> The mere weeks separating *Envoy*'s launch and the termination of *Horizon* furthermore encouraged their public association in the British media. *The Times Literary Supplement*, for example, was particularly enthusiastic in this regard, proclaiming the affinity between Connolly's magazine and 'the captain and crew of *Envoy*' in a hyperbolic register:

Within a few weeks of dedicating a valedictory to the lost *Horizon* and expressing the hope that "other independent editors could be found to take risks which Mr. Connolly evidently considers excessive at the moment" out of Dublin harbour, on the same high venture, speeds

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<sup>54</sup> Connolly, 'Comment', p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 132.

<sup>56</sup> Valentin Iremonger to Peter du Sautoy, 25 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3; John Ryan to The Continental Publishers, 4 Jan 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

another bold ship, confidently manned by adventurous young, with all her bravery on, sails filled, streamers waving.<sup>57</sup>

The ‘high venture’ pursued by Connolly and *Horizon* throughout the 1940s had been founded upon the safeguarding of culture in the midst of the enormous social, economic, and political upheaval of the Second World War. As Latham observes, ‘the magazine cultivated an aesthetic of embattlement’ from its first issues that was ‘matched by its quite literal struggle to survive the increasingly dire material conditions of the war’s early years’.<sup>58</sup> Connolly grandly envisioned his magazine as a protective ‘Ark’ for writers and artists in such a tumultuous climate and cultivated in his early editorials the image of *Horizon* as an autonomous platform for art detached from wider socio-political pressures.<sup>59</sup> ‘Our standards are aesthetic, our politics in abeyance,’ he famously stated at the magazine’s outset and further emphasised in the second issue his belief in cultural autonomy and ‘that writing is an art, that it is an end in itself as well as a means to an end’.<sup>60</sup> While the dangers and privations of wartime represented an immediate challenge to the survival of *Horizon*, Connolly at the same time more broadly pitched the magazine’s ‘aesthetic of embattlement’ against what he considered to be the equally degrading transformative forces of the mass media and expanding commercial publishing industries both in Britain and internationally.

As Brooker and Thacker observe, it was Connolly’s association of the ‘commodification of literary culture’ with ‘the consequent degradation of the analytical and creative ability’ that compelled his combative, ‘dynamic’, editorial stance toward the mass-market conditions governing mid-century literary life in Britain and internationally.<sup>61</sup> In his *Horizon* editorials, for example, he regularly attacked British national tabloid newspapers such as the *Daily Express*, accusing its owner Lord Beaverbrook of singularly contributing to

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<sup>57</sup> Philip Tomlinson, ‘Dream-Cities’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 December 1949, no. 2498, p. 825.

<sup>58</sup> Latham, ‘Cyril Connolly’s *Horizon* (1940-50) and the End of Modernism’, p. 865.

<sup>59</sup> Connolly, ‘Little Magazines’, p. 425.

<sup>60</sup> Cyril Connolly, ‘Comment’, *Horizon*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1940), 5-6 (p. 5); Cyril Connolly ‘Comment’, *Horizon*, vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1940), 68-71 (p. 70).

<sup>61</sup> Brooker and Thacker, ‘Introduction: The Call to Criticism and Modernist Destinies’, p. 828.



the ‘degradation of the milieu’ through its low journalistic standards and general aversion towards meaningful artistic discussion or representation.<sup>62</sup> ‘This nobleman’, he wrote with typical acerbity of Beaverbrook in March 1940, ‘injects into the jaunty philistinism of his papers a breath of the great art-hating art-fearing open spaces of our far-flung empire’.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to these mass literary channels, *Horizon* styled itself in defiant anti-commercial terms as a platform for both native and international writers and artists ‘[who] can find a market nowhere else’.<sup>64</sup> It was in his early editorials where Connolly most emphatically asserted the importance of such a platform that might alleviate what he considered to be the ‘dilapidated’ corner left to writers and artists in British life:

Only the entertainer receives his due, which nobody grudges him, but which hardly compensates for the squalor and penury in which the serious poet or painter is expected to rot. To-day the most precariously situated in any society are that abandoned trio, the writer, the painter, and the liberal intellectual. [...] The public must be asked to distinguish between the serious writer and the potboiling entertainer, between the poet and the prima donna journalist [...].<sup>65</sup>

In aligning *Horizon* in these instances with the concerns of the ‘serious’ writer as opposed to ‘popular’ cultural forms and commercial tastes, through which Connolly’s original hope with his magazine was to ‘[discover] a Joyce or an Eliot in one number’, Latham has observed how he can be seen as engaging in what Robert Scholes describes as the practice of ‘invidious distinction’ that had been a hallmark of high modernist critical discourse and its fractious relationship with mass culture, namely, the establishing of evaluative distinctions equating ‘high’ and ‘low’ art with ‘absolute notions of Good and Bad’ in a process that subsequently ‘rejects or suppresses any middle term that might mediate between their extremes’.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cyril Connolly, ‘Comment’, *Horizon*, vol. 1, no. 4 (April 1940), 229-237 (p. 234).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Cyril Connolly, ‘Comment’, *Horizon*, vol. 1, no. 3 (March 1940), 149-150 (p. 149).

<sup>65</sup> Connolly, ‘Comment’, *Horizon*, vol. 1, no. 4 (April 1940), p. 232; p. 233.

<sup>66</sup> Connolly, ‘Comment’, vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1940), p. 71; Robert Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. xii; p. 4. For Scholes, the ‘paradoxy’ that emerges from these distinctions is a ‘confusion generated by a terminology that seems to make clear distinctions where clear distinctions cannot – and should not – be made’. p. xi.

For Connolly, *Horizon*'s eventual demise was a testament to the difficulties of maintaining such a 'high venture' in the transforming conditions of the global literary marketplace. It was, indeed, with a romantic backward look to early twentieth-century modernist culture that he closed *Horizon*'s penultimate issue in November 1949, framing the magazine's ultimately insurmountable struggles to survive amidst commercial adversity and lack of a wider public interest within the context of an embattled tradition of Anglophone 'little magazines'. 'The swan-song of little magazines is always the same', Connolly observed, drawing explicit reference to T.S. Eliot's hugely influential review of the 1920s and 30s, *The Criterion*, which had famously closed in January 1939 with the editor's 'Last Words' expressing Eliot's concern for 'the continuity of culture' before the gathering shadows of war and the increasing difficulties in 'trying to maintain literary standards increasingly repudiated in the modern world'.<sup>67</sup> For Eliot, it was the 'little magazine' speaking independently to niche intellectual audiences in contrast to the rapidly expanding forms of mass media that was essential to preserving such elite standards, as he had outlined:

It will not be the large organs of opinion, or the old periodicals; it must be the small and obscure papers and reviews, those which are hardly read by anyone but their own contributors, that will keep critical thought alive, and encourage authors of original talent.<sup>68</sup>

The backward look to the *Criterion* in Connolly's valedictory address is characteristic of what Sean Latham has observed as the editor's '[cultivation] of the mythology of the "little magazine"' in defence of *Horizon*'s own kindred 'marginal, even bohemian status' within a perceived antipathetic wider social and economic climate.<sup>69</sup> It was, finally, in these dramatized adversarial terms by which Connolly envisaged the public reception of his magazine's imminent retirement 'into the long-desired shade', to be greeted with 'the

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<sup>67</sup> Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon*, vol. 20, no. 117 (November 1949), 285-286 (p. 286); T.S. Eliot, 'Last Words', *The Criterion: A Literary Review*, vol. 28, no. 71 (January 1939), 269-275 (p. 274; p. 273).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>69</sup> Latham, 'Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940-50) and the End of Modernism', p. 860.

satisfaction of the envious, the distress of our friends and the indifference of all but that one in every hundred and fifty thousand who constitute our world public'.<sup>70</sup>

The *TLS* article that hailed *Envoy*'s succession of *Horizon*'s 'high venture' in December 1949 at the same time recalled Connolly's besieged editorial tone in stating that 'Captain and crew of *Envoy* have chosen a hazardous time in the history for the launching. Not all ports are open. These are days of high prices and no patronage'.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, a key aspect of *Horizon*'s transnational influence on the new magazine was the way in which it provided *Envoy*'s editorial voice with a similarly galvanising connection at the mid-century to what Latham describes as 'the narrative of a romantically embattled modernism'.<sup>72</sup> *Envoy*'s early editorial typescript drafts are striking in the extent to which they call upon this narrative, casting the artist figure as threatened on all sides by the globalising forces of mass culture in a manner that looked back not only to *Horizon* but to the 'dynamic' rhetoric of earlier 'little magazines' such as *The Klaxon* with its broadsides against 'Commercialism [that] swings its iron hammer on all things'.<sup>73</sup>

The prospect that faces this journal and indeed, all artists to-day, is one of regression, if not of retreat. Poets, artists and writers are, willy-nilly, finding themselves in small isolated pockets of resistance if not actually standing in the pillory, the target of every form of abuse and pressure that modern materialism can bring to bear upon them. A whole race of literary jerry-builders has arisen meanwhile to deceive the muses into thinking that art and letters thrive under the benign influence of autocracy, and while man, newly liberated from the darkness of illiteracy is devouring his daily dose of countless millions of quires of gibberish, genuine artists are at discount and in general the discerning reading public is probably no greater in size to-day than it was during that period which we now rather fatuously describe as the "Dark Ages".<sup>74</sup>

Though this passage was ultimately removed from the final published version, the intensity with which it staked the magazine against the generalised commercial forces of 'modern

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<sup>70</sup> Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon*, vol. 20, no. 117 (November 1949), p. 286.

<sup>71</sup> Tomlinson, 'Dream-Cities', p. 825.

<sup>72</sup> Latham, 'Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940-50) and the End of Modernism', p. 861.

<sup>73</sup> Emery, 'The Ulysses of Mr. James Joyce', p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> Typescript draft entitled 'A Foreword to Volume One, Number One', *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/1/2.

materialism' would be reignited in later editorials. The March 1950 editorial, for example, fortified *Envoy's* position against an encroaching 'network of hostility and disparagement' by dramatically elevating its cultural role as heir to a legacy of Anglophone magazines spanning from *Horizon* back to the 1920s.<sup>75</sup> 'Now, one by one, the "little mags." are closing down', the foreword declared:

*Horizon* gone. *Life and Letters* has gone. *World Review* is rumoured to be closing. Although as long as *ENVOY* lasts its sales benefit by these events, we lament their passing. But one thing we can be sure of – that it was a declining readership and increasing costs of production which forced them to close not the lack of support from writers. And, surely, with *ENVOY* rapidly approaching the position of being the only surviving literary monthly in the West European Islands, we are deserving of all possible support, not from readers only but writers as well?<sup>76</sup>

The editorial invocation of this lineage of embattled 'little magazines' was important to *Envoy* not only in reaction to the precariousness of its financial state but in countering the uncertainty and anxiety that marked the magazine's audience relations and the question of its readership from its outset. The key factor in the longevity and success of *Envoy's* major Irish predecessor, *The Bell*, was its fundamental 'inclusive credo' that not only encouraged diversity in its literary and artistic contributors but in turn engaged closely with its audience in encouraging correspondence, conducting audience opinion surveys, and publishing specific articles about its readership.<sup>77</sup> 'We are absolutely inclusive', O'Faoláin affirmed in launching the first issue in October 1940.<sup>78</sup> The editorial was significantly entitled 'This is Your Magazine' and called upon readers in a surging vocative tone from all backgrounds throughout the country to contribute to the following issues. O'Faoláin urged ordinary citizens to recognise the value of their idiosyncratic daily experiences as vital constituents of the mosaic of contemporary Irish life:

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<sup>75</sup> 'Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 9 (August 1950) 5-7 (p. 6).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 96; Ballin, *Irish Periodical Culture*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>78</sup> Sean O'Faolain, 'This is Your Magazine', *The Bell*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1940), 5-9 (p. 9).

All over Ireland – this is the expression of our Faith – there are men and women with things itching them like a grain stuck in a tooth. You who read this know intimately some corner of life that nobody else can know. You and Life have co-operated to make a precious thing which is your secret. You know a turn of the road, an old gateway somewhere, a well-field, a street-corner, a wood, a handful of quiet life, a triangle of sea and rock, something that means Ireland to you.<sup>79</sup>

O’Faoláin’s encouragement of the ordinary citizen to transcribe their particular experiences was founded on his belief in the value of documentary realism, a mimetic literary style that aspired toward the accurate, unvarnished observation of everyday life. Documentary realism had become widely popular in Britain during the 1930s, associated with the development of new politicised mass-education movements and periodicals as manifested by the Left Book Club and the journal *Fact*, and social research organisations such as Mass Observation.<sup>80</sup> As Anthony Cronin observes, ‘Documentary was a form favoured everywhere in the 1930s and 1940s’, and it became central to *The Bell*’s national representational project, underpinned by the ‘implicit assumption that the Ireland its readers lived in had not been described and that too much Irish life had been seen through the haze of nostalgia for an invented past or idealism about a projected future’.<sup>81</sup> O’Faoláin was indeed even willing to sacrifice standards of literary quality in the service of this aim. ‘We have printed things, at times, that were not of the first literary standard because they were real and true’, he stated in September 1941, ‘and we would always lean primarily towards reality and veracity rather than towards a superficial literary perfection’.<sup>82</sup> O’Faoláin was determined that *The Bell* would come to represent ‘a bit of Life itself’ through its publication of honest and clearly expressed depictions of lived experience in rural and urban Ireland.<sup>83</sup> The assimilation of these experiences would ultimately contribute to a transformative national awareness and ‘stir ourselves to a vivid

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 103.

<sup>81</sup> Anthony Cronin, ‘Foreword’, in *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, pp. ix-x (p. ix).

<sup>82</sup> Sean O’Faolain, ‘Attitudes’, *The Bell*, vol. 2, no. 6 (September 1941), p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> O’Faolain, ‘This is Your Magazine’, p. 5.

awareness of what we are doing, what we are becoming, what we are'.<sup>84</sup> For Matthews, it was *The Bell's* pluralistic and dynamic '[appeal] to a broad spectrum of Irish men and women, of different social classes and competing political inclinations' that distinguished it as an Irish literary magazine throughout this time, with the vivid 'collection of divergent voices' that comprised each issue crucially 'bound together by a common thread of their Irish identity'.<sup>85</sup>

*Envoy's* contrasting post-war ambition to detach its cultural project from the inherited obligations of cultural nationalism in the primary service of 'Literary value' and a 'discriminating public who are interested only in the very best of contemporary writing' immediately set the magazine in a less defined and more socially divisive dynamic with its potential market audience.<sup>86</sup> Ballin's assertion that 'the weak market for cultural productions in Ireland was a crucial factor in the construction of audience relations' in mid-century Irish periodical culture is illuminating in this context, with *Envoy's* opening editorial's anticipated 'trying journey' from writer to reader, that 'unless its public – and by that we mean all those who have at heart good writing in general, and good Irish writing in particular – is eager to give it the help and encouragement which we feel confident the magazine will justify', registering a note of anxiety in terms of its prospective readership that was more explicitly voiced through the personal channels of the magazine's early literary correspondence.<sup>87</sup> Iremonger's concern that 'living or attempting to live on 26-county sales alone is at best a hand to mouth' was similarly echoed by Ryan in various letters.<sup>88</sup> Replying to George Godwin, the editor of the English literary quarterly *The Adelphi*, he remarked that 'producing a periodical of this type is, as you suggest, no easy task and yet I am inclined to believe that the number of people genuinely interested in good writing and criticism is greater than we

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 38.

<sup>86</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), 7-8 (p. 8); John Ryan to Brian O'Nolan, 17 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/5.

<sup>87</sup> Ballin, *Irish Periodical Culture*, p. 10; Ryan, Iremonger, Hillman, 'A Foreword to Vol. I. Number I', p. 8.

<sup>88</sup> Iremonger to McFadden, 22 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

think'.<sup>89</sup> However Ryan's initial optimism is undercut by an increasing unease that ultimately manifests itself in an antagonistic impatience toward this prospective audience:

The problem however is in shaking this public out of its lethargy. People of an intellectual turn of mind are very often easy-going in their ways, and expect good literature to be deposited at their doorsteps, without any effort on their part. By its very nature a literary magazine is financially handicapped and has not the resources with which to propagate itself. Consequently, I feel, unless the potential readers meet us at least half way the battle is lost, by default.<sup>90</sup>

It was this anticipated predicament regarding its audience that subsequently informed the criticism of the magazine's first issues by Ryan's friends and associates. Writing to the editor in December 1949, writer Ernest Gébler argued that 'there are not enough people in Ireland interested in how "creative workers" function or in criticism or the dissection of moral values to keep a magazine going that is more than one sixth so devoted', warning his friend that 'I would say you are on a too serious and high level altogether'.<sup>91</sup> O'Faoláin was similarly cautionary in his early correspondence with Ryan. 'You are bloody arty. Circulation on that basis will be 1000 at most', he admonished the editor having read *Envoy's* first issue, 'You will have to add what we call "life" to lit and art if you want to sell 2000', further emphasising the importance of this point with a pencilled note added to the original typescript stating 'This is crucial'.<sup>92</sup>

O'Faoláin's projected readership was ultimately verified in that Ryan later approximated *Envoy's* average monthly readership at less than a thousand.<sup>93</sup> Given the uncertainties regarding the magazine's audience relations, then, *Envoy's* reaching out to a wider embattled legacy of 'little magazines' was essential in fortifying its editorial voice, imbuing the desired authoritative communal tone that could grandly assert the magazine's position as 'the only surviving literary monthly in the West European Islands' without the

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<sup>89</sup> John Ryan to George Godwin, 10 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/1.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Ernest Gébler to John Ryan, 6 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/4/11.

<sup>92</sup> Seán O'Faoláin to John Ryan, [undated], *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/5.

<sup>93</sup> Ryan, 'An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen', p. 9.

necessary reliance on the backing of a substantial readership.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, it is this defiant character that Brooker and Thacker have noted as fundamental to the efficacy of the ‘little magazine’ genre, ‘powered by a sense of mission out of all sensible proportion to their financial resources and readerships’ in a way that enabled them for however brief a period ‘to function as points of reference, debate, and transmission at the heart of an internally variegated and often internationally connected counter-cultural sphere’.<sup>95</sup> By establishing an affinity with magazines such as *Horizon*, *Envoy* can be seen as attempting to accumulate what Pierre Bourdieu has theorised as their rich ‘symbolic capital’, thus accruing a level of cultural authority not contingent upon mass popularity or commercial success.<sup>96</sup> For Bourdieu, the ‘art business [is] a trade in things that have no price’ and the accumulation of ‘symbolic capital’ is achieved precisely through the detachment from or disavowal of commercial interest, thereby investing an authority and prestige in the art object that supersedes any economic valuation based on amassed sales or profit:

For the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or the theatre manager, the only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark of signature) or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.) and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation.<sup>97</sup>

The ‘symbolic capital’ Ryan and Iremonger drew from an embattled modernist ‘little magazine’ culture enlarged their view of *Envoy* as a fellow ‘serious monthly magazine of contemporary literature and art’ and bolstered its various editorial confrontations with the mass-market forces governing literary production and distribution in Ireland.<sup>98</sup> Writing in the February 1950 issue, Iremonger highlighted the detrimental impact of the commodification of the Irish literary market on the promotion of new writing and the survival of independent

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth’, *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 9 (August 1950), p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Brooker and Thacker, ‘General Introduction’, pp. 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> Bourdieu, ‘The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods’, p. 75.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Foreword: Oh to be in England now that Spring is there’, *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 5 (April 1950), 9-11 (p. 10).



literary ventures, arguing that the concentration of major publishers on the lucrative ‘popular fiction market’ in Ireland during the war and in the post-war years had significantly curtailed the opportunities afforded to ‘serious’ writers and editors, who were consequently forced to look abroad to London publishing houses.<sup>99</sup> Dublin’s main trade publishers during this period included the Talbot Press and Browne & Nolan, whose prominence into the post-war period testified to their ability to adapt to the demands of the mass market. These publishers drew their main income along profitable business lines rather than purely literary interests, with Talbot Press, for example, specializing in the production of children’s books, religious works, and schoolbooks.<sup>100</sup> The reputation of the Talbot Press as a prolific publisher of popular fiction, meanwhile, was based on the enormous success of authors such as Annie M.P. Smithson, whose romance novels it reissued during the war years to great acclaim.<sup>101</sup> Given their primary commercial concerns, major Irish publishers typically erred ‘on the side of caution’ in considering new or challenging work.<sup>102</sup> As Nicholas Allen and Terence Brown observe, ‘List management was the doctrine of any larger publisher and any book difficult to sell or questionable in subject matter was refused, regardless of literary merit’.<sup>103</sup>

The prospects of any leavening in the cautionary publishing approach adopted by Talbot Press and Browne and Nolan in the immediate post-war years were further reduced by the restricted conditions of the Irish book trade with the continuing enforcement of the Board of Trade ruling. The denied access to a wider British readership placed increasing pressure on maximising sales in the domestic market. Browne and Nolan had earlier defended their conservative policy in *The Bell* in 1948 by stressing the severe economic pressures placed on

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<sup>99</sup> Valentin Iremonger, ‘Foreword: Our Irish Publishers’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (February 1950), 9-13 (p. 12; p. 11).

<sup>100</sup> Nicholas Allen and Terence Brown, ‘Publishing after Partition, 1922-39’, in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Volume V: The Irish Book in English 1891-2000*, ed. by Clare Hutton (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 70-88 (p. 71-72).

<sup>101</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 65.

<sup>102</sup> Clare Hutton, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Volume V*, pp. 1-13 (p. 9).

<sup>103</sup> Allen and Brown, ‘Publishing after Partition, 1922-39’, p. 87.

Irish publishing houses in such a contracted commercial climate. ‘As matters stand’, it opened, ‘the future of publishing in Ireland is seriously menaced’:

Our home market is at present too small to absorb editions of an economic size, to provide adequate remuneration for our authors and to meet the normal expenses of publication [...] With the present high cost of printing it is hardly worth a publisher’s while producing a book of any kind for which a sale of 2,500 copies is not reasonably certain.<sup>104</sup>

Iremonger, however, remained unmoved by such arguments, countering in *Envoy* that ‘The fuss raised in 1948, and during last year, by the publishers about the effect of the British ban on Irish writers was largely dishonest’:

If our publishers were worried about the position at the time, it was not because their hearts were bleeding for any of our authors, but because they themselves were prevented from expanding their output for the popular fiction market which provided ready sales with a minimum of overhead expenses.<sup>105</sup>

*Envoy*’s pricing at two shillings was consciously set above the ‘pulp’ fiction disparaged by Iremonger, namely, ‘the 3d. or 6d. or shilling paper-backed novels’ for which ‘there was a large market during the war, and for which there will always be an unsatisfied demand’.<sup>106</sup> It was, moreover, priced above *The Bell*, which sold at one shilling and sixpence following its resumption of publication in November 1950, and the tensions we have been examining in relation to *Envoy* and the marketplace became most controversially focused on the returning magazine during this period. Shovlin has noted that the fact ‘that *Envoy* should regard its main competitor with such disdain is odd given its identification with a broader community of little magazines’, yet the provocation of its editorial antagonism becomes more clear when situated within the nexus of mass-market pressures we have been examining.<sup>107</sup>

Along with the expanding commercial publishing industry, the national daily newspapers presided over mid-century Irish cultural life. As Chris Morash has surveyed, the Irish

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<sup>104</sup> ‘Irish Publishers Answer Questions’, *The Bell*, vol. 15, no. 4 (January 1948) 3-11 (p. 6).

<sup>105</sup> Iremonger, ‘Foreword: Our Irish Publishers’, p. 12.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 139.

newspaper world settled into defined power relations in the twentieth century ‘with three national dailies dominating the Irish newsprint market, all aligned to business interests’, namely, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent*, and *The Irish Press*.<sup>108</sup> *The Irish Times* represented the smallest national circulation of the three at approximately 20,000 daily readers during the 1930s and 40s.<sup>109</sup> Its influence, however, ‘nonetheless remained disproportionately strong’ in Irish society, as Morash observes:

In part, this was because the Protestant middle class who made up its readership continued to be influential in the business and professional worlds, thus ensuring the paper an advertising base that depended more on targeting a particularly affluent readership than on mass circulation.<sup>110</sup>

*The Irish Times* was initially enthusiastic in its praise of *Envoy*, declaring that ‘Ireland’s new literary periodical is off to an auspicious start’ and wishing that the magazine ‘has a long, prosperous and useful span of life ahead of it’.<sup>111</sup> However, it was the ultimately capricious nature of such influential media attention and its capacity to swing dramatically from support to scorn that increasingly unsettled the magazine’s editors. *The Irish Times* review of *Envoy*’s October 1950 issue, for example, was as Shovlin notes particularly ‘harsh in its appraisal’ of the magazine, launching a strangely contradictory attack which first laments the circumscribed confines and lack of resources in Dublin’s literary scene that have contributed to the high ‘infant mortality rate’ among Irish magazines, while proceeding to then criticise *Envoy*’s attempts to expand beyond these local parameters with the issue’s range of international contributions.<sup>112</sup> ‘The infant mortality rate among Irish literary magazines is disturbingly high’, the review opened, ‘Even more striking is the incidence among them of rickets, infantile paralysis and, oddly enough, literary elephantiasis’.<sup>113</sup> Though recognising a

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<sup>108</sup> Christopher Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 149.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Hail and Farewell’, *Irish Times*, 10 December 1949, p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 140; ‘Envoy’, *Irish Times*, 21 October 1950, p. 6.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Envoy’, *Irish Times*, 21 October 1950, p. 6.

basic cause of this condition in that ‘the patch of soil from which it must draw whatever sustenance it gets, is generally far too small’, the review then more surprisingly takes issue with the international representation in the magazine, stating that ‘of its nine articles and stories, six are by or about foreigners, and no particular reason is obvious why they should be published in an Irish magazine – unless Dublin is intended to be the stamping ground for displaced persons’. *Envoy*’s October 1950 issue was one of the only to appear without an accompanying foreword and *The Irish Times* promptly associated this lack of editorial presence with its eclectic material as symptomatic of a lack of direction, arguing that ‘the congeries of garrulous contributors each month seem to have no ringmaster to check their antics. What *Envoy* is, or why, is a little difficult to discover’.<sup>114</sup>

What particularly provoked *Envoy*’s aggressive response to this sudden criticism from, as it described in the December editorial, ‘a daily which encourages Irish writing and devotes conscientiously a considerable amount of space to the arts practices in Ireland’, was that *The Irish Times* had been in the previous month contrastingly fulsome in its praise of the returning *Bell*, publishing an extended feature and interview on editor Peadar O’Donnell outlining his ambitious plans for the magazine.<sup>115</sup> ‘As far as content is concerned’, O’Donnell stated regarding his magazine in the interview, ‘the new *Bell* hopes to give social commentary a more prominent place than the old one’.<sup>116</sup> Critics have charted how O’Donnell’s fervent Republican-socialist political background propelled debates surrounding the national question and partition to the forefront of *The Bell* from this period.<sup>117</sup> The returning November issue would open with the subtitle ‘A Magazine of Ireland To-Day’, reasserting O’Faoláin’s founding principles of the representation of contemporary Irish life and active social engagement, stating that the magazine ‘aims once more at being a bit of Irish life, sharing

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Envoy’, *Irish Times*, 21 October 1950, p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), 7-8 (p. 7).

<sup>116</sup> Quidnunc, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 21 October 1950, p. 5.

<sup>117</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 115; Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, pp. 89-91.

eagerly in its conflicts'.<sup>118</sup> *The Irish Times* promotional article accordingly looked back appreciatively over the magazine's eight year tenure and its launching editorial ambition to 'submit itself to Irish life', praising its support of both established and emerging writers and the 'commentary sections' that

were most catholic ranging from a series by representatives of the different religions in Ireland to one from people of different income groups, explaining how they lived in, or outside, their budgets; from revealing articles on what it was like to be unemployed, by anonymous contributors, to equally revealing reportage on 'The Trade In Dublin' and 'Going To The Dogs'.<sup>119</sup>

It is in the broader context of these mass media pressures and anxieties that the inflamed terms of *Envoy's* consequent attack on *The Bell* should be viewed. Recoiling from what it stated as the 'savage' criticism of its magazine by the newspaper, the editorial remarked bitterly that 'one would have thought that *The Irish Times* would have been pleased at the very fact of *Envoy's* existence and would have gone to some trouble to encourage the editors to keep the magazine going; but the editorial policy of *The Irish Times* seems to be unpredictable'.<sup>120</sup> In reaction, the magazine asserts an antagonistic definition of its 'policy' by opposition to *The Bell's* 'popular' documentary and socially engaged literature, declaring that 'We do not intend to print work, for instance, on any of the following unless it has literary value':

1. The Turf Development Board.
2. How to Live on £400 a year.
3. Borstals and gaols.
4. Holidays in Ireland.
5. Spanish wine, Kathleen Mavourneen, Raftery and the Coombe.
6. Our glorious heritage (whichever one you happen to think of).
7. The Jansenistic Irish.

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<sup>118</sup> Peadar O'Donnell, 'A Recognisable Gait of Going', *The Bell*, vol. 16, no. 2 (November 1950) 5-7 (p. 7). The December issue, for example, argued that 'the section of our people who intrigue the imagination most to-day are those who have shut themselves into a rebel statelet in North-East Ulster' and accordingly opened with an article examining the polarizing religious tensions at the heart of partition by the Belfast Protestant clergyman Rev. Frederick S. Leahy. O'Donnell, 'A Welcome to a Contributor', p. 7; Rev. Frederick S. Leahy, 'Fears and Convictions of Ulster Protestants', *The Bell*, vol. 16, no. 3 (December 1950), 9-14.

<sup>119</sup> Quidnunc, 'An Irishman's Diary', *Irish Times*, 21 October 1950, p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), 7-8 (p. 7).

## 8. Careers for our girls.<sup>121</sup>

It was *Envoy*'s increasing bitterness as the perceived 'occupant of the journalistic dog-house' that provoked its subsequent sporadic attacks on *The Bell* in later issues. The March 1951 editorial for example once again polarised the two magazines in claiming that *The Bell*'s interests in 'political journalism and "social realism"' had 'nothing more in common with this review than that it, too, is published monthly', before proceeding to simplistically equate its sociological and documentary material as mere 'popular journalism' akin to the debased writing standards and conventions of the national press:

We have no objection whatsoever to this magazine and we recognize that popular journalism has its points, but to put such popular journalism before even the most modest of efforts at literature is immoral. The journalistic gaggle of geese and the great grey humus of Civil Service peasantry who control the potential outlets for culture in Ireland have skilfully evaded all issues relative to real art by embracing the shoddy, the mediocre, and the safe.<sup>122</sup>

*Envoy*'s invocation of an embattled international tradition of 'little magazines' and the 'serious' cultural legacy of periodicals such as *Horizon* was central to bolstering its editorial voice in response to the pressures and anxieties of the marketplace. Of course, the danger in this tendency was in the capacity of *Envoy*'s editorial attacks on 'popular' literary agencies and forms, and in particular its controversial assaults on the returning *Bell*, to corner the magazine into what Shovlin notes as a reactionary 'cultural élitism'. The potential for the magazine to become representative in this way as merely 'a gathering point for Ireland's aesthetes' threatened the genuine ambition to inaugurate a new 'epoch' in Irish culture, to the point that *Envoy*'s 'insistence on fine art and the primacy of continental European culture could at times look like crude snobbery'.<sup>123</sup> Yet, if *Envoy*'s 'arty-farty atmosphere', as O'Faoláin humorously termed it in correspondence with Ryan, could antagonise and polarise in this way, it also more generatively opened up the magazine to a diversity of significant but

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 16 (March 1951), p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 139.

– during this time – decidedly unpopular and non-commercial writers and artists who were suffering from the lack of publishing opportunities and public exposure in the post-war Irish literary scene.<sup>124</sup> If the magazine’s forewords controversially harnessed Connolly’s classic ‘dynamic’ editorial voice in confrontation with a range of literary milieu, *Envoy* also inherited more positive aspects of the genre in its receptivity to and promotion of literary contributors ‘not sought for to increase circulation’ in the magazine. In such instances, *Envoy* can be seen to fulfil what Adam McKible and Suzanne Churchill have observed as the vital ‘non-commercial enterprise’ of the ‘little magazine’, underpinned by the editorial defiance of ‘mainstream tastes and conventions’ with the intention of ‘publishing the experimental works or radical opinions of untried, unpopular or unrepresented writers’.<sup>125</sup> If the ‘dynamic’ thrust of *Envoy*’s editorial voice could at worst mire the magazine in expressions of ‘self-pity and aggression’, then it also importantly provided a platform for its ‘serious’ writers and artists who had become obscured or excluded from the Irish literary scene.<sup>126</sup> This was most emphatically established in *Envoy*’s second issue with the prominent promotion and publication of an extract of Samuel Beckett’s unpublished novel *Watt*.

### ***Recovering Samuel Beckett in the post-war Irish literary scene: ‘An Extract from Watt’***

Given Samuel Beckett’s marginal publishing history in Ireland throughout the 1930s, his commitment to remaining in France during the war, and his low visibility in the Irish literary scene in the years immediately following, it is on the surface remarkable that *Envoy* could so quickly establish a connection with him as to publish a new extended prose piece by the magazine’s second issue. As Ryan succinctly put it to the novelist and poet Naomi Mitchison in January 1950: ‘He lives in Paris, publishes infrequently, and generally desires

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<sup>124</sup> Sean O’Faoláin to John Ryan, [undated], *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/5.

<sup>125</sup> McKible and Churchill, ‘Little Magazines and Modernism: An Introduction’, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 155.

obscurity'.<sup>127</sup> Through Anthony Cronin's biographical reminiscences and in the surviving letters in the *Envoy* archive, it becomes clear however that the relationship between the magazine and writer was cultivated through a small network of friends and associates. Cronin recalls that Beckett's friend A.J. Leventhal had 'called the attention of those who were associated with the magazine *Envoy* to his work and arranged for us to see part of the then unpublished novel *Watt*'.<sup>128</sup> *Envoy*'s literary correspondence meanwhile reveals that Ryan contacted Beckett himself by way of an introduction from the Dublin painter Seán O'Sullivan, who had developed a friendship with Beckett in Dublin and Paris from the mid-1930s. Known predominantly for his portraiture, O'Sullivan was a friend of the Ryans and a regular visitor to their family home, where he regaled the young John Ryan with stories of James Joyce and his circle during his periods visiting and living in Paris. Ryan has recalled his youthful awe at O'Sullivan's 'astounding personality' and seemingly effortless continental sophistication: 'He spoke French and Irish as fluently as he spoke English. He had known Joyce well in the Paris of the 'thirties. He was a superb conversationalist and raconteur'.<sup>129</sup> It was through O'Sullivan that Ryan first became aware of Beckett, initially as 'Joyce's secretary', a capacity that was presumably inferred from Beckett's close early relationship with the Joyce family in Paris that included his research and dictation of portions of the developing *Work in Progress*.<sup>130</sup>

Beckett wrote to O'Sullivan on 18 October 1949 from his Paris apartment at no. 6 Rue des Favorites stating that 'I received your letter, and Mr. Ryan's, only yesterday', indicating that the *Envoy* editor initially asked for some of his earlier fiction to publish in the magazine:

I remember the short story you mention. I think it is included in More Pricks than Kicks. But not possessing a copy of that work, I can't say for certain. In any case, even if it is not, I would not consent to its publication now. I have not written anything in English for a long time. The best I can do for Envoy is an extract from an unpublished work called Watt, written during the occupation. I hope to get this off to them next week.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> John Ryan to Naomi Mitchison, 23 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>128</sup> Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), p. vi.

<sup>129</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 45.

<sup>130</sup> John Ryan to Naomi Mitchison, 23 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>131</sup> Samuel Beckett to Seán O'Sullivan, 18 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/4/5.



Beckett had begun writing his third novel, *Watt*, in Paris in 1941, continuing to work on it having been forced to flee the city ‘on the run’ from the Gestapo as a member of the French Resistance and completing the draft by 1945 following his subsequent period living in refuge in the south-eastern French village of Roussillon.<sup>132</sup> Written in English, the novel preceded his momentous decision to begin writing directly in French in the immediate post-war years and what he described as the ‘frenzy of writing’ that would ultimately transform his global reception from the 1950s onwards.<sup>133</sup> Before this time, however, Beckett remained a largely marginal and frustrated figure in Irish literary life. Ryan’s request to publish the author’s fiction was in and of itself a notable request considering that Beckett’s publishing history in his native country during the 1930s had been restricted to sporadic reviews, articles, and short poems. As Seán Kennedy observes, the cluster of reviews he managed to publish for example in *The Dublin Magazine* ‘did not exactly propel him to the forefront of the Irish literary scene at this time’, so that he remained a ‘peripheral’ figure in cultural discourse by his eventual departure to Paris in 1937.<sup>134</sup> Beckett’s most controversial early foray into Irish literary debate occurred through a London published article on ‘Recent Irish Poetry’ in 1934 where, writing under the pseudonym of Andrew Bellis, he scathingly attacked the Literary Revival and its cultural nationalist legacy as representative of a programmatic ‘flight from self-awareness’.<sup>135</sup> Singling out for excoriation a list of ‘leading twilighters’ including Austin Clarke, F. R. Higgins, and George Russell, the article dismissed in unashamedly reductive terms the continuing imaginative validity of the Ireland’s folkloric heritage, with the myths of ‘Oisín, Cúchulain, Maeve, Tir-nanog, the Táin Bo Cualigne, Yoga, the Crone of bear’ relegated to mere ‘cut and dried sanctity and loveliness’ and its neo-revivalist practitioners derided as

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<sup>132</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 323.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>134</sup> Seán Kennedy, ‘Beckett Publishing in Ireland, 1945-1956’, in *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon (London: The British Library, 2011), pp. 57-69 (p. 64).

<sup>135</sup> Bellis (Samuel Beckett), ‘Recent Irish Poetry’, p. 71.

‘antiquarians, delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods’.<sup>136</sup> This was followed by what W.J. McCormack has described as the ‘atrocious malrepresentation’ of Clarke in Beckett’s 1938 novel *Murphy*.<sup>137</sup> The novel’s merciless caricature of the ‘pot poet’ as Austin Ticklepenny, cruelly draws upon Clarke’s history of mental illness as a young man in lampooning his poetic technique and depicting him unceremoniously as ‘distinguished indigent drunken bard’.<sup>138</sup>

Kennedy, one of the few critics to seriously examine Beckett’s mid-century critical reception and publishing engagements in Ireland, has intriguingly suggested that the ferocity of these attacks on figures such as Clarke should be seen not only in terms of a conflict of aesthetics but also in the more ambivalent context of Beckett’s material frustrations as a writer throughout this time, so that Clarke is not just an antithetical ‘cut-rate revivalist’ but in fact represents a ‘significant rival in a competitive literary marketplace’.<sup>139</sup> Kennedy argues that a consideration of Beckett’s relationship with the Irish literary scene should recognise the conflicting condition in which he found himself as a young man ‘who wanted to be recognised as a writer of significance in Ireland, while also, and at the same time, resenting his need for affirmation from his peers (especially the Twilighters)’.<sup>140</sup> The prospects of such recognition increasingly diminished as the decade drew to a close, however, with the early iconoclastic impact of articles such as ‘Recent Irish Poetry’ not backed by a substantial published or even readily available body of creative work in Ireland, before the upheaval of wartime saw Beckett commit to remaining in France. That he failed to contribute to *The Bell* throughout the war years was an inevitable consequence of Beckett’s remoteness in Roussillon not only from Irish but from all affairs beyond the confines of the village.

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71; p. 70.

<sup>137</sup> W.J. McCormack, ‘Austin Clarke: The Poet as Scapegoat of Modernism’, in *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s*, ed. by Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp. 75-102 (p. 89).

<sup>138</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1938), p. 84; p. 88.

<sup>139</sup> Seán Kennedy, ‘Samuel Beckett’s Reception in Ireland’, in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon and Matthew Feldman (London & New York: Continuum, 2009), 55-74 (p. 58).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

However, that he ‘features hardly at all’ even as a debated presence in its literary pages testified more surprisingly to Beckett’s low literary visibility leading into and throughout the decade. This was exemplified for Kennedy by his absence in an ‘almost complete roll-call of Irish writers banned by the Censorship Board’ published in the magazine in June 1941, reflecting the extent to which ‘he had all but disappeared from Ireland’s literary consciousness’.<sup>141</sup> While Beckett had developed important connections in the 1930s with the cluster of modernist Irish poets whom he considered distinct from the ‘antiquarians’ in representing ‘the nucleus of a living poetic in Ireland’ including Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey, that he had come to represent a contrastingly detached figure for young Irish writers emerging in the 1940s is confirmed in Cronin’s reminiscences, writing that his early work ‘had brought him nothing in terms of the ordinary rewards of a writer’s existence – not even publication, still less readership and some esteem, not to mention money or fame’:<sup>142</sup>

Except to people like Leventhal who had been his contemporaries and boon companions in the thirties, and who now seemed to most of us to belong to a different era than ourselves, the name Beckett had only very vague connotations for the post-war generation in Ireland. It was known that he had published a comic novel of some sort in the thirties and that he lived in Paris, but he had very little identity otherwise.<sup>143</sup>

Beckett’s publication in *Envoy* occurred at the beginning of a remarkable period in his career that would transform his significance for an emerging generation of Irish writers from that of a vaguely recalled critical antagonist to an immediate and challenging creative influence. *Envoy*’s editorial receptivity to what represented his most difficult and experimental novel to date testified to the virtue of the magazine’s openness to non-commercial and unconventional material. Indeed, *Watt*’s ultimate path to full publication was ‘only marginally less circuitous’ than Beckett’s previous fiction (*Murphy* had been turned down by at least twelve publishers), having been refused by a number of publishers in

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Beckett, ‘Recent Irish Poetry’, p. 76.

<sup>143</sup> Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, pp. 403-404.

England and the United States before eventually being accepted by the Olympia Press in Paris in 1953.<sup>144</sup> The publishing of the 2,500 word extract in *Envoy* was therefore not only significant in an Irish context as representing Beckett's first extended piece of fiction published in an Irish magazine, but indeed marked the first publication of material from the novel globally. In stark contrast to the writer's 'peripheral' publishing status throughout the 1930s in Ireland limited to short reviews and sporadic poems, *Envoy*'s second issue prominently placed the author at the head of its list of contributors on the magazine's cover, with the extract from *Watt* placed after the editorial at the beginning of the issue.<sup>145</sup> Ryan saw the promotion of Beckett as part of *Envoy*'s mission to cultivate the transnational connections that had become otherwise obscured in Irish literary life. 'The really important thing is to have established a communion', he emphasised to the editor of the Parisian literary magazine *Points* in January 1950, 'Over here, we are determined, at all cost, not to be provincial and the fact that in this issue alone two of our most important contributions are permanently resident in Paris (i.e. Sam Beckett and Keeri-Santo) should go to prove that we are capable of seeing beyond the Liffey'.<sup>146</sup>

Beckett chose 'the first "appearance" of Watt' near the beginning of his unpublished novel for selection in *Envoy*.<sup>147</sup> Here, Watt, the novel's middle-aged journeying protagonist, alights from a tram where he is subsequently observed and commented upon with obsessive interest from across the street by three characters, Mr Hackett, Mr Goff and Mrs Tetty Nixon. What signalled Beckett's earlier 'Recent Irish Poetry', Patricia Coughlan states, as an 'Irish modernist manifesto', had been its emphasis on the interrogation of subject-object relations and the refutation of empirical or representational certitude in the artistic process, with this

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<sup>144</sup> Kennedy, 'Samuel Beckett's Reception in Ireland', p. 4.

<sup>145</sup> Kennedy, 'Beckett Publishing in Ireland, 1945-1956', p. 64.

<sup>146</sup> John Ryan to Sinbad Vail, 6 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/6. Author Keeri-Santo contributed the short story 'Drive into the Morning', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no 2 (January 1950), 51-63.

<sup>147</sup> Samuel Beckett to Aidan Higgins, 8 February 1952, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume I: 1929-1940*, ed. by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 392.

recognition of ‘the breakdown of the object’ necessarily leading to an aesthetic of fragmentation and irony – which Beckett memorably described as the ‘rupture of the lines of communication’.<sup>148</sup> As James Knowlson observes, *Watt* revels in this artistic rupturing precisely through its relentless ‘comic attack on rationality’.<sup>149</sup> The extract selected for *Envoy* confronts the reader with the exhaustive and self-contravening efforts of Mr Hackett and Mr and Mrs Nixon to conduct rational enquiry according to logical rules in their discussion of Watt, whereby the intensification of their analysis leads paradoxically to the dissolution of certainty amidst an ever expanding sequence of possible combinations and permutations. “Night is now falling fast,” said Goff; “soon it will be quite dark”, the extract opens, with this reference to the diminishing light anticipating the narrative’s loss of clarity as it progresses.<sup>150</sup> The three characters notice Watt alighting off a tram across the street, whose figure immediately begins to dissolve in the gloaming:

On the far side of the street, opposite to where they sat, a tram stopped. It remained stationary for some little time, and they heard the voice of the conductor, raised in anger. Then it moved on, disclosing, on the pavement, motionless, a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it merged in the dim wall behind it. Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman. Mr. Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord, loosely.<sup>151</sup>

The initial fastidiousness of the narrative here that pinpoints precisely how the tram ‘moved on, disclosing, on the pavement, motionless, a solitary figure’ soon becomes comically disruptive as Tetty and Hackett deliberate and hesitate over an array of potential likenesses of Watt’s dimly apprehended form. The plausible indecision over whether he is male or female gives way to a series of bizarre inanimate possibilities with the specificity of the narrative’s opening now descended into the absurd as Watt is finally likened to a ‘roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord, loosely’. For Cronin, *Watt*

<sup>148</sup> Patricia Coughlan, ‘Samuel Beckett’, in *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s*, pp. 173-208 (p. 178); Beckett, ‘Recent Irish Poetry’, p. 70

<sup>149</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 303.

<sup>150</sup> Samuel Beckett, ‘An extract from *Watt*’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), 11-19 (p. 11).

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

represented the first time in which Beckett achieved ‘his characteristic style, a syntax full of reservations and uncertainties, denials and admissions that something else might be the case’, with the succession of negatives that begin to confuse the sense of the narrative and disrupt its flow in this opening passage reflective of the novel’s broader ‘failure to form satisfying correlations between such things [...] this reduction and, at the same time, dreamlike extension of experience and image, which gives the book a strangely disturbing, ghostly, and unsettling power’.<sup>152</sup>

For *Envoy*’s Dublin readers this ‘ghostly, and unsettling power’ would have been heightened by the extent to which the extract sets itself in an urban setting that is at once familiar and strange. Experimental though the prose style may be in the extract from *Watt*, that Beckett chose for publication the early scene centred around the tram stop is at the same time suggestive of Kennedy’s assertion that he ‘clearly wished to have some kind of impact’ on the Irish literary marketplace, ‘albeit in terms shot through with disavowals of any interest in the unseemly business of self promotion’.<sup>153</sup> It is the observing characters’ obsessive but increasingly frustrated attempts to situate Watt’s character within the logical criteria and familiar parameters of this world that ultimately descends the narrative into semantic disarray. Watt’s elusion of definition in this way becomes representative of the ‘fallibility of all knowledge’, undermining in the process both the individual and social categories and constructs that give society its structure and meaning.<sup>154</sup> As in response to Hackett’s request that Nixon ‘might describe [Watt] a little more clearly’:

“I really know nothing,” said Mr. Nixon.

“But you must know something,” said Mr. Hackett. “One does not part with five shillings to a shadow. Nationality, family, birthplace, confession, occupation or means of existence, distinctive signs, you cannot be in ignorance of all this.”

“Utter ignorance,” said Mr. Nixon.

“He is not a native of the rocks,” said Mr. Hackett.

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<sup>152</sup> Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, pp. 336-337.

<sup>153</sup> Kennedy, ‘Beckett Publishing in Ireland, 1945-1956’, p. 64.

<sup>154</sup> Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 337.

“I tell you nothing is known,” cried Mr. Nixon. “Nothing.”<sup>155</sup>

The irony underlying *Envoy*'s ardent promotion of Beckett's experimental prose, as Shovlin first indicated, was that the original manuscript sent by the writer to the magazine was subsequently subjected to a series of unlicensed corrections by *Envoy*'s typesetter.<sup>156</sup> These resulted in the regularising of aspects of its punctuation and, most grievously, the placing of all speech in inverted commas (as quoted above) in the final published version. The galleys of the extract sent to Beckett for proofing that have survived in the *Envoy* archive show two distinct sets of handwritten corrections: the first in Beckett's hand in black ink and the second from an unidentified source written in blue ink.<sup>157</sup> From an examination of the script it is clear that Beckett's notable revisions and additions made at this stage were in fact subsequently adhered to by the magazine. Most significantly, he inflected the text along the more entertainingly comedic lines that for critics such as John Pilling would mark *Watt* as 'arguably his funniest' work.<sup>158</sup> At an early point in the extract where Mr Hackett enquires after Watt's name, for example, the original manuscript read:

“You haven't told us his name,” said Mr Hackett.  
“Watt,” said Mr Nixon.  
“I never heard you mention him,” said Mrs. Nixon.  
“Strange,” said Mr Nixon.<sup>159</sup>

However, Beckett's handwritten galley revisions inserted the repetition of this exchange between Hackett and Nixon, humorously punning 'Watt' with 'What?' in a way that would form part of an extended joke running through the novel. As Ruby Cohn notes, 'We may immediately associate Watt's name with the question "What?" Yet he never asks that question directly' – an absurdity in and of itself given Watt's and indeed the book's

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<sup>155</sup> Beckett, 'An extract from *Watt*', p. 16.

<sup>156</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>157</sup> Galley proofs of 'An Extract from *Watt*', *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/1/3.

<sup>158</sup> John Pilling, 'Beckett's English Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 17-42 (p. 39).

<sup>159</sup> Galley proofs of 'An Extract from *Watt*', *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/1/3, pp. 1-10 (p. 3).

obsessively enquiring nature.<sup>160</sup> Hackett's confusion of 'Watt' with 'What?' in the edited passage only adds to the comic semantic disarray surrounding all enquiries into his enigmatic protagonist:

"You haven't told us his name," said Mr Hackett.  
"Watt," said Mr Nixon.  
"I say you haven't told us his name," said Mr Hackett.  
"Watt," said Mr Nixon.  
"I never heard you mention him," said Mrs. Nixon.  
"Strange," said Mr Nixon.<sup>161</sup>

The fact that these revisions were dutifully inserted into the final published text makes it only more striking that certain glaring errors were left unchanged. The unidentified insertions handwritten in blue ink in the galleys sent to Beckett had placed, for example, all of the speech in inverted commas, thereby conventionalising to a degree the experimental nature of Beckett's prose style. Having corrected the proofs, Beckett was understandably at pains to have these removed, as he wrote to Ryan:

Herewith corrected proofs. As you will see I have restored my punctuation which I still prefer to that of your compositor. It is important (for me) that this text should not be afflicted with inverted commas. I feel sure that I may rely on you to have them removed. If you are in any doubt refer to the MS I sent you. Its punctuation is the one I should like.<sup>162</sup>

Despite the expressed wishes of the author, however, the inverted commas were maintained in the final version, most likely through a failure of communication between the editors and their typesetter.

The unfortunate outcome of these typographical errors for *Envoy* was that they seriously damaged the previously warm relationship between the magazine and the writer, to the point that the *Watt* extract was to represent both Beckett's first and last contribution. Beckett had earlier responded positively to the magazine's first issue, 'Thank you for *Envoy*

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<sup>160</sup> Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 114.

<sup>161</sup> Beckett, 'An extract from *Watt*', p. 13.

<sup>162</sup> Samuel Beckett to John Ryan, 15 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/4/5.



No 1, which I liked on the whole very much', he replied to Ryan in December 1949.<sup>163</sup>

However, his subsequent frustration at the magazine's failure to adhere to his editing requests quickly soured this initial enthusiasm. In correspondence with the poet and literary agent George Reavey in May 1950, for example, he expressed his lingering annoyance that the extract had been 'massacred by the compositor'.<sup>164</sup> It was this sentiment that novelist Aidan Higgins colourfully reemphasised to Ryan in a letter the following year – presumably in response to the editor's proposed hope of having Beckett contribute to another issue:

Samuel ('Molloy') Beckett is so incensed with your proof-reader's unwillingness to follow his corrections in the case of 'An Extract from Watt', that he has sworn (by St. Patrick?) that that's the last favour he will pleasure yiz with. (A fact).<sup>165</sup>

Cronin's biographical reminiscence of the period contrastingly suggest that Beckett may have been in fact more willing to rebuild relations with the magazine than Higgins' dramatized terms attested. According to him, Beckett did in fact seek out *Envoy* editors under the encouragement of A.J. Leventhal, having returned to Ireland following the death of his mother in August 1950. Cronin describes how Beckett arrived at *Envoy's* Grafton Street offices before departing for Paris:

He found the usual notice pinned to the door to say that these worthies might be found in McDaid's pub across the way but unfortunately, for once, nobody connected with the magazine was actually present and so Beckett never met Kavanagh or any of the young contributors, and this small but potentially interesting intersection of literary generations did not take place.<sup>166</sup>

The unfortunate outcome of these series of events should not however take away from the significance of Beckett's publishing in *Envoy* at this time. If he had failed to meet the magazine's editors in person, the publication of the *Watt* extract nonetheless encouraged Cronin's 'intersection of literary generations' on a significant textual level, signalling

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Samuel Beckett to George Reavey, 9 May 1950, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume I: 1929–1940*, p. 202.

<sup>165</sup> Aidan Higgins to John Ryan, 10 May 1951, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/1.

<sup>166</sup> Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 408.

Beckett's return to the Irish literary scene after the extended hiatus of the 1940s. Indeed, John McGahern's placing of Beckett along with Kavanagh as representing the 'two living writers who meant most to us' in Dublin during the 50s, the figureheads of a developing counter-cultural spirit that he described in terms of a 'freemasonry of the intellect with a vigorous underground life of its own', can be said to have had its roots in the early *Envoy* promotion of his work.<sup>167</sup> Ryan's assertion to Naomi Mitchison in January 1950 that Beckett 'had in his own quiet way, exercised quite a considerable influence on the younger Irish writers', has been more recently pinpointed by Cronin as spawning from their initial exposure to *Watt* at this time, recalling how when shown the manuscript by Leventhal in the Grafton Street office they were each 'struck by the dissolving beauty of its prose'.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, both Beckett's return to the Irish publishing scene and the quality of the extract itself were greeted with enthusiasm by the national press following the publication of *Envoy*'s second issue, with *The Irish Times* for example singling the writer out for praise in remarking that 'this, presumably is a chapter from a novel, and suggests the influences of Ronald Firbank and Wyndham Lewis. It is sufficiently original, however, to tempt one to seek the complete book; for Mr. Beckett is a writer of quality and style'.<sup>169</sup>

For Cronin, *Watt* powerfully resonated in what he considered to be the 'ghastly unreality' of the war and immediate post-war years.<sup>170</sup> Beckett's prose style resonated with younger writers attempting to come to terms with the aftermath of one of 'Europe's periodical fits of self-destruction', with its aesthetic of uncertainty and relentless attack on rationality registering both the personal and collectively felt experience of 'losing one's grip on reality' throughout this time.<sup>171</sup> As Pilling writes, 'Though there is no trace of the global conflict in

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<sup>167</sup> John McGahern, 'The Solitary Reader', in *Love of the World: Essays*, ed. by Stanley Van Der Ziel (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 87-95 (p. 92; p. 91).

<sup>168</sup> John Ryan to Naomi Mitchison, 23 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4; Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 403.

<sup>169</sup> 'Envoy', *Irish Times*, 14 January 1950, p. 6.

<sup>170</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 336.

*Watt*, it reads very much as if it could only have emerged from a world gone mad'.<sup>172</sup> In terms of Beckett's Irish reception, the *Envoy* publication initiated a new period of his significance for writers emerging in the 1940s and 50s, with *Watt* for Cronin marking a decisive break from the earlier critical antagonisms of his 1930s writing. 'Watt was a book which broke the silence, but it was more than that', he wrote:

Gone, or almost gone – for it does mangle the opening pages a little – was the form of satirical Irish whimsy – buttonholing, personal, would-be shocking and would-be charming at the same time – which had been the mode of other Irish novels of the 20s and 30s and was also the mode of *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy*.<sup>173</sup>

The publication of the *Watt* extract in *Envoy* occurred at a time when Beckett was transforming as a literary presence from the characteristic 'obdurate voice' of his critical iconoclasm and personal vendettas of the 1930s to that of a new and generative creative influence.<sup>174</sup> The Irish literary magazine subsequently became an important platform for him as a writer again from this period with the initial positive reception of his work in *Envoy* encouraging David Marcus to publish further extracts of *Watt* in his Cork-based literary magazine *Irish Writing* in 1951 and 1953. Beckett's global reputation would of course be transformed following the enormous success of his first play *Waiting for Godot* from 1953. However, that *Envoy*'s editors were determined to promote Beckett and arguably his most difficult work at a time of his contrasting obscurity in not only the Irish, but also the international literary scene, points to the virtues of its 'dynamic' editorial voice and the efficacy of the magazine as a platform for non-commercial and challenging material. In this, Ryan's earnestness to establish that *Envoy* was capable of 'seeing beyond the Liffey' resulted in a brief but significant moment of exchange between the Dublin magazine and the Paris-based writer.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Pilling, 'Beckett's English Fiction', p. 36.

<sup>173</sup> Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, pp. 335-336.

<sup>174</sup> Kennedy, 'Samuel Beckett's Reception in Ireland', p. 57.

<sup>175</sup> John Ryan to Sinbad Vail, 6 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/6.

## Chapter Two

### ‘The unlikely source of fine art’: *Envoy* in Graftonia

Writing to the Grey Walls Press in January 1950, John Ryan expressed his enthusiasm at the prospect of the publishers placing an advertisement in a forthcoming issue of *Envoy*. ‘I enclose a rate card which will explain the advertising set-up’ he replied, ‘and look forward to the honour of having your book ad., rather than the cheese, cakes and motorcar types which circumstances are obliging us to use’.<sup>1</sup> The contrasting attitudes conveyed here toward two distinct sources of advertising revenue, cultural and commercial, is emblematic of the ‘dynamic’ editorial voice examined in chapter one and which at its most vociferous pitched *Envoy* in an embattled adversarial position to the profit-driven concerns of the marketplace. The potential securing of an advertising placement from the Grey Walls Press ideally suited the kind of autonomous literary atmosphere typically cultivated in *Envoy*’s editorials, such as in the June 1951 issue, with its reaffirmed commitment ‘to print the personal expression of truth and experience’ in a ‘world where “little reviews” so consistently allow themselves to become the vehicles of pretentious cranks, professional bores and journalistic misfits of all descriptions’.<sup>2</sup> Founded by the prominent editor and poet Wrey Gardiner in 1940, the Essex-based publishing house were active and influential promoters of contemporary British poetry throughout the decade, producing important anthologies such as *Lyra: an anthology of new lyric* in 1942, which was edited by poets Alex Comfort and Robert Greacen and featured a rousing preface by critic Herbert Read that boldly expressed his ‘premonitions of a poetic renaissance’ in the midst of ‘a war which every day reveals more clearly its apocalyptic character’.<sup>3</sup> To return to Bourdieu, the inscribing of a name such as the Grey Walls Press in *Envoy*’s pages associated the new venture with the empowering ‘symbolic capital’ of the

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<sup>1</sup> John Ryan to Ronald Gant, 10 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 19 (June 1951), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Read, ‘Preface’, in *Lyra: an anthology of new lyric*, ed. by Alex Comfort and Robert Greacen (Essex: Grey Walls Press, 1942), pp. 9-11 (pp. 9-10).

revered publisher in a way that was explicitly cultivated in its editorials through the association with an embattled tradition of ‘little magazines’.<sup>4</sup>

However, the extent to which *Envoy*’s editorial voice embellished these ideal relations belies the underlying reality of its dependence upon and even active involvement in the business culture it often explicitly disavowed. The ‘cheese’ and ‘cakes’ concerns, for example, that Ryan could begrudgingly refer to as being ‘obliged’ to use in the magazine, were in actual fact representative of his and *Envoy*’s intimate and vital connection to one of Dublin’s most prosperous commercial chains: The Monument Creameries. Established by his parents, Séamus and Agnes Ryan, in 1918, the Monument Creameries gradually expanded from their first premises on Parnell Street into an extensive chain of Dublin cafés, restaurants, and bakeries. By the 1940s, the business was ‘booming’ with thirty branches located throughout the city’s central and suburban areas and employing over five hundred members of staff.<sup>5</sup> Following Séamus Ryan’s sudden death in 1933, Agnes assumed control of the family’s considerable business affairs. As Antoinette Quinn observes, she proved a ‘formidable business woman’ and oversaw the expansion of the Monument Creameries into the following decade.<sup>6</sup> The Ryan family’s grand mansion and estate at Burton Hall near Sandyford exuded their status by this time as ‘one of the wealthiest families in Dublin’.<sup>7</sup> For J.P. Donleavy, who became a regular visitor to Burton Hall as a close friend of Ryan in the 1940s and 50s, the mansion’s ‘interior grandeur’ and ‘sumptuous setting’ represented ‘the antithesis to Dublin’s desolate dens of iniquity’:

Surrounded by tree lined country lanes and set in its 200 acre park, Burton Hall was itself a cornucopia. A hundred heads of Guernsey cows grazed in gently rolling meadows. A champion pedigree bull tethered in a field by the drive awaiting to serve. Acres of walled vegetable and flower gardens. In long greenhouses glowingly golden peaches were ripening. Asparagus leaping from their beds to point their stalks at the sky. Artichokes splashing out

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu, ‘The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods’, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Íde M. Ní Riain, *The Life and Times of Mrs A. V. Ryan of the Monument Creameries* (Dublin: published by the author, 1986), p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 292.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

their large thistle leaves around the fresh purple of their budding fruit. In the Hall's basements were vast, and even for Ireland, nearly inexhaustible wine cellars. A fleet of cars in the courtyard garages.<sup>8</sup>

Agnes was supportive of her son's earnest literary ambitions and provided him with office and studio space in the floor above the Monument Creamery café at no. 39 Grafton Street, which subsequently became *Envoy's* headquarters. As Donleavy recalls, the office was 'luxurious indeed' and well furnished with 'desks and fitted carpets. A gramophone and other comforts. And even the practically unknown personal instrument of a telephone'.<sup>9</sup>

It was, crucially, Ryan's family allowance that provided him with the initial backing for the launching of *Envoy*. However, as is evident in his heated early correspondence with friends such as Donleavy regarding their vacillating financial commitment to the venture, it soon became imperative for the magazine to secure a sustainable monthly income through alternative channels. Unlike a magazine such as *Horizon*, which was substantially funded throughout its existence, the contrastingly limited nature of *Envoy's* start-up fund meant that it ultimately had to depend upon the revenue gained from advertisements to survive.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, for *Envoy* to last even past its first three issues, the securing of a stable monthly income through commercial advertisements became essential, as Ryan outlined to a prospective advertiser:

The circumstances of a literary magazine are, to say the least, precarious, and we in *Envoy*, though wishing nothing for ourselves, must largely depend on the revenue from advertisements to maintain the high standard which we believe we have set in this magazine.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J.P. Donleavy, *J.P. Donleavy's Ireland: In All Her Sins and in Some of Her Graces* (New York: Viking, 1986), pp. 108-110.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> Cyril Connolly's close friend Peter Watson, the wealthy younger son of a millionaire baronet, patronized *Horizon* throughout its existence, spending 'at least a thousand pounds a year to subsidize production costs and payments to contributors and staff', while also assuming the role of *Horizon's* art editor. Sheldon, *Friends of Promise*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> John Ryan to, S.F. McMaster, 21 Jan 1950, *Envoy Records*, Coll. 43/7/3.

*Envoy*'s advertising rates for single full-page insertions were seven pounds, with half-pages priced at three pounds and ten shillings, and quarter-pages at thirty-five shillings. To incentivize long-term advertising in the magazine, special rates were provided for bundles of six and twelve insertions, so that an order placed for twelve full-page insertions, for example, would earn the significant income of seventy pounds.<sup>12</sup> As Ryan frequently remarked in his solicitations to various businesses, 'The additional income which these sales would provide would make all the difference between "austerity" and decent production to us'.<sup>13</sup> If, in Cyril Connolly's terms, 'dynamic magazines usually start with a fixed amount of money to lose and lose it', then Ryan, even though ready to take a chance on challenging non-commercial material such as Beckett's *Watt*, was not therefore comfortable with the thought of merely squandering his considerable investment in the magazine. On the contrary, throughout *Envoy*'s life span he worked in various ways to market the magazine's autonomous cultural project as a commercially viable enterprise.<sup>14</sup>

This chapter situates *Envoy* within its immediate commercial milieu, the Grafton Street area, uncovering the extent of its engagement with the business network surrounding its offices and how this ultimately drew the magazine into a key transnational intersection of art and commerce in the post-war city, namely, Dublin's flourishing commercial gallery trade as presided over by the Victor Waddington Galleries. Though it may have railed in editorials against the deleterious effects of 'modern materialism', *Envoy*'s relationship with the business culture of 'Graftonia', as Ryan grandly termed it in his memoir of the period, was always more involved than such rhetoric allowed, informing key aspects of its production, design, and content in ways that drew the magazine's cultural project in from 'the perimeter of Commerce'.<sup>15</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker have observed that the particular

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<sup>12</sup> *Envoy* Advertising Rate Card, *Envoy Records*, Coll. 43/4/1.

<sup>13</sup> John Ryan to Lindsay Anderson, 14 October 1949, *Envoy Records*, Coll. 43/7/1.

<sup>14</sup> Connolly, 'Little Magazines', pp. 414-415.

<sup>15</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 95; Patrick Kavanagh, 'Diary: A Play', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 5 (April 1950), 78-86 (p. 78).

advertisements placed in a magazine are indicative of both ‘an external relationship to an imagined readership and a relationship to the world of commerce and commodities’, importantly observing the fact that ‘there is a world of difference between a magazine that only advertises bookshops or other publishers tucked away in the back pages’ and periodicals that contrastingly make ‘abundant use of advertisements ranging from 10 to 25 per cent of the total page contents’.<sup>16</sup> Each issue of *Envoy* opened with five to six pages of advertisements and, as such, it was to these commercial signifiers that the attention of the reader was first drawn. A sense of how this ‘world of commerce and commodities’ influenced both the magazine’s materiality and its content leads the chapter toward a clearer understanding of *Envoy*, as Brian Walker and Robert Welch have more broadly encouraged, ‘as an object situated in an environment of complex contingencies’ implicating culture in a nexus of ‘power, money, trade, and communications’.<sup>17</sup> In Dublin during the late 1940s and 50s, the cross channelling of business and cultural concerns was most emphatically represented by the city’s rapidly developing art market. Through the activities of the Jewish London-born dealer Victor Waddington and his gallery just off Grafton Street at no. 8 South Anne Street, Dublin’s ‘most fashionable street’ established itself in Donleavy’s words as ‘the unlikely source of fine art’.<sup>18</sup> Ryan’s close relationship with the dealer throughout *Envoy*’s twenty issues located the magazine within a vibrant cross-border and wider international network of artistic and business activity.

The extent to which the realities of *Envoy*’s commercial engagement jar with the adversarial market stance that typically bolstered its editorial voice in adversity has been identified by critics as a conflictual condition inherent to the literary magazine at mid-century.

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<sup>16</sup> Brooker and Thacker, ‘General Introduction’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume 1, Britain and Ireland*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>17</sup> Walker and Welch, ‘Preface’, in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Volume III: The Irish Book in English 1550-1800*, p. vii.

<sup>18</sup> Donleavy, *J.P. Donleavy’s Ireland*, p. 97.



Brooker and Thacker's description of *Horizon*, for example, as a magazine 'pitched between worlds' captures the predicament of mid-century periodicals inheriting a revered modernist legacy of 'little magazines' while at the same time attempting to survive in a rapidly transforming cultural and economic sphere.<sup>19</sup> While Connolly regularly cultivated an elitist rhetoric of embattlement in his editorials against the material conditions governing literary and artistic production in Britain, the wider commodification of the literary market, and the expanding mass-media and entertainment forms that were overwhelming smaller independent literary ventures, Sean Latham's provoking essay on the magazine reveals how *Horizon* ultimately 'eludes the very constraints of modernist autonomy and taste on which it appears to be initially staked'.<sup>20</sup> The invitation of *Horizon*'s readers to complete and return various survey questionnaires, for example, looked to gather information on their tastes, habits, and identities in a manner that was ultimately indicative of a more concerted interest on Connolly's part in assessing and increasing the magazine's readership base. Indeed, the published results of these surveys such as in the April 1941 issue revealed the range and heterogeneity of the magazine's audience base beyond that of an elite minority.<sup>21</sup> In such instances, Latham argues, 'even as Connolly positioned his magazine in the editorial columns as the last faltering guardian of an elitist culture of modernist taste, he simultaneously attempted to assess and even cultivate a surprisingly diverse readership'.<sup>22</sup> While Connolly invoked the marginal, anti-commercial mythos of the 'little magazine' in his editorials,

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<sup>19</sup> Brooker and Thacker, 'The Call to Criticism and Modernist Destinies: Introduction', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, p. 830.

<sup>20</sup> Latham, 'Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940-50) and the End of Modernism', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, p. 864.

<sup>21</sup> The published survey results in the April 1941 issue revealed the remarkably young age range of the magazine's readership, stating that 'over 40 per cent are between 20 and 30 years of age', with the general income range designating *Horizon*'s readers as 'mainly middle or lower middle class'. 'Horizon's Questionnaire', *Horizon*, vol. 3, no. 16 (April 1941), 292-296 (p. 292; p. 293). Latham has noted the 'surprisingly diverse array of careers' included in this middle-class bracket, from those engaged in full-time civil defence work, teachers, students, and civil servants. Other diverse occupations noted include clerks, farmers, writers, engineers, and businessmen. Latham, 'Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940-50) and the End of Modernism', p. 867.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 867.

therefore, *Horizon* nonetheless ‘remained consistently aware of itself as a business enterprise’ throughout its decade of publication.<sup>23</sup>

*Envoy* inherited this complex from its most significant periodical influence in the way in which it similarly invoked an embattled modernist ‘little magazine’ culture in response to economic adversity while at the same time attempting in various ways to navigate these challenges and indeed to establish itself as a viable commercial entity both in Ireland and globally. It is in the magazine’s production and design where we can first begin to trace these efforts for, as Shovlin importantly observes, ‘encoded in the outward presentation of any journal are a series of ideological pointers not always clear in editorial pronouncements’.<sup>24</sup> In this, it is salient to note that *Envoy* never committed in its material presentation to the kind of ‘visual radicalism’ characteristic of earlier infamous ‘dynamic’ British and Irish ‘little magazines’ such as *BLAST* and *The Klaxon*.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, rather than ‘assaulting the audience’ through such means it was through the magazine’s high production standards by which it actually sought to attract high class advertisements and a broader commercial readership.<sup>26</sup> It was indeed *Envoy*’s distinguishing material quality in Irish periodical culture that made it the ideal promotional vehicle for Victor Waddington and his expanding stable of Irish and international artists, a dealer whose similarly meticulous attention to matters of presentation had established him in Dublin, Brian Fallon notes, as ‘a salesman and showman of genius’.<sup>27</sup>

In assessing such questions of materiality in *Envoy*, the thesis draws from a body of recent scholarship that has established how the ‘material characteristics of the periodical [...]

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 868.

<sup>24</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Gasiorek, ‘The “Little Magazine” as Weapon: *BLAST* (1914-15)’, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, p. 296.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Bishop, ‘Re:Covering Modernism – Format and Function in the Little Magazines’, in *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*, pp. 287-319 (p. 296).

<sup>27</sup> Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960*, p. 241.

have consistently been central to its meaning'.<sup>28</sup> Discussing methodological approaches to the study of the 'little magazine' in the collection of essays *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*, Edward Bishop posits that a critical awareness of the ways in which 'formats affect our reading practices' is essential to examining the relationship between magazines and the marketplace, arguing that the 'physical form is in fact crucial in establishing protocols of reading' of literary texts in general and of the 'little magazine' in particular.<sup>29</sup> This consideration of the way in which a magazine's materiality contributes to its meaning leads to a deeper understanding of the 'sociology of the text', providing an insight into the relationship between a magazine and its external environment in a way that is not necessarily conveyed by its editorial or creative content alone.<sup>30</sup> The insights into factors such as audience relations, marketing strategies, commercial and distributive networks that emerge from such an approach ultimately complicate the 'standard definition' of the 'little magazine' as solely pitched in an 'adversarial position with regard to the dominant culture'.<sup>31</sup> Bishop considers an array of magazines in the context of their 'bibliographic environment', with his reading of the late nineteenth century London-based illustrated quarterly, *The Yellow Book*, in particular providing an instructive model by which we can similarly examine *Envoy*.<sup>32</sup> As he outlines, *The Yellow Book* was very much conceived along a 'high line', styling itself as an outlet for, in the words of its editor Aubrey Beardsley, new work deemed too 'risqué' for conventional mainstream publication, while its striking yellow cover played provocatively off the 'continental decadence' associated with the distinctive paperback editions of contemporary French novels produced in that colour.<sup>33</sup> The magazine's exclusive literary and artistic focus and its eschewal of commercial book reviews further promoted this radical air of detachment

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<sup>28</sup> Margaret Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre', in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, Lionel Madden (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 19-32 (p. 22-23).

<sup>29</sup> Bishop, 'Re:Covering Modernism – Format and Function in the Little Magazines', pp. 287-8.

<sup>30</sup> Ian Willison, 'Introduction', in *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*, pp. xii-xviii (p. xii)

<sup>31</sup> Bishop, 'Re:Covering Modernism – Format and Function in the Little Magazines', p. 287.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

from the allure and demands of the marketplace. However, a detailed consideration of the material quality and presentation of *The Yellow Book* in fact reveals the ultimately more involved and even profitably orientated relationship between its editorial and publishing team and their commercial milieu. As Bishop observes, there existed ‘a sub-text of respectability in the book itself’ that sublimated the immediate radical import of its material to the extent that the magazine actually came to appeal to a broader middle-class readership.<sup>34</sup> The employment of savvy and attractive production standards represented one way in which this process was effected, involving, for example the issuing of each copy to readers unopened and uncut and the use of soft, rag-content paper that lent an ‘expensive and antique appearance’ to the magazine.<sup>35</sup> For Bishop, it is in the recognition of such ‘conflicting narratives’ at play in a magazine that the critic can begin to dynamically situate it within the socio-economic conditions of its time, revealing, in this case, the ‘wider audience’ attracted and even solicited by *The Yellow Book* in a way that complicates its image as a purely non-commercial artistic venture.<sup>36</sup> With this in mind, Bishop argues that

We must distinguish between the ‘social addressee’ of the work and the actual receiver of the text. With *The Yellow Book* the addressee is ostensibly aesthetes, avant-garde readers who want to read what could not be published elsewhere, but the actual receiver of the text is more likely to have been a middle-class reader who is mildly daring, one who is willing to spend the not inconsiderable sum of five shillings to acquire a product that looks as if it is worth much more. For all its notoriety, then, *The Yellow Book* is a sort of coffee table book of Decadence.<sup>37</sup>

Bishop’s distinction between the ‘social addressee’ and the ‘actual receiver’ of a literary text can be usefully applied to our consideration of *Envoy*’s relationship with the marketplace. In the context of our earlier discussion, the typical addressee of the magazine’s antagonistic editorial voice can be said to represent the ‘intelligent few’, as defiantly categorised by Ryan in the magazine’s final issue, namely, an elite readership of writers, artists, and intellectuals

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

ranged against the ‘hostility of the unimaginative many’ in Irish society.<sup>38</sup> However, the blustery character of *Envoy*’s editorial persona that increased in intensity as its financial state worsened belies the more implicit ways in which the magazine actually sought to attract a wider commercial audience, particularly in its initial production stages. As we will first examine, key aspects of *Envoy*’s production and design were influenced by the magazine’s immediate commercial milieu, the affluent Grafton Street area, in a way that conflicts with the characteristic volatility of its editorial voice, to the point that the magazine actually styled itself in various ways with local businesses and a broader middle to upper-class ‘receiver’ in mind. In this way, as Thacker and Brooker have observed more generally of the ‘little magazine’ genre, *Envoy* can be seen as operating with the complex condition of being ‘simultaneously resistant to commercial philistinism and complicit in marketing of [itself] as a high-quality commodity’.<sup>39</sup>

### ***‘My own special provenance’: Designing a literary magazine***

As *Envoy*’s resident artist, Ryan was in charge of all aspects of the magazine’s production and design. Replying to John D. Stewart following the publication of *Envoy*’s second issue in January 1950, he delighted in the Belfast writer’s particular commendation of these features of the magazine, stating that ‘format, printing etc., are very important, and as these are my own special provenance I am naturally pleased to hear them praised’.<sup>40</sup> The editor’s demanding standards and attention to detail in the production process are evident in his literary and business correspondence at this time. The magazine was produced by the Dublin letterpress, printing, and bookbinding firm, Cahill & Company, and though Ryan was

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Foreword: Envoi’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 7-9 (p. 7).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, ‘Introduction: *Fin de Siècle* Ventures (1884-1906)’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume 1: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, pp. 69-75 (p. 73).

<sup>40</sup> John Ryan to John D. Stewart, 21 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/5.

generally satisfied with the print run of the first issue he was nonetheless angered to find that they had ‘bungled a number of copies particularly where they closed pages while the ink was still wet’.<sup>41</sup> The further detection of minor inconsistencies in page alignment and pagination compounded his dissatisfaction with what he considered to be the generally low printing standards in the city. Ryan expressed these frustrations in correspondence with Seán O’Faoláin, who had similarly employed Cahill’s in the publishing of *The Bell*:

I am convinced now that no Irish printer, with the possible exception of Hely’s, can centre the printing on a page without getting margins cock-eyed. It seems to be one of these things which we shall always have with us, like the off register colour printing which is so rampant that no Irish advertiser will design a lay-out which hasn’t got at least a quarter inch allowance for error.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these minor issues, however, the production value of *Envoy*’s opening issue was of a standard that immediately distinguished it as a mid-century Irish literary magazine. Ryan was particularly keen to make a strong impression with *Envoy*’s cover, which he designed himself **[Fig. 1]**.<sup>43</sup> Demi octavo in size and rendered in a striking three-colour tone that was subsequently varied with each issue, the cover’s illustrated urban scene framed by a triumphal arch immediately evokes the refined Georgian and Edwardian atmosphere of the central Dublin city area. Beneath the archway, the listed names of the contributors are set against a receding townscape, where a cobbled canal bridge leads to a wide street lined with terraced houses. The stately capitalized typeface used for the magazine’s title accompanied by the italicized flourish of its subtitle together compliment the refined rendering of the archway and its background city scene.

That Ryan desired to make a visual statement with *Envoy*’s design tantamount to the quality of its content is reflected in his correspondence following the magazine’s launch.

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<sup>41</sup> John Ryan to Seán O’Faoláin, 1 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/5.

<sup>42</sup> John Ryan to Seán O’Faoláin, 1 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/5. Hely’s Ltd. were printers of fine books and colour reproductions based in East Wall, Dublin.

<sup>43</sup> Writing to the assistant literary editor for the *Observer*, Terence Kilmartin, Ryan remarked ‘I am very glad that you liked the cover (I designed it myself)’. John Ryan to Terence Kilmartin, 1 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

Writing to Ronald Gant at the Grey Walls Press, he stated that ‘I am very glad that you liked the magazine, particularly the design and lay-out, as it was in these things that we made a very real attempt to escape the low standards of our predecessors in this country’.<sup>44</sup> In this, he was determined to distinguish *Envoy* from its major Irish periodical predecessor. In terms of its design, *The Bell* had originally opted for a relatively spare visual approach with its title superimposed in block capitals over a basic illustration of a bell, beneath which was initially subtitled ‘A Survey of Irish Life’ along with the issue’s list of contributors. This aesthetic in many ways embodied O’Faoláin’s editorial desire for the magazine to present the ‘minimum of associations’ that he considered absolutely necessary in order to engage afresh with the spectrum of contemporary Irish life.<sup>45</sup> While O’Faoláin had been initially able to publish all twelve issues of *The Bell*’s first volumes on heavy white paper stock, the strains of wartime trade restrictions and increasing shortages gradually began to take its toll on the magazine, with its paper quality by the winter of 1941 ‘noticeably diminished’ and regularly revealing the phantom print from previously pulped-down pages.<sup>46</sup> As he later recalled in his autobiography, it was consequently joked that *The Bell* was ‘the only magazine in the world printed on lavatory paper with ink made of soot!’<sup>47</sup>

Ryan was keen to emphasize that in ‘production, design and quality of paper’ *Envoy* would be ‘very much better in every respect’ than its predecessor.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, if *The Bell*’s ‘utilitarian’ design was consciously bare and non-associative, the decorative cityscape illustrated by Ryan for *Envoy*’s cover was immediately more elaborate and commercially attractive, establishing the editorial commitment to a high standard of production and appealing to a more specifically urban and consciously urbane audience.<sup>49</sup> It is notable in this regard that the cover is foregrounded by a capitalized ‘DUBLIN’, rather than any reference to

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<sup>44</sup> John Ryan to Ronald Gant, 10 Jan 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

<sup>45</sup> Sean O’Faolain, ‘This is Your Magazine’, *The Bell*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1940), 5-9 (p. 9), p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 66.

<sup>47</sup> Seán O’Faoláin, *Vive Moi!*, ed. and afterword Julia O’Faolain (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993), p. 315.

<sup>48</sup> John Ryan to News Brothers Ltd., Cork, 11 November 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/5.

<sup>49</sup> Ballin, *Irish Periodical Culture*, p. 72.

‘Ireland’ or ‘Irish’, inscribed at the base of its triumphal archway.<sup>50</sup> Ryan has recalled that he designed the cover while living in the central city area of Hatch Street, ‘with details borrowed from the Georgian architecture to be found there’, with the scene itself depicting the view from nearby Leeson Street Bridge facing southward towards Upper Leeson Street.<sup>51</sup> The illustration’s insertion of the triumphal archway before the bridge interestingly appears to reference the landmark state visit of King Edward VII to Dublin in 1903, during which time a triumphal arch was temporarily erected on Leeson Street Bridge to celebrate his parade through the city [Fig. 2]. To the Dublin bookstall browser in 1949, however, the archway would more immediately have suggested the rusticated piers and impressive entablature of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers’ Arch, erected in 1907, at the Grafton Street entrance to St. Stephen’s Green [Fig. 3]. The insertion of the magazine’s full title *Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art* in place of the customary commemorative inscription in the archway’s central decorative panel thereby transforms the celebration of a momentous political event into a cultural one.

Discussing the significance of triumphal arches as powerful forms of urban spectacle in the commemoration and celebration of political events such as that of the state visit of King Edward VII, Yvonne Whelan observes that their erection in prominent city areas represented the attempt to exploit ‘both the enchanting power of grand display and the latent symbolic capital of the cultural landscape’.<sup>52</sup> When considered in relation to *Envoy*’s immediate commercial milieu, the Grafton Street area, we can begin to see how the elegant cover design channelled this ‘symbolic capital’ of Georgian and Edwardian refinement to attract vital advertising income from high-class businesses located in the vicinity of its offices. As Joseph

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<sup>50</sup> The inscriptions ‘Printed in Ireland’ followed by ‘Printed in Republic of Ireland’ would appear on the cover from the February 1950 issue, while the magazine’s subtitle would change to ‘An Irish Review of Literature and Art’ from the April 1950 issue.

<sup>51</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood* (quotation taken from descriptive note accompanying an unpaginated photographic reproduction of *Envoy*’s cover included in the book).

<sup>52</sup> Yvonne Whelan, ‘Performance, Spectacle and Power’, *Key Concepts in Historical Geography*, ed. by John Morrissey, David Nally, Ulf Strohmayer, Yvonne Whelan, (London: Sage Publications, 2014), pp. 182-190 (p. 187).



Brady observes, Grafton Street represented the ‘most fashionable’ district in Dublin throughout the 1940s and 50s.<sup>53</sup> The department stores Switzers and Brown Thomas were a major draw for local shoppers, marketing themselves as quality costumiers, furriers, and milliners to ‘a middle-class clientele and those who aspired to be such’.<sup>54</sup> Alongside these major outlets, a host of smaller independent businesses including tailors, jewellers, and fashion designers were located along the main thoroughfare and throughout its adjacent streets, each specialized ‘to meet the needs of a wealthy and fashion-conscious segment of the population’.<sup>55</sup>

Ryan was aware of the commercial potential of *Envoy*’s design and high-production standards from the outset – even pitching the magazine as an attractive commodity to the mass-market commercial publishers that were elsewhere attacked in its editorial pages. Writing to W.H. Smith in London following the lifting of the British Board of Trade ban, for example, he emphasised that the ‘cover design and the magazine’s format make the magazine attractive from the bookseller’s point of view’.<sup>56</sup> He even printed ‘a couple of hundred cover reproductions with blurbs at back’ in the confidence that ‘the cover reproductions will make excellent publicity display’.<sup>57</sup> Ryan’s assurance in this was no doubt buoyed by the array of appreciative comments regarding *Envoy*’s material quality that attended its launch. While, as we have seen, *Envoy*’s relationship with *The Irish Times* would gradually deteriorate over time, the newspaper was initially supportive of the magazine and congratulated in particular its ‘attractive and gracious’ physical appearance.<sup>58</sup> Artist and writer Lionel Miskin, meanwhile, wrote rapturously to Ryan that ‘I cease not to marvel at your cover’ and delighted

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Brady, *Dublin, 1930-1950: The Emergence of the Modern City* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), p. 446; p. 301.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> John Ryan to W.H. Smith and Sons, 2 March 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/5.

<sup>57</sup> John Ryan to Leslie Daiken, 2 February 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Hail and Farewell’, *Irish Times*, 10 December 1949, p. 6.

that ‘the colours balanced so happily and individually’.<sup>59</sup> Ernest Gébler similarly opened his letter to the editor by stating that ‘Your cover design is excellent. It couldn’t be bettered’.<sup>60</sup> Fellow literary periodicals were equally congratulatory, with the editor of *Points* magazine in Paris, Sinbad Vail, writing that ‘Envoy looks nice, very nice indeed, nicely printed too’, and George Godwin of *The Adelphi* in London commending the ‘delightful production and most attractively offered to your public’.<sup>61</sup>

That *Envoy*’s design played a key role in the promotion of the magazine is further evidenced by the fact that Ryan included copies of the cover in his letters soliciting advertisement placements from commercial businesses as a guarantee that the ‘reading public’ who would subsequently view the advertisements in the magazine ‘would be a really discerning one and not merely the kind who simply buys a magazine to while away an idle hour’.<sup>62</sup> The initial success of this marketing strategy emerges clearly from the magazine’s business correspondence, with George Childs of the Dawson Street based New Ireland Assurance Company, for example, commenting that ‘I was very pleased when I learned of your venture and in my opinion we need a high class literary review in this country and I think with the vision and energy of your Editorial Board you will make the Magazine a success’, before going on to request a full-page advertisement in the magazine:

My Company is anxious to help every aspect of Irish life and industry but we naturally cannot place advertisements from a sentimental point of view. We do believe, however, that ‘Envoy’ will be read by people of discrimination who will realise the value of insurance and that is why we placed these for full pages with your review during the current year.<sup>63</sup>

Nowhere was this marketing tactic more suited, of course, than to the fashionable Grafton Street area and the advertisements that subsequently filled the opening pages of each issue

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<sup>59</sup> Lionel Misikin to John Ryan, 16 February 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/4; Lionel Misikin to John Ryan, 18 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/4.

<sup>60</sup> Ernest Gébler to John Ryan, 6 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/4/11.

<sup>61</sup> Sinbad Vail to John Ryan, 10 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/7; George Godwin to John Ryan, [undated], *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/6/1.

<sup>62</sup> John Ryan to S.E. Nicholson, 8 November 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/6/2.

<sup>63</sup> George S. Childs to Tony MacInerney, 5 April 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/6/2.

were heavily drawn from businesses in the immediate vicinity of *Envoy*'s offices, with the effect that the magazine's 'high venture' in literature and art became intimately merged with the world of high commerce.

*Envoy*'s debt to the Monument Creameries was inscribed in the inside cover of the first issue with a full-page advertisement dedicated to the company. Generally known for its quality local produce sold at affordable prices, the Monument Creameries' flagship Grafton Street café, newly renovated and opened in 1946, was specifically styled to suit its refined surroundings. As *The Irish Times* promotional feature on the new café described, the 'striking beauty' of its design was characterized by 'a skilful blending of comfort and design in the modern manner' that created for its customers both a 'new gay atmosphere' and 'a new degree of comfort'.<sup>64</sup> The company's prominence at the beginning of *Envoy*'s advertisement section in the majority of its issues set the precedent for the array of adverts taken by businesses from the Grafton Street area in the magazine that addressed both an aspiring middle-class clientele and the city's wealthier elite. Electronic goods distributors Wilson & Co. Ltd., based at no. 97 St. Stephen's Green, were represented in the first issue with a full-page promoting the 'Webster-Chicago Portable Wire Recorder Model 180', a new voice recorder which promised to revolutionize the working methods of 'executive and creative men and women' and which was specifically orientated towards 'Doctors, Businessmen, Lawyers' as well as 'Authors'. More luxurious tastes were solicited in a half-page advert for Miss Doran's Modèles salon at no. 51 Dawson Street, which was popularly known for its regular exhibitions of the latest fashion trends from London and Paris, showcasing designer wear such as 'tailored suits, tweed coats, three piece ensembles, specially designed millinery, cocktail dinner and evening frocks'.<sup>65</sup> Other Grafton Street area businesses regularly advertised throughout *Envoy*'s following issues included the self-styled 'House of Tailoring' Willie Lynn Ltd. at no. 56 Grafton Street and costumiers Richard Alan and Company Ltd. at

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<sup>64</sup> 'A Brand New Café With A Grand Old Name', *Irish Times*, 28 June 1946, p 3.

<sup>65</sup> 'Social and Personal', *Irish Times*, 24 April 1950, p. 5.

no. 58 Grafton Street, who similarly specialized in ‘tailor made coats and suits’; Austen’s at no. 26 South Anne Street stocked the best in ‘Ladies’ knitwear, blouses and scarves; Hirsch Ribbons Ltd. at no. 24 Suffolk Street boasted ribbons that were distinguished by their ‘lustre, quality, and finish’; Dixon and Hempenstall at no. 111 Grafton Street provided a specialist opticians service; while the connoisseurs of ‘Cuisine Française’ in Dublin, Restaurant Jammet, were located nearby at no. 45 and no. 46 Nassau Street. Renowned as ‘the most fashionable restaurant in Dublin’, the restaurant attracted the elite of society, as a popular commercial tourist guide described:

It is patronized by wealthy professional men, by racing enthusiasts and by foreign visitors, and is famous for its lobster dishes and oysters, especially the latter, which are taken with Jacob’s biscuits and draught stout.<sup>66</sup>

If *Envoy*’s embattled editorial voice characteristically pitched itself among a countercultural vanguard of the ‘intelligent few’ ranged against the ‘hostility of the unimaginative many’, then such oppositional rhetoric is complicated by the more eclectic commercial realities of its bibliographic environment that we have begun to uncover.<sup>67</sup> To return to Bishop, the magazine’s attractive production standards and the prevalence of Grafton Street area businesses in its pages suggests the targeting of a broader middle to upper-class ‘receiver’ of the magazine beyond the concerns of its more explicitly addressed artistic or intellectual milieu.<sup>68</sup> While its editorials antagonistically distinguished *Envoy*’s ‘serious’ cultural project from the disparaged profit driven interests of ‘popular journalism’ and major commercial publishers, its ‘bibliographic environment’ reveals in this way the ultimately more complicit and even opportunistic nature of the magazine’s engagement in the marketplace.<sup>69</sup> The March 1951 issue for example may have established *Envoy* exclusively in the service of ‘*Literary value, literary value*’, yet we are now beginning to uncover the ways

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<sup>66</sup> *Dublin by Day and by Night* (Dublin: The Parkside Press, 1948), p. 97.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Foreword: Envoi’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 7-9 (p. 7).

<sup>68</sup> Bishop, ‘Re: Covering Modernism – Format and Function in the Little Magazines’, p. 291

<sup>69</sup> ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 16 (March 1951), p. 7.

in which its cultural project was at the same time marketed as an attractive and even mass-orientated commodity.<sup>70</sup> A recurring feature of the advertisements in the magazine was the linking of their quality goods and services with this cultivated literary image. South King Street sellers of men's shirts and collars, Frank Hugh O'Donnell Ltd., for example, equated the importance of 'being well-dressed' with being well-read, contending that 'just as *Envoy* stresses the intellectual attributes of our writers and artists, so, too, do ODO shirts and collars emphasise the craft and style sense of Irish workers and designers'. This intermingling of art and commerce was in fact a sustained feature throughout *Envoy* and was most comprehensively illustrated through its association with Victor Waddington and Dublin's rising art market. Indeed, it was through Ryan's close relationship with the art dealer that *Envoy* established itself as a key promotional agent in a thriving transnational network of artistic and business activity.

***'The transmutation of art into bread and butter': Victor Waddington and Dublin's post-war commercial gallery trade***

A commodity regularly featured in *Envoy* was the full-page advertisement promoting the 'AGA' domestic cooker. Addressed to middle and upper class housewives, the advert was framed by the tagline 'You've time to live when you cook by AGA' and outlines how the cooker radically diminishes the amount of time spent in the kitchen through its temperature control system [Fig. 4]. 'The wonderful thing about AGA cooking is that it actually looks after itself', the text explains, and is headed by a sketch of an elegantly attired lady enjoying the new leisure time provided by her purchase by visiting an art gallery, daintily balancing her handbag and exhibition catalogue on one hand as she views one of the exhibited paintings. The advert's arts angle is further emphasized by the notice inserted beneath the main body of

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<sup>70</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), p. 8.

text promoting a special sixteen-page informational booklet on the AGA ‘magnificently illustrated in full colour’. That the AGA advertisers specifically chose an art exhibition to illustrate the exciting social life a housewife could enjoy having purchased her ‘care-free cooking system’ was reflective of the surge in commercial interest in the visual arts in Ireland during the 1940s and the significant expansion of its art market through the activities of an interconnected network of commercial galleries and various independent artist groups. If *Envoy*’s outbursts against the conservative market strategies of major Irish publishers testified to the limited alternative literary opportunities available to Irish writers at the mid-century, the commercial conditions for artists during this period were contrastingly far more promising. As S.B. Kennedy has observed, the decade witnessed ‘a considerable increase in the number of works of art sold at exhibitions in Dublin’ and that this rise ‘in demand for works of art of all kinds both stimulated and coincided with the development of a number of exhibition venues’.<sup>71</sup> In chapter six we will consider in detail how the internationalising transformations in Irish art practice in the 1940s through independent groups such as the White Stag and the ‘Irish Exhibition of Living Art’ were provoked by a growing dissatisfaction toward the institutional frameworks and cultural nationalist ideologies governing Irish artistic production and promotion, and how these developments in turn proved both liberating and challenging for *Envoy* in its ambitions to establish a new status and standard of art writing in Irish periodical culture. Along with these interconnected groups and events, the rise of commercial gallery trade in Dublin was central to the rapidly developing art market in the city. ‘Artistic activity increased’, Jane Eckett observes, ‘and, with it, the pace of art dealing’, and emerging Irish artists most importantly benefitted from the support of a cluster of commercial galleries centred around the Grafton Street area which worked in new and innovative ways to stimulate public interest in exhibition attendance and picture buying.<sup>72</sup> Writing in his regular column in

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<sup>71</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950*, p. 147.

<sup>72</sup> Jane Eckett, ‘Art Market’, in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, ed. by Catherine Marshall and Peter Murray (Dublin; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 16-20 (p. 17).

*The Dublin Magazine* in 1945, art critic Edward Sheehy noted the significance of these developments and their role in the emergence of a new more diverse market for visual art in Dublin:

There is an increased public interest in painting, and, though the conventional drawing-room landscapes and genre paintings have sold like confectionary, the more original and even still experimental painters have found discerning buyers. In these last months the number of exhibitions was so great that the critic in a quarterly cannot deal adequately even with the minority selected.<sup>73</sup>

The acceleration of this trend into the immediate post-war years was followed with equal interest in the national media, with a feature in *The Irish Times* in 1949 stating that ‘the demand for Irish paintings, which has been steadily increasing in recent years, has now reached the level at which Irish artists can regard painting as a profitable career’, pointing to not only ‘the increased number of Irish people buying paintings, but also to the fact that an ever-increasing number of people are buying Irish paintings’.<sup>74</sup> The article interviews a ‘Dublin art dealer’, whose encouragement to readers to consider the value of an artwork in terms of every day commodities illustrates exactly the kind of business acumen responsible for the expansion of the local art market beyond the merely specialised interests of patrons and connoisseurs during this time. ‘A man will cheerfully pay £50 for a radio set’, the dealer remarks, ‘knowing that it will seriously deteriorate after 10 years use, and depreciate in value steadily and steeply from year to year from the moment that it leaves the shop’.<sup>75</sup> However, this gradual degradation in the use and worth of such a commodity is in stark contrast to the ‘£10 or £15’ priced painting, which represents a far sounder investment in that it ‘certainly will not deteriorate, probably will not depreciate, and very easily might appreciate after 15 or 20 years’. As an example of ‘the appreciation of pictures’, the dealer draws attention to the surge in value of work by Jack Butler Yeats during the 1940s, stating that ‘a small Jack Yeats

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<sup>73</sup> Edward Sheehy, ‘Art Notes’, *The Dublin Magazine*, vol. 20, no. 3 (July-September 1945), 45-47 (p. 45).

<sup>74</sup> ‘Painting Is Becoming Profitable’, *Irish Times*, 26 August 1949, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

sold in a Dublin gallery 20 years ago for £8 or £10 is worth £60 to-day, and undervalued at that, by international standards’.

Though unnamed in the article, the expressed association with and indeed detailed knowledge of Yeats and his painting indicates the dealer in question to be Victor Waddington, whose close personal and professional relationship with the painter during the 1940s saw him become the instrumental figure in Yeats’ remarkable exhibiting success in these years. From their first exhibition together in 1943, Riann Coulter writes, dealer and artist were ‘bound by a professionally and personally enriching relationship that lasted for the rest of Yeats’s life’, with Waddington staging a series of one-man shows of his work in Dublin in the 1940s and 50s along with promoting Yeats internationally.<sup>76</sup> Born in London of Scots Presbyterian and German Jewish heritage, Waddington moved to Dublin with his family as a child in 1916. As Catherine Marshall observes, Waddington was largely responsible for the introduction of ‘the commercial gallery in the modern sense’ into Ireland following the opening of his first Dublin gallery in 1925 on the first floor of no. 28 South Anne Street, adding an associate picture-framing business at no. 19 Nassau Street in 1939.<sup>77</sup> This arrangement lasted until 1942 when the original gallery was given over to framing and print selling and new premises for exhibitions were opened at no. 8 South Anne Street. Before Waddington established his first gallery in 1925, exhibiting practices in the city were largely dominated by the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, an institution that remained largely conservative in its exhibiting standards and selections.<sup>78</sup> The emergence of the commercial gallery however provided new more immediate public opportunities for artists to show and sell their work. As such, Fiona Barber identifies, ‘from about the late 1940s onwards what it meant to be an Irish artist underwent considerable changes. Rather than being supported by old money and an

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<sup>76</sup> Riann Coulter, ‘The transmutation of art into bread and butter’: Victor Waddington and Irish art, 1943-57’, in *Jack B. Yeats: Old and New Departures*, ed. by Yvonne Scott (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), pp. 120-137 (p. 121).

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Marshall, ‘Commercial Galleries’, in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, pp. 77-80 (p. 77).

<sup>78</sup> The exhibiting practices of the RHA are considered in greater detail in chapter six.



established network of cultural contacts, Irish artists in the 1950s began to operate much more as entrepreneurs, facilitated by dealers such as Victor Waddington'.<sup>79</sup>

It was during this time when Waddington established himself as 'Ireland's primary dealer and a public champion of modern art', with his initial support of major figures such as Yeats leading to the promotion of a range of younger Irish artists emerging in these years.<sup>80</sup> No. 8 South Anne Street subsequently established itself as a dynamic focal point of transnational activity in the city. Waddington played a fundamental role in the encouragement of cross-border artistic networks and exchange through his contracting of a new generation of Northern painters variously influenced by major twentieth-century developments in British and continental visual modernism and who would come to 'dominate' the Irish art scene into the 1950s.<sup>81</sup> As art critic and poet John Hewitt has recalled, he acted as 'the enthusiastic impresario' for these young artists and as such came to represent 'the very practical benefactor to a lively generation' that included painters Colin Middleton, Daniel O'Neill, and Gerard Dillon.<sup>82</sup> The facilitation and stimulation of cross-border activity was combined with both the promotion of Irish artists abroad and the securing of important exhibitions of foreign art for post-war Dublin. Waddington, Coulter writes, brought a 'crucial international dimension to the Irish art world' through the arranging of major travelling exhibitions of contemporary British and French art in Dublin in 1947, while at the same time organising showcases of contemporary Irish painters in London and the United States.<sup>83</sup>

The 'new professionalism' that Waddington introduced into dealer-artist relations in Dublin during these years was essential to the commercial success of his galleries, contracting his stable of artists to a monthly stipend and providing them with materials in return for first

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<sup>79</sup> Fiona Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p. 109.

<sup>80</sup> Riann Coulter, 'Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish Art, 1943-1960' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London), p. 141.

<sup>81</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 130.

<sup>82</sup> John Hewitt, *A North Light: Twenty-five years in a municipal art gallery*, ed. by Frank Ferguson and Kathryn White (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), p. 166.

<sup>83</sup> Coulter, 'Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish Art, 1943-1960', p. 134.

refusal on sales, while investing considerably in their public promotion through a variety of media and regularly showcasing their work through solo and group shows.<sup>84</sup> The career launching impact of this support has been memorably recalled by the English painter Nevill Johnson who first developed a relationship with the dealer while living in Belfast during the Second World War. Like most of the artists who came to be represented by the Waddington Galleries, Johnson had previously spent a number of years struggling to maintain and develop his art while working a day job, which in his case was as a sales representative for the manufacturing company Ferodo Ltd.<sup>85</sup> In his autobiographical account of these Belfast years from the mid 1930s to the late 40s, Johnson recalls the arduous task involved in remaining committed to his art while trying to maintain a living: ‘So, rising before dawn, painting early and late while earning my keep by day I worked without stint, fuelled by the distant hope of one day escaping from business’.<sup>86</sup> This challenging lifestyle was a reality for a number of Johnson’s fellow painters in Belfast during the period, including Daniel O’Neill, who worked gruelling nightshifts as an electrician, and Gerard Dillon, who was casually employed as a painter decorator. For Johnson, as with O’Neill and Dillon, his contact with Waddington ultimately provided the desired escape from business that would see him eventually settle in Dublin in 1948. ‘He was a great sort of daddy at the time’, Johnson later described the dealer, ‘He had hunches and he believed in what he was doing and he sent us a cheque every month and asked no questions’.<sup>87</sup> Johnson was first introduced to the dealer in the mid 1940s and dramatically recalls in his autobiography his first journey by train from Belfast to the Dublin gallery. ‘Armed with a parcel of works I boarded the Enterprise’, he writes, ‘and struggled on foot from Amiens Street Station through a rainstorm to the gallery in South Anne Street’:

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<sup>84</sup> Coulter, “The transmutation of art into bread and butter”: Victor Waddington and Irish Art, 1943-57’, p. 120.

<sup>85</sup> Dickon Hall, ‘Nevill Johnson’, in *Nevill Johnson: Paint the Smell of Grass*, ed. by Dickon Hall and Eoin O’Brien (Bangor: Ava Gallery, 2008) pp. 11-117 (p. 11).

<sup>86</sup> Johnson, *The Other Side of Six* (Dublin: Academy Press, 1983), p. 43.

<sup>87</sup> Nevill Johnson interviewed on *The Marian Finucane Show*, RTE Radio One, 26 August 1983.

I entered this prestigious soft-carpeted temple of the arts like a bullock from the misty bog, leaving pools of water behind me on the carpet. The walls glowed with works of the highest quality as I knelt red-faced to untie my bundle. Victor Waddington, dressed overall in grey, with white shirt and scarlet tie, stood magisterial, one eye askance. I was back at square one, nosehigh like a dog among the trouser legs. 'I like your work', said the magistrate, 'I will take the lot. What prices are you asking?' On my knees I concluded my first deal. There was light in the tunnel and a chance of freedom.<sup>88</sup>

Waddington was renowned for his ability to negotiate and exploit the commercial market in the service of his artists and together with a cluster of smaller galleries such as the Society of Dublin Painters at no. 7 St. Stephen's Green and the Grafton Gallery at no. 2 Harry Street, he worked to establish, in Donleavy's words, 'Dublin's most fashionable street the unlikely source of fine art'.<sup>89</sup> As Brian Fallon observes, the dealer represented 'a salesman and showman of genius':

The buying public for his artists was never large, but it was adequate for a city of Dublin's size and Waddington knew how to turn exhibition openings into social events which attracted both a moneyed clientele and a fair share of press coverage.<sup>90</sup>

Waddington's success was importantly based upon an 'innovative and multi-stranded' approach to the selling of pictures, targeting both wealthy art buyers and an emerging middle-class market of more moderate means with a varied and competitive pricing policy, dealing variously in original work, reproductions, and framing.<sup>91</sup> Selling both popular conventional and new more experimental works, high quality presentation was central to Waddington's commercial reputation and image as a dealer, with his gallery on South Anne Street providing a particularly attractive venue for the showcasing of new work. For Sheehy writing in 1947, no. 28 South Anne Street represented the 'ideal gallery' for exhibitions, with the fundamentals of 'space, lighting and setting' achieving an 'excellent' standard.<sup>92</sup> Sheehy's

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<sup>88</sup> Johnson, *The Other Side of Six*, p. 52.

<sup>89</sup> Donleavy, *J.P. Donleavy's Ireland*, p. 97.

<sup>90</sup> Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, p. 241.

<sup>91</sup> Marshall, 'Commercial Galleries', p. 77.

<sup>92</sup> Edward Sheehy, 'School or Academy: Art Notes', *The Dublin Magazine*, vol. 22, no. 3 (July-September 1947), 56-59 (p. 57.).

praise extended beyond the gallery itself to include the promotional publications regularly produced by Waddington in association with his exhibitions, remarking that the ‘format of his catalogues is a pleasure in itself’.<sup>93</sup>

Along with the high standards set by his gallery space, Waddington introduced a new level of production and professionalism in the publication of art catalogues and books in Dublin. *Twelve Irish Artists*, was the first title to appear under the Waddington imprint in 1940 and reviews of the book praised its material quality and design as much as its content.<sup>94</sup> Quarter bound in light blue linen and grey paper with its front board designed in a restrained geometric Art Deco style and typeface, *Twelve Irish Artist*’s large folio size provides an impressive space for its twelve featured illustrations all reproduced in full-colour on glossy art paper.<sup>95</sup> As John Weldon writing under his pseudonym, Brinsley MacNamara, wrote in *The Bell*, ‘This is an important and much-needed publication which, in the manner of its production, can stand with the very best of similar work in other countries’.<sup>96</sup> Praising the quality of its reproduced images of paintings by Seán Keating, Paul Henry, and Harry Kernoff among others, which are ‘so handsomely brought together’ that they ‘should make for a larger acquaintance with the work of all our painters’, he characterised the publication as the perfect marriage of design and content:

It has a two-fold merit; it sets out to do a service for the cause of art and becomes, while doing so, a work of art itself. The claims of the publisher are fully justified: it *is* simple, artistic and dignified. It makes an immediate impression and we are won by it afresh to all the charm and quality of Irish painting.<sup>97</sup>

Waddington shared a natural affinity with Ryan and *Envoy*, who as we have seen was similarly determined to associate his magazine with a high standard ‘not only in actual

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *Twelve Irish Artists, with an introduction by Thomas Bodkin* (Dublin: Waddington Galleries, 1940).

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Dillon Redshaw, ‘*Twelve Irish Artists Described*’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Summer, 2002), 142-145 (p. 144).

<sup>96</sup> Brinsley MacNamara, ‘Books: *Twelve Irish Artists*’, *The Bell*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1940), p. 88.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

content, but in the design and production as well'.<sup>98</sup> *Envoy*'s distinguishing commitment as a mid-century Irish literary magazine to the visual arts itself testified to the impact of Dublin's expanding art market during this time and its stimulation of what Róisín Kennedy observes as a new 'period of optimism', with the increased support and opportunities afforded to artists instilling 'the confidence needed to produce genuinely interesting work'.<sup>99</sup> By employing the subtitle 'A Review of Literature and Art', Ryan echoed Connolly's *Horizon* in setting out the prominent status of visual art in his magazine that was backed through a concerted and sustained programmatic arrangement showcasing the work of both contemporary Irish and international artists. In this, *Envoy* drew from Waddington's commitment to the high standards of presentation that were helping to drive what Kennedy has termed as the 'commercialization of Irish art' in these years.<sup>100</sup> All but one of its twenty issues were enhanced by visual art reproductions, accenting the magazine's general white print stock with four pages of glossy art paper sewn prominently into the centre of each issue and featuring the halftone photographic reproductions of art works under discussion. Ryan furthermore encouraged *Envoy*'s featured artists to contribute a series of original tailpieces to each issue, writing to Louis le Brocquy of the importance of their decorative quality in 'considerably enhancing the appearance of the magazine'.<sup>101</sup>

That such a philosophy chimed with Waddington's enterprise was reflected in the close and mutually beneficial promotional relationship between the magazine and the dealer from its first issues. Copies of *Envoy* were sold at no. 8 South Anne Street alongside Waddington's own publications and the gallery was even used by Ryan for meetings with prospective contributors to the magazine's art section.<sup>102</sup> The Waddington Galleries

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<sup>98</sup> John Ryan to Padraic Colum, 7 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

<sup>99</sup> Róisín Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 1 (2 vols.) (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College Dublin, 2006), p. 126.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>101</sup> John Ryan to Louis le Brocquy, 29 March 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>102</sup> 'Envoy Dispatch List', *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/7. Noelle Biehlmann Johnson, who contributed an article on the Irish painter Thurloe Conolly to *Envoy*'s February 1950 issue, alludes to the use of Waddington's gallery for *Envoy* meetings in correspondence with Ryan, writing in December 1949 to the editor that 'Following our

meanwhile were along with the Monument Creameries the most prominently advertised Grafton Street area business in *Envoy*, typically commanding a full-page opposite each issue's table of contents.

Ryan's working relationship with Waddington extended further to shape both the arrangement and content of *Envoy*'s art section. Writing to Thomas McGreevy in the preparation stages of the first issue, Ryan proposed that the critic write an article on Jack Yeats with the artist's forthcoming exhibition at the no. 28 South Anne Street directly in mind. 'It may be that our first issue will synchronise with the Waddington exhibition', he proposed, 'and Mr. Yeats might permit us to use some of the paintings'.<sup>103</sup> Though this particular plan did not ultimately come to fruition, it did set the precedent for the general arrangement of *Envoy*'s central 'Contemporary Irish Painters' series, which was largely shaped around Waddington's own calendar of exhibitions and events.

The eight artists featured in the series, Daniel O'Neill, George Campbell, Thurloe Conolly, Nano Reid, Colin Middleton, Louis le Brocqy, Patrick Swift, and sculptor Hilary Heron, were either directly part of Waddington's stable or had exhibited at no. 28 South Anne Street by the 1950s. Waddington's *Envoy* advertisements generally announced the current and forthcoming exhibitions scheduled in the gallery and these subsequently became a focal point for the articles themselves. Cecil Salkeld's consideration of Daniel O'Neill's recent development in *Envoy*'s first issue, for example, is framed by the success of his 'latest exhibition at the Victor Waddington Galleries' that had taken place earlier that September.<sup>104</sup> The February 1950 issue, meanwhile, which advertised an exhibition of new paintings by the

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short interview at the Victor Waddington galleries, I should like to have confirmation of the latest date for submitting my MS on Thurloe Conolly'. Noelle B. Johnson to John Ryan, 5 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/2.

<sup>103</sup> John Ryan to Thomas McGreevy, 12 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>104</sup> Cecil Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: A Critical Appreciation', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), 31-43 (p. 40).

Drogheda native Nano Reid to be held the following month, was duly followed in March's *Envoy* by an extensive article on the artist by fellow painter Patrick Swift.<sup>105</sup>

Through this close relationship with Waddington and the city's developing exhibiting culture, *Envoy* established itself as a key cultural and commercial node in a network of cross-border and wider international activity that was, in Brian O'Doherty's terms, beginning to 'renew, in assimilable amounts, the flow of ideas' between the post-war art scenes of Dublin, Belfast, and the wider world.<sup>106</sup> At a time when, as Robert Fisk remarks, the partition of Ireland had taken on 'a new and enduring permanence' in the political sphere following the transformative events of the Second World War, artists, critics, dealers, and art institutions variously based in Belfast and Dublin were engaging in a converse movement to develop fruitful and sustained cross-border relations that in turn shaped the course of Irish art in these years.<sup>107</sup> Waddington's promotion of Northern painters such as Daniel O'Neill, Gerard Dillon, and Colin Middleton was more broadly backed by new independent exhibiting institutions such as the 'Irish Exhibition of Living Art' which, Coulter observes, aimed to be representative of 'an all-Ireland organisation' from its outset in 1943.<sup>108</sup> For *The Irish Times* assessing these developments in 1947, they were providing welcome evidence 'that Art knows of no partition'.<sup>109</sup>

*Envoy* consequently represented one of the earliest publishing sites to identify and contextualise the significance of Dublin's commercial gallery trade in fostering these connections and that of the role of Waddington in particular in revitalising conditions of Irish

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<sup>105</sup> Patrick Swift, 'Contemporary Irish Painters (4): Nano Reid', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950), 26-35 (p. 34).

<sup>106</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *The Irish Imagination, 1959-1971* (Dublin: Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality 1939-45* (London: André Deutsch, 1983), p. 188.

<sup>108</sup> Coulter, 'Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish art, 1943- 1960', p. 128. O'Neill and Dillon were strongly represented in all but one IELA exhibition each between 1943 and 1951 (O'Neill did not exhibit in the inaugural show, while Dillon did not exhibit in 1945). Middleton featured in the 1945, 1949, and 1950 exhibitions. Coulter charts in her thesis how the IELA's 'all-Ireland' ethos effected greater cross-border collaboration not only between artists but also institutionally with the holding of the first IELA exhibition in the Belfast Art Gallery at Stranmillis in 1955. The event was organised in association with the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts and, as Coulter writes, 'from 1955 to the early 1970s the IELA travelled annually to Belfast where it provided the opportunity for both artists and the public to see work by Northern artists hanging side by side with their Southern counterparts and international art'. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>109</sup> 'An Irishman's Diary', *Irish Times*, 14 August 1947, p. 6.

art practice. Salkeld's opening article on Daniel O'Neill set the tone in this respect, referring intimately to Waddington as 'a friend of the Arts, whom I need not name here', before proceeding to emphasise his transformative influence on the young painter's career in the immediate post-war years.<sup>110</sup> 'I think the strain of living a "double existence" – of working for a living by day, and painting by night was taxing him to the utmost. He was too nervous, too intense', Salkeld writes of O'Neill's early years working as an electrician in Belfast, 'One thing was clear. Here was a painter of great promise who seemed doomed to wear himself out in a struggle for the freedom to paint. And indeed the prospects did not seem too bright'.<sup>111</sup> It was however the financial backing provided by Waddington that Salkeld establishes as the catalyst for the eventual radical change in the painter's prospects, with the security of a regular retainer making it possible for him to 'devote his whole time to painting' and turn from a struggling amateur to a contracted professional artist:

This was the most important event in O'Neill's life – so far. I say 'so far,' because it is clear what the effects of such a change in his circumstances must have meant to O'Neill at the time. You must imagine to yourself a man who has been trying to do something for nearly ten years, against the most impossible odds. Suddenly, at the touch of a wand, he is not only permitted but encouraged to do this thing. The result must be a rush, an overwhelming flood of all those images and emotions that have for so long lain dormant and fertile.<sup>112</sup>

The trajectory of O'Neill's career under the direction of Waddington was indeed remarkable, having only begun oil painting in 1939 at the age of nineteen and largely self-taught as an artist, the dealer's promotion of the painter saw him hold a series of successful exhibitions in

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<sup>110</sup> Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: A Critical Appreciation', p. 36.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36. O'Neill was employed during the early 1940s as an electrician for the Belfast Corporation Transport Department. Painting in his spare time and even taking night shifts for a period so that he could paint in the daylight. During this period he would arrive home each morning and set up his easel and canvass in his living room at no. 4 Dimsdale Street, which his young painter friend James MacIntyre described as 'so tiny that I couldn't imagine how he managed to find any space in which to paint'. James MacIntyre, *Making My Mark: An Artist's Early Life* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2001), p. 95. O'Neill later recalled that he would remain working there each day until 'I felt too tired to continue'. Brian Fallon, 'A very individual radiance', *Fortnight*, no. 307 (June 1992), 19-20 (p. 19).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 36. James MacIntyre has given a further insight into Waddington's impact on O'Neill at this time, recalling how he listened 'all ears' in Belfast to Gerard Dillon recounting his friend's excitement at having established a connection with the dealer. 'His conversation was all about Dublin and its artists and galleries', MacIntyre recalls, 'Gerard said that he had encountered Dan on a Dublin street, in a very drunken and euphoric state because he had just sold some of his paintings and had also arranged an exhibition for 1946'. MacIntyre, *Making My Mark: An Artist's Early Life*, p. 101.



Dublin and internationally in the immediate post-war years. While Salkeld overstates his enthusiasm for O'Neill's 'astonishing list of achievements in three years', the painter's recent exhibition history was nonetheless an impressive reflection of the 'prodigious speed' of his development and public reception in this short period of time from 1946 to 1949, while at the same time testifying to the transnational connections of his dealer that had seen O'Neill's work already displayed in London, the Continent, and North America:

Since he has been able to give all his time to painting, he has exhibited in Dublin – his first one-man show – in Autumn, 1946; in New York, in the Spring of 1947; in a group Exhibition, with three other Northern painters at the Victor Waddington Galleries, in Autumn 1947; at Beverly Hills, California, in the Autumn of 1948; another group exhibition in London in the Spring of 1948; and finally his latest exhibition here in Dublin, at the Victor Waddington Galleries, in September of this year. He has also exhibited in group shows in London and Amsterdam'.<sup>113</sup>

The 'torrent of creation' that Salkeld attributes to Waddington's support was echoed in subsequent articles. Patrick Collins, for example, emphasizes the importance of the 'rare encouragement' provided by the dealer to O'Neill's Belfast compatriot, George Campbell, while John Ryan in his closing article of the series is keen to frame Waddington's significance more generally in the context of modern Irish art, stating that 'the minor revolution which took place in Irish painting (*circa* 1945) and the consequent improvement in public taste (for which we must thank Mr. Victor Waddington), did a great deal to further the cause of creativity in art'.<sup>114</sup>

Salkeld's charting of O'Neill's development and public reception in terms of his various one-man and small group shows indicates the extent to which this cultivation of 'public taste' had become based around the context of the independent commercial gallery. The increasing regularity and popularity in Dublin of one-man shows in the small independent gallery setting, Róisín Kennedy observes, 'had a profound effect on the dominant

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<sup>113</sup> Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: A Critical Appreciation', p. 41.

<sup>114</sup> Patrick Collins, 'George Campbell: Profile Of An Artist', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), 44-50 (p. 47). John Ryan, 'Patrick Swift: An Introductory Note', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 56-57 (p. 57).

role of exhibition societies and particularly the RHA in the war years', shifting the balance of power in the art market from the public institution to the private enterprise:

Artists tended to keep their best works for their gallery show rather than the annual exhibition. The emphasis on the gallery context was undoubtedly connected to the growing commercialism of Irish art, and to the fact that there were increased opportunities to exhibit in this forum. The one-man show was also especially important to the criticism of modernist Irish art because it allowed the viewer an opportunity of seeing a body of work by one artist, rather than a single painting or sculpture by very different work.<sup>115</sup>

*Envoy's* close relationship with the Waddington Galleries encouraged the textual recreation of this 'gallery context' in its visual art articles, not only in the regularity of their direct references to exhibitions themselves but in the way in which the detailed individual artist focus of each article and accompanying reproductions worked to similarly provide the reader with the comprehensive experience of the one-man show. It is notable in this regard that *Envoy's* visual art features were typically the longest contributions to each issue, with Salkeld's opening piece on O'Neill again representative in running to seventeen pages including illustrations. Indeed, if the commercial gallery was facilitating a new level of focus on the individual artist, then *Envoy's* art articles complimented this development in their extensive and detailed scope, with Salkeld's article, for example, representing at that time the longest critical consideration of O'Neill's work in Irish periodical culture.<sup>116</sup> This allowed for an unprecedented attention to and explication of the technical qualities of the artist's work, contributing to their public reception in providing the unspecialised reader with a more informed understanding of the painting process.

Key to O'Neill's rising reputation as an artist during the 1940s was the distinguishing expressive textural and tonal qualities of his figure and landscape scenes, which Sheehy had

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<sup>115</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 1, p. 78.

<sup>116</sup> John Hewitt had earlier considered O'Neill along with a range of other artists in an essay included in the 1944 collection *Now In Ulster*. The comprehensive nature of his essay however afforded only a brief focus on individual artists. John Hewitt, 'Under Forty: Some Ulster Artists', in *Now In Ulster*, ed. by Arthur Campbell and George Campbell (Belfast: Campbell Bros. and W & G Baird), pp. 13-35 (pp. 34-35). Edward Sheehy periodically discussed O'Neill in his regular art column in *The Dublin Magazine*. Again, however the brevity of the column limited the extent of his focus on the artist, such as in Sheehy, 'Art Notes', *The Dublin Magazine*, vol. 20, no. 4 (October-December 1945), 41-42 (p. 42).

praised in an early review as his ‘sensuous handling of paint, his rich colour and dramatic sense in composition’.<sup>117</sup> What Anne Marie Keaveney describes as the remarkable ‘element of paradox in O’Neill’s artistic production’ was the seeming rapidity with which he reached a consistent level of ‘unified compositions with good tonal harmonies, painterly brushwork and use of impasto’, having received only minimal formal training.<sup>118</sup> O’Neill experimented with and became skilled in a variety of techniques to develop these qualities in his painting. Smooth surface areas created through a delicate layering of thin transparent glazes of oil paint with fine hairbrushes were juxtaposed with heavier scumbled and impastoed stretches of canvass, creating a dynamic ‘textured effect’ that combined with a rich palette where dominant nocturnal tones were offset by bright infusions of colour.<sup>119</sup> Wartime shortages necessitated a greater experimentalism with materials and implements in order to create such effects. Susan Stairs notes how it became customary for artists such as O’Neill during the war to paint ‘on scraps of cardboard, off-cuts of plywood and even on the hardback covers of large books. Tablecloths, too, became a substitute for canvas’, while O’Neill’s young painter friend in Belfast, James MacIntyre, has recalled his fascination at the artist’s material ingenuity in adversity:

He had invested in a tube of toothpaste, cut the bottom off, removed the paste and refilled the tube with oil paint. Next, he placed a thin nail inside the nozzle and with the aid of a pair of pliers, carefully tightened it to a reduced diameter. When the nail was removed and the tube gently squeezed, it produced a line of paint of consistent size which was something not easy to obtain using a brush. His ingenuity astounded me. [...] I could think only of his paintings and his total commitment to his art and his will to survive whatever the odds.<sup>120</sup>

The expressive possibilities of colour and texture were revealed to O’Neill primarily through his study of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century European modernist

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<sup>117</sup> Sheehy, ‘Art Notes’, p. 42.

<sup>118</sup> Anne Marie Keaveney, ‘Daniel O’Neill (1920-1947)’, in *The Hunter Gatherer: The Collection of George and Maura McClelland at the Irish Museum of Modern Art*, ed. by Catherine Marshall (London: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2004), pp. 37-46 (p. 38).

<sup>119</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 132.

<sup>120</sup> Susan Stairs, *The Irish Figurists and Figurative Painting in Irish Art* (Dublin: The George Gallery Montague Ltd, 1990), p. 134; MacIntyre, *Making My Mark: An Artist’s Early*, pp. 95-96.

art and the legacy of expressionism as it had broadly manifested in painters such as Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Georges Rouault, and Maurice de Vlaminck.<sup>121</sup> The dual qualities of a heavily worked surface area and rich palette would become synonymous with O'Neill's work as it matured over the following years, depicting often recognisably Irish figure and landscape scenes in a strongly atmospheric and emotive manner.

The extensive nature of Salkeld's *Envoy* article on O'Neill allows for a detailed explication of the artist's developing technique that would have been otherwise unavailable to the magazine's readers, and which was further enhanced by the inclusion of a series of reproductions of the artist's recently exhibited work. Though the half-tone reproductions do not give a sense of O'Neill's vibrant use of colour, they do provide a real sense of the artist's textural dynamism, which is subsequently considered in detail in Salkeld's prose. 'As to texture', he writes, 'it is something that few art lovers, but nearly all painters, can really appreciate', describing it succinctly as 'the art of making oil-paint sit up and "behave" – the way you want it to':

It is an extra-ordinarily elusive and refractory medium; it needs loving care, caressing, wheedling, and downright brutality occasionally to make it behave. Like a superb instrument, it is in itself inert; but in the hands of its master, it will not only behave, but respond to his personality, and do things for him it will do for nobody else.<sup>122</sup>

As an example of O'Neill's 'taming of the medium' in this way, Salkeld looks to the paintings reproduced in the article and O'Neill's provocative depiction of a woman breastfeeding, *The First-Born* (oil on canvass, undated) [Fig. 5]. Encouraging the reader to examine the reproduced illustration as they would in exhibition, Salkeld elucidates the

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<sup>121</sup> O'Neill first became influenced by European modernist art through the study of reproductions from books in the Belfast City Reference Library during the war, this inspired him to visit Paris in 1949 where he stayed for a period of six months. Keaveney, 'Daniel O'Neill (1920-1947)', p. 39. As Shulamith Behr observes, expressionism 'did not constitute a cohesive movement or style; individual artists and groups were widely dispersed and differed in their background and training'. However it was by the mid-twentieth century broadly associated with certain key characteristics that linked together a large and diverse body of European modernist artists, namely, the departure from naturalistic representation and harmonious colour toward the subjective expression of internal and emotionally charged experience, realised in a radically high-keyed vibrant palette and a loose spontaneous brushwork style. Shulamith Behr, *Expressionism* (London: Tate Gallery, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>122</sup> Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: A Critical Appreciation', p. 39.

painting's 'skilfully balanced composition' by identifying its combined textural elements in the employment of 'two contrasted textures of paint: the soft, blurred impasto of the background and flesh and the heavy, scrambled treatment of the draperies'.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, O'Neill's Parisian street scene, *Rue de Paris* (oil on canvass, undated) is examined in terms of its 'skilful and subtle use of textures', with the monochrome reproduction, though lacking the vibrant colouring of the original, nonetheless '[showing] the deft use of the palette-knife, the simple, vital lines of the structure of the picture' [Fig. 6].<sup>124</sup>

*Envoy* extended the 'gallery context' of its visual art coverage beyond this individual artist focus to combine with Waddington's broader activities as 'a mediator between Irish and international art' in his securing of major travelling group exhibitions to Dublin.<sup>125</sup>

Waddington's efforts to cultivate a post-war art market for foreign painting resulted for example in two significant group shows of contemporary British and French art held in the spring and early summer of 1947. 'The School of London' and 'Modern French Paintings' together brought a range of twentieth-century painting to Irish audiences as diverse as Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, Jankel Adler, Robert MacBryde, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso.<sup>126</sup> For Coulter, in order 'to fully appreciate the importance of Waddington's enterprise we must consider the paucity of international art available in Dublin during this period', with the 'lack of a national collection or gallery of modern art meant that access to both Irish and international modern art was severely restricted'.<sup>127</sup> The 'School of London' exhibition catalogue noted that 'the Irish public has had little opportunity on account of the late war of making itself acquainted with recent London painting', with 'their information has been of necessity derived from reproductions', and the media response to the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. pp. 41-42.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>125</sup> Coulter, 'Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish Art, 1943-1960', p. 164.

<sup>126</sup> 'School of London: Drawings, paintings, sculpture' ran from 27 March to 19 April 1947, while 'Modern French Paintings' was organised in May 1947.

<sup>127</sup> Coulter, 'Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish Art, 1943-1960', p. 164.

two-week exhibitions similarly identified their novel significance in the context of the more generally localised parameters of the Irish exhibiting scene.<sup>128</sup> The *Irish Independent*, for example, stated that ‘there was plenty of food for thought in these exhibits’ and alluded to Waddington’s marketing acumen in stimulating such a considerable level of public interest in the event that was ‘daily attracting hundreds of visitors, a fitting reward in itself to the enterprise that insisted that Dublin should have such an art gallery’, and further noting that ‘the visitors are not from the city alone, many have come from distant parts of the country’.<sup>129</sup>

*Envoy* continued the enterprise of the Waddington galleries in cultivating the Dublin market for foreign art by supplementing its individual artist articles with extended group features on British and continental painting. ‘Modern German Painting’ and ‘Aspects of Modern British Painting’ carried on from Waddington’s earlier efforts in the belief that ‘Irish culture can be immeasurably enriched by a lively appreciation of the culture of others’.<sup>130</sup> James Hillman secured *Envoy*’s survey on ‘Modern German Painting’, written by the prominent post-war art critic Werner Haftmann, while visiting Germany in the spring of 1950. Hillman shared Ryan’s belief in the importance of reproductions in providing the reader with the immersive experience of the gallery and stressed in his letters to the editor from Germany ‘that any article would be valueless unless some illustrations were included’.<sup>131</sup> The acquisition of five photographic reproductions taken from recent German exhibitions along with Haftmann’s extensive article represented something of a coup for the magazine at this early stage, and Hillman enlisted his friend and translator Michael Heron based in the University of Besançon to provide the English translation of Haftmann’s German prose. Published in *Envoy*’s July 1950 issue, the survey extended to a considerable nineteen pages

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<sup>128</sup> Morris Collis, *School of London, Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture* (Dublin: Waddington Galleries, 1947), Dublin, National College of Art and Design, National Visual Arts Library, IE/NIVAL EXB/11277.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Notable Exhibition in Dublin’, *Irish Independent*, 6 April 1947, p. 5.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), 9-10 (p. 10); Werner Haftmann, trans. by Michael Heron, ‘Modern German Painting’, *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), 50-64; Lionel Miskin, ‘Aspects of Modern British Painting’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 16 (March 1951) 33-43.

<sup>131</sup> James Hillman to John Ryan, 2 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/1.

including illustrations, spanning the course of twentieth-century German painting and its wider continental influences in a way that provided a comprehensive introductory guide to the significance and legacy of expressionism that still remained a dominant force in contemporary Irish art from major figures such as Yeats to newcomers such as O'Neill. 'At the beginning of every work dealing with art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century', Haftmann opened, 'we find the dictum that the whole of modern culture is based on the fundamental idea that man's mental and spiritual activities have an anti-naturalistic function':

In matters of art, this means that art disassociates itself from Nature and that man's imaginative power creates pictures which have an independent value as counter parts to Nature, as lyric symbols and formal constructions – in a word, as new productions of the human mind. This concept evolved during the first decade of this century and in the course of a painful assimilation of the contents of the naturalistic painting – landscapes, human figures and concrete objects – towards expression of colour and form in their own right.<sup>132</sup>

Haftmann consequently charts the development of the anti-naturalistic impulse underpinning 'Expressionist art' from the abstractions of Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee to the intense landscapes and figures of Emile Nolde and Oscar Kokoschka, defining the movement in broad terms as aspiring toward the expression of 'the inner vision' of the artist through the radically subjective application of colour and distortion of form in a way that 'no longer aimed at mere aping of Nature but at the most spontaneous expression of the passionate, the irrational, the subjective'.<sup>133</sup>

'Aspects of Modern British Painting' in *Envoy's* March 1951 issue, meanwhile, provided a similarly comprehensive survey of the major twentieth-century developments and contemporary state of British painting. The survey followed on from the ambition of Waddington's earlier 'School of London Exhibition' in aiming to give an insight into the most prominent and emerging painters in post-war Britain, featuring a number of the artists who had earlier been exhibited by the dealer at no. 28 South Anne Street including Henry

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<sup>132</sup> Haftman, 'Modern German Painting', p. 50.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

Moore, Jankel Adler, Graham Sutherland, and Robert MacBryde. In this, the survey's focus on the Irish born London-based painter Francis Bacon would have been most striking for Irish readers given the previously limited extent of his media coverage in Dublin during the 1940s. 'Aspects of Modern British Painting' featured a reproduction of *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (oil on canvass, 1950) which depicts two distorted animal figures engaged in violent struggle, with the canvas dominated by the central screaming mouth that would become such an iconic existential motif of Bacon's painting. Bacon would be exhibited in Ireland for the first time in Dublin the month following the *Envoy* issue, and the magazine's British art critic Lionel Miskin considers the distinguishing expressive intensity of his 'apparitions of corruption and terror' and the experience of viewing his work in exhibition, introducing Bacon as 'a young painter whose work stimulates the extremes of speculation and curiosity, unbounded admiration and furious contempt'.<sup>134</sup> *Fragment of a Crucifixion* suspends its two figures in a white angular cage set against a dark cross-shaped structure in a manner that typifies the invasive geometric arrangement of Bacon's post-war style. Miskin importantly balances his illustration of the artist's violent imagery with that of his distinctive compositional control and the 'organisational gifts and his sense of spacing' that ensure 'his paintings retain an atmosphere of deep concentration. They are contemplative and calm rather than exhibitionist or hysterical'.<sup>135</sup> From this, he draws parallels between Bacon's distorted figures and the prominent influence of cinema and photography on his painting, thereby providing the Irish reader with a valuable stylistic and contextual introduction to the painter's work:

His recent daemonic portraits are curiously reminiscent of stills from the early German cinema, they evoke the same physical reaction of terror and nausea. Indeed, I feel the influence of stills to be of the greatest significance in Bacon's development [...] his indefinable outrages prey upon the imagination and stubbornly resist forgetfulness.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Miskin, 'Aspects of Modern British Painting', p. 37.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.



*Envoy*'s close relationship with Victor Waddington situated the magazine at the heart of the Grafton Street area's flourishing gallery trade in the immediate post-war period and the developing commercialisation of Irish and international art in Dublin during these years. The magazine became in this way involved in what *The Irish Times* memorably described in their 1953 profile of the dealer as 'the transmutation of art into bread and butter'.<sup>137</sup> It was firstly in its editorial commitment to high production standards that made *Envoy* the perfect promotional associate for Waddington in the fashionable environs of 'Graftonia'.<sup>138</sup> Just as the dealer's typically 'suave, well-groomed, impeccably dressed' character saw him 'play the *impresario* of the art gallery to perfection', so too was Ryan's close attention to the image and presentation of his magazine attuned to the business culture and commercial opportunities surrounding *Envoy*'s offices.<sup>139</sup> While *Envoy*'s editorial voice regularly hit out against the accused profit-driven concerns of the mass market, Ryan in many ways sought to establish himself in a similar *impresario* role in the foregrounding of his magazine's commercially attractive format and design. This blending of commercial and cultural interests connected *Envoy* to an exhibiting scene extending beyond the confines of Dublin out toward Belfast, Britain, and the wider world. The magazine thereby became a key site of transnational promotion and exchange at a time when Irish art, to quote Fiona Barber, was beginning to become more 'visible within the wider cultural domain' of Britain, Europe, and North America; while the Dublin art world was in turn becoming increasingly permeated by international exhibitions and influences.<sup>140</sup> Looking back on these developments from the vantage point of 1955, critic James White observed that 'Twenty-five years ago, a handful of painters and sculptors lived a somewhat remote life from the people of the country and were understood by a minority':

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<sup>137</sup> 'Portrait Gallery: Victor Waddington', *Irish Times*, 28 March 1953, p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 95.

<sup>139</sup> 'Portrait Gallery: Victor Waddington', *Irish Times*, 28 March 1953, p. 5.

<sup>140</sup> Fiona Barber, 'Excavating Room 50: Irish Painting and the Cold War at the 1950 Venice Biennale', in *A Shared Legacy: Essays on Irish and Scottish Art and Visual Culture*, ed. by Fintan Cullen and John Morrison (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 207-219 (p. 209).

To-day hardly a week passes without a couple of exhibitions by individual artists. Three major group shows are held in Dublin and as many as ten group shows are held in cities and towns outside the capital. The work of our principle contemporary artists has been shown in North and South America, in Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Belgium and Holland and will be shown in other countries of the future.<sup>141</sup>

Through its connection with the Waddington Galleries and the editorial commitment to high standards of presentation and extensive coverage of painting and sculpture, *Envoy* established itself as a key cultural and commercial node in a developing transnational network that was in the process of expanding the dimensions of post-war Irish art and literature.

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<sup>141</sup> James White, 'The Visual Arts in Ireland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 44, no. 173 (Spring 1955), 101-108 (pp. 107-108).

## Chapter Three

### Marketing the ‘Mighty Character’: A magazine amidst the global commodification of Dublin’s literary pub culture

The recognition that ‘painting was becoming profitable’ was an effect of the rise in consumer spending in Ireland in the immediate post-war years.<sup>1</sup> That Ireland’s ‘economic prospects had not seemed too bleak’ in the late 1940s, Diarmaid Ferriter notes, was helped by the fact that during the war its national income had not declined, unlike in many other European countries, so that personal expenditure levels actually rose by twenty five per cent from 1945 to 1950.<sup>2</sup> This injection of commercial activity was further increased by what Irene Furlong has observed as the ‘tourist boom’ experienced by the country at this time.<sup>3</sup> Initially generated by an influx of British visitors to the country, cross-channel tourism was stimulated by the prospect of Dublin’s ‘plentiful food and entertainment’ in contrast to the more severe rations and shortages that yet remained in force in Britain.<sup>4</sup> Irish economist James Meenan noted in a 1951 report on national income and expenditure during the war years and after the novel positive economic impact of this ‘new form of earning through tourist trade that was hardly known before the war’, and the growing realization at government level of Ireland’s significant potential as a popular tourist destination led to new initiatives on developing both the country’s infrastructure and on the international marketing of its national image.<sup>5</sup> While British holidaymakers remained a primary marketing target, the State’s receipt of Marshall Aid funding from 1947 onwards led to the increased involvement of the United States in Irish international policy and affairs that in turn facilitated and encouraged a new transatlantic

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Painting Is Becoming Profitable’, *Irish Times*, 26 August 1949, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 466.

<sup>3</sup> Irene Furlong, *Irish Tourism 1880-1980* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> James Meenan, ‘National Income, Expenditure and Investment’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 40, no. 158 (June 1951), 117-185 (p. 177).

emphasis ‘on advertising and promotional activities to attract a lucrative U.S. market’.<sup>6</sup> According to an official report on Irish tourism in 1951, the annual influx of American tourists into the country had risen to 20,000 visitors by 1949, a figure that would only increase over the following decades with the rapid development of the global commercial aviation industry and the establishment of new transatlantic travel routes.<sup>7</sup> Furlong notes that in 1947 the nation’s total earnings from tourism were estimated at £28 million at a time when more traditional exports such as cattle, for example, were worth just over £15.5 million.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, by 1950, income generated through tourism had replaced emigrant’s remittances as the country’s ‘largest source of dollars’, with a growing number of Irish citizens consequently finding employment in this sector.<sup>9</sup>

The activities of the official bodies in charge of Ireland’s nascent tourist industry in the immediate post-war years, the Irish Tourist Association and the Irish Tourist Board, were as Linda King observes centred around both the development of the country’s minimal domestic accommodation and leisure infrastructure and the provision of new strategies and ‘prototypes for how Irish national identity could be visualized for both national and international consumption’.<sup>10</sup> In this latter capacity, the identification and promotion of Ireland’s distinctive qualities and attractions for the prospective American, British, and European visitor was paramount, what the 1951 official report described as the nation’s unique ‘Factors of Appeal’ that would be of ‘tremendous advertising and publicity value’ to

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<sup>6</sup> Linda King, ‘(De)constructing the Tourist Gaze: Dutch influences and Aer Lingus Tourism Posters, 1950-1960’, in *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture: Negotiating Modernity, 1922-1992*, ed. by Linda King and Elaine Sisson (Cork University Press, 2011), pp. 167-187 (p. 170).

<sup>7</sup> *Synthesis of Reports on Tourism 1950-1951* (Dublin: The Stationary Office, 1951), p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Irene Furlong, ‘Tourism and the Irish State in the 1950s’, in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, ed. by Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O’Shea, Carmel Quinlan (Dublin Mercier Press, 2004), pp. 164-186 (p. 176).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> King, ‘(De)constructing the Tourist Gaze: Dutch influences and Aer Lingus Tourism Posters, 1950-1960’, p. 167. The Irish Tourist Association was established in 1925 as an organisation to promote Ireland as a tourist destination, while the Irish Tourist Board was founded in 1939 to fulfil a more regulatory capacity in registering and grading the private and public tourist infrastructure in Ireland. These two bodies would later be merged into a single statutory organisation, Bord Fáilte Éireann, in 1955.

its emergent international marketing campaign.<sup>11</sup> The annual official tourist guides produced by the Irish Tourist Association and the Dublin Corporation aimed to provide such information for the arriving tourist, and the various editions published at this time reveal the extent to which the experience of the ‘literary pub’ and its expected colourful denizen, the Irish literary ‘character’, were becoming established as a major consumable attraction alongside what Joseph Brady has observed as the ‘standard menu that took in cathedrals, the museums, galleries, universities, learned societies and parks and gardens’.<sup>12</sup> To a greater extent than any other mid-century Irish literary periodical, *Envoy* identified itself as a magazine and a milieu with the social environment and atmosphere of the public house, a condition that situated it in immediate and complex relation to the globalising commodification of Dublin’s ‘literary pub’ culture in the immediate post-war years.

The ‘sheer proximity’ of John McDaid’s at no. 3 Harry Street to *Envoy*’s Grafton Street offices immediately established it as the magazine’s ‘editorial pub’.<sup>13</sup> A narrow, high-ceilinged building with tall front windows facing out onto Harry Street, it was in McDaid’s where much of the daily editorial business was discussed and concluded. As Ryan colourfully described in correspondence with J. P. Donleavy, the close-quartered and raucous atmosphere of the pub represented the ‘normal environment’ for *Envoy*’s associated writers and artists ‘locked in as intricate and complicated a machine of skulduggery and guile as all the red gouldle in Christendom will resolve’, praising the fact that ‘a body can go into the Daid’s [*sic*] for his bottle of stout without the nagging fear that people are going to be nice to one another’.<sup>14</sup> *Envoy*’s intimate association with McDaid’s was itself a broader reflection of the extent to which the public house had become established in mid-twentieth-century Irish culture as the primary location of artistic exchange: a condition that was at once liberating in

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<sup>11</sup> *Synthesis of Reports on Tourism 1950-1951*, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Brady, *Dublin, 1930-1950: The Emergence of the Modern City*, p. 390.

<sup>13</sup> John Ryan, ‘No home to go to as time called for McDaid’s’, *Irish Times*, 22 May 1985, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> John Ryan to James Patrick Donleavy, 18 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

the unrestrained bohemian ambience of its nightly milieu and more soberingly reflective of the general lack of alternative cultural and commercial forums available to writers outside its doors. While Irish painters and sculptors benefited considerably from the rise of the commercial gallery in Dublin during the 1940s, Irish writers by contrast lacked the comparative support and promotional structures of the art dealer and the publicised exhibition event. These uncongenial circumstances were moreover compounded by the strictures of censorship and the limitations of a denuded local publishing industry, so that writers generally faced in this period a much harder task in achieving ‘the transmutation of art into bread and butter’.<sup>15</sup> These straightened circumstances in turn placed a greater emphasis on the public house as a public forum where literary authority and influence could yet be asserted, as Anthony Cronin has described in a late radio interview, while ‘the norm of literary life in other places was the café, it was only that we had even less outlets for our surplus energies than people had in other places’ that places such as McDaid’s became such a focal point.<sup>16</sup> For Cronin, the heady concentration of literary life in the confines of the public house saw it become a nightly theatre for the staging of personality:

Of course people used to live out their lives in public a lot in those days, they don’t do now you know, the pub was a much more theatrical place, it was a theatre in which certain people lived out their lives in public. And this led to a lot of dramatic conflict between them, I mean there had to be drama, and there was an audience there which expected them to dramatize themselves the moment they came in the door.<sup>17</sup>

McDaid’s represented for Cronin the exemplary ‘literary pub’ in this context, as ‘very much a place of theatre, a place where people lived out their lives in public before the same audience everyday and dramatized themselves in this extraordinary way’.<sup>18</sup> *Envoy* established itself as both a magazine and a milieu at a time when this audience was expanding beyond that of a

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Portrait Gallery: Victor Waddington’, *Irish Times*, 28 March 1953, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Archival recording of Anthony Cronin featured on *Bowman: Sunday 8.30* (John Bowman’s weekly archive programme), RTÉ Radio One, 15 January 2017.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

mere gathering of drinking regulars to gain a much wider international public attention and notoriety.

Thus far we have examined the largely generative and enlarging nature and effects of *Envoy*'s transnational engagement, from the recovery of exiled Irish writers such as Samuel Beckett to the magazine's role within a dynamic international exhibiting network connected to and extending from Victor Waddington's South Anne Street gallery. However, as we will consider in this chapter, *Envoy*'s position amidst the globalising commodification of Dublin's 'literary pub' culture in the post-war years placed the magazine in an ultimately more problematic and even artistically compromising relation to the pressures and opportunities of the marketplace. In his recent study of mid-century Irish literary culture through the works and relationships of the poet Louis MacNeice, Tom Walker has charted the rising prominence and prevalence of 'the staging of Irish characters, the celebration of "character" or "the character" in and of itself' in Dublin's literary scene during the 1940s.<sup>19</sup> For Walker, the exaggerated, confrontational, and inevitably alcohol-fuelled behaviour that came to be associated with the 'performance of character' in the public house was both a condition of and protest against the broader 'mid-century marginalisation' experienced by Irish writers in society.<sup>20</sup> The nightly staging of personality recalled by Cronin in McDaid's can be seen in this context as provoked by and in turn substituted for the aggrieved lack of public recognition and support received by writers for their actual work. However, even as such performances sought to reclaim a sense of literary authority over an immediate audience, they more problematically drew a new and powerful form of public attention that ultimately threatened to degrade further the 'complex artistic and intellectual achievements' of figures such as Patrick Kavanagh and Brendan Behan to the level of the mere memorable encounter or anecdote, as Walker writes, no more than a 'colourful seam of Irish life, an 'idiosyncratic

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<sup>19</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

happening, vividly expressed'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the sensational entertainment factor that became associated with the performance of 'character' amidst the lively confines of the 'literary pub' conferred an unprecedented public notoriety, even celebrity status, upon the Irish writer both at home and on the international stage in a way that had increasingly little to do with the worth of their published writing. The generation of this public interest in turn stimulated the growth of a commercial industry packaging versions of the Irish literary 'character' and Dublin's pub culture for domestic and international consumption. So, even as Kavanagh writing in *Envoy* could dramatize his daily struggle 'in the bohemian jungle which lies on the perimeter of Commerce', the wild literary personality he then represented and in turn amplified throughout the magazine's existence was itself simultaneously undergoing a wider process of commodification through a diverse and wide-ranging array of media channels.<sup>22</sup> This condition situated the mid-century Irish writer in a conflictual dynamic between protest and performance that registers across the breadth of *Envoy*'s promotional, editorial, and creative content: from its distributed advertising circulars and material design to its promotion of both major literary predecessors such as James Joyce and dominant contemporaries including Kavanagh. Over the course of this first section of the thesis, we have been broadly considering what Brooker and Thacker argue as the 'dialogic matrix' of the little magazine in the marketplace, 'at times expressed as an affinity, at times posed in frank opposition to the forms of technological and commercial modernity'.<sup>23</sup> This tension between resistance and capitalisation emerges most acutely in *Envoy* in response to the globalising market pressures and opportunities rapidly developing around Dublin's post-war 'literary pub' culture.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> Kavanagh, 'Diary: A Play', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 5 (April 1950), 78-86 (p. 78).

<sup>23</sup> Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 'General Introduction', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume 1, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, p. 3.



*'A place of theatre': Envoy and the rise of Dublin's 'literary pub' culture*

In his study of the cultural life of wartime London, Robert Hewison has identified the importance of a designated 'limited area' of social activity in creating the conditions whereby the 'brief conjunctions of time, people, and circumstance, producing a mixture of unconventional behaviour and artistic enthusiasm' known as 'Bohemia' can properly develop.<sup>24</sup> In this way, he argues, an otherwise disparate group of writers and artists can become 'momentarily stabilised [...] by a physical geography'. In London during the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period, 'Bohemia the place' was located in the Soho area of the city's West End. Dubbed 'Fitzrovia' by the writer Julian MacLaren-Ross in reference to the popular local public house, the Fitzroy Tavern, the closely situated array of clubs, studios, bars, and restaurants that characterized the area attracted a vibrant literary and artistic milieu.<sup>25</sup> Ryan's echoing of MacLaren-Ross in his adoption of the title 'Graftonia' to describe the vicinity surrounding *Envoy's* offices reflected the extent to which the magazine's milieu came to regard the Grafton Street area as a comparably vibrant cultural focal point.

Above all, it was the area's lively pub culture that cultivated this bohemian atmosphere. For Terence Brown, the emergence of the public house as a focal point for literary and artistic activity during the mid-twentieth century was a key aspect of the broader 'transition' in Irish cultural life from the venerated locations and practices of literary exchange that had earlier characterized the Literary Revival.<sup>26</sup> Lady Augusta Gregory's grand demesne at Coole Park in Gort, County Galway, had represented in many ways the 'spiritual home' of the Revival, with its large Georgian family house and vast surrounding woodland estate 'redolent of the Ascendancy Protestant world from which it mainly derived'.<sup>27</sup> Coole

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> Julian MacLaren-Ross, *Memoirs of the Forties*, (Cardinal: Sphere Books, 1991; first published 1965) p.154.

<sup>26</sup> Terence Brown, *The Irish Times: 150 Years of Influence* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Park and its environs came as a revelation to W.B. Yeats when first stayed there in the summer of 1897, so much so that, Jon Stallworthy remarks, ‘the noble house with its seven woods had a stronger hold on his imagination than any home of his own, with the exception of Thoor Ballylee’.<sup>28</sup> Yeats’ series of poems inspired by and dedicated to the house and the ‘excellent company’ of its regular guests, which included John Millington Synge, George Russell, and Douglas Hyde, cultivated an image of Coole Park as an elite intellectual gathering point where thoughts ‘knitted into a single thought’.<sup>29</sup> Lady Gregory, a prolific folklorist and dramatist, had furnished the house with a fine art collection and extensive library that would come to represent for Yeats an aristocratic haven sufficiently removed from the intellectually impoverished ‘new commonness’ of city life.<sup>30</sup> The refined, detached atmosphere of Coole Park found a respectable urban counterpart during this period in Dublin’s fashionable suburbs of Rathmines and Rathgar where ‘evenings’ were held in select homes ‘at which culture, politics and literary reputation were discussed over tea, sherry and biscuits’.<sup>31</sup> However, for Brown, the changing conditions of the mid-twentieth century gradually initiated a departure from such rarefied practices:

By the mid-1930s, with Yeats mostly abroad and AE (George Russell) dead (both of whose ‘evenings’ in the 1920s had been the focus of such intellectual exchange), the capital’s cultural life was finding its centre of gravity in the public house rather than the genteel drawing-room. [...] That the demotic attractions of the lounge and public bar were replacing the refinement of the salon bespoke how the country’s literary and artistic practitioners were themselves becoming more interested in the daily life of the nation’s citizenry than in the romantic idealism that had inspired the Irish Literary Revival at its inception.<sup>32</sup>

It was in the central city demotic surrounds of the public house where literary and artistic life increasingly centralised. As Brian Fallon observes, the ‘literary pub’ became ‘interwoven into the cultural, intellectual and social life of the period’, with the 1940s in

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<sup>28</sup> Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats’s Poetry in the Making* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 178.

<sup>29</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘Coole Park, 1929’, in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, pp. 488-489 (p. 488).

<sup>30</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘In the Seven Woods’, in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, p. 198.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *The Irish Times: 150 Years of Influence*, p. 137.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

particular representing a time when Irish writers and coteries became distinguished and defined by the distinctive atmospheres of the public houses that they habitually frequented.<sup>33</sup> For Cronin, the *Envoy* offices carried an exciting ‘air of gaiety, indeed of conspiracy’ that was crucially created and sustained by the magazine’s umbilical association with McDaid’s, ‘*Envoy* was an annexe to the pub, or the pub to it’.<sup>34</sup> ‘There were always painters, authors, theatre people and above all poets in residence’, Ryan has recalled of McDaid’s, ‘It was a place absolutely devoid of glamour but the customers made up for that’.<sup>35</sup> At around one o’clock each day, those gathered upstairs at no. 39 Grafton Street would make their way to McDaid’s for a customary lunchtime drink, remaining there until the beginning of the ‘holy hour’ when all public houses were legally required to close their doors from half past two to half past three. By evening, McDaid’s would typically have filled once again with any number of its literary regulars, including Ryan, Cronin, Hillman, and Donleavy; painters such as Patrick Swift, Sean O’Sullivan, and Harry Kernoff, and the more prominent literary figures of Patrick Kavanagh, Brian O’Nolan, and Brendan Behan amongst others.<sup>36</sup> Drinking would generally continue until closing at ten-thirty, after which time the group might depart with take-away bottles for the infamous ‘Catacombs’, a warren of basement rooms and passages at no. 13 Fitzwilliam Place, or further afield to a so-called ‘*bona fide* pub’, such as Matt Smith’s in the village of Stepside to the south east of the city, where alcohol could be legally procured after hours by travellers who had journeyed a distance over three miles.<sup>37</sup>

Dublin’s ‘literary pub’ culture was fundamental to practices of social and cultural exchange for *Envoy*’s milieu of writers and artists. ‘Any meeting with anybody took place in a pub’, Johnson recalls, ‘it was the place where you exchanged opinions, laughter and ideas and

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<sup>33</sup> Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, p. 149.

<sup>34</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 78.

<sup>35</sup> Ryan, ‘No home to go to as time called for McDaid’s’, *Irish Times*, 22 May 1985, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 295.

<sup>37</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 5.

so on'.<sup>38</sup> In this context, it can be said to represent what the American urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg has defined as one of the 'core settings of the informal public life' in the city.<sup>39</sup> In his 1989 study, *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg identified the three basic urban environments of daily life, in which home and work are fundamentally distinguished from 'the third place', a term designating the diverse urban settings that encourage the informal gathering of individuals, facilitating voluntary and desirable social exchange outside of familial or professional obligation.<sup>40</sup> 'Third places', Oldenburg writes, 'serve to *expand* possibilities, whereas formal associations tend to narrow and restrict them [...] laying emphasis on qualities not confined to status distinctions current in the society'.<sup>41</sup> For Oldenburg, the vitality and sustainability of these places are founded upon an openness to the 'rich and varied association' of individuals unrestricted by differences in social or professional standing and which ultimately create an eclectic regular clientele 'who give the place its character and who assure that on any given visit some of the gang will be there'.<sup>42</sup>

Cronin depicts such a 'rich and varied association' in his recollection of the typical atmosphere of McDaid's during the *Envoy* years, which in its vibrant heterogeneity created an alternative nightly milieu to the more rigid societal divisions and conventions that governed Irish daily life:

McDaid's was never merely a literary pub. Its strength was always in variety, of talent, class, caste and estate. The divisions between writer and non-writer, bohemian and artist, informer and revolutionary, male and female, were never rigorously enforced; and nearly everybody, gurglers included, was ready for elevation, to Parnassus, the scaffold or wherever.<sup>43</sup>

For a young Irish poet such as James Liddy, the 'Bohemia' he experienced in McDaid's was tantamount to that associated with the 'Beat' generation of poets in San Francisco in the

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<sup>38</sup> Nevill Johnson interviewed on *The Marian Finucane Show*, RTÉ Radio One, 26 August 1983.

<sup>39</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts and how they get you through the day* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22; p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 3.

1950s, ‘under that high ceiling of McDaid’s we were in a San Francisco of our own union; in a duet between city and author, man and wife, or man and woman, or man and man’.<sup>44</sup> As Oldenburg writes, the contingent, fluid environment of the ‘third place’ is ‘largely a world of its own making, fashioned by talk and quite independent of the institutional order of the larger society’.<sup>45</sup> What emerges therefore as the most influential characteristic among its regulars is ‘the flavor of one’s personality’.<sup>46</sup> In this way, the regulars of a ‘third place’ ultimately become recognized as a ‘cast of characters’ who not only become synonymous with their established locale but also act as a draw for new members.<sup>47</sup> If the ‘third place’, then, is the breeding ground of the ‘character’, this assumed unique and complex connotations and consequences for the Irish writers and artists immersed in Dublin’s pub culture during the mid-century.

Though undoubtedly providing a liberating social space for writers and artists, the focalization of Irish literary and artistic life in the informal environment of the public house was at the same time a more sobering reflection of the debilitating lack of official cultural platforms and commercial opportunities in 1940s and 50s Dublin. For a prominent literary figure such as Patrick Kavanagh, the financial insecurity he experienced during this period exacerbated his feelings of official and institutional marginalization. ‘Like many other writers during the Emergency years and after’, Gerry Smyth observes, ‘Kavanagh encountered the dearth of outlets for cultural discourse in Irish civil society, and his work suffered as a consequence’.<sup>48</sup> As a result, he was forced to ‘scrape a precarious existence on the hackwork available at home’ which saw him take an array of journalistic posts throughout the 40s and

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<sup>44</sup> James Liddy, ‘Patrick Kavanagh and the Beat Generation’, in *Patrick Kavanagh: Midlands Conference Papers*, ed. by Kathleen Rettig Collins, James Liddy, Eamonn Wall (Blair: Microsmart Printing, 1995), pp. 30-36 (p. 32).

<sup>45</sup> Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>48</sup> Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*, p. 103.

50s.<sup>49</sup> During *Envoy*'s existence, Kavanagh had no regular employment and depended upon the monthly fee provided by Ryan for his 'Diary' series in the magazine.<sup>50</sup> Living alone in basic accommodation at no. 62 Pembroke Road, Kavanagh's gravitation towards the public house and a milieu comprised mainly of men much younger than himself was itself a condition of his isolated and meagre bachelorhood, as Antoinette Quinn observes, 'most men of his own generation had wives and families to return to in the evenings and were not inclined to fritter either their time or their money in pubs on a daily basis'.<sup>51</sup> The sense with which the poet felt debarred from the economic security of a suburban family lifestyle filtered poignantly into his confessional writing and poetry during this time. The *Envoy* July 1950 'Diary' dramatized the poet's sense of 'friendlessness in society' by enacting a dialogue with two contrasting sides of himself, that between the committed writer and the dispirited idler 'constantly running away from it, into pubs or wherever I could find distractions to make me forget'.<sup>52</sup> 'Ah, Kavanagh, I'll never make a man out of you', his committed half urges, 'Stick to your typewriter. Don't mind that call at the door asking you out to the Pub to waste *your* time and *his* money'.<sup>53</sup> The manuscript drafts that have survived in the *Envoy* archive reveal that Kavanagh had initially written a lyric response to this rallying call that was later cut from the published version, whereby the poet invokes the restoring power of poetry in lieu of familial or material comfort:

O Verse as I take you up I find  
Beside me a wife and a family,  
A car in the garage, a piano playing  
The Third Programme going full blast  
All that I thought I had missed  
Now is not quite to my mind.

But with the magic wand of Verse  
I can choose the better things –

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 300.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), 75-82 (p. 77; p. 79).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

Keep the wife and lose the curse  
That domesticity brings

And even have reality  
Flesh and blood enclosing the dream,  
There's a friend at the door just now  
O Verse may I never deem  
You harsh to a broken vow.<sup>54</sup>

However, while here the 'magic wand of Verse' provides momentary solace in isolation, transforming the poet's lonely impecuniousness into the positive freedom to 'choose the better things' and avoid potentially entrapping familial and material responsibilities, Kavanagh's feelings of personal frustration and bitterness would ultimately dominate much of this thought and action during this period.

In the uproarious and drink-fuelled arena of the public house, it was the forceful and often confrontational performance of 'character' that increasingly prevailed over the personally restorative and transfiguring touch of verse. As Quinn describes, Kavanagh's typical entrance into McDaid's was itself self-consciously performative:

When he arrived at McDaid's unaccompanied, he would peer round the door for a couple of moments, sizing up the scene and deciding which party to join, then stride in and make for his chosen group, attracting their attention with some general observation made in booming tones or by launching into an anecdote. A loud declamatory mode of utterance, a platform tone, was common among Dublin writers of Kavanagh's generation.<sup>55</sup>

At once an assertion of authority over an immediate, limited audience and an expression of marginality from wider public recognition beyond the public house doors, the exaggerated verbal and physical behaviour for which Kavanagh the 'character' would become renowned was in a larger sense a reflection of what Tom Walker has described as a 'gesturing against prevailing cultural and societal values' in which 'writers were drawn into the roles of critic and victim of current circumstances through the bind of somehow being oppositional and

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<sup>54</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, untitled poem in manuscript draft 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 8 (July 1950), *Envoy Records*, Coll. 43/5/2. The poem was later published jointly in June 2001 by *The Times Literary Supplement* and the Galway-based journal *West47*. Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 147.

<sup>55</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 295.

integral figures'.<sup>56</sup> For Kavanagh, Behan, and Brian O'Nolan, the ensuing years of drinking have been recognized as a significant contributing factor to their successive premature deaths within a few years of each other during the 1960s.<sup>57</sup> Behan's descent from 'drunkard to alcoholic, and finally, to dipsomaniac' resulted in what would appear to Ryan as a daily state 'more dead than alive'.<sup>58</sup> According to Cronin, O'Nolan was a 'true alcoholic', possessed by 'a built-in psychological need' for drink that saw him regularly begin his day by frequenting the 'Early Houses' that had obtained a special license to serve alcohol from seven o'clock in the morning to cater for night workers.<sup>59</sup> Kavanagh, meanwhile, in the 'dark days' of the mid-fifties at the worst excesses of his whiskey consumption would appear to his young companions to be possessed by a 'deliberately suicidal' drinking tendency with a 'complete abandon and absence of remorse'.<sup>60</sup> The deteriorating alcoholism of a major literary figure such as Kavanagh, slumped in a barroom snug and far removed from the security and comfort of the 'big suburban house' that represented the material aspiration of his poetry during this time, was in a fundamental sense a condition of the poet's general marginalization in the literary marketplace throughout his Dublin career.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Marketing the 'Mighty Character'***

Considering the spiralling drink culture of Dublin's 'literary pub' scene, with its most infamous personalities ultimately reduced by the mid-1950s and 60s to 'illness, alcoholism, irrelevant squabbles, vendettas, and premature graves', it is striking that the persona of the 'Mighty Character' and the talk of writers and artists in the performative environment of the

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<sup>56</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 132.

<sup>57</sup> Behan died in 1964; O'Nolan in 1966; and Kavanagh in 1967.

<sup>58</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>59</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>61</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Auditors In', in *Patrick Kavanagh: Collected Poems*, ed. by Antoinette Quinn (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p. 181.



public house were at this time contrastingly undergoing a wider rapid process of commodification, transforming through a variety of media channels into a highly marketable brand and ready product for consumption both at home and internationally.<sup>62</sup> While the immediate post-war years signalled the escalation of this market development that would ultimately culminate in the ill-fated international celebrity status of figures such as Behan in the early 1960s, its roots stretched back to 1939 with the arrival of the New Zealand born artist Alan Reeve to Dublin. Reeve had developed a renowned reputation as a caricaturist of famous personalities while travelling across the Continent and his decision to move to neutral Dublin following the outbreak of war attracted considerable national publicity at this time. *The Irish Times* for example announced with some excitement the arrival of this ‘Famous Cartoonist’ to the city, announcing Reeve’s intentions of preparing a new collection of illustrations depicting well-known personalities in the city.<sup>63</sup> ‘Dublin has never had an exhibition of cartoons by so famous a figure, and it will be interesting to see how he views our Irish figures of public life’, the article stated, describing his signature style as aiming ‘not only at a good likeness, but to express the whole environment of his subjects’.<sup>64</sup> Reeve’s international cosmopolitan air and striking appearance saw him become a minor celebrity in Dublin and his popularity ensured that he found many willing subjects for his caricatures. ‘He knows, and is known by, everybody, and to know Alan Reeve is to like him a lot’, *The Irish Times* wrote again in a later article, and the newspaper played an important promotional role for the artist by showcasing his quickly amassing portfolio of Dublin illustrations in a weekly series entitled ‘Drawing the Crowd’.<sup>65</sup>

Reeve eventually organised an exhibition to showcase his new work for the beginning of June in 1940. Held in the high-profile surrounds of the Brown Thomas department store on

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<sup>62</sup> Gerald Dawe, “‘How’s the Poetry Going?’”, in *The Proper Word: Collected Criticism, Ireland, Poetry, Politics*, ed. by Nicholas Allen (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2007), pp. 32-39 (p. 34).

<sup>63</sup> Quidnunc, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 23 October 1939, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Quidnunc, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 27 June 1940, p. 4.

Grafton Street and featuring forty caricatures of personalities and public figures across Irish social and cultural life, the exhibition was a resounding success and received widespread publicity.<sup>66</sup> The large crowds eager to see how familiar Irish public figures had been characterized saw the event ‘packed to the doors’ on its opening night.<sup>67</sup> Reeve’s most ambitious and largest exhibited piece was immediately singled out as the highlight of the show. Grandly entitled *Dublin Culture*, the illustration depicts the annual Christmas party in the backroom of the Palace Bar on Fleet Street [Fig. 7]. As Fallon notes, the Palace was at this time in its ‘vintage period’ as a ‘literary pub’, with its close proximity to the offices of *The Irish Times* establishing it as a social gathering place for journalists and writers, and Reeve’s caricature captures the vibrant clamorous atmosphere of its backroom filled with Dublin’s literary and artistic elite.<sup>68</sup> Seated prominently at the central table in the illustration is the enormous figure of R.M. Smyllie, the editor of *The Irish Times* whose ‘larger-than-life persona’ and considerable literary influence saw him acquire as Brown observes ‘a reputation as a Dublin character, which made him a recognized landmark of city life in general, in a way that his predecessors had mostly not been’.<sup>69</sup> Smyllie’s attentions are turned towards an equally prominent standing Patrick Kavanagh with the poet captured in the full flow of declamation, and both men are in turn surrounded by a heady array of conversing figures including Brian O’Nolan, Austin Clarke, F.R. Higgins, Padraic Fallon, Robert Farren, Seumus O’Sullivan, A.J. Leventhal, Edward Sheehy, Harry Kernoff, and Sean O’Sullivan. The illustration proved hugely popular and was immediately recognized for its iconic quality. *The Irish Independent* regarded the ‘excellent’ pub scene as the highlight of the exhibition, while *The Irish Times* declared that ‘the picture is worthy of preservation as a record of our

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Exhibition of Caricatures by Alan Reeve’, 3 to 15 June 1940, (Dublin, 1940).

<sup>67</sup> Quidnunc, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 5 June 1940, p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Fallon, *An Age of Innocence*, p. 150.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, *The Irish Times: 150 Years of Influence*, p. 150.

times’, noting that ‘as a crowd they are representative of poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, journalism, civic administration and many phases of the arts and literature’.<sup>70</sup>

The significance of Reeve’s illustration is in the way in which it at once emphatically located and commercially packaged mid-century *Dublin Culture* within the context of the public house, creating an iconic image to be mass disseminated and consumed both at home and abroad. *The Irish Times* noted how Reeve’s caricature series ‘has attracted widespread notice, not only in all parts of Ireland, but across the Channel and in the US’, and the following years would be marked by the increasing association of Dublin culture with the ‘literary pub’ in a globalizing literary marketplace.<sup>71</sup> Cyril Connolly’s special Irish number of *Horizon* in 1942, for example, opened with an enthusiastic travelogue style account of his recent visit to the neutral State that similarly established the ‘literary pub’ to British audiences as a city highlight for the visitor alongside the ‘beauty of [Ireland’s] monuments and countryside’.<sup>72</sup> Recalling Reeve’s *Dublin Culture*, Connolly sketches an entertaining and glorified image of the Palace Bar, characterizing his visit there in typical terms and thus contributing to the conventional expectations now becoming associated with the ‘literary pub’ experience:

The Palace Bar is a small back room in a pleasant tavern which is frequented entirely by writers and journalists; it is as warm and friendly as an alligator tank, its inhabitants, from a long process of mutual mastication, have a leathery look, and are as witty, hospitable and kindly a group as can be found anywhere. The Palace Bar is perhaps the last place of its kind in Europe, a Café Littéraire, where one can walk in to have an intelligent discussion with a stranger, listen to Seumas O’Sullivan on the early days of Joyce, or discuss the national problem with the giant Hemmingway-esque editor of *The Irish Times*.<sup>73</sup>

The rapidity of the commodification of the Irish ‘literary pub’ experience was most emphatically reflected in its prominent assimilation into the developing Irish tourism drive of

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<sup>70</sup> ‘New Zealand Artist at Brown Thomas’s’, *Irish Independent*, 5 June 1940, p. 9; ‘Work of Alan Reeve: “Dublin Culture” On View’, *Irish Times*, 4 June 1940, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Quidnunc, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 27 June 1940, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Cyril Connolly, ‘Comment’, *Horizon*, vol. 10, no. 25 (January 1942), 3-11 (p. 7).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the immediate post-war years, becoming an essential means by which, to return to Linda King, 'Irish national identity could be visualized for both national and international consumption'.<sup>74</sup> Official and unofficial tourist guides of Dublin played a key role in this development, with the ITA guide published in 1948, for example, proclaiming literary Dublin as 'a city of vivid "characters"' whose 'magnificent contribution to world culture is indelibly marked by the genius of place and personality'.<sup>75</sup> The Dublin Corporation guide of the following year, meanwhile, located these 'vivid characters' in the new literary pub culture of the Grafton Street area. 'The home of Dublin humour is the Dublin pub', it opened, 'if you find yourself in Grafton Street on a drizzling wet night, your best plan is to escape from the squelching roar of traffic and nip into the bright-lit crowdedness of the Bailey, or Davy Byrne's of Duke Street'.<sup>76</sup> In her essay on the development of Irish tourism during the mid-century, King draws from the sociological theory of John Urry and his study into the construction of the 'tourist gaze', which explores how our experience as tourists and the particular sights and attractions we look for when abroad are 'socially organised and systematised' in various ways from within the industry.<sup>77</sup> Building on Urry's writing, King observes that 'once a gaze has been selected, materialized, reproduced and commodified, it feeds and confirms the fantasies and expectations of the potential tourist', so that the publicity material received prior to travelling 'provides a syntax of signs centring on the articulation of cultural or physical difference that the tourist seeks out on arrival'.<sup>78</sup> While King's essay focuses on the range of publicity material published for Aer Lingus as it rapidly expanded its aviation activity into the 1960s, we can see a similar process at work here in the construction of the 'tourist gaze' for Dublin's 'literary pub' culture. The dramatic descriptive style of the

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<sup>74</sup> King, '(De)constructing the Tourist Gaze: Dutch influences and Aer Lingus Tourism Posters, 1950-1960', p. 167.

<sup>75</sup> *Dublin: Official Guide* (Dublin: Irish Tourist Association, 1948), pp. 56-57.

<sup>76</sup> Kenneth Reddin, 'Humorous Dublin', in *Official Guide: 'This is Dublin'* (Dublin: Corporation of the City of Dublin, 1949), pp. 183-186 (p. 185).

<sup>77</sup> John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd edn. (London: Sage Publications, 2002; first published 1990), p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> King, '(De)constructing the Tourist Gaze: Dutch influences and Aer Lingus Tourism Posters, 1950-1960', p. 171.

Corporation guides are particularly illustrative of this process, attractively establishing and packaging the typical public house experience for the international visitor:

Order your drink and stand still, or sit still, looking blankly before you or at the array of gin, whiskey and liqueurs stacked in front of you. In a few minutes you will be overhearing a public denunciation, refutation, or get a vivid pastiche of some international figure, or of someone in Dublin whom it is not necessary to know to enjoy. Evince interest and you will be press-ganged into a company of doctors, deplorable in their compassion for the failings of their colleagues. In Dublin we love to score off each other, in fun, in malice, and worse.<sup>79</sup>

Central to the marketing of the ‘literary pub’ in these guides was the idealized framing of the talk and performance of its characters within the context of a romanticised tradition of Irish storytelling. So that the Corporation guide grandly associates the significance of the literary figures a visitor would most likely come across on a Grafton Street night, such as ‘Myles na gCopaleen’ and ‘Paddy Kavanagh’, as inheritors of ‘the oral tradition of the past, the trade of the shanachie [*sic*], the story-teller, the wandering poet’.<sup>80</sup> The explicit referencing in these accounts of the actual public houses where such characters may be found meanwhile is backed by strategically placed advertisements such as that of Neary’s Bar and Lounge at no. 1 Chatham Street, which describes itself in echoingly elevated terms as ‘A Famous Tavern, A Modern Lounge, A Comfortable Rendezvous and of course the best drink’.<sup>81</sup>

Official tourist guides represented only part of the rapidly expanding commercial industry based on the promotion of Dublin’s ‘literary pub’ life and the Irish literary ‘character’ across a wide range of media during the post-war period. Tom Walker has recently charted this development for example in relation to various projects commissioned by the BBC Features Department that aimed ‘to present aspects of southern Irish culture to BBC audiences’ which ‘not only characterized Ireland but also broadcast Irish characters’.<sup>82</sup> The radio series devised and recorded in the late 1940s by Northern poet W.R. Rodgers, *Irish*

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<sup>79</sup> Reddin, ‘Humorous Dublin’, in *Official Guide: ‘This is Dublin’*, pp. 183-5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>82</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, pp. 114-116.

*Literary Portraits*, for example, sought to capture the vitality of Dublin's 'small-talk [...] in all its startling contradictions, its instant regurgitations of living memory, its fascinating paradoxes that would not lie flat on the page of history'.<sup>83</sup> The ground breaking editing and splicing techniques used in the series enabled Rodgers to collate his individually recorded interviews with various contemporary writers on major Irish literary figures of the past into a flowing and entertaining narrative of reminiscence and opinion, evoking the 'spontaneous conversation' of the public house.<sup>84</sup> The first episode of the series, broadcast on June 1949, focused on W.B. Yeats as a 'character who still excites debate amongst Dubliners' and featured interviews with writers such as Seán O'Faoláin, Frank O'Connor, and R.M. Smyllie.<sup>85</sup> The series, which ran for ten episodes until 1965, proved hugely popular among listeners, registering alongside the developments in Irish cultural tourism that we have noted the rapidly expanding international market for such material.<sup>86</sup> Yet, it was precisely in their broad appeal wherein this new globalising coverage on the 'literary character' posed a significant emerging issue for mid-century Irish literary life – even as it was ostensibly celebrated. As Walker argues, it can be seen as reflective of a broader reorientation of media and commercial focus on the living Irish writer from the serious published work to the entertaining public experience. 'Whatever their value as oral history may be these features repackaged Irish literature as anecdote', he observes, transferring the depiction of Ireland 'as a land of vivid incident and talkers [...] to the pubs and parlours of Dublin':

The work of writers such as Yeats, Joyce, Synge or Moore serves as little more than a backdrop for the performance of amusing gossip. Their complex artistic and intellectual achievements become another 'colourful' seam of Irish life, an 'idiosyncratic happening, vividly expressed' for BBC listeners.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> W.R. Rodgers, 'Preface', in *Irish Literary Portraits*, ed. by W.R. Rodgers (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1973), pp. xi-xix (p. xi).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>85</sup> 'W.B. Yeats', in *Irish Literary Portraits*, pp. 1-21 (p. 1).

<sup>86</sup> The other literary figures discussed throughout the course of the series were James Joyce, George Moore, J.M. Synge, George Bernard Shaw, Oliver St. John Gogarty, F.R Higgins, and George Russell.

<sup>87</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 117.

*‘Envoy is especially recommended to those who want the wit and talk of a Dublin “pub”’*

The extent to which *Envoy* was embedded in this post-war commodification of Dublin’s ‘literary pub’ culture is first indicated by key advertising trends within the magazine. Given the frequency with which advertisements for local public houses appeared throughout its twenty issues, it is clear that *Envoy* both consciously targeted and was in turn targeted by the ‘literary pub’ market as a lucrative source of revenue. Public houses located in the vicinity of Grafton Street feature regularly, joining the array of diverse business interests from the area that found common commercial interest in the pages of the magazine. Unsurprisingly, McDaid’s is the most frequently advertised of these, representing a literary companion to the ubiquitous presence of the Waddington Galleries, and is joined by nearby pubs including Neary’s, the Dawson Lounge at no. 25 Dawson Street, and the International Bar at no. 23 Wicklow Street. Public houses from further afield regularly represented in the magazine include the Abbey Bar, located next to the Abbey Theatre, and Peter Lalor’s Lounge at no. 40 Wexford Street. A high advertising line is typically employed in the promotion of these establishments, with McDaid’s, for example, pitching itself as a pub ‘Where the élite meet’ and ‘where the drink is efficacious and the conversation effervescent’. Ryan has described in a late interview the mocking local reaction to the slogan following its publication in *Envoy*, writing that ‘No sooner did it appear in print than the Grafton Street boulevardiers were speaking of McDaid’s where the effete bleat’.<sup>88</sup> While naturally arousing the ridicule of those familiar with the pub’s typically raucous atmosphere, more accurately likened by one to ‘a cattle market on a busy day’, the slogan’s rarefied air recalls the marketing tactic regularly employed in official travel guides at the time in attempting to package ‘literary pub’ culture as an attractive commodity for the uninitiated holidaying visitor.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ryan, ‘No home to go to as time called for McDaid’s’, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Quidnunc, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 28 September 1972, p. 11.

Indeed, a significant draw for businesses in placing advertisements in *Envoy* was the prospect of the international exposure that the magazine would provide, with Ryan in his business correspondence shrewdly emphasizing the commercial benefits of the magazine's foreign exchange to prospective advertisers. Drafting a general letter to the magazine's 'advertising agencies in the city' in 1951, for example, he opportunistically exaggerated *Envoy*'s foreign sales, writing 'May we take this opportunity to bring to your notice the fact that we have now achieved a considerable circulation in the United States and in Europe. This should be of particular interest to such of your clients as are anxious to advertise their goods in the foreign market'.<sup>90</sup> The advertisement placed in *Envoy* by the Abbey Bar sought to establish itself within this British and American context and capitalize on the influx of holidaying literary enthusiasts into the city, featuring quotes of approval from the respective cultural authorities of the *New York Times* and the *Observer*: 'Odeon and Olivia Meeker of the New York "Times" say you should visit The Abbey Bar. The Art Critic of the "Sunday Observer" says, "It is my favourite pub". Numerous writers tell you that here is something different'. The extent to which this strategy similarly influenced *Envoy*'s editors' own marketing of their magazine is furthermore revealed through the promotional circulars that have survived in the *Envoy* archive. The circular sent out to international distributive agencies and media outlets following *Envoy*'s launch, for example, consciously promoted the magazine in the context of the wider marketing trends we have been examining thus far, stating that '*Envoy* is especially recommended to those who want the wit and talk of a Dublin "pub" combined with living writing of the very finest' [Fig. 8].<sup>91</sup> Here we can see another key instance whereby the magazine actually marketed itself beyond the characteristic 'social addressee' of its editorial content, namely, a niche intellectual and artistic elite singularly committed to new challenging creative work.<sup>92</sup> The circular in fact targets a broader audience

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<sup>90</sup> John Ryan to 'our advertising agencies in the city', January 1951, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/1.

<sup>91</sup> 'Envoy Circular', *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/7.

<sup>92</sup> Bishop, 'Re:Covering Modernism – Format and Function in the Little Magazines', p. 290.



of foreign readers and prospective tourists whose more casual interests in Irish literature would be attracted by the typical ‘literary pub’ experience in Dublin as it was being commercially packaged across a variety of promotional media during this time. To recall Urry and King and the construction of the ‘tourist gaze’, the magazine engages in the commercial process whereby the ‘gaze has been selected, materialized, reproduced and commodified’, providing ‘a syntax of signs centring on the articulation of cultural or physical difference that the tourist seeks out on arrival’.<sup>93</sup>

A striking example of the way in which the opportunities and challenges of this international market dimension informed key aspects of *Envoy*’s content occurs in its promotion of James Joyce, whereby the famed writer becomes both the subject and stage for the ‘wit and talk of a Dublin “pub”’ and performance of ‘character’ promoted in the magazine’s advertisement circulars. The growing international focus on Irish literary life was further increased by what Gerry Smyth has identified as the ‘development of international Irish Studies’ in the post-war years, with major emerging North American based literary critics such as Richard Ellmann and Hugh Kenner spearheading new academic industries dedicated to its major figures of Yeats and Joyce that resulted in the rapid ‘rise of specialist publications, conferences and symposia, biographies, critical studies and general academic engagement with the island’s modern literary heritage’.<sup>94</sup> Ellmann’s study of Yeats published in 1948, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, and his later monumental biography of Joyce in 1959, represented just two key publications in a period of intensive international academic activity, signalling, as Smyth observes, the moment when the engagement with and appreciation of these figures ‘began to take institutional form, paving the way for the development of a full-blown critical industry involving academics, universities, publishers,

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<sup>93</sup> King, ‘(De)constructing the Tourist Gaze: Dutch influences and Aer Lingus Tourism Posters, 1950-1960’, p. 171.

<sup>94</sup> Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*, pp. 96-97.

book-sellers, tourism policies and advertising agencies'.<sup>95</sup> Ellmann's own visits to post-war Dublin to gather research for his forthcoming studies anticipated the rising numbers of literary academics and student visitors in these years, forming a key part of the cultural tourist influx we have been charting with the city becoming 'a destination for US scholars, who enthusiastically 'did their time in Dublin, sipping the stout and looking for contacts and information'.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the increasing commercial interest and activity associated with the writer over the following years would prompt *The Irish Times* to declare in 1954 that 'Joyce must be regarded as a tourist attraction', equating the 'aura' and 'assets' of his 'international fame' with Ireland's most prominent material exports.<sup>97</sup> 'Doubtless, there is quite a number of foreigners who think of Ireland almost exclusively as the country which produced Joyce', the article continued, 'just as there are others who think of our country in terms of successful revolution or her equally successful whiskey':

There is certainly no sign that interest in Joyce is falling off. There must be almost no university in the world which can claim that it has no postgraduate student who is writing a thesis on some aspect of Joyce. The American universities, in particular, have taken him to the heart of their curricula. From the far side of the Atlantic comes a marching army of thesis-writers to retrace the long journey of Leopold Bloom on that June day half a century ago.<sup>98</sup>

Recent critical considerations of *Envoy* have identified the challenges posed by this influx of North American 'thesis-writers' for the magazine's milieu and their own articulation of the significance and influence of the major precursor and exemplar Joyce represented. 'Like many of their fellows since', Smyth writes, 'Irish critics of the 1950s were caught between resentment at this usurpation of their "patch" and flattery that issues which were still of direct relevance to them were being paid such impressive intellectual attention'.<sup>99</sup> This ambivalent position most characteristically flared into a reactionary antagonism in periodicals

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 178. Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York: Macmillan, 1948).

<sup>96</sup> Joseph Brooker, 'Post-war Joyce', in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. by John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 52-75 (pp. 61-62).

<sup>97</sup> 'Bloomsday', *Irish Times*, 16 June 1954. p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*, p. 97.

such as *Envoy* towards the academic industry rapidly developing around Joyce, whereby the magazine, in a marked divergence from its more generally open international ethos, resorted to the kind of combative anti-commercial attitude we examined in chapter one. As Smyth charts, the sense with which the industry could be viewed in such confrontational terms as an ‘invasion of Irish literature’ was further exacerbated by the advent and institutionalisation of the ‘New Criticism’ in North American academic practice and its subsequent prevailing dominance in Western literary criticism more generally.<sup>100</sup> This new specialised interpretative model as exemplified in the work of critics such as Hugh Kenner was very much shaped by and promoted within the university context of its origination, with its insistence on the primacy of the text and extensive textual analysis finding its perfect medium in the book-length academic monograph of the professional critic.<sup>101</sup> For *Envoy*’s milieu of writers who were contrastingly more used to conceiving of and publishing their criticism in the independent occasional context of the journal or within the even smaller allocated print space of the newspaper article, anxiety toward the potential undermining of these practices as a ‘legitimate critical criterion’ in turn provoked a counteroffensive against the accused pedantic obscurities of the growing body of academic material devoted to Joyce and Yeats as merely representing the commercial products of a self-serving literary industry.<sup>102</sup> As such, Joseph Brooker observes, the tone of address of ‘Joyce’s Dublin successors [...] to visiting American scholars’ in these years regularly ‘swings between mockery and outright contempt’, where Joyce himself ‘is repeatedly “brought home” or pulled back to earth, with the implicit or explicit claim that only Dubliners really understand him’.<sup>103</sup>

Indeed, what Ryan later disparagingly referred to as the ‘excruciating abstruseness’ of the ‘corpus of Joycean scholarship and pseudo-scholarship’ emerging in these years provided

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 178-183.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Brooker, *Joyce’s Critics: Transitions in Reading and Culture* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 201.

the critical ammunition for much of the material in *Envoy*'s special number dedicated to Joyce in April 1951.<sup>104</sup> Playwright Denis Johnston, for example, opens his essay 'A Short View of the Progress of Joyceanity' by recalling an encounter between Joyce's original inspiration for *Ulysses*' Buck Mulligan, Oliver St. John Gogarty, and a visiting Joycean enthusiast in order to highlight the absurdity of 'the intensity with which Joyce's work is being studied in the United States'.<sup>105</sup> Gogarty related to Johnston how 'the fellow', Canadian Jewish writer and lawyer A.M. Klein, had spent an evening with him in Dublin's Holles Street Hospital (Gogarty was a practicing otolaryngologist as well as a literary figure in his own right) enquiring about the fourteenth and arguably most difficult episode of the book, 'Oxen of the Sun', which is set at night in the maternity hospital.<sup>106</sup> Some months after their meeting, Gogarty came across Klein's published essay on the episode in a 'New York quarterly', which he subsequently showed in disgust to Johnston. 'I opened the periodical and glanced through the essay that had caused him such annoyance', Johnston describes:

Written by a Montreal attorney who combines poetry-writing with law, it proved to be an elaborate study of the Oxen of the Sun chapter in *Ulysses*, and was described in the poopsheet as the Appendix to a forthcoming critical examination of the whole book. Although it was obviously the flower of much learning, it could hardly be recommended as light and informative reading-matter, as it was couched in that irritating jargon that prefers expressions like "he essays no explication" and "Illustration seems to confirm the surmissal," to the simpler phraseology that you or I would use. And as if this were not trying enough, the author also had a way of putting the lay reader in his place by throwing out breezy asides such as: "Joyce is illustrating Haeckel's fundamental biogenic law that ontogeny is a recapitulation of phylogeny".<sup>107</sup>

Johnston is keen to draw association between the consciously abstruse nature of the writing and the wider academic industry from which it has emerged – and which will in turn provide the cultural and commercial support structure for its transition into a full monograph. 'In his

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<sup>104</sup> John Ryan, 'Introduction', *A Bash in the Tunnel: James Joyce by the Irish*, ed. by John Ryan (Brighton: Clifton Books, 1970), pp. 1-2 (p. 2).

<sup>105</sup> Denis Johnston, 'A Short View of the Progress of Joyceanity', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 17 (April 1951), 13-18, p. 14.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

genuine regard for every syllable of our bad boy from Belvedere, he is typical of the present attitude of all literate North America', he asserts, 'Nowadays scholars and critics have gone one better than lawyers in this trick of turning their job into a mystery by a powerful use of hard words'.<sup>108</sup>

Patrick Kavanagh, meanwhile, ridicules with relish the Joyce industry in his poem composed for the special *Envoy* number, 'Who Killed James Joyce?'. Parodying the nursery rhyme 'Who Killed Cock Robin', the poem comically charges North American scholars with the death of the author in their quest for academic advancement and commercial gain, with the essential life of his writing ultimately drained rather than illuminated by the intensive critical focus of the university. As the opening three verses read:

Who killed James Joyce?  
I, said the commentator,  
I killed James Joyce  
For my graduation.

What weapon was used  
To slay the mighty Ulysses?  
The weapon that was used  
Was a Harvard thesis.

How did you bury Joyce?  
In a broadcast Symposium.  
That's how we buried Joyce  
To a tuneful encomium.<sup>109</sup>

Kavanagh and Johnston's antagonism towards the Joyce industry in many ways recalls the 'dynamic' anti-commercial stance of the 'little magazine' in the marketplace that we examined in chapter one.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, 'Who Killed James Joyce?' explicitly mocks the North American scholar travelling to Dublin who, having secured a scholarship to Trinity College through his 'Joycean knowledge', eagerly sets out on his first Bloomsday in the footsteps of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>109</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Who Killed James Joyce?', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 17 (April 1951), p. 12.

<sup>110</sup> Connolly, 'Little Magazines', p. 414.

the characters of *Ulysses* across the city, so that he can end the poem in proud achievement that:

I made the pilgrimage  
In the Bloomsday swelter  
From the Martello Tower  
To the cabby's shelter.<sup>111</sup>

However, such individual antagonistic posturing should not distract from *Envoy's* ultimately more involved and nuanced engagement within this rapidly expanding international market and the lucrative opportunities of the cultural tourist influx into Dublin in these years.

Kavanagh's ridiculing of the perceived cult of Joyce belies the extent to which *Envoy* as a magazine more generally marketed itself with this broader commercial audience in mind.

That such a marketing strategy was intimately associated with the rising popularity of Dublin's mid-century 'literary pub' culture is established in *Envoy's* opening issue with the publication of an essay by Roger McHugh, 'The Passing of Barney Kiernan's', situated prominently at the head of the magazine and thereby representing its first leading article. McHugh, himself a recent PhD graduate and lecturer at University College Dublin, had initially begun researching the history of Barney Kiernan's public house during the war years while writing the historical drama *Trial at Green Street Courthouse*.<sup>112</sup> Though the public house had closed by the mid-1940s, the original site at nos. 8 – 10 Little Britain Street in the north inner city retained a literary significance primarily as the location of the 'Cyclops' episode of *Ulysses*. Here Leopold Bloom encounters in the small backroom of the bar the character of 'the citizen', a belligerent nationalist whose formidable proportions and inflamed rhetoric are comically described through an exaggerated mock-heroic mythic language that

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<sup>111</sup> Kavanagh, 'Who Killed James Joyce?', p. 12.

<sup>112</sup> *Trial at Green Street Courthouse* was performed in 1945 at the Abbey Theatre. Set on a single day in 1871 in the backroom of Barney Kiernan's and the adjacent Green Street Courthouse, the play reconstructed the famous trial involving the shooting of Head Constable Talbot by Robert Kelly. *Trial at Green Street Courthouse*, Playography Ireland Online Database <<http://www.irishplayography.com/play.aspx?playid=31767>> accessed 26 August 2017.

gives the episode its distinctive parodic form.<sup>113</sup> McHugh's essay details the colourful history and character of the recently closed public house, and he was keen to point out to Ryan its potential international interest for Joycean enthusiasts when proposing the essay for publication in *Envoy*'s first issue. 'Herewith is an article, "The Passing of Barney Kiernan's"', he wrote to the editor in the autumn of 1949, 'which may interest your Dublin readers and certainly will interest those abroad who know us mainly through Joyce and his contemporaries'.<sup>114</sup> McHugh had initially submitted an original short story to Ryan to be considered for publication, however the editor's preference for 'The Passing of Barney Kiernan's' was based on his shared anticipation as to its wider popular potential. As Ryan replied in early October:

Many thanks for the "Passing of Barney Kiernan's" which will certainly appear in our first issue. Much as I liked your other manuscript, this, I feel, is better all round for the first number and should stimulate a lively correspondence on the subject of the other licensed landmarks on Bloom's itinerary'.<sup>115</sup>

What distinguishes the 'Cyclops' episode of *Ulysses* along with the comic exaggerations of its parodic form as one of the most entertaining scenes and settings for the reader is in the way in which it so vividly recreates and dramatizes the very 'wit and talk of the Dublin "pub"' that *Envoy* promoted in its advertisement circulars. For Terence Killeen, Joyce's entrusting of the narration of the episode to an unidentified but immediately familiar Dublin 'character', a local pub habitué whose garrulous speech dominates the action 'results in the second most pulsating, vibrant linguistic performance of the whole book (Molly Bloom's being, of course, the first)':

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<sup>113</sup> Joyce's revels in this comically exaggerated mythic language in his introduction of 'the citizen', for example: 'The figure seated on a large boulder at the foot of a round tower was that of a broadshouldered deepchested stronglimbed frankeyed redhaired freelyfreckled shaggybearded widemouthed largenosed longheaded deepvoiced barekneed brawnyhanded hairylegged ruddyfaced sinewyarmed hero. From shoulder to shoulder he measured several ells and his rocklike mountainous knees were covered, as was likewise the rest of his body wherever visible, with a strong growth of tawny prickly hair in hue and toughness similar to the mountain gorse (*Ulex Europæus*)'. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler (London: The Bodley Head, 1986), p. 243.

<sup>114</sup> Roger McHugh to John Ryan, (undated), *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/4.

<sup>115</sup> John Ryan to Roger McHugh, 13 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

Noman's language is the Dublin argot in all its intensity, comedy, and awfulness. No greater demonstration could be given of the oft-claimed thesis that Dublin's energies were primarily linguistic. Molly Bloom's monologue aside, it is Joyce's finest exercise in a living, rather than in a literary or journalistic language (these are supplied in heightened form for contrast): hence its wide appeal.<sup>116</sup>

It is the vivid speech of Joyce's narrator that McHugh foregrounds in the early pages of his essay, summoning in the process a comparable linguistic verve in his description of him as 'an anonymous Dublin Thersites whose virulent scurrility figures scorches and crackles around the central figures as they come, drink and depart'.<sup>117</sup> McHugh quotes a particular comic passage from the episode in example of this whereby the narrator describes in farcical terms 'the citizen' engaging in conversation in Irish with his fearsome dog 'Garryowen':

So he calls the old dog over.

"What's on you, Garry?" says he.

Then he starts hauling and mauling and talking to him in Irish and the old towler growling, letting on to answer, like a duet in the opera. Such growling you never heard as they let off between them. Someone that has nothing better to do ought to write a letter *pro bono publico* to the papers about the muzzling order for a dog the like of that. Growling and grousing and his eye all bloodshot from the drouth is in it and the hydrophobia dropping out of his jaws.<sup>118</sup>

From this McHugh asserts the importance of reclaiming the history of Barney Kiernan's pub in light of its recent closure, arguing that while 'much attention has been devoted to Homeric parallels and associations [in *Ulysses*], the associations of Barney Kiernan's public house are also worth recording'.<sup>119</sup> Moving from an initial depiction of another famous Joycean pub, Davy Byrne's at no. 21 Duke Street where Bloom memorably eats his lunch while on his peregrination about the city, McHugh states that 'now that Barney Kiernan's public house no longer exists, the reader's chances of gathering much information about it are considerably less', and thereby proceeds to recount in detail its history and the array of colourful characters

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<sup>116</sup> Terence Killeen, *Ulysses Unbound: A Reader's Companion to James Joyce's Ulysses*, 2nd edn. (Bray: Wordwell in association with the National Gallery of Ireland: 2005; first edn. 2004), pp. 138-139.

<sup>117</sup> Roger McHugh, 'The Passing of Barney Kiernan's', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), 9-14 (p. 9).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11. As we saw in *Envoy*'s publication of an extract from Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, the inverted commas here have been erroneously inserted into the text.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



that frequented it as a means of further enriching the reader's enjoyment of the 'Cyclops' episode. Central to the pub's early popularity was its adjacency to the busy Green Street Court House, and McHugh describes for example how he 'met a lively old man who had served his time there, early in this century' who subsequently recounted that 'one thing which he vividly remembered was how he used to carry into court for Isaac Butt a carafe of neat gin and a tumbler'.<sup>120</sup> The essay's journalistic collation of these vivid remembered instances culminates in the colourful character sketch of the publican Barney Kiernan himself, who was well-known in Dublin for his collection of crime paraphernalia procured from the courthouse and which he subsequently exhibited in the pub. 'His most prized exhibits, which were always on view, were associated with crime', McHugh writes, before recalling his own earliest recollection of them upon first visiting the establishment:

On my first visit to Barney Kiernan's about 1929, I had seen an impressive row of them, all dusty, cobwebbed and garnished with spiders. The low-ceilinged bar was very dark, but one could see exhibits ranging from handcuffs and horse-pistols to a sugar-cone and faded prints of the Parnellite period.<sup>121</sup>

McHugh's essay establishes Barney Kiernan's pub as one of the key 'licensed landmarks on Bloom's itinerary' in a manner that was continued and supplemented over *Envoy's* following issues.<sup>122</sup> The November 1950 issue, for example, prominently presented a photographic essay of Dublin entitled 'Six Photographs of the Background to Joyce's *Ulysses*' with the accompanying acknowledgement, 'Reproduced by permission of the Irish Tourist Board'.<sup>123</sup> In what therefore represents the most explicit coordination between the magazine and the post-war cultural tourist industry developing around Irish literary life, the photographic series constructs and commodifies the 'tourist gaze' for the arriving literary enthusiast to Dublin, presenting a series of by turns idyllic and quaint shots of the city, from

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>122</sup> Ryan to McHugh, 13 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>123</sup> Joachim Gerstenberg, 'Six Photographs of the Background of Joyce's *Ulysses*', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 12 (November 1950), unpaginated sequence located between pages 56 and 57.

sun-drenched portraits of St. Stephen's Green and St. Patrick's Cathedral to the ornate Victorian stucco work of John O'Meara's pub 'The Irish House' at the corner of Winetavern Street and Wood Quay, with the slogan 'Céad Míle Fáilte' clearly visible along its façade.<sup>124</sup> These scenes are combined with more immediately recognisable Joycean landmarks including views of Sandymount Strand and Eccles Street [Fig. 9 & 10].<sup>125</sup> In his unpublished thesis examining the posthumous reputation of Joyce in Ireland, Conor Wyer identifies the series as evidence of the extent to which 'Joyce has been associated with tourism from a very early stage' and how from this period the celebration of the writer and his work became 'both a cultural and economic transaction'.<sup>126</sup> For Wyer, the photographs included in *Envoy* represent 'one of the earliest examples of Joyce being associated with cultural tourism':

The mix of specifically Joycean locations such as Eccles Street and Sandymount Strand alongside more general locations indicates Joyce's association with specific locales of the city could be applied to Dublin more generally and the city as a whole could be promoted as a tourist destination. The patronage of the Irish Tourist Board signifies the value being attributed to Joyce's work as that of a cultural commodity.<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, what fundamentally sublimates the antagonistic posturing against the Joyce industry in *Envoy*'s later special Joyce number is the extent to which the issue's calculated design and high production standards aspire toward a similarly distinctive quality as a 'cultural commodity' within the international tourist market elsewhere disavowed. In line with the quality photographic reproductions of Joyce's Dublin in the November issue, the special number exudes once again Ryan's talent as a designer and the shrewd tailoring of *Envoy* to suit the expectations of a specific commercial audience. The usual format of the magazine's cover with its list of contributors set beneath the archway is exchanged for the editor's illustrated rendering of the popular 1928 photographic portrait of Joyce by the American

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<sup>124</sup> Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 1.

<sup>125</sup> As listed in the series the six photographs depict: 'St. Stephen's Green', 'The Quays Looking Towards the Four Courts', 'The Irish House', 'Sandymount Strand', 'Eccles Street', and 'St. Patrick's Cathedral'.

<sup>126</sup> Conor Wyer, 'An Afterlife of James Joyce' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2008), p. 174.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178

photographer Berenice Abbot [Fig. 11 & 12].<sup>128</sup> This is combined most impressively inside the issue itself with a page-length illustration entitled ‘Bloomsday, 16th June 1904’. Prominently placed on the page facing the issue’s editorial, Ryan’s bustling illustrated scene brings to vivid animation ‘Bloom’s itinerary’, depicting in caricature form the various locations and scenes encountered throughout the book and framed by the cityscape of Dublin itself [Fig. 13]. That such appealing design features were employed with a broader international market in mind is reflected in the detailed distribution information provided directly beneath the issue’s table of contents, pitching the magazine at a competitive mass market price in North America and Canada at ‘\$5.00 per year, 60 cents per single copy’, while directing prospective commercial publishers to the magazine’s ‘Agents for U.S.’, the Eastern News Company based in New York.

Ryan would, of course, organise the first official ‘Bloomsday’ celebration in Dublin three years later in 1954, an event that in many ways exemplified the process of the assimilation of Joyce’s posthumous reputation within the contemporary context of Dublin’s ‘literary pub’ culture that we have been examining.<sup>129</sup> The party gathered by the editor to mark the event on June 16 included Brian O’Nolan, Kavanagh, Cronin, A.J. Leventhal, and Tom Joyce, a cousin of the writer, under the planned intention of ‘covering as much of the original ground as the book had charted’.<sup>130</sup> Once again reflecting his shrewd eye for presentation, Ryan hired a number of one-horse ‘broughman’ cabs especially for the occasion in evocation of *Ulysses*’ 1904 city, and the party departed from the Martello Tower in Sandycove in the morning on a scheduled route of the major locations featured in the book across Dublin.<sup>131</sup> Ryan has recalled the excitement and publicity surrounding their departure, writing that ‘from the Martello Tower our two-carriage progress soon became a cavalcade as

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<sup>128</sup> Berenice Abbot, ‘James Joyce’ (1928), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, <<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/43904?locale=en>> accessed 27 August 2017.

<sup>129</sup> Ryan in his capacity as honorary secretary of the James Joyce Tower Society would furthermore be instrumental in the establishment of the James Joyce Museum in the Martello Tower at Sandycove in 1962.

<sup>130</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p.138.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

numerous other vehicles tagged behind'.<sup>132</sup> However, the ambitious scope of the day's planned journey quickly derailed as the party became more preoccupied with halting at the various public houses along the route. 'More pubs were visited *en route* than even the most faithful adherence to the Joycean master plan demanded', Ryan conceded, and the celebration soon became a platform for the increasingly inebriated performance of character within the confines of the 'literary pub'.<sup>133</sup> Media coverage of the event focused on the colourful personalities of the gathered 'literary notabilities' as much as the significance of Joyce and his work itself.<sup>134</sup> 'Word of the event had got round early and the celebrants began to arrive shortly after dawn', *The Irish Times* opened, for example, detailing the various 'memorable visits' paid to the 'local hostelries' along the way, such as the comic ironic moment when the party were greeted in a pub in Blackrock 'by the naïve amazement of a little man when he heard the reason for the outing. With some dogmatism, he claimed that he had never heard of Joyce!'.<sup>135</sup> Ryan later remarked that rather than representing a 'pilgrimage' in honour of Joyce, the more applicable terms for the heavy drinking that ultimately defined the opening 'Bloomsday' celebration was a 'pilgrimage [...] being a pilgrimage, a grimace and, to some extent, a disgrace'.<sup>136</sup> Yet even as the party's inebriated scurrility mocked the reverence and adulation becoming rapidly associated with the Joyce industry, their activities marked the transformation of June 16 into an official cultural event and a highly marketable commodity. As we have been examining in this section, the event carried on from *Envoy's* earlier promotion of the writer in registering the process by which both Joyce and the 'literary pub' culture of his Dublin admirers were becoming established as 'both a cultural and economic transaction' in a rapidly globalising literary marketplace.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> 'An Irishman's Diary', *Irish Times*, 17 June 1954, p. 5.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 138.

<sup>137</sup> Wyer, 'An Afterlife of James Joyce', p. 174.

*'A phrase made up to crown a pint of beer': Kavanagh's 'Diary'*

Ryan filmed the first Bloomsday celebrations in 1954 in a now famous recording, which captures the jovial early stages of the pilgrimage with Kavanagh, Cronin, and Brian O'Nolan gathering around the 'broughman' cabs, while later scenes suggest the derailing inebriation that Cronin has recalled of O'Nolan and Kavanagh even upon their arrival in the early morning, with footage of Kavanagh urinating against the strand walls by the Martello Tower and then assisting along with Cronin a dazed looking O'Nolan across the beach.<sup>138</sup> Notwithstanding the excitement and momentous nature of the event, the inevitable alcoholism that dominated the proceedings is more forebodingly reflective of what Gerald Dawe has observed in figures such as Kavanagh and O'Nolan as 'an embittered and caustic self-regard that is itself tragi-comic. *Such-and-such is a terrible man for the gargle*'.<sup>139</sup> For Dawe, alcoholism represented 'an affliction of the 1950s', drink became the 'arbiter of authenticity' in literary life and the public house 'a counter-cultural shelter, literally a public house for private lives, with its holy hours, after hours, Sunday closings and other licensing controls creating a lifestyle all of its own, as well as lasting mythologies'.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, if *Envoy's* promotion of 'the wit and talk of a Dublin "pub"' presented real commercial opportunities for the magazine, it at the same time more problematically implicated its living writers in the context of the expanding market audience for the performance of 'character' and the consequent expectation, to return to Cronin, of figures such as Kavanagh 'to dramatize themselves the moment they came in the door'.<sup>141</sup> It was with Kavanagh whereby the tensions arising from this situation became most acute in the magazine, pitching the poet in a complex

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<sup>138</sup> 'The First Bloomsday', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0gNNWHmj9Q>> accessed 2 July 2017; Cronin recalls that 'Early in the morning though it was, Myles appeared to be deep in something else; while, Paddy even on the journey out, appeared to have been absorbing refreshment by some secret chemical process known only to himself. Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 124.

<sup>139</sup> Gerald Dawe, 'From Borstal Boy and Ginger Man to Kitty Stobling: A Brief Look Back at the 1950s', in *Beautiful Strangers: Ireland and the World of the 1950s*, pp. 167-180 (pp. 171-172).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Cronin on *Bowman: Sunday 8.30*, RTÉ Radio One, 15 January 2017.

dynamic between protest and performance that is strikingly illustrative of the challenges faced by the mid-century Irish writer amidst the commodification of Dublin's 'literary pub' culture. The full promotional tag line used in the magazine's advertising circulars is itself indicative of the tensions implicit in this dynamic: 'Envoy is especially recommended to those who want the wit and talk of a Dublin "pub" combined with living writing of the very finest'. The stated commitment to presenting 'living writing of the very finest' satisfied *Envoy's* projected self-image as a 'serious' monthly magazine, providing an elevated autonomous platform for new challenging writers that was pitched in opposition to the more commercially orientated concerns of larger Irish publishing firms. As we have seen, it was *Envoy's* sense of its embattled position amidst a 'network of hostility and disparagement' and its support of the marginalized artist against a prevailing philistine business culture and conservative literary establishment that provided such a vitalizing context in adversity, stimulating the 'tone of embattlement' that Shovlin has identified as a central focalizing agent for the magazine.<sup>142</sup> However, this embattled artistic image is at once problematized by the circular's combining recommendation to readers 'who want the wit and talk of a Dublin "pub"', which not only solicits the broader commercial readership we have been considering but draws the focus away from an exclusive consideration of the writer's work and literary significance to the more superficially entertaining qualities of personality, anecdote, and the memorable encounter. As Walker observes, at its worst the commercial packaging of these characteristics threatened to dilute the 'complex artistic and intellectual achievements' of the mid-century Irish writer to just another "'colourful" seam of Irish life, an "idiosyncratic happening, vividly expressed"'.<sup>143</sup>

It is in Patrick Kavanagh's writing and through his editorial representation in the magazine whereby the strains and tensions arising from this condition most emphatically

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<sup>142</sup> 'Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 9 (August 1950), 5-7 (p. 6); Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 152.

<sup>143</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 117.

emerge. Simultaneously representing *Envoy*'s chief 'polemicist' and its resident 'character', Kavanagh encapsulated the magazine's complex marketplace position pitched between protest and performance.<sup>144</sup> Kavanagh's monthly 'Diary' series was at the vanguard of *Envoy*'s iconoclastic ambitions, launching 'an excoriating assault on the failings of Irish culture' whereby the poet's own personal '*cri de coeur*' figured as an emblem of the mid-century marginalization of the Irish writer in society.<sup>145</sup> However, if his writing registered in this way the frustrations of the isolated artist whose serious work was often confined to 'the perimeter of Commerce', then the force of Kavanagh's personality as it manifested across the 'Diary' series at the same time associated the poet and *Envoy* with the 'exaggerated performance of character' that was itself rapidly becoming established as a popular commercial product for domestic and international consumption.<sup>146</sup> The lively, spontaneous, and regularly sensationally entertaining style of the 'Diary' fulfilled in an immediate sense *Envoy*'s advertised promise of the 'wit and talk of a Dublin "pub"', even as the actual content of the individual essays repeatedly expressed a sense of embittered estrangement from the wider commercial market such an audience entailed.

Ryan first approached Kavanagh with the proposal of contributing to his forthcoming literary magazine following a chance meeting on Grafton Street in the summer of 1949, recording how 'over some large whiskies he consented to write a "diary" for the magazine, a promise which he faithfully kept for the whole two years of *Envoy*'s existence'.<sup>147</sup> At the poet's demand, Kavanagh's monthly contributions were to be placed at the end of each issue as to emphasize their independent and distinctive status from the other material included in the magazine.<sup>148</sup> Ryan's securing of the services of such a well-known literary figure in

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<sup>144</sup> Ryan, 'An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen', p. 9.

<sup>145</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 132; Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines*, p. 46.

<sup>146</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 132.

<sup>147</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 95.

<sup>148</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 292.

Dublin represented a major coup for the new magazine. John McGahern has recalled how ‘there was a definite sense of excitement about Kavanagh’s presence in this city’ among young Irish writers in Dublin at this time, and Ryan believed that his personality would give *Envoy* a vital ‘aim and continuity’, providing the ‘link that [would hold] the whole thing together’.<sup>149</sup> For Kavanagh’s part, the monthly stipend provided by Ryan greatly alleviated his financial difficulties during this time.<sup>150</sup> He equally relished the new public platform for his writing and opinions provided by the magazine, even anticipating in a letter to his brother Peter the polemical character for which it would become notorious, writing in November 1949 that ‘I am doing a nasty Diary at the back of the magazine each month’.<sup>151</sup> The real enthusiasm he felt for the venture is clear from his early letters to Ryan at this time. In correspondence with the editor while on a trip to London in January 1950, for example, he wrote, ‘Thanks for the dough, and the magazine. You have no idea how exciting it reads from this angle. Very, very good indeed’, before proceeding to roundly denounce both the London and Dublin literary establishments in a manner that would come to define his ‘Diary’ series:

Most of the writers here are as dead and damned and resentful as the assonantal chaps. I don’t like to say it but they are afraid of me, that I will take over the scene and massacre them, which with the Lord’s help I shall. [...] Is anybody left who isn’t mad at me now?<sup>152</sup>

Kavanagh’s established status as a Dublin ‘character’ by the *Envoy* period and Ryan’s anticipated public interest in his personal ‘Diary’ feature was in large part due to the poet’s ‘extraordinary physical presence’ in the city during this time.<sup>153</sup> Reflecting on Kavanagh’s daily routine in Dublin, Cronin has remarked that ‘seldom can there have been such as small

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<sup>149</sup> John McGahern, ‘Journey along the Canal Bank’, in *Love of the World: Essays*, pp. 330-333 (p. 330); Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 91; Ryan, ‘An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen’, p. 8.

<sup>150</sup> As Quinn notes, both Ryan and his mother Agnes proved ‘generous patrons’ to the poet: ‘By December [1949] Kavanagh’s rent arrears were cleared and a few months paid in advance; a good supply of coal had been delivered; he had a new Remington typewriter, a new radio and his first telephone’. Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 292.

<sup>151</sup> Patrick Kavanagh to Peter Kavanagh, 8 November 1949, Dublin, University College Dublin, Special Collections, Patrick Kavanagh Archive, Kav B 80 (58 a).

<sup>152</sup> Patrick Kavanagh to John Ryan, 15 January 1951, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/2.

<sup>153</sup> McGahern, ‘Journey along the Canal Bank’, p. 333.



area so patrolled by genius'.<sup>154</sup> Writing in the morning, Kavanagh would typically spend his early afternoons in and around the collection of bookmakers, bookshops, and public houses of Baggot Street, before moving into the city centre where his 'large, hatted figure' became 'an inescapable sight around Grafton Street, his hands often clasped behind his back, muttering hoarsely to himself as he passed'.<sup>155</sup> Antoinette Quinn has considered the extent to which the uncouth appearance, eccentric mannerisms, and aggressive outbursts for which he soon became infamous through the course of his daily peregrinations were representative of a kind of physicalized protest against mid-century Dublin societal convention. What Quinn has described as the poet's 'exaggerated country persona' was consciously cultivated by Kavanagh in reaction to the middle-class suburban life from which he felt excluded, challenging its fashionable etiquette and social mores by drawing attention 'to his large physique and ungainliness and priding himself on the curtness and acerbity of his Monaghan speech'.<sup>156</sup> In the arena of the street, bookshop, café, and public house, however, such unconventional acts of display more than anything else contributed to Kavanagh's public image as a notoriously entertaining Dublin personality, with the potentially subversive import of his behaviour sublimated into the litany of humorous anecdotes and vivid reminiscences for which he soon became renowned and which were subsequently channelled into the developing commercial industry surrounding the Irish literary 'character'.

It was Kavanagh's 'staged personality' that was foregrounded in a feature article and interview with the poet in the final issue of *The Bell* before its temporary closure in April 1948.<sup>157</sup> The piece was conducted as part of 'The Bellman' series, which typically provided a light entertaining counterweight to the magazine's heavier social and cultural commentary. The series' distinctive playfully irreverent tone was established by the interviewer, referred to

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<sup>154</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 75.

<sup>155</sup> McGahern, 'The Solitary Reader', in *Love of the World: Essays*, p. 92.

<sup>156</sup> Antoinette Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born-Again Romantic* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), pp. 317-318.

<sup>157</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born-Again Romantic* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), p. 317.

only as the ‘Bellman’, who as Kelly Matthews observes was often ‘disingenuously obsequious to his interviewees, and knowingly sardonic in his commentary’.<sup>158</sup> Entitled ‘Meet Mr. Patrick Kavanagh’, the feature humorously caricatures the poet’s ‘larger than life’ persona and the publicity it was generating during this time, characterizing him as a figure ‘so fabulous as to be almost a figment of his own imagination’ who shares with a range of global artistic celebrities as varied as ‘Mr. Frank Sinatra, Mr. Dylan Thomas, Picasso and the Marx Brothers the capacity for rousing emotions to screaming point’:

Mr. Kavanagh has been described, by those who pretend to dislike him, as a Consommé of a Boy; by others (who don’t pretend so hard, perhaps) as The Last of Lever’s Gossoons. And (it must be confessed) he himself does little to dispel that illusion – if illusion it be. There can be hardly a film-star’s publicity agent who would not give a considerable ‘cut’ off his fees for the secret of the ‘build-up’ with which, in a few short years, Mr. Kavanagh has become surrounded.<sup>159</sup>

Though comically embellished, the sketch does give a real sense of the public notoriety for which Kavanagh the ‘character’ was fast becoming associated. ‘Eating or drinking with Mr. Kavanagh in public is an experience not to be missed – presuming you have nerve enough’, the ‘Bellman’ continues, before setting the scene in mock-dramatic fashion for his arranged meeting with the poet in a Grafton Street café, whereby Kavanagh’s physical stature and mannerisms are exaggerated to immense proportions. ‘Kavanagh – both mentally and physically as well as vocally – is constructed on what the sculptors call the “heroic” scale’, he opens:

And so, seated at the same café table as Mr. Kavanagh, one is constantly conscious of what women novelists used to call The Elemental. A great root-like hand shoots across the table to the toast-dish, casting a thunder-cloud shadow on the cloth. P.K., without warning, suddenly crosses his legs, jerks the table for a good two feet in the air, cups and dishes a-jingle-jangling, and continues the conversation as if no earthquake has occurred. Or he as suddenly hunches the enormous, mountainous shoulders, and chairs, table, walls even, seem to shiver with him. Nuclear fission (one reflects) is a ripple in a teacup compared to Mr. Kavanagh in a tea-shop.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 54.

<sup>159</sup> The Bellman, ‘Meet Mr. Patrick Kavanagh’, *The Bell*, vol. 16, no. 1 (April 1948), 5-11 (pp. 5-6).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

When the article eventually arrives at the interview proper, Kavanagh in turn duly fulfils the entertaining conversational role anticipated of him, wheeling with vivid spontaneity between real insight, sensational riposte, and spurious statement. At one point, he reflects on the dangers inherent in the saturated media focus on the personality of the artist, anticipating the ultimately destructive consequences of the sudden transatlantic celebrity status that would be experienced by writers such as Dylan Thomas and Brendan Behan during the early 1960s. ‘I hate – I *abhor* – publicity I tell you!’ he declares, ‘Publicity’s a cancer. It eats out a man – till there’s nothing but the shell left’.<sup>161</sup> However, even as he protests against the detrimental effect of the ‘fierce beams of Publicity’, Kavanagh performs with verve the role of the ‘character’, providing the expected ream of eccentric sound bites that would only encourage the kind of superficial public attention he claims to loathe. The recounting of his literary career in Dublin is peppered with sensationalized asides, for example, he exaggeratedly declares himself at one point to be ‘the laziest person in the whole world – bar none’, before bluntly outlining his ambitions to marry a ‘beautiful, sympathetic and rich wife’ with the claim that ‘I hate work. I want to get rich [...] I’m very fond of women – beautiful women. I hate all men. They bore me’.<sup>162</sup>

This association of Kavanagh the street ‘character’ with popular public entertainment, an ‘experience not to be missed’ on the Dublin ‘literary pub’ circuit, would impinge even on *Envoy*’s high literary atmosphere, influencing the editorial promotion and representation of the poet in various ways. Following his agreement to write for the magazine, the upstairs rooms at no. 39 Grafton Street became part of Kavanagh’s daily beat about town. Quinn writes how the ‘ambience of the small-circulation newspaper or journal office’ appealed to

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

the poet and he soon took a ‘proprietary interest’ in *Envoy*’s office life and affairs.<sup>163</sup> As

Cronin recalls:

Kavanagh would peer round the door at about twelve o’clock [...] Though not officially the editor of the magazine he read all the morning mail and interested himself in all the contributions that came in the post, pontificating about them, and, in fact, with whatever concealments, evasions and exaggerations he chose to employ, contributing the intangible quality called life to the whole proceedings.<sup>164</sup>

Kavanagh’s resident status in *Envoy* was inscribed into the magazine’s March 1950 issue with the publication of Ryan’s first editorial ‘pen picture’, a full-length caricature of the poet prominently printed on the page facing the foreword.<sup>165</sup> Headed by the title ‘Envoy Contributors’, the illustration, as Ryan later elaborated, was intended as part of a new series to introduce the ‘personality of the writer’ to the magazine’s readership and the July issue would feature a second caricature of the prominent academic, essayist, and translator Arland Ussher [Fig. 14].<sup>166</sup> It was Kavanagh’s caricature, however, that drew most public attention. John Montague has recalled how it captured ‘exactly the man I saw’ during these years, ‘hat jammed on his head, arms under his oxters’.<sup>167</sup> The illustration depicts the poet with arms resolutely crossed in a gruff side-profile gaze that immediately dismisses the viewer. Kavanagh is clad in a long rumpled jacket and hat that droops over his enlarged hooked nose and horn-rimmed glasses, playing off the abrasive image of ‘rustic uncouthness’ that was by now infamous among the Dubliners for whom he was a daily sight.<sup>168</sup> The oversized proportions of the illustration, with Kavanagh’s hobnailed boots comically implanted upon a miniaturized rural scene, recalls the exaggerated scaling of ‘The Bellman’ article the previous year that had cast the poet in mock Swiftian terms as a ‘poor Gulliver in Brobdingnag’ and irreverently coloured his every feature and mannerism with rural imagery: ‘The great head,

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<sup>163</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 294.

<sup>164</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 78.

<sup>165</sup> Ryan, ‘Envoy Contributors: Mr. Patrick Kavanagh’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950).

<sup>166</sup> ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), 9-10 (p. 9).

<sup>167</sup> John Montague, ‘A Tribute to Patrick Kavanagh’, *Irish Times*, 2 December 1967, p. 6.

<sup>168</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born Again Romantic*, p. 317.

hung over his plate, shows a wispy nimbus: oily-black fleece of a sheep caught on the barbs of a fence'.<sup>169</sup> Ryan's later editorial note on *Envoy's* 'pen pictures' acknowledged the danger of 'the writer the poet or the painter [becoming] encumbered with the sort of "ballywhoo" publicity which accompanies such interpretative artists as musicians and actors', however, it was arguably this exact type of attention that his most caricatures encouraged.<sup>170</sup> The general entertainment value of the caricature form itself suggests the broader commercial readership that was elsewhere solicited in the magazine's advertisement circulars, with the comic depiction of such a colourful literary figure as Kavanagh appealing variously to the casual literary enthusiast at home, the international tourist keen to gain a sense of the vivid characters of Dublin's 'literary pub' culture, or even simply the local Dubliner familiar with the poet's daily eccentrics. As with the earlier 'Bellman' article, the caricature implicates *Envoy* in the performance of 'character' as it was undergoing a wider process of commodification during this time, thereby problematically blurring the role and significance of a major figure such as Kavanagh between the diverse and conflicting identities of 'poet, novelist, critic and Stage Irishman-about-Town'.<sup>171</sup>

This condition was further problematized by the fact that it was the exaggerated persona of the 'Countryman' in Dublin which Kavanagh himself adopted and exploited in his 'Diary' series to dramatize his struggles amidst the city's philistine business culture.<sup>172</sup> The verse-playlet published in place of his customary prose in *Envoy's* April 1950 issue, later entitled 'Adventure in the Bohemian Jungle', fancifully casts the poet as a 'rural naif', a 'simple man arrived in town, | Lover of letters', who is led to the foyer and barroom of the Abbey Theatre thronged with the city's nouveau riche elite and aspiring middle-class.<sup>173</sup> Innocently hoping to experience 'the world of art | Where beats a universal heart' among

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<sup>169</sup> The Bellman, 'Meet Mr. Patrick Kavanagh', p. 9.

<sup>170</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), p. 9.

<sup>171</sup> The Bellman, 'Meet Mr. Patrick Kavanagh', p. 5.

<sup>172</sup> Kavanagh, 'Diary: A Play', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 5 (April 1950), p. 78.

<sup>173</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born Again Romantic*, p. 288.

Dublin's cultural milieu, the 'Countryman' instead to his dismay finds himself amidst a 'wild bottle party', with the occasion of a public artistic event revealing itself as a mere pretence for charlatanism, frivolous entertainment, and licentiousness.<sup>174</sup> The various pseudo cultural figures he encounters at the party increase his feelings of disillusionment and alienation from the proceedings, worst of whom is the rich businessman and religious benefactor, 'Count Mulligan'. Praised by his entourage as a 'great Art patron', Mulligan's actual support of poets is revealed as paltry and woefully inadequate in comparison to the enormous sums regularly donated to Catholic cultural institutions, a pious civic involvement that the 'Countryman' is quick to associate with materialistic self-interest and vanity.<sup>175</sup>

He has never committed rape or bigamy it is true  
 Goes to Mass every morning in fact,  
 A good beginning to the businessman's day  
 God nicely in His place, card-indexed,  
 His stomach comfortable on golf dreams  
 The Bishop calling round to have dinner to discuss  
 With him the problem of the city's poor.  
 A charitable man is Count Mulligan  
 Chairman of the Christian Beggar's Guild  
 Benign, bountiful – evil.<sup>176</sup>

The dearth of 'real patrons' of the literary arts in mid-century Irish society provoked Kavanagh's ire throughout his *Envoy* writing, a condition he asserted was reflective of the prevailing attitudes of a 'cynical and materialistic country' that had failed to endow the 'priestly nature of the poet's function' with its rightful recognition and support.<sup>177</sup> The deleterious effect of this situation, as he stated in March 1950, was the marginalization of significant literary work and a subsequently degraded appreciation of literature in the public sphere that eschewed 'the noble and serious' for 'the base and ludicrous'.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Kavanagh, 'Diary: A Play', p. 79.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>177</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950), 83-88 (p. 85).

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

What is striking about the ‘Diary’ series in the context of both the market trends and influences we have been examining and in relation to Kavanagh’s own rapidly developing reputation as a ‘literary pub’ ‘character’ during this time, is the extent to which it actually locates these debased socio-cultural conditions within the confines of the public house; prophetically warning of the destructive force of the drinking culture of Dublin’s literati and denouncing the commercial promotion of its lively conversation and atmosphere. Acknowledging in *Envoy*’s second issue the recent establishment of McDaid’s as the ‘Poet’s Pub’ for the ‘new writers who are on the way in’, Kavanagh cautioned that ‘Alcohol is the worst enemy of the imagination. Young writers should keep out of pubs and remember that the cliché way of the artistic life is a lie’.<sup>179</sup> That he was himself becoming a resident fixture amidst this heavy drinking scene did not restrain the poet from ruthlessly attacking its rapidly popularizing market image as the home of vivid ‘wit and talk’. Among the bustling cast of characters satirized in ‘Adventure in the Bohemian Jungle’ is the ‘President of the Travel Society’, serving in the verse-playlet as a representative of the Irish Tourist Association, who leads a group of impressionable Americans into the Abbey Theatre barroom eager to sample the lively literary atmosphere that was being promoted by the ITA at this time.<sup>180</sup> As we examined, the proliferation of Dublin tourist guides produced in these years cultivated a glorified commercial image of the public house and its literary locals, with the popular annual nightlife guide to the city, *Dublin by Day and by Night*, for example, grandly depicting the Palace Bar as the ‘Mecca of those connected with the literary and artistic life of the Irish capital’, and highlighting it as a must-see for the literary tourist: ‘There you may see prolific poets, preeminent painters, energetic editors, and not so energetic novelists gathered together to talk shop over glasses of beer or whiskies and sodas’.<sup>181</sup> It is precisely this glorified commercial image that Kavanagh was determined to dismantle throughout his ‘Diary’ series.

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<sup>179</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), 81-86 (p. 84).

<sup>180</sup> Kavanagh, ‘Diary: A Play’, p. 79.

<sup>181</sup> *Dublin by Day and by Night* (Dublin: The Parkside Press, 1949), p. 117.

Writing of his first visits to the Palace and Pearl Bars in the 1930s, for example, he mocked both his own early naïve impressionability in the company of the literary sets that gathered there and the effusive praising tone now becoming associated with their contemporary commercial promotion. ‘When I came to Dublin in 1939 I thought the Palace the most wonderful temple of art’, he described in *Envoy*’s first issue, ‘There’s where the gabble about poetry was to be heard’.<sup>182</sup> The ‘Diary’ series is determined to debunk such attractively idealized images, forcibly exposing a contrasting reality of the public house as one of wearily repeated conversations and self-serving posturing sharpened by drink into personal maliciousness. So that Kavanagh flatly declares in *Envoy*’s first issue how his initial awe of the Palace and Pearl quickly subsided with the realization that ‘All were looking for artistic kudos, for creative erections and the result was frustration all round’.<sup>183</sup>

Indeed, the symbolic association of the public house with artistic frustration, representing a noxious and ultimately entrapping social arena drawing from its regulars ‘everything that was loud, journalistic and untrue’, figured largely in Kavanagh’s poetry of this time.<sup>184</sup> ‘Jungle’, published in *The Irish Times* in 1948, presents a brief though particularly intense expression of this attitude, dramatically transforming the poet’s daily journey along Pembroke Road and Baggot Street into a hellish ordeal whereby the intimately known urban village space is ‘defamiliarised into a primitive terrain inhabited by predatory beasts and partially evolved humans’.<sup>185</sup> Anticipating the narrative device of ‘Adventure in the Bohemian Jungle’, Kavanagh, as Quinn notes, is fancifully cast as ‘an innocent abroad in a dangerous world’, making his way in ‘terror’ through the tree lined streets that suddenly take on the form of a lurid and enclosing jungle canopy.<sup>186</sup> As he walks from Pembroke Road

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<sup>182</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Diary: Being some Reflections on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Irish Literature’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), 86-90 (p. 88).

<sup>183</sup> Kavanagh, ‘Diary: Being some Reflections on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Irish Literature’, p. 88.

<sup>184</sup> Kavanagh, ‘Self-Portrait’, in *Patrick Kavanagh, A Poet’s Country: Selected Prose*, ed. by Antoinette Quinn (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2003), pp. 305-316 (p. 309).

<sup>185</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born Again Romantic*, p. 294.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*; Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Jungle’, *Irish Times*, 25 September 1948, p. 6.



into the city centre, the poet is threatened on all sides by a series of abstracted bestial characters, from the ‘lions of Frustration’ whose viciousness suggest an embittered and cynical artistic milieu to the zealously conservative ‘natives pulling the jungle | Grass of Convention’ over the city’s public art works. A feverish poetic pitch characterizes the three sextains, with their loose iambic rhythm propelled by a succession of exaggerated verbal movements: the poet ‘dragged’ himself in terror, the natives ‘pulling’ the jungle grass before they ‘dived’ out of sight in the final stanza; combining with the poem’s intense phonetic charge that resounds with the ‘roar’ of the lions and the screeching of the natives. The menacing sense of enveloping darkness, symbolically equated with the loss of ‘Reason’ and subsequent descent into madness, culminates in the ‘jungle night’ of the final stanza and the metaphoric dissolution of the natives into the ‘depths of blackest porter’:

They screeched on Baggot Street Bridge  
Then dived out of my sight  
Into the depths of blackest porter;  
Till half-past ten of the jungle night  
The bubbles came up with toxic smell  
From Frustration’s holy well.

This bleak association of the public house at closing time with ‘Frustration’s holy well’ was sustained in *Envoy* through the sonnet sequence published in lieu of Kavanagh’s customary ‘Diary’ prose in the February 1951 issue. Harnessing the dramatized register of ‘Jungle’, the five sonnets were grandly titled ‘A Sonnet Sequence for the Defeated’, opens amidst an enervated and despondently envisaged literati with the lines ‘Always in pubs I meet them, the defeated | With a long sweep of the face crying’.<sup>187</sup> Across the opening two sonnets the bestial imagery of ‘Jungle’ once again abounds, with the pub satirized as a ‘trough’ in this ‘pig-sty life’ and its denizens grotesquely characterized as ‘hogs’ and ‘sows’.<sup>188</sup> The concluding sonnet, however, opens with more clarity in its critique, specifically exposing the

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<sup>187</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘A Sonnet Sequence for the Defeated’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 15 (February 1951), 13-15 (p. 13).

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

glorified market image of the public house to reveal instead the realities of a socio-cultural environment degraded by exploitative commercial influences, whereby meaningful artistic discourse has been reduced to

A phrase made up to crown a pint of beer,  
A paragraph for a gossipy columnist,  
A group of idle men and women or  
Anything temporary, sensationalist –  
Shakespeare and Blake, where are they now, or Keats?  
Drink up your drink, get yourself a job ...  
O God, I cried, these treats are not the treats  
That Heaven offers in the Golden Cup  
And I heard the demon's terrifying yell:  
There is no place as perfect as our hell.<sup>189</sup>

In such instances Kavanagh's *Envoy* poetry exposes the culturally damaging effects of the commodification of Dublin's 'literary pub' culture and the expanding commercial market for the memorable anecdote and entertaining sound bite, eschewing substantial critical recognition and analysis for the superficial entertainment of the 'sensationalist' comment transcribed and disseminated for mass consumption by the 'gossipy columnist'.

The fundamental irony undercutting the force of Kavanagh's critique, however, is the extent to which the formal qualities of the prose and verse of his 'Diary' series are themselves drawn from and imbued by the performative culture they ostensibly disavow. So that, in general, the series paradoxically appealed to the market audience explicitly disparaged in 'A Sonnet Sequence for the Defeated' – to the extent that it can actually be said to represent *Envoy's* most vivid instance of the advertised 'wit and talk' in its promotional circulars. It is, for example, the boisterous social atmosphere of the public house that is most immediately summoned by the rhythm and tone of Kavanagh's 'Diary' prose voice, which Kit Fryatt notes is 'characteristically jumpy and declamatory, its single-sentence paragraphs offering a close

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

parallel to [his] spoken manner'.<sup>190</sup> For critic Hubert Butler, meanwhile, assessing the significance of *Envoy* shortly after its closure, the 'Diary' was 'meant for speech, not print', leading to a 'chaotic' narrative structure prone to regular and abrupt changes in point of focus and intent.<sup>191</sup> This is evident from the first 'Diary' which over the brief course of five pages hits out at a bewildering array of targets including the Abbey Theatre, Radio Éireann, writer Frank O'Connor, poet Austin Clarke, the Palace and Pearl Bars and their associated literary coteries, Government Minister for External Affairs Seán MacBride, painter Jack Butler Yeats, and, in conclusion, characterizing a generalized Irish literary milieu as 'the enemies or the fools of art'.<sup>192</sup> The nature of these attacks, typically favouring the short and memorably acerbic outburst over the more rigorous or penetrating argument, cultivate an entertaining narrative style that regularly relies for its culminating moments on the 'phrase made up to crown a pint of beer' that Kavanagh himself disparaged of his literary companions. So that his considerable dismissal of 'a standard of ethics among newspapers' in *Envoy*'s second issue is primarily backed up by the vividly comic image: 'A group of newspapers accusing one another thus are like a group of fag-puffing ladies-in-waiting on O'Connell Street at 1 a.m. moralising'.<sup>193</sup> In many ways, this prose voice anticipates Kavanagh's later short-lived independently published journal, *Kavanagh's Weekly*, which as Gerry Smyth observes was characterized by a 'rambling, anecdotal, impulsive and occasional' style that was ultimately more resonant of 'a pub monologue than a reasoned textual response', with a single argument rarely sustained over the course of a whole article.<sup>194</sup>

It was away from the rude environment of the public house that Kavanagh generally associated with creative wellbeing and productivity, the attainment of an ideal position of

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<sup>190</sup> Kit Fryatt, 'Patrick Kavanagh's "Potentialities"', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, ed. by Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 181-195 (p. 181).

<sup>191</sup> Hubert Butler, 'Envoy and Mr Kavanagh', *The Bell*, vol. 17, no. 6 (September 1951), 32-41 (p. 41).

<sup>192</sup> Kavanagh, 'Diary: Being some Reflections on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Irish Literature', p. 86.

<sup>193</sup> Kavanagh, 'Diary', p. 82.

<sup>194</sup> Gerry Smyth, 'The Moment of *Kavanagh's Weekly*', in *Patrick Kavanagh*, ed. by Stan Smith (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 55-71 (p. 68). *Kavanagh's Weekly* appeared for thirteen issues between 12 April and 5 July 1952.

distance from where the poet could tap into ‘a calm mood, a still centre, which is the key to whatever heavens of the imagination there are’.<sup>195</sup> However, the inflated register that we have noted in his poems of this period, whereby Pembroke Road is transformed into as a terrifying ‘jungle’ and, in ‘A Sonnet Sequence for the Defeated’, the closing image of the public house is hellishly envisaged, ‘And I heard the demon’s terrifying yell: | There is no place as perfect as our hell’, in fact rise to the feverish pitch and sensationalized rhetoric that the poet elsewhere derogatorily associates with the city’s nightly pub culture and its passing audience attracted by the performance of ‘character’. The ‘hysterical’ tone that Quinn has observed in such poems inevitably far exceeded in intensity the actual failings and crimes of which their targets were accused, and which a more subtle and composed critique would ultimately have better exposed.<sup>196</sup> Discussing the cacophonous quality of the ‘Diary’ in his 1951 article on the magazine, Butler drew from the animalistic imagery favoured by Kavanagh himself in describing the series at its most extreme points as tantamount to ‘a monkey house at feeding time’.<sup>197</sup> Indeed, it was the notorious appeal of the ‘Diary’ series that largely stimulated the widespread publicity and high sales that characterized the public reception of *Envoy*’s early issues. Writing in the days following the launch of the first issue, Ryan excitedly noted that the magazine was proving popular in central Dublin, with ‘bookshops within our immediate area of operations report selling out twice and even three times on the same day’.<sup>198</sup> The novel and entertaining quality of Kavanagh’s attacks on various personalities, locales, and institutions well-known to the average middleclass Dubliner played an important role in this, which as Fryatt notes were ‘relished by many readers more for bracing ill-temper than argument’.<sup>199</sup> For Walker, Kavanagh ultimately embodied in this way the ‘self-contradictory condition of characterhood’ that was more broadly symptomatic of the period, whereby the

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<sup>195</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, *Envoy*, vol. 1 no. 4, (March 1950), p. 84.

<sup>196</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born Again Romantic*, p. 288.

<sup>197</sup> Butler, ‘*Envoy* and Mr Kavanagh’, p. 35.

<sup>198</sup> John Ryan to Seán O’Faoláin, 7 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/5.

<sup>199</sup> Fryatt, ‘Patrick Kavanagh’s “Potentialities”’, p. 182.

poet operated as both ““a holy fool and holy show””, railing ‘vehemently against the notion of Irish character while performing the role’.<sup>200</sup>

As we examined in chapter two with the Victor Waddington Galleries, *Envoy*’s complex involvement in the global commodification of Dublin’s ‘literary pub’ culture situated the magazine at a key transnational intersection of culture and commerce in the post-war city. However, while Ryan’s close working relationship with Waddington was of indisputable benefit to the group of Irish painters who became contracted by the dealer and thereby experienced an unprecedented level of exposure on a national and international stage, the commercial influences we have been examining in relation to the promotion of the ‘character’ and the ‘wit and talk of a Dublin “pub”’ implicated literary figures such as Kavanagh and Brendan Behan in an ultimately more challenging and even personally destructive market dynamic. The ‘fierce beams of Publicity’ that Kavanagh cautioned against in his 1948 interview in *The Bell* would only intensify in the coming years as the audience for the memorable performance of ‘character’ in the lively surrounds of the public house expanded to the level of global fame and notoriety.<sup>201</sup> The condition by which, as he anticipated in ‘A Sonnet Sequence for the Defeated’, serious literary achievement could become diluted through such mass media attention into merely ‘Anything temporary, sensationalist’ would, of course, most dramatically impact upon Behan in the 1950s, with the international theatrical acclaim he initially experienced with *The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage* in 1954 and 1958 becoming gradually superseded by the increasing demand for the drink-fuelled theatricalities of his personality.<sup>202</sup> Drawing parallels between Behan and the echoingly ill-fated celebrity status of cultural figures such as Dylan Thomas and Elvis Presley, Gerald Dawe observes that the Irish playwright’s eventual death in 1964 in his early

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<sup>200</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 132.

<sup>201</sup> The Bellman, ‘Meet Mr. Patrick Kavanagh’, p. 7.

<sup>202</sup> Kavanagh, ‘A Sonnet Sequence for the Defeated’, p. 15.

forties ‘makes its own telling point about the traps that were on offer in the decade of television and mass-produced populist magazines. For like Dylan Thomas who had died as a result of alcoholism before him in 1953 and Elvis Presley, who died after him, Behan had become that modern phenomenon – a *celebrity*’ on the British and American stage.<sup>203</sup> Dawe highlights Behan’s notorious live interview with Malcolm Muggeridge on the BBC ‘Panorama’ programme in 1956 as a moment when the literary ‘character’ blurred into that of the stage-Irishman, with Behan ‘cursing and swearing and obviously the worse for drink’ before a global televised audience.<sup>204</sup> Following the interview, Cronin has recalled that ‘wherever one went from now on, every other newspaper would contain photographs of an ever more bloated Brendan, apparently endlessly performing a clumsy *danse macabre* for an avid audience’, while Kavanagh’s similarly spiralling alcoholism into the 1960s when he took to ‘drinking whiskey with wild abandon’ in McDaid’s saw the older poet become for Cronin ‘to a very great extent, a caricature of himself’.<sup>205</sup>

Indeed, if *Envoy*’s transnational aspirations were founded upon the ideal of the generative expansion of the horizons of Irish cultural discourse and experience, its involvement in the commodification of Dublin’s ‘literary pub’ culture contrastingly reveals the extent to which this international engagement could in fact implicate the magazine in the reinforcement of globalising “‘Irish” stereotypes’ that pandered towards “‘English” prejudice and American expectation’.<sup>206</sup> What Cronin satirised in his 1964 comic novel, *The Life of Riley*, as the ‘Celtic, loquacious, adjectival, metaphorical, alliterative, bouncing, lyrical’ Irish qualities and characters he saw as being targeted by popular BBC radio series’ such as W.R. Rodger’s *Literary Portraits*, catered to the demands of an expanding post-war audience that has been examined particularly in relation to Britain by Clair Wills in her study on the complex relationship between cultural stereotypes and the social experience of post-war Irish

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<sup>203</sup> Dawe, ‘From Borstal Boy and Ginger Man to Kitty Stobling: A Brief Look Back at the 1950s’, p. 172.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>205</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 164; p. 188.

<sup>206</sup> Dawe, ‘From Borstal Boy and Ginger Man to Kitty Stobling: A Brief Look Back at the 1950s’, p. 173.

emigration in these years.<sup>207</sup> Considering the impact of the radio and the sensational mass appeal of Behan's 'Panorama' television interview in the formation and reinforcement of 'stereotypes of Irish ethnicity' for popular consumption, Wills charts the extent of their 'long historical reach' encompassing both the seductions of 'Celtic charm' and the endearing 'caricature of the emotional, truth-telling, spiritual, earthy Irishness', and the sensationalised deviant 'characteristics of drunkenness, belligerence, semi-vagrancy and unreliability which were commonly associated with the Irish from the early nineteenth century'.<sup>208</sup> As with Dawe, Wills furthermore regards the cult of the mid-century Irish literary 'character' as contributing to a broader twentieth-century legacy of mass media entertainers and entertainment:

The 1950s saw the beginning of the long heyday of Irish entertainers on British popular radio and TV, including Eamonn Andrews, and slightly later – Terry Wogan, Dave Allen and Val Doonican, all of whom offered variations on caustic, kitsch and sentimental versions of Irishness. As Brendan Behan discovered after his drunken appearance on Panorama [...] incoherence was no barrier to popularity. What English audiences found themselves warming to in Behan's performance were the same qualities to which they objected in Irish immigrant labourers en masse: drunkenness, irreverence, lack of inhibition (he sang a song from *The Quare Fellow* on air), the refusal to be tamed by the expectations of polite society.<sup>209</sup>

What makes a reading of *Envoy* so compelling within this broader context is the extent to which it situates the magazine and its literary figures at a key early moment when the opportunities and challenges inherent in the commodification of Dublin's 'literary pub' culture and the cult of 'character' were only beginning to materialise and impact upon Irish literary life. In this way, to return to Walker and Welch, we can gain a clearer understanding of *Envoy* as a material 'object situated in an environment of complex contingencies', whereby the magazine's international ambitions and engagement saw it become implicated in these

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<sup>207</sup> Anthony Cronin, *The Life of Riley* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), p. 203.

<sup>208</sup> Clair Wills, *The Best Are Leaving: Emigration and Post-War Irish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. xv; p. 145; p. 152.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

dynamics of ‘power, money, trade, and communications’ shaping the global literary marketplace.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Walker and Welch, ‘Preface’, in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Volume III: The Irish Book in English 1550-1800*, p. vii.



**Part Two**

**Editorial Preoccupations: Poetry and Visual Art**

## Chapter Four

### ‘The main opposition to the neo-Gaelic lobby’: *Envoy* and neo-revivalism

The conditions by which major figures such as Patrick Kavanagh and Brendan Behan became entrapped in degrading and ultimately self-destructive public personas of the ‘Mighty Character’ about town testified to the challenges faced by writers and artists in establishing their proper role, value, and identity in mid-century Irish society.<sup>1</sup> As a young poet in the 1890s, W.B. Yeats had famously recalled being struck by the ‘sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come’, registering the nascent momentum of a movement vitalised by the recovered connection to a heroic national past and the belief in its communalising power to both transform the present and shape the future of a country and its people.<sup>2</sup> What compelled the Irish Literary Revival and what fundamentally distinguished the revolutionary decades of the early twentieth century from the post-independence period, as Patrick Crotty writes, was this galvanising recognition across all aspects of social and cultural life of a ‘country in an inchoate state of possibility, a country moving inexorably, with whatever degree of difficulty, towards a separate, still tantalisingly undefined cultural and political identity’.<sup>3</sup> It was this rapidly developing communal momentum that established Ireland and Irishness for a poet such as Yeats as a ‘site of a species of optimism, so that his ‘reading of the national past and future enabled him to avoid the sense of the irrelevance and diminishing efficacy of the poetic imagination’.<sup>4</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century and in the wake of three sobering decades of national independence, however, Irish writers and artists increasingly found themselves in more

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<sup>1</sup> Dawe, “‘How’s the Poetry Going?’”, in *The Proper Word*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> William Butler Yeats, ‘Ireland After Parnell’, Book II of *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922); *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Crotty, ‘The Irish Renaissance 1890-1940: Poetry in English’, in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature, vol. 2: 1890- 2000*, ed. by Margaret Kelleher and Philip O’Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 50-112 (p. 55).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

uncertain and disparate circumstances, whereby, Walker argues, ‘the empowerment that this shift might once have offered had dissipated. Irishness had again become a source of entrapment rather than liberation [...] with any coherent aesthetic agenda fallen by the way’.<sup>5</sup> As editors of a new Irish literary magazine in December 1949, John Ryan and Valentin Iremonger were acutely aware of these challenges while at the same time determined to establish *Envoy* as the focal point that could instate ‘a new [epoch] of life and promise’ in Irish culture.<sup>6</sup> This second part of the thesis focuses exclusively on their respective primary editorial preoccupations in the magazine and thereby central to critical assessments of *Envoy*’s overall significance: poetry and visual art. *Envoy* was distinguished in mid-century Irish periodical culture by the fact that its two main editors were a practising painter and poet. That Ryan initially designated editorial duties relating to *Envoy*’s selection of short stories to James Hillman, an inexperienced and as yet unpublished creative writer who would ultimately spend much of the early period of the magazine travelling abroad, reflects the comparative lack of editorial purpose in relation to fiction at *Envoy*’s outset.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, Ryan and Iremonger were determined in their respective editorial capacities to establish *Envoy* as a dynamic platform for contemporary art and poetry. Over the course of the following three chapters the thesis examines *Envoy*’s conflict with the cultural nationalist legacies of the Revival period in poetry and visual art and the contested issue of their continuing institutional prominence over practices of cultural production, promotion, and transmission in post-war Irish society. The chapters assess the impact of this conflict on the terms of critical debate and discourse, before considering the extent to which *Envoy*’s transnational aspirations and engagement responded to the restrictive conventions of Irishness inherited by the young writers and artists who gathered around the magazine, and to what point it encouraged the

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<sup>5</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, Iremonger, Hillman, ‘A Foreword to Vol. I. Number I’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ryan outlined in his correspondence to various authors that Hillman ‘makes the decisions on short stories’. John Ryan to Michael Campbell, 21 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

embracement of expanded spheres of cultural influence and the articulation of new aesthetic agendas within and upon which contemporary Irish poets and painters could begin to develop and cohere. Surveying the transitory conditions of mid-twentieth-century Irish literary life as ‘stretched between a declining nationalistic communality, and an historical trajectory that would bring liberal energies and freedoms, but also new and vast difficulties’, Alan Gillis argues that ‘it is almost a given that the imaginative task of Irish writers of the era precluded an aesthetic confrontation with the cultural stasis in which they found themselves. Whatever way one contextualizes it, the historical moment necessitated stylistic renegotiation’.<sup>8</sup> This second part of the thesis considers the significance of *Envoy*’s transnationalism in laying foundations in contemporary Irish poetry and visual art for the development of such a renegotiation into the 1950s and 60s.

### ***Enlisting a poetry editor: Valentin Iremonger***

John Ryan first wrote to Valentin Iremonger while in the preparation stages of *Envoy* in September 1949 enquiring whether he would be interested in contributing any of his poems to the magazine, expressing that ‘I would very much like to have you in this first issue. If the Affairs of State are not crowding all your hours you might send me a poem or two’.<sup>9</sup> The rise of Iremonger’s career in the dynamic environment of the Department of External Affairs in these years was combined with his increasing public prominence as a poet and critic. The early fervent independent publishing activity that saw him work with poet Robert Greacen in producing the inflammatory poetry pamphlet *On the Barricades* and its ambitions to herald a ‘new vitality in Irish writing’ was combined during the war years with their editorial collaboration through the more prestigious London publishing channels of Faber & Faber,

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Gillis, “‘Any Dark Saying’: Louis MacNeice in the Nineteen Fifties’, *Irish University Review*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 105-123 (p. 107; p. 105).

<sup>9</sup> John Ryan to Valentin Iremonger, 2 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

having edited together an anthology of contemporary Irish poetry that was eventually published in 1949.<sup>10</sup> As with *On the Barricades*, the emphasis of *Contemporary Irish Poetry* was on young poets and new poetry. ‘Only the work of living poets has been included, the bias being toward the young and less-well known’, its preface stated, and the anthology featured among its thirty-four contributors a range of emerging voices that would later contribute to *Envoy* including Pearse Hutchinson, Roy McFadden, and Iremonger himself alongside established figures who would subsequently exert a major influence on the magazine such as Louis MacNeice.<sup>11</sup> During the 1940s Iremonger contributed critical and creative material to a range of British and Irish periodicals including *The Irish Times*, *The Listener*, and *The Spectator*, however, it was through his numerous critical essays, reviews, and poems published in *The Bell* where he most comprehensively developed his literary reputation, becoming one of the magazine’s most regular contributors and commentators up until its temporary suspension in 1948. Ryan, by contrast, considered himself ‘an indifferent critic of poetry’ and was keenly aware of his comparable lack of experience in the practicalities of poetry editing or publishing, conceding to Iremonger that ‘As yet I do not know what rate one pays for poetry but if you let me know what is the usual procedure I would be obliged’.<sup>12</sup> Iremonger was at this time considering reviving the recently suspended *Bell* and his warm and encouraging reply to Ryan not only granted the use of his poems but strongly advanced his case for the role of poetry editor in the magazine. ‘I suggest that you should not function without a special Poetry Editor’, he began:

The *Bell* found that they had to have such a being. It has the advantage that it gives the poetry section of the magazine some direction and objective and enables the magazine to lay down a line and to observe some standards. Poetry is a specialised job and I think that the experience of the *BELL* and *HORIZON* would indicate that a special poetry editor should be at your

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<sup>10</sup> Greacen, Williamson, and Iremonger, *On The Barricades* [unpaginated prefatory note printed on the pamphlet’s inside cover].

<sup>11</sup> Robert Greacen and Valentin Iremonger, ‘Preface’, in Robert Greacen and Valentin Iremonger, eds., *Contemporary Irish Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> John Ryan to Lionel Miskin, 25 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4; Ryan to Iremonger, 2 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

elbow. If I can be of assistance to you, don't hesitate to ask me. I require no remuneration for it but I am anxious that, as ENVOY is the remaining hope we have for a decent magazine in Ireland, you should not fall down on the poetry.<sup>13</sup>

He then proceeded to demonstrate his expertise in this department by providing Ryan with a detailed list of the typical payment policies for poetry submissions in British and Irish periodicals, drawing from his by now considerable experience submitting to magazines such as *The Listener*, *The Spectator*, *The Bell*, and *Irish Writing*. 'As you asked for information on payments for poetry the following notes might be of use to you,' he continued:

For poems of mine which the Listener published they paid on a scale which was roughly

£3-3-0 for up to 16 lines

£4-4-0 for up to 24 lines

£5-5-0 for up to 36 lines

This however might be classed as luxury payment. THE BELL when in operation paid (when it paid at all) £1-1-0 per poem or 10/6 for a short poem. Most of the English little mags. pay about the same rates.

If you can afford it, I suggest that the following scale would be quite equitable and would enable you to hold your head up (IRISH WRITING pays more or less on this scale)

£1-1-0 for up to 16 lines

£2-2-0 for up to 28-30 lines

Everything, of course, depends on your finances and on the good will of your contributors and their understanding of your difficulties. I may mention that some poets such as Austin Clarke and Paddy Kavanagh might be considered as deserving a higher 'special' scale.<sup>14</sup>

Ryan was naturally delighted with the enthusiasm of Iremonger's reply, writing 'I am very grateful to you for the interest you have shown in the venture, and can hardly express adequately my thanks for your generous offer to act as our poetry editor', and admitting that 'I, too, felt that was a very real need for this though, I confess, I didn't have the slightest idea of how I was to fulfil it'.<sup>15</sup> He concluded the letter by inviting Iremonger to his Hatch Street apartment to discuss the matter further and it was there that Iremonger was officially offered and duly accepted the position of *Envoy*'s poetry editor, a development that Ryan expressed

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<sup>13</sup> Valentin Iremonger to John Ryan, 10 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> John Ryan to Valentin Iremonger, 12 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

to J.P. Donleavy shortly afterwards ‘has more than any other single factor assured *Envoy* of at least a fighting chance’.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the 1940s, Iremonger’s critical writing was marked by its focus on young emerging poets and the wider socio-economic conditions and contexts governing literary production in Ireland, whereby the aspiration to stimulate a contemporary Irish poetry scene merged with the equal imperative of improving the material conditions by which such a scene could develop and flourish. Writing in 1947, for example, Iremonger returned to an issue that he had ‘referred to in these pages again and again’, namely, the limited domestic publishing opportunities available to Irish poets.<sup>17</sup> Contrasting the dynamism of independent British publishers such as the Grey Walls Press who have developed their ‘flourishing businesses mainly on the work of young poets’ against what he claimed to be the distinct ‘lack of interest on the part of our publishers’, Iremonger diagnosed a depressed post-war scene that was fundamentally stifled by ‘the want of a centralising force among Irish poets’:

To-day, Irish poets are scattered, they work without reference to each other. Schools of poetry are not good things but the contacts and interests that they arouse can redound to the advantage of the poetry. The literary editors of the periodicals and the papers here must share also the blame for this lack of a centralising force because although they extended their pages to a small extent to the poets, they did not extend their patronage. Indeed, the hostile note is always there in their relationship with the poets.<sup>18</sup>

It was this sensitivity toward the material contexts of literary production that in turn determined the central critical conflict of *Envoy*’s poetry section, whereby Iremonger was joined by equally vociferous critics in the magazine such as Kavanagh and Anthony Cronin in the interrogation of the continuing institutional privileging of the cultural nationalist legacy of the Revival in Irish literary discourse. That the Literary Revival was ‘still seen’, as John Goodby observes, ‘in Ireland and abroad, as constituting the only legitimate Irish poetic tradition’ into the post-war years was not only a cause of the enormous reputations of major

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<sup>16</sup> John Ryan to James Patrick Donleavy, 7 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

<sup>17</sup> Valentin Iremonger, ‘Poets and their Publishers’, *The Bell*, vol. xiv, no. 1 (April 1947), 78-81 (p. 78).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

figures such as Yeats, but also of its singular promotion through official channels at the expense of a more diverse or pluralistic recognition of the field of contemporary Irish poetry.<sup>19</sup> As we will examine in this chapter, the dissatisfaction towards this situation across the critical writing that comprised *Envoy*'s poetry section became centralised on the privileged association between neo-revivalist poets and poetics and the national broadcaster Radio Éireann.

For John Montague, Iremonger significantly represented 'the main opposition to the neo-Gaelic lobby' in these years.<sup>20</sup> *Envoy*'s critical agenda in poetry became concentrated against those living Irish poets of prominence who had largely built their reputations upon and remained staunchly committed to core aesthetic and ideological values inherited from the Revival, and, most importantly, who were perceived to have been elevated to and secured in positions of public authority in Irish literary life through the cultural nationalist State apparatus and its institutions such as Radio Éireann. The immediate material tensions experienced within the close confines and limited opportunities of literary Dublin underpinned the conflict between various literary groupings and are, once again, essential to understanding the inflamed terms that typically characterised literary debate of the period and the challenges faced by a magazine such as *Envoy* in forming a coherent and penetrating anti-establishment voice. While *Envoy*'s critical writing bore the strains of the real personal sense of victimisation and marginalisation experienced by its writers, the magazine's challenging of neo-revivalist poetics and its supporting institutional frameworks nonetheless saw it play a key role in what Walker has observed as the '[struggle] away from essential or at least categorically definable notions of Irish literary identity within the wider critical discourse of the time', with the poets and critics who comprised its poetry section attempting to dismantle

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<sup>19</sup> John Goodby, *Irish Poetry since 1950: From stillness into history* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> John Montague, 'The Impact of International Modern Poetry on Irish Writing', in John Montague, *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays*, ed. by Antoinette Quinn (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989), pp. 208-220 (p. 217).



the obligation to adhere to and create a national identity through the display of a connection with place, the embodiment of national character, the performance of a national style, or the fashioning of myths of historical continuity. On a number of fronts, they were re-examining the Irish poet's relationship to place, history, and style.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Occupying a 'central authorial location': Neo-revivalism and Radio Éireann***

In the contracted market conditions that had largely relegated Irish poetry publishing by the 1940s to an 'inconspicuous and private enterprise', the contrastingly expanding literary possibilities of the radio provided a powerful alternative platform by which poets could retain a position of influence in mid-century Irish society.<sup>22</sup> The decade witnessed significant developments in Radio Éireann that would gradually begin to elevate the national service to what Brian O'Neill observes as a 'higher cultural ground' in the post-war period, with increased investment, improving transmission facilities, and a new more concerted focus on programme content, arrangement, and production 'succeeding not only in professionalizing the service but also extending the range of programmes that could be offered'.<sup>23</sup> Literature and the arts particularly benefited from this increasing professionalism, with the creation of new programmes devoted to poetry, fiction, and drama signalling the potential of the radio 'to serve as a dynamic agent of cultural transmission, specifically of literary discourse'.<sup>24</sup> For the small group of literary men who assumed positions as directors, writers, and broadcasters with Radio Éireann during this time, the service was key to establishing and consolidating their influence as public literary figures, providing a means by which, Eileen Morgan-Zayachek writes, they could 'occupy a central authorial location' in

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<sup>21</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, pp. 135-136; p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> John McAuliffe, 'Disturbing Irish Poetry: Kinsella and Clarke, 1951-1962', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, pp. 225-239, (p. 226).

<sup>23</sup> Brian O'Neill, 'Lifting the veil': the arts, broadcasting and Irish society', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 22, no. 6 (2000), 763-785, (p. 776).

<sup>24</sup> Eileen Morgan-Zayachek, 'Frank O'Connor and the Literary Development of Radio Éireann', *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Autumn 2009), 57-73 (pp. 53-54).

Irish cultural discourse to a far greater extent than any individual poetry publication or literary work could hope to effect.<sup>25</sup> However, while the increasing prominence afforded to literature in Radio Éireann was itself a welcome and badly needed development in a period more generally characterised by the severely limited interest and involvement of the State in the arts, what brought the radio service and its associated literary milieu into such conflict with *Envoy* was the claim that this ‘central authorial location’ had become monopolised by an institutionalised cultural nationalism to the exclusion of a more dynamic and pluralist representation of the field of contemporary Irish poetry.

Luke Gibbons has identified the key institutional role played by Radio Éireann in the identity formation of the newly independent Irish State, observing that ‘since the opening of 2RN, the first radio service, in 1926, the statutory legislation governing broadcasting had stressed the importance of maintaining and consolidating national identity’.<sup>26</sup> The privileging of Irish-language concerns, traditional music, and Gaelic games formed in this way part of an almost ‘ritualistic incantation of the need to make programmes which would reflect traditional Irish values, and promote a deeper intrinsic value of Irish language, history and tradition’.<sup>27</sup> Radio Éireann’s overriding cultural nationalist agenda inevitably dictated the appointment of the authors, poets, and critics who would preside over the expanding literary concerns of the service into the 1940s, so that its most prominent literary figures were those who had largely built their reputations upon and remained committed to core nationalist aesthetic and ideological values inherited from the Revival. Robert Farren, who adopted the Irish-language name Roibeárd Ó Faracháin in public literary life, was appointed to the newly created position of Talks Officer in 1939 and over the following decade would become a hugely influential literary presence at the station, largely determining the scope and content of its poetry, fiction, and theatre programmes. A poet, critic, and verse-dramatist, Farren’s

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

influential 1948 study *The Course of Irish Verse in English* affirmed the central importance of ‘the making of a national poetry’ based on the translation into English of traditional Irish-language verse techniques within the broader context of a venerated Gaelic culture.<sup>28</sup>

Summoning the ethnicist rhetoric that had underpinned the isolationist cultural and economic programme of de Valera’s Fianna Fáil government, Farren asserted the necessity of the ‘growth of Irishness, in separate existence from English poetry, of the poetry that was and is composed in Ireland or by Irishmen’.<sup>29</sup>

Farren reserved his highest praise in *The Course of Irish Verse in English* for the two poets he had secured prominent broadcasting positions at Radio Éireann at the beginning of the decade, F. R. Higgins and Austin Clarke, as exemplary ‘translators into English of Gaelic poetry’.<sup>30</sup> While Higgins’ poetic career was cut short by his sudden death of a heart attack in 1941, Clarke’s association with the national broadcasting service would last into the 1960s. The capacity of the radio to elevate the significance and extend the audience of the poet beyond the possible reach of the published volume was nowhere more evident than with Clarke at this time. As Alan Gillis observes, the 1940s were representative of a broader mid-century ‘transitory stage’ in his poetic career from ‘would-be bard to satirist’, whereby the early twentieth-century acclaim he experienced with his first poetry publications in the heady revivalist company of figures such as Thomas MacDonagh, Yeats, and George Russell gradually subsided into the 1930s as he found it increasingly difficult to secure publishing outlets in Dublin and London.<sup>31</sup> The privately printed 1938 volume *Night and Morning* was to be Clarke’s last until the mid-1950s when his poetic underwent an invigorating departure along new modernising satirical lines.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the 1940s, however, he maintained a

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Farren, *The Course of Irish Verse in English* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s*, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Clarke’s return to poetry publishing in 1955 with the volume *Ancient Lights* announced what John McAuliffe has described as a ‘major shift’ in his poetic, incorporating to a more concerted extent than before the subversive and jarring combination of the traditional Gaelic metrical and sound patterns for which he was most popularly associated with hard-hitting contemporary socio-political content and critique. In this way, as McAuliffe writes,

‘central authorial location’ in Irish cultural discourse both with his radio work and more sporadic print reviewing and critical writing. It was in Clarke’s weekly poetry programme where he maintained the continuing efficacy of neo-revivalist values and practices. His feature on ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry’ in May 1950, the transcript of which has survived in the RTÉ Radio archive held at University College Dublin, is illustrative of the key formal and ideological values associated with neo-revivalism and how they not only aligned with the broader cultural nationalist ethos of Radio Éireann but moreover found new opportunities of expression through the radio medium itself.

Clarke opened ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry’ by drawing from his personal experiences of the Literary Revival and the revolutionary ferment of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Affirming the empowering force of what Gregory Castle has termed the ‘ethnographic imagination’ underpinning Irish literary activity during this time, he describes how the native imaginative resources of Ireland’s mythic and folkloric heritage provided narratives and forms that could encompass a period of seismic political and cultural upheaval on both the national and international stage:<sup>33</sup>

The First World War and the Rebellion gave for a time a deeper significance to mythology. Those ancient stories seemed to adumbrate the forces of violence and destruction stirring in the human race itself. To some of us who were learning to write at that time it seemed that only in epic poetry could we symbolise remotely those primitive and terrible forces of existence.<sup>34</sup>

Clarke’s own fervent early mining of heroic mythological material resulted in the epic narrative poems of his first publications, with *The Vengeance of Fionn* (1917) recounting in

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‘Clarke was drawing on Irish forms to describe contemporary urban life, thereby reversing the earlier work’s use of traditional forms to describe traditional Irish material. Clarke now grounded the best of the poems’ epiphanies in complex, social settings which framed and ironized them.’ John McAuliffe, ‘Disturbing Irish Poetry: Kinsella and Clarke, 1951-1962’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, pp. 225-239 (p. 229; p. 231).

<sup>33</sup> Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Austin Clarke, ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry, IV. The Lost Generation’, 8 May 1950, Dublin, University College Dublin, Special Collections, RTÉ Radio Scripts, Scripts of Radio Talks and Features in English, Austin Clarke 3.30.1 Scripts P260/330, pp. 1-9 (p. 5).

blank verse the Fenian Cycle legend of the pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne by the famed leader of the Fianna, Fionn mac Cumhaill, who vows in a rage to ‘hunt them day and night from Dowth | to Errigal’s black boulders’ following the elopement of his betrothed with the warrior Diarmuid.<sup>35</sup>

What most importantly distinguished Clarke’s immersion in Irish-language and folkloric material and what subsequently shaped the course of neo-revivalism into the post-independence period, as he proceeds to emphasise to his listeners, was his ‘increasing awareness of Gaelic literature and its manifold forms’ and the recognition of the innovative aesthetic possibilities offered by an Irish-language influenced poetry in English.<sup>36</sup> Clarke outlines how his developing ambition to write poetry in English that could reflect the Irish-language poetic tradition and thus radically reorient it along native, nationalist lines was stimulated by the writings of key early revivalist figures such as William Larminie who, he continues, ‘set down in the early ’nineties, that Gaelic assonance could be used in English to modulate rhyme’. Larminie was similarly lauded in Farren’s study as ‘a man of exceptional quality’ through his ‘advocacy of assonance as a metrical device’ in the landmark 1894 essay ‘The Development of English Metres’.<sup>37</sup> Here Larminie primarily advanced the role of assonance in enriching and revitalising the ‘worn out’ conventions of English rhyme, asserting the superiority of the Gaelic practice of internal assonantal patterning whereby ‘the assonances are freely used in the interior of the verse’ in creating a poetry of unrivalled harmonic and metrical complexity.<sup>38</sup> Larminie distinguished the bardic culture of Gaelic Ireland above all for its sensitivity to and harnessing of the musical qualities of poetry, so that ‘old Gaelic verse was, in sound at least, very complex and very beautiful’ and urged Irish poets to translate these techniques into English-language versification and thereby achieve

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<sup>35</sup> Austin Clarke, *The Vengeance of Fionn* (1917), in *Collected Poems*, ed. by R. Dardis Clarke, intro. by Christopher Ricks (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2008), p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Clarke, ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry, IV. The Lost Generation’, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Farren, *The Course of Irish Verse in English*, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> William Larminie, ‘The Development of English Metres’, *The Contemporary Review*, vol. 66 (November 1894), 717-736 (p. 734).

‘both greater freedom and finer sound in quantity sweetened by assonance, in assonance strengthened by quantity’.<sup>39</sup>

Larminie’s aesthetic theories formed part of a broader developing revivalist poetic over the following decades that as Harry White observes was distinguished by the extent to which its ‘musical aspirations’ were conceived as ‘expressive of the integrity and imaginative purity of Gaelic culture’.<sup>40</sup> The translation of Irish-language rhyming and metrical patterns into English was assimilated into the broader nationalist cultivation of a distinctive ‘Irish Mode’, where the striving for an enriched and more rhythmically complex musicality in verse was underpinned by this idealised ethnicist vision and the broader communalising capacity of song to establish, as the poet and Easter 1916 rebel leader Thomas MacDonagh famously stated, a literature that was ‘by, of, to and for the Irish people’.<sup>41</sup> MacDonagh was a formative influence on Clarke as a student at UCD and he emphasises in ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry’ the shaping influence of Irish-language derived sound and metrical patterns on his developing poetic and that of his neo-revivalist contemporaries such as Higgins and Farren into the 1920s and 30s, stating that ‘[we] set ourselves, therefore, to learn this art and, by subtle deviations, escape the tyranny of conventional and expected rhyming’, aiming ultimately ‘to suggest in English something of the complex internal assonantal pattern on which Gaelic prosody is based’.<sup>42</sup>

Radio represented a powerful modern medium by which these values could be preserved, promoted, and developed into the mid-century, with the primacy of sound and the speaking voice foregrounding the qualities of ‘language, music, orality, voice, performer, and audience’ that encompassed ‘the idea of song’ as ‘a central means through which Irish poets

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 732.

<sup>40</sup> Harry White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas MacDonagh, ‘Preface’, *Literature in Ireland: Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1916), pp. vii-ix (p. viii).

<sup>42</sup> Clarke, ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry, IV. The Lost Generation’, p. 6.

and critics [...] reflected on poetry's nature and purpose'.<sup>43</sup> The 'central authorial location' in Irish cultural life that the radio provided its broadcasters, moreover, invested the poet with a new public status and significance before a mass listening audience in a way that summoned the revered image of the bard in Gaelic culture. As Emily C. Bloom writes, 'the bardic model of public poetry on air captured the imagination of broadcasters, writers, and theorists well into the post-war period', with its viewed potential to 'resurrect a tradition of oral poetry' especially appealing to Irish writers 'who were steeped in the folklore and poetry popularized earlier in the century by the Irish Literary Revival'.<sup>44</sup> Clarke firmly believed in the potential of radio to cultivate a national audience for poetry founded upon the revivalist reverence for song and the belief that through music, orality, and voice the poet could connect to and express the folkways of Gaelic culture. As early as 1937 he called for a more professional and disciplined approach to radio verse-speaking than he claimed was evident in both Irish and British broadcasting. 'Unfortunately, the fact that there is a correct method of verse-speaking has not been generally accepted by broadcasting authorities', he argued, 'Performances waver between artificial self-consciousness and soulfulness, mournfulness and the declamatory method of the professional actor'.<sup>45</sup> In a concerted effort to raise standards he founded together with Farren the Dublin Verse-Speaking Society in 1939, which utilised the radio platform provided by Clarke's weekly broadcast by allocating a regular twelve-minute segment dedicated solely to the reading of poetry and verse-drama. 'Poetry is primarily an oral art, though many poets have forgotten this fact', Clarke emphasised, 'In reading poetry, we experience vicariously by means of the inner ear the pattern of movement and word music. To reproduce these effects aloud is itself an art'.<sup>46</sup> A later article on 'Verse-Speaking' in *The Bell* in 1947 reaffirmed these principles and defended Clarke's privileging of revivalist

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<sup>43</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931-1968*, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Austin Clarke, 'Verse-Speaking and Verse Drama', *The Dublin Magazine*, vol. XII (October-December), repr. in *Selected Plays of Austin Clarke*, ed. by Mary Shine Thompson (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smyth, 2005), pp. 307-316 (p. 310).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

poetics in his radio programmes. ‘When reading a poem in print we can hear the word-music with our inner ear, but the fact that we cannot reproduce the same effect with the voice at once means merely that verse-speaking implies skill’, he asserted, before stating that ‘at a time when poetry is neglected here and we have few publishers of our own, broadcasting enables us to spread an interest in poetry and particularly to draw attention to the work of the Irish literary revival’.<sup>47</sup>

In ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry’, Clarke demonstrated the correct vocalisation of ‘the pattern of movement and word music’ fundamental to neo-revivalist poetics through the recitation of the poem ‘Aisling’ from his 1929 collection *Pilgrimage and Other Poems*. ‘Aisling’ assumes in six eight-line stanzas of loose iambic pentameter the classic Gaelic narrative of the vision poem where Ireland appears to the poet in the guise of a beautiful woman. Set in the epic mountainous region of the Dingle Peninsula, ‘At morning from the coldness of Mount Brandon’, the wandering poet chances upon ‘a woman airing in the sun’ whose transcendent beauty is described in the second stanza:

Coil of her hair, in cluster and ringlet,  
Had brightened round her forehead and those curls –  
Closer than she could bind them on a finger –  
Were changing gleam and glitter. O she turned  
So gracefully aside, I thought her clothes  
Were flame and shadow while she slowly walked,  
Or that each breast was proud because it rode  
The cold air as the wave stayed by the swan.<sup>48</sup>

Daniel Corkery in his hugely influential nationalist study of Gaelic poetry *The Hidden Ireland* privileged the ‘aisling’ as a genre ‘that called for a richer and richer music’ from its practicing poets, ‘and this it was given lavishly, sumptuously, yet without vulgarity’, so that to read the great vision poems of the period is to feel that ‘a beautiful thing is being wrought out before

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<sup>47</sup> Austin Clarke, ‘Verse Speaking’, *The Bell*, vol. 15, no. 3 (December 1947), repr. in *Selected Plays of Austin Clarke*, pp. 317-320 (pp. 319-320).

<sup>48</sup> Clarke, ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry, IV. The Lost Generation’, p. 6.



our eyes, and it is through beauty of it we are moved, or not at all'.<sup>49</sup> Clarke's praising of Corkery along with Larminie in his poetry programme for '[applying] for the first time the standards of literary criticism to Gaelic and revealing the imaginative poetry of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' governs his recital of the second stanza of 'Aisling', which achieves the 'richer music' essential to Corkery's elevation of the genre through its complex assonantal patterning.<sup>50</sup> Here Clarke escapes what he extravagantly termed 'the tyranny of conventional and expected rhyming' by forgoing a basic end-rhyme scheme in favour of a more subtle and shifting internal echo chamber of vowel sounds emblematic of the 'Irish Mode'.

The idealised beauty of the woman with her intricately woven hair finds its sonic correlative in the stanza's meticulously wrought assonance, with the vowel sounds at the end of each line typically joined by a corresponding or more subtly reoriented harmony in the middle of the next: so that the short 'i' and 'e' sounds in 'ringlet' at the end of line 1 open out into the long vowels of 'brightened' in line 2; while 'finger' at the end of line 3 finds its vowel harmony in 'glitter' in the middle of line 4. The long 'o' of 'clothes' at the end of line 5, meanwhile, initiates the shifting accenting of the vowel in line 6 from the iambic to the trochaic with 'shadow' and 'slowly'. Clarke's acute sensitivity to such minute tonal inflections and their internal rhythmic effect over the stanza was detailed in the supplementary note on poetic technique included at the end of his 1936 *Collected Poems*. Here he outlined how in Gaelic assonance 'the tonic word at the end of the line is supported by an assonance in the middle of the next line' and that the creation of 'internal patterns of assonance in English [...] changes the pivotal movement of the lyric stanza'.<sup>51</sup> This movement is exemplified in the shifting tonal stress across two lines with 'clothes', 'shadow',

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<sup>49</sup> Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1925), p. 126; p. 133.

<sup>50</sup> Clarke, 'Fifty Years of Irish Poetry, IV. The Lost Generation', p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Austin Clarke, 'Notes', in *The Collected Poems of Austin Clarke* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), pp. 309-319 (p. 309).

and ‘slowly’. Moreover, the successive long ‘o’ sounds find their mimetic correlative in line 6 in the slow walk of the woman, subduing as they do the pace of the stanza from the initially clipped vowelled ‘glitter’ of the rapidly changing light over her hair. These effects are more broadly overlaid by the alternating vowel harmonies at the end of each line in the stanza: ‘ringlet’ / ‘finger’ (line 1 and 3); ‘curls’ / ‘turned’ (line 2 and 4); ‘clothes’ / ‘rode’ (line 5 and 7); ‘walked’ / ‘swan’ (line 6 and 8); and in the internal alliteration and consonance of ‘c’ ‘l’ and ‘g’ in ‘coil’ / ‘cluster’ / ‘curl’ / ‘closer’ and ‘gleam’ / ‘glitter’ / ‘gracefully’. As Goodby has observed more generally of the elaborate sonic texturing central to Clarke’s application of the ‘Irish Mode’, in such poems ‘the aim – to fruitfully disrupt readers used to the standard rhyme of English tradition – is achieved musically and with only the mildest complication of syntax’.<sup>52</sup>

Clarke closed ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry’ with the expressed belief in the continuing significance of folkloric and religious models and inherited Gaelic forms to contemporary Irish poetry, asserting that ‘into them passed much of the bardic imagination and its occidental extravagance. In exploring through the poetry of those ages we discover, though our minds must remain in the twentieth century, something of the sources of our own imaginative being’.<sup>53</sup> More contentiously, however, he then prescribed such practices as an essential native safeguard against deficient modern international influences, affirming the cultivation of an ‘Irish Mode’ in poetry as representative of ‘an instinctive attempt to protect our poetry in a formative period from the loose careless standards which were coming into force elsewhere’. For Patrick Crotty, ‘[no mid-century Irish poet] was more committed to the idea of an explicitly Irish poetic than Austin Clarke’, and what most provoked the criticism of his younger contemporaries who became associated with *Envoy* was the extent to which the institutionally backed promotion of neo-revivalism maintained the primacy of this isolationist

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<sup>52</sup> John Goodby, ‘From Irish mode to modernisation: The Poetry of Austin Clarke’, *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 21-41 (pp. 25-26).

<sup>53</sup> Clarke, ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry, IV. The Lost Generation’, p. 8.

standpoint in Irish literary discourse.<sup>54</sup> This attitude was itself tacitly reflected in the extent to which a radio programme entitled ‘Fifty Years of Irish Poetry’ could so exclusively focus on the legacy of the Revival and its neo-revivalist inheritors. Indeed, Clarke’s literary criticism of the 1940s was framed by a persistent separatist rhetoric that sought to distinguish and define Irish poetry in essentialising racial terms from external and, above all, British influences. Anticipating Farren’s privileging of the ‘growth of Irishness, in separate existence from English poetry, of the poetry that was and is composed in Ireland or by Irishmen’ in *The Course of Irish Verse in English*, Clarke had for example asserted in 1946 that ‘Irish poetry has its own problems, and they are not those of contemporary England’, stressing that ‘We have to move on solely, inch by inch, carrying our merry and doleful past with us’.<sup>55</sup> For Alan Gillis, it was in the accumulation of such published criticism and broadcasted scripts that Clarke ‘as he set about diagnosing Irish literature, came to epitomise the imaginative insularity and aesthetic stagnation that had so many of his peers streaming out of Dublin for asylum’, promoting an ‘Irish Mode’ that was ‘ultimately a dated attempt to fabricate an exclusive literary identity that mirrored the State’s gradual descent into cultural isolationism’.<sup>56</sup>

***The challenges of anti-establishment dissent: Envoy in the ‘pernicious atmosphere of intimately acquainted Dublin’***

The institutional privileging of neo-revivalist poetics in post-war Irish society provided a crucial framing context for *Envoy*’s poetry section, with Clarke’s radio broadcasts joining a cluster of associated official print publications that provoked the anti-establishment thrust of its critical content and shaped the dissenting aesthetic aspirations of its published

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<sup>54</sup> Crotty, ‘The Irish Renaissance 1890-1940: Poetry in English’, p. 103.

<sup>55</sup> Austin Clarke ‘Poetry in Ireland To-Day’, *The Bell* (1946), in *Reviews and Essays of Austin Clarke*, ed. by Gregory A. Schirmer (Gerrard’s Cross: Colin Smythe, 1995), pp. 105-110 (p. 108).

<sup>56</sup> Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s*, p. 80; p. 82.

poetry. An awareness of the extent to which questions of aesthetics were inextricably bound up in this way with the institutional contexts governing literary production and transmission importantly accounts for the inflamed nature much of the critical writing on the state of contemporary Irish poetry in the magazine. Iremonger's editorial for the August 1950 issue was entitled 'Crabbed Age and Youth' and dramatically pitched *Envoy* in these terms as the voice of an emergent younger generation of Irish poets hitherto marginalised from official literary discourse.<sup>57</sup> Written following Clarke's 'Fifty Years of Irish Poetry', the editorial responds directly to the poet's radio broadcasts while also, as is revealed from Iremonger's private correspondence at this time, registering the frustration at the limited focus and largely dismissive attitude toward young Irish poets in Clarke's forthcoming State commissioned pamphlet *Poetry in Modern Ireland*. In what was in no small part a testament to his cultural prominence as radio broadcaster throughout the 1940s, Clarke was commissioned by the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland to write the pamphlet as part of an ambitious series aiming to stimulate an international market for Irish culture and his official literary credentials were accordingly highlighted in the pamphlet's opening note on the author 'as a distinguished poet in the generation that succeeded Yeats [and] a pioneer of verse speaking in the Irish theatre and on Radio Éireann'.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the purportedly expansive scope of the series 'to give a broad, vivid and informed survey of Irish life and culture, past and present', Clarke's pamphlet echoes his 'Fifty Years of Irish Poetry' broadcast in the selectivity of its focus on 'the legendary days' of the Revival and its post-independence legacy.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, while his account of the revivalist ferment of the first decades of the twentieth century is animated by vivid personal reminiscence, such as his teaching at UCD by Douglas Hyde who 'declaimed for us in class' the tenets of Gaelic poetry while 'excitedly jumping from the rostrum step to the floor and

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<sup>57</sup> Valentin Iremonger, 'Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 9 (August 1950), 5-7.

<sup>58</sup> Publisher's note on the series and author in Austin Clarke, *Poetry in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Colm O'Lochlainn, 1951), [unpaginated].

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

back again', Clarke's far briefer engagement with the younger generation of Irish poets emerging in the 1940s is contrastingly curbed by a marked sense of detachment.<sup>60</sup> The pamphlet's latter section dealing with contemporary Irish poetry is broadly framed as 'a struggle between separate culture and international standardisation' – of which Clarke's sympathies and interest clearly lie with the former – with the younger poets such as Iremonger and Robert Greacen attempting to work outside of a recognisably neo-revivalist tradition merely categorised in generalised terms as 'modernistic' with no accompanying analysis of their poetry.<sup>61</sup> The cursory, disengaged nature of Clarke's writing here is epitomised in the mere two-line reference given to Iremonger and Greacen's recently published anthology *Contemporary Irish Verse*, which again eschews any actual analysis of the featured poems for a passing general statement that the anthology 'shows how strong has been the influence of modernism here during the last decade or so', followed by the basic critical observation that 'the book contains no preface and, as our younger writers have not issued any statement of their aims, it is difficult to estimate completely their intentions'.<sup>62</sup> *Poetry in Modern Ireland* would not be published until 1951, however, as is revealed from a letter that has survived in Clarke's papers held at the National Library of Ireland, Iremonger had come across the 'unamended text' of the pamphlet in the Department of Foreign Affairs and then proceeded 'to look up the portion of it dealing with the poets of my generation'.<sup>63</sup> As Iremonger then outlines, it was his dissatisfaction at the lack of representation of younger Irish poets in such a widely disseminated official publication combined with the consistent promotion of neo-revivalist poetics in Clarke's 'recent radio talks on Twentieth-century poetry' that provoked the barbed tone of his August *Envoy* editorial, stating that 'It is very discouraging to have gone to a lot of trouble, financial and otherwise, to provide a platform

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Valentin Iremonger to Austin Clarke, 10 August 1950, Dublin, National Library of Ireland, Manuscript Collections, Austin Clarke Papers, MS 38,659/1.

whereon Irish writing, in all its aspects, can be presented to the world, and then to find that those writers whom you hoped would rally to support the position would not'.<sup>64</sup>

'Crabbed Age and Youth' is consequently marked by the intensity of its editorial attack on Clarke and his official broadcasting and publishing influence. 'In a recent series of talks on twentieth-century Irish poetry given on Radio Éireann', it opens, 'the speaker, himself a well-known poet, disparaged, as usual, the work of many of our younger writers', before asserting that 'in these talks the only poets whose work received any mention were those who deliberately write in what they imagine is a specific "Irish" mode and whose main efforts are directed towards proving how Irish they are'.<sup>65</sup> Iremonger, as we have seen, was acutely aware of the limited public platforms for contemporary poetry in Irish society, diagnosing 'the want of a centralising force among Irish poets' due to the lack of publishing outlets and official support in various articles in *The Bell* in the immediate post-war years.<sup>66</sup> As such, he would have been particularly sensitive to the potential of the radio to serve, in Morgan-Zayachek's terms, 'as a dynamic agent of cultural transmission, specifically of literary discourse' that could reinstate poetry into 'a central authorial location' in Irish society. 'Crabbed Age and Youth' is thus preoccupied with extending the significance of the monopolising influence of figures such as Clarke and Farren in the national broadcasting service. Claiming that 'the Radio Éireann talks [are] symptomatic of a more general problem in the realm of Irish letters to-day, namely, the attitude of established Irish writers towards the younger generation', Iremonger declares that

Here, today, little encouragement is given and a young writer has to battle his way through a network of hostility and disparagement which more often than not finally dries up his talent; and we are not so rich in writers that we can forgo even the slightest.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. As this passage further indicates, the poor relations between Clarke and *Envoy* were exacerbated by Clarke's apparent disinclination to contribute any poems of his own to the magazine and thus truly make it a platform for Irish writing in 'all its aspects'. Ryan wrote to him in September 1949 expressing that 'We shall be pleased to study any original Mss. which you may care to offer'. Clarke, however, did not ultimately feature in any of the twenty issues. John Ryan to Austin Clarke, 12 September 1949, Austin Clarke Papers, MS 38,655.

<sup>65</sup> Iremonger, 'Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth', pp. 5-6.

<sup>66</sup> Iremonger, 'Poets and their Publishers', p. 79.

<sup>67</sup> Iremonger, 'Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth', p. 6.

The sense of personal frustration underlying Iremonger's attack on Radio Éireann here signalled a basic challenge faced by the magazine in attempting to establish a penetrating anti-establishment presence in what Anthony Cronin would later describe 'as the pernicious atmosphere of intimately acquainted Dublin'.<sup>68</sup> What Seamus Deane has noted as the 'aggressions, the bitterness and the boredom which were the occupational hazards of the residual bohemian life in the city' inevitably intensified the personal stakes in any debate, inflaming the language of critical discourse with a heightened personal intensity that hampered the capacity for more objective and constructive anti-establishment critique.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the extent to which the figure of the socially frustrated and marginalised artist recurs throughout the poetry featured in *Envoy* is representative of this condition. Iremonger himself conceded to his friend Robert Graves in 1948 that he had been suffering from a period of 'enforced dryness' in his creative output, stating that the 'net result to me is that I have got very little poetry written in the past 18 months', and his 'Poem' in *Envoy*'s second issue dramatized this descent into poetic enervation against a wider institutional backdrop of indifference and hostility.<sup>70</sup> 'Poem' evokes the 'elegiac' tone that Dennis O'Driscoll has noted as characteristic of Iremonger's poetry of this time, juxtaposing a wistfully remembered youth with the dispiriting conditions of the present.<sup>71</sup> The poet's early happy childhood and subsequent 'adolescent swagger' culminate in the first flourishing of poetic inspiration and experiment, with the succession of war images also suggestive of Iremonger's own fervent poetic wartime activities with independent publications such as *On the Barricades*:

And there was poetry. When I found  
Lines detonating in my mind and my pen

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<sup>68</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 111.

<sup>69</sup> Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 229.

<sup>70</sup> Valentin Iremonger to Robert Graves, 9 February 1948, Oxford, St John's College Special Collections, MS Robert Graves, Correspondence of Valentin Iremonger, GB 473 RG/J/Iremonger/4.

<sup>71</sup> Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Valentin Iremonger. Sandymount, Dublin', in *Troubled Thoughts, Majestic Dreams: Selected Prose Writings* (Oldcastle: Gallery Books, 2001), pp. 107-109 (p. 109).

Stabbing the pages of my memory. I would have sold  
My sister to the devil for a poem  
Complete and lucid as spring-water, to startle  
God and rock his golden throne.<sup>72</sup>

However, the sobering recognition that this hoped for poetic achievement ‘never came’ coincides with a despondent concluding image of the aged poet now entrapped in a vaguely figured surrounding atmosphere of societal constraint. ‘I thought to-day’, he regretfully concedes,

How my youth wore down like an old shoe-sole  
Sodden with age,  
Leaving between me and the hostile, hard  
Ground of society, nothing ... nothing at all  
Now to prevent the damp and the needling chill  
Eating my bones and burrowing to my heart.

What Goodby has observed as the broader ‘disillusion at the lack of a context, of support, of an audience’ suggested here in the poet’s embittered final position was sustained in subsequent *Envoy* poems such as David Marcus’s ‘Portrait’, which evokes a similar condition of artistic malaise in an urban bohemian fringe resonant of the *Envoy* milieu.<sup>73</sup> Poet and editor, Marcus had founded the Cork-based literary quarterly *Irish Writing* in 1946 and struggled considerably to maintain publication over the immediately following years, with the magazine’s limited finances compounded by the ‘ruinous’ constraints of the Board of Trade embargo.<sup>74</sup> ‘Portrait’ recalls the narrative movement of Iremonger’s ‘Poem’ in its descent from youthful carelessness into adult frustration:

Hitting the bottle every other night,  
Having it easy with women, betting on the nod,

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<sup>72</sup> Valentin Iremonger, ‘Poem’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Goodby, *Irish Poetry since 1950*, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> David Marcus, *Oughtobiography: Leaves from the Diary of a Hyphenated Jew* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2001), p. 83. *Irish Writing*’s financial difficulties saw its publication run plagued by inconsistency that stunted the development of its reception and influence in these years. As Marcus recalls, the magazine ‘had been planned to appear quarterly but the delayed traumatic birth of *No. 1* caused a lapse of six months between it and *No. 2* and a similar period between *Nos. 2* and *3* while I monitored progress and assessed whether life could be sustained on Irish circulation alone without further losses. *Ibid.*, p. 97.



He rode his youth to death against the years,  
Till one day he got thinking about God.<sup>75</sup>

This depiction of a derailing alcoholism would have been immediately familiar within *Envoy*'s heavy-drinking culture, and the protagonist's sudden desire for spiritual meaning ultimately ends in disappointment as he becomes assailed by a host of unattributed 'fears [that] within him grew'. As with Iremonger, the initial sense of agency in the poem ultimately dwindles to a concluding stasis, with the protagonist's anxieties 'Making him long for drink or long for bed' in a way that recalls again Deane's assessment of the 'occupational hazards' of artistic life in the constricted socio-cultural conditions of mid-century Dublin, whereby 'talent, time and money could be wasted, drunkenness and unemployment could be given moral status, finally, writing itself would be imbued with something of the spirit of subversive squalor'.<sup>76</sup> So that 'Portrait' drifts itself at its end into a state of disturbed unconsciousness:

Eventually he slept, his last thought being  
One of relief to leave it all behind;  
But in his sleep devilish dreams continued  
Blowing the same balloons up in his mind.

The equation of societal disaffection and alienation with alcoholism was, of course, most forcefully depicted in Patrick Kavanagh's poetic satires of Dublin's literary scene as representative of 'Frustration's holy well'.<sup>77</sup> For Montague, his first chastening sense of Dublin in the 'poetic flytings of my youth' as a city where 'begrudgery ruled' was encapsulated by the public feuding between Kavanagh and Clarke, with Kavanagh's 'thundering in his *Envoy* diary' riposted by 'Clarke's sly barbs'.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, it was in the 'Diary' series where *Envoy*'s conflict with the institutional channels governing poetic production reached its most excoriating pitch, with Radio Éireann and its neo-revivalist

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<sup>75</sup> David Marcus, 'Portrait', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 11 (October 1950), p. 17.

<sup>76</sup> Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, p. 228.

<sup>77</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Jungle', *Irish Times*, 25 September 1948, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> John Montague, 'The Big Splatter', *Dublin Review of Books*, no. 16 (Winter 2010)  
<<http://www.drb.ie/essays/the-big-splatter>> accessed 2 January 2017.

coterie becoming obsessive targets of attack for the poet. The extent to which the polemic thrust of the 'Diary' series was by turns fuelled and blunted by Kavanagh's 'lack of distance from his targets' is clearly evident in the poet's relationship with the national broadcasting service, with the wildly scathing terms of his criticism underscored by his own personally aggrieved sense at having been successively overlooked for positions at the station.<sup>79</sup>

Kavanagh's May 1950 'Diary' launches its assault by recalling the satiric caricatures of Farren and Clarke from 'The Paddiad' – 'Paddy of the Celtic Mist' and 'Paddy Frog' – set in the physical and moral squalor of the Pearl Bar as the pair debate over the merit of the stock revivalist poet figure 'Paddy Connemara West':

Paddy Frog leaves down his stout,  
Clenches his chubby grocer's fist,  
Says "I disagree with Mist  
That Paddy Connemara West  
Is inferior to Stephens at his best."<sup>80</sup>

Kavanagh's qualifying statement following this verse that 'Satire doesn't seem to have any effect at all' is just as quickly disregarded as he continues unperturbed in his attack on both writers and the validity of their prominent influence in Irish literary life. As can be traced in Iremonger's August *Envoy* editorial, the frenetic nature of Kavanagh's attack implicitly registers the anxiety at the 'central authorial location' afforded to Farren and Clarke – not only through their radio positions but in publications such as *The Course of Irish Verse in English* and Clarke's forthcoming *Poetry in Modern Ireland* – even as it forcefully dismisses their influence and significance. 'This giving of the job to Clarke is yet another example of the patronage of mediocrity which we have had', Kavanagh states in reference to the poet's

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<sup>79</sup> Goodby, *Irish Poetry since 1950*, p. 34. Kavanagh had, for example, applied and was interviewed for the newly created Radio Éireann position of Talks Officer in 1939. The substantial salary of six hundred pounds per year allocated to the new role would have transformed Kavanagh's own characteristically impecunious state of affairs. However, as Antoinette Quinn observes, his lack of the minimum State requirement of fluency in the Irish language combined with his 'inadequate qualifications and limited broadcasting experience' meant that he was 'never a serious candidate', and the position was ultimately given to the far superior candidate of Robert Farren. Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>80</sup> Patrick Kavanagh 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 7 (June 1950), 83-91 (p. 83). 'Stephens' refers to contemporary Irish poet and storyteller, James Stephens.

commission by the Cultural Relations Committee, ‘It might be said that not only are Mr. Clarke’s friends in Verseland not poets, but they are even less poetical than the average man’.<sup>81</sup> From this, he progresses to singularly deride Clarke’s ‘poetry talks on the Dublin radio’ as ‘interminable’, casting him as ‘a manufacturer of that most saleable commodity, gilt for the gingerbread of the Philistines’.<sup>82</sup> While Kavanagh identifies the serious issue here regarding the exclusive privileging of neo-revivalist figures and ideologies within the State’s cultural apparatus during a period of severely limited institutional opportunities provided to writers and artists, the customary recourse to such sensationalised rhetoric combined with the relentlessly personal and embittered focus of the attack impedes its ultimate impact beyond the mere expression of marginalisation. That this polemic voice could inflate to the ‘hysterical’ tone that we examined in chapter three was exemplified in Kavanagh’s final ‘Diary’ entry, whereby the claim that ‘every organ of opinion in Ireland to-day is in the hands of the enemies of the imagination’ culminates in a moment of unbridled hyperbole with the assertion that ‘Radio Éireann has the supreme and horrible vulgarity of death’.<sup>83</sup>

***‘Incidental nationality’: Establishing a critical response to neo-revivalism and its institutional prominence***

When the ferocity of Kavanagh’s ‘Diary’ prose is considered alongside *Envoy*’s editorial polemics it becomes clear the extent to which the institutional contexts governing literary production and transmission weighed upon and inflamed the terms of poetic discourse at this time. These pressures in turn significantly freighted questions of aesthetics and the contested role and identity of the poet in society, compelling an imperative need within the magazine to establish and advance new ideological criteria and formal procedures by which

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>83</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born Again Romantic*, p. 288; Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (65-71) p. 71.

Irish poets could begin to assert themselves outside of conventional structures and obligations. However, if the histrionic tendency we have traced in *Envoy*'s critical writing registered the real personal and collective strains inherent in such an endeavour, then the magazine's poetry section nonetheless laid significant foundations for what Gillis has termed the 'stylistic renegotiation' demanded of the historical moment.<sup>84</sup> Notwithstanding the wildly overblown nature of Kavanagh's most vicious anti-establishment assaults, for example, the claim, as Tom Clyde advances, that 'in these pages, Kavanagh only attacks, he does not propose any positive alternatives, either directly or implicitly by his writing', disregards the generative iconoclastic significance of the body of critical pronouncements across the 'Diary' series that – even when negatively framed – do transcend the level of personal grievance to more productively form part of an emergent critical consensus across *Envoy*'s poetry section.<sup>85</sup>

Kavanagh in many ways cleared the ground in his early 'Diary' entries for what Gerry Smyth refers to as the concept of 'incidental nationality' emerging from the magazine's critical content and which represented a key rejoinder to official neo-revivalist discourse.<sup>86</sup> For Smyth, that *Envoy* represented a 'more attractive proposition to those younger writers and critics alienated from the specifically nationalist problematic which seemed to dominate *The Bell*' was a reflection of the magazine's advancement of the concept of 'incidental nationality' in conceiving the function and value of literature and criticism in post-war Irish society, whereby 'the editorial line held that literary affiliation, and "literature" needed no qualifying adjective to make it valuable or interesting'.<sup>87</sup> This ambition to 'offset the debilitating effects of a calcified nationalism by denying the culture/nation nexus' was in many ways led by and most forcibly iterated in Kavanagh's 'Diary' series.<sup>88</sup> 'Nationalism is a

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<sup>84</sup> Gillis, "'Any Dark Saying": Louis MacNeice in the Nineteen Fifties', p. 105.

<sup>85</sup> Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines*, p. 45.

<sup>86</sup> Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*, p. 118.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

good working hypothesis. It served Yeats and many another native writer as a basis for their creative work', he declared in *Envoy's* third issue, 'But to take the geographical areas as a spiritual reality, is to go wrong'.<sup>89</sup> Kavanagh importantly reaffirmed this view even amidst the petty fulminations against Clarke and Farren in his June 1950 'Diary' with the declaration that 'The first falseness is in this idea of Ireland as a spiritual entity', arguing thereby that 'people in Ireland are just people living. To define them racially in the lump is [a] mistake'.<sup>90</sup> That these ideas were gaining traction within *Envoy's* poetry section is evident in the way it was echoed in subsequent essays on mid-century Irish poetry in the magazine, with the survey of mid-century poetry in the July 1950 issue asserting for example that 'any deliberate attempt on a poet's part to become anything except a good poet is bound to be disastrous. If he happens to be Irish, I suppose the result is Irish poetry. A great poet writes out of himself, out of his own impulse and his own sincerity'.<sup>91</sup> The positive critical impact of this developing concept of 'incidental nationality' within the magazine registered in the way in which it encouraged a more rigorous interrogation of the formal procedures central to 'Irish Mode' poetics and its veneration within cultural nationalist discourse. Indeed, it is when Iremonger begins to transmit this embittered feelings of marginalisation in 'Crabbed Age and Youth' into a more concerted interrogation of the institutionalised ideological and aesthetic values underpinning neo-revivalist practice that the editorial begins to establish a more compelling critical foothold. Turning his focus toward 'the younger generation' and the assertion of an emergent collective attitude developing outside of these institutional structures, he questions, 'Does it matter whether a young writer writes *à la mode* or not, does it matter whether his coat is green or grey?', before declaring that

The younger poets – those so blandly ignored by the speaker and by Radio Éireann itself in its poetry programmes – take their nationality rather more for granted. They seem to be less interested in the technical craftwork by means of which one apparently becomes Irish – the

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<sup>89</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (February 1950), 82-87 (p. 83);

<sup>90</sup> Patrick Kavanagh 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 7 (June 1950), 83-91 (p. 84).

<sup>91</sup> Paul Gerard, 'Poetry in Ireland, 1930-1950', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), 65-74 (p. 74).

over-use of assonance, Larminie, Raftery, a strained and imprecise imagery – and rather more concerned with the craftsmanship involved in trying to write good poetry [...] if the poet happens to be Irish, the result, as like as not, is probably Irish poetry. They would probably claim that being Irish is more an attitude of mind than the wearing of embroidered cloaks.<sup>92</sup>

Goodby's observation that for Iremonger and his contemporaries 'the struggle was to establish a critical realism against the Irish mode' begins to manifest itself more clearly here in the concerted attempt to demystify the formal procedures, such as assonance, that retained a prominence in Irish culture as representative of national identity and which were heightened particularly through the radio medium; with the editorial challenging the primacy of the relationship between Irish poetry and song and the inherited obligations placed on the Irish poet, in MacDonagh's terms, as singer 'by, of, to and for the Irish people'.<sup>93</sup>

Kavanagh's assaults on neo-revivalism similarly achieve a penetrating critical foothold when attending more specifically to the ideological ramifications of form and rhetoric. Iremonger's interrogation of the formal procedures by which one traditionally 'becomes Irish' in 'Crabbed Age and Youth' was earlier highlighted in Kavanagh's June 1950 'Diary', with his emphasis on '[eliminating] the adjective "Irish" from the discussion' encouraging a critical consideration of 'the body of poetry written during this century in Ireland stripped of its clothes'.<sup>94</sup> 'Of the clothes', Kavanagh continues, 'assonance, rhyme and so forth – we will no doubt hear about from Mr. Clarke, whose only real rival on the mysteries of versification is his friend Mr. Ó Farrachain [*sic*]', and the 'Diary' then proceeds in more substantial terms to highlight through quotation the critical language by which these basic formal procedures are mystified to the point of national essence in cultural nationalist poetic discourse.<sup>95</sup> Kavanagh quotes from a remarkable section in *The Course of Irish Verse in English* as exemplary of Farren's 'literary style' whereby the author establishes F.R.

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<sup>92</sup> Iremonger, 'Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth', pp. 6-7.

<sup>93</sup> Goodby, *Irish Poetry since 1950*, p. 44.

<sup>94</sup> Kavanagh 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 7 (June 1950), p. 85

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Higgins at ‘the centre of the Irish ethos’ by virtue of the poet’s ‘sensuous language’.<sup>96</sup> Farren focuses here on Higgins’ 1923 poem ‘To My Blackthorn Stick’ and in particular its second quatrain which praises the toughness of the poet’s treasured walking stick:

Well shod in bronze and lithe with hillside breeding,  
Yet, like a snarl, you dogged my side,  
Mailed in your tridents and flaunting out the fierceness  
That bristled through your hide.<sup>97</sup>

It is Farren’s zealous notation of the minute tonal inflections in the quatrain’s opening line that Kavanagh quotes in his ‘Diary’, revealing the obsessive extent to which Higgins’ ‘total Irishness’ could be wholly conceived and promoted within the context of song, orality, and the elaborate musicality created by internal assonantal and consonantal patterning.<sup>98</sup> As

Farren writes:

The fibrous smoothness of the starting line is thus secured: by placing within it at deciding intervals consonants which half-let the breath through them: SH in shod; NZ in bronze; TH in lithe and S in hillside; and by assonanting shod with bronze, and lithe with side; the assonances join the words, giving continuity or smoothness, and contrariwise they emphasize rough-smooth consonants.<sup>99</sup>

This fervent delineation of the individual tonal components is combined with the evocation of the performance of sound itself, as Farren dramatizes the act of the poem’s recitation with reference to how the consonants ‘half-let the breath through them’. The extent to which such a veneration of the musical qualities of Higgins’ poetry could elevate the critical discourse of neo-revivalism to a level of spiritual transcendence was emphatically reflected in Farren’s prose over the following pages, where the praise of the expressive power of Higgins’ ‘sensuous language’ culminates in a passage of remarkable mystical and religious intensity that almost loses intelligibility in its rapture:

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<sup>96</sup> Farren, *The Course of Irish Verse in English*, p. 138.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

That a maker of verse is a true-born poet few signs convince us better than sensuous language, properly and changefully used. Profound and intimate seizure, within the spirit, of bodily being external to itself, produces in the seizing spirit an analogue to body and the dematerialising of objects in the act of knowledge is only a preparation for spiritual rematerialising, or to avoid paradox as far as possible, for *resubstantiation* in a deeper knowing act. Mystics speak illuminatingly of *the spiritual senses*; poets can humbly ratify the phrase: and the sensuous language of poets is their endeavour to embody, in the plainer sense of the word, that which has taken substance in their inward souls. Higgins gives the sign.<sup>100</sup>

It was *Envoy*'s challenging of the tenets of neo-revivalism and the institutional contexts that privileged its production and transmission that situated the magazine at the beginning of a period when 'a whole set of expectations and assumptions about what it was to be an Irish poet were thrown into question'.<sup>101</sup> A key aspect of *Envoy*'s poetry section was in identifying and interrogating the privileged status of the Revival and its legacy in official literary discourse, with the expanding literary influence of Radio Éireann in particular preoccupying much of its editorial and critical writing. The ultimate achievement of its poetry section, however, rested on its capacity to lay new aesthetic and ideological foundations upon which an emergent generation of Irish poets could begin to independently establish themselves. The articulation of the concept of 'incidental nationality' we have considered in the writings of Iremonger and Kavanagh represented a key progression in this regard and encouraged the generative transnational poetic activity that we will examine in chapter five. The poets who gathered around *Envoy* including Iremonger, Kavanagh, Geoffrey Taylor, Anthony Cronin, John Montague, Richard Murphy, and Pearse Hutchinson together shared what Walker has observed more generally as a 'growing unease about the restrictions imposed by the prevailing pressure placed on Irish culture to display its identity', a collective feeling that in turn stimulated the re-examination of 'the Irish poet's relationship to place, history, and style'.<sup>102</sup> We will now examine how this concept more positively and substantially materialised across *Envoy*'s poetry section, considering its role in encouraging

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 143-144.

<sup>101</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 148.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 136; p. 148.



the enlargement and diversification of the Irish literary domain through the cultivation of a range of transnational networks and affiliations that laid important foundations for the processes by which emerging Irish poets began, in the words of Dillon Johnston and Guinn Batten, to '[pioneer] their own independent space and strategies of voice' into the 1950s and 60s.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Dillon Johnston and Guinn Batten, 'Contemporary poetry in English: 1940-2000', in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature, vol. 2: 1890- 2000*, pp. 357-420 (pp. 358-9).

## Chapter Five

### **‘Auden and Dylan Thomas, Moravia, Sartre, Pound are all Irish poets’: Extending the Irish literary domain**

The prevailing cultural nationalism in official Irish poetic discourse circumscribed the largely ‘restrictive terms of Irish critical debate’ that persisted into the immediate post-war years, to the extent that individual poets and independent poetic networks that were actively shaping the contemporary scene but which were not easily categorised within pre-existing national ideological or aesthetic frameworks could be by turns implicitly occluded or even explicitly excluded from the ‘Irish literary domain’.<sup>1</sup> Clarke’s generalising and thinly veiled pejorative application of the term ‘modernistic’ in categorising a range of Irish poets from Iremonger, Greacen, and Roy McFadden to Denis Devlin, Louis MacNeice, and Patrick Kavanagh in *Poetry in Modern Ireland* was emblematic of the lack of serious official engagement with contemporary Irish poetry throughout this time. The nationalist rhetoric underpinning much neo-revivalist critical writing, moreover, maintained the validity of what Edna Longley observes as the conventional ‘route to separateness’ in Irish poetry that disregarded the diverse international strands of influence and affiliation beginning to shape the contemporary field.<sup>2</sup> The continuing institutional privileging of such a perspective in the national broadcasting service and through official publications, however, belied the extent to which the immediate post-war years coincided with the development of new independent contexts and opportunities for cross-border, cross-channel, continental, and transatlantic poetic exchange that in turn complicated and challenged Irish poetic conventions. If, then, to return to Gillis, the historical moment demanded a ‘stylistic renegotiation’ within

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<sup>1</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 109; p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Longley, ‘Poetic Forms and Social Malformations’, *The Living Stream*, pp. 196-226 (p. 202).

contemporary Irish poetry, it also demanded the renegotiation of the way in which these influences and activities were represented and received.<sup>3</sup>

A key manifestation of the concept of ‘incidental nationality’ in *Envoy*’s poetry section was, therefore, its commitment to mapping and establishing the significance of the transnational connections and networks influencing post-war Irish poetry at a time of their limited visibility in public literary discourse. Kavanagh again laid important declarative ground for this development in his ‘Diary’ series. ‘As far as I am concerned, Auden and Dylan Thomas, Moravia, Sartre, Pound are all Irish poets’, he provocatively stated in June 1950, playfully inverting the exclusionist conventions of national literary debate so that ‘Irishness’ itself now expands to become a marker of global universal affinity: ‘They have all said the thing which delighted me, a man born in Ireland, so they must have a great deal of Irish in them. They all said the same thing in the same language’.<sup>4</sup> The aspiration to extend the parameters of the Irish literary domain became central to the critical project of *Envoy*’s poetry section, drawing into generative dialogue hitherto marginalised non-resident Irish and international voices that significantly contributed to the magazine’s negotiation of the pressures placed upon Irish poets to display their national identity. In this way, *Envoy* becomes exemplary of Niall Carson’s view of the Irish literary periodical as a key site for ‘[tracing] the transnational element within Irish letters and to show the current of ideas, writers, and debates that flowed across borders’ during the mid-twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, *Envoy*’s transnational poetic aspirations draw the magazine into the context of the ‘cross-cultural patterns of connection and association, both experiential and textual’ that are central to Jahan Ramazani’s formulation of twentieth-century ‘poetic transnationalism’.<sup>6</sup> For Ramazani, the virtue of re-evaluating the literary history of this period through a transnational

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<sup>3</sup> Gillis, “‘Any Dark Saying’’: Louis MacNeice in the Nineteen Fifties’, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Kavanagh ‘Diary’, *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 7 (June 1950), p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> Carson, ‘Transnationalism, Ireland and *The Bell*’, p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> Jahan Ramazani, ‘A Transnational Poetics’, *American Literary History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 332-359 (p. 342).

perspective is that it ‘can help us both understand and imagine a world in which cultural boundaries are fluid, transient, and permeable, and thus read ourselves as imaginative citizens not of one or another hermetically sealed national or civilizational block, but of intercultural worlds that ceaselessly overlap, intersect, and converge’.<sup>7</sup> The ambition to develop a critical culture ungoverned by the singular demands of a ‘hermetically sealed national [block]’ and thus to make more permeable the traditional borders of Irish poetic discourse was central to the essays, reviews, letters, and poems that comprised *Envoy*’s poetry section.

### ***Continental Relations: Pearse Hutchinson***

John Ryan’s feeling that with the removal of wartime overseas travel restrictions in Ireland ‘the windows had been flung open’ was nowhere more exemplified in the *Envoy* milieu than by the aspirations and activities of the young poet Pearse Hutchinson. Hutchinson seized upon the returning opportunities for cross-channel and continental travel during the immediate post-war years. ‘Well you see, I was growing up and moving around and being interested in all kinds of things during the war, and so the minute the war was over a lot of us made a beeline for London’, he recalled, writing of the excitement of regular cross-channel visits in his early twenties when London’s vibrant post-war exhibition scene and influx of foreign cinema established the city for him as a ‘hive of artistic activity’.<sup>8</sup> While London represented the most immediately and easily accessible destination for Irish writers and artists, Hutchinson’s travelling ambitions soon saw him look further afield to the Continent, and it was ultimately his introduction to Spain and Spanish literary culture that would prove most significant at this time. Hutchinson had studied Spanish and Italian at University College Dublin in 1947. Despite leaving after only a year and half without taking his degree,

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Coleman, ‘From Findrum: Pearse Hutchinson in Conversation’, in *Reading Pearse Hutchinson: From Findrum to Fisterra*, ed. by Philip Coleman and Maria Johnston (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), pp. 213-236 (p. 223).

it was at UCD that he recognised his fundamental ‘love with language and languages’, quickly becoming fluent in Spanish and developing the keen interest in its literature that would culminate in his first visit there in 1950.<sup>9</sup> The significance of this trip for the young poet was later recalled as ‘that early September of 1950, in Seville, in Granada, in Córdoba, [when] the light walked for me as it had never before, and I walked through the light I’d always longed for’.<sup>10</sup> For Philip Coleman, these first experiences abroad set the course of Hutchinson’s poetic trajectory into the following decades in a way that would see him become an exemplary figure of ‘poetic transnationalism’ as articulated by Ramazani.<sup>11</sup> The poet’s early absorption of Spanish linguistic and literary culture stimulated his expanding ambitions to ‘embrace the linguistic resources and opportunities of non-Irish and, indeed, non-Anglophone places and voices’ that saw Hutchinson eventually become fluent in a range of languages including Catalan, Galician, Galician-Portuguese, French, Dutch-Flemish, Italian, as well as Irish.<sup>12</sup> It was during these early years when Hutchinson first began to experiment with translation and the juxtaposition of languages and cultural references in his poetry that, as Coleman and Maria Johnston observe, he first laid foundations for the maturing of his poetic over the following decades and its distinguishing ‘celebration of the play of cultural difference in ways that are related, implicitly and explicitly, to his embrace of many languages, cultures and the manifold possibilities for poetic expression they represent’.<sup>13</sup>

It was *Envoy*’s international outlook that initially attracted Hutchinson to the magazine.<sup>14</sup> He has recalled how he felt a new sense of ‘community’ among its milieu and found in the eclectic social atmosphere of McDaid’s pub an enlivening local counterpart to his

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<sup>9</sup> Pearse Hutchinson, ‘Drowning in the Aesthetic: Pearse Hutchinson Interviewed’, *Poetry Ireland Review*, no. 52 (Spring 1997), 22-33 (p. 23).

<sup>10</sup> Pearse Hutchinson, ‘Introduction’, in *Done into English: Collected Translations* (Oldcastle: Gallery Books, 2003), pp. 15-25 (p. 16).

<sup>11</sup> Philip Coleman, ‘At Ease with Elsewhere’, review of Pearse Hutchinson *Collected Poems*, *Dublin Review of Books*, no. 11 (Autumn 2009) <<http://www.dr.ie/essays/at-ease-with-elsewhere>> accessed 5 July 2017.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Philip Coleman and Maria Johnston, ‘Introduction’, in *Reading Pearse Hutchinson*, pp. 7-16 (p. 9).

<sup>14</sup> Hutchinson in conversation with Frank Kersnowski, Frank Kersnowski *The Outsiders: Poets of Contemporary Ireland* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1975), p. 176.

cross-channel and continental bohemian excursions. ‘I’ve seldom seen such a cross-section of life in any pub as there’, he later remarked, ‘and I took to it’.<sup>15</sup> Ryan was keen to have Hutchinson involved in the magazine from the outset, writing to the poet in September 1949 that ‘We shall be pleased to study any original MS. which you have to offer’, and *Envoy*’s receptive attitude to Hutchinson and his early writing illustrates the key role played by the magazine as a post-war publishing outlet for an emerging group of Irish poets beginning to look outward for exemplars and affinities in a newly expanded international literary sphere.<sup>16</sup> Along with his poems published in various issues of the magazine, Hutchinson was invited to write two extended essays on Spanish and North American poetry that were among his earliest published attempts to transmit his intensive engagement with foreign literary cultures into critical and creative writing.<sup>17</sup> The nascent character of Hutchinson’s work makes it strikingly representative of both the vitalising energies and implicit challenges inherent in this endeavour, situating his writing and *Envoy* at the outset of a broader period of progression in contemporary Irish poetry toward greater international association and involvement.

John Goodby has identified one of the basic challenges in this regard in his consideration of Hutchinson’s poetry along with other Irish poets whose sensibilities and careers were shaped by foreign travel and emigration in the post-war period including Patrick Galvin and Desmond O’Grady. For Goodby, the invigorating impact of the exposure to foreign experiences and influences at the same time exposed the poetry to the dangers of becoming mired in the inherited oppositional terms of a ‘Joycean pre-war concept of “exile”’ in its consequently denigrating representation of Irish society, thereby remaining in a way obsessively tied to the ‘perceived backwardness, isolation, and lack of opportunity’ that the poetry ostensibly disavowed.<sup>18</sup> In such a context, ‘internationalism did not necessarily make

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<sup>15</sup> Coleman, ‘From Findrum: Pearse Hutchinson in Conversation’, p. 222.

<sup>16</sup> John Ryan to Pearse Hutchinson, 12 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/3.

<sup>17</sup> Pearse Hutchinson, ‘Modern Spanish Poetry’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 16 (March 1951), 55-60; Pearse Hutchinson, ‘The American Poets’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 18 (May 1951), 38-47.

<sup>18</sup> Goodby, *Irish poetry since 1950*, p. 72.

for a re-examination of inherited stereotypes’ but rather merely the reinforcement of reductive binaries.<sup>19</sup> While the poetry may indeed ‘register the energies of their different host cultures’, the turning of these energies against the perceived strictures of Irish life could see it denuded to the merely simplistic and ‘straightforwardly negative and therefore to be responded to with a mixture of rebelliousness and self-protective distancing’.<sup>20</sup> ‘Because of this’, Goodby argues, ‘their oppositionalism can seem pre-programmed, their detachment disengagement, such that both the Irish and foreign aspects of the poetry can appear to be trapped in stereotypes’.<sup>21</sup> That this was an issue for Hutchinson during his first exhilarating years of post-war travel can be traced in aspects of his *Envoy* poetry, reflecting how the expansive potential of new international connections and perspectives could nonetheless collapse back into the narrowed and ultimately self-exhausting socio-cultural antagonisms that were, to return to Seamus Deane, a serious condition of the ‘occupational hazards of the residual bohemian life’ in mid-century Dublin.<sup>22</sup>

Hutchinson’s early embrace of foreign cultures was to a significant extent compelled by his increasingly disaffected sense of 1940s Ireland as ‘an extremely puritanical, blinkered society’.<sup>23</sup> Such a view found natural kinship in the *Envoy* milieu and underpinned the sense of artistic affinity he found among its associated writers and artists. Indeed, as with Iremonger, Marcus, and Kavanagh, Hutchinson’s societal disaffection registers in his *Envoy* poetry the ‘spirit of subversive squalor’ that we have seen as both a reaction to and symptom of the frustration and marginalisation pervasively experienced by Irish poets in mid-century literary Dublin.<sup>24</sup> His short poem ‘The Plot, If Any’ featured in *Envoy*’s October 1950 issue alongside David Marcus’s ‘Portrait’ and brought a more distinctively literary perspective to the latter’s depiction of social and spiritual degeneration. The poem sketches the descent of an

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, p. 229.

<sup>23</sup> Coleman, ‘From Findrum: Pearse Hutchinson in Conversation’, p. 215.

<sup>24</sup> Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, p. 228.

initially hopeful literary figure into disillusionment and eventual stasis, with his early ambitions to write a novel ultimately amounting to nothing more substantial than a disparate collection of lines and phrases jotted down in his ‘more-than-usually desultory journal’.<sup>25</sup> The lack of purpose or narrative indicated in the title conditions in turn the slack form and disjointed rhythm of the poem itself, with its opening sentence meandering across eight lines of metrically irregular and unrhymed lines:

Unable to write novels, in which his conscience  
would come victorious, not more often than was plausible  
but enough to point the effort  
he could not make in his own haphazard weeks  
that followed each other full of pleasures and failures,  
empty of energy for not hurting others,  
he was left with poems, maxims, and entries  
in a more-than-usually desultory journal.

The convolution of the syntax with prepositions combined with the lack of punctuation and disorientating accumulation of negatives (‘Unable to write’ | ‘could not make’ | ‘not hurting others’) disrupt any kind of narrative momentum so that the poem reads as if from the pages of the writer’s ‘desultory journal’ itself.

Hutchinson would increasingly come to regard his foreign excursions as the only means of evading such artistic malaise, with his cross-channel and continental trips during the immediate post-war years culminating in his eventual move to Spain in 1951. ‘To give joy free rein’, he later recalled, ‘I had to leave home. And not just home but homeland. Puritanism seemed to me the worst thing ever invented, it was my enemy, and with it I identified (not unnaturally, given that prevailing late-Forties atmosphere), Ireland itself’.<sup>26</sup> This feeling was expressed in Hutchinson’s *Envoy* poem ‘Ireland’, published the month before his departure to Spain in March 1951. ‘Ireland’ dramatizes the figure of the poet poised on the brink of a defining transformative act of revolt that heralds Hutchinson’s decision to leave the country

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<sup>25</sup> Pearse Hutchinson, ‘The Plot, If Any’, *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 11 (October 1950), p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Pearse Hutchinson, *The Soul that Kissed the Body: New and selected poems in Irish with translations into English and introduction by the author* (Oldcastle: Gallery Books, 1990), p. 14.



the following month. The poem indicates in this way the catalysing force of Hutchinson's international aspirations at this time, with its taut form and purposeful tone shedding the flaccidness and indecision of the earlier 'The Plot, If Any':

Winter is when the bread  
crumbles under butter:  
The frost forbids that spread.

When lest the butter liquefy  
it's kept in liquid butter by:  
that's the one good season, summer.

So I wait for, crouching in this crass quarter,  
the time of putting butter into water.<sup>27</sup>

The expansive expectation inherent in the title 'Ireland' is immediately subverted by the poem's contracted form which iconoclastically reduces the grandiosity of national representation to the terse frame of short three-lined and two-lined verses, a movement that is accompanied by the denuded reformulation of Ireland itself as a mere 'crass quarter'. The form evokes the puritanical atmosphere of restraint that the poet will ultimately resolve to escape in his desire to embrace the generative fluidity suggested in the poem's closing action of 'the time of putting butter into water'. Hutchinson's disruption of the national paradigm here locates him within the broader critical progression in *Envoy's* poetry section away from prevailing cultural nationalist conceptions of Ireland, as Kavanagh described, as 'a spiritual entity'.<sup>28</sup> The imbuing self-image of the rebellious artist in 'Ireland' testifies to how Hutchinson's poetic sensibility was becoming emboldened by the alternative post-war international cultural channels by which he increasingly anticipated his future creative flourishing. Yet, to return to Goodby, while the assertive dismissal of the nation as a mere 'crass quarter' provides the poem's central iconoclastic thrust, it is at the same time suggestive of how such basic oppositional posturing could become ultimately 'limited by a

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<sup>27</sup> Pearse Hutchinson, 'Ireland', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 16 (March 1951), p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Kavanagh, 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (February 1950), p. 83.

discourse of dissidence’ in a manner similar to the inflamed satirical writing elsewhere in *Envoy* with poets such as Kavanagh.<sup>29</sup> Hutchinson’s early *Envoy* poetry thereby implicitly registers the nascent challenges of harnessing a post-war international sensibility into the service of a new anti-establishment poetic even as it announces its vitalising energies.

While, as Goodby writes, ‘internationalism’ in such instances ‘did not necessarily make for a re-examination of inherited stereotypes’, it is in Hutchinson’s extended critical essays in *Envoy* where the magazine begins to establish itself as a more generative focal point for transnational literary production and exchange.<sup>30</sup> Again, the nascent quality of Hutchinson’s writing here is illustrative of *Envoy*’s position at the outset of a period when emerging Irish poets were beginning to explore and consider themselves within an expanded international literary sphere. Hutchinson’s survey of ‘Modern Spanish Poetry’ in the March 1951 issue registers in its sweeping, fervent narrative style the exhilarating impact of the poet’s visit to Spain the previous September as well as his more general absorption of Spanish literature at this time. His eagerness to establish the breadth of this newly acquired knowledge in fact disrupts the development of a more measured, detailed critical engagement at various points in the survey. Ambitiously spanning the progression of modern Spanish poetry from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, the survey in such instances passes through a heady array of admired figures, groups, and movements with little concern for the unspecialised reader. The opening paragraph is itself exemplary of this, where Hutchinson references with an assumed familiarity a succession of major Spanish Baroque poets of the seventeenth century before proceeding to loftily equate the prominent nineteenth century lyric poet, José de Espronceda, with an array of European classical composers. ‘Spanish literature has had, like most, what is termed its “golden age”’, Hutchinson begins:

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<sup>29</sup> Goodby, *Irish poetry since 1950*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Out of that a few big names remain; in poetry Góngora, Lope de Vega, Quevedo, Garcilaso, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Luis de León. And the end of the seventeenth century was very nearly the end of poetry. At the start of the nineteenth, under the influence of mainly French romanticism, something struggled forth which was mistaken, for a time, for a revival. Not much of that froth is left: Espronceda, spoiling his most serious poems with a self-pity unequalled, I imagine, by any other poet of repute, and at other moments a kind of Offenbach of words – or perhaps less, perhaps Lehar, even Friml; and Zorrilla, whose soberer narrative and dramatic verses have still an intermittent bite.<sup>31</sup>

If such a flaunting display of continental references and associations in many ways betrays the ‘rather self-conscious Europeanism’ that Brown has observed more generally as a condition of *Envoy*’s earnestness toward greater international involvement, where the survey does begin to engage with Spanish literary culture on a more illuminating and productive level is in the later narrowing of its focus on the major twentieth-century poetic figure of Federico García Lorca and, most significantly in an Irish publishing context, in Hutchinson’s creative engagement with his poetry through the act of translation.<sup>32</sup>

Hutchinson considers Lorca’s significance in terms that had the potential to fruitfully resonate within the dominant contexts and preoccupations of mid-century Irish poetic debate, focusing on the innovative juxtaposition and blending of traditional and modern forms for which the poet had become renowned in the 1920s and 30s. Lorca’s defining connection with his native Andalusian region of southern Spain and the folk culture preserved and embodied by its surviving Gypsy communities shaped his poetic appreciation for the oral and song traditions that had similarly remained central to Irish neo-revivalist discourse.<sup>33</sup> As Christopher Maurer notes, the ballad form in particular became a ‘touchstone’ for Lorca’s early poetry and the site of many of his most significant poetic innovations.<sup>34</sup> Lorca’s rich use of metaphor, for example, testified to the poet’s distinguishing capacity to ‘recreate traditional

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<sup>31</sup> Pearse Hutchinson, ‘Modern Spanish Poetry’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 16 (March 1951), 55-60 (p. 55).

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> For studies that have explored the relationship between Lorca and key members of the Irish Literary Revival including John Millington Synge and Yeats, see Jean L. Smoot, *A Comparison of Plays by John Millington Synge and Federico García Lorca: The Poets and Time* (Madrid: Porrúa Turanzas, 1978); Stephen Hart, ‘Paradigms of Peripheral Modernity in Lorca and Yeats’, *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 102, no. 2 (April 2007), 410-426; and Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989).

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Maurer, ‘Poetry’, in *A Companion to Federico García Lorca*, ed. by Federico Bonaddio (Suffolk: Tamesis, 2007), pp. 16-38 (p. 28).

forms rather than imitating them strictly’, infusing his ballads with a symbolic and mythic intensity that drew from the surrealist influences of his close friends the painter Salvador Dalí and filmmaker Luis Buñuel.<sup>35</sup> Hutchinson establishes the basic importance of the ballad form to Lorca while illustrating through his own translation of the poet the modernising significance of his expressive language. ‘[Lorca] realised that the extraordinary natural music in the Spanish language needed a strict form as frame’, he writes, and outlines how the Spanish ballad metre (typically comprised of eight syllable lines with feminine rhymes) provided this structure as ‘the most perfect, the tensest, the most insistent, ever used for narrative verse’.<sup>36</sup> Hutchinson focuses on Lorca’s ‘Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard’ to illustrate how he ‘re-livened the form’, one of the most famous poems from the 1928 collection *Gypsy Ballads* which comments on the brutal treatment of the Andalusian gypsy community by Spanish authorities. Most significantly, by including an English-language translation of the ballad’s opening section in his *Envoy* article, Hutchinson not only provides the Irish reader with a more immediate insight into the metaphoric intensity of Lorca’s poetic, but promotes the act of foreign language translation itself in Irish literary discourse. The presentation on the page of both Lorca’s original Spanish and Hutchinson’s English interpretation encourages the reader to consider the process of foreign language translation and its creative potential:

Los caballos negros son.  
 Las herraduras son negros,  
 Sobre las capas relucen  
 manchas de tinta y de cera.  
 Tienen, por eso no lloran,  
 de plomo las calaveras.  
 Con el alma de charol  
 vienen por la carretera.  
 Jorobados y nocturnos,  
 por donde animan ordenan  
 silencios de goma oscura

Black, all black are their horses.  
 And black also their horseshoes.  
 Over their dark cloaks glisten  
 spots of ink and of wax.  
 Their skulls are skulls of lead,  
 for this they cannot weep.  
 With soul of patent leather  
 down the road they come riding.  
 Hunchbacked and nocturnal  
 where they move they evoke  
 silences of dark rubber

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Hutchinson, ‘Modern Spanish Poetry’, p. 57.

y miedos de fina arena.

and fears of fine sand.<sup>37</sup>

Menacingly depicting the approaching Civil Guard on horseback, the section is emblematic of Lorca's compression of a vivid and allusive metaphoric sequence within a traditional verse form, culminating in Hutchinson's translation with the surrealistic juxtapositions of 'silences of dark rubber' and 'fears of fine sand' that, he argues, 'are not to be analysed, slotted. They depend on sudden impact, and reverberation. Each reading renews the impact, and the reverberation deepens and widens'.<sup>38</sup>

The concerted focus on Lorca's innovative modern use of the ballad in 'Modern Spanish Poetry' combined with Hutchinson's own translation of his poetry gives an insight into the potential of *Envoy*'s international outlook to bring alternative perspectives to poetic forms and practices conventionally promoted in official Irish literary discourse in the exclusivist terms of their 'total Irishness'.<sup>39</sup> The scope *Envoy* provided to Hutchinson for what were among his earliest published Spanish language translations testified on an individual level to the significance of the magazine's internationalism for emerging poets in these years, with Hutchinson's first attempts to translate Lorca anticipating the central importance of translation to his maturing poetic and its developing transnational appreciation of language as a fecund 'space of cultural openness and conjunction'.<sup>40</sup> More generally, as Shovlin observes, *Envoy*'s encouragement of foreign language translation represents an important aspect of the transnational 'legacy' of the magazine and 'the attempt to heighten greater awareness of European culture' in mid-century Ireland, with Hutchinson's translation of Lorca joined by

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> Farren, *The Course of Irish Verse in English*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>40</sup> Coleman and Maria Johnston, 'Introduction', p. 10. The formative significance of Hutchinson's early engagement with Spanish literary culture in *Envoy* was reflected in his first published volume of poetry, *Josep Carner: Poems* (1962), a collection of thirty poems translated from Catalan into English. His first original volume, meanwhile, *Tongue Without Hands* (1963), took its title from a translated quotation of the twelfth century Castilian epic poem *El Cantar de mio Cid*, with numerous Spanish words and phrases appearing throughout the collection. Vincent Woods, 'Jasmine and Lagarto: Pearse Hutchinson's Poetry of Spain', *Estudios Irlandeses*, no. 5 (2010), 113-118 (p. 115).

the array of German, French, and Russian translations all presented to an Irish literary audience across the magazine's twenty issues.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Challenging the 'route to separateness': British and Irish poetic relations***

If *Envoy*'s enlistment of the critical and creative writing of a poet such as Hutchinson sought to extend the Irish literary domain outward to the Continent, then the magazine's transnational aspirations were more collectively and arguably most importantly realised through the cultivation of cross-channel poetic relations during a period of great socio-economic and cultural tension between Britain and Ireland. What Longley has termed the 'route to separateness' in mid-century Irish poetry was largely driven by a persistent anti-colonial sentiment that drew from and in turn contributed to the prominence of the protectionist ideology of self-sufficiency underpinning the political and economic programme of de Valera's Fianna Fáil government.<sup>42</sup> Farren's assertion of the importance of the 'growth of Irishness, in separate existence from English poetry, of the poetry that was and is composed in Ireland or by Irishmen' in *The Course of Irish Verse* was representative of the extent to which the exclusivist imperative of cultural nationalism continued to dominate Irish literary debate into the post-war years.<sup>43</sup> As Longley observes, the preoccupation with declaring aesthetic independence from such a standpoint remained based upon the need to 'break or weaken Anglo-Irish and English literary links infinitely complicated by a shared

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<sup>41</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 153. Translated authors in *Envoy* included: German literary academic Werner Milch, trans. by Keeri-Santo, Werner Milch, 'German Prose Fiction of To-Day', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 7 (June 1950), 22-37; German art critic Werner Haftman, trans. by Michael Heron, Werner Haftman 'Modern German Painting', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), 50-64; German poet and dramatist Heinrich von Kleist, trans. by Michael Hamburger, Heinrich von Kleist, On the Puppet Theatre, *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 10 (September 1950), 63-70; German philosopher Martin Heidegger trans. by Michael Heron in Martin Heidegger, 'The Country Lane', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 11 (October 1950), 71-75; French poet Jacques Prévert trans. by Robert Gilkey in Jacques Prévert 'Four Tales for Naughty Children', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 11 (October 1950), 75-81; Russian playwright and short story writer Anton Chekhov trans. by Hubert Butler in Anton Chekhov, 'Extracts from Sachalin Island', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 13 (December 1950), 37-46, and 'Sachalin Island II', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 14 (January 1951), 50-56; French poet Tristan Corbière trans. by C. F. McIntyre in --- 'Poems', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 19 (June 1951) (65-67).

<sup>42</sup> Longley, 'Poetic Forms and Social Malformations', p. 202.

<sup>43</sup> Farren, *The Course of Irish Verse in English*, p. xi;

language'.<sup>44</sup> That such a view still retained prominence in official literary discourse was exemplified in Clarke's *Poetry in Modern Ireland* which focused its narrative almost exclusively on the 'struggle' for a 'separate culture' in twentieth-century Irish poetry, moving from the major literary figures of the Revival who 'in turning to our ancient sources [...] broke from the main tradition of English', to culminate with Clarke's neo-revivalist contemporaries such as Farren who is praised in similar terms as 'a poet of doctrine, much pleased by all that has been defined for us and his first task has been ambitious, for he attempted to free us from the encroaching tradition of the English convert school and find his own meanings of expression'.<sup>45</sup>

Literary tensions between Britain and Ireland were significantly exacerbated by the publishing contexts and conditions governing poetry production and distribution throughout this period. The affirmation of the 'legendary days' of the Revival in texts such as *Poetry in Modern Ireland* at the same time threw into sharp relief the extent to which the early twentieth-century domestic publishing industry upon which it had developed and thrived was now all but exhausted.<sup>46</sup> Clarke was keenly aware of the vital role played by commercial houses such as Maunsel and Company and private printing presses such as Dun Emer and the Cuala Press in promoting and sustaining local literary activity in these decades, providing a diversity of native publishing platforms that in turn supplemented the commercial sustenance that writers such as Yeats already received from their larger London publishers.<sup>47</sup> Yeats' reputation in Dublin had been particularly enhanced by the fine printing of many of his works

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<sup>44</sup> Longley, 'Poetic Forms and Social Malformations', p. 202.

<sup>45</sup> Clarke, *Poetry in Modern Ireland*, p. 7; p. 52; p. 58;

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Dun Emer Press was founded in 1902 by Yeats's sister, Elizabeth Corbet Yeats, specialising in hand printed limited and expensive literary editions. Cuala Press, specialising in similarly limited editions, was founded as an offshoot of this earlier venture in 1908 and ran until 1946, notably publishing Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* in 1941, before closing in 1946 until the late 1960s. Gifford Lewis, "This terrible struggle with want of means": Behind the Scenes at the Cuala Press', in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Vol. V: The Irish Book in English 1891-2000*, pp. 529-547. Maunsel and Company, founded in 1905, was 'essentially established to support the revivalist impulse' and published a variety of dramatic material from the Abbey Theatre as well as numerous works and collections by lesser known writers and poets associated with the revivalist mode. Distinguished for its generally high production standards and commercial success in these years, the house eventually closed in 1928. Clare Hutton, 'The Extraordinary History of the House of Maunsel', in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Vol. V: The Irish Book in English 1891-2000*, pp. 548-561 (p. 550).

through Dun Emer and Cuala Press into the 1920s and 30s. ‘Even in the windows of the Dublin bookshops’, Clarke nostalgically recalled, ‘his books were a blaze of gold and in each of them appeared a drawing or reproduced painting of the poet – a dim mysterious figure’.<sup>48</sup> The closure of Maunsell in 1928 and the decreasing activity and eventual closure of Cuala Press in 1946 testified to the broader diminishment of Dublin’s dynamic publishing energies of the first decades of the twentieth century. This development was compounded by the upheaval of the literary market following the outbreak of the Second World War, contracting the already limited parameters of Irish poetry publishing into a largely ‘inconspicuous and private an enterprise’ throughout the 1940s.<sup>49</sup> The publishing silence endured by Clarke himself from the late 1930s reflected how even well-known poets could become lost in the ‘vacuum’ in Irish poetry publishing during this time.<sup>50</sup> With no major collection published by the poet for seventeen-years until 1955, his personal struggle was representative of the way in which ‘the dissemination of poetry had become submerged within the broader area of cultural production both in Irish and in English’.<sup>51</sup>

The ‘precarious position’ of Irish poets and poetry publishing, as Clarke described it in 1946, placed serious strains and pressures on the relationship with the dominant metropolitan centre of London.<sup>52</sup> The cultural nationalist aspiration for literary self-sufficiency and the anxiety at the loss of Irish writers to British publishing houses was undercut by the realisation of the greater commercial opportunities they afforded in a way that represented, according to Goodby, a ‘classic postcolonial double-bind; indigenous literature defines itself in its rejection of the former imperial power while requiring its markets in order to survive’.<sup>53</sup> The unresolved ambivalences in Clarke’s own critical writing were emblematic of this condition.

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<sup>48</sup> Austin Clarke, ‘W.B. Yeats’, (first published in *The Dublin Magazine*, 1939), in *Reviews and Essays of Austin Clarke*, pp. 9-13 (p. 9).

<sup>49</sup> John McAuliffe, ‘Disturbing Irish Poetry: Kinsella and Clarke, 1951-1962’, p. 226.

<sup>50</sup> Lucy Collins, ‘Editorial: Reading Irish Poetry Cultures, 1930-1970’, *Irish University Review*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 1-5 (p. 4).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Clarke, ‘Poetry in Ireland To-Day’, (first published in *The Bell*, 1946), in *Reviews and Essays of Austin Clarke*, p. 105.

<sup>53</sup> Goodby, *Irish poetry since 1950*, p. 22.



His 1946 *Bell* article on ‘Poetry in Ireland To-Day’, for example, opened with the author’s expressed dissatisfaction toward the fact that ‘most of our contemporary poetry is hidden away in periodicals and semi-private editions, or scattered among the publishers’ list of London and America’, only to be followed a few paragraphs later by the contradictory complaint that the depressed state of contemporary Irish poetry owes much to the fact that ‘there is very little English interest in it. The latter fact can be proved very briefly’, he continues, ‘it is now twenty-two years since any English publisher has brought out an anthology of Irish poetry’.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, the extent to which these cross-channel market tensions pervaded Irish cultural debate is evident in their sporadic infiltration of even the more generally liberal transnational outlook of *Envoy* itself. The British distribution constraints place upon the magazine at its outset with the Board of Trade embargo combined with the editorial anticipation of the ‘arduous function’ faced by the magazine in having to survive largely on domestic sales contributed to what Shovlin has observed as the emergence of a note of ‘anxiety about the role of Britain in Irish affairs’ in the magazine’s first issues, with its early editorials registering at times a somewhat surprising ‘chauvinism when it comes to matters of material production’.<sup>55</sup> *Envoy*’s second editorial, for example, drew in a manner not dissimilar to Clarke attention to the poor present state of the domestic literary market by invoking the successful Irish publishing houses of the early twentieth century, stating that ‘since the firm of Maunsell & Roberts went out of existence none of our Irish firms have done anything to assist our writers who have to depend on British publishers for the production of their works’.<sup>56</sup> This ‘humiliating position’, as the editorial describes it, is brought to the fore in the magazine’s third issue, with its editorial explicitly directed at ‘Our Irish Publishers’.<sup>57</sup> ‘The

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<sup>54</sup> Clarke, ‘Poetry in Ireland To-Day’, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> Ryan, Iremonger, Hillman, ‘Foreword’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), p. 8; Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 134; p. 133.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Foreword: Mid-Way’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Foreword: Our Irish Publishers’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (February 1950), 9-13.

vast bulk of our serious book-publishing is done from English publishing houses', it states, before proceeding to detail the array of prominent Irish authors who have sought representation across the Irish Sea in the absence of any sufficient native alternative:

One has only to look down the lists of such publishers as Macmillans, Jonathan Cape, Michael Joseph, Peter Davies, etc., to see the wealth of Irish names there – Yeats, Russell, Synge, O'Faolain, O'Connor, O'Casey, Lavin, *et al.* Practically all our writers whose names, abroad, represent Irish literature have their works produced in London. There are, of course, so far as the writers are concerned, sound financial reasons for this. If they were to depend on the ingenuity of our native publishers for their sales, there would not be much bread and butter on their tables. But the net point at issue is that so long as this position continues, and as long as our Irish publishing firms continued to allow the works of reputable writers to be published in London, there will be a loss of income and prestige to Ireland.<sup>58</sup>

The sudden concern for Ireland's 'prestige' here is a surprising one given the magazine's more general ambitions to dismantle such venerated conceptions of the national entity.

Indeed, Shovlin notes that 'given the professed aim of *Envoy* to open Ireland up to a broader international public, this attitude represents a curious throwback to Fianna Fáil isolationism of the 1930s and 40s'.<sup>59</sup>

However, while such early moments in the magazine testify to the real material pressures placed upon Irish literary discourse and which weighed most heavily on the strained cultural and economic dynamics shared between Britain and Ireland, it was ultimately the capacity to transcend such schismatic tensions over the course of its twenty issues that distinguished *Envoy*'s poetry section. The three poets whose echoing aesthetic and ideological principles provided a critical spine to the poetry section, Iremonger, Cronin, and Kavanagh, together demonstrated the value of the emergent concept of 'incidental nationality' in the magazine in the way in which it encouraged the development of generative cross-channel poetic dialogue during a period otherwise defined by post-colonial antagonism and division. In this way, to return to Ramazani, their various reviews and essays mounted a significant early challenge to the conventions and obligations of a 'hermetically sealed national [block]'

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 134.

that remained dominant in Irish literary debate, beginning instead to chart and cultivate the ‘cross-cultural patterns of connection and association, both experiential and textual’ that existed between the literary cultures of both islands.<sup>60</sup> In his study, *The Poetic Economies of England and Ireland 1912-2000*, Dillon Johnston identifies the importance of mapping this ‘poetic traffic’ so as to gain an insight into ‘the sharings of resources and circulation of influences’ across British and Irish borders.<sup>61</sup> The exclusivist nationalist rhetoric that was maintained in official Irish publications belied the extent of these networks of ‘mutual exchange within a poetic economy’ and the basic reality that

most Irish and English poets nevertheless have moved within the same marketplace, employing the same language, sharing many poetic models, attending each other’s readings, subscribing to and publishing in the same journals, competing for the same prizes and chairs, and submitting to some of the same editors and publishers.<sup>62</sup>

*Envoy* becomes in the critical writings and poetry of Iremonger, Kavanagh, and Cronin a key post-war focal point for the reception of British and British-based Irish poets hitherto largely ‘kept beyond the bounds of Irish literature’, with the assimilation of major figures such as Louis MacNeice and W.H. Auden playing a key role in the magazine’s emergent aesthetic and ideological response to neo-revivalist poetics and the inherited pressures of cultural nationalism.<sup>63</sup>

### *A place in ‘the intellectual history of modern Ireland’: Louis MacNeice*

Iremonger established the importance of cross-channel poetic dialogue in *Envoy*’s first issue with his extended review of Louis MacNeice’s recently published *Collected Poems, 1925-1948*. The foregrounding of MacNeice and his influence in the opening issue of an Irish

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<sup>60</sup> Ramazani, ‘A Transnational Poetics’, p. 342; p. 355.

<sup>61</sup> Dillon Johnston, *The Poetic Economies of England and Ireland 1912-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. xi.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 43.

literary magazine was itself a declarative, controversial act, and it is necessary to first chart MacNeice's conflictual status in mid-century Irish poetry to gain a clearer sense of its significance. The British-Irish literary tensions we have been examining became focused on the figure of MacNeice to arguably a greater extent than any other poet during this time, polarising the terms of his reception and overshadowing evaluations of his work in Ireland. The son of a Church of Ireland rector who was sent from his County Antrim home in Carrickfergus into the English public school system as a young boy, MacNeice completed his formal education at Oxford to begin working as a lecturer at various English universities and, from the 1940s, as a features producer for the BBC. The rise of his poetic career under the auspices of T.S. Eliot's Faber & Faber in the company of W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender, meanwhile, saw MacNeice become popularly associated with the 'Thirties generation' of British poets whose work and preoccupations were shaped by the decade's socio-political upheaval and its defining challenges placed upon the role of the poet and function of poetry in society.<sup>64</sup> Important recent scholarship has begun to establish how MacNeice not only remained 'obsessed with Ireland and her history' throughout this time but also actively developed and maintained connections with a range of Irish cultural milieu on his regular visits across the Irish Sea.<sup>65</sup> However, that he could nonetheless be commonly regarded in Derek Mahon's notoriously polarising terms as 'a fully paid-up member of the British academic, artistic and administrative Establishment' who had 'no place in the intellectual history of modern Ireland' was reflected in the fractious and stunted nature of his Irish critical

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<sup>64</sup> Skelton, 'Introduction', in *Poetry of the Thirties*, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Welch, 'Yeats and MacNeice: A Night-Seminar with Francis Stuart', in *Louis MacNeice and his Influence*, ed. by Kathleen Devine and Alan J. Peacock (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1998), pp. 1-19 (p. 3). Walker's *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time* is the exemplary recent study of MacNeice and his relation to contemporary Irish poetry, building upon earlier work by MacNeice scholars including Terence Brown's 'MacNeice's Irelands, MacNeice's Islands', in *Literature and Nationalism*, ed. by Vincent Newey and Ann Thompson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), pp. 225-238; and Edna Longley, 'Progressive Bookmen: Left-wing Politics and Ulster Protestant Writers', in *The Living Stream*, pp. 107-129. Christopher J. Fauske has also recently examined MacNeice's relationship with Ireland in Christopher J. Fauske, *Louis MacNeice: In a Between World* (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2016).

reception in the late 1930s and 40s.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the anti-British separatist rhetoric we have been examining in the writings of poets such as Clarke and Farren centred on MacNeice and his influence to the extent that, as Elmer Kennedy-Andrews has written, he could be dismissed as ‘not [qualifying] as an “Irish” poet at all’.<sup>67</sup>

MacNeice’s conflictual status in the mid-century Irish poetry scene was foregrounded in a now well-known radio discussion on the subject of modern poetry between himself and F.R. Higgins broadcast by the BBC in Belfast in July 1939.<sup>68</sup> In the course of the discussion, Higgins antagonistically pitched a venerated native Irish verse tradition in opposition to deficient English standards, employing the ethnicist rhetoric we have been examining in relation to neo-revivalist poetics to establish the primacy of song, folk culture, and rural life in Irish poetry as expressive of the national essence. While English poetry is broadly denigrated as ‘chaotic’, lacking ‘the awful sense of respect for words which poetry demands’ and fatally detached from its rural roots through the seismic social transformations of industrialism, Irish poetry has retained its vital structuring connection to the folkways of the past, the ‘traditions, born from the ancient, yet everlasting soil, [that] maintain a regular rhythm in keeping with the old racial heart-beat’.<sup>69</sup> Higgins asserts to MacNeice in turn that ‘you cannot escape from your blood, nor from our blood-music that brings the racial character to mind’. MacNeice, however, remains critical of such overriding racial prescriptions, arguing that such a nationalistic conception of poetry would lead to the greater ‘likelihood of good poetry appearing among the Storm Troopers of Germany than in cosmopolitan communities of Paris and New York’. Though considerate of Higgins’ views, he remains ‘unconverted’ to the elevation of ‘racial blood-music’ above all other qualities, contrastingly aligning himself with

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<sup>66</sup> Derek Mahon, ‘MacNeice in England and Ireland’, *Time Was Away: The World of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by Terence Brown and Alec Reid (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1974), pp. 113-122 (pp. 113-114).

<sup>67</sup> Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home: Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland 1968-2008* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> The broadcast first resurfaced in 1986, when Paul Muldoon used an edited extract from the exchange to preface his *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Paul Muldoon, ed., *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Louis MacNeice and F.R. Higgins, ‘Tendencies in Modern Poetry (transcript), *The Listener*, vol. 22, no. 550 (27 July 1939), pp. 185-186 (p. 185; p. 186).

a more mundane, flexible, and open view of the poet as a ‘sensitive instrument designed to record anything which interests his mind or affects his emotions’. Walker has importantly noted that the oppositional posturing between Higgins and MacNeice here only represents a ‘partial picture’ of their relationship together, with the radio broadcast in fact marking the beginning of their friendship and also ultimately anticipating MacNeice’s own more nuanced engagement in his poetry with the concept of racial character as raised by Higgins.<sup>70</sup> However, MacNeice’s expressed concern in their discussion that ‘I have the feeling that you have side-tracked me into an Ireland versus England match’ nonetheless prefigured the overriding national tensions that came to dominate and distort the Irish reception of his work over the following decade.<sup>71</sup>

These tensions were exacerbated to a significant extent by what Gillis has identified as the distinguishing ‘ferocity of [MacNeice’s] attacks’ upon Irish society in his critical writing and poetry in these years, which bound together the opposing forces of unionism and nationalism by ‘their shared sense of history: a master-narrative of fear and loathing based upon identity and murder’.<sup>72</sup> MacNeice’s interrogation of the essentialising tropes and forms that were central to the nationalist identity formation of the Free State should be regarded, Gillis notes, within the broader context of his experiences amidst the intensifying ‘propagandist atmosphere’ of the 1930s.<sup>73</sup> As Piers Brendon has pointed out, ‘propaganda became part of the air people breathed’ during this time and consequently instilled a heightened sensitivity among MacNeice and his British contemporaries toward the capacity of language to mobilise and control the masses to an unprecedented catastrophic effect:

All the major occurrences of the day were the subject of organised deception which ranged from the big, amplified lie to the delicate economy with truth. [...] Leaders used aircraft to grab the limelight and they emblazoned their messages on the sky. Dictators imposed their version of the truth by means of dogma and terror. They created new cults and persecuted

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<sup>70</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 48

<sup>71</sup> Louis MacNeice and F.R. Higgins, ‘Tendencies in Modern Poetry’, p. 186.

<sup>72</sup> Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s*, p. 28.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

unbelievers. Russia and Germany, and to a lesser extent Italy and Japan, had their own reality. Facts were moulded like plasticine into the approved shape, whether Communist, Aryan, Fascist or imperial.<sup>74</sup>

MacNeice's eventual decision to return to London in 1940 after a brief period living in America and to involve himself in the British war effort as a non-combatant working with the BBC in turn sharpened his attitude towards Irish society and the Free State's neutral status, and he became increasingly critical of what he considered to be the self-preserving insularity underpinning Fianna Fáil's neutral policy. The intensification of this feeling provoked a series of poetic broadsides directed against the South which, in the terms of Piers, attacked the cultural nationalist rhetoric that authorised the State's maintaining of its 'own reality' detached from the wider moral obligation to respond to global crises.<sup>75</sup>

The poem 'Neutrality', published in 1943, in many ways represented the culmination of MacNeice's contentious engagement with Irish affairs, concentrating the poet's critical eye on 'That neutral island facing the Atlantic, | That neutral island in the heart of man'.<sup>76</sup> As Clair Wills observes, 'Neutrality' employs the poetic currency of 'Yeatsian myth-mongering' in its vocabulary, idiom, and setting to implicate the legacy of the Revival in the cultivation and sanctioning of an isolationist cultural and political ideology.<sup>77</sup>

Look into your heart, you will find fermenting rivers,  
Intricacies of gloom and glint,  
You will find such ducats of dream and great doubloons of ceremony  
As nobody to-day would mint.

But then look eastward from your heart, there bulks  
A continent, close, dark, as archetypal sin,  
While to the west off your own shores the mackerel  
Are fat – on the flesh of your kin.

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<sup>74</sup> Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), p. xvi.

<sup>75</sup> Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, p. xvi.

<sup>76</sup> Louis MacNeice, 'Neutrality', in *Louis MacNeice Collected Poems*, ed. by Peter MacDonald (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p. 224.

<sup>77</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 128.

MacNeice's setting of the poem in Yeats' imaginative home of County Sligo and the referencing of 'images rooted in the poet's creative lexicon' with 'ceremony' and 'dream' summon the exalted poetic language that elevated the revivalist recovery and expression of Ireland's folk culture.<sup>78</sup> However, while for Yeats, these imaginative resources provided the rich store of 'unbounded and immortal things' that imbued his early poetry, MacNeice sardonically attaches it to the defunct currency of 'ducats' and 'doubloons' to contrastingly emphasise the aesthetic and ethical bankruptcy of such persisting Irish imaginaries in the fraught present moment and their enshrinement of an escapist national sensibility at a time of global challenge and crisis.<sup>79</sup>

It was the aggrieved view of MacNeice as 'critiquing Ireland from the vantage point of England' and his perceived denigration of the legacy of the Revival that inevitably drew return fire from his Irish contemporaries and polarised the terms by which his critical writing and poetry were evaluated.<sup>80</sup> If MacNeice was in poems such as 'Neutrality' unreserved in his censure of the southern State, then, as Walker observes, 'literary Ireland attacked MacNeice back' with equal intensity throughout this period.<sup>81</sup> Walker has charted how Austin Clarke and Robert Farren in particular repeatedly attempted to 'exclude MacNeice from the Irish literary domain' in reviews and articles in these years.<sup>82</sup> The limited attention paid to Irish poets not perceived to be operating directly within the legacy of the Revival in *Poetry in Modern Ireland* designated the sole reference to MacNeice in the survey as 'one of the leaders of the English modernist school which was so active in the year before the last war'.<sup>83</sup> Farren's *Course of Irish Verse in English*, meanwhile, predictably finds little room for MacNeice in the context of its cultural nationalist imperative that 'Irish poetry on the whole,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'The Celtic Element in Literature' (1902), in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961) pp. 173-188, (p. 179).

<sup>80</sup> Gillis, *Irish Poetry of the 1930s*, p. 29.

<sup>81</sup> Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, p. 43.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Clarke, *Poetry in Modern Ireland*, p. 57.



and certainly in its better part, is decidedly Irish'.<sup>84</sup> The cursory reference to MacNeice at the book's conclusion follows a lengthy consideration of Clarke in which Farren culminates his appreciation of the Dublin poet by quoting his popular translation of the Gaelic song 'The Blackbird of Derrycairn', where the mythical blackbird mourns the loss of pagan Ireland to the church of St. Patrick. Farren's appreciation for Clarke's rich use of assonance in recreating the bird's mournful song, 'The song that shakes my feathers | Will thong the leather of your sandals', results in a rapturous evaluation of the poem that lauds its essential Irishness.<sup>85</sup> 'This lyric could be the subject of a long, luminous analysis', Farren emphasises, 'but I will say no more here than this: that every vowel, and every rest fit into place here like pieces of stained-glass, and that the thought and feeling come through like sunlight to make all the colours glow. It is as Irish as Cormac's Chapel in Cashel, something the world has had from us, and not otherwise have found.'<sup>86</sup> The contrast between this concluding summation and the following reference to MacNeice is stark, eschewing any actual consideration of his poetry for a brief biographical note that consigns him to England and, thereby, English critical concerns. 'MacNeice, born in Belfast, of Irish family, is almost wholly Irish in origin; but almost wholly English in his work', Farren remarks, 'In him the tradition of voluntary transplantation has its latest notable example. He has written poems with Irish subjects and some Irish feeling; but all told he is an English poet so far'.<sup>87</sup>

Such cursory and limiting considerations of MacNeice's work and influence by his Irish contemporaries was a condition of the extent to which the poet had become, as anticipated in 1939, 'side-tracked into an Ireland versus England match' over the course of the decade. The impeded nature of MacNeice's Irish reception during the 1940s represents a striking instance of the effects of the prevailing restrictive conventions of mid-century Irish

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<sup>84</sup> Farren, *The Course of Irish Verse in English*, p. 167.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

poetic debate, whereby extra-literary national expectations and obligations could still dominate the discussion to the occlusion of any serious extended treatment of the literary work itself. The significance of Iremonger's *Envoy* review, therefore, is in the first instance in its refusal to become narrowly fixated on the question of MacNeice's 'Irishness', representing in this way an early manifestation of the magazine's editorial claim that the *Envoy* poets 'take their nationality more for granted'.<sup>88</sup> If the perceived lack of rootedness or easily classifiable 'racial character' had previously limited the scope of MacNeice's critical reception, it is conversely the perceived universal qualities of his critical and poetic work that launches *Envoy*'s appreciation. MacNeice in this way becomes in Edna Longley's terms a 'broad conduit for the materials and techniques of twentieth-century poetry' through which key British and Irish poetic developments in the 1930s and 40s correlate and converge.<sup>89</sup>

Iremonger's review is itself an important contemporary rejoinder to later appraisals that MacNeice had 'no place in the intellectual history of modern Ireland', contrastingly insisting on the poet's immediate influence among emerging Irish poets.<sup>90</sup> '*MacNeice is read*', he stresses in italics, 'That a volume of his *Collected Poems* appears at this period in his career is one indication of the demand for his work', before continuing to anticipate even his posthumous reputation:

With MacNeice, I should imagine, it is a fairly safe bet that he will still be read – and widely read – in a hundred years' time. In him, the last twenty years, which have been of importance as a turning point in the history of man, have received in poetry, their most lucid commentary and expression and in a later age, apart from those who will read him for pleasure and for his poetry, biographers, historians and sociologists will turn to him for an indication of the mental climate of these depressing, if exciting, times.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Iremonger, 'Foreword: Crabbed Age and Youth', p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Edna Longley 'The Room Where MacNeice Wrote "Snow"', *The Living Stream and Revisionism in Ireland*, pp. 252-270 (p. 252).

<sup>90</sup> Mahon, 'MacNeice in England and Ireland', pp. 113-114.

<sup>91</sup> Valentin Iremonger, 'Book Reviews: *Collected Poems, 1929-1948*, by Louis MacNeice', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), 78-84 (p. 78).

The extension of MacNeice's significance beyond particularly Irish or British concerns to encompass the 'mental climate' of the times signals the broad scope of the review. Iremonger does not attempt to wade into the debate for or against the poet's 'Irishness', on the contrary, the review does not at any point refer to MacNeice either as an Irish or English poet.

Iremonger is in fact keen to establish his impact on contemporary poetry across both sides of the Irish Sea, stating that 'it can probably be safely asseverated that certainly every poet under thirty-five years of age – and many a one older than that – owes something, be it an approach, a method or a way with an image, to the verse of Louis MacNeice'.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Iremonger's conviction in the pervasive nature of MacNeice's influence is such that he establishes his poetry as having 'proved to be the basic idiom of the poetry of our time', arguing that

there is one quality – which indeed is demanded of any writer – which he has to a high degree and which is a *sine qua non* of the poet also: that of communication – his poems are about something. The subject matter of almost every poem that he has written can be readily grasped by the average reader. To be sure, how could it be otherwise when he has attempted to delve into the feelings of the average man of our time.<sup>93</sup>

In identifying these basic values of communication and the concerns of the 'average reader', Iremonger draws from key aesthetic and ideological principles of the 1930s British poetic milieu from which MacNeice emerged. It was the decisive turning away from aesthetic disinterestedness toward varying degrees of politicized engagement in a decade fraught by economic depression and the rise of fascism that broadly gave the 'Thirties generation' of British poets their defining meaning and significance.<sup>94</sup> In this, the shifting political convictions that variously bound and separated Auden, Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis, and MacNeice were more definitively underpinned by a collective commitment to a new poetic infused with the language, materials, and pressures of contemporary life, motivated, as Samuel Hynes has written, by 'the idea that by using the language of the contemporary world

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>94</sup> Skelton, 'Introduction', in *Poetry of the Thirties*, p. 14.

poets would make themselves participants in it, and would thus make their poems actions'.<sup>95</sup> MacNeice developed his own theory of 'impure poetry' in this publically engaged aesthetic atmosphere, which he outlined in his 1938 work *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* as 'a poetry conditioned by the poet's life and the world around him'.<sup>96</sup> Edna Longley has identified the importance of community and of cultivating the relationship between poet and reader as one of the 'consistent themes' of MacNeice's poetry, whereby he 'emphasized from the outset not how poetry might help change society, but how a sense of social obligation might change poetry'.<sup>97</sup> This sense of social obligation establishes the function of poetry in *Modern Poetry* as 'being firstly communication', emphasising the responsibility of the poet to his audience in the deployment of language and the conveyance of meaning, thereby prescribing basic aesthetic qualities of precision, lucidity, and familiarity over the carelessly overblown, superficially decorative, or obscurely esoteric expression.<sup>98</sup> The poet is not to be considered in the rarefied terms of the mystic or visionary, nor as an elevated Shelleyan legislator of men, rather, he is an immediately more relatable and mundane figure, simply 'a specialist in something which everyone practices'.<sup>99</sup> The ideal poet is not divorced or elevated from life by the eccentricity of his vocation, on the contrary, he is embedded in and determined by the common experiences and preoccupations of the everyday. MacNeice states his personal 'prejudice' in this regard for poets 'whose worlds are not too esoteric':

I would have a poet able-bodied, fond of talking, a reader of the newspapers, capable of pity and laughter, informed in economics, appreciative of women, involved in personal relationships, actively interested in politics, susceptible to physical impressions.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976), p. 74.

<sup>96</sup> Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), unpaginated preface, [italics author's own].

<sup>97</sup> Edna Longley, *Louis MacNeice: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 96.

<sup>98</sup> MacNeice, *Modern Poetry*, p. 80.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

*Modern Poetry* sets these celebrated commonplace qualities in opposition to a range of designated ‘escapist art’, whereby MacNeice casts a generally critical gaze on various poetic movements, forms, and individuals perceived to have contrastingly separated the poet and poetry from ‘actual life’.<sup>101</sup> Movements from late nineteenth century Aestheticism to early twentieth-century Imagism are criticised in this context alongside major figures including T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats as contributing to the condition by which ‘the poet seems no longer organic to the community’.<sup>102</sup> The ‘exceptional book-learning’ behind the accumulation and fragmented juxtaposition of historical and cultural references of an epochal poem such as *The Waste Land* ultimately resigns Eliot in this regard to a detached, aloof figure ‘more interested in ideas’ than ‘concrete life or the concrete human being’.<sup>103</sup> While Yeats’ immersion in mythology and the occult casts his early poetic in similarly escapist terms as the product of a ‘spiritualist, a hankerer for yoga, a malingerer in fairyland’.<sup>104</sup> *Modern Poetry*’s defusing of such arcane visions of the poet combines with the demystification of poetry’s formal procedures. As poetic subject matter and imagery should be drawn from the material of daily life, so should poetic diction and rhythm be informed by the ‘spontaneous colouring of speech’ and speech patterns of everyday conversation, challenging the conventional distinction between poetry and prose.<sup>105</sup> The poem should in this way open itself to the richly variegated registers and discourses that channel into the linguistic ferment of the city, admitting everything from the colloquialism of slang, journalese, and cliché to the technical language of psychology, science, and sociology into its expressive texture. ‘In this world’, Longley observes, ‘demotic idiom serves a democracy of content and attitude; the poet as Everyman displaces aristocratic and esoteric models of his role’.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 7; p. 170.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>106</sup> Longley, *Louis MacNeice: A Critical Study*, p. 105.

It is this moderated view of the poet employing a familiar and specifically urban ‘demotic idiom’ that Iremonger foregrounds at the outset of his review of *Collected Poems*, quoting for example from MacNeice’s 1936 poem ‘Hidden Ice’ to display how ‘in [his] verse, the configuration of city life is not only intellectually perceived, it is emotionally *felt*’.<sup>107</sup> MacNeice himself described ‘Hidden Ice’ in *Modern Poetry* as a poem ‘in praise of ordinary people who live by routine’ and its opening verses exemplify the study’s emphasis on the necessary intimate connection between the formal constituents of the poem – its diction, syntax, metre, imagery – and its contemporary subject matter, thereby communicating an experience or idea of contemporary life through the lexicon of its community.<sup>108</sup>

There are few songs for domesticity  
For routine work, money-making or scholarship  
Though these are apt for eulogy or for tragedy.<sup>109</sup>

This first verse announces the poem as a ‘song for domesticity’ in the correspondingly unadorned diction and rhythm of the ‘routine-work’ it describes, with its conversational tone, casual enjambment, and lack of distinctive metrical or rhyming pattern nearing the condition of prose. Terence Brown situates the opening ‘prosaic statement’ of ‘Hidden Ice’ at one end of the spectrum of MacNeice’s more generally wide-ranging technical virtuosity as a poet, reflective of the ‘diction of an extreme simplicity, sometimes banal, at others tense and austere’ that featured throughout his poetry of this time.<sup>110</sup> It is in such poems, moreover, where MacNeice demonstrates his distinguishing ability to extract from the banalities of his subject and language moments of expressive metaphoric significance without recourse to ‘windy rhetoric or overdone poeticism’.<sup>111</sup> For Brown, ‘these poems maintain the use of a language which would not disturb a prose context, yet which by subtle, almost imperceptible

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<sup>107</sup> Iremonger, ‘Book Reviews: *Collected Poems, 1929-1948*, by Louis MacNeice’, p. 81.

<sup>108</sup> MacNeice, *Modern Poetry*, p. 174.

<sup>109</sup> Louis MacNeice, ‘Hidden Ice’, in *Louis MacNeice Collected Poems*, p. 88.

<sup>110</sup> Terence Brown, *Louis MacNeice: Sceptical Vision* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 161; p. 160.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

imagery, quickens into the indefinable condition of poetry'.<sup>112</sup> Iremonger's quotation of the following two verses of 'Hidden Ice' displays this process:

And I would praise our adaptability  
Who can spend years and years in offices and beds  
Every morning twirling the napkin ring,  
A twitter of inconsequent vitality.

And I would praise our inconceivable stamina  
Who work to the clock and calendar and maintain  
The equilibrium of nerves and notions,  
Our mild bravado in the face of time.<sup>113</sup>

Both verses here enact Brown's subtle expressive intensification within the prosaic texture of the poem. The clichéd colloquialisms of 'years and years in offices and beds' and 'work to the clock and calendar' that, again, aptly evoke the tired routine of ordinary workers lead without tonal disturbance into the heightened imagery of the third and fourth lines. The striking particular image of the individual 'twirling the napkin ring' in a vague state of restlessness and its lyrical colouring as 'a twitter of inconsequent vitality', for example, admit insight and feeling without expressively exceeding the poem's controlling demotic idiom. Iremonger's isolation of these two verses foregrounds a MacNeice who is distinguished by his sensitivity and openness to the experiences and lexicon of contemporary city living. It is this urban sensibility moreover that he elevates above the conventionally dominant rural domain of Irish poetry, whereby MacNeice becomes a template for the contemporary poetic 'configuration' of Dublin's own steadily expanding middle-class society. 'How could it be otherwise when the great bulk of the reading public are those whose unspoken feelings he has lyricised', Iremonger states, 'not the countrymen with the long nights of winter hanging heavy on their hands but the middle-class city dwellers with the long evenings of summer lost to them':<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Iremonger, 'Book Reviews: *Collected Poems, 1929-1948*, by Louis MacNeice', p. 81.

<sup>114</sup> Iremonger, 'Book Reviews: *Collected Poems, 1929-1948*, by Louis MacNeice', p. 80.

For the countryside, with its calm deliberate progress, the slow fall from season into season, means little to MacNeice [...] his world is an analogy-ridden urban one, with its sharp pithy judgements, its pungent comments on its own humdrum life'.<sup>115</sup>

The importance invested in 'communication', the concerns of the 'average reader', and a poetic grounded in a lucid, demotic idiom and urban setting in what represented some of the first major aesthetic and ideological pronouncements in *Envoy*'s poetry section situates the magazine at a key point of intersection between British and Irish poetry during the 1930s and 40s, indicating in Ramazani's terms 'the 'cross-cultural patterns of connection and association, both experiential and textual' that existed between the poetry of both islands.<sup>116</sup> Iremonger's reaffirmation of the preference for 'fleshly particularities to abstractions' underpinning MacNeice's 1930s poetry was a reflection of the extent to which these basic values had been progressively cultivated in the contemporary Irish poetry emerging in the 1940s as a response to the legacy of the Revival and neo-revivalist poetics.<sup>117</sup>

It is important to remember when considering *Envoy* that for Iremonger and his young contemporaries emerging in the 1940s, *The Bell* had represented their most significant early Dublin publishing platform. A condition of the lack of extended scholarly focus on *Envoy* over recent decades, and of Irish periodical culture more generally, has been the tendency to rely upon a shorthand appraisal of the magazine in the terms of its most iconoclastic editorial statements, with the typically limited space afforded to critical commentaries inevitably resulting in their gravitation toward the declarative certitudes of the editorial voice in lieu of a more detailed consideration of the magazine's internal polyphonic complexity. The simplistic polarisation of the relations between *Envoy* and *The Bell* is a reflection of this tendency, taking its cue from the magazine's sporadic antagonistic editorial assertions made primarily to clear a space for itself beyond the shadow of its major predecessor. As such, because *Envoy* attacks *The Bell*'s sociological ethos in various editorials, the magazine is therefore consigned

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ramazani, 'A Transnational Poetics', p. 342.

<sup>117</sup> Longley, *Louis MacNeice: A Critical Study*, p. 98.



to the opposite end of the literary spectrum as an autonomous project exclusively ‘devoted to art’ or ‘retreating into pure literary affiliation’.<sup>118</sup> Such binary oppositions however belie the intimately connected reality of literary life in Dublin during the mid-twentieth century and which was indeed exemplified by a poet and critic such as Iremonger, whose own developing creative and critical sensibility from the early 1940s was shaped by his regular publication in *The Bell* in ways that subsequently informed his *Envoy* editorship. The realist fidelity to the accurate observation and transcription of the particularities of everyday experience that underpinned Seán O’Faoláin’s editorial ambition for *The Bell* to represent ‘a bit of Life itself’ naturally inflected Iremonger’s own maturing critical aesthetic within the pages of the magazine.<sup>119</sup> There can be traced across his essays and reviews the advancement of a lucid, direct, and stringent poetic voice grounded in the actual life and experiences of the poet that culminated in his 1946 extended essay on ‘Aspects of Poetry To-Day’.<sup>120</sup> ‘Whether poetry is “great” or not is of little importance – what does matter is that it should be valid’, Iremonger argued, and accordingly advocated that poets ‘write with the rhythms and word-selections of common everyday speech’, looking for ‘the material of their poetry in the only place where material for poetry can be found – in the everyday life of the people around them; the Deadly Nightshade, Imagination, relegated to its proper subordinate position, to be used sparingly’.<sup>121</sup>

Where *Envoy*’s poetry section marked a decisive post-war development from the realist project of *The Bell* and which consequently drew it in greater rapport to the poetic of major individual figures such as Louis MacNeice was in the disengagement of these aesthetic values from the extra-literary obligations of national or political representation combined with a new emphasis on the urban as opposed to the rural environment. Rather than this process thereby initiating for young Irish poets ‘a retreat into pure literary affiliation’ or an aloof experimentalism, however, there remained a central focus on ‘communication’ though now

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<sup>118</sup> Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines*, p. 46; Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*, p. 120.

<sup>119</sup> O’Faolain, ‘This Is Your Magazine’, p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> Valentin Iremonger, ‘Aspects of Poetry To-day’, *The Bell*, vol. 12, no. 3 (June 1946), 242-250.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250; p. 248.

refigured in more individualist terms, what Iremonger charted as the ‘increasing withdrawal from their audiences as groups and their addressing themselves to individuals’, so that ‘through the recording and interpretation of personal experience, poets now attempted the formulation of fundamental human values’.<sup>122</sup> MacNeice’s 1930s poetic persona again provided a guiding exemplar in this regard as representing the least overtly politicised poet of the ‘Thirties generation’. While as Peter McDonald observes, MacNeice’s poetry in the late 1930s in particular ‘was more committed than ever to the exploration of, and engagement with, public contexts’, he nonetheless retained a basic ‘scepticism’ toward explicit political identification or support throughout the decade.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Iremonger emphasised the significance of this independent stance in an early post-war article that anticipated his later *Envoy* support of the poet, stating that ‘Intuitively Louis MacNeice seemed to realise at the outset of his poetic career that his part as a poet was to be on the fence: aware of what was happening, favouring perhaps one side, but knowing too that his poetry was not the place for the propagating of that side’s claims’.<sup>124</sup> It is MacNeice’s perceived resistance to such social and political pressures while nonetheless retaining a basic artistic connection to the community and thus, as Iremonger stated, the fundamental ‘[conception] of poetry as an extension of the ordinary man’, that makes him a significant poetic precursor for the magazine.<sup>125</sup>

### ***The Envoy poet as ordinary man: Anthony Cronin, Geoffrey Taylor, and Patrick Kavanagh***

The concept of the poet as an extension of the ordinary man represented a significant mid-century response to what Seamus Deane has described as ‘the spiritual heroics of the foundation period of the State’, registering the collective desire of emerging poets in the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 246-247.

<sup>123</sup> Peter McDonald, *Louis MacNeice: The Poet in his Contexts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 204; p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Valentin Iremonger, ‘Louis MacNeice: A First Study’, *The Bell*, vol. 14, no. 3 (July 1947), 67-79 (p. 68).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

1940s ‘to climb down from the dizzy height of mythology, the glories of battle, elaborate readings of tradition and labyrinthine pursuits of Irishness’ that had compelled and empowered the Literary Revival and its legacy.<sup>126</sup> Yeats had, of course, returned to the idealised imaginative and communalising engagement with folk culture and rural life of his early poetic in his posthumously published final address to Irish poets in ‘Under Ben Bulben’, which summoned once again the generative folkways of ‘ancient Ireland’ to both assert the poet’s authority on the present and boldly prophesise of the ‘coming days’.<sup>127</sup> The famously uncompromising opening demand that ‘Irish poets, learn your trade’ was predicated upon a turning away from contemporary disorder to the symbolic and narrative touchstones of the heroic national past, as the second half of section five delineates:

Sing the peasantry, and then  
 Hard-riding country gentlemen,  
 The holiness of monks, and after  
 Porter-drinkers’ randy laughter;  
 Sing the lords and ladies gay  
 That were beaten into the clay  
 Through seven heroic centuries;  
 Cast your mind on other days  
 That we in coming days may be  
 Still the indomitable Irishry.<sup>128</sup>

What Terence Brown has described as the ‘mesmeric’ rhythmic and rhetorical performance of ‘Under Ben Bulben’ encapsulates the empowering force of Yeats’s mythic sense and the ‘dogmatic power’ it invested in his verse to engage, however controversially, in the public sphere.<sup>129</sup> ‘Under Ben Bulben’ is itself an example of the ‘well made’ song demanded of Yeats’s would-be successors, with the emphatic trochaic opening in ‘Sing the peasantry’ characteristic of what Helen Vendler has noted as the poem’s startling rhythmic thrust that

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<sup>126</sup> Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, p. 233.

<sup>127</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘Under Ben Bulben’, from *Last Poems* (1936-1939), in *Variorum Yeats*, pp. 636-640 (p. 637; p. 640).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 639-640.

<sup>129</sup> Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999), p. 369. For Brown, it is the mesmeric quality of Yeats’s performance in ‘Under Ben Bulben’ that ultimately exacerbates the ‘deficient ethical sense’ underpinning the poem, which advances the extreme eugenic beliefs that Yeats developed in the 1930s and his abhorrent call for the regeneration of civilisation through mass bloodshed. *Ibid.*

immediately calls its audience ‘to almost military attention’, launching a strident movement that is sustained through marching iambic tetrameter lines and strong rhyming couplets.<sup>130</sup> The metrical stress on ‘Sing’ at the beginning of this extended sentence that completes the remainder of the stanza, moreover, establishes the importance of folksong and the exalted conception of the poet as bard that Yeats had cultivated from his earliest revivalist writings and would in turn resonate through the neo-revivalist poetic we have been examining into the mid-century. Gregory Castle has observed how ‘the idea of the bard as a social authority resonated deeply’ with Yeats as a young man, drawing inspiration from texts such as Standish O’Grady’s *History of Ireland* which charted the tradition of bardic culture in Ireland and its elevated societal influence in ‘[nourishing] the imagination, intellect and idealism of the country’.<sup>131</sup> It is the invocation of the supreme authority of the bard as ‘the most powerful influence in the land’ of ancient Ireland, around whom Yeats had emphasised from his earliest writings that ‘all manner of superstitious reverence environed’, that returned to sanction and imbue the rhetorical sweep of the fifth section of ‘Under Ben Bulben’ and its capacity to simultaneously address the real present and mythic past, emphatically culminating in a ‘universalising’ national image with the summoning of a vision of ‘the indomitable Irishry’.<sup>132</sup>

Reflecting on the charge laid down by Yeats to his contemporary and succeeding poets in the ‘extraordinary fifth section’ of ‘Under Ben Bulben’, John Montague admitted to a jarring sense of disconnection from its idealised revivalist poetic, writing that ‘There are times when I wonder if that passage was not inserted with malice afterthought’:

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<sup>130</sup> Helen Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 207.

<sup>131</sup> Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, p. 69; Standish O’Grady, *History of Ireland: The Heroic Period*, vol. 1 of 2 (London: Sampson, Low, Searle, Marston, & Rivington; Dublin: E. Ponsonby, 1878), p. vii.

<sup>132</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘Bardic Ireland’, review of Sophie Bryant’s *Celtic Ireland* in the *Scots Observer* (4 January 1890), in *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats, vol. 1: First Reviews and Articles 1886-1896*, ed. by John P. Frayne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 163-166 (p. 163); Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, p. 260.

A friend once told me of interrupting two old men near Belmullet, in order to ask the way, and being shown a path which led over the foaming sea cliff: is that what Yeats meant by bequeathing us a catalogue of subjects that could only be legitimately treated in parody?<sup>133</sup>

Iremonger more forcibly expressed this feeling of alienation in his personal correspondence of the 1940s, writing to Robert Graves who was then compiling his own sprawling mythological work *The White Goddess* that ‘Here in Ireland we cannot so readily accept the mythology, probably living away from the country, it would be easier to be objective about it’, before antagonistically pitching his generation against the legacy of his literary forbears, ‘The currency of our sagas has been debased by Yeats, AE, and the remainder of that and the succeeding generations who followed their lead. For my own part, I feel that I must fight it and conquer it first.’<sup>134</sup> Drawing from an image rooted in Yeats’ creative lexicon, that of the ‘great tapestry’ of Celtic history the poet envisioned hanging behind and imbuing the imaginative literary and artistic work of the present, Iremonger asserted with the sweeping stridency that would mark *Envoy*’s more inflammatory editorials that<sup>135</sup>

The huge Celtic fabric built up by Yeats and his disciples was fake. It couldn’t stand up to an economic depression, much less armour-piercing bombs. Anything salvaged from the ruins of the Four Courts in 1923 perished in the Economic War, and good riddance, say my generation. You’re not allowed to be yourself, let alone be a Celt.<sup>136</sup>

Indeed, beyond mere questions of aesthetic difference, the mid-century diminishing of the visibility and significance of poetry itself in these sobering socio-economic conditions to that of a largely ‘inconspicuous and private enterprise’ most emphatically detached emerging poets in the 1940s from the elevated national role and public authority commanded by a

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<sup>133</sup> John Montague, ‘Under Ben Bulbin’, *Yeats and Ireland: Shenandoah, The Washington and Lee University Review*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Summer 1965), 21-24 (p. 23).

<sup>134</sup> Iremonger to Graves, 6 July 1944, MS Robert Graves, GB 473 RG/J/Iremonger/3.

<sup>135</sup> Yeats famously declared in 1937 that ‘Behind all Irish history hangs a great tapestry, even Christianity had to accept it and be itself pictured there. Nobody looking at its dim folds can say where Christianity begins and Druidism ends. [...] That tapestry filled the scene at the birth of modern Irish literature, it is there in the *Synge of The Well of the Saints*, in James Stephens, and in Lady Gregory throughout, in all of George Russell that did not come from the *Upanshads*, and in all but my later poetry’. W.B. Yeats, ‘A General Introduction for my Work’ (1937), in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 509-526 (pp. 513-515).

<sup>136</sup> Iremonger to Graves, 4 April 1944, MS Robert Graves, GB 473 RG/J/Iremonger/2.

figure such as Yeats at the height of the Revival.<sup>137</sup> In the introduction to his ‘critical prose’ in 1937, Yeats had laid down another formidable gauntlet to his successors with the declaration that ‘A poet is justified not by the expression of himself, but by the public he finds or creates; a public made by others ready to his hand if he is a mere popular poet, but a new public, a new form of life, if he is a man of genius’.<sup>138</sup> Yet Yeats’ enduring belief in what Longley has observed as the capacity of the poet and poetry ‘to conceive and address an entire society’ became increasingly untenable by the mid-century whereby poetic production and promotion had become largely confined to the margins of social life: a time when Irish poets were generally struggling to find publication let alone reach national prominence.<sup>139</sup> In this, the necessary mid-century ‘climb down’ from the bardic intensities of revivalist discourse was in the most basic sense a reflection of the consequently more mundane lifestyles of Irish poets from this time, with Iremonger, Cronin, and Kavanagh for example representative of the civil service and journalistic occupational backgrounds that now generally sustained the poet and which immersed them in the prosaicness of everyday life.<sup>140</sup> In such a climate it was Joyce rather than Yeats that would represent the overarching guiding figure in Irish cultural life, becoming as Gerry Smyth observes ‘the touchstone of authentic Irish art because his work [...] is thoroughly informed with the local’ and by which in a book such as *Ulysses* he could transmute the everyday to a level of universal significance.<sup>141</sup> ‘Nothing of Dublin was too humble for Joyce to recall – nothing to dull or commonplace’, Ryan emphasised:

Our songs, our voices, as insignificant as the twitterings of the starlings on the trees in O’Connell Street, even when as hollow as St Paul’s tinkling cymbals became, under his hand, glorious cadenzas, brilliant arpeggios and dreamy codas penned across this mighty score.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> McAuliffe, ‘Disturbing Irish Poetry: Kinsella and Clarke, 1951-1962’, p. 226.

<sup>138</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘Introduction’ (1937), in *Essays and Introductions*, p. vii; p. x.

<sup>139</sup> Edna Longley, ‘Introductory Reflections’, in *Yeats Annual 12. That Accusing Eye: Yeats and his Irish Readers* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 3-28 (p. 3; p. 7).

<sup>140</sup> Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, p. 233.

<sup>141</sup> Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*, p. 108.

<sup>142</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 52.

*Envoy*'s advancement of the concept of the poet as an extension of the ordinary man, what Iremonger reiterated in the October 1950 issue as a poetry grounded in 'everyday occurrences, the concern for the objective world of things rather than the platonic world of ideas', emerges as the closest thing to a coherent and sustained aesthetic programme in the magazine, linking *Envoy* to key British influences such as MacNeice and Auden and spurring various distinctive strategies of voice among its regular contributors, from the austere simplicity of Anthony Cronin to the observational precision of Geoffrey Taylor, and the ludic irreverence of Patrick Kavanagh.<sup>143</sup> Writing in June 1951, what the issue's foreword introduced as a 'manifesto' that would be 'accepted without reservation by the body of intelligent and creative writers', Cronin sweepingly stated that 'For over a hundred years before the first world-war poetry was deliberately and consciously poetic. The ability to ignore the real was confused with imagination. It was all very transcendental'.<sup>144</sup> The essay contrastingly situates itself at a mid-twentieth century point severed from such romantic idealism in the combined aftermath of two world wars, thereby asserting the necessity in contemporary poetry of a particularly severe variation of the lucid, direct, stringent poetic voice earlier advocated by Iremonger. 'Poetry must abandon all attitudes', he declared:

We will have to be very hard and bitter, precise and clear and ordinary, if we are to escape the consequences. We have had enough poets whose eyes rolled in a fine frenzy. What we need now are a few shifty-eyed individuals who nevertheless can achieve honesty when writing.<sup>145</sup>

This movement toward an aesthetic of restraint compels the explicit disavowal of expressive or emotional excess in poetry. 'The capacity to feel is rapidly atrophied by any sort of pretence of feeling', Cronin continues, 'The poet does not feel more intensely than anybody else – that is the romantic lie propagated by Palgrave and a hundred other bad anthologies. He

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<sup>143</sup> Valentin Iremonger, 'Book Reviews: Diamond Cut Diamond, by Ewart Milne', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 11 (October 1950), 86-89 (p. 89).

<sup>144</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 19 (June 1951), 7 (p. 7); Anthony Cronin, 'Guilty Poetry', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 19 (June 1951), 22-26 (p. 22).

<sup>145</sup> Cronin, 'Guilty Poetry', p. 24; p. 22.

is simply an honest man with a capacity for strict expression'.<sup>146</sup> The explicit disassociation from the emotional intensities embodied in a classic nineteenth-century anthology such as *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* and the countering prescription of the contemporary poet in mundane terms as 'simply an honest man' set in a chastened post-war atmosphere recalls Iremonger's own moderated conception of the poet and poetry. For Edward Larrissy, it was the renewed critical sensitivity to 'the registers, discourses and dictions which may shape our consciousness' that informed the 'governing tone' of British poetry into the late 1940s and early 50s, a recognition of the need for 'a more responsible and adequate language' in the aftermath of war that would avoid 'lapsing into abstraction or generality, or alternatively succumbing to the temptations of the irresponsible poetic gesture'.<sup>147</sup> Cronin's advancement of a poetic based upon 'strict expression' locates *Envoy* in this broader international climate and, as with Iremonger's promotion of MacNeice, he attempts to separate the poet's social awareness from any necessary overriding political or ideological allegiance. 'As a man, a poet should have political opinions, which is to say he should have political antagonisms and sympathies', Cronin states, 'But since the major part of his job is to distinguish real feeling from false, he must beware of engagement in the great mummery of politics and deny himself, except as a conscious holiday, the luxury of political sentiment'.<sup>148</sup> It is, rather, in the poet's essential focus on and fidelity to his own individual experience and predicament in such a climate by which he can thereby become a communicant of universal values. 'The central political fact for every poet is his own position in the world', Cronin continues, 'and if he expresses his feeling about that accurately he is doing as good a political job as anyone else'.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>147</sup> Edward Larrissy, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Poetry, 1945-2010*, ed. by Edward Larrissy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1-9 (pp. 3-4).

<sup>148</sup> Cronin, 'Guilty Poetry', p. 23.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 24.



Cronin's poem featured in *Envoy's* April 1950 issue, 'For A Father', is representative of the way in which he attempted to establish this advocated 'strict expression' in his own early poetry. The poem meditates on the nature of generational inheritance through the relationship between a father and son, whereby the son's changing ambivalent attitude toward his father's influence, veering from natural early attachment to inevitable later resistance, is amplified by his eventual departure to a 'strange and frightening city' that Cronin has later attributed to his own trips to Salzburg and Vienna in the immediate post-war years which, he recalls, 'were under full power occupation at the time and were patrolled by armies in their national uniform, American, French, Russian, and English'.<sup>150</sup> 'For A Father' articulates this dynamic in a precise, simple diction and an irregular metre of varying long and short lines that work to restrain any kind of conventional expressive or rhythmic momentum:

With the exact length and pace of his father's stride  
The son walks  
Echoes and intonations of his father's speech  
Are heard when he talks.<sup>151</sup>

This opening verse anticipates what Goodby has observed as the 'unadorned quality' and 'unillusioned stringency' that would become central to Cronin's developing poetic over the following decades.<sup>152</sup> The exactitude of the son's replication of his father's habits is mirrored by the poem's strict economy of expression, with the consciously flat monosyllabic end-rhyme of 'walks' and 'talks' muting its musicality and, thereby, avoiding the overt 'pretence of feeling' from which Cronin sought to detach himself in his critical prose.<sup>153</sup> While the following verse describes how the son 'absorbed his father's smile and carefully copied | The way that he stood' as a youth, his progression into young adulthood provokes a conflicted impulse toward independence as the third verse describes how 'He grew into exile slowly |

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<sup>150</sup> Anthony Cronin reads his poem 'For a Father', University College Dublin Digital Library, <<https://vimeo.com/164087491>> accessed 23 July 2017.

<sup>151</sup> Anthony Cronin, 'For A Father', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 5 (April 1950), p. 30.

<sup>152</sup> Goodby, *Irish poetry since 1950*, p. 44.

<sup>153</sup> Cronin, 'Guilty Poetry', p. 23.

With pride and remorse'.<sup>154</sup> The son's decision to emigrate and eventual arrival in a daunting post-war foreign city, however, poignantly occasions an instinctive retreat into his inherited paternal traits. Cronin again avoids the melodramatizing of this culminating moment of physical exile and emotional reconciliation through its compression within the poem's restrained form, so that the final verse concludes:

In a strange and frightening city  
As strangers rejoice  
He smiles with his father's hesitant smile  
And speaks with his voice.

*Envoy's* eagerness to establish a 'valid' post-war contemporary Irish poetic, underpinned by a concrete view of poetry that, as Cronin stressed, 'must never be confused with prophecy, for the poet is occupied with the real, not with the ideal', was reflected in the regularity with which the poems featured in the magazine functioned on the level of direct critical pronouncement and exhortation, with their narrative content and subject matter informed by and in turn supplementing the instructive imperative of the essays and reviews.<sup>155</sup> Cronin's assertion that poets would have to be very 'hard and bitter, precise and clear and ordinary' in order to create a poetry adequate to the chastened conditions of a post-war world was explicitly advocated in *Envoy* poems by Geoffrey Taylor, who in many ways transferred his former guiding editorial persona with *The Bell* into the exhortatory voice of his *Envoy* poetry. Taylor had taken over as poetry editor of *The Bell* from Frank O'Connor in 1941, maintaining the position for over four years. Though, as Kelly Matthews notes, Taylor's tenure as editor initiated a greater focus on questions of aesthetics and poetic form as opposed to overriding sociological or national contexts, he nonetheless remained faithful to the founding realist ethos of the magazine in generally insisting 'that poets should pay attention to

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<sup>154</sup> Cronin, 'For A Father', p. 30.

<sup>155</sup> Cronin, 'Guilty Poetry', p. 25.

the representational “sense” of their work’.<sup>156</sup> This position was similarly expounded in his contributions to *Envoy*, with ‘Dialogue’, in the magazine’s second issue, for example, associating the poet’s craft with the precision of the microscope and dictionary in its praise of the qualities of accurate observation and expressive exactitude:

Oh better, through plain window look  
On field-checked hill, on farm, on tree;  
Or prize, with microscope and book,  
Anatomy from flower or flea.  
High light, deep darkness, being alike shut out,  
Let dictionaries unlock our verbal doubt.<sup>157</sup>

This aesthetic of precision was again explicitly promoted in the poem ‘The Years’ in May 1950, which advised poets on the avoidance of lofty symbolic abstractions. ‘Let us grow more objective, even more | Disinterested’, Taylor urged:

Beyond the surface is secondhand and dead  
Symbol or emblem, insignificant;  
Or, if now new either to heart or head,  
Untransferable and indifferent.<sup>158</sup>

The appropriation of the poem as a platform for direct pronouncement and exhortation in *Envoy* testified both to the nascent character of the magazine’s critical poetic project and the impatience of its poets to assert their developing aesthetic and ideological views on the Irish literary scene. This tendency was nowhere more reflected in the magazine than with Patrick Kavanagh, whose poetry in general, as Quinn has observed, ‘became increasingly implicated into his critical enterprise during the 1940s’.<sup>159</sup> A defining characteristic of Kavanagh’s proliferation of critical and journalistic writing in magazines and newspapers throughout the decade, and which was exemplified in his ‘Diary’ series, was the increasing extent to which his ‘prose and poetry mingled casually and unselfconsciously’ on the page,

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<sup>156</sup> Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 75.

<sup>157</sup> Geoffrey Taylor, ‘A Dialogue’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), p. 23.

<sup>158</sup> Geoffrey Taylor, ‘The Years’, *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 6 (May 1950), p. 51.

<sup>159</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born Again Romantic*, p. 255.

with poems themselves regularly employed in favour of prose to assert a point of view or launch an attack.<sup>160</sup> In this way, Quinn writes, ‘the demarcation between his creative and his critical writings diminished as the same preoccupations and attitudes, the same words, and above all, the same speaking voice were encountered in both’.<sup>161</sup> Kavanagh’s immersion in the antagonistic confines of Dublin’s literary pub culture narrowed much of this cross-generic pollination in his writing along ultimately self-destructive satirical lines, with his regular prose outbursts against figures such as Farren, Higgins, and Clarke translating seamlessly into his balladeering broadsides against ‘Paddy Mist’ and ‘Paddy Frog’. Yet such satirical writing did not ultimately prevail to the exclusion of Kavanagh’s assimilation of and contribution to the more generative poetic influences developing within *Envoy*’s milieu that we have been examining in this chapter. On the contrary, Quinn goes so far as to say that ‘the *Envoy* years have at least equal claim to be considered a time of rebirth’ as the poet’s celebrated later period of convalescence and poetic renewal by Dublin’s Grand Canal in 1955, ‘for in the less than two years of its existence his poetics underwent the crucial reorientation that made all his later poetry possible’.<sup>162</sup>

It is in Kavanagh’s adoption and distinctive appropriation of *Envoy*’s quotidian poetic persona and a poetry grounded in the ordinary and, increasingly, the urban experience of the poet where we can begin to trace this development. The sense that Kavanagh was becoming aware of the creative potential in such a strategy of voice while writing his *Envoy* ‘Diary’ is reflected, as with Taylor, in the way in which his poems included in issues of the magazine increasingly begin to figure as manifesto-like statements of both personal intent and public exhortation. The poems were moreover substantially backed in later issues of the magazine by key critical essays that followed the lead of Iremonger in extending the reach of this poetic voice across the Irish Sea to encompass key British literary developments of the 1930s and

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., pp. 254-255.

<sup>162</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 301.

40s, whereby Auden emerges for Kavanagh as a major post-war exemplar. Though importantly drawing from the shared founding critical principles developing within the magazine's poetry section, Kavanagh's particular cultivation of a quotidian poetic persona and urban demotic idiom provided a distinctive comic counterpoint to the solemn austerity and precision of Cronin and Taylor, anticipating instead rather what Goodby has characterised as the 'poetics of the casual' that would shape Kavanagh's later work and which would invigorate his poetry with a new playful, improvisatory, and self-reflexive energy.<sup>163</sup>

Kavanagh's March 1950 'Diary' opened with the ballad later collected as 'Spring Day', a title that indicates the poet's arrival in the fertile terrain of what Quinn describes as an emergent 'cult of the quotidian' in his *Envoy* poetic, whereby the vaunting of 'ordinariness as a prerequisite for poetry' in turn encourages the comic and self-delighting subversion of decorum across the lyric surface:<sup>164</sup>

O Come all ye tragic poets and sing a stave with me –  
Give over T.S. Eliot and also W.B.  
We'll sing our way through Stephen's Green where  
March has never found  
In the growing grass a cadence of the verse of Ezra Pound.<sup>165</sup>

The opening quatrain's blithe dismissal of the high figures and concerns of literary modernism and the Revival as variously represented by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and W.B. Yeats sets the tone for a ballad that revels in its own anti-literary and anti-intellectual bias. Goodby has noted that Kavanagh's attraction to the ballad was in part stimulated by his acute awareness of 'the subversive, plebeian effect such forms could have' and 'Spring Day's' rolling iambic metre and rhyming couplets of loose long and short lines propel the poem's nonchalant iconoclasm, where the bathetic juxtaposition of reference and register entertains the incongruous coupling of Ezra Pound and St. Stephen's Green, and veers from mock

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<sup>163</sup> John Goodby, 'The Later Poetry and its Critical Reception', in *Patrick Kavanagh*, pp. 121-144 (p. 126).

<sup>164</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born-Again Romantic*, p. 334; p. 332.

<sup>165</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950), 83-88 (p. 83).

eloquence ('stave' and 'cadence') into crude vernacular ('Give over').<sup>166</sup> In presenting 'Spring Day' in the form of popular Irish song with its opening 'Come all ye', as well as dramatizing in the stanzas themselves the poet's oral performance as he invites the reader to join him to 'sing our way through Stephen's Green', Kavanagh flaunts the central communalising authority of the song tradition in Irish poetic discourse and the inherited self-assurance of a form, Quinn writes, 'whose rhetoric invites communal assent, presupposes that singer and audience share a common ideology or that the singer's message will be endorsed by his audience'.<sup>167</sup> Yet 'Spring Day' invokes and exploits the supreme status of music and the poet as singer in Irish culture only to playfully subvert the means by which these formal procedures have become enshrined in revivalist and neo-revivalist practice, to recall Harry White, 'as expressive of the integrity and imaginative purity of Gaelic culture'.<sup>168</sup> So the ramshackle irreverence of the opening rhyming couplet 'me' and 'W.B' cocks a snook at the meticulous sound patterning we have examined as central to neo-revivalist poetics, eschewing the serious elaborately tuned 'word-music' of a poet such as Austin Clarke for an aesthetic that contrastingly delights in its own comic improvisational flair.<sup>169</sup> The poet's music does not, therefore, transcendently commune with the venerated folk culture of a national past, but rather, as the following stanzas begin to outline, merely the casually encountered 'ordinary things' of his everyday life.<sup>170</sup>

'Spring Day' not only casts its irreverent gaze over the gravities of the Literary Revival but also, strikingly, at the perceived exaggerated solemnity of the young poets within *Envoy's* milieu itself. Kavanagh's befriending of *Envoy's* associated young writers and painters such as Anthony Cronin, John Jordan, and Patrick Swift came as a 'godsend' to a poet who by the late 1940s, Cronin recalls, was almost 'totally without literary friends' in

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<sup>166</sup> Goodby, 'The Later Poetry and its Critical Reception', p. 139.

<sup>167</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: Born-Again Romantic*, p. 332.

<sup>168</sup> White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination*, p. 8.

<sup>169</sup> Clarke, 'Verse Speaking', in *Selected Plays of Austin Clarke*, pp. 309.

<sup>170</sup> Kavanagh, 'Diary', p. 83.

Dublin.<sup>171</sup> The stimulating social and intellectual influence this emergent artistic cohort had upon the older poet was exemplified with Cronin, who became ‘almost a daily companion’ for Kavanagh at this time.<sup>172</sup> Kavanagh consequently singled out Cronin in his final ‘Diary’ as one of the younger generation of Irish poets who, ‘if he has it in him, will be unlikely to be led down the national cul-de-sac’.<sup>173</sup> He moreover considered ‘For A Father’ a ‘smashing poem’ in what represented, as Quinn notes, a ‘remarkable occurrence’ for a poet known almost exclusively for his invectives against the contemporary scene.<sup>174</sup> However, if Kavanagh was drawing significant influence from the critical movement toward ordinariness and a new simplicity of expression behind such poems, ‘Spring Day’ at the same time playfully curbs the self-conscious seriousness of *Envoy*’s critical project, a characteristic that was exemplified in Cronin’s own ‘Guilty Poetry’ with such portentous statements as ‘Poetry must abandon all attitudes. The only thing that can save us, now, or at least procure us mercy, is a full confession of guilt’.<sup>175</sup> Rather, the comic deflationary note emerging in Kavanagh’s poetry here encourages young Irish poets to deflect such intellectual solemnity and existential angst, to come to the realisation that

Philosophy’s a graveyard – only dead men analyse  
 The reason for existence. Come all you solemn boys  
 From out your dictionary world and literary gloom –  
 Kafka’s mad, Picasso’s sad in Despair’s confining room.<sup>176</sup>

What steers ‘Spring Day’ clear of the perceived graveyards of high intellectualism and existential despair is a newly found appreciation for the banal that in turn loosens the poetry’s aesthetic from a prescribed ‘confining room’ to revel in comic indecorum, anticipating what Goodby has identified as the ‘radical heterogeneity’ that would increasingly come to

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<sup>171</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 65.

<sup>172</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 296.

<sup>173</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 65-71 (p. 70).

<sup>174</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, p. 296.

<sup>175</sup> Cronin, ‘Guilty Poetry’, p. 25.

<sup>176</sup> Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, p. 83.

characterise later Kavanagh's poetry.<sup>177</sup> In this, Kavanagh exemplified the liberating effects of *Envoy's* transnational outlook in establishing W.H. Auden as an enabling model and influence over the course of his 'Diary' series, drawing the English poet into the magazine's emergent aesthetic in a manner akin to Iremonger with MacNeice. Ryan has recalled the significance of the *Envoy* coterie and the young Dublin painter Patrick Swift in particular in reinvigorating Kavanagh's appreciation for Auden. Swift became along with Cronin a close friend and influence on the older poet at this time. 'W.H. Auden was the key whereby Swift opened the doors of Kavanagh's perception', Ryan has recalled, describing how the painter's love of the English poet and impressive ability to recite from memory large sections of his work made a significant impact upon Kavanagh, whose own sphere of literary influences had up to this point remained relatively narrow.<sup>178</sup> Reflecting on Auden's wider influence over British and Irish poetry from the mid-twentieth century onwards, John Redmond characterises it as 'at once deflationary and permissive. At the same time as proposing a less exalted role for poetry, he offers a much wider sense of what poems can be'.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, what Kavanagh most importantly drew from Auden was this 'deflationary freedom' that sanctioned and encouraged the fusion of unconventional material and diverse registers into the subject and form of verse, where for example the employment and skilful adaptation of fixed-forms such as ballads and sonnet-sequences could combine with the indecorum of a 'casual, mixed idiom' encompassing the lexical spectrum of contemporary urban life from common slang to scientific jargon.<sup>180</sup>

In his extended essay written in place of the customary 'Diary' in *Envoy's* penultimate issue, entitled 'Auden and the Creative Mind', Kavanagh reflected on the 'quality called creativity' and elevated the English poet above his contemporaries in the belief that 'Nobody

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<sup>177</sup> Goodby, 'The Later Poetry and its Critical Reception', p. 125.

<sup>178</sup> John Ryan, 'Introduction', in *PS... of course: Patrick Swift 1927-1983*, ed. by Veronica Jane O'Mara (Oysterhaven: Gandon Books, 1996), pp. 11-13 (p. 11).

<sup>179</sup> John Redmond, 'Auden in Ireland', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 424-441 (p. 424).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 430.



writing to-day has this quality in more abundance than Auden'.<sup>181</sup> In line with the thematic strand of critical pronouncements by this stage accumulated in his poetry and prose over the course of the 'Diary' series, Kavanagh declares that 'Almost any kind of the crude material of life can be burned to give us intoxicating things':

For all the poet does is to explode the atoms of our ordinary experience. He takes our lives and stimulates the drab things and when this comic performance is over it is probable that the world is a little the worse for wear.<sup>182</sup>

It is this 'comic performance' that Kavanagh repeatedly isolates and praises in Auden's verse, with an earlier 'Diary' for example quoting the lines 'Pardon the studied taste that could refuse | The golf-house quick one and the rector's tea' from the 1935 poem originally titled 'To A Writer on his Birthday' and collected in the 1936 volume *Look Stranger!*.<sup>183</sup> It was in this poem where Auden famously called for the 'strict and adult pen' of his contemporaries in a committed response to the escalating political tensions of 1930s.<sup>184</sup> Kavanagh's Auden from the vantage point of the mid-century, however, is the comic insouciant poet whose loosened idiom can freely and unselfconsciously entertain the contemporary urban imagery and slang of the 'golf house quick one' in the ascent towards universal themes and significance. In 'Auden and the Creative Mind', he quotes with similar idiosyncrasy from the poet's major long poem, *Age of Anxiety*, first published in 1947, revelling again in the tonal shifts of Auden's mixed contemporary idiom:

Blind on the bride bed the bridegroom snores  
Too aloof to love. Did you lose your nerve  
And cloud your conscience because I wasn't  
Your dish really?<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Auden and the Creative Mind', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 19 (June 1951), 33-39 (p. 33).

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Diary', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (February 1950), 82-87 (p. 85).

<sup>184</sup> W.H. Auden, 'XXIV', in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber 1977), pp. 155-157 (p. 157).

<sup>185</sup> Kavanagh, 'Auden and the Creative Mind', p. 35.

‘Auden could take a thing as banal as that and make it a sensual drug’, Kavanagh asserts, ‘he touches nothing that he does not make an excitement’, and his essay repeatedly looks to the capacity of the seemingly ‘un-poetic’ and insignificant material in freeing the poet from inherited expectations and obligations:

Those critics who misunderstand the nature of the creative mind would say that this material is rubbish and they would be right. But their attitude would be that of a man who would judge a fire not by its heat or by the fact that it was alight at all but by the largeness, the importance and the respectability of the lumps of unburnable stone or wet wood that were piled up in the grate.<sup>186</sup>

It is the liberating possibilities of this new stylistic heterogeneity by which ‘Spring Day’ draws to its culminating conclusion, with the pronouncement of its penultimate stanza that ‘The world began this morning, God-dreamt and full of birds, | The fashion shops were glorious with the new collection of words’ recalling the blithe juxtapositions of the poem’s opening whereby the divine act of creation descends unceremoniously into the prosaicness of ‘fashion shops’.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, as Goodby observes, the contents of fashion shops are to be considered no less glorious in such a poetic that will increasingly begin to focus its new collection of words around such mundane material as the site for the play of different ‘stylistic features disruptive of a homogenous lyric tone and surface’.<sup>188</sup> ‘Spring Day’ thus concludes in encouraging young Irish poets toward ordinariness in a distinctive variation of the earlier critical pronouncements of Iremonger and Cronin:

O Come all ye gallant poets – to know it doesn’t matter  
Is Imagination’s message – break out but do not scatter  
Ordinary things wear lovely wings – the peacock’s body’s common  
O Come all ye youthful poets and try to be more human.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, p. 83.

<sup>188</sup> Goodby, ‘The Later Poetry and its Critical Reception’, p. 135.

<sup>189</sup> Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, p. 84.

Antoinette Quinn has charted Kavanagh's progression into the 1950s and 60s in terms of this gradual formal loosening of his poetic, culminating in the creation of 'a personal speaking voice that can modulate from the argot of street, racetrack and boxing ring to literary and religious allusion'.<sup>190</sup> It is this shared aspiration toward the radical refiguring of the Irish poet and the proper subject and material of contemporary Irish poetry that binds the critical spine of *Envoy's* poetry section in Kavanagh, Cronin, Taylor, Iremonger, and Hutchinson. As we have examined throughout this chapter, the formulation of new aesthetic and ideological procedures by which such a reorientation could begin to be realised in the magazine was intimately connected to, and stimulated by, *Envoy's* simultaneous commitment to the broadening of the sphere of Irish poetic influence. The extent to which the connections established with figures such as MacNeice and Auden contributed to this process was a testament to the generative potential of *Envoy's* transnational project, through which, to return to Quinn, a post-war generation of Irish poets could begin to confidently assert themselves as 'incidentally but not programmatically Irish'.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Antoinette Quinn, 'Introduction', *Patrick Kavanagh: Collected Poems*, pp. xi-xxxii (p. xxv).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Six

### ‘This most necessary and justified forum’: Art Writing

In the landmark study *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950*, S.B. Kennedy argues that the 1940s represented a ‘watershed’ decade for the visual arts in Ireland, whereby the exceptional conditions of wartime initiated the radical transformation of Irish art practice and promotion along new independent and internationalising lines.<sup>1</sup> The concentration of an array of returning Irish and incoming foreign artists in neutral Dublin precipitated this period of accelerated change, with the war years witnessing a major increase in and diversity of art exhibitions held in the capital from the conversion of small apartment rooms into makeshift galleries to the showcasing of Irish and international artists in grand public venues that attracted thousands of visitors. The formation of independent artist groups and collectives such as those associated with the White Stag Group and ‘The Irish Exhibition of Living Art’ were among the most significant manifestations of what Fionna Barber has described as the ‘new dynamism’ that invigorated the Dublin art scene during this time, encouraging the public advancement of a range of practices and influences associated with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century developments in British and continental visual modernism on a new level of diversity and scale.<sup>2</sup> Along with the activities of commercial dealers such as Victor Waddington, the platforms these groups provided for the range of international modernist styles and ideas that were now being more broadly assimilated and promoted by emerging Irish artists in turn challenged the primacy of established institutions such as the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts and institutionalised cultural nationalist practices and representational modes.

As a young man and aspiring painter in wartime Dublin, John Ryan immersed himself in the city’s vibrant art scene, with the Grafton Street rooms that would later become *Envoy*’s

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Barber, ‘Excavating Room 50: Irish Painting and the Cold War at the 1950 Venice Biennale’, p. 209.

offices functioning as a vibrant cultural focal point for painters and sculptors during these years. Key to *Envoy*'s transnational identity formation was the extent to which it drew from and associated with these transformative developments in Irish art. Launched at the moment of transition between decades in December 1949, the magazine's visual art section aimed to establish the significance of the war years while at the same time attempting to situate the emerging 'younger generation' of painters and sculptors of whom Ryan felt part within the newly expanding international dimensions of post-war life.<sup>3</sup> This final chapter of the thesis locates *Envoy* within the context of the 'watershed' period of the 1940s and what Róisín Kennedy has observed as its 'dramatic impact on the exhibition of, and discourse on modernist art' in Dublin.<sup>4</sup> The chapter establishes how *Envoy* marked a significant departure in mid-century Irish literary magazine culture in the prominent status it gave to visual art and the extent to which the arrangement and rhetoric of its central 'Contemporary Irish Painters' series drew from the independent and internationalising reformations in Irish art practice over the course of the decade. From this, we will consider *Envoy*'s broader role in the development of Irish art criticism in these years, assessing its contribution to what Kennedy has charted as a 'growing awareness of more sophisticated methods of appraising the work' of contemporary Irish artists within the contexts of European visual modernism.<sup>5</sup>

In *Writing About Visual Art*, David Carrier examines how the practice of art writing, namely, critical writing that not only interprets and evaluates artists and artworks but also as importantly engages with the practices, events, institutions, and debates that comprise and shape the art scene, shapes our visual sense in a way that 'defines, informs, and structures our experience of art'.<sup>6</sup> For Carrier, when considering a writer's engagement with visual art it is crucial to take into account how language and the distinct literary codes they employ

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<sup>3</sup> John Ryan, 'Patrick Swift: An Introductory Note', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 56-57 (p. 57), p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Róisín Kennedy, 'Experimentalism or Mere Chaos? The White Stag Group and the Reception of Subjective Art in Ireland', in *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, pp. 179-194 (p. 180).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> David Carrier, *Writing About Visual Art* (New York, Allworth Press, 2003), p. 22.

consequently impact upon the nature of their response. ‘We know art directly’, he argues, ‘but writing imposes verbalized ways of thinking upon these visual artefacts. Visual thinking is verbally structured by the rhetoric of art writing’.<sup>7</sup> For Michael Orwicz, it is vital to consider how the verbal structures of art writing are influenced and even determined by material conditions and contexts, so that we may understand ‘the stakes that selecting this particular artist and those specific formulations represented in “the critics” strategies at a particular historical moment’.<sup>8</sup> As with Orwicz, this chapter takes as its starting point the conception of art criticism as ‘discourse’ and part of a wider

historically constituted representational and signifying practice, embedded in a complex of shifting social and material conditions – linguistic rules, literary codes, gendered cultural, political and institutional formations – which in different ways mediated the content, form and the very objects of criticism.<sup>9</sup>

As we will examine, *Envoy* was distinguished in mid-century Irish periodical culture in the extent to which the independent and internationalising developments in Irish art of the 1940s were assimilated into its nascent identity formation as a magazine, with the defiant anti-establishment narrative stimulated across its ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’ series becoming emblematic of the ‘vigorous, impatient youth’ that Shovlin has observed as defining its ‘outlook’.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the severe material difficulties experienced by Irish poets in these years who, as Goodby notes, suffered in the contracted conditions of the literary market from ‘disillusion at the lack of a context, of support, of an audience’, the 1940s initiated a contrasting period of ‘optimism’ among artists that was backed by the expanding and diversifying support structures of independent groups and dealers both at home and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Orwicz, ‘Introduction’, *Art criticism and its institutions in nineteenth-century France*, ed. by Michael Orwicz (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 1-8 (p. 3).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 151; Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 1, p. 125.

internationally.<sup>11</sup> *Envoy* becomes in this way a key early publishing site to register this growing sense of confidence and momentum in contemporary Irish art. Yet, if the enlivening impact of these developments imbued and emboldened the rhetoric of *Envoy*'s art writing, the rapid nature of the transformative changes in Irish art practice during these years at the same time provided real challenges for the relatively underdeveloped state of Irish art criticism to which the magazine was no less exposed. Indeed, a key aspect of the public debate surrounding the discourse of art writing in the 1940s and 50s was centred on its capacity to seriously engage with and critically interrogate the independent and internationalising influences impacting upon Irish art and artists. The chapter thereby considers *Envoy*'s place within this debate and how its art writing contributed to the growing level of sophistication identified by Kennedy into the 1950s by which contemporary Irish artists could be discussed and evaluated in an increasingly expanding international sphere. Having read the first two issues of the magazine, one of the most significant of the 'younger generation' of artists that would be featured in *Envoy*'s pages, Louis le Brocquy, wrote to Ryan expressing his desire to take out an annual subscription, stating that 'I'm full of enthusiasm and hope that this most necessary and justified forum may continue and gain in strength'.<sup>12</sup> This chapter ultimately considers the extent to which *Envoy* represented such a forum during a period of radical change in Irish art.

### ***A 'watershed decade' in Irish art: The 1940s***

The distinguishing importance of the visual arts to *Envoy* testified to the invigorating impact of the 'watershed' decade of the 1940s from which the magazine emerged, whereby a range of developments that contributed to the reformation of the conditions and contexts of art practice along more independent and international lines accelerated the departure from the

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<sup>11</sup> Goodby, *Irish poetry since 1950*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Louis le Brocquy to John Ryan, 15 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3.

institutional structures and traditional values that had presided over the first decades of the Free State.<sup>13</sup> As a young man who first became engaged in the Dublin art scene during the war years and who began exhibiting in the immediate post-war period, John Ryan's nascent sensibility as a painter and later ambitions as arts editor were shaped by the dynamic independent ethos and vitalising international influences that stimulated the production and exhibition of painting and sculpture in these years and which instilled a new sense of confidence and momentum in contemporary Irish art both at home and overseas. If, as critics have broadly identified, *Envoy's* 'commitment to the visual arts' and 'the seriousness with which [it] addressed, examined and promoted Irish painters and sculptors' were key factors that distinguished it as a mid-twentieth-century Irish magazine, then the extent to which this commitment was stimulated by the progressive internationalising developments in Irish art practice and its public reception during the 1940s needs to be more fully assessed.<sup>14</sup> This opening section situates Ryan and his artistic milieu within the transformative contexts of the decade, establishing its significance in setting the impetus for the magazine's art section, the shaping of its arrangement and the stimulation of its rhetoric, and how these factors importantly set *Envoy* apart from conventions in the coverage of visual arts in Irish literary magazine culture during the 1940s.

'I was always an artist, really', Ryan remarked in a late interview, 'As far back as I can remember, from about the age of four, I was drawing'.<sup>15</sup> The son of art collector and patron, Agnes Ryan, Ryan's early artistic interests were cultivated by his mother who had herself harboured ambitions of becoming an illustrator in her youth and who greatly enjoyed the company of artists throughout her life, setting up the family home at Burton Hall near Sandyford as a lively meeting place for painters and writers. Agnes was a friend and early collector of the painting of Jack Butler Yeats and she introduced her son to the artist during

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<sup>13</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Showlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 154; Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines*, p. 219.

<sup>15</sup> Ryan, 'An Interview with John Ryan, Conducted by Kurt Jacobsen', p. 5.



the war years.<sup>16</sup> Ryan soon became a regular visitor to Yeats's studio at no. 18 Fitzwilliam Square and, as with other emerging painters of his generation at this time, Yeats proved a liberating avuncular influence on his conception of the artist figure and modern art.<sup>17</sup> As we noted in chapter two, the late 1930s and 40s saw a radical transformation in Yeats' painting that ultimately coincided with his establishment as Ireland's most celebrated artist. Describing the significance of this departure from the representational fidelity that had largely conditioned the painter's career up to this point, toward a loosened brushwork style and increasingly experimental use of colour in the depiction of Irish figure and landscape scenes, Bruce Arnold writes:

Throwing all caution to the wind, Yeats began to paint with thick impasto, using fingers and palette-knife as well as brushes, and with the wide use of primary colours, brilliant reds, yellows, blues, and greens, bringing fire, sun, light, into unconventionally high-flown antagonisms and juxtapositions which verge often on the extraordinary, and are always challenging.<sup>18</sup>

Though his private and highly idiosyncratic approach to painting impeded the prospect of any direct disciples of this style, Yeats's individual experimentalism combined with the enormous success he achieved in these years through the support of Victor Waddington exerted a significant influence upon Ryan and his young artist contemporaries in the way he broadly 'expressed for those around him how to be liberated in what they painted, and in how they executed their work'.<sup>19</sup> The afternoons Ryan spent in the company of the older painter, by this time in his seventies, were for him a riveting experience and he has recalled with excitement

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<sup>16</sup> Yeats's late work *There Is No Night* (1949) was hung prominently in the entrance at Burton Hall. Ní Riain, *The Life and Times of Mrs A. V. Ryan*, p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> Louis le Brocquy writes, for example, that during the war years 'I used to visit Jack Yeats regularly in his Fitzwilliam Square drawing-room studio and sometimes saw that rose fixed to his easel [...] I still remember him telling me, "pay no attention to adverse criticism. The true artist has vision. The critic has only an opinion"'. 'Louis le Brocquy quoted in Anne Madden, '1940-14: Return to Ireland', *Louis le Brocquy Official Site* <<http://www.annemadden.com/LeBPages/chronology2.html>> accessed 28 December 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Arnold, 'Jack Yeats and the Making of Irish Art in the Twentieth Century', in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage: Figurative Painting from Twentieth-Century Ireland*, ed. by James Christen Steward (London: Merrell Holberton, 1998), pp. 52-62 (p. 57).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

how Yeats allowed him to spend hours ‘rummaging’ through his sketchbooks and examining his recently completed work:

He painted *sub rosa*. There was always a rosebud attached to the highest point of his easel. It served some mystical purpose – although I never thought to ask. His benign figure, stooped with age, radiated gentleness, while his painterly eyes darted hither and thither in quest of images – as though there was time yet for another thousand pictures. He was the most truly great and good man I had ever known.<sup>20</sup>

The admiration that Ryan felt for the ‘glowing canvases of [Yeats’] final years’ was shared by his friends such as J.P. Donleavy, who wrote how his first experience ‘marvelling’ at Yeats’ late work actually compelled him to take up painting prior to seriously committing to writing in the 1940s. ‘Impressed by the prices and delighted by these marvellous extravagant whorls of colour’, he described, ‘and myself hardly capable of drawing an imitation of a triangle never mind a circle, I bought some paints, brushes and canvas’.<sup>21</sup> The boldness Ryan and Donleavy felt as ‘amateurs to dare enter into and embark upon a career in the world of art’ testified to the invigorating reformation of Irish art practice along more diverse and dynamic independent lines during the 1940s, of which Yeats’s individual experimentalism formed part.<sup>22</sup>

During the first decades of the new State, the promotion and reception of visual art in Ireland had become dominated by its assimilation into and mediation through official institutional channels in the broader service of cultural nationalism. As Fionna Barber writes, ‘visual imagery played a significant role in constructing cultural forms of nationalism’ in the 1920s and 30s, with publications such as *The Saorstát Éireann Official Handbook* in 1932 reflecting the extent to which major Irish artists and art of the period had become absorbed into both the ‘modern and archaic’ ideological strands central to the identity formation of the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>21</sup> J.P. Donleavy, *J. P. Donleavy’s Ireland*, p. 115. Donleavy would, following encouragement from Ryan, eventually exhibit his first paintings at the Society of Dublin Painters’ Gallery, no. 7 St Stephen’s Green, in December 1948, and has recalled the excitement of carrying his ‘still wet canvasses’ along Grafton Street in preparation for the exhibition. Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Free State.<sup>23</sup> Paul Henry's mountain landscape *Errigal Co. Donegal* was used for the frontispiece of the handbook with five additional landscape scenes by the artist included within, all featuring the distinctive compositional and iconographic qualities that in their widespread reproduction throughout this time had come to represent 'the quintessential image of the West of Ireland in the public mind'.<sup>24</sup> As S.B. Kennedy observes, while not himself politically engaged, Henry's tranquil, simplified depictions of the Western seaboard that typically set small clusters of thatched cottages, rolling hillsides, and still lakes beneath a monumental cloud-filled sky 'helped to formulate a popular vision of Irish identity' that visually expressed the idealised rural values promoted by de Valera's government in these years.<sup>25</sup> Seán Keating's included illustration of the construction of the Shannon hydroelectric works at Ardnacrusha, Co. Limerick, meanwhile, reflected the similarly effective nationalist application of visual art in the chronicling of major state developments in the modernization of the emergent nation.<sup>26</sup> Keating assumed an official stature in Irish art during this time in 'producing the most dramatic and rhetorical visual icons of the Irish Free State' that was further backed by his staunch association with the art practice values enshrined by the only official exhibiting and education institution in Ireland during the 1920s and 30s: the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts.<sup>27</sup>

'Like its sister academies elsewhere', Kennedy observes, the RHA was 'driven by a sense of tradition' and the need 'to safeguard standards of artistic skill and craftsmanship'.<sup>28</sup> This tradition was based upon a rigorous pedagogic philosophy whereby artists were trained to master conventional methods of illusionistic representation, focusing in particular on the study and perfected rendering of the human form and aspiring towards a technical standard of

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<sup>23</sup> Fionna Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>24</sup> *Saorstát Éireann / Irish Free State Official Handbook* (Dublin, Talbot Press, 1932); S.B. Kennedy, *Paul Henry, with a catalogue of the Paintings, Drawings, Illustrations* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Saorstát Éireann / Irish Free State Official Handbook*, p. 160.

<sup>27</sup> Brian P. Kennedy, 'The Irish Free State 1922-49: A Visual Perspective', in *Ireland: Art into History*, ed. by Raymond Gillespie & Brian P. Kennedy (Dublin: Town House, 1994), pp. 132-152 (p.150).

<sup>28</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism* p. 158.

excellence that was embodied in the early twentieth century by the celebrated Irish society portraitist, William Orpen. Orpen's enormous reputation as an artist in Britain and Ireland and his influence as a teacher in the RHA affiliated Dublin Metropolitan School of Art inculcated these values of 'academic realism' to an emerging generation of Irish painters during the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> It was through the influence and success of Orpen's most prominent pupils such as Keating that academic values continued to shape the public conception of visual art and the role of the artist in post-independence Ireland in broadly conservative, nativist, and populist terms. Traditional standards of craftsmanship and representational methods in the depiction of recognisable Irish figure, narrative, and landscape scenes naturally aligned with 'the dominant ideology of nationalism' that pervaded Irish art discourse of which Keating's painting was emblematic.<sup>30</sup> The iconic qualities of Keating's narrative depictions of Irish life saw them become archetypal images of nationhood, charting the turbulent social, cultural, and political transformation from revolution into independence. As Éimear O'Connor observes, the romanticized, patriotic characterisation of Irish rebels and flying columns in works such as *Men of the West* (1915) and *Men of the South* (1921-22) associated Keating in the public consciousness as 'the painter of Ireland's fight for independence', while *An Allegory* (1924) more ambivalently registered the traumatic aftermath of the Civil War.<sup>31</sup>

The dominance of the 'officialdom in Irish art' as represented by the RHA, its affiliated traditionalist educational institutions and prominent individual figures such as Keating, impeded the promotion and reception of what Barber has described as 'forms of cultural identity distinct from the reductive ethnicity promoted within the rhetoric of the Irish

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<sup>29</sup> Yvonne Scott, 'Realism', in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, pp. 401-405 (p. 402).

<sup>30</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 2, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Éimear O'Connor, *Seán Keating: Art, Politics and Building the Irish Nation* (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2013), p. 63; pp. 137-139.

Free State' during the early twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> As such, the radical experimental innovations in art practice that had compelled the development of European visual modernism from the late nineteenth century posed significant challenges for Irish audiences conditioned by a narrow 'nationalist discourse on art' that, as Róisín Kennedy notes, 'took place largely in general, non-specialist contexts' based on accessible narrative and iconographic qualities in the representation of recognisable Irish figures and scenes.<sup>33</sup> It was, subsequently, largely on the margins of early twentieth-century Irish culture where European visual modernist practices and ideas generally subsisted, promoted by the diligent efforts of individuals and small exhibiting societies with 'little audience for such work outside of a very small community of committed artists, collectors and curators'.<sup>34</sup>

However, the transformation of social and cultural life following the outbreak of the Second World War initiated an accelerated period of change in these circumstances, with the exceptional conditions of neutrality concentrating a new diversity of international artistic activity in Dublin that mobilised painters and sculptors along more influential independent lines and stimulated a wider public interest in alternative art practices and ideas. In her cultural history of the period, Clair Wills identifies how Ireland's neutral status made the southern State an attractive destination for an array of international and Irish artist émigrés who would subsequently have a 'decisive' and wide-ranging impact on Irish culture. 'Writers, artists and musicians who might once have gravitated towards London now chose Dublin as their cultural metropolis', Wills writes, creating an enlivening 'international atmosphere' that invigorated the local arts scene.<sup>35</sup> Foremost among the artists to arrive in the neutral capital were English pacifists Basil Rákóczi and Kenneth Hall, who gathered around them an eclectic

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<sup>32</sup> Catherine Marshall, 'Orpen, William', in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, pp. 336-339 (p. 336); Barber, 'Excavating Room 50: Irish Painting and the Cold War at the 1950 Venice Biennale', p. 211.

<sup>33</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision': Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 2, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Francis Halsall, 'Modernism and Postmodernism in Irish Art', *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, pp. 297-301 (p. 299).

<sup>35</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 282.

body of local and foreign artists in neutral Dublin under the name of the White Stag Group. Rákóczi and Hall originally formed the White Stag Group together as a platform for their shared interests in Freudian psychoanalysis and modern art while living in London's 'Fitzrovia' district in the mid-1930s, and the practice they established from this time of arranging lectures and exhibitions in their studio residences to advance their explorations in creative psychology and painting was transferred to Dublin following their move to Ireland in 1940.<sup>36</sup>

'It was something new, an accident of the war. And their visit did us good', writer Terence de Vere White has recalled of the White Stag Group, 'Uninhibited by Dublin backgrounds, they butted their way into the public consciousness'.<sup>37</sup> From their arrival, the international cosmopolitanism associated with and in turn cultivated by Rákóczi and Hall lent an 'exotic aura' to the activities of the White Stag that stimulated much publicity in a city relatively unaccustomed to such colourful artistic arrivals.<sup>38</sup> Early media attention on Rákóczi and Hall foregrounded their continental bohemianism, with the *Irish Independent*, for example, describing how 'They lived until a week before the outbreak of war on a high floor in the Montparnasse, near that roaring highway of Paris, the Boulevard Raspail'.<sup>39</sup> For their part, Rákóczi and Hall actively embellished these Parisian associations in the presentation of their studio rooms as a 'modern setting for their paintings', furnishing them with 'white walls and gay curtains of striped blue and white [...] to create a Parisian atmosphere reminiscent of the art galleries of the Rue de la Boétie'.<sup>40</sup> If these Gallic flourishes veered towards superficial internationalist affectation, then Rákóczi and Hall's exhibiting and promotional practices

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<sup>36</sup> S.B. Kennedy has extensively detailed the biography of the group in *The White Stag Group* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Terence de Vere White, *A Fretful Midge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 111-112.

<sup>38</sup> Róisín Kennedy, 'Experimentalism or Mere Chaos? The White Stag Group and the Reception of Subjective Art in Ireland', p. 181. Rákóczi was himself of Hungarian descent and the internationalism associated with the White Stag Group was further enhanced by the eclectic mix of foreign artists into Dublin who subsequently became associated and exhibited with the group, including the Canadian sculptor Jocelyn Chewett and her Scottish husband painter Stephen Gilbert who moved together from Paris, French painter Georgette Rondel, and fellow English painters Phyllis Hayward and Nick Nicholls.

<sup>39</sup> 'The White Stag', *Irish Independent*, 17 October 1940, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Basil Rakoczi, 'The White Stag Group', *Commentary*, vol. 1, no. 3 (January 1942), p. 13.

were nonetheless genuinely progressive in the context of Dublin's art scene in 1940, contributing to the radical overhaul of exhibiting practices in Dublin that we examined with the Victor Waddington Galleries in chapter two. In a city where, Catherine Marshall observes, 'public initiatives to develop audiences for visual art were neglected', Rákóczi and Hall accompanied Waddington in injecting new life into the independent promotion of visual art in Ireland in the way they successfully operated outside of official exhibiting structures.<sup>41</sup> As S.B. Kennedy writes, they 'broke all conventions' by using their rented rooms at no. 34 Lower Baggot Street and no. 30 Upper Mount Street for the exhibition of regular individual and group shows.<sup>42</sup> The transformation of the domestic space into temporary exhibiting venues represented a 'small scale and seemingly radical approach that offered a striking contrast to the pomp and formality of the RHA', and from their first group show in April 1940, Rákóczi and Hall would over the following five years hold a considerable twenty-five exhibitions in their respective apartments featuring a mix of foreign and native artists that were supplemented by various public lectures on psychology and modern art.<sup>43</sup> Equally challenging to the formal conventions of Irish art was the theory of 'subjective' painting promoted by Rákóczi and Hall in their exhibitions and art criticism, with their independent exhibiting practices backed by an artistic philosophy that eschewed communal narrative qualities familiar to Irish art discourse to focus intensely on the relationship between the individual and the creative process, encouraging the exploration of the unconscious through the use of spontaneous compositional techniques and an experimental approach to form and colour in the depiction of semi-representational and abstract images.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Catherine Marshall, 'Commercial Galleries', in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, pp. 76-80 (p. 77).

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy, *The White Stag Group*, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed chronology of the exhibitions of the White Stag Group see Kennedy, *The White Stag Group*, pp. 155-164.

<sup>44</sup> What they termed 'subjective' art involved a highly personal and experimental approach to painting that aspired towards 'the workings of the imagination turned inwards upon the memories, dreams, and phantasies of the Unconscious', eschewing representational obligation to the 'external world' and drawing influence from a diverse range of European modernist artists including Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, and Joan Miro. Basil Rákóczi, Kenneth Hall, Patrick Scott, *Three Painters* (Dublin: Sign of The Three Candles, 1945).

Assessing the impact of the White Stag Group on wartime Dublin, Seán Kissane argues that ‘more than any particular style, it was the level of professionalism, internationalism and ambition which they brought with them from London that most affected the Irish art world’.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, as Barber writes, the extent to which the radical activities of the group injected an enlivening ‘urban avant-garde’ presence in Dublin that was ‘distinguished in its orientation towards artistic tendencies in Europe or England, rather than a renewed excavation of familiar themes in Irish culture’, was key to the ‘instigation’ of the most significant native independent exhibition to be held during the war years: the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in 1943.<sup>46</sup> The foundation of the IELA was itself an expression of the increasingly confident independent artistic culture in wartime Dublin, with the exhibition organised by a small group of artists in the studio room of Louis le Brocqy at no. 16 Upper Fitzwilliam Street.<sup>47</sup> Foremost among the group was Dublin painter Mainie Jellett, whose published attacks on the RHA during the war years encapsulated the growing dissatisfaction towards the conservative institutional exhibiting practices in the city and the lack of opportunities available to emerging artists. Jellett’s exhibiting association with and vocal support of the White Stag Group, enthusiastically welcoming their international influence and eclectic experimentalism that, she asserted, ‘was not hidebound to any particular school or cramped by academic conventionality’, represented a continuation of her determined efforts to promote a greater liberality and diversity in the exhibiting forums for visual art in Ireland since the early 1920s.<sup>48</sup>

A 1942 article entitled ‘The R.H.A and Youth’ published in the monthly arts magazine, *Commentary*, occasioned her most impassioned critique of not only the staid art

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<sup>45</sup> Seán Kissane, ‘The White Stag Group’, in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, pp. 487-489 (p. 488).

<sup>46</sup> Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>47</sup> Ríann Coulter, ‘Hibernian Salon des Refusés?’, *Irish Arts Review*, vol. 20 no. 3 (Autumn 2003), 80-85 (p. 81).

<sup>48</sup> ‘Exhibition of Pictures: White Stag Group’s Work’, *Irish Times*, 10 October 1940, p. 6; For a detailed consideration of Jellett’s promotion of visual modernism in these early decades, see Ríann Coulter, ‘Translating Modernism: Mainie Jellett, Ireland and the Search for a Modernist Language’, *Apollo: The International Magazine for Collectors*, vol. 164 (September 2006), 56-62.



practices and values of the RHA but its failing ability to present work that satisfied even its own purported academic standards. ‘Every year I go to the R.H.A. exhibition in a spirit of hopefulness’, she wrote, ‘expecting there may be some change for the better, some new young head pushing its head up through the miasma of vulgarity and self-satisfaction’:

Then I looked at the work hung on the line from year to year [...] bad craftsmanship, vulgarity, and faulty weak draughtsmanship were its main characteristics, and, in the cases where there had been any standard maintained in technique, it merely resulted in a coloured photograph void of any creative element either of colour or form.<sup>49</sup>

‘The R.H.A. must not shut its doors to life’, Jellett concluded, ‘otherwise it will of necessity die of senile decay’, and the IELA was founded the following year to provide an alternative annual exhibiting venue that would represent the diversity of artistic activity in the city by providing a platform for artists working in non-academic idioms.<sup>50</sup> Opening in September 1943, the IELA committee’s stated aim to ‘make available to a large public a comprehensive survey of significant work, irrespective of School or manner, by living Irish artists’ was emphatically realised through both its wide-ranging representation and in its hugely positive public reception.<sup>51</sup> Held in the grand rooms of the National College of Art, the exhibition featured one hundred and sixty eight works by a diverse selection of emerging and established artists and was attended by crowds of over five thousand over the course of three weeks, representing what Kennedy has described as ‘probably the most consequential art exhibition to have been held in Ireland during the first half of this century’.<sup>52</sup> The high profile nature of the exhibition attracted widespread media attention that, as Wills writes, ‘brought an injection of fresh energy’ into the public discourse of Irish art and questions surrounding its nature and significance, revealing the extent to which an emerging generation of painters and sculptors

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<sup>49</sup> Jellett., Mainie, ‘The R.H.A. and Youth’, *Commentary*, vol. 1, no. 6 (May 1942), 5-7 (p. 5).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> ‘Minutes from inaugural meeting of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art’, Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 1943, quoted in Coulter, ‘Hibernian Salon des Refusés?’, p. 80.

<sup>52</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 121.

were becoming influenced by continental modernist practices and styles.<sup>53</sup> As it established itself as an annual exhibition over the following years, moreover, the IELA became a key early instigator in the ‘move towards the erosion of the international isolation in Irish art’ with the increasing overseas exhibition of painters and sculptors during the immediate post-war years.<sup>54</sup> Organizing of a special travelling exhibition of ‘Living Irish Art’ to the Leicester Galleries in London in October 1946, the IELA along with commercial dealers such as Victor Waddington initiated the process whereby Irish painters and sculptors gradually ‘became visible within the wider cultural domain’ of Europe and the North America.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Redressing the ‘marginal position’ of visual art in the Irish literary magazine***

The major developments in contemporary Irish art during the 1940s instilled a new ‘period of optimism in which Irish artists seemed at last to have found the confidence needed to produce genuinely interesting work’, and it was into this newly invigorated independent artistic atmosphere, enlivened by the increasing extent and variety of exhibitions in Dublin and the growing recognition and coverage of visual art in the media, that Ryan became immersed as a young man.<sup>56</sup> Following the precedent set by the White Stag Group in the transformation of the urban domestic space into an independent cultural focal point, the apartment rooms at no. 39 Grafton Street that would later be used for *Envoy*’s offices became during the war years a lively gathering point for Ryan and his young artist contemporaries, who included the young painter Patrick Swift and sculptor and designer Desmond MacNamara, each of whom would later contribute to *Envoy*. MacNamara first rented the

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<sup>53</sup> Wills, *That Neutral Island*, p. 285.

<sup>54</sup> Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910*, p. 116.

<sup>55</sup> Barber, ‘Excavating Room 50: Irish Painting and the Cold War at the 1950 Venice Biennale’, p. 212. The London IELA show featured a considerable seventy-six works by artists who had regularly exhibited at the IELA in Dublin over the previous three years, including Daniel O’Neill, George Campbell, Louis le Brocquy, and Nano Reid, in what was ‘the first comprehensive Irish exhibition to be held in London since the war’. Arthur Power, ‘Irish Exhibition for London’, *Irish Times*, 1 October 1946, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 1, p. 125.

apartment in the upstairs rooms of the building and during the time he lived there from 1944 to 1948, he established the bohemian atmosphere that would later be associated with the *Envoy* years. ‘Mac cherished the company of writers, musicians, poets, artists, or lacking these avocations, the bizarre, the unorthodox or the innocent visionary’, Ryan recalled, and his ‘pad’ on the top floor of the building ‘was open to all-comers, quite literally, morning, noon and nights’.<sup>57</sup> Ryan’s experiences amidst this milieu emboldened his own youthful artistic aspirations and in December 1948 he featured in his first solo exhibition at the Society of Dublin Painters’ Gallery, no. 7 St. Stephen’s Green. The exhibition consisted of twenty-nine works and was characterized by a youthful eclecticism in style, subject matter, and medium.<sup>58</sup> *The Irish Times* expressed a certain bewilderment at the ‘wide variety of styles’ variously executed in drawing, watercolour, and oil, considering the contrast between the precise rendering of his drawn portraits and the distorted forms of his watercolours as the reflection of an ‘experimental stage’ in the artist’s development.<sup>59</sup> However, it was nonetheless deemed to be ‘on the whole a promising exhibition’, registering both the new found confidence among young painters in presenting their early work and the increasing public and media attention more generally gathering around the exhibition event in Dublin.

It is important to stress here the extent to which the forming of Ryan’s artistic sensibility in this period shaped his later editorial commitment to establishing *Envoy* as a review of literature and art that would showcase the younger generation of painters to emerge during the war and immediate post-war years. In this, *Envoy* sought to redress what Róisín Kennedy has observed as the conventionally ‘marginal position’ of visual art and art writing in the Irish literary magazine, drawing from the private publishing enterprise of dealers such as Victor Waddington and also the independent initiative of the White Stag Group, whose developing artistic views, aspirations, and activities were outlined and promoted through a

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<sup>57</sup> Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood*, p. 61.

<sup>58</sup> *Exhibition of Paintings by John Ryan*, 13 to 21 December 1948, unpaginated exhibition catalogue (Dublin: The Falcon Press, 1948), IE/NIVAL EXB/233.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Painting Exhibition’, *Irish Times*, 14 December 1948, p. 3.

range of print media, including journal articles, exhibition catalogues, and independently published books during the war years in what represented a ‘concerted use of print to promote visual art [that] had not been seen in Dublin before’.<sup>60</sup> Notwithstanding these activities, however, the capacity of the literary magazine to establish itself over the course of the 1940s as a focal point for visual art had been significantly curbed by the general lack of a concerted editorial drive or defined agenda towards painting and sculpture during these years, so that art criticism was typically published in ‘a random fashion [...] with literature and theatre given much closer scrutiny’.<sup>61</sup> ‘In the literary periodical’, Kennedy writes, ‘visual art was subsidiary to literature, the dominant focus of interest’:

Such a juxtaposition, while quite common internationally, was not offset in Ireland by any specific publication forum for discussion of the visual arts and it therefore increased the widespread perception that Irish visual art was less significant than Irish literature.<sup>62</sup>

This condition was in many ways exemplified by *Envoy*’s main literary predecessor, *The Bell*. As ‘the leading cultural periodical’ of the 1940s, *The Bell* had significant potential to establish itself as a focal point for the major developments in the visual arts during these years.<sup>63</sup> However, Seán O’Faoláin’s overriding literary designs and ambitions for his magazine largely occurred at the expense of any comparable programmatic engagement with the major developments in Irish art during these years. *The Bell*’s opening editorial vividly established the ‘inclusive credo’ of the magazine, calling on all Irish citizens with the declaration that ‘Whoever you are, then, O reader, Gentile or Jew, Protestant or Catholic,

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<sup>60</sup> Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision’: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 2, p. 125; Kennedy, ‘Experimentalism or Mere Chaos? The White Stag Group and the Reception of Subjective Art in Ireland’, p. 183.

<sup>61</sup> Róisín Kennedy ‘Critical Writing and the Media’, in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, 91-96 (p. 91).

<sup>62</sup> Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision’: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 2, p. 125. As Sonia Perkins has recently detailed, the popular journal run by the Irish Capuchin Franciscans, *The Capuchin Annual*, also importantly featured high quality visual art reproductions and art criticism in these years, with its generally conservative editorial bias ‘towards the traditional school of Irish art’. Sonia Perkins, “Where and what is Ireland?”: Fr. Sean and the Capuchin Annual, 1930-54’, in *Periodicals and Journalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Writing against the Grain*, ed. by Mark O’Brien and Felix M. Larkin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2014), pp. 143-157 (p. 151).

<sup>63</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 132.

priest or layman, Big House or Small House – The Bell is yours’.<sup>64</sup> Yet a striking feature of the editorial is the way in which its surging vocative tone fails to include with similar directness the various artistic disciplines in Ireland, with visual art not referenced specifically at all. Rather, the editorial is framed as a dialogue between the professional writer-editor, the ‘We’ who ‘are running The Bell’, and the masses of potential literary contributors to the magazine who ‘know intimately some corner of life that nobody else can know’.<sup>65</sup> O’Faoláin establishes both himself and poetry editor Frank O’Connor as the instructive literary presences of the magazine, ‘The professional writer’s job, as for himself (as for others when he turns critic)’, he outlines, ‘is to be able to sense the synthetic thing a mile away’.<sup>66</sup> In this, he addresses both the fellow ‘professional writer’, of whom O’Faoláin demands ‘we want your best and only your best’, and, more radically, the ordinary citizen more humbly interested in ‘trying their hand at literature’.<sup>67</sup> ‘If you doubt whether you have the gift of the written word and yet do want to set down something vital to yourself’, he continues, ‘there is a special section where you can try your hand’, guiding readers to the ‘The Belfry’ section of the magazine which invited contributions from young poets.<sup>68</sup> *The Bell* did, of course, publish significant articles on painting and sculpture over the course of its first eight years as a magazine, however the ultimately ‘spasmodic’ nature of its visual arts coverage was in striking contrast to the prominence and cohesion of its editorially arranged literary features such as ‘The Belfry’, with the effect that visual art failed to convincingly establish itself as part of the identity of the magazine.<sup>69</sup>

This tendency was most evident in *The Bell*’s limited coverage of the IELA during the war and immediate post-war years. From its launching exhibition, the IELA was recognised across the national media as a momentous development in Irish art, presenting a diversity of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 96; O’Faolain, ‘This is Your Magazine’, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Frank O’Connor, ‘The Belfry’, *The Bell*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1940), 92-94 (p. 92).

<sup>68</sup> O’Faolain, ‘This is Your Magazine’, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Clark, *British and Irish Art 1945-51: From War to Festival*, p. 139.

contemporary painting and sculpture to the public on a new level of scale and ambition. In an article entitled ‘Living Art – A New Departure’ *The Irish Times*, for example, hailed it as ‘the most vital and distinguished exhibition of work by Irish artists that has ever been held’ and claimed that ‘in its modestly Irish way’ it was an ‘epoch-making exhibition’.<sup>70</sup> The enormous attendance figures alone made the first IELA one of the most significant cultural events of the war years, however, *The Bell*’s coverage of the exhibition and over the following years was decidedly underwhelming. While Arthur Power’s *Bell* article on the 1943 RHA exhibition ran to a considerable fourteen pages complete with illustrations, in which he began positively by stating that ‘Let it be said straightaway that this year’s Royal Hibernian Academy is better than last year’s; it is in better taste; and all round of a higher standard’, his article on the first IELA was by contrast not even a full page in length, published without any accompanying illustrations and, aside from brief praise given to the sculptor Jerome O’Connor who was given a retrospective within the exhibition itself, lacking any specific commentary on particular artists or their work.<sup>71</sup> The article is generally positive, yet it fails to capture or contextualise the significance of the event in relation to contemporary Irish art, to the vast numbers of visitors it attracted and the way in which it had generated such considerable media attention and debate. What particular detail he does provide on the work displayed beyond reference to O’Connor is in relation to his dissatisfaction with the arrangement of the exhibition that did not represent ‘the best examples of the artists shown’.<sup>72</sup> ‘It is an exhibition which give one much food for thought’, he concludes in the characteristically generalised and understated manner, ‘Certainly one’s pictorial vision will be altered by this show. Also it will give the public a good idea of what is being done by the advanced group in Ireland’.<sup>73</sup>

*The Bell* did not cover the IELA at all in 1944, an exhibition which initiated a significant development from the previous year in its decision to showcase non-Irish artists

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<sup>70</sup> ‘Living Art – A New Departure’, *Irish Times*, 16 September 1943, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur Power, ‘The R.H.A’, *The Bell*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1943), p. 226-235 (p. 226).

<sup>72</sup> Arthur Power, ‘The Exhibition of Living Art’, *The Bell*, vol. 7, no. 1 (October 1943), 77-78 (p. 78)

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

alongside native work through the acquisition of loan paintings from Britain. The magazine's coverage of the 1945 IELA, meanwhile, returned to the brevity and generalised discourse of Arthur Power's article, but this time taking the form of a 'Symposium' that presented the contrasting reviews of four different visitors to the exhibition – none of whom represented established critics in Irish art.<sup>74</sup> The opening and most inflammatory response was provided by Oliver St. John Gogarty, whose critique of the exhibition was marred by basic errors and a lack of specificity regarding the exhibited paintings. 'The abominations I beheld at the Exhibition of Living Art were not Reality', he opens, before singling out for attack 'the portraits of Alan Duncan which are like ikons in a second-hand junk shop'.<sup>75</sup> Confusion immediately ensues however with an accompanying editorial footnote stating that 'There are no such pictures in the Exhibition'. Without any further clarification or emendation in the text itself, Gogarty proceeds unabated to attack with similar vagueness the 'illustrations for the dermatology of a leper colony which offend the eyes on the right-hand wall', before broadly rounding on the international influences in the works on display with an almost xenophobic vehemence:

It is enough to ask (and surely not too much to expect) that the judges of this exhibition use their eyes, even if they have caught the infection of this alien international venom [...] Throw the stuff out! It is rotten and no amount of public taste can tolerate it. If you investigate, you will find that these atrocities are the work of lately-come aliens who infiltrate a country by the avenues of 'Art'.<sup>76</sup>

Reflecting on the lack of a dedicated visual arts section in *The Bell* during these years, Kennedy concludes that the magazine's arts coverage 'was rather disappointing. Appearing at a time when interest in modernist art was mounting in Ireland, its lacklustre engagement with the topic is indicative of the prominent position afforded to literature by its editor, and his

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<sup>74</sup> Oliver St. John Gogarty, Micheal Mac Liammoir, David Webb, Mary Joyce, 'Exhibition of Living Art: A Symposium', *The Bell*, vol. 11, no. 1 (October 1945), 616-620.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 616-617.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

assistants'.<sup>77</sup> O'Faoláin's own personal ambivalence towards visual modernism may have also accounted for the lack of concerted editorial engagement with modernist art in his magazine. For Kelly Matthews, the realist '*voir clair*' that O'Faoláin encouraged in *The Bell's* prospective contributors in the representation of national identity consequently instilled a 'hesitancy to accept the aesthetic challenge of literary modernism and other avant-garde movements that were on the rise in Europe and America'.<sup>78</sup> That the representational challenges of abstraction or the intense subjectivity of expressionism posed similar aesthetic issues in this regard was conceded by O'Faoláin himself in a previously unpublished 1951 BBC radio interview with Paul Henry, a painter for whom his professed 'love and admiration' was based on Henry's representational fidelity to 'our appealing western coast which he has formalized, yet at the same time kept so real'.<sup>79</sup> Contrasting Henry's depictions of 'the reality of the life of the west of Ireland' with 'fashionable cubist paintings', O'Faoláin admits in the interview a sense of bewilderment at the complete departure from direct representational methods founded upon the essential affiliation to subject and place:

But the thing one feels with your painting is that Paul is in that picture, all of Paul is in that picture, his spirit, his urge, his personality is in the picture, but at the same time, dammit, the light and the clouds and the mountain and the water – they are there too. But you get one of these modern painters, or one of these collage painters, who sticks bits on a canvass, he's in the picture but there's nothing else there, I mean, nature is not there at all [...] I don't know what they're depending on.<sup>80</sup>

It was Henry who O'Faoláin recommended to Ryan for inclusion in *Envoy* following the launch of the magazine, writing that 'Paul Henry (keep your nose from wrinkling) has written a sort of Autobiography. Ask him for the chapters dealing with his life as a Paris art student.

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<sup>77</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision': Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vo. 2, pp. 90-91.

<sup>78</sup> Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Sean O'Faolain, 'Foreword', in Paul Henry, *An Irish Portrait: The Autobiography of Paul Henry, with a Foreword by Sean O'Faolain* (London, New York: B.T. Batsford, 1951), pp. vii-viii (p. vii).

<sup>80</sup> Seán O'Faoláin interviews Paul Henry, 15 May 1951, Cultra, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, BBC Northern Ireland Community Archive, Paul Henry Sound Archive, Cat. 830529, Ref. 17430-17431.



Light but will interest readers'.<sup>81</sup> O'Faoláin's promotion of Henry via the Belfast artist's early experiences on the Continent was obviously written with *Envoy's* international visual arts ambitions in mind, however, it was manifestly not part of Ryan's editorial agenda to associate *Envoy's* art section with a figure who by the mid-twentieth century had largely become institutionalized as an Irish painter.<sup>82</sup> Neither, moreover, was the inclusion of the kind of 'light' visual arts piece as proposed by O'Faoláin with its connotations of leavening the more seriously regarded literary material featuring in each issue. It was indeed this characteristic 'subsidiary' position of visual art in the literary magazine that Ryan as arts editor of *Envoy* desired to overhaul.<sup>83</sup>

In employing the subtitle 'A Review of Literature and Art', Ryan set out the prominent status of visual art in the magazine that was backed through a concerted and sustained programmatic arrangement. The serialization of articles along thematic lines provided an editorial focus and cohesion. Their typically extensive length not only recreated the gallery context which provided a new focus on individual artists that we examined in chapter two, but also regularly exceeded the length of the literary articles included each issue. International features considering 'Modern German Painting' and 'Modern English Painting' advanced the editorial assertion that 'Irish culture can be immeasurably enriched by a lively

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<sup>81</sup> Seán O'Faoláin to John Ryan, [undated], *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/5.

<sup>82</sup> The early Parisian chapters of Henry's autobiography *An Irish Portrait*, edited by O'Faoláin himself and published in 1951, recount the artist's departure of his native Belfast for the French capital at the age of twenty-two in 1898, where he studied art at various independent academies and experienced for the first time contemporary developments in modern European painting through the works of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, and Paul Gauguin. Henry recalls in his autobiography his excitement at the bold expressive brushwork and simplified pictorial arrangement of van Gogh, stating that 'for the first time in years one felt as if a fresh wind was blowing through the dusty galleries [...] I can well remember the shock with which I looked at my first Van Gogh. It seemed crude and meaningless to me, but in a few months I would have walked half across Paris to look at new things by him, for by then the revolutionary in me had developed'. (Henry, *An Irish Portrait*, pp. 24-25). Henry's simplified compositional arrangement and palette, the characteristic two-part division of the picture plane and his boldly outlined cloud formations, represented at their conception a new manner in depicting the West of Ireland that incorporated stylistic influences associated with these artists and the development of 'post-Impressionism'. However, by the 1930s, as Barber observes, the mass-reproduction of his landscapes combined with their repeated and 'increasingly formulaic' execution with 'innumerable paintings characterized by a contrast of smoothly worked clouds with the relative impasto of the hills and thatched roofs' saw Henry's art become sublimated of its radical potential and generally regarded in institutionalized terms. Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910*, p. 70.

<sup>83</sup> Kennedy 'Critical Writing and the Media', p. 91.

appreciation of the culture of others'.<sup>84</sup> Contemporary Irish art and the international influences impacting upon local art practice in Dublin, meanwhile, were most concertedly assessed in the longest running series of the magazine entitled 'Contemporary Irish Painters'.<sup>85</sup> From the outset, Ryan was determined that *Envoy* represent the 'Irish artists which we believe to have the greatest promise' and 'Contemporary Irish Painters' was launched with this ambition in mind.<sup>86</sup> Spanning ten issues with eight individual artist features supplemented by two group themed pieces, the series averaged at four thousand words and thirteen pages per article, including four pages of half-tone reproductions of paintings prominently sewn into the centre of each issue.<sup>87</sup> If *The Bell* had been broadly reflective of the generally 'random fashion' in which art criticism was published in 1940s literary magazine culture, then *Envoy*'s exclusive focus on a 'younger generation' of artists in 'Contemporary Irish Painters' distinguished it as a visual art print platform during this time.<sup>88</sup> What was not definitively conveyed in *The Bell*'s visual arts coverage was the extent to which the IELA developed from a new independent venture to what S.B. Kennedy observes as a 'well established' and 'important part of the annual calendar' by the late 1940s.<sup>89</sup> Aided by the independent promotional activities of Victor Waddington, one of the most significant achievements of the IELA during these years was 'the number of new names which came to prominence' in its annual exhibitions, and it was from this pool of emerging painters and sculptors that *Envoy* drew from in its 'Contemporary Irish Painters' series.<sup>90</sup> The eight artists

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<sup>84</sup> Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 10 (September 1950), 9-10 (p. 10). Werner Haftman, 'Modern German Painting', *Envoy*, vol. 3, no. 8 (July 1950), 50-64. Lionel Miskin, 'Aspects of Modern English Painting', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 16 (March 1951) 33-43.

<sup>85</sup> The series alternated its title between 'Contemporary Irish Painters' and 'Contemporary Irish Artists' throughout *Envoy*'s twenty issues. The articles were headed with the series title from the third issue onwards.

<sup>86</sup> John Ryan to Terence Kilmartin, 1 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>87</sup> The two supplementary articles on the subject of contemporary Irish art were Edward Sheehy's consideration of 'Recent Irish Painting' in the context of the 1950 IELA exhibition and a symposium of artistic opinion entitled 'The Artist Speaks', in which a selection of artists featured in the magazine voiced their views on art and art writing. Edward Sheehy, 'Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950', *Envoy*, vol. 3 no. 10 (September 1950), 45-52. 'The Artist Speaks: Five Irish Painters join in a Symposium of Artistic Opinion', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 15 (February 1951), 38-44.

<sup>88</sup> Kennedy 'Critical Writing and the Media', p. 91.

<sup>89</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 133.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Ryan selected for the series were Daniel O'Neill (1920-1974), George Campbell (1917-1979), Thurloe Conolly (1918-2016), Nano Reid (1900-1981), Colin Middleton (1910-1983), Louis le Brocquy (1916-2012), Patrick Swift (1927-1983), and sculptor Hilary Heron (1923-1977). Of these eight artists, six ranged in age from their early twenties to early thirties, while Middleton and Reid were by 1949 in their late thirties and late forties respectively. Though largely disparate in terms of the influence of modernist practices and styles in their work, they were collectively associated among the 'Moderns' in post-war Irish art through their representation on the public stage in exhibitions such as the IELA.<sup>91</sup>

***'The dissatisfaction of youth with the academic and conventional conception of values':***

***Mobilising an iconoclastic art critical discourse***

The prominent position of visual art in *Envoy* was established not merely in its concerted arrangement but also in the extent to which the independent internationalising artistic activities of the war years imbued and shaped the iconoclastic narrative of its art writing, becoming a key aspect of what Shovlin has observed as the 'vigorous, impatient youth [that] defined the outlook' of the magazine.<sup>92</sup> Considering the juxtaposition of visual art and literary material typical of modernist 'little magazines' such as *BLAST*, Rebecca Beasley argues that 'for the editors of these magazines, contemporary visual art and design signalled their publication's modernity and provided an avant-garde frame for literary material that was

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<sup>91</sup> Patrick Collins, 'George Campbell: Profile of an Artist', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), 44-50 (p. 44). Louis le Brocquy, Thurloe Conolly, Nano Reid and Hilary Heron all featured in every IELA show between 1943 and 1951; Patrick Swift featured in the IELA from his first year exhibiting in Dublin in 1950; O'Neill and Dillon were strongly represented in all but one IELA exhibition each between 1943 and 1951 (O'Neill did not exhibit in the inaugural show, while Dillon did not exhibit in 1945). Campbell featured in every exhibition between 1947 and 1951. Middleton featured in the 1945, 1949, and 1950 exhibitions. All exhibition details acquired from the IELA exhibition catalogues held at the NIVAL. 1943-1945: IE/NIVAL EXB/10952; IE/NIVAL EXB/10964; IE/NIVAL EXB/10933. 1947-1951: IE/NIVAL IELA/0007-0011.

<sup>92</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 151.

often less secure in its experimentation'.<sup>93</sup> Visual art and the radical developments of the early 1940s certainly provided this 'avant-garde' frame for *Envoy* to an extent that distinguished it as an Irish literary magazine. Recent scholarship into the conditions and contexts of visual art criticism has begun to uncover the key role played by the publishing context in determining the rhetorical structures by which the art writer articulates their response to a particular artist or artwork. Róisín Kennedy's assertion of the 'fundamental effect' of the site of publication 'on the nature of the writing which appears within it' was earlier stressed by social art historians such as Michael Orwicz, who argued for a greater recognition of the 'sites in and through which "the critics" mobilised their discourses' in studying the contemporary production, reception, and import of art criticism.<sup>94</sup> With this in mind, we can examine how the forming of 'Contemporary Irish Painters' around this 'younger generation' of painters and sculptors 'mobilised' the iconoclastic art critical rhetoric running through the series, both in the characterisation of its featured artists and its cultivation of a narrative of the development of Irish art founded upon the progressive independent culture of the 1940s, representing the expression of what Edward Sheehy described in *Envoy* as 'the dissatisfaction of youth with the academic and conventional conception of values, not merely in painting but in every sphere'.<sup>95</sup>

It was in *Envoy*'s September 1950 issue that Sheehy emphasized the transformative impact on the Dublin arts scene with the foundation of the IELA in 1943 and its progression into an established institution by the close of the decade. 'A little over a decade ago', he opened, 'Irish painting was almost wholly academic':

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<sup>93</sup> Rebecca Beasley, 'Literature and the Visual Arts: Art and Letters (1917-20) and The Apple (1920-2)', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1 Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, pp. 485-504 (p. 485).

<sup>94</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 1, p. 12; Orwicz, *Art criticism and its institutions in nineteenth-century France*, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Orwicz, 'Introduction', *Art criticism and its institutions in nineteenth-century France*, p. 3; Sheehy, 'Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950', *Envoy*, vol. 3 no. 10 (September 1950), 45-52 (p. 46).

To realise how different the picture is to-day one has only to see the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, at present holding its ninth annual exhibition. Here, though not bigotedly or exclusively, the emphasis is on the modern; that is on imagination, on individual vision, on the experimental, and consequently away from the safe, the accepted and the familiar in both technique and expression.<sup>96</sup>

This narrative of radical departure from a presiding academic tradition, singularly cast as conservative and outmoded, toward a newly emerging ‘modern’ sensibility founded, however broadly, upon the imaginative experimental expression of the individual artist spurred ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’. Ryan himself staked *Envoy*’s position in far more polemic terms in his article on Patrick Swift with the claim that ‘the fact that all the artists included [in the series] are of the younger generation is not so surprising when we consider that no painting of any worth (excepting that of Yeats) was produced in this country prior to the last war’.<sup>97</sup> Not only did such a statement iconoclastically dismiss any consideration of major artists of the preceding decades such as Paul Henry or Seán Keating, but it also overlooked the pre-war activities and achievements of Irish modernist painters such as Mainie Jellett who had first began exhibiting her cubist inspired works in Dublin in the early 1920s. Rather, Ryan firmly situates the progression of modern Irish art within the context of the war years from which *Envoy*’s youthful milieu derived, positioning ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’ in terms of the magazine’s launching ambition to inaugurate ‘a new [epoch] of life and promise’ in Irish culture.

*Envoy*’s brazen focus on youth registered above all the vitalising impact of the war years on contemporary Irish art, with each article in the series bound by a collective sense of excitement and anticipation at the nascent energies and future promise of the featured painters and sculptors. As we examined in chapter two, the rapid rise of Belfast painter Daniel O’Neill imbued Cecil Salkeld’s opening article of the series, describing him as an ‘an artist who sprang into the arena fully formed’ with the anticipation that ‘with a man of [his] age we must

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<sup>96</sup> Edward Sheehy, ‘Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950’, *Envoy*, vol. 3 no. 10 (September 1950), 45-52 (p. 45).

<sup>97</sup> John Ryan, ‘Patrick Swift: An Introductory Note’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 56-57 (p. 57), p. 56.

concern ourselves much more with the future'.<sup>98</sup> It is, similarly, the rapid rise and anticipated future potential of Louis le Brocquy that imbues critic W.J. White's later article on the Dublin painter. White's concession that '[le Brocquy] is only thirty-three. He has been painting for only eleven years [...] it would be much to claim that he is even yet out of his formative period', for example, only amplifies his enthusiasm for 'the extraordinary speed of his development' during the early 1940s and into the post-war years.<sup>99</sup> A prominent exhibitor in Dublin in the IELA in Dublin from its foundation, le Brocquy's international reputation began to quickly develop in the late 1940s following his move to London, where his oil and watercolour studies of the itinerant communities he encountered in rural Ireland during the war years, depicted in a distinctive semi-abstracted, geometric figure style combined with a loose expressive application of colour, began to receive widespread acclaim.<sup>100</sup> From his first show solo in London's prestigious Gimpel Gallery in 1947, le Brocquy's 'tinker series' began to attract international recognition in the way its starkly rendered, fragmented images of marginalised wandering individuals and family groups drew powerful associations with the mass dispossessed of war-torn Europe, reflecting the artist's 'concern with making reference to wider political and social issues' that resonated in the British post-war art world.<sup>101</sup> White's charting of le Brocquy's development in these few years and the international impact of the 'tinker' and child figure in his work 'charged with a meaning of its own as a symbol of the lost children of Europe, wandering through a cruel world' is backed, as with Salkeld, by the enthusiastic cataloguing of his recent exhibiting history.<sup>102</sup> White describes le Brocquy in the exuberant language that recalls Salkeld's characterisation of O'Neill as 'nearly a sensation in London as any young painter can hope to be' and charts the diverse network of critics,

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<sup>98</sup> Cecil French Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: A Critical Appreciation', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (December 1949), 31-43 (pp. 35-36).

<sup>99</sup> W. J. White, 'Contemporary Irish Artists (VI): Louis le Brocquy', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 6 (May 1950), 52-65 (p. 64).

<sup>100</sup> Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>101</sup> Róisín Kennedy, 'The Critical Reception of Louis le Brocquy's *A Family*', *Third Text*, vol. 19, no. 5 (September 2005), 475-486 (p. 477).

<sup>102</sup> White, 'Contemporary Irish Artists (VI): Louis le Brocquy', p. 59.

galleries, dealers, and collectors both at home and abroad that together contributed his post-war reception.<sup>103</sup>

For Patrick Swift writing on Nano Reid, meanwhile, the narrative of nascent youth integral to ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’ works to recast its oldest featured painter as a newly radicalized and reinvigorated presence. Reid was fifty-years of age at the time of publication, having amassed a considerable exhibition history in Dublin dating back to the 1930s, however, Swift’s particular enthusiasm for the stylistic departures of her 1940s painting cultivates an image of Reid’s ‘freshness in maturity’ that resituates the artist within the emerging context of the ‘younger generation’ of Irish painters featured in the series.<sup>104</sup> What Riann Coulter has observed as Reid’s turn towards ‘increasingly expressionist work’ during this period was exemplified in the oil paintings reproduced in *Envoy: Boyne Bridge and Gulls* and *Farm by the River* (oil on canvass, 1950) [Fig. 15].<sup>105</sup> Blending the figurative with the abstract in their evocation of the natural world, they utilize a bold linear style to outline the simplified forms of animals and the landscape against a flattened, segmented picture plane that is expressively imbued by the thick, spontaneous application of pigment on the canvass. For Swift, the freeing effect of this new approach on her lineation and palette evidences how Reid’s ‘enthusiasm and life are stronger than ever and the vigour and power of her works increase’, encouraging him to characterize her in the nascent context of her young contemporaries in ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’ with the contention that ‘Everything she paints shows a new searching and a new discovery’:

She works to-day with all the energy and fire that marked her early painting and drew so much comment on the vitality of her brushwork and composition. As a painter, she is still

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<sup>103</sup> White enthusiastically catalogues, for example, the array of London exhibitions, dealers, and collectors that contributed to le Brocquy’s rising post-war reputation, describing how he ‘has held three shows of his own (one at the Leicester Galleries, two at Gimpel Fils), and his work has been bought by many notable collectors, including Mr. Ernest Duveen, Mr. Howard Bliss, Mr. H.J. P. Bomford’. White, ‘Contemporary Irish Artists (VI): Louis le Brocquy’, pp. 56-7.

<sup>104</sup> Patrick Swift, ‘Contemporary Irish Artists (4): Nano Reid’, *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950), 26-35 (p. 34).

<sup>105</sup> Riann Coulter, ‘Nano Reid: From the Boyne to Bohemia’, in *Irish Women Artists, 1800-2009: Familiar but Unknown*, ed. by Éimear O’Connor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), pp. 134-151 (p. 141).

young; her attitude is marked by a modesty and a determination that make one feel she is just beginning.<sup>106</sup>

In the absence of any collectively produced modernist manifesto or explicitly outlined stylistic or ideological consensus among the artists that comprised *Envoy*'s 'Contemporary Irish Painters', the concentration of the series within the immediate context of developments in the war and post-war years provided an important sense of cohesion and momentum by which a 'younger generation' of artists could nonetheless be collectively identified and promoted. The exclusivist editorial arrangement that from the outset focused the series in this way, premised on the iconoclastic view that 'no painting of any worth (excepting that of Yeats) was produced in this country prior to the last war', in turn cultivated a rhetoric of opposition that pitched the nascent energies of *Envoy*'s artists in radical terms against a homogenously styled conservative academic establishment. Ryan's own view of the 'Emergency' as a 'revolution' in Irish art resolutely positioned the old regime of the 'Orpen-Lavery-Osborne tradition' against the young 'partisans' of the 'le Brocquy-Conolly-Middleton tradition' in a way that was reinforced throughout the series.<sup>107</sup> Patrick Collins, for example, employs this polarizing strategy when framing his discussion on painter George Campbell in the context of the on-going conflict between modern and academic art in Ireland. 'The public knows there is a war on, with the Academicians ranged against the Moderns', he opens, before affirming that 'the day will inevitably go to the Moderns, simply because young things have a greater expectation of life than old things, and conservative art is very old and very tired'.<sup>108</sup> The dramatized struggle of *Envoy*'s 'young things' in the face of domestic institutional and public adversity is a motif running throughout the series. Le Brocquy's progression as an artist during the 1940s is cast in heroic terms in White's article, which

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<sup>106</sup> Patrick Swift, 'Contemporary Irish Artists (4): Nano Reid', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 1950), 26-35 (p. 32).

<sup>107</sup> Ryan, 'Patrick Swift: An Introductory Note', p. 57. John Ryan to Dr. Casey, [undated], *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/2.

<sup>108</sup> Patrick Collins, 'George Campbell: Profile of an Artist', *Envoy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1950), 44-50 (pp. 44-5).



describes how in order to establish himself ‘among the *avant garde* of Irish painters, and to achieve his present modest prosperity he has battled his way through misunderstanding, and even positive hostility, with a single-minded devotion to his own conception of art’.<sup>109</sup>

Edward de Courcy’s article on sculptor Hilary Heron, meanwhile, depicts her as a ‘rebel’ who quit the staid confines of the National College of Art before completing her diploma ‘to work out her own sculptural salvation’ under the influence of the semi-abstracted figures of English sculptor Henry Moore.<sup>110</sup> Salkeld’s similarly rebellious characterisation of O’Neill as a ‘young painter who sprang into the arena fully formed’, moreover, prompts his incendiary depiction of the expressive qualities of the Belfast artist’s work reproduced in his *Envoy* article.<sup>111</sup> *Early Morning* (oil on board) depicts a female figure in a vibrant morning scene, seated at the breakfast table before an open window where the striking whites and yellows of the lace curtains and sunflowers frame a receding dawn landscape of cool blues and greens. In a final flourish of the hyperbolic register that has imbued the article up to this point, Salkeld casts both O’Neill himself and the vibrant palette of *Early Morning* in romanticised incendiary terms as

a picture bursting with vitality and sparkling with all the fire-works at O’Neill’s command. The sun-flower is an explosion of fiery paint, and the whole composition goes up in flames to the whirling sun. Indeed, O’Neill uses paint in this picture as a revolutionist might use dynamite – only to far better purpose.<sup>112</sup>

Notwithstanding the resistance that remained among prominent Academicians towards visual modernism throughout the 1940s and even beyond the *Envoy* years into the 1950s, the dramatization of the period as a ‘war’ with ‘partisans’ ranged against each other at the same

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<sup>109</sup> White, ‘Contemporary Irish Artists (VI): Louis le Brocquy’, p. 53.

<sup>110</sup> Edward de Courcy, ‘Hilary Heron’, *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 7 (June 1950), 50-58 (p. 54). As John Turpin has documented in his history of the college, a ‘general traditionalist art consensus’ dominated the National College of Art throughout this period. Its didactic philosophy was heavily influenced by the RHA, founded on the importance of the life-class and an academic discipline of firm drawing and tone in the representation of the figure and landscape. John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin Since the Eighteenth Century: A History of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan 1995), pp. 341-343.

<sup>111</sup> Cecil Ffrench Salkeld, ‘Daniel O’Neill: A Critical Appreciation’, p. 32.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

time occluded the more generally heterogeneous and intersecting relations of Irish exhibiting institutions during period. The extent to which the combative posturing inherent in Ryan's editorial design of the 'Contemporary Irish Painters' series and the amplified register resonating throughout the individual articles themselves was, to return to Orwicz, 'mobilized' within *Envoy's* publishing context becomes evident when we realize the ultimately more nuanced and integrated reality of the Irish art scene throughout the 1940s.<sup>113</sup> While it was the growing dissatisfaction towards the perceived conservative values and low standards of the RHA that provoked the founding of an alternative exhibiting platform for contemporary Irish art in the IELA, the relationship between the two bodies as it developed from 1943 onwards was never one of exclusive or antagonistic opposition. In his study of post-war British and Irish art, Adrian Clark cautions against the uncritical acceptance of a such a simplistically dichotomized view of the traditional and modern, observing that 'it would be dangerous to distinguish the two bodies in all respects, partly because the small size of the Irish art world meant that artists took the opportunity to show their work at both exhibitions'.<sup>114</sup>

An examination of the RHA exhibition catalogues reveals the regularity with which *Envoy's* 'Contemporary Irish Artists' featured in its annual shows. It was the RHA's rejection of Louis le Brocquy's two paintings *The Spanish Shawl* (oil on board, 1941) and *Image of Chaos* (1942) in 1942 that had in many ways provided the 'catalyst' for the foundation of the IELA.<sup>115</sup> However, this did not by effect exclude the artist from their exhibitions in any definitive sense. On the contrary, le Brocquy first exhibited at the RHA as early as 1937 and was well represented in its annual shows during the *Envoy* period, leading to his ultimate election as an Academician in 1951.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, for Kennedy, the RHA's lack of a defined policy in relation to modernist art is evidenced in the fact that while le Brocquy's *The Spanish*

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<sup>113</sup> Orwicz, *Art criticism and its institutions in nineteenth-century France*, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> Clark, *British and Irish Art 1945-51*, p. 65.

<sup>115</sup> Coulter, 'Hibernian Salon des Refusés?', p. 81.

<sup>116</sup> Le Brocquy exhibited four watercolours and drawings in 1949 and two oil paintings in 1951. All exhibition details acquired from the annual RHA exhibition catalogues 1949-1951 are held at the NIVAL: IE/NIVAL/EXB/10953; IE/NIVAL EXB/11060.

*Shawl* was rejected by its selection committee in 1942, his arguably more stylistically experimental work *A Picnic* (wax resin on canvass, 1940) had been shown there two years previously in 1940.<sup>117</sup> Along with le Brocquy, other artists associated with the ‘younger generation’ exhibited with varying regularity including Daniel O’Neill, George Campbell, Colin Middleton, and even Ryan himself.<sup>118</sup> Equally, as Coulter has identified, the IELA from its outset was ‘not intended to be hostile to the Royal Hibernian Academy’ but was rather aware of the necessity of cooperation and inclusivity within the small parameters and limited resources of the Irish art world. The invitation of prominent Academicians to join its organizing committee and the use of the National College of Art as its launching exhibition venue were arranged with this pragmatic view in mind, while the President of the RHA, Dermot O’Brien, also became an important patron of the institution in its early stages. As Coulter writes:

If inviting three members of the Academy to contribute to the organising committee could be seen as an astute political move, the use of the NCA, a venue that was not merely the site of all RHA exhibitions, but also an institution where academicism was deeply entrenched, dispelled any myths of rebellion. As the committee were keen to emphasise, the IELA was not a *Salon des Refusés*.<sup>119</sup>

The IELA’s founding ambition to present ‘a comprehensive body of significant work’, moreover, cultivated a heterogeneous exhibiting culture that for Coulter ‘could be best described as pluralistic’.<sup>120</sup> The opening 1943 exhibition, for example, included works by prominent academicians and even virulent critics of modernism such as Seán Keating alongside those of younger artists associated with modernist styles and practices in what

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<sup>117</sup> For Kennedy, *A Picnic* was ‘much more radical in its disposition of mass and form and a more penetrating study of human relationships than the *Spanish Shawl*. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p.116.

<sup>118</sup> The 1949 RHA exhibition featured two paintings by Daniel O’Neill (oil on canvass); two by George Campbell (oil on canvass); and one by Colin Middleton (oil on canvass). The 1950 exhibition featured two paintings by Campbell (oil on canvass); two by Middleton (oil on canvass); one by O’Neill (oil on canvass); one by John Ryan (watercolour). The 1951 exhibition featured two painting by Campbell (oil on canvass).

<sup>119</sup> Artists James Sleator, Margaret Clarke, and Laurence Campbell represented the Academicians who joined the IELA organizing committee. Coulter, ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish art, 1943-1960’, pp. 38-39.

<sup>120</sup> Coulter, ‘Hibernian Salon des Refusés?’, pp. 81-82.

represented ‘a cross-section of contemporary art’ that afforded ‘unique opportunities for the comparison and juxtaposition of traditional and modern art in Ireland’.<sup>121</sup> Sheehy himself notes this point in his survey of recent Irish painting in *Envoy*’s September 1950 issue, attributing part of the ‘considerable’ influence of the Living Art exhibitions to their eclecticism, thereby attracting a public ‘which would in all probability be completely put off by any exclusive insistence on the more extreme forms of modernism in painting’.<sup>122</sup>

When we consider the more eclectic and overlapping realities of the Irish art scene during the 1940s it becomes clear how the polemic anti-establishment narrative that both shaped and ran through *Envoy*’s ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’ series was to a significant extent heightened by the magazine’s publishing context. *Envoy* was indeed distinguished as a mid-century Irish literary magazine in the extent to which its art writing both drew from and was vitalised by the reformation of Irish art practice along more independent and international lines in these years, channelling what Shovlin has identified as the ‘vigorous, impatient youth [that] defined the outlook’ of the magazine in its amplification of the division of young and old, individual and institutional, modern and traditional.<sup>123</sup> As such, *Envoy* ultimately reflected its novel position whereby these nascent energies in Irish art were first beginning to seriously concentrate and cohere in the literary magazine format during the 1940s. The incendiary language by which these developments were expressed across the series, casting a new ‘younger generation’ of artists as rebels and partisans in a war against institutional hostility galvanised the magazine’s broader iconoclastic ambitions, functioning in this way as an expression of ‘the dissatisfaction of youth with the academic and conventional conception of values, not merely in painting but in every sphere’.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Séan Keating’s *Tip Wagons at Poulaphouca* (1943) was included in the first IELA exhibition. Coulter, ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish art, 1943-1960’, p. 37.

<sup>122</sup> Sheehy, ‘Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950’, p. 48.

<sup>123</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, pp. 151.

<sup>124</sup> Sheehy, ‘Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950’, p. 46.

*From 'howls of execration' to 'bland championing': The challenges of modern Irish art criticism*

If *Envoy* registered the vitalising energies and gathering confidence of this 'watershed' decade in Irish art, then the rapid and transformative nature of many of the developments occurring in the 1940s at the same time posed significant challenges for the relatively underdeveloped state of mid-century Irish art criticism to which the magazine was no less exposed.<sup>125</sup> As a magazine that defiantly positioned itself among the 'younger generation' of Irish artists and the variety of new independent exhibitions and events occurring in these years, *Envoy's* art writing was inevitably marked by the nascent critical sense that characterised much of the published engagement with, and evaluation of, visual modernist styles and practices at this time. As *Envoy* sought to announce itself at the forefront of the internationalisation of Irish art practice and the process by which its painters and sculptors were in turn becoming 'visible within the wider cultural domain' of Europe and the North America, the magazine reveals in its earnestness the challenges inherent in establishing an art critical culture that could seriously assess and interrogate these major developments.<sup>126</sup>

Considering in *Envoy's* September 1950 issue the progress made by the IELA over the preceding seven years and more generally that of the public reception of visual modernism in Ireland throughout this time, Edward Sheehy emphasised how much had changed in prevailing critical attitudes from the early opposition provoked by its first exhibitions 'among the academicians and among the public accustomed to academic art', where exhibited paintings were met with 'howls of execration' and 'the moderns' variously looked upon 'as incompetents who are too stupid or ignorant to master the academic techniques, or as deliberate hoaxers imposing a farrago of meaningless nonsense on the public, or as novelty

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<sup>125</sup> Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 90.

<sup>126</sup> Barber, 'Excavating Room 50: Irish Painting and the Cold War at the 1950 Venice Biennale', p. 212.

addicts purely and simply'.<sup>127</sup> Though this recollected picture appears somewhat exaggerated when we consider the generally positive media coverage and large attendance figures experienced by the IELA from its launching exhibition in 1943, that young artists working in modernist styles and practices nonetheless faced virulent criticism during this time from influential figures in Irish cultural life was reflected in reviews such as that by Oliver Gogarty in *The Bell* in 1945, when he scathingly declared the majority of paintings on display as 'abominations' influenced by 'the work of lately-come aliens who infiltrate the country by the avenues of 'Art''.<sup>128</sup> For Sheehy, the progression from such inflamed hostility towards a more receptive and supportive public consensus regarding visual modernism had helped to instil the new 'self-confidence' in contemporary Irish art that in turn encouraged his feeling that Ireland was in the process of '[developing] a body of painters comparable to their contemporaries in Europe and America'.<sup>129</sup>

However, if this departure from the wartime 'howls of execration' ensured more generally congenial conditions for emerging Irish painters and sculptors to develop their art and careers in Dublin, it did not necessarily coincide with a comparably definitive maturing in the art critical engagement with their work in the contexts of European visual modernism. The successful transition of the IELA into a 'well established' and 'important part of the annual calendar' by the late 1940s and the growing reputations of contemporary Irish artists both at home and abroad testified to the increasing confidence of an expanding native art scene. However, these developments were not accompanied by a comparably definitive expansion or deepening in the art critical field, which remained largely restricted to a limited range of print platforms. For Dorothy Walker, 'criticism at mid-century rarely met the standard of art it addressed, particularly in the daily press' where the lack of print space and the

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<sup>127</sup> Sheehy, 'Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950', p. 46.

<sup>128</sup> Gogarty, 'Exhibition of Living Art: A Symposium', p. 617.

<sup>129</sup> Sheehy, 'Recent Irish Painting: The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1950', p. 46.

characteristically generalised nature of its content impeded more rigorous in-depth analysis.<sup>130</sup> The continuing absence of a specialist Irish art journal, meanwhile, hindered the cultivation of ‘a specialised readership’ that in turn ‘had a stultifying affect on the critic’s ability to engage with the subject’.<sup>131</sup> The continuing absence of a specialist Irish art journal, meanwhile, hindered the cultivation of ‘a specialised readership’ that in turn ‘had a stultifying affect on the critic’s ability to engage with the subject’.<sup>132</sup>

The gradual replacement of anti-modernist hostility with an opposite but in many ways equally uncritical culture of praise in the reportage of exhibitions and artists was a condition of the underdeveloped state of Dublin’s art criticism in these years of rapid development and increasing confidence in Irish painting, characterised by a growing tendency that first developed in the ‘Emergency’ towards ‘the bland championing of Irish art [that] prevailed over any sustained discussion of the purpose and nature of art practice’.<sup>133</sup> For Kennedy, while the increasingly positive reviews of contemporary art exhibitions ‘reflected a genuine improvement in the standard of Irish art’, the enthusiasm of critics was at the same time ‘indicative of the much narrower range of art criticism in these years’:

The wide scope of art criticism of the ‘Emergency’ had ceased and critics were now supportive of the efforts of modernist Irish artists irrespective of the work’s aesthetic or intellectual failings. Modernism was now widely accepted as providing the inevitable direction for Irish art.<sup>134</sup>

If the influence of European visual modernism on Irish art practice was reaching a point of general public acceptance and the opportunities of a wider international market becoming an increasing reality for artists, the domestic critical standards and structures in the evaluation of Irish artworks within these contexts remained in a period of transition.

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<sup>130</sup> Dorothy Walker, *Modern Art in Ireland* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1997), p. 52.

<sup>131</sup> Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 1, p. 124.

<sup>132</sup> Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 1, p. 124.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

Charles Sidney, one of a small number of art critics who moved from London to Dublin during the war, was among a diverse group of writers who identified the apparent lack of rigour in the promotion of modern Irish art during this period. Writing in *The Bell* in 1944, he argued that what was more ‘disconcerting’ than the ‘campaign against the moderns’ was ‘a certain type of defence of the opposite camp [...] a defence which threatens to do more harm than good to the artists’.<sup>135</sup> For Sidney, this tendency which first emerged in the early years of the war was now becoming increasingly prevalent, an early example of which he highlights in an *Irish Times* review of an exhibition of paintings by Nano Reid held at the Society of Dublin Painters’ Gallery, no. 7 St. Stephen’s Green, in 1942.<sup>136</sup> The review opens by hailing Reid ‘a born artist and a born stylist’ and proceeds to laud both her character and art in high-flown generalised terms. ‘Her work will, without doubt, as the years go on, still grow richer in content and still more pointed in the matter of style’, it continues, ‘but already everything she does, whether in oils or water-colours, has artistic validity’.<sup>137</sup> Sidney’s own admitted ‘admiration’ for Reid does not prevent him from stressing the exaggerated and insubstantially superlative character of such a reviewing style, in which Reid ‘has to be saluted as a genius’ and is promptly compared with and placed above her proclaimed modernist precursors including Raoul Dufy and Pierre Bonnard.<sup>138</sup> Drawing quotations from the review itself, Sidney highlights the sweeping nature of the article within the confines of such a limited print space in its assertion that ‘[Reid’s] work was “more solid than Dufy’s” and that it “would probably hold its own with Bonnard’s”’, arguing himself that ‘It is a *tour de force* on the part of Miss Nano Read [*sic*] to have actually progressed in her work since those lines were written’.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Charles Sidney, ‘Art Criticism in Dublin’, *The Bell*, vol. 9, no. 2 (November 1944), 104-110 (p. 105).

<sup>136</sup> The unsigned review was entitled ‘Nano Reid Exhibition: A Stylist in Art’, *Irish Times*, 27 November 1942, p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Raoul Dufy (1877-1953) and Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) were two French artists broadly associated with the development of post-Impressionism from the early twentieth century.

<sup>139</sup> As Kennedy observes, it was in the national daily newspapers where this ‘sweeping and unsubstantial’ art critical culture was most prevalent, an inevitable condition given the limited print space generally allocated to



This overblown laudatory rhetoric in the promotion of modernist Irish art was ripe for ridicule by Brian O’Nolan writing under the pseudonym of Myles na gCopaleen in his popular *Irish Times* column ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’. ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’ provided the daily public platform for O’Nolan’s wide-ranging satirical commentary on contemporary Irish cultural politics. As Carol Taaffe has recently examined, the column humorously and often mercilessly attacked what O’Nolan considered to be ‘a condescending paternalism everywhere in Irish culture’ and its propagation by a diverse array of ‘self-anointed critics and cultural guardians’ from censorious government officials and chauvinist cultural nationalists to declamatory liberal intellectuals and self-consciously modern artists.<sup>140</sup> For Taaffe, while ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’ may have ‘circled well-worn ground – satirising the language revival, the scandal of censorship and perennial worries about national identity’ throughout the 1940s, its unique edge as a column was in the way in which it incisively ‘attended to the very nature of cultural debate itself, to its rhetoric, its repetitiveness and its endless capacity for self-caricature’.<sup>141</sup> A master impersonator, O’Nolan harnessed the polyphonic character of Myles to relentlessly parody the rhetorical conventions upon which these public debates were structured, variously exposing the clichéd, affected, overstated, and plainly nonsensical language prevalent in Irish critical discourse, staging ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’ in his own words as ‘a unique compendium of all that is nauseating in contemporary writing’.<sup>142</sup> The comic fashioning of the column as a ‘survey of sub-literature and all that is pseudo, mal-dicted and calloused in the underworld of print’ was seriously underpinned by the awareness of how

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exhibition reviews where multiple artists were covered with minimal detail. Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 1, p. 126. This tendency was also predictably a feature of the visual art coverage variously appearing in popular glossy magazines such as *Irish Tatler and Sketch*, a magazine that styled itself as ‘Ireland’s Premier Social Monthly’ reporting on the latest Dublin social and sporting events, fashion trends, and featuring local and international celebrity profiles. Its coverage of the 1947 IELA, for example, effusively praised the selection committee and unreservedly celebrated all the paintings on display, declaring that the committee ‘have shown judgment worthy of the highest praise’ and that ‘of nearly one hundred and fifty exhibits there are hardly ten which we would cheerfully consign to the dustbin’. ‘Art in Ireland’, *Irish Tatler and Sketch: Ireland’s Premier Social Monthly*, vol. 56, no. 12 (September 1947), 11-18 (p. 11).

<sup>140</sup> Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass, Flann O’Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork University Press, 2008), p. 147; p. 28.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>142</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’, *Irish Times*, 27 March 1942, p. 3.

deficient critical standards impeded cultural progression.<sup>143</sup> Myles's assertion that 'a sociological commentary could be compiled from [the] items of mortified language' that provided much of the daily satirical fodder for the column reflected the author's sensitivity to the way in which 'linguistic ruts reflect social ruts. The clichés attacked were not simply inelegant lumps of prose, but symptoms of thinking that had slipped into easy habits'.<sup>144</sup>

It was O'Nolan's irrepressible capacity as 'a ventriloquist of mid-century Ireland in all its guises' that made him a particularly biting satirist of the rhetoric of Irish art criticism throughout the period.<sup>145</sup> 'Cruiskeen Lawn' was itself complexly situated within the conflicting dynamics of post-independence Irish culture, between what Taaffe describes as 'the shibboleths of a national tradition and insecure imitation of European fashion', variously expressing the author's antipathy towards calcified cultural nationalist views that still summoned idealised nativist visions of the Irish language and rural life, and the contrasting yet in his view equally naïve mass importation of cosmopolitan continental ideas and styles by a younger generation of Irish writers and artists eager to accelerate the State's European involvement.<sup>146</sup> As Myles declared in October 1944, 'I do not find that there is anything discernible under the head of "Irish culture". If the speaker has in mind step-dancing, crubeens and potheen, I say that that is not culture. If he means French pictures made-in-Ireland [...] I say that none of that is culture'.<sup>147</sup> The explicit and disparaging reference to the pervasive influence of Francophone modernism in Irish contemporary art reflected O'Nolan's sceptical attitude toward the avant-garde posturing of emerging Irish artists working in largely inherited European modernist styles, and it was the promotional art critical culture that attended the success of exhibitions such as the IELA and the increasing local and international

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, 'Cruiskeen Lawn', *Irish Times*, 27 August 1943; Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 138.

<sup>145</sup> Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 205.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>147</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, 'Cruiskeen Lawn', *Irish Times*, 20 October 1944, p. 3.

success of its associated emerging painters that he ‘chronicled with gleeful disdain’ throughout ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’.<sup>148</sup>

Myles’s art critical parodies repeatedly brought attention to the inadequacy of the small column space provided for newspaper exhibition reviews in engaging with the works on display in any depth beyond a general succession of high-flown yet ultimately redundant laudatory phrases. ‘I have never written an informed and intelligent review of a Dublin exhibition of pictures’, he wrote in his mock review of the first IELA exhibition, ‘but pray don’t let that worry you, neither has anybody else’.<sup>149</sup> And the column promptly reels off a series of superficially grandiloquent lines on each artist, with the work Jack Butler Yeats ‘arresting alike by reason of the deftness of the paintwork and the chaotic order of this artist’s elusive technique’ and Mainie Jellett presenting ‘a strikingly successful essay in the art of this most individualistic of painters’; while repeated commendatory phrases abound with Mary Swanzy’s painting ‘conceived and executed with that feeling for colour which one has come to expect from her’ and Cecil Salkeld praised as having ‘the deftness one comes to expect from this gifted artist’. In a comic culmination the review itself is abruptly cut off in mid-sentence with the author’s apologies that ‘One cannot deal in the course of a short article with the very varied and striking exhibits and no person who is interested in art should fail to ...’.

A June 1944 article, meanwhile, occasioned a particularly extended parody of the grand opening of a Dublin art exhibition with Myles impersonating the effusive officiator in charge of launching the event. ‘Dear ladies – and you, gentlemen’, he begins, ‘we are here in this lovely room surrounded by those wonderful pictures, we are friends, the purpose of our meeting is solemn, in it we take a pride and there is in us also an exaltation’, before characterising the exhibited artist (humorously referred to as ‘Myles’ throughout) in a succession of superlatives as ‘a magnificent, a *free* genius, a many-sided visionary’.<sup>150</sup> In a

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<sup>148</sup> Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 131.

<sup>149</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’, *Irish Times*, 4 October 1943, p. 3.

<sup>150</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’, *Irish Times*, 26 June 1944, p. 3.

mocking rehearsal of the by now common theme of the young Irish artist's liberating pilgrimage to the Continent, the speaker sketches the painter's early formative period studying in 'Paris in the eighties, and the temerity of the raw young Irishman in approaching that great Russian who was to be his master for so many years'. Though further unspecified, the influence of this period of continental exposure on the development of the painter is nonetheless evaluated in sweepingly positive terms as having been 'assimilated, purified, transmuted into that singleness of vision which became the great searing characteristic of his maturer work', directly recalling the lofty panegyric reviewing style we examined in relation to the earlier Nano Reid exhibition and its foregrounding of the rhetorical flourish and impassioned overstatement over objective comparative or technical analysis. When the speaker finally arrives at introducing the paintings on display, his overblown rhetoric quickly topples into the nonsensical:

In formally declaring this heavenly exhibition open, I must not detain you too long from saying hello to these really grand, *realised*, paintings [...] if you will look at No. 1 on the far wall you will see what I mean – the hesitant yet *brave* brush work, the forms not yet fully articulated, the colour almost ... *silent*, if we compare it with the crashing polyphonies of the later work.

Here, the increasing expressive intensity of the language coincides with a contravening loss of clarity, culminating in semantic disarray as colour is attributed with audible qualities that are by turn silent and polyphonic. Though exaggeratedly comic in effect, such a passage not only satirises a lack of critical rigour in the promotion of modernist Irish art, but more fundamentally challenges the capacity of the literary to engage with the visual in a meaningful way.

Myles's parody at the same time more broadly draws attention to the small parameters of the Dublin art scene and the limited range of its associated print outlets, and, ultimately, the potential of these combined conditions to restrict the discourse of Irish art to a rarefied and self-regarding coterie culture. The grand rhetorical tone of the officiator, addressing a select

audience in an elevated literary language, pointed toward a cultural elitism that was widely and aggressively denounced throughout ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’ in both literature and visual art. Writing in March 1944 with a characteristic blend of the mock-dramatic and underlying edge, Myles urged ‘Beware of “culture”, reader; of “art” and “artists” be careful and apprehensive’ and warning of their capacity ‘when isolated in our own day to become merely a self-conscious social cult’.<sup>151</sup> It is precisely this exclusive social atmosphere that is evoked in his extended parody of the opening of the Dublin exhibition, with the officiator’s introductory speech repeatedly addressing the audience as his ‘friends’ and assuming their affectionate familiarity with the artist’s personality and work. Indeed, as he progresses through the various paintings on display, the commentary escalates from the mere descriptively calamitous to the absurdly esoteric, with the final painting hailed as representative of the ‘hierophantic, Egyptian spirit as reflected in, say, cuneiform, “calligraphic” mysticism of the Hyksos voluptuaries ... but *after* it has passed through the purifying crucible of Byzantium’. In this fervid cultish atmosphere, the speech humorously closes with the figures in the paintings suddenly animated with life and ‘leap from frames and dash out the door’ in a desperate attempt to escape the cloistered confines of the exhibition room.

Theodore Goodman drew similar attention to these issues surveying the ‘Irish post-war scene’ in 1946.<sup>152</sup> As an art critic, Goodman was in general a supporter of the ‘younger generation’ of artists that would become associated with *Envoy*, and the opening of his article looked back on the promise of ‘revival in the visual arts’ during the war years, noting that ‘the young painters, whose work I did my best to encourage in their early exhibitions, are now for the most part regarded by the moneyed public, who buy pictures, as having arrived. [...] The

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<sup>151</sup> Myles na gCopaleen, ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’, *Irish Times*, 21 March 1944, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> Theodore Goodman, ‘Further Outlook Unsettled’, *Commentary*, vol. 5, no. 2 (February 1946), p. 13. Goodman moved to Dublin from London following the outbreak of war in 1940. His prominence as an art critic throughout this period was largely based on his monthly art column in *Commentary*, spanning from 1942 until his return to London in 1946.

dealers run after them, their prices steadily advance'.<sup>153</sup> However, Goodman's appreciation for these artists does not preclude him from highlighting his dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of critical analysis in the media praise of their work. Alluding to the dangers of the cultivation of a self-regarding coterie culture satirised in 'Cruiskeen Lawn', he argues that 'There are a few promising painters, but in nearly every case they have been so over-praised by the narrow and provincial Dublin clique of so called "art lovers", while at the same time echoing Charles Sidney's wartime *Bell* criticism in his identification of an increasing complacency in the appraisal of contemporary Irish art and the loss of 'all that precious humility without which no true artist can ever achieve genuine creative work'.<sup>154</sup> Writing a couple of months later in May, he reiterated these concerns with the assertion that:

It art is to revive at all in Ireland and if creative ability is to be encouraged it is absolutely essential that a few competent people be found to act as guides to the public, to encourage genuine ability and to discourage dishonesty.<sup>155</sup>

As Kennedy notes, the basic difficulty in encouraging the development of such a body of dedicated art writers in Dublin was a reflection of the fact that 'the cohesive intellectual substratum needed to sustain such debate was simply too small in Ireland'.<sup>156</sup> For Edward Sheehy writing in *The Dublin Magazine* in 1950, the situation was compounded by the uncongenial material conditions faced by the writer in attempting to earn a living through art criticism. Responding to a recent speech made by Seán Keating in which the artist denounced the journalist art critic as 'simply a middleman who comes between the painter and the public and whose only qualification seems to be that he should have made a mess of football news', Sheehy argued that the essentially amateur status of the majority of art criticism in the media was an inevitable condition in mid-century Dublin where 'journalism cannot support the full-

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Goodman, 'Further Outlook Unsettled', p. 13.

<sup>155</sup> Theodore Goodman: 'Irish Art and the Critic', *Commentary*, vol. 5, no. 5 (May 1946), p. 13.

<sup>156</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision': Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 2, p. 3.

time professional critic and is therefore inevitably served by the amateur with an interest in painting, or failing that, by the first journalist to hand'.<sup>157</sup>

The prominence given to the visual arts in *Envoy* testified to Ryan's aspiration to establish his magazine as a new focal point for the development of the critical discourse of contemporary Irish art at a time when its standards and structures were coming under increasing scrutiny. Ryan's editorial correspondence during the preparation stages of the magazine reveals his initial ambitions for the series to comprise of articles consisting of a considerable four thousand words, though the actual average word count of 'Contemporary Irish Painters' would ultimately be closer to half this prospective amount at two thousand five hundred.<sup>158</sup> The editorial policy of paying contributors at competitive rates along with the commitment to printing extended articles focusing in detail on individual artists reflected the desire to encourage and associate the magazine with a more professionalised art critical ethos.<sup>159</sup> The considerable task in achieving such standards, however, emerges from Ryan's letters in which he repeatedly voices his frustrations at the difficulty of securing art writers with both a satisfactorily detailed knowledge of and interest in *Envoy*'s proposed painters. 'I haven't as yet discovered anybody sufficiently well qualified to write up you and your paintings for the proposed article', he wrote to Louis le Brocquy in January 1950, 'There are plenty of hack men of course who could turn out a fairly creditable job, but as one of your

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<sup>157</sup> Edward Sheehy, 'Art Notes', *The Dublin Magazine*, vol. 25, no. 3 (July-September 1950), 48-50 (p 49). Keating's speech is quoted in Sheehy's article and is referenced as having been delivered at a recent 'student debating society' event. Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ryan's early letters written to various art critics to contribute to *Envoy* all proposed this larger word count, for example, writing to the poet and critic Thomas MacGreevy he enquired whether he would 'care to do an article (of say 4,000 words) on Jack Butler Yeats for the first issue'. John Ryan to Thomas MacGreevy, 12 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4. The difficulty in completing such a considerable piece of writing within the inevitably short deadline period for submission appears to have ultimately necessitated the smaller word counts that actually featured in the magazine. Louis le Brocquy, for example, wrote to Ryan in November 1949 to inform him that the prominent London-based Irish art critic Maurice Collis would be unable to contribute to the magazine for this very reason, remarking that 'I don't think he thought this involved 4000 words when I mentioned the matter to him originally. An essay of this length would involve the writer in a very considered critique indeed'. Louis le Brocquy to John Ryan, 11 November 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3.

<sup>159</sup> Ryan set out the 'standard rate' of two pounds and two shillings per one thousand words for each article. Ryan to MacGreevy, 12 September 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

admirers I don't think that that would be quite good enough'.<sup>160</sup> The group of writers that Ryan ultimately assembled for 'Contemporary Irish Painters' in many ways reflected the small parameters and largely amateur conditions of the post-war art critical field, with only one established critic featuring among the otherwise eclectic mix of artists and journalists.<sup>161</sup>

Inevitably, then, the rhetoric of *Envoy's* 'Contemporary Irish Painters' in the promotion of its artists was to a significant extent shaped by the underdeveloped art critical culture from which the magazine emerged. Ryan's founding ambition for *Envoy* to represent the 'Irish artists which we believe to have the greatest promise', combined with the magazine's close relationship with art dealer Victor Waddington, established the essential promotional basis of each article, a feature that was moreover cultivated by the typically close relationships shared between the various art writers and their particular subjects.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, the interconnected and intimate nature of the network of friends, lovers, associates, and admirers that comprised the series' writers and artists evoked in one sense the exclusive coterie culture satirised by Myles na gCopaleen in his attacks on the Dublin art scene.<sup>163</sup> The exaggerated terms that imbue Cecil Salkeld's opening 'appreciation' of his artist friend Daniel O'Neill was certainly representative of the overblown, effusive literary style that was 'chronicled with gleeful disdain' in the art critical parodies of 'Cruiskeen Lawn'.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> John Ryan to Louis le Brocquy, 14 January 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>161</sup> Edward Sheehy was the only established art critic featured in *Envoy's* 'Contemporary Irish Painters' series. A.J. Leventhal has noted that he also wrote under a pseudonym in the magazine and this would appear to be 'Edward de Courcy' in the article on sculptor Hilary Heron. A.J. Leventhal, 'Edward Sheehy: An Appreciation', *The Dublin Magazine*, vol. 31, no. 4 (October-December 1956), 26-28 (p. 27). Of the other contributors to the series, John William White worked as the London editor for *The Irish Times* during this period; Noelle Biehlmann Johnson, a Frenchwoman living in Belfast wrote occasional art criticism under the pseudonym of Noelle Brissac and her article on Thurloe Conolly appears to have been her most extended published critical piece by this time; Cecil Salkeld, Patrick Collins, Patrick Swift, and Ryan himself, meanwhile, were all primarily artists, though Salkeld had published widely on literature and art throughout the 1930s and 40s.

<sup>162</sup> John Ryan to Terence Kilmartin, 1 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/4.

<sup>163</sup> Daniel O'Neill's friendship with Cecil Salkeld saw him become a regular visitor to the Salkeld's home at no. 43 Morehampton Road during and after the war, which Salkeld alludes to at the opening of his article in his recollection of O'Neill's 'first visit to our house'. Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: A Critical Appreciation', p. 31. Noelle Biehlmann Johnson (Noelle Brissac), recently separated from the painter Nevill Johnson, was involved in an intimate relationship with Thurloe Conolly during the immediate post-war years. Patrick Swift developed a close friendship with Nano Reid during the war years and the older artist was an important early supporter of his work. W.J. White, meanwhile, referred to Louis le Brocquy as 'a very good friend of mine' in correspondence with Ryan. W.J. White to John Ryan, 1 February 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/7.

<sup>164</sup> Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: An Appreciation', p. 31; Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking-Glass*, p. 131.



Notwithstanding the remarkable rapidity of O'Neill's development during these years, the superlative nature of Salkeld's praise inevitably exceeds the bounds of his achievements whereby the painter is hailed as a 'prodigy' who is 'painting picture after picture of astonishing richness in texture, with an apparently inexhaustible fertility'.<sup>165</sup> Salkeld's dramatized recollection of his first encounter with an O'Neill portrait, moreover, provokes lofty comparisons between the young painter as 'a master of his art' with the 'old masters' of the Italian Renaissance including Leonardo da Vinci:

Suddenly I came upon a smallish portrait – a girl's head, so strikingly different from anything I had seen in this country, I thought for a moment it might be a reproduction of an old master; but, no – the treatment was quite modern, the paint thick and rich and suave. I brought it over to the light. The head and shoulders of the girl were suspended in a kind of cavernous gloom reminiscent of Leonardo.<sup>166</sup>

Salkeld's expressed appreciation for his subject set a tone that was sustained throughout the series, with the editorial to the April 1950 issue, for example, directing readers to 'the very great achievement' of Colin Middleton in a way that was personally established by Sheehy at the opening of his article on the painter with the recollection that, 'When I met Colin Middleton's work for the first time my reaction was one of intense admiration'.<sup>167</sup> At its most emphatic, the promotional rhetoric of *Envoy's* 'Contemporary Irish Painters' led to the sweeping advancement of its artists within the context of European visual modernism that was both accompanied and accentuated by the strident dismissal of a native tradition, national affiliation, and provincial local standards. In these instances where polarising overstatement prevailed over a more measured critical approach, *Envoy's* 'thrust toward involvement in an international context' exposed itself to the kind of 'blushing self-conscious foreignism' satirised by Myles na gCopaleen in his critique of the permeation of modern European art

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<sup>165</sup> Salkeld, 'Daniel O'Neill: An Appreciation', p. 32; p. 37.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43; p. 32.

<sup>167</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 1 (April 1950), p. 11; Edward Sheehy, 'Contemporary Irish Painters (5): Colin Middleton', *Envoy*, vol. 2, no. 1 (April 1950), 32-40 (p. 32).

practices and styles in Ireland throughout the 1940s.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, while ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’ registered the real sense of excitement and momentum with the increasing internationalisation of Irish art during the immediate post-war years, the earnestness to critically establish its artists within this wider cultural domain at the same time reflected the as yet transitional state of Irish art criticism in the consideration of these developments.

Patrick Swift’s article on Nano Reid is in many ways most representative of this tendency in the magazine. Of the art writers featured in ‘Contemporary Irish Painters’, Swift was the youngest and also arguably the most personally influenced by his subject. As the poet and writer John Jordan recalls, Swift ‘not alone admired [Reid] immensely as an artist but loved [her] as a person’, having befriended the older painter in Dublin during the post-war years.<sup>169</sup> Reid offered Swift crucial encouragement and support in the lead up to his first exhibitions in Dublin and even helped him in various practical ways including the provision of a paraffin heater for his studio.<sup>170</sup> Their close relationship together is itself highlighted in the reproductions of Reid’s paintings accompanying her *Envoy* article, with her *Portrait of a Young Man* (oil on canvass, 1950) a portrait of Swift himself, and Swift’s writing is duly marked by his ardent appreciation for the painter and her art in which he sets out to establish with all the ‘vigorous, impatient youth [that] defined the outlook of *Envoy*’ her status as a modern artist of international significance.<sup>171</sup> ‘Throughout her career, Nano Reid has held exhibitions at more or less regular intervals in Dublin, and her position as an Irish painter is secure’, he states, ‘But much more important than her merit relative to Irish painters is her position by general European standards’.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 136; Myles na gCopaleen, ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’, *Irish Times*, 13 April 1944, p. 3.

<sup>169</sup> John Jordan, ‘P.S. (1927-1983)’, in *PS... of course: Patrick Swift 1927-1983*, pp. 141-142 (p. 141).

<sup>170</sup> Veronica Jane O’Mara, ‘A Short Life of Patrick Swift’, in *PS... of course: Patrick Swift 1927-1983*, pp. 37-89 (p. 47).

<sup>171</sup> Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical*, p. 151.

<sup>172</sup> Swift, ‘Contemporary Irish Artists (4): Nano Reid’, p. 32.

Swift was encouraged in his internationalist focus by Reid's increasing prominence among the contemporary Irish artists beginning to achieve a wider overseas reception at this time. 'Seeing her work in London at St. George's galleries', he excitedly recalls following a visit earlier that year to a group show in which she featured, 'one is struck by the tremendous force of her composition. Surrounded entirely by English and Continental work, she seems to emerge with a profound realisation of structure, whether in figure or landscape'.<sup>173</sup> It is this ambition to situate her within an international context that compels the article's disparaging attitude toward any evaluations of Reid's painting confined to the perceived deficient critical conventions of Irish art. So that Swift sets out instead the importance of assessing her art 'by general European standards' and echoing *Envoy's* poetry criticism we examined in chapter five with his belief that 'In Ireland, we are inclined to think of our painters as particularly "Irish" and to readjust our attitude in considering continental or English artists. There is no especial value in attempting to say how great Nano Reid may be in the Irish scene, but one can say that she has her place in European painting'.<sup>174</sup>

However, it is in his eagerness to establish Reid's 'place in European painting' where Swift resorts to the sweepingly laudatory rhetoric that conditioned much of the promotional rhetoric of Irish modernism during this time. Identifying the dual importance of a bold linear style and expressive colour to Reid's art, Swift first establishes her as a painter 'outstanding for her draughtsmanship' who 'began with a pure and firmly realised preoccupation with drawing', and how as her artistic career developed she combined this 'insistence on line with the freedom of her approach' that manifested itself in increasingly spontaneous brushwork,

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 32. Reid's developing international exposure culminated in June 1950 with her selection alongside Norah McGuinness by the Cultural Relations Committee to represent Ireland at the twenty-fifth Venice Biennale in Italy. As Fiona Barber writes, the inclusion of Reid and McGuinness among the eight hundred artists from a total of twenty-nine different countries at this highly prestigious exhibition of modern art 'helped to signal the end of a long period of isolationism in Ireland in favour of a new internationalist approach to cultural policy' and was the first major international exhibition that the nation had participated in since gaining full independence from the Commonwealth the previous year. Barber, 'Excavating Room 50: Irish Painting and the Cold War at the 1950 Venice Biennale', p. 207.

<sup>174</sup> Swift, 'Contemporary Irish Artists (4): Nano Reid', p. 35.

heavy application of pigment on the canvass, and distorted use of perspective.<sup>175</sup> It is these qualities of ‘draughtsmanship allied with the freed imagination’, he then broadly asserts, that place her ‘in the great tradition of Ingres-Degas-Lautrec and Picasso (who will always be remembered as a draughtsman above all)’. Swift’s situating of Reid in the context of this formidable line of continental precursors is further embellished in his charting of her artistic development toward her mature style. While admitting that ‘it is difficult to give an exact account’ of the period after her first exhibition in Dublin in 1933, he nonetheless describes her progression over the following ten years in hyperbolic terms ‘as marked by a consistent development of style that is scarcely paralleled outside a handful of the greater artists of our day’. ‘Apart from Picasso’, he continues, ‘(who is partly guilty of being what Wyndham Lewis has called him; a great eclectic), such consistency and purposefulness have marked the development of all great artists.’<sup>176</sup> Because the superlative tenor of Swift’s association of Reid with such a diverse array of artists as Jean Auguste Dominic Ingres, Edgar Degas, Pierre Bonnard, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Pablo Picasso, and Wyndham Lewis is largely unaccompanied by a requisitely interrogative or extensive comparative analysis, there occurs a certain dislocation between the earnestness of the art writer and the critical substance of his appreciation. In such moments, *Envoy*’s art criticism reflects the relatively underdeveloped critical culture in the promotion of modernist Irish artists from which the magazine emerged, recalling the earlier concerns of critics such as Charles Sidney in reaction to the excessively laudatory reviewing of Reid’s wartime exhibitions. Indeed, Sidney’s observance that it would be ‘a *tour de force* on the part of Miss Nano Read [*sic*] to have actually progressed in her work since those lines were written’, could be equally ascribed to her later *Envoy* appreciation.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>177</sup> Sidney, ‘Art Criticism in Dublin’, p. 105.

***'The Artist Speaks': Towards a more sophisticated visual analysis***

In Swift's appreciation, the internationalist focus of 'Contemporary Irish Painters' in many ways betrayed the 'self-conscious Europeanism' that was ultimately a condition of the on-going critical negotiation of contemporary Irish art within this wider cultural domain.<sup>178</sup> Yet if *Envoy* inevitably reflected in such instances the relatively underdeveloped state of Irish art critical discourse, then it did nonetheless succeed in contributing to what Kennedy has identified as the 'growing awareness of more sophisticated methods of appraising the efforts of contemporary artists' into the 1950s.<sup>179</sup> As we examined in chapter two, *Envoy*'s recreation of the 'gallery context' in coordination with dealer Victor Waddington and through the extended focus on individual artists and their reproduced work in each issue importantly provided a greater scope for the critical engagement with questions of art practice, methodology, and technique throughout the magazine's twenty issues.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, this greater editorial focus on the individual artist encouraged a key critical development in the 'Contemporary Irish Painters' series whereby Ryan invited the featured painters themselves to voice their opinions on the present state of Irish art criticism and their aspirations for its future progression. *Envoy*'s February 1951 issue staged this 'symposium of artistic opinion' in a special feature entitled 'The Artist Speaks', including contributions from Louis le Brocquy, Gerard Dillon, Nano Reid, George Campbell, and Patrick Swift.<sup>181</sup> What emerges most strongly from the symposium is a collective dissatisfaction with the presiding conventions by which artworks remained largely experienced and evaluated. The artists variously draw attention to the lack of a serious engagement with the nature of art practice in the critical field that was compounded by a generally underdeveloped visual sense in the evaluation of

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<sup>178</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 215.

<sup>179</sup> Kennedy, 'Experimentalism or Mere Chaos? The White Stag Group and the Reception of Subjective Art in Ireland', p. 187.

<sup>180</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 1, p. 78.

<sup>181</sup> Louis le Brocquy, Gerard Dillon, Nano Reid, George Campbell, Patrick Swift, 'The Artist Speaks', *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 15 (February 1951), 38-44 (p. 38).

paintings beyond basic representational qualities. ‘As far as art criticism is concerned’, George Campbell argued, ‘I feel its function is often misunderstood, but then it is a difficult period in which to be bold, coming as it does so soon after its academic predecessors’:

I do wish for a more interpretive art column and less of what the critic likes and dislikes, since his likes and dislikes are usually based on a literary conception of art. Let him analyse more the philosophy of the artist and leave likes to the people who buy. I’d prefer a fumbling attempt to interpret than all the well-turned jargon – since I believe art is itself a fumbling after an unknown quantity.<sup>182</sup>

Campbell’s frustrations at the prevailing ‘literary conception of art’ that relied on basic qualities of narrative, iconography, and emotiveness over more specialist individual considerations of methodology, medium, technique, and a sophisticated modern visual sense that could seriously engage with the formal and material elements of the artwork, attests to the ultimately limited extent to which the critical discourse of Irish art had progressed despite the transformative developments since the foundation of the IELA in 1943.

As Kennedy writes, ‘literary criticism’ remained ‘a key area of conflict between artists and critics in that it highlighted the apparently irreconcilable spheres of the written word and the visual image and gave priority to the former’, a condition that was sustained by the fact that ‘many prominent art critics in Ireland came from literary backgrounds and were primarily interested in literature as opposed to visual art’.<sup>183</sup> It was through a basic literary lens by which ‘the officialdom in Irish art’ as it had manifested in the post-independence period through artists such as Seán Keating and Paul Henry had been traditionally viewed and lauded.<sup>184</sup> The nationalist appeal of Keating’s depictions of rebel figures and post-revolutionary civic life, for example, was based on their striking iconographic and narrative qualities that could be powerfully articulated in literary terms. Acknowledging the persistence of this narrative-based sensibility in the interpretation of Irish artworks in 1945, Ernie

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<sup>182</sup> George Campbell, ‘The Artist Speaks’, *Envoy*, vol. 4, no. 15, 38-44 (p. 42).

<sup>183</sup> Kennedy, ‘The Politics of Vision’: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972’, vol. 1, p. 15.

<sup>184</sup> Marshall, ‘Orpen, William’, in *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Vol. V: Twentieth Century*, p. 336.

O'Malley, a major combatant in both the War of Independence and Civil War whose art writing in the 1940s on painters such as Jack Butler Yeats was contrastingly distinguished for its visual acuity in the articulation of national identity, argued that 'the visual sense is not strongly developed in Ireland' and how that even despite the accelerated developments of the war years 'we are inclined to see paint in a literary way as if the implied title should continue as a story on the canvas'.<sup>185</sup>

The call of *Envoy's* artists in 'The Artist Speaks' for the maturation of this visual sense was at the same time a broader reflection of their shared desire of detachment from the popular nationalist conceptions of the role of art and civic duty of the artist to which basic literary readings of paintings naturally aspired. The impassioned 'collective aesthetic' embodied by painters such as Keating founded upon a deep sense of national obligation is countered in 'The Artist Speaks' with a more individualist and technical focus that could seriously engage with painting on its own terms *as painting*.<sup>186</sup> 'No real painter ever wants to be known through any other medium than his painting', Patrick Swift asserts, 'the influence of literature on painting is at all times dangerous if not deadly. Painting is a visual art; and the job of the artist must be to create in visual terms the tension experienced'.<sup>187</sup> Nano Reid, meanwhile, casts in more dramatized terms the limiting and even pernicious subjection of the visual to literary analysis, arguing that

In a country where the main tradition of the arts has been literary it is inevitable that the work of the painter be interpreted in terms of the writer's art. Plastic sense is a rarity. The picture which does not tell a story gives rise to a conglomeration of confusing and irrelevant surmises.<sup>188</sup>

Where *Envoy* can be said to have importantly stimulated the development of this 'plastic sense' in Irish art criticism was in its encouragement and facilitation of the

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<sup>185</sup> Ernán O'Malley, 'Introduction', *Jack B. Yeats: National Loan Exhibition June-July 1945* (Dublin: National College of Art), pp. 6-16 (p. 15).

<sup>186</sup> Kennedy, 'The Politics of Vision: Critical Writing on Art in Ireland 1939-1972', vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>187</sup> Patrick Swift, 'The Artist Speaks', pp. 42-43.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

collaborative working relationship between artist and writer during the writing process of a number of the articles in the 'Contemporary Irish Painters' series. Ryan's correspondence with Louis le Brocquy is illustrative of the extent to which editor, artist, and art writer worked together in this way in the preparation stages of 'Contemporary Irish Painters' articles. Though living in London, le Brocquy maintained a keen interest in the Dublin arts scene during the immediate post-war years and responded enthusiastically to Ryan's request that he might be represented among *Envoy's* featured contemporary artists, replying to the editor in October 1949 that 'I'd feel very honoured to be included in your review'.<sup>189</sup> Le Brocquy's development as an artist during the 1940s and 50s was distinguished by his diverse interests and experiments in an array of media, with his painting in watercolour and oil combined with, for example, serious work in tapestry design. From the outset, le Brocquy was keen for his *Envoy* article to provide an intimate and detailed insight into his creative process and the way in which it was stimulated by the distinctive qualities and challenges inherent in these different media. The securing of an art critic for the article with the necessary plastic sensitivity and with whom le Brocquy could regularly meet to discuss these matters during the composition stage thus emerged as a key requirement. The eventual choice of le Brocquy's 'very good friend' W. J. White, the London editor and occasional art columnist for *The Irish Times*, was agreed upon with this in mind, and le Brocquy wrote to Ryan in January 1950 that 'I'd be very pleased, if he is willing, to be "interviewed", by him'.<sup>190</sup> White subsequently accepted the offer having met with the painter in London, writing to Ryan that 'I have just lunched with Louis le Brocquy and had a talk about the article which you are kind enough to want. I think, at the moment, that the article will turn a good deal on the artists' own version of what he is getting at'.<sup>191</sup> Thus was initiated the series of informal meetings between writer and artist over the course of three weeks through which process the article was written, with

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<sup>189</sup> W.J. White to John Ryan, 1 February 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3. Louis le Brocquy to John Ryan, 25 October 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3.

<sup>190</sup> Louis le Brocquy to John Ryan, 16 Jan 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3.

<sup>191</sup> W.J. White to John Ryan, 13 February 1950, *Envoy* Records, Col. 43/5/7.



White later describing to Ryan that ‘after I had written the first draft I had to spend a good deal of time discussing it with le Brocquy and rewriting’.<sup>192</sup> With the final draft of article complete, le Brocquy wrote to Ryan to assure him that White had ‘my habits of mind well in hand’ and it was eventually published in *Envoy* that May.<sup>193</sup>

The value of this collaborative exchange is reflected in the article itself through the intimate and detailed insights it provides into le Brocquy’s painting process and the importance of the various media and methods he utilized at this time in the creation of his work. The painter’s request ‘to have the medium, size and the date printed under the titles’ of the four works reproduced in the magazine ‘since all these factors have some bearing on the paintings’ was duly adhered to, with the published article cataloguing le Brocquy’s use of different materials for the surface of his oil and watercolour paintings including board, canvass, and panel.<sup>194</sup> The accompanying painting measurements meanwhile provided a sense of their varying scale that would otherwise have been unknowable from the illustrations as reproduced. White himself furthermore draws attention throughout to the physical properties of the artworks under discussion, noting for example that *Southern Window* (1939) is executed in a ‘wax-resin medium on sailcloth’.<sup>195</sup>

It is this attention to the materiality of le Brocquy’s work that informs White’s detailed focus on the artist’s distinctive manipulation of the various media represented in his oeuvre throughout the 1940s. Le Brocquy’s post-war experiments in tapestry design, for example, brought him critical acclaim in Britain during this time. His first major tapestry works were created through a commission from the prestigious Edinburgh Tapestry Weavers, who invited a number of prominent London-based artists to design tapestries for them in 1948.<sup>196</sup> As Dorothy Walker observes, the subject matter and figuration of le Brocquy’s subsequent works

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<sup>192</sup> W.J. White to John Ryan, 26 February, *Envoy* Records, Col. 43/5/8.

<sup>193</sup> Louis le Brocquy to John Ryan, 1 March 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3.

<sup>194</sup> Louis le Brocquy to John Ryan, 2 April 1950, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3.

<sup>195</sup> W.J. White, ‘Contemporary Irish Artists (VI): Louis le Brocquy’, p. 54.

<sup>196</sup> The other artists included in project were Stanley Spencer, Jankel Adler, and Graham Sutherland.

for the Edinburgh Tapestry Weavers ‘[corresponded] closely to the paintings of the period’, with *Travellers 1948* (tapestry, 1948) continuing the ‘tinker’ theme that had dominated his first post-war exhibitions in London [**Fig. 16**].<sup>197</sup> However, while his tapestry design shared these thematic and pictorial affinities with the earlier oil and watercolour work, as a medium it entailed a wholly distinctive set of compositional challenges that set it apart from painting and which particularly attracted le Brocquy as an artist. ‘After that first commission from Edinburgh Weavers’, Walker writes, ‘the medium took its hold on his fascination’, stimulating him to produce a number of further and more ambitious tapestries through new successive commissions.<sup>198</sup> Le Brocquy was particularly fascinated by the way in which the medium of tapestry exerted a certain autonomy during the composition process that contributed to the finished design in ways beyond the artist’s original intention or control. The process began with the production of a full-scale graphic design for his tapestry, annotated with numbers denoting areas of a particular colour in a range of dyed wools. As Anne Madden describes, the design was thus conceived ‘like a musical score, in initially imperceptible colour indicated by signs. The realization of the woven work added its own surprise to the original graphic conception’.<sup>199</sup> Describing in a late interview that it ‘[involved] a completely different set of problems’ to painting, le Brocquy explained how ‘Although one can visualise what one is doing, to a certain extent, when the tapestry is palpably there this causes an independent birth of something, and that is so contrary to the whole involved process of painting that is rather refreshing’.<sup>200</sup> As it was in Britain where le Brocquy’s tapestry designs were created and critically received, White’s illustration of his work in the medium provided an important introduction to Irish readers. ‘Another medium in which he has been experimenting recently, and with interesting results, is tapestry’, he explains, before progressing into a detailed insight of the challenges posed by the medium in

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<sup>197</sup> Dorothy Walker, *Louis le Brocquy* (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1981), p. 31.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>199</sup> Anne Madden, *Louis le Brocquy: A Painter Seeing His Way* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), p. 94.

<sup>200</sup> Harriet Cooke, ‘Harriet Cooke talks to Louis le Brocquy’, *Irish Times*, 25 May 1973, p. 12.

the creation of pictorial space and the harnessing of the innumerable dyed woollen strands woven into the design that provide its colour:

For the artist, tapestry presents new and stimulating problems. The designs must have an emphatic surface pattern. The illusion of perspective fails completely in tapestry, because of the “wall” interposed by the texture of the weave. Recognising this limitation, Le Brocquy tries to create a *feeling* of depth, by the superimposition of flat planes of colour. The natural insistence on surface caused by the texture of the fabric itself will then, he believes, set up a dynamic and proper tension between surface and depth.<sup>201</sup>

White’s sensitivity towards the compositional arrangement of le Brocquy’s painting and the way in which it is informed by the various media employed is similarly reflected the article’s engagement with his post-war oil and watercolour paintings in the expression of international themes. The travelling groups and isolated individuals that comprised le Brocquy’s post-war ‘tinker series’ were characterized by their distinctive geometric figuration, the shallowing of the pictorial space and its fragmentation into angular planes of colour, that together pictorially evoked the sense of disquiet and dislocation that strongly resonated within the context of post-war life. It is, consequently, the importance of this ‘organisation of the picture’s surface, by means of shallow, strongly-defined planes, with the abandonment of three-dimensional illusion’ that White emphasizes, highlighting the way in which their individual expressive vibrancy is particularly enhanced by the watercolour medium:

The water-colours, small in area, have an intricate variety of surface movement in which the tension comes from the hair-spring tracery of Indian ink lines. The washes of colour, which serve to accent the planes, are sometimes isolated by means of wax from ensuing washes, in order to stress their clarity and individual vitality.<sup>202</sup>

It is indeed the fragmented figurations of le Brocquy’s ‘tinker’ paintings such as in *The Fearful World* (oil on canvass, 1948), included in *Envoy*, that stand for White as among the artist’s most powerful recent works, evoking the ‘dread of man, in a world in which

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<sup>201</sup> W.J. White, ‘Contemporary Irish Artists (VI): Louis le Brocquy’, pp. 63-64.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

civilization may be extinguished by his own combination of genius and idiocy' [Fig. 17].<sup>203</sup>

Most significantly for the Irish reader, however, the article provides an insight into the way in which this atmosphere is achieved not just in its subject matter but also technically through le Brocquy's plastic sensitivity.

*Envoy's* article on Louis le Brocquy was characteristic of the distinguishing prominence the magazine gave to visual art in that it was among the most extensive critical considerations of the painter in an Irish periodical at the time of its publication. Indeed, *Envoy's* promotion of the painter coincided with the beginning of a period that would see le Brocquy achieve a new level of public recognition and esteem both at home and internationally. Le Brocquy's 1951 exhibition at the Victor Waddington Galleries was his first one-man show in Dublin in the post-war years, with its high attendance and positive media reaction signalling the broader transformation in the public reception of the painter whose rejection by the Academy during the war years had provoked the founding of the IELA. Reviewing the exhibition in January 1952, Ryan regarded its 'outstanding success' as 'fresh evidence that there is developing in this country an adult public opinion in matters of art which is independent and indeed indifferent to the activities of the powerful forces of intellectual reaction in our midst'.<sup>204</sup> Indeed, as we have examined in this final chapter of the thesis, *Envoy's* art section can be said to have significantly contributed to the development of this maturation in the public appreciation of modern art practice. That the fervent period of independent activity of the 1940s had succeeded in significantly raising the public profile of contemporary Irish artists was reflected in the establishment of the Arts Council in 1951, which initiated, however gradually, a new era of state recognition and support for living

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>204</sup> John Ryan, 'The Louis le Brocquy Exhibition', *Our Nation: An Independent Review of Current Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 9 (January 1952), 12-13 (p. 12).

artists and their work. For Fintan Cullen, it was this period that laid the foundations for the continued growth of visual art in Ireland up to the present day:

In the second half of the twentieth century, the status of the visual arts in Ireland was transformed. Ignored and underfunded for much of the preceding 150 years, the role of visual art in post-Second World War Ireland is one of public presence and official patronage. The setting up of the Arts Council in 1951 and the slow growth in gallery spaces and loan exhibitions has meant that art is now visible throughout the country in a way unknown to previous generations.<sup>205</sup>

Ryan's editorial ambition to 'provide an outlet for [and] present to the world all that is outstanding and genuinely creative in Irish art' established *Envoy* as a key early publishing platform in the drive towards this development.<sup>206</sup> Ultimately, in its commitment to raising the cultural status of visual art and the standards of art criticism in the context of the 'younger generation' of painters and sculptors to emerge in the 1940s, *Envoy* can be said to have fulfilled Louis le Brocquy's early hope for the magazine as a 'most necessary and justified forum' during a period of transformation in Irish art.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Fintan Cullen, 'The Visual Arts in Ireland', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. by Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 304-321 (p. 314).

<sup>206</sup> 'Foreword', *Envoy*, (April 1950), 9-11 (p. 10).

<sup>207</sup> Louis le Brocquy to John Ryan, 15 December 1949, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/5/3.

## Conclusion

The foreword to *Envoy*'s twentieth issue in July 1951 opened abruptly with the statement by its editors that 'we have to announce that this is to be the final issue of *ENVOY*. The decision to cease publication had to be taken suddenly, and it was not possible for us to inform readers in advance'.<sup>1</sup> *Envoy*'s business correspondence throughout 1951 was marked by the strains of rising production costs that in turn provoked increasingly desperate pleas for financial support in the magazine's final issues.<sup>2</sup> '*Envoy* urgently requires the assistance of all who are interested in preserving this forum of Irish creative thought', a notice stated in the June 1951 issue, for example, calling upon 'the patronage of the reading public' in order to 'keep the magazine alive and flourishing'.<sup>3</sup> It was ultimately the failure in attracting such patronage that led to the magazine's closure the following month. Retreating into the classic embattled editorial voice of the 'little magazine' in the face of overwhelming material adversity, the valedictory foreword claimed that *Envoy* 'enjoyed the friendship of the intelligent few, and the hostility of the unimaginative many' throughout its existence, blaming its ultimately insurmountable financial issue on the indifference of the 'power-drunk moguls of big-business' and the transforming commercial conditions of the mass-market:

*ENVOY* was founded in December, 1949, and has reached its twentieth number. One may suppose that for a literary magazine to survive for such a period, without official or private patronage, is in itself an achievement. No effort was spared to make the journal a financial success, but the inauguration of *ENVOY* as a monthly magazine coincided with the beginning of a phase of increasing prices in the publishing and printing industries, a disastrous spiralling which bids fair to eliminate literary publications entirely.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Foreword: *Envoi*', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 7-9 (p. 7).

<sup>2</sup> Writing to 'our advertising agencies in the city' in January 1951, for example, John Ryan informed them that 'the recent increases in the cost of paper and printing have obliged us to raise our advertising page rate. The new rate is £9-0-0 per page (as against £7-00 old rate) and the half-page and quarter page are of course pro-rata'. John Ryan to 'our advertising agencies in the city', January 1951, *Envoy* Records, Coll. 43/7/1.

<sup>3</sup> *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 19 (June 1951), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

It is this note of rising frustration and ultimate failure that has largely come to dominate conceptions of Irish cultural life during the difficult 1950s. For Dillon Johnston, the dismal recognition that ‘no poetic centre could hold in postwar Ireland’ with the closure of *Envoy* was compounded by the similarly curtailed publishing lives of its fellow literary magazines over the next years.<sup>5</sup> David Marcus’s *Poetry Ireland* and Patrick Kavanagh’s *Kavanagh’s Weekly* both terminated in 1952, while *The Bell* closed once again in December 1954. For Seamus Deane, similarly, that the 1950s ‘saw the death of more journals than any other decade before or since’ was a reflection of the extent to which the cultural climate remained singularly ‘oppressive’ for Irish writers and artists.<sup>6</sup> Kavanagh, however, struck a more philosophical note in his closing *Envoy* ‘Diary’, identifying rather the short-life span of the magazine as the inevitable and, in terms of its artistic integrity, even desirable fate of the sub-genre. ‘Literary magazines are not meant to last a long time’, he stated, ‘Those that do always become the opposite of their early lives. Twenty issues is as good a number of issues to end as any. *ENVOY* has done a good job’.<sup>7</sup> Brooker and Thacker similarly establish the fugitive nature of the magazine as fundamental to its character and import, stating that, ‘If they were doomed to flare and fade, powered by a sense of mission out of all sensible proportion to their financial resources and readerships, magazines belonged to a nexus out of which an ongoing campaign for artistic, intellectual, and broadly political values were launched and launched again’.<sup>8</sup>

A compelling way to consider the legacy of *Envoy* and to challenge the singularly terminal narrative of the 1950s as it has been retrospectively cast by critics is not to merely focus on the difficulties of establishing a ‘centre’ in Dublin or Cork at this time, but to think more transnationally about practices of cultural production and exchange and thereby take

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<sup>5</sup> Dillon Johnston, *Irish Poetry after Joyce*, 2nd edn. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997; first published Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*, p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Diary’, *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951) 65-71 (p. 70).

<sup>8</sup> Brooker and Thacker, ‘General Introduction’, p. 3.

into account the alternative overseas opportunities that unfolded through the magazine's posthumously evolving literary and artistic networks. Indeed, when we uncover the extent and significance of the peripatetic movements across the Irish Sea of the cluster of writers and artists who had originally gathered together in the *Envoy* period, what in fact becomes clear is the variety of new supportive coteries and independent publishing opportunities that crystallised around key London magazines emerging in these years such as *Nimbus*, *Encounter*, *Time and Tide*, and *X: A Quarterly Review*. Following the closure of *Envoy*, Patrick Swift and Anthony Cronin moved to London where they set about establishing themselves in Soho. Cronin characterised the concentrated cultural life and lively bohemian atmosphere of Soho in terms that are immediately reminiscent of *Envoy*'s 'Graftonia'. 'There were several pubs within a short stroll of each other, where the drinking clubs were entitled to remain open in the afternoon and where fellow-spirits of some sort as well as one's friends could be found', he has recalled, describing the area's eclectic local milieu in a manner similar to the earlier atmosphere of McDaid's:

Soho itself, to most people who drank there, was then a pleasant backwater and a geographical convenience [...] the fact that it had a built-in tolerance to eccentrics of all descriptions, artists as well as criminals; and that a backdrop of delicatessens, off-licenses, small shops and restaurants was preferable to many other settings. It was too, a village, and therefore satisfied something in the soul that abhorred the metropolis.<sup>9</sup>

Cronin, who would take up a position in London as literary editor of the established weekly political and literary review *Time and Tide*, initially lodged with Swift in Soho and it was there in the popular Duke of Wellington bar where they first met David Wright in 1953, the influential South African-born poet and editor who would subsequently play a key role in the promotion of contemporary Irish writers and artists in the city over the following years.<sup>10</sup>

Wright was involved at this time with the literary quarterly established in 1951, *Nimbus*, and became its associate editor in 1955. The close relationship he developed with Cronin and

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<sup>9</sup> Cronin, *Dead as Doornails*, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> David Wright, 'Patrick Swift in London', in *PS... of course: Patrick Swift 1927-1983*, pp. 179-185 (p. 179).



Swift during this time drew them into his independent publishing circles and extended in turn a developing magazine network outward from London to Dublin.

It was Wright who Swift first contacted, for example, having come across the loose typescript collection of poems that Kavanagh had gathered together as representative of his body of work since the 1947 volume *A Soul for Sale*, and which had recently been rejected for publication by major British publishers Macmillan.<sup>11</sup> Swift returned to Dublin for a brief spell in 1956 during which time he and Kavanagh, as Antoinette Quinn records, ‘resumed the close friendship they had enjoyed in the *Envoy* years’.<sup>12</sup> Having been invited by the poet to look over the contents of his typescript collection, Swift immediately recognised its significance and wrote excitedly to Wright in London:

I am reading the m.s. of Paddys collected verse of seven years (Most of which is strictly speaking unpublished, should a need for pomes arise sometime) Im getting a copy made to send you and George [Barker], just for to show you at last how good the man is [*sic*].<sup>13</sup>

Wright has recalled how Swift posted to him in London ‘a thick bound volume of typescript poems with no author’s name on them nor any explanation of their provenance’, but that upon reading the opening poems combined with their Dublin origin he was immediately aware of their authorship.<sup>14</sup> Replying ecstatically to Swift having read the whole collection, he stated that ‘I am incoherent with enthusiasm; he is not an Irish poet, he is the Irish poet. This is the goods. All my life I have been wrong about PK’.<sup>15</sup> The subsequent publication under Wright’s editorial guidance of nineteen of the poems in the Winter 1956 issue of *Nimbus* sparked the rejuvenation of Kavanagh’s late poetic career both in London and Dublin, initiating the

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<sup>11</sup> Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*, pp. 349-350.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Swift to David Wright, [undated, 1956], Austin (TX), The University of Texas at Austin Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, *Nimbus: A Magazine of Literature, the Arts, and New Ideas* Archive, 1945-1962, Box 3, Folder 7.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, ‘Patrick Swift in London’, p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Kavanagh to Peter Kavanagh, 19 March 1956, in *Lapped Furrows: Correspondence 1933-1967 between Patrick and Peter Kavanagh: with other documents*, ed. by Peter Kavanagh (New York: Peter Kavanagh Hand Press, 1969), p. 196. Swift relayed Wright’s letter to Kavanagh who subsequently quoted it in correspondence with his brother Peter.

network of publishing connections that would eventually lead to the publication of his last individual volume *Come Dance with Kitty Stobling: and other poems* in 1960.<sup>16</sup> The prominence with which Kavanagh was presented in the issue, with his name printed centrally on the front cover, the considerable selection of nineteen poems supplemented with an appreciative essay by Cronin and a page-length portrait illustration of the poet by Swift, was of a level he had not experienced since the *Envoy* years. The *Nimbus* selection republished a number of the poems that had originally first appeared in the Dublin magazine including ‘Kerr’s Ass’, ‘Who Killed James Joyce?’, and ‘Ante-Natal Dream’, while more recent poems reaffirmed Kavanagh’s earlier ‘Diary’ pronouncements in weaving the mundane particularities of experience into the comic and self-reflexive texture of the verse. So that ‘The Hospital’, for example, admits the banalities of square cubicles, plain concrete, and a wash-basin into the sonnet form under the premise that ‘nothing whatever is by love debarred’.<sup>17</sup> Cronin’s accompanying critical appreciation similarly reveals the extent to which the emergent aesthetic preoccupations we examined across *Envoy*’s poetry section continued to resonate and evolve throughout the decade. ‘[I]t is a virtue of Kavanagh’s poetry, as it is always a characteristic of the artist, that he is not anxious about the “importance” of the experience that goes to make it’, he states, echoing Kavanagh’s own recent espousal of ‘parochialism’ in establishing the virtue of a poetic that can invest the particular and ordinary experience with that of universal significance:

The artist, whatever his experience, must believe that it is both ordinary and significant, commonplace and yet demanding expression. The symbolists, with their eagles, bones and roses, and the vendors of local colour and the picturesque, both sin against the ordinary, which is the only exciting and important thing in the world: the first because they attempt to emphasise the universal; the second because they emphasise the particular. The movement of

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<sup>16</sup> As Wright outlines, Kavanagh’s poems in *Nimbus* were seen by the poetry reader for Longman’s publishing house, Thomas Blackburn, who subsequently proposed that they be published in volume form. Wright, ‘Patrick Swift in London’, pp. 180-181.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, ‘The Hospital’, *Nimbus*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Winter 1956), p. 19.

poetry is from the particular to the universal, from the ordinary to the significant, and in neither case is there a short cut.<sup>18</sup>

This network of literary and artistic relations continued to develop across the Irish Sea into the late 1950s and 60s and in many ways found its culminating expression with the launching of *X: A Quarterly Review*. Swift proposed to Wright that they set up their own magazine following the latter's departure from *Nimbus* in 1957, and the first issue of *X* was eventually published in November 1959. As Shovlin observes, the magazine throughout its seven issues became 'a mouthpiece for a particular strand of Soho bohemianism', with its 'distinctly Irish flavour' redolent of the cross-channel exchange that was becoming an increasingly distinctive feature of the periodical culture of these early post-war decades.<sup>19</sup> Wright's expressed excitement to Swift at securing Kavanagh's long poem 'Living in the Country' for the opening issue, which he considered 'one of K's very best' and anticipated its significant 'reader-drawing potential', not only reflected Kavanagh's rejuvenated reputation and influence at this time but more broadly prefigured the prominent promotion of Irish writers and artists in the magazine as Shovlin indicates, with Swift's own editorial and individual contributions joined with regularity by Kavanagh, Cronin, Samuel Beckett, Francis Bacon, Aidan Higgins, and the first published prose of John McGahern.<sup>20</sup> The prominence with which Cronin, Kavanagh, and Beckett were featured alongside the list of other major contributors on *X*'s opening cover was matched by the substantial print space afforded to them within the issue, with Cronin's extensive critical essay on 'the notion of commitment' in

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony Cronin, 'Innocence and Experience: The Poetry of Patrick Kavanagh', *Nimbus*, 20-23 (p. 21). Kavanagh had earlier distinguished between the 'provincial' and 'parochial' mentality in *Kavanagh's Weekly*. While the 'provincial has no mind of his own' in that he 'does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis – towards which his eyes are turned – has to say on any subject', the 'parochial' poet's contrasting faith and confidence in the local of enables him to transfigure the particular into the universal. 'The parochial mentality on the other hand', Kavanagh continues, 'is never in any doubt about the artistic validity of his parish. All great civilisations are based on parochialism – Greek, Israelite, English'. Patrick Kavanagh, 'Mao Tse-Tung Unrolls His Mat', *Kavanagh's Weekly: A Journal of Literature and Politics*, vol. 1, no. 7 (24 May 1952), 1-3 (p. 2).

<sup>19</sup> Frank Shovlin, *Touchstones: John McGahern's Classical Style* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> David Wright to Patrick Swift, 19 September 1959, Bloomington (IN), Indiana University, Lilly Library Manuscripts Department, *X* mss., LMC 2103, Box 1, n.d. *X* mss., Correspondence, Wright, D.J.

poetry again drawing from and building upon the aesthetic preoccupations earlier developed in *Envoy*.<sup>21</sup> Cronin here recalls Iremonger in particular with the reassertion that ‘Poetry maintains the language as a living instrument of communication’, stating that ‘It is arguable that the poetry which remains closest to the speech and speech rhythms of its own day does this best, all else tending towards rhetoric, otiosity and decoration’, while Swift and Wright similarly later promote McGahern in terms of the restrained post-war aesthetic we earlier examined in the Dublin magazine, with his prose distinguished by ‘the lucidity of its English and its spare poetic qualities’.<sup>22</sup> *X*’s second issue continued this strong promotional relationship with its Irish contributors, placing an advertisement for Kavanagh’s forthcoming *Come Dance with Kitty Stobling* on the magazine’s inside cover page. The advert again reflected the extent to which the poet’s recent successes had unfolded through this British periodical network, stating that his poems ‘have appeared in periodicals and been much admired and discussed’, with the forthcoming Longman’s volume providing ‘readers in this country their first opportunity to buy his work in collected form’. This was followed with equal prominence by Cronin’s major long poem ‘R.M.S Titanic’ placed at the head of the issue.<sup>23</sup> Reflecting on Cronin’s poem with the enthusiasm that marked his cross-channel editorial engagement throughout the 1950s, Wright wrote to Swift that he believed it to be ‘the best thing he has done, & in fact an opus of importance’, before remarking that ‘A thing like Tony’s coming in gives me a great lift, almost as if the mag [*sic*] by the fact of its existence was beginning to grow poems. A fancy’.<sup>24</sup>

That a magazine can, similarly, grow vital cultural networks that extend beyond the brevity of its existence is evidenced by the evolving relationships of the cluster of writers and artists who first gathered together around *Envoy* in Dublin during the immediate post-war

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<sup>21</sup> Anthony Cronin, ‘The Notion of Commitment: An Aesthetic Inquiry’, *X: A Quarterly Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (November 1959), 9-16 (p. 9).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Cronin, ‘R.M.S. Titanic’, *X: A Quarterly Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (March 1960), 85-94.

<sup>24</sup> David Wright to Patrick Swift, [undated, 1960], *X* mss., Box 1, n.d. *X* mss., Correspondence, Wright D.J.

years. It is the hope of this thesis to encourage future scholarship into the conditions and contexts of this periodical culture as it developed into the 1950s and 60s. That a significant aspect of *Envoy*'s legacy registers in the continuing development of these transnational literary and artistic relations was, of course, very much in keeping with the original spirit of the magazine and its milieu, and which would find a new dynamic publishing platform in Dublin with the Dolmen Press into the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> *The Dolmen Miscellany* published in 1962 gathered together much of the literary activity of the preceding decade while pointing toward its future development, establishing the 'new generation' of writers who had first begun publishing during the 1940s and whose shared sensibility, as its editorial note outlined, was marked by the 'obvious desire to avoid the forms of 'Irishism' (whether leprechaun or garrulous rebel) which have been so profitably exploited in the past'.<sup>26</sup> The collection featured a number of the writers who had seen some of their earliest poetry and prose printed in *Envoy* including Iremonger, Higgins, Pearse Hutchinson, Richard Murphy and John Montague, and Iremonger was quick to realise the significance of the publication in correspondence with its co-editor, hailing it as 'the best edited miscellany of Irish writing I have ever seen'.<sup>27</sup>

The view of *Envoy* we have uncovered over the course of this thesis is that of a magazine whose brief flaring in the immediate post-war years provided a vital platform for the emergent transnational networks, movements, and influences that would variously refigure and expand the dimensions of Irish cultural life into the following decades. During a period where creative activity was impeded by the pervasive financial hardship experienced by Irish writers and artists, *Envoy* became actively involved in the key intersections of art and commerce emerging in the post-war city and which were importantly stimulated by the

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<sup>25</sup> The Dolmen Press was founded by Liam and Josephine Miller in 1951, publishing in various forms a range of poets in the 1950s including David Marcus, Thomas Kinsella, Ewart Milne, Richard Murphy, Padraic Colum, John Montague, Brendan Kennelly, and Máire MacEntee. Liam Miller, *Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press 1951-1976* (Dublin: Dolmen Editions, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> John Montague and Thomas Kinsella, 'Prefatory Note', *The Dolmen miscellany of Irish writing*, ed. by John Montague and Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1962).

<sup>27</sup> Valentin Iremonger to John Montague, 17 September 1962, Victoria, University of Victoria, McPherson Library, *John Montague Papers*, SC134, SM. 4.24, Series 5.7.

influences of a newly expanding international market. If the magazine's opportunistic association with cultural tourism in these years problematically implicated its major literary figures in the globalising commodification of Dublin's 'literary pub' scene, then its direct financial support of struggling writers such as Kavanagh and its promotion of an emerging group of painters and sculptors in coordination with Victor Waddington provided vital economic assistance in a challenging time. Indeed, as we have charted, the continuing development of this independent support network would resonate through the interconnected relations of British and Irish periodicals over the following two decades. The achievement of *Envoy* for its young writers and artists was not only in establishing the necessary 'centralising force' that Iremonger had earlier identified as lacking in Dublin following the closure of *The Bell*, but in the way in which the magazine transnationally extended the concept and parameters of the post-war artistic community beyond the typically restrictive terms of mid-century Irish cultural discourse: reasserting and even salvaging connections with overseas Irish writers and artists such as Louis le Brocquy, Louis MacNeice, and Samuel Beckett; drawing in British and continental affiliations as diverse as W.H. Auden and Federico García Lorca; and laying critical foundations towards a greater understanding of major twentieth-century international movements such as in visual art with essays on the legacies of expressionism in Germany and Britain.<sup>28</sup> 'We are a European nation', *Envoy*'s final editorial affirmed, and it was crucially within and from this wider cultural sphere of influence and affiliation that emerged the coherent aesthetic and ideological responses to institutionalised cultural nationalism in the magazine, by which an emerging generation could begin to articulate new strategies of voice and critical procedures adequate to the conditions and contexts of post-war life.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Iremonger, 'Poets and their Publishers', pp. 78-79.

<sup>29</sup> 'Foreword: *Envoi*', *Envoy*, vol. 5, no. 20 (July 1951), 7-9 (p. 8).

## Appendix: Illustrations

**Fig. 1.** *Envoy* cover design.

**Fig. 2.** Temporary triumphal archway erected on Leeson Street Bridge for the state visit of King Edward VII to Dublin (1903). The Lawrence Photograph Collection, National Library of Ireland, Ref. no. L ROY 07605.

**Fig. 3.** The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Arch, erected in 1907, at the Grafton Street entrance to St. Stephen's Green.

**Fig. 4.** Page-length *Envoy* advertisement for the AGA cooker.

**Fig. 5.** *Envoy* reproduction of Daniel O'Neill, *The First Born* (oil on canvass, undated).

**Fig. 6.** *Envoy* reproduction of Daniel O'Neill, *Rue de Paris* (oil on canvass, undated).

**Fig. 7.** Alan Reeve, *Dublin Culture* (1940).

**Fig. 8.** *Envoy* advertisement circular.

**Fig. 9.** 'St. Stephen's Green', from 'Six Photographs of the Background to Joyce's *Ulysses*'.

**Fig. 10.** 'The Irish House', from 'Six Photographs of the Background to Joyce's *Ulysses*'.

**Fig. 11.** Cover design of *Envoy*'s special Joyce number.

**Fig. 12.** 'James Joyce', by Berenice Abbot (1928)

**Fig. 13.** 'Bloomsday, 16th June 1904', *Envoy* illustration by John Ryan.

**Fig. 14.** '*Envoy* Contributors: Patrick Kavanagh'.

**Fig. 15.** *Envoy* reproduction of Nano Reid, *Boyne Bridge and Gulls* (oil on canvass, 1950).

**Fig. 16.** Louis le Brocquy, *Travellers 1948* (tapestry, 1948).

**Fig. 17.** *Envoy* reproduction of Louis le Brocquy, *The Fearful World* (oil on canvass, 1948).



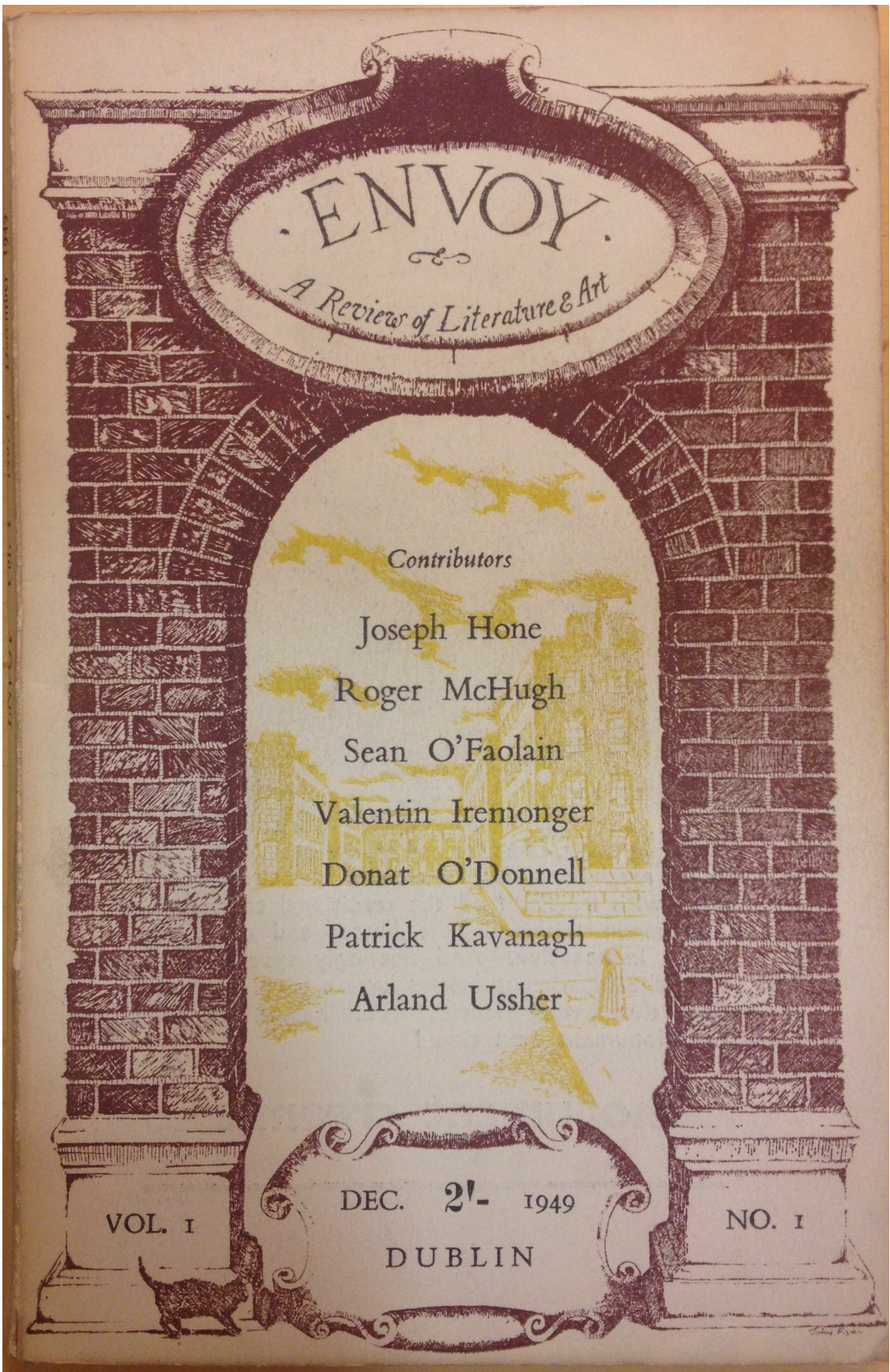


Fig. 1. *Envoy* cover design.





**Fig. 2.** Temporary triumphal archway erected on Leeson Street Bridge for the state visit of King Edward VII to Dublin (1903). The Lawrence Photograph Collection, National Library of Ireland, Ref. no. L ROY 07605.



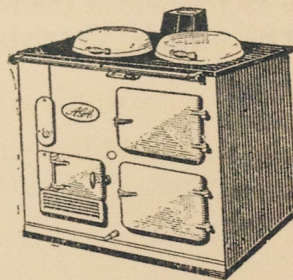
**Fig. 3.** The Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Arch, erected in 1907, at the Grafton Street entrance to St. Stephen's Green.





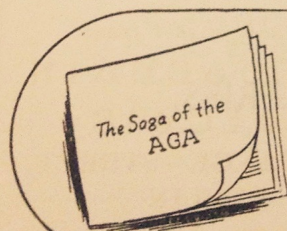
## You've time to live

The wonderful thing about AGA cooking is that it actually looks after itself. Temperatures of cooking ovens, hotplates, simmering oven, are controlled . . . and exactly right for use on the instant. AGA cooking . . . the clean, safe, care-free cooking system . . . makes all meals more delicious and nutritious. It *seals in* the flavour, preserves all the goodness in food. The model shown here does all the cooking and provides all hot water on  $3\frac{1}{2}$  tons of fuel (at most) a year. Refuelling, only twice a day.



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**A. H. Masser Limited (Dept. E.) East Wall Rd., Dublin**

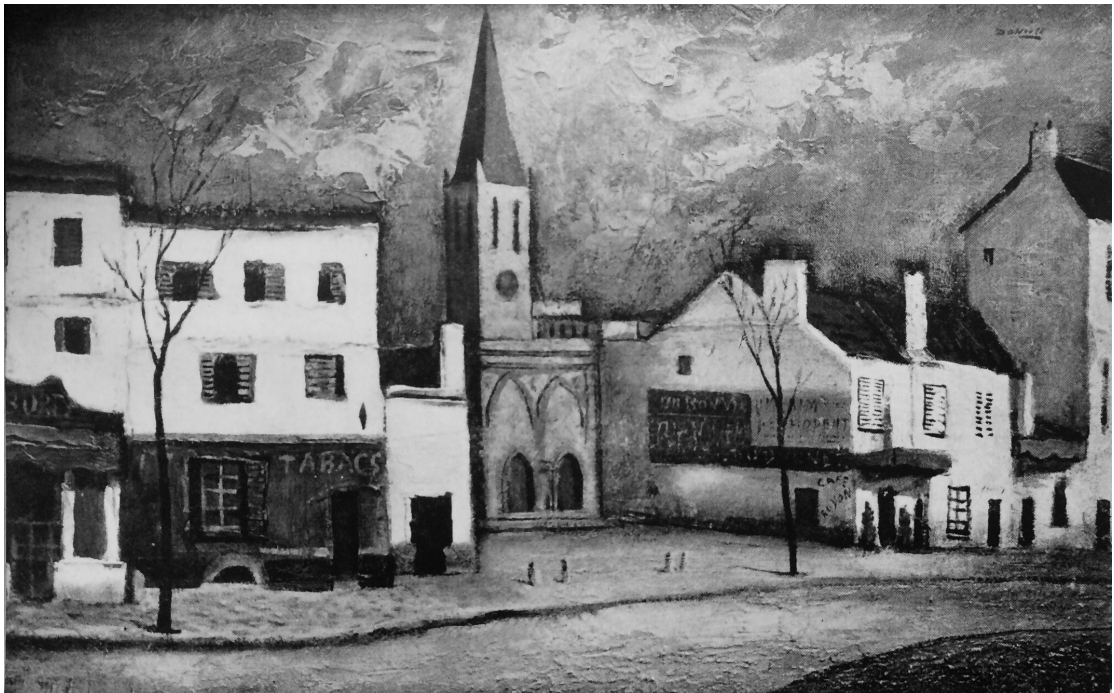
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Fig. 4. Page-length *Envoy* advertisement for the AGA cooker.





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**Fig. 6.** Envoy reproduction of Daniel O'Neill, *Rue de Paris* (oil on canvass, undated).



Fig. 7. Alan Reeve, *Dublin Culture* (1940).

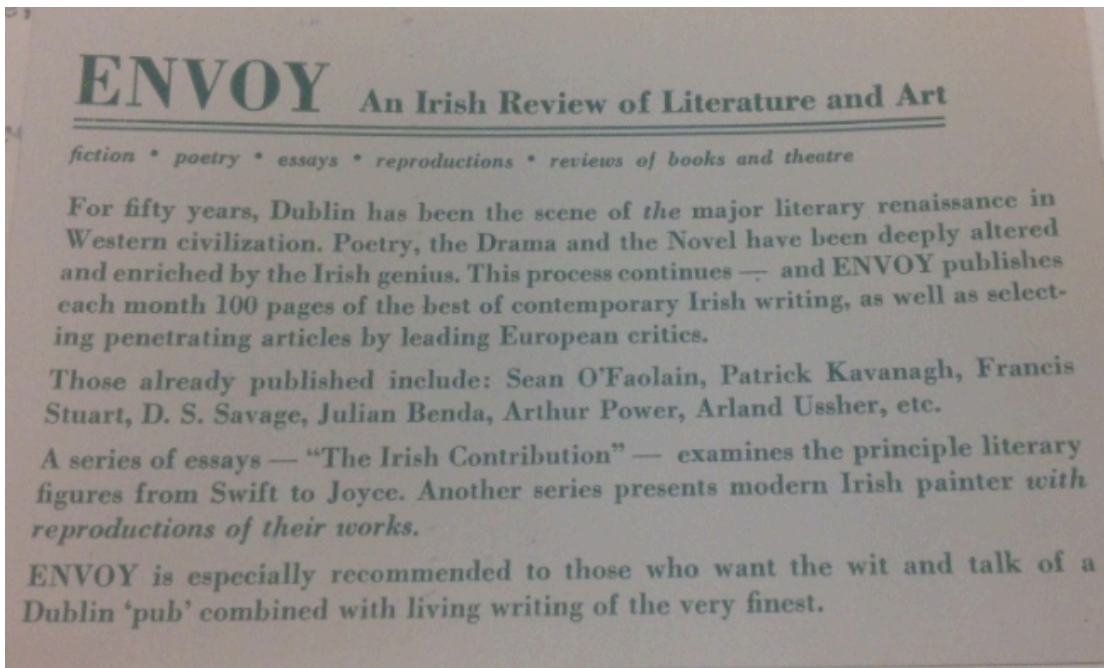
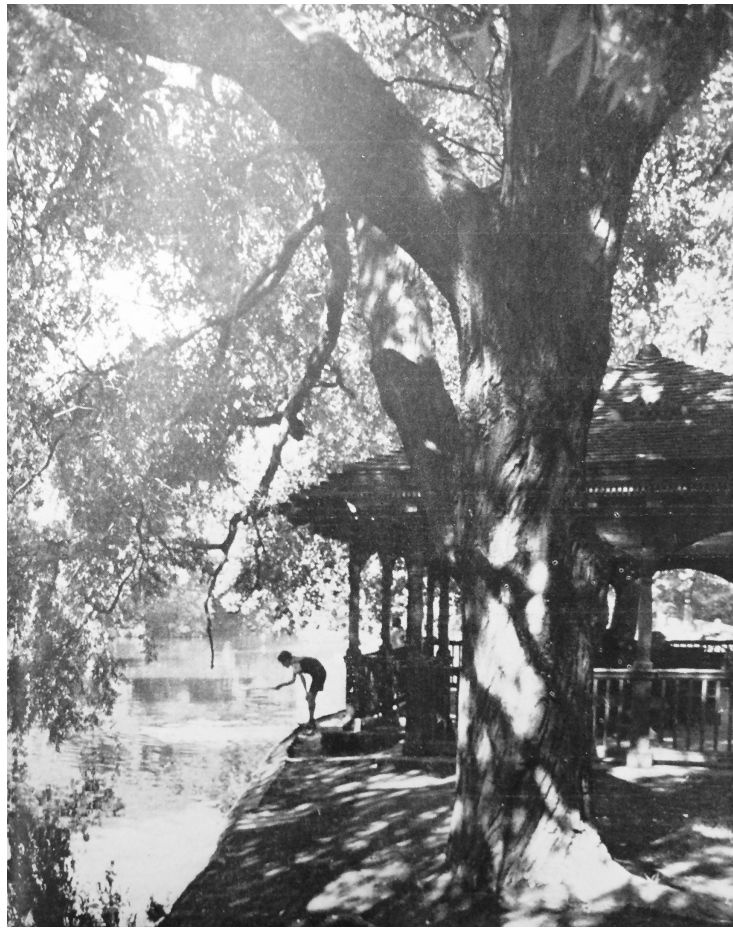


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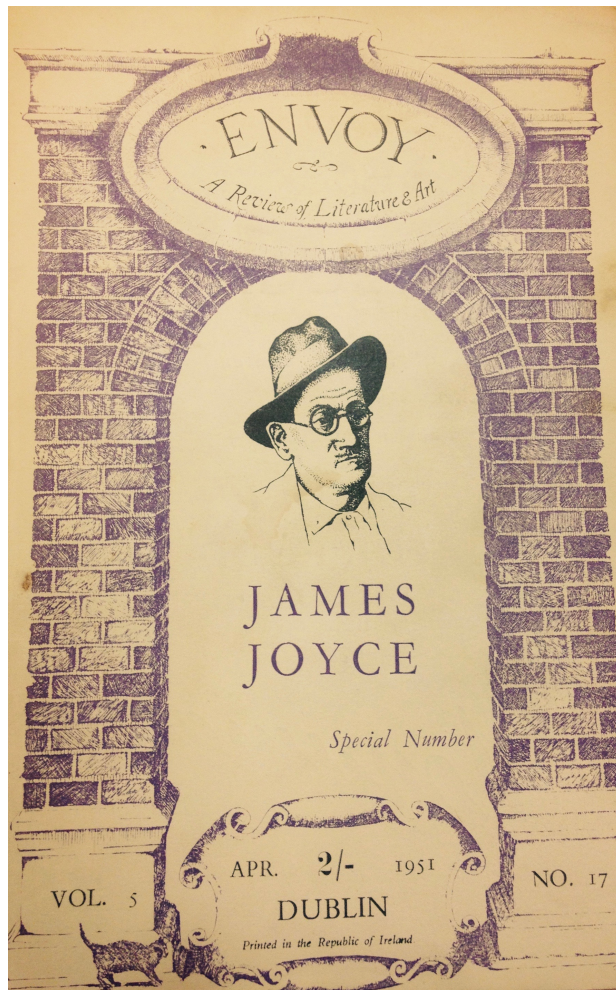


Fig. 11. Cover design of *Envoy*'s special Joyce number.



Fig. 12. 'James Joyce', by Berenice Abbot (1928).





Fig. 13. 'Bloomsday, 16th June 1904', *Envoy* illustration by John Ryan.



ENVOY CONTRIBUTORS



MR. PATRICK KAVANAGH.

**Fig. 14.** 'Envoy Contributors: Patrick Kavanagh'.





**Fig. 15.** *Envoy* reproduction of Nano Reid, *Boyne Bridge and Gulls* (oil on canvass, 1950).



**Fig. 16.** (above) Louis le Brocq, *Travellers* 1948 (tapestry, 1948).

**Fig. 17.** *Envoy* reproduction of Louis le Brocq, *The Fearful World* (oil on canvass, 1948).

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## Radio

### RTÉ Radio One

Nevill Johnson interviewed on the *The Marian Finucane Show*, 26 August 1983

Anthony Cronin on Bowman: Sunday 8.30, John Bowman's weekly archive programme, 15 January 2017

### **Thesis**

Coulter, Ríann, 'Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish Art, 1943-1960' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)

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### **Special Collections**

Dublin, Michael O'Brien (private)

New Theatre Group Archive

Indiana University, Bloomington, Lilly Library Manuscripts Department,

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National College of Art and Design, Dublin, National Visual Arts Library.

Irish Exhibition of Living Art (Exhibitions Database)

John Ryan (Artists Database)

Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts (Exhibitions Database)

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National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Special Collections

Sean O'Casey Papers

Austin Clarke Papers

Southern Illinois University, Morris Library, Special Collections Research Center

Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art Records

St John's College, Oxford, Special Collections

Robert Graves Papers

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, Co. Down

BBC Northern Ireland Community Archive

University College Dublin, Special Collections

Patrick Kavanagh Archive

RTÉ Radio Scripts, Scripts of Radio Talks and Features in English

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Nimbus: A Magazine of Literature, the Arts, and New Ideas Archive, 1945-1962

University of Victoria, McPherson Library

John Montague Papers

