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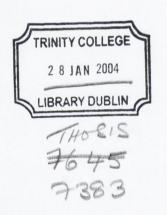
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Allegorical Making: Austin Clarke, Louis MacNeice, Thomas Kinsella

Charlotte Fryatt, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis submitted to the School of English at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



DECLARATION

This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any other university. I agree that the library may lend or copy this thesis upon request.

Charlotte Fryatt

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the generous financial assistance offered by the Postgraduate Studentship scheme of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (British Academy) between 1999 and 2001, and the Government of Ireland Research Scholarship programme of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences between 2001 and 2003. I would also like to thank the Graduate Studies Office at Trinity College Dublin for the grant of a Postgraduate Award in 1999, and the Graduate Studies Research Travel Fund in association with the Trinity Trust for monies which enabled me to travel to Denmark to present a paper at the conference of the European Federation of Associations and Centres for Irish Studies in 2001.

I have been privileged to research and write this thesis under the supervision of Dr. Eve Patten, whose assistance and encouragement have been invaluable. I would like to thank Professor Terence Brown, who supervised this project during Dr. Patten's absence, and who supported my sometimes fraught negotiations for funding. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Professor Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin for her friendly advice and efforts to facilitate my research. Many thanks are due to the School of English, its academic and administrative staff, for providing such a supportive atmosphere in which to undertake postgraduate study.

Many of the ideas in this thesis were first aired at seminars and conferences: I would like to thank the organisers of the Graduate Seminar in the School of English, the conference of EFACIS 2001, the New Voices in Irish Criticism conferences in 2002 and 2003, the Trinity Translation Studies Group, and the English Department of University College Cork, for opportunities to present my research.

Thanks are also due to the following, for their advice, friendship, practical and moral support during the writing of this thesis: Paul Ahern, Nicola Boardman, Charlie Buzenet, Louise Choo, Ed Clarke, Michael and Olive Coleman, Patrick Crotty, Andrew

English, Áine Fitzpatrick, Tom and Eve Gallagher, Martin Golding, Andrew Goodspeed, Dylan Harris, Christine and Michael Hinds, Ben Keatinge, Belinda McKeon, Gill and Robin Newton, Donal Nugent, Níamh O'Keeffe, Patricia O'Keeffe, Tadgh O'Sullivan, Seamus O'Sullivan, Lucy Pearson, Beth Rosenberg, Gary Sexton and David Wheatley.

Without the generosity, affection and patience of my family this project would not (and could not) have been brought to a conclusion. Especial mention is due to my great-uncle John Spencer Fryatt, to my grandparents Elizabeth Fryatt, the late Bill Fryatt, and the late Olive Hudson, and most of all to my parents Clare and John Fryatt.

Throughout the last four years, Philip Coleman has been a continual source of help and encouragement, understanding and love. My gratitude to him is inexpressible; as a small and inadequate token of it, this thesis is dedicated to Philip, with μ .

Summary

This thesis looks at the work of three poets, Austin Clarke (1896-1974), Louis MacNeice (1907-1963) and Thomas Kinsella (1928-), in order both to raise the profile of allegory as a modality at work in twentieth-century Irish poetry in English, and to introduce more rigorous and wide-ranging theories of allegory into a field dominated by identitarian conceptions of the mode. As stated in the Introduction, it is intended as an exposition of recent allegory theory, followed by three case studies which explore different aspects of that theory, and which also contribute to the critical literature on each poet, rather than as a comparative study or as a survey of allegorical expression in a twentieth-century Irish context.

Chapter 1, "Useless for Communicating any Valuable Information": Theoretical approaches to Allegory', sets out the terms on which we might base an understanding of allegory. Particularly important is the contention that allegory is an authoritarian form, careless of human individuality and violent towards the objects and bodies with which it makes its meanings. This hierarchical authoritarianism matters, because allegory is not 'unreal', but palpably and problematically involved in the material world. Allegory seeks to assimilate that which is not itself into its textual system. The desire which animates allegory seeks, encyclopaedically, to enclose the world. However, precisely because allegory is voracious in this way, it encounters resistance from bodies which refuse to be co-opted to significance. Allegory will usually assimilate this resistance, but traces of it remain visible to the critical reader.

Chapter 2, "Mind spewed": Allegories of Mind and Memory in Austin Clarke's Poetry' begins with a discussion of the relation between mythopoeia and mental illness and explores theoretical connections between them. It then follows the development of Clarke's understanding of allegory from the sometimes naïve and hierarchical imagery of *Pilgrimage and Other Poems* (1929) to *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust* (1966), which questions and challenges allegorical hierarchies. The account of *Mnemosyne* examines the relationship between the goddess of memory and Clarke's protagonist Maurice Devane, particularly in terms of his troubled sexuality. Finally, the chapter analyses Maurice's food-loathing and anorexia in terms of the psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. This psychoanalytical material is applied to the structure of *Mnemosyne* to argue that a linear progress narrative cannot account for the poem's development and posits instead a structure based on the boundaries that characterise

abjection and their transgression. Allegory itself, in Clarke's long poem, becomes a form of abjection, traces of which accompany its protagonist into the sane, 'symbolic' world outside the asylum.

Chapter 3, "The Stern Door Marked In Exile": Allegory and History in Louis MacNeice's Poetry' reassesses the critical profile of poems collected in *Holes in the Sky* (1948), *Ten Burnt Offerings* (1952), and the long poem *Autumn Sequel* (1954) and reads MacNeice's negotiations with history in terms of allegory. It suggests theoretical grounds for MacNeice's allegorical treatment of the past, and advances a reading of *Ten Burnt Offerings* and *Autumn Sequel* which finds that these poems have historical and political resonances previously ignored by critics, largely because these poems do not conform to pre-existing ideas of MacNeice's poetic strengths. The chapter also offers an account of *Autumn Sequel*, paying particular attention to the poem's structures of sentiment and nostalgia and its quest narrative, in which MacNeice identifies his unease with allegory's potential for hierarchy and hypostasis. The poetic consequences of that unease are assessed in a brief section on MacNeice's last three collections.

Chapter 4, "Ever more painstaking care': Allegory, Rhetoric and Encyclopaedic Form in Thomas Kinsella's Poetry' examines Kinsella's commitment to increasing simplicity of language and structure as expressed through the revision of his work. Kinsella's contradictory attitude to order in his poetry, whereby he rejects 'imposed' structuring, but is happy to present his poems as artificial constructs, is considered in relation to allegory's imposition of order upon nature, and the violence that entails. Finally, this chapter remarks on the theory of 'encyclopaedic form' in relation to Kinsella, arguing that the Peppercanister series, in particular, constitutes an encyclopaedia of Kinsella's personal, familial, civic and social concerns, and asking whether such a project can be productive of political liberation for writer or readers.

The Conclusion draws together the findings outlined in these chapters and suggests directions for further research, both in terms of a revised and expanded understanding of allegory's function in Irish poetry and with regard to subjects of future study.

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List of Abbreviations

I: Primary Texts by Clarke, MacNeice and Kinsella

- CCP Austin Clarke. Collected Poems. Ed. Liam Miller. Dublin: Dolmen, 1974.
- BT ——. The Bright Temptation: A Romance (1932). Dublin: Dolmen, 1965.
- MCP Louis MacNeice. Collected Poems. Ed. E.R. Dodds. Rev. ed. London: Faber & Faber, 1979. AJ Autumn Journal. AS Autumn Sequel.
- D Thomas Kinsella. Downstream. Dublin: Dolmen, 1962.
- NLD —. Notes from the Land of the Dead. Dublin: Cuala, 1972.
- NP --- New Poems 1973. Dublin: Dolmen, 1973.
- KCP1 Collected Poems 1956-1994. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- KCP2 Collected Poems 1956-2001. Manchester: Carcanet, 2001.
- PIR Dennis O'Driscoll. 'Interview with Thomas Kinsella'. Poetry Ireland Review 25 (Spring 1989) 57-65.

II: Primary Texts by Other Authors

- FQ Edmund Spenser. The Faerie Queene. Ed. A.C. Hamilton. London and New York: Longman, 1977.
- Inf. Dante Alghieri. Inferno. Trans. John D. Sinclair. New York: Oxford University Press, 1936, repr. 1961.
- Par. ——. Paradiso. Trans. John D. Sinclair. New York: Oxford University Press, 1936, repr 1961.

III: Secondary Texts

GTD Walter Benjamin. The Origin of German Tragic Drama. Trans. John Osborne. London: New Left Books, 1977.

Introduction

They are indeed poets' poetry [...] They are 'words, words, words' just as *The Faerie Queene*, for all its moral lessons, is words, words, words.¹

As Rita Copeland and Stephen Melville note in their excellent article 'Allegory and Allegoresis, Rhetoric and Hermeneutics', 'the position of modern readers with respect to allegory has lately become profoundly peculiar'. We have no unequivocal definition of allegory, we are unsure of its origins, we do not know when it can be said to have succeeded or failed or even what constitutes a definite instance of it, and we use the term to signify a trope, genre, or even the quality of 'the literary' itself. The most common explanation of the term, that it is 'speaking other', or 'saying one thing when one means another', is both inadequate and replete with all kinds of potential: is such a divorce of speech and its meaning desirable or even possible? This is the point at which, as Copeland and Melville note, allegory 'becomes entangled in our efforts to characterise our own modernity or postmodernity.' (179) Allegory's peculiarities are crucially involved, it seems, in the widespread and increasing interest in the mode which has inspired this thesis and of which it is a part. Over the last four decades, in particular, allegory has become a topic of growing attention in the study of literature, and the origins of this concern can be traced back still further, to critical movements contemporaneous with literary Modernism. For many of the most influential literary theorists of the twentieth century, for Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, and Jacques Derrida, for instance, 'allegory' was and is a crucial term. These formulations have become canonical, models to be upheld or challenged by scholars researching particular authors, texts or genres: the trope, form, mode or genre we call allegory receives now an unprecedented volume of critical attention.

It is dismaying, then, to find that while the debates surrounding allegory and (post)modernity have received considerable attention from those engaged in Irish

studies, they have had little serious impact on the study of Irish literature in English. Allegory is often mentioned by critics working in this area; they rarely fail to evoke, in particular, Benjamin, or less often, de Man, Derrida or Hans-Georg Gadamer. To take a very recent example, David Wheatley, in his introduction to a selection of James Clarence Mangan's poems, finds that '[w]ith its melancholy lumber-room of skeletons, dispossessed chieftains and bewitched maidens, Mangan's work belongs squarely in the allegorical rather than the symbolist tradition, despite his recruitment as a precursor of the author of The Secret Rose.'3 Wheatley continues, 'as Benjamin, [...] a student of ruins and allegory, observed: in the guise of allegory "history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay". Allegory thus places itself "beyond beauty". ' (18) In such popular appropriations of The Origin of German Tragic Drama, 'allegory' signifies a combination of melancholy grandeur and factitious modernist fragmentation set in opposition to 'symbolism', which is often taken to be no more than a kind of fraudulently totalising 'beauty'. Wheatley's edition of Mangan is very selective, and aimed at a non-specialist audience; its introduction accordingly brief, but similar digests of Benjaminian theory are also common in academic publications.⁴ Benjamin's work asserts remarkable resistance to appropriation and use in other contexts; attempts to evolve a model based on Benjamin for application to Irish studies often result in travesty. 5 Bearing in mind these failures, yet wanting to acknowledge the enormous influence that reading Benjamin had upon the development of this thesis, I have kept evocations of his criticism to a minimum, and where I have referred to it, have tried to be attentive as possible to its nuance.

The misuse of allegory theory by students of Irish literature might often stem from a worthy impulse to escape the provincialism and identitarian politics of much criticism in the area. All too often, however, it ends up reinforcing it. The resistance to theory, always pronounced in allegory studies – some, including Copeland and Melville,

might say intrinsic to it (185) - is ferocious in its Irish context. The result, as noted below in Chapter 1, is monotonous concentration on allegories of national identity, almost to the exclusion of all other aspects of allegory. This is not to disparage the study of expressions of national identity in Irish literature: that there is any attention paid at all to Irish allegory is due to critical interest in literary decolonisation and postcolonialism. In practice, however, interest in texts as allegories of historical or current affairs has overwhelmed interest in allegory itself. The critic's role is still seen as primarily hermeneutic, uncovering "hidden" or "repressed" signs of the cultural and political embedded within representations of the private or domestic, to see them pointing to something outside or beyond the text'. The processes of allegorical making, its rhetorical effects and political implications, by contrast, have received very little attention. (In this, the study of allegory in Irish literature lags at least thirty years behind developments in allegory theory: the intense hostility to allegory understood as a hermeneutic tool which characterised theoretical studies from mid-century New Criticism to the 1970s and 1980s⁷ has been greeted by moves, like Copeland and Melville's, to rehabilitate allegoresis.) I have tried, in this thesis, to challenge a binary understanding of allegory as either a rhetorical figure or interpretative device. Considering the allegorising slant of so much Irish criticism, however, I have emphasised a rhetorical definition of allegory, one which treats it as a distinct mode with its own ideological and political texture, rather than as a means of representing extratextual persons and events.

The argument advanced above applies particularly to poetry. Although allegory is a major mode in twentieth-century Irish poetry in English, there exists no survey of it, and there are very few essays on individual poets' allegorical practice. Although it might lay some groundwork for such a study, or at least provoke further research and debate, this thesis is not a survey of allegorical making in twentieth-century Irish poetry. Such a

project would be, as the following chapters may indicate, enormous in scope, and beyond the remit of a thesis. The understanding of allegory that I outline in Chapter 1 is based upon close reading of texts, attention to imagery, diction and structure. If this methodology were to be extended to the very many Irish poems which could be said to be allegorical, the results would be voluminous. The study of allegory shares its subject's propensity to limitless analogical extension. With its arbitrary closures and rigid structuring, however, allegory also provides a model for limitation in its study.

While I do not consider the three poets discussed in this thesis to be 'representative' of twentieth-century Irish poetry, or of particular traditions in it (questions of representation quickly become extremely vexed where allegory is concerned), I do wish to suggest some of the different aspects from which allegorical making can be approached, and the different degrees to which a poet might accept or resist the structures of allegory and its ideology. A study considering more than one poet, however limited, has certain advantages, from this point of view, over a single-author thesis. At the same time, this thesis is not primarily a comparative study, though I draw some comparisons both within individual chapters and in the conclusion. Rather, it presents three comparable, but self-contained case studies of kinds of allegorical making, intended as contributions to the critical literature on each poet as well as to Irish literary studies and the study of allegory.

In no way do I wish to suggest that there is an allegorical school, or movement, in twentieth-century Irish poetry. Within anglophone Irish writing, even such a thing as an allegorical 'tradition' (pace Wheatley) is elusive, and many theorists of allegory would argue that allegory is inimical to the development of traditions. This thesis is concerned with allegory as a form which is present to some extent in most, if not all poetry. The poets discussed here show a particular concern with it, but so do others whom I have not considered; and I do not wish to imply that their shared practice of allegorical

making links them into a literary-historical grouping (such literary-historical and influential links, do exist, of course, particularly between Clarke and Kinsella). My focus is, however, on the formal, philosophical and political implications of allegory, and how it has largely been ignored or effaced both in accounts of these poets' work and in Irish poetry in general. I have deliberately chosen to look at poets whose work is widely known and who are considered major figures in Irish poetry, the better to demonstrate that allegory is disregarded even in work which receives considerable critical attention, though the model advanced in this thesis might well be extended to less well known poets.

The basic aims of this thesis are twofold: to posit a more rigorous model for the study of allegory within an Irish context, one which is attentive to the implications of the mode itself, and to raise the profile of allegory as an aspect of the work of each poet discussed, thereby suggesting its importance in Irish poetry as a whole, and the possible extension of similar critical readings to other poets. In the essay from which the epigraph to this introduction is taken, Daniel Corkery discusses the *aisling* as the characteristic poetic form of what he called 'the hidden Ireland', peculiarly alienated from even its own subject matter. *Aisling* poetry, and the literature of allegorised national identity more generally, is now the least 'hidden' aspect of Irish allegory. The purpose of this thesis is to make other aspects a little less obscure.

Notes

¹ Daniel Corkery, 'The Aisling', The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century (1924, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970) 133.

² Rita Copeland and Stephen Melville, 'Allegory and Allegoresis, Rhetoric and Hermeneutics', *Exemplaria* 3:1 (March 1991) 159-187, 178.

³ David Wheatley, 'Introduction', James Clarence Mangan, *Poems*, ed. David Wheatley (Oldcastle: Gallery, 2003) 14.

⁴ This usually takes the form of name-dropping in the interests of lending the writer intellectual ballast. For instance, Terry Eagleton comments, in 'Nationalism, Irony and Commitment', Just as the pious Jews, so Walter Benjamin reminds us, were forbidden on pain of idolatry to fashion graven images of the future, so political radicals are prohibited under pain of fetishism from blueprinting their ultimate desire.' In *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, ed. Seamus Deane, (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1990) 23-39; 26. In another unfortunate use of the 'Theses' (unfortunate, at least, to readers with a visual imagination) Declan Kiberd compares Brian Friel to Benjamin's angel of history: '[The playwright] is the angel of history, caught in the storm that blows from paradise and propelled into that future to which his back must always be turned'. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995) 630. The angel suffers more mistreatment in Tim Armstrong's survey of 1930s Irish modernism: 'Like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, Devlin's blind Justice is blasted by the wind of events, but in this case the Angel does not feel the wind and see its results with Benjamin's pity and terror.' 'Poetry, History and Irish Modernism', *Modernism and Ireland: the Poetry of the 1930s*, eds Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995) 43-74; 62.

⁵ The literary-historical criticism of W.J. McCormack constitutes something of an exception, closely attentive as it is to the European resonances of Irish literature. Where allegory is concerned, however, even his accounts sometimes lack discrimination. See Chapter 4, section I below.

⁶ Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 182. See below, Chapter 1, section V, for a fuller discussion of Corbett's book.

⁷ For an especially virulent example of such hostility, see Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory:* Defining the Genre (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979).

Chapter 1

'Useless for Communicating any Valuable Information':

Theoretical Approaches to Allegory

'I have found "allegorical" a splendid term to cover up one's ignorance, but a useless one for communicating any valuable information'

I: TOWARDS DEFINITION

The task of defining 'allegory', even for the limited purposes of this thesis, gives rise to trepidation. Theoretical writing on the subject is voluminous and contradictory. For some critics allegory is a localised phenomenon, confined to Western Europe and spanning a historical period which variously extends from the sixth century BCE, or the first or fourth centuries CE to the eighteenth century.² After that date, the 'culture of the sign' is seen to have broken down, and the context for allegory lost. 'Modern' allegory can be 'postallegorical', (Van Dyke 290), or it might continue an institutional existence as literary history and literary theory (Teskey 149-50). For other theorists, allegory continues, albeit substantially altered, to become a dominant form in nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing.³ An extreme version of this position holds that allegory represents the condition of all discourse, or even 'human existence itself', the motives for composition and interpretation being located in the loss that predicates desire.⁴

Some critics distinguish sharply between compositional allegory and allegorical interpretation in the interests of keeping the allegorical canon to a manageable size,⁵ while admitting that such a distinction is impossible to make in practice, since all 'compositional' allegories demand interpretation, and even a 'non-allegorical' text like the *Iliad*, once allegorised, retains a residue of allegoresis. As J. Stephen Russell comments, medieval writers 'would no doubt have been amused by [the] implication that there is such a thing as non-allegorical writing'. Assertions that allegory has

maintained a fabulistic tradition in which the relation of image to meaning is acknowledged as arbitrary are routine. ⁷ Almost equally common are studies that posit *figura* or typology as the essence of allegory. ⁸ Structuralists would maintain that allegory is a projection of metaphor onto the sequence of metonymy; ⁹ whereas Deborah Madsen, applying 'the methodological advances of poststructuralism', argues that metonymic and metaphorical allegory constitute two competing traditions within the genre (Madsen 1 and *passim*).

The venerable debate surrounding allegory and symbol also persists, despite the fact that in literary theoretical terms, 'the opposition of symbol to allegory makes little sense' (Teskey 107). This opposition marks one of the many points at which the theory of allegory ceases to be an engagement with ideologies and shades into ideology itself. Critical positions on allegory indeed seem to arrange themselves into binary oppositions: advocates of a history of allegory against champions of its universality, figuralists against fabulists, structuralists against poststructuralists, partisans of 'symbol' against supporters of allegory. Middling approaches are difficult to find, and there is no evidence that an attempt at mediation would be more helpful than the extreme positions. As Gordon Teskey comments, '[e]xtreme approaches have led to insights that would never be obtained by more apparently responsible ones' (12). Allegory is generative of immense critical controversy, which, in turn, invites speculation as to whether this is a characteristic inherent in allegorical writing itself.

Many critics look to etymology to represent allegory's generation of oppositions. The word 'allegory' derives from the Greek *allegoria*, a word derived from *allos* (other) and *agorenein* (to speak in the *agora*, in public). It was first used in the third century BCE to connote a rhetorical trope that has an explicit and an implicit meaning. By the first century BCE, rhetorical theorists were linking *allegoria* with metaphor. The first Latin rhetoricians to use the word gave it the sense of a series of related metaphors or a

continued metaphor. The first century CE Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian canonised these definitions, 10 and declared inversio, 'where it is one in woordes, and another in sentence or meaning, 11 synonymous with allegory. This, as its presence in Thomas Elyot's lexicon of 1538 suggests, remained a standard definition for many centuries. Around the same time as Quintilian's treatise, allegoria developed the connotation 'allegorical interpretation', something that had hitherto been described as hyponoia (under-meaning). It is in this sense that the Latin equivalent of the Greek portmanteau, alieniloquium (other-speaking) was generally used in medieval texts. The first recorded use of 'allegory' in English, John Wycliffe's fourteenth-century translation of Galatians 4:24: 'be whiche bingis ben seid by allegorie or goostly understonding', also assumes a hermeneutic rather than rhetorical context. 12 In English, 'allegory' exists as a vast metagenre, naming 'in a variety of ways a trope, an interpretative method and a narrative genre, and a vertiginous overlapping has resulted from these definitions' (Madsen 29). Madsen's point is that the confusion and controversy surrounding allegory largely result from this ambiguity of reference: critics tend to choose one of these definitions for allegory, without informing the reader of their choice (or, in some cases, acknowledging it to themselves) and then proceed as if it were the only definition. This is indeed a difficulty in many theories of allegory, and it is not easily surmounted. (Section II of this chapter addresses this question in more detail.)

The apparent paradox produced by combining *allos* and *agoreuein* might connote, as for Angus Fletcher, an essential ambivalence in the allegorical text;¹³ or it might signify the existence of a rift in consciousness that allegorical structures attempt to conceal (Teskey 2). However, any account which finds that *allos* inverts the meaning of *agoreuein* admits ideology, for it assumes that public speech is naturally transparent and open, meaning what it says, and that there is an abnormal form of 'other' speech which does not do this. Recognition that allegory does not involve a simple inversion of these

terms is already present in Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589): 'properly and in his principall vertue *Allegoria* is when we do speake in sence translative and wrested from the owne signification, neverthelesse applied to another not altogether contrary, but having much conveniencie with it.' Uncharacteristically, Puttenham departs from his classical sources to suggest that the relationship of the 'public' and the 'other' is one of obliquity, not diametric opposition.

Looking closer, we can see that 'other' (allos) and public speech (agorenein) each have meanings which can be configured in similarly oblique attitudes. As Jon Whitman points out, agora, from which agorenein is derived, 'developed at an early stage two quite different connotations' (263). In the legislative context which agorenein was normally used, it connoted an official assembly. However, the agora could also mean the open marketplace, and some of its other derivatives suggest 'base', 'common'. Whitman comments:

combined with the inverting word *allos*, the resulting composite connoted that which was said in *secret*, and that which was unworthy of *the crowd*. These two connotations of the word allegory – guarded language and elite language – became explicit parts of allegorical theory and practice. (263)

He goes on to link guarded language with political allegory, and elite language with religious and philosophical esoterica. Whitman's commitment to inversion as an etymologically inscribed feature of allegory means that he misses the intimate and powerful connection of the *secret* to the *crowd*. Some very powerful allegorical statements combine 'guarded' and 'elite' features in most unexpected ways. Teskey cites the example of Machiavelli's account of the treatment of Remirro de Orco by Cesare Borgia. After employing Remirro to pacify a turbulent region, which he did efficiently and brutally, Cesare curried favour with the newly subdued people by having their oppressor murdered and his body placed, in two pieces, accompanied by a bloody knife and a piece of wood, in the town square. Machiavelli records that this cruel spectacle

both stunned and satisfied' the spectators.¹⁵ Cesare's emblem is a sophisticated one, as Teskey points out: the 'piece' of wood is not a mimetic chopping block, and a body cannot be cut in two with a knife. The wood suggests that, under this autocratic regime, the human body is no more valuable or individual than wood, while the knife, by its obvious inadequacy to the task of dismemberment, enacts a discourse of presence and absence which is designed to keep the spectators wondering how and when the murder was carried out, that is, to keep them in a state of terror by affirming that this can happen at any time to any subject (Teskey 136-7). Emblematic complexity, which is not for the crowd, is here presented explicitly to the crowd; the language of the emblem is most guarded, the actual instrument of bisection remaining mysterious, at precisely the point its political message ('this can happen to you') is most blatant. The *agora*, consequently, becomes simultaneously the location for the exercise of ultimate political power and for the display of the degraded body, the body as meat in the market. Indeed, under certain political systems, political power is the power to 'stun and satisfy' the marketplace.

The *allos* component presents a similar pair of apparently conflicting meanings: one can 'speak other' or 'speak of the Other'. Madsen uses this distinction to advance her 'dual definition' of allegory, linking 'speaking other' with fictional fable and 'speaking of the Other' with the historical contiguity of typology (*figura*). Fable is content to acknowledge that its meanings are imposed, figuralism insists that they are intrinsic. As she acknowledges, a hygienic separation of fabulism and figuralism is impossible, since we 'speak other' (use fables) in order to 'speak of the Other' (achieve the transcendent union of persons or historical moments which is *figura*) (Madsen 30). And yet her account promotes figuralism at the expense of fable, for we can 'speak other' to 'speak of the Other' but not *vice versa*. Allegory, designated as 'other-speech', only seems to want to point one way, to a valorised Other (in a religious context, such

as Madsen assumes, God; in a philosophic one, truth; in Machiavelli's anecdote, the prince) which is imagined to be outside its textual system. Anything else, which is perceived to be outside that system, must either be assimilated into it, or effaced entirely.

The validity of a definition of allegory as other-speech can be challenged. Carolynn Van Dyke suggests that while allegory functions as an Other within literary genres, otherness does not constitute the principle of meaning within allegory. She points out that a text which 'says one thing and means another' is a text that means two things, which, since there is only one set of words available, is really one complex thing (42). The most common way of understanding allegorical parallelism, as a matter of stories told on different 'levels', each of which is coherent in itself, does not account, therefore, for the ways in which allegories actually produce meaning (31-5). The otherness of allegory, she argues, is located not in the relationship between words and meaning, but 'between elements of the poem's implicit code' (40). As a meta-genre, allegory combines

subjects and predicates of the narrative propositions [which] seem alien to each other – respectively timeless and timebound, Realistic [i.e. idealistic] and mimetic, native on the one hand to philosophical discourse and on the other to literary narrative. [...] literary allegory in general is the set of genres that are based on the synthesis of deictic and non-deictic codes (40).

This is a large and inclusive definition. However, it immediately raises a few problems. We are asked to suppose that the synthesis of different and opposed narrative codes accounts for the 'otherness' that we perceive in allegory, but that this sense of otherness does not extend to the meanings of the words in the text, which are, after all, the only means by which we can intuit the presence of the codes. The problem of texts that produce different meanings with a single set of words, has here been displaced, rather than interrogated.

Furthermore, (and this must even now be a familiar objection) it makes 'literary allegory' a very large 'set of genres' indeed. Almost all literature makes some accommodation between codes productive of specificity (deictic) and codes productive of abstraction (non-deictic), but this terminology does at least allow for a description of the relative proportion and prominence of each code, which the 'split-level' model does not. With this approach, we can evolve ways of saying how allegorical a text, or even a genre is, though it is less useful in discriminating between allegories and non-allegories. How allegorical, after all, is an allegory? Van Dyke claims that allegory, as a narrative genre, affords simultaneous and equal privilege to concrete specifics and abstractions (193). About their simultaneity, she seems to be right. In no allegory is there a 'level' which is all specifics, and another which is all abstraction. Concerning relative privilege, however, her formula seems a little too easy. In all the medieval and Renaissance allegories she discusses, deictic elements are wholly necessary, but usually function as pointers to the superior importance of abstract universals. For instance, she points out that we misunderstand Everyman, in a way that precisely parallels Everyman's own delusions, if we impute the desertion of his companions Fellowship, Kindred and Cousin to personal weakness instead of to 'the laws of the categories whose names they bear' (130).

When the relative proportion of deictic to non-deictic codes actually begins to approach something more like equality, as in modern allegories such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1949) or Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Van Dyke declares the age of allegory over, and a postallegorical phase in operation. These modern allegories could be said to be more 'deictic' in that the non-deictic element is not typically or wholly fulfilled by abstract universal agents, but by historical or cultural agents, which nonetheless represent something more than their individual selves. To take Van Dyke's own example, the pleasure of reading *Animal Farm* lies not just in

recognising that the pig Napoleon represents Stalin, nor in recognising that he is a synthesis of fictional pig, Napoleon, Stalin and (we might add) the abstraction Tyranny, but in working out the particular nature of that synthesis (42). Even where the non-deictic element is not primarily an abstraction, however, allegories valorise the non-deictic. The deictic pig element of Napoleon is entirely necessary for the plot of *Animal Farm*, and for an understanding of the non-deictic codes, but it is only in recognising and evaluating those non-deictic elements that the reader begins to perceive that the text is not simply an anthropomorphic folly. It is the non-deictic element in allegory that makes it itself, however valuable and necessary the deictic elements are in pointing the reader towards it. In short, we read *Animal Farm* for its insights into totalitarianism, not for its commentary on the farmyard behaviour of pigs.

This inconsistency in Van Dyke's argument can be attributed partially to an inappropriate theoretical approach. Despite the peculiar aptness of the term 'deictic', which designates direct argument in logic as well as the production of specificity in grammar – a very allegorical ambiguity – Van Dyke's use of models derived from Tzvetan Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose* provokes some uneasiness. Terms developed from the study of mimetic prose fiction, which puts a high value on specificity, can only with effort be made to apply to poetic narratives which valorise abstraction. In effect, it forces her to argue from negative principles, the principles of 'ordinary stories' (38), so that she implicitly endorses the assumption she set out to dismantle: the assumption that allegory is abnormal, Other among genres.

Quite apart from this, however, we see that the main, if unacknowledged, issue in Van Dyke's definition of allegory is the same as in Madsen's: allegory is a form that consistently points outside itself, to an imagined transcendental signified, while co-opting the particular and deictic into its system. Teskey compares this effect to the 'vanishing point' in linear perspective. By pointing to a truth that is stationed just beyond the

textual system, towards which all interpretative effort should be directed, allegory makes us feel 'that we are not so much following a sequence of words as penetrating to a center.' That center is also a vortex, in that allegory's textual system pulls in and encloses whatever it encounters, making it signify within the text. Whether allegory is or is not 'other-speech', in the sense that otherness is the principle by which its meaning is constructed, depends on the extent to which we are prepared to accept the validity of this system.

It is a system that affords many theorists, and all three poets discussed in this thesis, some unease, because of its deferral to very rigid hierarchical structures. Joel Fineman, in his essay 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire', labels allegory the 'hierarchizing mode' (Greenblatt 32). Fineman describes allegory in structuralist terms, but the problem is essentially the same one as Van Dyke and Madsen posit: 'it is always the structure of metaphor that is projected onto the sequence of metonymy, not the other way around, which is why allegory is always a hierarchizing mode, indicative of timeless order, however subversively intended its contents may be' (32). Fineman's assertion alludes to Roman Jakobson's influential work on 'metaphor' and 'metonymy' as basic modes underlying cultural production. Jakobson identifies metaphor with the 'selection' axis of language, by which we select a particular word from a number of synonyms, metonymy with the 'combination' axis, by which we combine the chosen words into a sequence. He states that poetry 'projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination' (Lodge 39); that is, in poetic language, combinatorial features are also determined by the principle of equivalence that applies to selection: syllable equals syllable, pause equals pause. (The opposite of poetry, for Jakobson, is metalanguage. Metalanguage uses the contiguous, metonymic axis of combination to determine the selection of words. Jakobson gives a metalinguistic example: 'Mare is the female of horse' (Lodge 39). Allegory is to poetry, we might say, as allegoresis to

metalanguage.) It is not immediately clear, however, how Fineman draws his conclusion about the hierarchising nature of allegory from Jakobson's formulations or why he implies that the imposition of metonymic sequence upon metaphorical structure ('the other way around') would mitigate those hierarchising tendencies.

The representative system established when metaphor determines the sequential order of a text is a hierarchising one because if one group of objects or persons is figured by another, the structures of power in the group which is represented must be preserved in the representation in order that the representation makes sense. An allegory may stand on the power relationship alone, and the establishment of stable hierarchies is consequently of great importance for allegory: it facilitates the movement of meaning. Such movement may be dizzying; it is quite easy to produce an analogical pile-up. As a pilot to his ship so a ruler to his kingdom, so Christ to the Church, so a man to his wife, so the soul to the body, so form to matter. A system determined by metonymy, Fineman supposes, would not require the maintenance of power relationships across the rift produced by other-speech, because the contiguity of sequence provides sufficient connection, and therefore it would not hierarchise. Jakobson's metalinguistic example is not, for the purposes of this argument, at all encouraging, for it suggests that even where sequence is used to build an equation, hierarchies of value are maintained. The word 'horse' can describe all mares, but the word 'mare' can only describe certain horses.

In seeing allegory as completely and relentlessly hierarchising, however, Fineman is perhaps taking its truth-claims at face value. Recalling Van Dyke's warning about the dangers of 'split-level' analysis, it is worth remembering that the sequence will display features that are not assimilable to the structure: there will be aspects of the narrative which are not easily metaphorised. This 'incoherence' of sequence to structure facilitates the reader's entrance into the allegory: 'an allegory must be, unlike a parable or a fable, incoherent on the narrative level, forcing us to unify the work by imposing meaning on

it. An allegory is an incoherent narrative [...] that makes us interpret throughout' (Teskey 5). Sequence (or 'narrative') resists the imposition of structure upon it; the reverberations of that resistance will always be audible in the language of the allegory, and at certain moments the struggle is thematically visible.

Teskey calls this struggle and its results 'capture' - a better term, since it acknowledges the ultimate success of structure's imposition upon sequence (6). Like Madsen, Teskey sees two 'others' in allegory: a negative, unassimilable, anti-cosmic 'other' which he associates with the body, especially the female body, and a positive, transcendental 'Other' which is the textual embodiment of the 'singularity', the 'ineffable presence into which, it is supposed, everything in the allegory is ultimately drawn' (5). Allegory, more or less violently in every case, produces meaning by making others into Others, and capture is the process by which it does so. Meaning, in this scheme, is not a representation of the world but an attempt to control it; it is 'instrumental meaning [...] the creative exertion of force' (5). The ordinary resistance of bodies to their subjection into indifferent substance to be imprinted by meaning creates a kind of 'noise' which allegory encourages us to interpret as the resonance of truth (6, 63-4). This noise is what we hear when we recognise an archetype or personification and thereby intuit that we are reading an allegory. Extraordinary – that is, thematically visible – resistance to reduction into imprintable substance occurs relatively rarely in allegories, but examples are to be found in Dante's encounter with Francesca da Rimini (Inf. canto V) 17 and Britomart's rescue of Amoret from Busirane¹⁸ (Teskey 19-31). Teskey explicitly compares the project of capture to rape:

At such moments we see violence being committed on an unwilling woman in such a way that the usual fantasy of her conversion to the rapist's desire is abandoned. Nor is there, however, any fantasy of releasing her from that desire. We are confronted instead with a struggle in which the rift between heterogeneous others is forced into view. The woman continues forever to resist being converted into an embodiment of the meaning that is imprinted on her (19).

Teskey locates the reason for the production of allegorical, instrumental meaning in a philosophical problem. We perceive that our consciousness is a product of nature, and yet we also perceive nature as other to ourselves, alien. The dilemma of consciousness that is produced by something other to itself is resolved by casting the other as coterminous with it: we assert that because the self is in the world, the world must be in the self. Instrumental meaning bridges the rift between self and world. The microcosm-macrocosm analogy produced by the identification of self and world is one of allegory's most cherished features, cherished, argues Teskey, because it expresses the desire in which allegory originates. This is 'the desire of the organism to master its environment by placing that environment inside itself (7), a desire which is expressed in the allegorical vision of the universe as a giant man. Immediately, however, we perceive that any subject who desires this is in competition with all other bodies, which all have the same desire. These other bodies must be eliminated in the most complete way possible: by devouring them. The structure underlying allegory is one of mutual devouring - Teskey calls it 'allelophagy' (8). The hierarchies of allegory are created in reaction to the horror of allelophagy, but also sustain it in their persistent attempts to make the world mean the self and the self the world.

Teskey's is a convincing attempt to account for the types of 'otherness' we see at work in allegory, its tendency to hierarchise, and (this is rare in the literature on the subject) the philosophical and psychological needs in which it originates. If it also seems somewhat hyperbolic, delighting in its evocation of violence and resistance, this can perhaps be explained by the meditation on political contention and conflict that the study of allegory necessitates. Despite all attempts to separate allegories from a poetics of allegory²⁰ it is precisely the quality that Joel Fineman calls the 'structural effect' (Greenblatt 33) and Angus Fletcher calls ' "withdrawal of affect" ' (326), the delight in

and deferral to power presented as cosmic unity, the resonance of suppressed violence, which bleeds from allegories into their critics.

II: ALLEGORICAL TEXTUALITY

(i)

Fond ones dozed with the patriarchs,
Afrits, darkening from Syria
In later myriads, saw dust-men,
Who rode in rust, guard wormwood, shoe-holes
Mad for Jerusalem. Sin shrouded
The plural couch, concubinage.
There was new vinage awash in ships:
Love without lips and night prolonged:
Our pallid Song o' Songs – her Talmud
In ghetto – rudded in slumber of don,
Aye, demijohn. Shall no cruse aid her?
Lickerish echo: "no crusader."²¹

This stanza, from Austin Clarke's autobiographical poem 'The Hippophagi', describes a feeling of personal moral degradation, which is linked to a loss of ecclesiastical authority. It foregrounds its figuralism by using the most famous of typological images, that of the multiple nature of Jerusalem. According to the doctrine of fourfold meaning – quadrifaria – developed by the Church Fathers, Jerusalem signified the historical Jewish city, the Church, the Christian soul, and the 'New Jerusalem', the heavenly Church triumphant. To these, Clarke adds suggestions of other figurae. Jerusalem appears as the Jewish nation in the rather puzzling phrase 'her Talmud/ In ghetto' – Clarke seems to be suggesting that Christian allegoresis and typology confine Jewish traditions to a cultural 'ghetto'. Clarke's Jerusalem is also the licentious prostitute of the Jewish prophetic tradition in exile, the 'holy land' of the Crusades, and a mixture of both of these: a generalised location of sexualised exoticism. The 'patriarchs' of the first line refer to the progenitors of quadrifaria as well as to the Old Testament patriarchs. That they doze, and their believers' trust in them is '[f]ond', suggests Clarke's unease with

allegorical writing as much as his sense of the Church's loss of moral authority. For Clarke, it is patristic allegoresis that has made the Song of Songs 'pallid'. Though a combination of dreaming 'slumber', aristocratic or academic privilege ('don') and drunken licence ('Aye, demijohn') might restore the poem's blush-making eroticism ('rudded'), Jerusalem – and by extension, the traditions embodied in the Song of Songs and the Talmud – remains captive at the end of the stanza, a widow lacking the benefit of Elijah's miraculous 'cruse' (1 Kings 17:12-16). The crusaders, far from being Jerusalem's saviours, are at best Quixotic figures: 'dust-men' (or 'sawdust men') '[w]ho rode in rust' and had holes in their shoes. At worst, they exemplify a Church that has abnegated its moral responsibilities: they are implicitly equated with '[a]frits', evil spirits of Arabian mythology. Characteristically, Clarke makes the same phrases suggest both possibilities: a dust-man empties the rubbish bins, but might also be a terrifying demon concocted of desert sand. 'Rust' is the creaky armour of Don Quixote, but also dried blood. 'Lickerish' sounds like a sweetmeat, but means 'lecherous', suggesting the 'rape' of Jerusalem by the crusaders.

This stanza is worth paraphrasing at some length, because it is an allegory that engages in a debate about the value of allegoresis, and as such, suggests how difficult it might be to separate these two categories. Clarke uses Jerusalem to signify the Church and the individual soul: the condition of Jerusalem after the Crusades implies the corruption of the speaker of 'The Hippophagi' and the Church of which he still counts himself a part. Christian warriors have accomplished the ruin of Jerusalem-as-Church; that is, the Church's predilection for violent oppression has caused the diminution of its own moral authority. As far as the passage is the account of the degradation of an individual soul, the Crusaders represent the corrosive effects of suppressed sexuality. Such is the alienation of this speaker from his own sexuality, that any meditation on sexual expression provokes tired Orientalist fantasies about polygamy and rape.

'The Hippophagi' also specifies the means by which a Church and culture might maintain its authoritarian control over individuals. In other passages in the poem Clarke castigates superstition, or the transformation of saints into little more than Christianised lares and penates. Here, however, his focus is on interpretations that confine the meanings of texts, that make the erotic language of the Song of Songs a 'pallid' prefiguration of Christ's asexual love for his personified Church, that restrict the operation of the Talmud to the ghetto. Clarke's point is complicated both by his use of the example of the Talmud, which is itself a collection of exegetical works, and by his dense syntax and punctuation, which allow the reader to conjecture that the Song of Songs is somehow a ghettoised Talmud. But the targets of his hostility - Christian arrogation of non-Christian meaning, meaning used as a coercive rather than a communicative tool - are clear. Allegoresis, for Clarke, is 'not just a method of discovering implicit meanings [...] but also a declaration that certain meanings, implicit or explicit, constitute the text's intention, while other meanings, although explicit, [are] insignificant' (Van Dyke 44). It is 'a method of suppressing meaning' (45). Clarke perceives the political implications of allegoresis so defined: the same intolerance of multiple and different meanings that motivates the suppression of sexual love in a poem also motivates the suppression of minority or individual culture in a society. The stanza marshals allegory against allegoresis: the oppressive violence of the Crusaders is analogous to a range of repressive social forces - from denial of sexuality to anti-Semitism – which have their roots in the abuse of interpretation.

The Song of Songs is the example *par excellence* of the allegorised text, the text upon which meaning has been imposed, rivalled only perhaps by the myth of Venus' adultery with Mars. Teskey states the position:

to allegorize a poem – to say it says something other than what it does say – does not make that poem an allegory. The Christian Fathers' interpretation of the Song of Songs as an allegory of Christ's love for

his church (following Jewish interpretations of the Song of Songs as an allegory of God's love for Israel) and Porphyry's Neoplatonic interpretation of the caves of the nymphs episode in the *Odyssey* are of cultural value in their own right [...] But neither of the works on which they comment is an allegory; for neither work [...] contains instructions for its own interpretation (3).

He goes on to give the example of Spenser's Error as a figure which tells us not only what she means, but also how to read other figures in the poem. Error is allegorical, but she is also an allegory. Maureen Quilligan makes a similar point, asserting that the association of allegoresis with allegory was itself an error. According to her account, allegoresis arose as a method of interpreting textual agents as personifications, from which it was assumed that it could also be a method for composing narratives that use personification. Quilligan suggests that allegories are the only literary form immune to allegoresis, because they can have no meaning that is not also present in their inscribed interpretative guides (29-31). Teskey's need to insist on the 'cultural value' of the products of allegoresis and Quilligan's location of the origin of the link between it and allegory in a 'mistake' (not a fruitful misunderstanding, her tone makes clear, but a muddle that needs straightening out) suggest the low esteem in which they hold allegorical interpretation. Clarke is not unusual in his hostility to allegoresis;²² with a few exceptions,²³ such hostility has become an accepted part of most critical discussions of allegory.

For most critics, distinguishing allegory from allegoresis is a way of limiting the class of works that can be called 'allegories', though, as Teskey admits, it cannot limit the use of the term 'allegorical', which still might cover such non-allegories as the Statue of Liberty or Liberty in Delacroix's painting *Liberty Leading the People* (Teskey 3-4). Unfortunately, while it may appear to keep the allegorical canon within the bounds of manageability, this approach raises more problems than it solves. The location of the distinction between allegory and allegoresis in the issue of interpretation is perhaps the

most glaring of these. If an allegory is a work that, in Teskey's words, 'contains instructions for its own interpretation', then all allegories contain at least the possibility of allegoresis. In many medieval allegories, as Russell's collection of essays makes clear, these instructions may take the form of an expository scene in which a character is portrayed in the act of allegoresis. In more recent allegories the act of allegoresis is often an occasion for dramatic irony, the interpreters pathetically or comically misreading their proof texts.²⁴ For example, Thomas Kinsella's poem 'Worker in Mirror, At His Bench' offers ironic readings of itself and of the poet's adoption of more open formal strategies in the collection of which it is a part, *New Poems* (1973). Taken at face value, the interpretative guide offered in this and later self-reflexive poems like 'At the Head Table' is distinctly and deliberately unhelpful, but allegoresis is nonetheless written into these texts, telling us how, or, more often, how *not* to read.²⁵ Apart from any other consideration, if this in itself is enough to make a text an allegory, then the category has scarcely been limited – every self-reflexive text might, on these grounds, be claimed for allegory.

Viewing this problem from another angle, we might say that while an allegory is a text which includes allegoresis, an allegorical interpretation includes no allegory. That is to say, we can provisionally identify a text as an *allegorised* text and not a composed allegory when we have certain pieces of information at our disposal: the respective dates of composition of the allegorised text and the interpretation, data concerning stylistic features of the interpretation and the text and how these relate to generically similar works, information on the authors of both text and interpretation and what their respective purposes might have been in writing them. But this provisional recognition is dependent on our identifying the meaning in the interpretation as meaning *imposed* upon the text, which allows denigration of interpretation (Kinsella: 'the real sin is the imposition of order'²⁶) and covertly admits the ideology of the allegory/symbol

distinction into the debate. Coleridge casts the difference between allegory and symbol as synonymous with that between imposed and implicit meaning:

The Symbolical cannot perhaps be better defined in distinction from the Allegorical, than that it is always a part of that, of the whole of which it is representative – "Here comes a sail," – (That is, a ship), is a symbolical expression. "Behold our lion!" when we speak of some gallant soldier, is allegorical. Of most importance to our present subject is this point, that the latter (allegory) cannot be other than spoken consciously; – whereas in the former (the symbol) it is very possible that the general truth may be unconsciously in the writer's mind during the construction of the symbol; and it proves itself by being constructed out of his own mind – as the Don Quixote out of the perfectly sane mind of Cervantes, and not by outward observation or historically.²⁷

If we are to call allegoresis 'imposed' meaning, we must accept the implications of that designation for 'implicit' meaning, one of which is Don Quixote springing forth fully armed from his creator's head.

To determine whether an interpretative meaning is imposed, we must be able to recover the text from its interpretations, and read it 'pre-allegorically'. It would be facile to say that this is impossible – scholarly opinion counts – but it is not easy. There are a number of restrictions on the reader attempting to recover an allegorised text, among which must be counted the availability of the text without the attendant exegetical material. Many Authorised Version texts of the Song of Songs print its allegorical interpretation as a gloss; even a text as recent as the *Good News Bible* (1966) mentions the allegorical interpretation in its headnote to the book. The tendency to remake texts (especially in translation) to suit contemporary tastes must also be taken into account. For instance, Joep Leerssen's engaging essay on Kinsella's translation of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* reveals that where textual variants exist in the Irish, Kinsella's choices reflect the late twentieth-century tendency to equate bawdiness or brutality with authenticity, just as Augusta Gregory's reflect a wholly different set of priorities. A similar valorisation of the erotic, in reaction to a previous generation's perceived prudery, could also be behind

Clarke's intimation that the Song of Songs is 'merely' a collection of erotic love-lyrics, and that any religious gloss a diminution of that 'mere', complete status.

A larger difficulty with recovering the 'pre-allegory' from the allegorised text is the implicit assertion that the intention discovered thereby is more significant and valuable than that specified by the interpretation. This is nothing other than allegoresis, as Van Dyke defines it, 'the declaration that certain meanings [...] constitute [...] the text's intention' (44) while others are insignificant, imposed. What Van Dyke has discovered here is not the reason why we should reject allegoresis in favour of a more holistic reading method, but an uncomfortable truth about polysemy. Multiple meaning does not guarantee free play or equality between the different significations of a word, figure or text. On the contrary, we tend only to tolerate polysemy where there is a corresponding textual assurance that the various different meanings can be unified or hierarchically arranged in order of importance. In Teskey's words, '[a] polysemous sign can mean different things in different contexts because all such signs are supposed to belong to one truth toward which they collectively tend' (57). Polysemy is the means by which allegory orders its cosmos: 'every opposition arising from the contrast of meaning and life is redistributed hierarchically such that one term is placed over the other. Under the regime of polysemy, anything that appears to escape or resist the project of meaning - passion, body, irony - is interpreted as a further extension of meaning' (Teskey 30). Suppression of meaning is an inevitable consequence of multiple meaning, even in the simplest of metalinguistic constructions. Mare is the female of horse, but horse is not the 'male' of mare, 'horse' is a generic which includes mares. Any sense of 'mare' which could be an explication of 'horse' rather than the explicated other of horse is suppressed. A rather simplistic interpretation of Animal Farm might conclude that Napoleon the pig 'is' Stalin, but in no sense is Stalin Napoleon the pig. Allegoresis operates under the polysemous regime, and in a fashion very similar to Teskey's 'capture': it treats the text as

a body which must be made to mean. In order that the text can be made meaningful, its original identity must be erased; that is, the text must be reduced to indifferent substance, signs declared insignificant. Where the original identity of the text is very strong, as in the Song of Songs, the text itself seems to offer resistance to its allegoresis. The Song of Songs is the Francesca da Rimini of allegoresis, resisting our attempts to turn its *eros* into *agape* until we faint with the effort. The 'ordinary' noise of texts resisting their interpretation is the hum of the very debate in which we are now engaged.

(ii)

This discussion of allegory and allegoresis is in many ways a discussion about allusion, about the 'other-texts' that writers include, or readers perceive, in their works. Until the eighteenth century, 'allusion' could be used as a virtual synonym for 'allegory'. (The OED now cites this usage as obsolete). The conflation of the two terms goes back to Quintilian, for whom an allusive quality in a figure is definitive of allegory, making both proverbs and arguments by example kinds of allegory. The fourth century BCE theorist Diomedes makes a further distinction, between allegories in which meaning is arbitrarily imposed and allusion or riddle, in which meaning is simply encoded so that intellectual exercise is required to understand it. Diomedes adds that texts which explicitly indicate their own meaning are not allegories.³⁰ Something of this survives in Puttenham: referring to a poem that contains the phrases 'clouds of care', 'stormes of strife' and 'waves of woe', he comments, 'I call him not a full Allegorie, but mixt, bicause he discovers withall what the cloud, storme, wave, and the rest are, which in a full allegorie should not be discovered, but left at large to the readers judgement and conjecture.' (Puttenham 198) Puttenham's example is worth remarking because of its peculiar deafness to irony: he emphasises allegory's relation to 'dissimulation', to the riddle or enigma, while twice using the most hackneyed example – of the ship and pilot – to illustrate it. Angus Fletcher displays a similar (and uncharacteristic) obtuseness in

claiming that '[e]nigma, and not always decipherable enigma, appears to be allegory's most cherished feature' (73) and yet remarking on the diminishing returns offered the reader who 'deciphers' Yeats's 'Three Movements' or Brecht's parables (81-2). This lack of ironic perception seems to originate in the idea that obscure allusion has always an exclusive function. Some surprising authorities have been marshalled to support this view, as Madsen comments:

Huppé and Robertson claim that Augustine sanctioned deliberate obscurity in poetry because the mind is thus engaged in the search for concealed meaning; literal obscurity necessitates interpretation that should proceed according to the rule of charity. Augustine's concept of charity as the normative meaning to which exegesis should take recourse is explained by Huppé and Robertson as if it were the hidden essence encoded by secular poets rather than the exegetical process described by Augustine (132).³¹

Unfortunately, Madsen sees this misperception as an opportunity to remount her hobby-horse: the supposed critical definition of allegory solely in terms of pagan 'fabulism' and the neglect of Christian figural traditions. Madsen still supposes, however, that the business of 'fabulistic' allegory is to 'encode' meanings which are subsequently extracted by the interpreter. This exclusive, encoding function may play a part in some esoteric traditions, and Renaissance theory typically presents figural language as a way of protecting the sensitive matter of poetry 'from the vulgar judgement' (Puttenham 198). However, other functions may precede this exclusive one. Mary Carruthers, in her study of late classical and medieval rhetoric, *The Craft of Thought* (1998), suggests that many enigmatic allegories and fables have a mnemonic purpose, indeed, have their origin in what she calls 'mnemotechnic' – the art of memory. The strange and striking enigmatic image arises, in short, from a clear understanding of how human memory works: we remember what we find odd, especially when it involves violent transformation or appeals to our sexual feelings: '[i]t is a principle of mnemotechnics that we remember particularly vividly and precisely things that are odd and emotionally striking, rather than

those that are commonplace. Sex and violence, strangeness and exaggeration, are especially powerful for mnemonic purposes' (28-9). Carruthers understands memory to mean not simply the faculty of recalling the past, but the bedrock of all kinds of intellectual and creative activity: thought, meditation, speech and creative art. In this sense, memory extends into the future as well as into the past. Carruthers entitles one section of her study 'Remembering the Future' (66) – as she explains, this is not at all a paradox in terms of pre-scholastic thought, which did not draw the rigid modern boundary between 'memory' and 'imagination':

[composition] can be presented and analysed as recollective because it was assumed to involve acts of remembering, mnemonic activities which pull in or "draw" (tractare, a medieval Latin word for composing) other memories. The result was what we now call "using our imagination", even to the point of visionary experience. But medieval people called it "recollection" and they were neither wrong nor foolish nor naïve to do so.

(Carruthers 70)

This is a convincing rationale for allegorical enigma, but Carruthers' contention that allegory's propensity for violence is simply an *aide-memoire* may strike some readers as rather Panglossian. There is nothing benign about a concept of memory which extends its reach into the future. Such memory is inevitably selective, because it seeks to be coercive:

God, said the Psalmist, made his works for remembering [...] This is a statement obvious in memory cultures [...] as obvious as a statement that "God made his works to be measured" would be to us now. The injunction to "remember", "be mindful of" is characteristic of the Hebrew Bible [...] This "remembering", affective [...] and goal-oriented, bears only partial resemblance to the familiar model of memory as the mind's storehouse of things we have experienced in the past. [...] The matters memory presents are used to persuade and motivate, to create emotion and stir the will. And the accuracy or authenticity of these memories – their simulation of an actual past – is of far less importance [...] than their use to motivate the present and to affect the future. (Carruthers 68-9)

Remember Jerusalem. Remember the men of '98. The kind of memory culture which Carruthers describes tears experience from the past and foists it upon the future.

Allegory, enigmatic or not, is deeply involved in this process of taking from the past in an attempt to control and order the future.

Riddles and obscurities aside, it is easy to see how allusion might be thought a type of allegory. In both cases we deal with a text that reaches 'outside' itself in order to make meaning, and that engages in a form of capture, taking a piece of an already existent text, and making it mean something else in a new context. Allusion is one of the instructions embedded into an allegory to aid interpretation. In many cases, it may be the first such instruction received by the reader, for it is often in perceiving an archetype (the forest, the journey, the mountain, the emblematic beast) which is recognisable from other allegorical works that we intuit that we are reading an allegory. We might argue that all sorts of literary texts use allusion in this way, or even that it is only by recognising allusion to other texts that we can understand the new text at all:

Hors de l'intertextualité, l'œuvre littéraire serait tout simplement imperceptible, au même titre que la parole d'une langue encore inconnue. De fait, on ne saisit le sens et la structure d'une œuvre littéraire que dans son rapport à des archétypes, eux-mêmes abstraits de longues series de textes dont ils sont en quelque sort l'invariant. [...] Vis-à-vis des modèles archétypiques, l'œuvre litteraire entre toujours dans un rapport de réalisation, de transformation ou de transgression. 33

Jenny goes on, in fact, to exclude 'le citation, le plagiat et la simple réminiscence' ['quotation, allusion and mere reminiscence'] from the field of study. He gives as an example of such non-intertextual allusion Lautréamont's mocking reference in *Maldoror* to Alfred de Musset's characterisation of the poet as a pelican nourishing her young with her own blood. For Jenny, this allusion is not intertextual – or is, at best, a 'weak' form of intertextuality – because 'le rôle thématique de cette image est sans rapport dans les deux textes' [the thematic role of this image does not connect the two texts] (262). Only a single semantic feature – both poems deal with 'sadness' – allows its re-use by Lautréamont (263), but this cannot be claimed as a real connection, since the sadness is so comprehensively ironised in the later poem. However, as Jonathan Culler notes in

relation to Jenny's essay, even a superficial allusion takes something of its source to the new text:

Lautréamont's mockery of Romanticism is made possible by empty allusions to, or if one prefers, misuses of romantic images and topoi. If intertextuality is what makes the later text "perceptible" then it clearly must include these relations to romantic discourse, even the superficial repetition of the pelican.³⁴

Neither Jenny nor Culler is interested in the allegorical significance of the pelican as an emblem of Christ. Culler calls it 'unusual' (105), Jenny calls it 'frappante et originale' [striking and original] before acknowledging its traditional significance in a parenthesis: 'quoiqu'elle appartienne déjà à une tradition chretienne' [although it already partakes of a Christian tradition] (Jenny 262). This lack of interest is because, as Culler notes, Lautréamont's allusion is intentionally emptied of emblematic significance in order to ridicule his Romantic predecessor, who retained, if not precisely the religious connotations of the emblem, then at least a feeling of solemnity and sacramentalism.

As we will see in Chapter 3 of this study, Louis MacNeice in *Autumn Sequel* has much the same attitude towards allusion. The poem is full of 'empty' allusion, that is, allusion which does not fulfil, transform or transgress the meaning of the texts to which it refers, but simply evokes and forgets them. It begins with a characteristic example: 'August. Render to Caesar. Speak parrot: a gimmick for Poll'.³⁵ The Parrot reappears throughout *Autumn Sequel* as a representative of those things which its speaker perceives as a threat to the poem's allegorical world of fantasy and Utopian friendship: automation, depersonalised modernity, the mechanical world. Little, apart from a certain fondness for neologism, links MacNeice's Parrot with the figure to whom it seems to allude, the Parott of John Skelton's 'Speke, Parott'.³⁶ Both poets associate parrots with meaningless prattle and automatic repetition. However, where the 'nonsense' of Skelton's Parott is allegorical speech, devising symbols for topical events and persons, the prattle of MacNeice's Parrot is an attribute of an allegorical character,

representing the noise and meaninglessness of automated modernity. MacNeice's reference confounds the expectation that allusion develops our understanding of the source text, either by elucidating it (Jenny's 'réalisation') or parodying it ('transgression'). MacNeice's Parrot tells us nothing about Skelton's. It even regresses from Skelton's – hardly sophisticated – insight that apparent nonsense may be symbolically meaningful, to a position that does not question the association of parrots and prattle. This is particularly evident when we compare MacNeice's allusion to another, which may, in fact, have been his original source for the phrase.³⁷ Cassio, reproaching himself for his drunkenness, exclaims to Iago: 'Drunk, and speak parrot, and squabble? Swagger, swear and discourse fustian with one's own shadow?' (II.iii.273-5).³⁸ Shakespeare's allusion to Skelton is resonant with dramatic irony: Cassio, lacking all skill in dissimulation, accusing himself of prattling like a parrot, addresses a master of 'other-speech', whose capacity for suggestion, innuendo and satire far exceeds that of Skelton's allegorist.

The emptiness of allusion in *Autumn Sequel* has doubtless contributed to its unpopularity with critics and readers. It is scarcely surprising, however, that an allegorical poem should use empty allusion, since this kind of reference replicates the structure of allegorical imagery itself. To make the pelican signify maternal devotion and by extension Christ's blood sacrifice, it is necessary to forget what is known about real pelicans: that they do not nourish their young on their blood.³⁹ The pelican is emptied of its true characteristics and refilled with a single metaphorical one. Similarly, genuine attributes of the parrot are elided and replaced with the half-truth (not all parrots mimic human speech) which equates them with repetition and prattle. Allegorical allusion empties its source texts of their previous significance and makes them mean something else because allegories generate imagery by taking what they perceive to be 'other', outside their textual system, and co-opting it into meaningfulness. As Teskey comments, 'What we call allusion is in truth capture, the process by which a

work achieves monumentality by taking its substance from the realm of the previously made' (162). The unruly negative 'other' of an allegory can be, and often is, another text. Furthermore, if allusion functions as an interpretative tool, we find ourselves in the curious position of using empty travesties of source texts to elucidate the complexities of the allegorical text.

For all allegory's apparent deference to hierarchies, its persistent genuflection in the direction of a transcendental Other, a 'singularity', there is no corresponding deference towards 'tradition', defined as a literary canon. Teskey notes that the process by which allegories are made is hostile to 'the concept of tradition', which he explains as 'traditio, a "handing down" or a "handing on" of something through time. [...] Creative work is supposed to conform to this movement. Beneath every act of making we see a hand reaching back to the past to receive what is handed to it before extending itself forward to release what it holds to the future' (158). But this benign model of culture moving forward in time cannot account for the violence of allegorical making. Teskey proposes an alternative model, whereby the 'hands' of tradition reach back to take their forms from pre-existent works, and forward, to grasp an unappropriated and undifferentiated nature which can be imprinted with those forms. Making is the 'perennial assault of the generated on what is established before it in time, on that which has given it substance' (162) and it is also a consuming assault upon nature, as a phrase from 'The Dream of the Rood' reminds us. The wood of the cross remembers being hewn down, 'astyred of stefne minum'. 40 'The otherness of this voice', Teskey declares, is not the transcendental other of allegory; it is not a goal for us, nor are we a goal for it; it is something to which we can only attend, in the brief moment when incommensurate ways of being encounter each other' (165). The usual caveat with regard to Teskey's criticism applies: here, in addition to the relish with which he evokes violence, there is a certain sentimentality disguising itself as ecological correctness and rigour. But his basic

claim, that allegorical making is retrogressive, is convincing. Allegories do not recognise the monuments of tradition except as material with which they can improvise their own monumentality. They become intelligible by stripping other texts of their proper meaning and breaking down the past into usable fragments, with which they proceed to construct their new textual system, or cosmos. The feeling that MacNeice's use of the parrot emblem represents a regression from Skelton's, while it contradicts received ideas concerning the transmission of traditional material, is a sound intuition. It also intimates that 'the hierarchizing mode' maintains within it an unsettling radicalism, to which we shall return in section III.

(iii)

This section, however, concludes with a reflection on the choices which govern the construction of the textual systems of allegories, their intertextual borrowings from other texts, other allegories and from mythology. Readers, it seems, identify the genre 'allegory' by recognising narrative patterns which are common to many different texts. The subject of archetypal narratives was one of intense interest to mid-twentieth century theorists. 41 Since the 1970s, this interest has dwindled to the point where such archetypes are barely mentioned. This may be attributed to the establishment of alternative literary canons, and the increased value placed upon cultural diversity in literary study. Critics are now more uneasy with a totalised, universal generic model such as Fletcher attempts to provide, because, as Madsen points out, it contrives both to expand the allegorical canon beyond usefulness and to 'build an image of generic integrity that is based upon a severely limited set of textual characteristics' (25). Madsen's utilitarian point - that we must separate allegorical effects from what MacNeice calls 'allegory proper' - rather contradicts her insistence that 'Allegory is one of many genres in which a text may participate, no two genres being mutually exclusive' (25). It still leaves us with the question 'How allegorical is an allegory?' Fletcher's

model, though it combines the numinous and the pseudoscientific in a way characteristic of other mid-century American theory, ⁴³ also captures something in allegories themselves: their simultaneous expansiveness and reductiveness, the way they aspire to include the whole of nature but can accomplish this only by reducing nature to an indifferent substance out of which abstract meaning can be made.

More urgently, perhaps, recent critics have been uneasy about identifying characteristic patterns in allegory because it brings them to the edges of the territory of myth-criticism occupied by Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade. The totalising, universal patterns described by these writers unsettle our ideas of the value of diversity. They seem to be determined to synthesise a 'monomyth' from remarkably diverse materials. Campbell begins his summary of the universal monomyth as follows:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away or else voluntarily proceeds to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm) or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). (245-6)

He concludes: 'The changes rung on the simple scale of the monomyth defy description' (246), but even in those opening three sentences he has rung a remarkable number himself. It surely matters whether the hero comes from hut or castle, whether he is lured or carried away or sets out voluntarily, whether he survives the struggle at the threshold of his adventure or not. In short, the interest of myth lies in the changes rung, the choices made according to the historical and cultural circumstances under which the myth developed. As Jenny comments, a literary work acquires meaning in its *relationship* with archetypes, not simply through their presence. A monomyth cannot elucidate this relationship, only state and re-state it. We might also suspect such myth-criticism of placing high value on the products of strong cultures while co-opting the myths of more marginal ones to the dominant pattern. Furthermore, the deployment of archetypal

patterns in literature can facilitate political apathy and assist social control by naturalising conditions which are in fact socially produced and changeable.

Eliade suggests that traditional societies cope with suffering through a combination of self-castigation and scapegoating. Any adverse circumstance is held to result either from the individual or society's fault (having sinned or displeased the gods) or from some malign agency (evil spirits, witchcraft). No traditional society considers suffering meaningless or arbitrary (Eliade 95-102). Ciaran Carson's well-known protest against the mythic structures underlying Heaney's *North* voices a very modern, liberal concern at this normalisation process:

[Heaney] seems to be offering his "understanding" of the situation almost as a consolation [...] It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened [...] It is as if there never were and never will be any political consequences of such acts; they have been removed to the realms of sex, death and inevitability.⁴⁶

The poem to which Carson refers, 'Punishment', makes a figural connection between the judicial murder of a woman in Iron Age Jutland (the speaker assumes her crime is adultery) and the vigilante punishment (by tarring and feathering) of Catholic women who associated with British soldiers in Belfast. While the speaker of the poem begins by empathising with the woman being dragged to her place of execution, his empathy turns to voyeurism and finally, to an understanding of her killers' motives. As the poem develops its figural message, compassion drains from the speaker, culminating in the moment of figural transcendence, when historical context evaporates:

I who have stood dumb when your betraying sisters cauled in tar, wept by the railings,

who would connive in civilized outrage yet understand the exact and tribal, intimate revenge.⁴⁷

At this point of figural connection, the speaker has undergone a withdrawal of affect:

his sense of the woman as a suffering human being has all but evaporated beneath his identification with the power of her tormentors. The signifier of that identification with primitive 'tribal' power is, ironically, 'civilised outrage'. Instead of removing the 'political consequences of such acts' to an invulnerable realm, Heaney has removed the speaker to a position where he feels invulnerable, defensively armoured by both atavistic 'tribal' urges and 'civilised outrage' against all affective feeling. ⁴⁸ If any consolation is offered by the figural structures of this poem, it is the consolation of being able to feel nothing. This total withdrawal of compassion is not a fault in the speaker's, or Heaney's (Carson mixes them up, deliberately) political awareness. Nor is it simply an expression of traditional, 'tribal', archaic, normalised suffering. It is a direct consequence of employing figural allegorism: 'As a figure that both names and abstracts, allegory is prone to "forms of violence" akin to those imposed by a tribe or community on a victim who is punished in the name of, or instead of, everybody else' (Kelley 8). Heaney's 'poor scapegoat' is the scapegoat not only of her community but of the poet's allegorical expression.

Finally, to admit the importance of archetypes in allegory risks encroaching not just upon myth-criticism, but upon myth itself. Though there can scarcely be a 'compositional' allegory which does not include mythic material, and the (much-disputed) origins of allegory probably lie in myth, in the defensive allegorising of Homeric and Hesiodic stories against sixth-century BCE charges of their absurdity or immorality, myth and allegory are not identical. In one sense, allegory is the opposite or inverse of myth, in that it appears when belief in the historical reality of myths is under threat or begins to wane. For Teskey, allegorical figures and allegorical narrative are the result of the overthrow or decay of classical myth: '[t]he violent defeat of Prudentius' Worship of the Ancient Gods is a revelation of what underlies, at various depths, all allegorical expression' (55). The apparent revival in the Renaissance of the moribund

gods represents their co-opting or capture by political authority in the form of the state:

the prominence of the gods in the art of the Renaissance reflects their role in the conjoining of political authority to spiritually resonant forms [...] In the relatively secularized culture of the Renaissance, the classical gods were politically sacred, conferring an aura of mysterious power on the symbols of the state. (Teskey 79)

That is, the gods are not allegorically useful until they are barely twitching. The galvanising action of allegory on myth does not work until the resonance of myth and belief in it is in an advanced state of decay.⁴⁹

Attempts such as Fletcher's to link allegory directly with myth, magic, ritual and religion, while useful, should be treated with some caution. Fletcher asserts that 'the greatest allegories [...] are governed by that sort of rigid destiny which can only operate through magical ordinances such as those of the oracle or an all-powerful deity' (208), but the political history of allegory – its association with the breakdown of belief systems – suggests that the oracle or deity does not have the power to muster direct allegorical agency. That is given over to a mediator, like the Renaissance state, which actually arrogates the power to itself, while continuing to benefit from the aura emitted by the discarded and decayed beliefs. This would suggest an explanation for the hyperliteracy of allegories, which finally differentiates them from myths. Myth does not necessarily acknowledge an existing body of texts from which it draws its material. Allegory, on the other hand, is perpetually involved with such texts, constantly judging the extent to which they should be acknowledged.

Nonetheless, in dealing with allegories, archetypal patterns and conventional images remain among the reader's primary hermeneutic tools. Journeys and fights, forests, mountains, gardens and emblematic animals alert us to the presence of the allegorical in a text before we begin to see the gaps, the 'incoherence' in allegorical narratives, the perception of which marks the reader's full entry into the textual world. For Fletcher, the *progress* and the *battle* are the two fundamental patterns of allegorical

narrative (151). Although he does not explicitly refer to it, he seems to divide the progress into two kinds, the quest and the pageant or procession. The quest narrative is characterised by an unremitting forward movement towards a goal. This goal may be represented as a home, often a higher and better home than the one the protagonist leaves, as in The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), the Celestial City is a better home for Christian than his dwelling in the City of Destruction. Such a progress and return 'home' may be ironised, and the unremitting progress may tend towards the protagonist's degradation and ruin. The quest may be regarded as a textual representation of the tendency of allegory, as a form, to strive after a 'singularity', a valorised Other. The pageant works in a different way. Although the same unremitting forward progress can be observed in the danse macabre, the medieval 'testament' poem, the procession of the Seven Deadly Sins, or in Fletcher's example 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' (154), it is not directed towards reaching a goal, towards a textual representation of the 'singularity'. Its aim is to fix the various agents in a hierarchical order, to provide a chain of being or ladder of perfection on which the desired Other, the singularity, may be approached. The pageant represents the tendency of allegories to order, to isolate and fix their imagery hierarchically. Actual achievement of the goal is of little importance in the pageant narrative, which might explain the tendency of these kind of progress narratives to finish abruptly and with an air of deliberate contrivance, like the 'Phoenix and the Turtle', or to remain unfinished. Pageants are closely related to encyclopaedic allegories: 'These genres [the Dance of Death and the 'complaint'] are next door to the more ambitious encyclopedic allegories of the middle ages, which contain all known facts [...] beside moral and philosophical lore' (Fletcher 155). The battle, meanwhile, is characterised by its symmetry: simply put, it is what happens when an allegorical protagonist, impelled by the desire to achieve its goal, encounters another body coming the opposite way. The battle is the textual expression of the self's desire to master its

environment and the resistance that environment offers to the self. As such, it includes the agon and the debate, as Fletcher comments: 'Prometheus Bound, the work Coleridge took to be the fountainhead of allegory, is written in the debate form. Prometheus Bound reduces battle to the static suffering of an agon' (158).

We seldom find progress and battle in isolation from one another. Even Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, felt to be so characteristic of the battle form that its name has become a generic term, includes progress elements, and as Fletcher comments, 'The Pilgrim's Progress, for instance, has debates inset into the narrated progress, while The Faerie Queene, essentially a battle form, mingles pastoral progresses with the "fierce wars" and "faithful loves" (160). Because the two narrative patterns are almost always mixed, however, the personal preference of a critic can play a large part in determining which is the dominant pattern in any given allegory. Fletcher feels The Faerie Queene to be primarily about battles, but MacNeice, who expresses a strong preference for progress narratives over battles ('As for Homer, give me the Odyssey every time as against the Iliad**

Iliad**

No avoids the discussion of battles and moments of amorous repose in his Clark lecture on Spenser, focussing instead on Guyon's sea-journey to the Bower of Bliss and Britomart's progress through the House of Busirane (Varieties 37-9).

However, if the terms 'progress' and 'battle' are to cover all forms of allegorical action, then we must also understand them metaphorically, as mental travel and debate or dialogue. Fletcher does not see this as a problem: 'The progress [...] does not even need to involve a physical journey. [...] The whole operation can be presented as a sort of introspective journey through the self; Kafka's 'The Burrow' [...] would be a good instance' (153). But it is not a matter of indifference whether the journey or fight is externalised and textually visible, or only perceptible as a journey or fight through the introduction of a further metaphor. One might solve this problem by asserting that only textually visible progresses and battles are allegorical, but this produces a variant of

the 'how allegorical?' question: how visible is visible? The reason Fletcher needs to include mental journeys and battles under his rubric is that he has failed to distinguish sufficiently not between progress and battle, but between what are termed above 'quest' and 'pageant'. Kafka's burrow-dweller does not engage in a mental journey, but in an encyclopaedic pageant, detailing all that can be known from its position in the burrow, placing itself and its 'enemies' on a hierarchical ladder according to whether they will devour it, or it them.⁵¹ 'The Burrow' functions as an illustration and a critique of the practice of allegory, the rigidity and fragility of its structures, its determination to conquer and consume its environment.

With this distinction between 'quest' and 'pageant', we return to some of the issues raised in section I. 'Quest' is another name for sequence, metonymy, deictic codes; 'pageant' for structure, non-deictic codes and metaphor. In his introduction to the works of the Pearl poet, Casey Finch adapts Barthes's distinction between 'classical' and 'modern' language, 52 calling them respectively 'horizontal' and 'vertical' language, to suggest a similar area of enquiry. Classical, horizontal language is 'relational', 'earthbound and diacritical': it suggests metonymy and chronometric time: '[e]ach moment in it [...] is ranged along a conventional plane that connects it with every other moment in a causal [...] relation'.⁵³ Finch associates horizontal language with the epics of antiquity, as opposed to vertical language, which is associated primarily with the Old Testament.⁵⁴ Vertical language produces meaning metaphorically, relating a word not to words meaning something different but connected to it, but to other words meaning something like itself; it 'leaps upward from a horizontality that would bind it to its civic and rhetorical duties, from the sheer interconnectedness of things, in order to assume an epiphanic quality' (16). The allegory of *Pearl*, Finch asserts, combines these two kinds of language in a way which preserves their discreteness: 'For here we confront these two modes, the vertical and the horizontal, ranged in a relation to one another which is both

fused and polarized. Heaven and earth are pressed into a contiguity, even as they remain starkly separated' (21). This paradox, which a Christian inevitably relates to the Incarnation, has a more humble secular function. It opens the possibility of analysing allegory's imposition of structure upon sequence, of pageant-like hierarchies on our quests for truth. That imposition may be finally inevitable, as Fineman and Teskey assert. But it seems that all three poets discussed in this thesis pursue allegorical modes because they believe that they can lead to a form of liberation (a different form, in each case). It is in the paradoxical relations of specificity and abstraction, metonymy and metaphor, rigidity and movement, that we might seek such a freedom from 'capture'.

III: DECORUM AND DECORATION

For the rhetoricians of the Renaissance, public speech that did not employ figurative language was a 'disgrace' to its speaker (Puttenham 151), a disgrace of the magnitude of 'the great Madames of honour' (149) wandering around naked. 'Decoration' and 'decorum' share more than a distant etymological connection:⁵⁵

Even so cannot our vulgar Poesie shew it selfe either gallant or gorgeous if any lymme be left naked and bare and not clad in its kindly clothes and coulours, such as may convey them somewhat out of sight, that is from the common course of ordinary speech and capacitie of the vulgar judgement, and yet being artificially handled must neede yeld it much more bewtie and commendation. This ornament we speake of is given to it by figures and figurative speaches, which be the flowers as it were and coulours that a Poet setteth upon his language of arte, as the embroderer doth his stone and perl, or passements of gold upon the stuffe of a Princely garment. (150)

This kind of figurative explanation of the importance of figures has usually been taken to mean that the unadorned sense, the plain and sober 'content' of a poem, is analogous to the naked body; figurative language to the clothes that adorn but partially conceal it. As such, it gives rise to the notion that MacNeice articulates, then repudiates, in *Varieties of Parable*: 'we tend to feel, "Oh the poetry's just there to sugar

the pill," as if the poet had started with a naked message and then coldbloodedly decided to dress it up in such and such a way.' (31) But Puttenham's figure for the practice of figurative language is more complex than this, since it immediately fulfils its own definition by obscuring slightly what it describes. What precisely is the naked body of poetry that is to be concealed by figures? It may be a 'message' of the kind that MacNeice refers to, the sort of thing that can be conveyed in a prose paraphrase. Then, however, Puttenham refers to this thing that is 'dressed' by figures as the poet's 'language of arte', which is odd, if what he means is the bare sense of that language, not its artistic expression. There is a further figurative slippage as Puttenham refers to figurative language as the decorative elements, gems, pearls and cloth of gold embroidered onto the plain 'stuff' of a garment. Now the garment, which in the first metaphor stood for figurative language, stands for the thing that is ornamented by figurative language, and it is still no clearer what that actually is. Since this passage occurs at the beginning of the third book, entitled 'Of Ornament', of the Arte of Poesie, we might conjecture that the thing being cloaked is the subject of book two: poetic proportion, metre, rhythm, shape. If true, this would bring Puttenham's concept of ornament close to the structuralist understanding of allegory. But it is not true: Puttenham understands proportion to be another form of 'exornation' existing alongside figurative language (149). Puttenham structures his illustrative metaphor to suggest that the body of poetry, this substance which is supposed to be decorated by figures, is an elusive property. One thing we can say (almost) for certain is that it is a female body.

This elusive quality is perhaps to be found in all metaphor: it is a result of the attempt to make an experience of consciousness (perceiving the sense, or essence of a text) converge with a physical object (a body, or a suit of clothes).⁵⁶ It emerges in a very particular form however, in allegory, or to be more precise, in personification.

Personifications of abstract universals raise the problem of tautology. What is Justice? Justice is just. But, as Teskey points out, this logical and philosophical problem has an imaginative corollary in the literary study of allegory:

What is the nature of a subject [...] of a predicate that relies on itself? What sort of body does Justice have? [...] the event of self-predication, whereby Justice is said to be just, leaves a residue that is not justice but the thing in which Justice must inhere in order to be true to itself. The logical absurdity is transformed by the poets into a kind of metaphysical wit, creating a surface noise that we are to suppose that allegory will recuperate at a point farther in (22-3).

The recuperation is actually an illusion. The figure simply moves to a further level of abstraction – Teskey's example is of Spenser's Disdayne, who disdains to be called Disdain. A similar, less witty, movement characterises Puttenham's elusive 'body' of poetry, as it effectively disappears from his figural illustration of figurative language, leaving a 'residue', however, in the empty suit of clothes which has now become the sign of the thing which figurative language 'decorates'.

The question 'What sort of a body does Justice have?' may seem a trivial and quibbling one, and so it is, in a philosophical context. It becomes more immediate and pertinent in allegorical literature because that body must be described by the allegorist (if not visualised by the reader). The form Justice, to put it in Platonic terms, needs matter to imprint. Teskey suggests an ingenious reason for the feminine gender of most personified abstractions. Personification of an abstraction as feminine both provides matter for form to shape and raises potentially unruly feminine bodies from their place outside and beneath the allegorical cosmos to a secure position within it. 'It seems that by conferring on personifications the feminine gender matter is surreptitiously raised up from its logical place, which is beneath the lowest *species*, into the realm of abstractions.' (Teskey 23) Convention, both grammatical (in Latin, abstract nouns are feminine) and philosophical (the ancient association of matter with femininity and form with masculinity) thoroughly supports this movement. There is nothing particularly odd,

then, in a male protagonist being represented as a instance of an abstract universal which is personified as feminine, as Guyon is represented by Alma as a lower instance of the abstraction Shamefastnesse, 'You shamefast are, but *Shamefastnesse* itself is shee' (FQ II.x.43 1.9).⁵⁷ Nor is it unusual for Puttenham to represent the body of poetry as feminine, analogous to the bodies of 'great Madames of honour'. Spenser, though, is in control of his figures in a way that Puttenham is not. Shamefastnesse's furious (and immodest) blushing is the only textually visible sign of resistance to her capture and raising into the realm of abstraction, and this resistance or 'noise' is itself immediately captured and exploited by Alma as the manifestation of a truth: 'She is the fountain of your modestee' (FQ II.43.8).⁵⁸ The bodies of the 'great Madames' similarly resist being made to signify the meaning of poems, but Puttenham lacks the art to make the resistance, in turn, mean something, so the suit of clothes vacated by the body of poetry simply replaces it in the metaphorical structure.

The allegorical universe – which we have referred to as a 'cosmos' – demands that its signs be polysemous, and that their meanings be arranged hierarchically. It is a rigid and authoritarian place, above all concerned with fixing figures in a chain of being or a ladder of perfection. But it is also a place of perpetual dramatic action: action that is present as 'noise' in even the most fixed and stratified emblem, action which makes even the most flat and undeveloped allegorical character seem to have a violent will of his or her own. The typical allegorical protagonist, in Fletcher's words, 'is a conquistador; he arbitrates order over chaos by confronting a random collection of people and imposing his fate upon that random collection' (69). This does not simply apply to the hero of an allegorical fiction: all the figures in an allegory take part in this imposition of order. As they encounter other bodies, allegorical persons seek to assimilate those others to themselves. 'Each is like a wilful personality asserting itself to produce a generalized system [...] Allegory in this way allows its creator a maximum of will and wish-

fulfillment with a maximum of restraint, a paradoxical combination that cannot fail to fascinate the reader.' (Fletcher 69)

Fletcher explains this paradoxical combination of will and restraint in terms of the 'daemonic agent'⁵⁹ and the 'cosmic image'. Allegorical figures behave like people possessed by daemons (39). They compartmentalise function, are obsessive in their pursuit of a goal, they act compulsively and do not 'change' in the sense of novelistic development, though they do undergo metamorphoses. They seem to be controlled by 'something outside the sphere of [their] own ego[s]' (Fletcher 41). They may become wholly identified with their daemon, like Spenser's Malbecco. Malbecco begins his story as a type, the jealous and impotent cuckold, and ends it as Jealousy personified: 'he has quight/ Forgot he was a man, and Gealosie is hight' (III.x.60, ll.8-9). This is a rare example, but always a possibility 'when an allegory works at the extreme edge of abstraction' (Kelley 32).⁶⁰ More common is what Teskey calls 'hierarchical, animated idealism', whereby '[a] certain agency is attributed to abstractions that, in predicating themselves, overflow their limits and cascade into the world, where they take up a partial residence in things.' (17)

Fletcher points out that the word daemon originates in the Greek for 'to divide': daemons decide the fate (divide the lot) of allegorical protagonists, but they also divide the allegorical cosmos into compartments, as the psyches of the lover and his lady are divided into landscapes and personifications in *Le roman de la rose*. Daemons represent one further division: that between humans and gods. In classical thought, daemons occupied an intermediate position between the divine and the mortal, and according to Fletcher, the allegorical agent assumes something of this quality: 'not quite human, and not quite godlike' (61). Believers in daemonic agency come to see themselves in such an intermediate position, and consequently emphasise the rank of others in a hierarchic order. Their compulsive movement brings them to a point of stasis: the daemonic agent

hypostatises into the cosmic image. By such a process agency becomes confused with imagery and action becomes a diagram. The hypostatized agent is an emblem.' (Fletcher 69) The confusion of agency and imagery is an abiding characteristic of allegory.

Images can be daemonic (for the iconoclast) as agency can become cosmic. The aspects of Fletcher's theory of daemonic agency consequently have their counterparts in his theory of cosmic imagery. For instance, where daemons compartmentalise function, images are isolated from one another, producing either diagrammatic or surrealistic effects (98-108). Fletcher derives the term kosmos from Aristotle's Poetics, where it appears as one of the eight types of poetic language, using it to signify both the allegorical universe and the individual 'ornament' or signifier that places a figure within that universe, macrocosm and microcosm (Fletcher 108). Any attribute or stylistic device which performs this hierarchic function is a kosmos, the carapace and joints of the metamorphosed Gregor Samsa no less than talismans, heraldic devices or astrological constellations (Fletcher 143-4). In the allegorical cosmos, there is no such thing as an image employed just for decoration: "Mere" ornament no longer exists, in this view (125). As Fletcher implies, with use of the word 'mere', which has the archaic meaning of 'complete', we might also say that all ornament is mere ornament. No allegorical ornament signifies anything in particular. If it does, it ceases to be an ornament and becomes an agent, galvanised and weirdly animate. Allegorical ornament is a pure signifier of status. Puttenham's illustrative metaphor, which (perhaps inadvertently) implies that figures are extraneous ornaments attached to an insubstantial body, may not be as remote from twentieth-century theory as we might at first think.

However, Fletcher's master tropes of daemonic agency and cosmic imagery are not comprehensive or definitive. *Kosmos* endorses and legitimates the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, which, as Teskey shows, can be read as simply a front for the self's illegitimate desire to master, even to devour nature. Daemonic agency is also

problematic. It implies that hypostasis is the only goal of allegory, that a figure who has become its daemon, like Malbecco, represents the sina que non of allegorical expression. Malbecco exhibits that 'fascinating' combination of 'will' and 'restraint' very clearly, but both qualities appear in him in their most stunted forms: not so much will and restraint as wilfulness and constraint. He only 'fascinates' in the sense that he inures us to the violence of capture. His grotesque and stereotypical antics - not for nothing does MacNeice consider him a 'humour' (Varieties 40) – occupy us while his human body is taken over by an abstraction. Against Malbecco we might set other Spenserian figures, equally 'allegorical', but whose trajectory seems to be in the opposite direction, away from daemonic possession. MacNeice compares Malbecco, a representative of 'the Spenser of the humours' (Varieties 40) to representatives of 'the Spenser of the dreams', Guyon and Britomart (Varieties 37-9). Kelley, too, chooses Britomart as an emblem of the allegorical tendency that resists daemonisation. Though Britomart has many of the characteristics of the allegorical protagonist that Fletcher describes - she progresses steadily towards her goal of union with Artegall, she carries cosmic ornaments, which can, on occasion, achieve a kind of agency of their own, she even embodies an abstraction, Chastity - she does not appear to be possessed. She even 'develops' psychologically, from being a lovesick 'silly Mayd' (FQ III.ii.27) into a mature awareness of her destiny as the founder of a British royal line, all the while 'reading', not always correctly, the signs and visions she is given. The psychological developments evidenced by such episodes as Britomart's seaside lament (FQ III.iv.8-10) and her adventures in Busirane's house (FQ III.xii.22-III.xii.44) do not show that Britomart somehow exceeds her allegorical presentation, since they are mediated entirely through allegorical devices. Kelley comments, 'Thus, if Spenser offers an interiorized Britomart who eventually achieves her mature identity, he does so by beginning with a conventional emblem which he then appropriates to instruct [her]' (34).

The differences between Malbecco-type and Britomart-type allegory lead Kelley to suggest that besides Fletcher's daemonic conception of allegory, there exists a second, complementary definition:

A second definition is suggested by [...] de Man's reading of allegory as a figure of narrative (and reading) in the rhetorical tradition inaugurated by Quintilian and Cicero. This allegory is ever and shiftily narrative in its compulsions as it urges readers to read a figure one way and then another, but always figurally, with the conviction that figures never stop, but always succeed each other. De Man's contention that referring elsewhere (or deferring to somewhere else) it itself a narrative, temporal or temporizing gesture reiterates in a modern key the definition offered by classical rhetoricians, for whom allegory is an ironic, extended figure that refers elsewhere (35).

There are a number of reasons, however, to be wary of this definition of a type of allegory that allows for a certain degree of freedom from daemonisation and hypostasis through reading and narrative, referral and deferral, which, for convenience and brevity, we will call 'temporising' allegory, as opposed to Fletcher's 'daemonising' allegory. Kelley's alternative definition risks endorsing a postmodern enthusiasm for 'allegory', defined as self-reflexiveness and combinatorial play, which finds it everywhere and refuses to confront its political problems.⁶¹ More seriously, the conviction of temporising allegory 'that figures never stop' could itself be read as a form of daemonic possession and unremitting propulsion: characters like Britomart, who 'read' their surroundings to discover their destinies are possessed by that reading, rather than by an abstraction. What we imagine to be psychological development is actually the resonance of continual exegetical activity. Possession by reading gives us the impression of a more lively or more interiorised character than possession by abstraction, but all possessed characters end by being fixed in a hierarchy. If Malbecco is Jealousy, Britomart is Genealogy. All her maturational developments are harnessed to the fulfilment of her role as the wellspring of the Tudor bloodline. Her part in the narrative concludes with her restoration of patriarchy (FQ v.vii.42) which is the necessary precondition to her

achievement of that role. Daemonic, hypostatic allegory seems always to contrive a way to dominate its temporising, narrative counterpart even as it draws on its repressed power.⁶² If allegory offers any opportunity for liberation from rigidity, hierarchy and hypostasis it is more fleeting, more elusive than Kelley's 'second definition' suggests.

It is perhaps helpful here to return to Fletcher's attempt to explain the appeal of allegory with his triad of will, restraint and fascination. We have already seen that he conflates wilfulness, which consists in exerting control over and finally consuming nature and other bodies, with will, which might take the form of liberating oneself from the need to control and consume. Restraint, likewise, is confused with constraint, a set of authoritarian and arbitrary prohibitions upon behaviour, when restraint might equally take the form of what Teskey calls 'prudent, empathetic restraint, sophrosyne' (166). Our fascination with allegory, whereby we are acclimatised to its structures and inured to its violence, is the product of its wilfulness and constraint. Will and restraint, especially applied to our capacity for fascination, might produce something different: a critical interest that is alert to allegory's project of capture. Will, restraint and critical interest are not characteristic of allegories; Teskey cites sophrosyne as an explicitly non-allegorical way of being.⁶³ However, it is certain that in its wilful attempt to encompass and constrain all of nature, the whole cosmos, allegory encounters real will and restraint. It is in these encounters that readers' critical interest develops.

From this point of view, Kelley offers better evidence that allegory does offer an opportunity for liberation in her conviction that allegory survives its devastating Romantic reconstruction to continue into modernity, albeit as a mutation. Writers and readers – including all three poets discussed in this thesis – continue to believe that allegory is interesting and useful. This thesis argues that allegory allows the poets concerned to inscribe into it their unease, resistance and struggle with it, precisely because its overall tendency is towards hierarchy and hypostasis. Those moments of disquiet

might then figure other forms of political dissent. An alternative, narrative and temporising *kind* of allegory is an overstatement, but there is no reason to believe that the hypostatic and daemonising form cannot be shot through with moments of liberation, wilfulness with instances of will, constraint with restraint, fascination with the capacity to critique it.

IV: ALLEGORY AND MODERNITY

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there is still a critical debate over allegory's extension into modernity. It seems that the term itself is more robust than the forms, figures and genres it has been used to describe. Opponents of modern allegory, or those who would at least like to limit its scope, sometimes do so on pragmatic grounds: we have already encountered arguments for the limitation of the allegorical canon by narrowing definitions of allegory to exclude, for instance, hermeneutic allegory. Reading Greenblatt's claim that the impulse to make allegories is fundamentally the same as that which impels 'discourse' (viii), or the scholar whom Kelley quotes as asserting in quick succession that the work of Hayden White, the productions of a shadowy entity called 'the Hegelian-Marxist agenda', and indeed, 'literary realism' itself are all '[e]qually allegorical' (Kelley 8), it is possible to have some sympathy with those who feel that critical enthusiasm for allegorical making needs, at all costs, to be restrained.

Some of the most convincing approaches to achieving such restraint take the form of defining the historical and philosophical conditions under which allegory emerged and flourished. Though allegorical making may take place where these conditions are not present, it cannot be assigned to a broader, historicised category of 'allegory'. Such a category, these critics claim, could not survive the intellectual reconstructions of the Enlightenment, nor the emergence of Romantic symbol theory. Teskey presents a sophisticated version of this argument, which ends, as it must, by

undoing itself (148-167). He begins by restating the position familiar from Whitman, Van Dyke and Allen, among others: 'Allegories are historical, it would seem, inasmuch as they share specifiable conditions and contexts' (148). When allegories begin to lose the support of a unified 'culture of the sign', they attempt to compensate for its loss by evolving complex private symbolic systems, that is, by packing the numinous context which formerly existed in the cultural ether into the work itself. This is a process which Teskey sees beginning as early as the sixteenth century, with mannerist painting, accelerating through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and reaching a 'terminus' and reversal with Romantic symbol theory 'The collapsing of numinous contexts into numinous works reached its terminus, when the process reversed itself [...] No effectual distinction was made between [the] object and its representation, between existence in the work and in the world'. (149) Having collapsed numinous contexts into numinous works, Romantic writers and theorists proceed to expand the collapsed numinousness out again, not into 'culture', but into 'nature'. (Not surprisingly, Teskey at this point invokes W.B. Yeats's A Vision).65 The distinction between allegory and symbol is thus a function of the ideological distinction between culture and nature. The modernist reversal of prejudice regarding allegory and symbol, which we encounter in its most extreme form in Walter Benjamin's study The Origin of German Tragic Drama, might then be regarded as an attempt to reinvest cultural products with numinousness, a numinousness which is ironically recast as the (natural) phosphorescence of decay.

However, at least as far as Teskey is concerned, this reversal lacks the significance of the Romantic revolution that produced symbol theory. He sees the symbol itself now in decay, 'the occasion for the more technical manifestations of literary theory', inspiring anthropology and deconstructionist criticism (156). Another outlet for allegorical impulses after the breakdown of the culture of the sign is literary history: 'The practice of literary history begins where the history of allegory ends' (150). The late

twentieth-century has, in turn, seen the breakdown of literary history, 'the last stages of a process that began in the Enlightenment when allegory ceased to function historically' (157). Teskey's history of allegory is one of progressive decay: the decay of myth into allegory, allegory's decay into symbol theory and literary history, the decay of those into deconstructive investigations like Paul de Man's into the inhuman or non-human character of figural language. It is a view of allegory's history which resembles Benjamin's allegorical commentary on Klee's 'Angelus Novus': 66

Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage on wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet [...] a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁶⁷

'Progress' is the problem for Teskey's history of allegory's emergence from decay and its own subsequent decay into institutional existence as theory and literary history. Such a 'history' is at variance with the retrogressive character of allegorical making. A progressive, tradition-based model for the history of allegory cannot cope with, cannot even envisage, the violence of allegorical making:

the existence of a continuous allegorical tradition from the sixth century B.C. well into the eighteenth century is by no means a matter of fact. It is at best a serviceable hypothesis, allowing the investigator to imagine a continuum of handing on, into which changes, even ones as radical as Christianity, are introduced as mere modifications to progress. The grounds for this kind of philological scholarship are [...] in a sort of moral utilitarianism about culture itself. (161)

A desire to make culture progress, even if the progress in question is progressive decay, 'must repress any real knowledge of creative work, which is, as Baudelaire shrewdly observed, the enemy of progress.' (Teskey 162) Like Benjamin's angel of history, allegory sees history not as a chain of events, but as a single catastrophe. Allegory is not ahistorical, but nor is it receptive to chronometric limitation. The most appropriate way to represent allegory is not in terms of a tradition, or chain of events, but a single image,

like Benjamin's. Teskey finds his emblem for the treatment of history by allegory in a modification of its master figure, the microcosm/macrocosm analogy. Because allegories collect the fragments of the past and consume them they are closely connected to waste, have 'a tang of the excremental about them' (167). As the work (or Man, or microcosm) progressively seeks to take the world (or nature, or macrocosm) within itself, it also produces waste 'and this waste is the substance of history, of a past that the analogy of microcosm and macrocosm cannot absorb. The material remains of the past are the evidence of our failure [...] to coincide with the world.' (167) As the microcosm expands within the world, the space left it narrows, and eventually, the microcosm is forced to confront its waste product, history. 'Therein,' Teskey claims, 'lies the value of allegory to us: it teaches us to reflect on the past as the real' (167).

This pessimistic summary of allegory, history and cultural value seems anxious to appear restrained and cautious, but seems nonetheless to have absorbed some of the megalomania of the microcosm/macrocosm analogy. While it is impossible to deny that allegory, as a form and genre, is persistently involved in consumption, violent struggle and the production of waste, it is excessive to claim that its value resides only in its ability to show us that history consists of these things. (Incidentally, the past is not necessarily made any more *real* by its presentation to us as waste: excrement is not more real a thing than any other.) Teskey's deconstructionist-influenced practice produces some fine analyses of the workings of allegory, but his reluctance to allow that it might have a value beyond prompting awareness of its own systematising vicegrip risks mystifying the operations of allegory even as it tries to demystify them.⁶⁹

This re-mystification is common to many poststructuralist accounts of allegory in modernity. In his essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' Paul de Man treats it briefly as part of a larger discourse on irony and allegory. For de Man, irony and allegory are 'linked in their common discovery of a truly temporal predicament', which is barred to

the 'mystifying' forms of symbolism and mimesis.⁷⁰ Allegory finds this genuine temporality through its striving towards a point which it can never reach. De Man posits this point as an origin made irrecoverable by the passage of time, but it is also valuable to think of it in terms of Teskey's 'singularity', a truth situated 'outside' the allegorical world which has the effect of drawing us into its centre:

it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign which precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* [...] of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this sign to be pure anteriority. (207)

Irony, meanwhile, divides temporal experience into a past in which the self is wholly naïve and a future in which it is knowing, but worried about returning to naïveté again. The ironic voice is aware of its own previous 'inauthenticity' but can 'only restate it on an increasingly conscious level [...] endlessly caught in the impossibility of making this knowledge available to the empirical world' (222). Allegory and irony are clearly different in mood and structure: allegory is successive where irony is synchronic, irony exists in a permanent present, where allegory is memorial and prefigurative, evading the here and now. Equally clearly, to de Man, both modes open 'a temporal void' in which the sign is divorced entirely from its meaning.71 The danger of such a scheme is that the void, the total disjunction of signification, can be fetishised and mystified in its turn. De Man implies an awareness of this as he indicates the vulnerability of allegory and irony in a collision with empirical experience: 'Both [allegory and irony] are fully demystified when they remain within the realm of their respective languages but are totally vulnerable to renewed blindness once they leave it for the empirical world'. His own ironic discourse can, in fact, be shown to be vulnerable in just this way. As Kelley comments:

the cumulative effect of [de Man's] readings is surprisingly transhistorical: allegory becomes the property of language in general, a plot of figures undone and redone that is "modernist" insofar as it

echoes twentieth-century modernism's sense that it is cut off from [...] history. For this reason, the "rhetoric of temporality" he ascribes to allegory does not include asking how it might change over time to register variable pressures on figural speech (Kelley 10-11).

Kelley's study Re-inventing Allegory, one of the best accounts available of post-Renaissance allegory, attempts to synthesise some poststructuralist concerns with a more humanistic outlook, which, for instance, recognises the importance of pathos in modern allegory. The book, arranged in chronological order, concentrates heavily on the Romantic reconstruction of allegory and theory, though it also includes chapters on Spenser, seventeenth-century, later nineteenth-century and twentieth-century allegory. Kelley defends this literary historical scheme despite its flaws and partiality: 'allegory is a historically contingent genre and idea whose survival in modernity retrospectively conveys the cultural and literary interest of its earlier forms and historical moments. With each "return call" on the past, modern allegory makes one of many "uncertain and incremental return[s] to a starting point" '(13). The compares this process to the fortda game, by which an infant reassures itself, and grows more confident in, its absent mother's eventual return. This is an optimistic reading of allegory's tendency to 'improvise [...] with what it rips off (Teskey 163). It would mean that, for instance, the sense of MacNeice's 'Speak, parrot' is not a simply regression from Skelton or from Shakespeare. Instead, the allusion imports the knowledge of its own regressiveness as growing confidence in the allegory's function, in the reader's ability to read the figure.

Kelley expresses a timely unease with poststructuralist readings of allegory, suggesting that their commitment to ruin and decay, to the vastness and unbridgeability of the gap between allegorical signs and the things they signify can itself become a fixed, rigid and reified sign. This is clear in her discussion of Timothy Bahti's 'firmly deconstructive' reading of the closing argument of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (257). In this passage Benjamin describes how emblems in the *Trauerspiel* decay into

more grotesque, ruined and horrific forms: the palace, either verbally or physically, becoming a dungeon, the bower into the tomb, the crown a wreath of bloodied cypress. This decay is possibly infinite: 'As those who lose their footing turn somersaults in their fall, so would the allegorical intention fall from emblem to emblem down into the dizziness of its bottomless depths' (GTD 232). Then, however, Benjamin suggests that allegorical imagery undergoes a reversal in order to become signs of redemption: 'Ultimately in the death-signs of the baroque the direction of the allegorical reflection is reversed; on the second part of its wide arc it returns, to redeem.' (GTD 232) For Bahti, this reversal exposes the absolute divergence of allegorical signs and their meanings: that is its redemptive message; allegory is the 'denial of the sign', liberating us from the delusions of signification. ⁷³ Kelley likens this conclusion to 'a turnstile with all exits closed' (257). Instead, she reads the reversal that Benjamin describes as akin to the mysterious somersault (Kelley calls it a 'backwards leap') that at end of the Inferno, Virgil performs to get himself and Dante out of Hell (Inf. canto XXXIV, Il. 76-81). This acrobatic feat, which 'puts readers and travellers on the path towards resurrection, is what Benjamin claims as the redemptive opportunity offered by allegorical images and emblems.' (Kelley 257) It is an ingenious illustration, and a fine example of Kelley's refreshing optimism with regard to the cultural value of allegories. However, some of Benjamin's remarks on the consequences of the 'reversal' might lead us to doubt whether it can be figured within an allegory, as Kelley claims it is in the Commedia:

Allegory [...] thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it: the secret, privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of a world without hope. All this vanishes with this *one* about-turn, in which the immersion of allegory has to clear away the final phantasmagoria of the objective and, left entirely to its own devices, re-discovers itself, not playfully in the earthly world of things, but seriously under the eyes of heaven. [...] Allegory goes away empty-handed. (*GTD* 232-3)

Those allegorical characteristics that Benjamin claims are cancelled by the 'reversal'

resemble those of Dante's Hell (though Dante ironises 'secret, privileged knowledge': the occupants of Hell have a dim foreknowledge of the 'future', and can predict Dante's exile, but have to ask the pilgrim for news of their living friends in the 'present') and it is true that with Virgil's somersault, Dante begins the part of his progress which takes place 'under the eyes of heaven'. But if allegory is transformed, losing its peculiarities, at this point in the *Commedia*, then we would not be justified in referring to the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* as allegories. Allegory would already have gone away, empty-handed, and in Purgatory and Paradise we would read its afterlife. The reader would find an eternal, resurrected world already available, and the emblematic pageantry of the Earthly Paradise, for instance, would be redundant.

A more likely explanation⁷⁴ of the reversal that gets Dante and Virgil out of Hell is that it is a *figure* for the kind of redemption that Benjamin describes, or, to put it more accurately and more convolutedly, it is a figure for the pilgrim's ascent with Beatrice out of the transfigured Eden into Paradise, which is turn a figure for his understanding of love in God at the close of the poem, which is a figure for redemption, which means there are no more figures. Benjamin describes the movement of allegorical intention from emblem to emblem as a fall, because that is how it is in the *Trauerspiel*, and, we might say, in modernity. But an allegory might cast that fall as an ascent.⁷⁵ Allegories can capture their own redemptive potential and recycle it back into their textual systems, make figures out of it. So we should be wary of the claim that the reversal into redemption is something we can actually witness in and abstract from allegorical texts, rather than construct painstakingly as we explore each figure.

The paragraph above suggests some of the difficulties encountered in evolving a Benjaminian model for the study of allegory. Benjamin's work initiates the study of allegory in modernity and he remains unsurpassed as a theorist of the mode. He is influential: his meditations on history, allegory and the decay of signs, beginning in *The*

Origin of German Tragic Drama, and expanded in his study of Baudelaire, the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', and parts of the unfinished Passagen-Werk, enable a large proportion of today's postmodern allegory theory, perhaps most significantly the work of Paul de Man. Nonetheless, his books and essays are also resistant to appropriation by other writers. He is often 'pillaged', as Charles Rosen puts it in 'The Ruins of Walter Benjamin'; (Smith 130) and the result of such pillage is seldom other than travesty. Rosen also draws attention to the 'unteachable' qualities of Benjamin's criticism, contrasting his practice with that of the academic 'professional' Harold Bloom (Smith 171-2):

Benjamin cannot be taught. His criticism imposes nothing. His metaphors for the most part glance at and then fall back from the work of literature [...] His interpretations do not give meaning to, but strip meaning from, the work, allowing the inessential to drop off and the work to appear in its own light. He does not place the work historically but reveals its integrity: history in his account finds its way to the work. (172-3)

As he cannot be 'taught' to students, so Benjamin cannot be 'used' by scholars. His belief in the autonomy of works of art is expressed in the autonomy of his own criticism. Where the critic intent on finding a philosophical model with which to discuss a work of art demands summaries, Benjamin offers ambivalence. For him the allegory is both the sign, itself decaying, of the decaying material and figural objects which constitute modern culture (seventeenth-century 'early' modern as well as twentieth-century: Benjamin's modernity begins its trajectory in the world of the *Trauerspiel*) and the latent agent of a resurrected world which can only be accessed through death and decay. Allegory is a confrontation with a morbid face – the facies hippocratica – in the form of a 'petrified, primordial landscape' (GTD 166) in which inheres the possibility of awakening in 'God's world' to an angel's countenance (232). We can read this as Kelley does: 'when readers recognize that decaying emblems are just decaying signs, they recognize the world of eternity and resurrection to which allegorical

signs point' (257), but are still left with a problem. Redemption is not, for Benjamin, dependent upon the reader making an intuitive leap,⁷⁶ it is there from the beginning in the allegorical sign, present not despite its decay but solely because of it:

For it is to misunderstand the allegorical entirely if we make a distinction between the store of images, in which this about-turn into redemption takes place, and that grim store which signifies death and damnation. For it is precisely visions of the frenzy of destruction, in which all earthly things collapse into a heap of ruins, which reveal the limit set upon allegorical contemplation, rather than its ideal quality. (232)

German Tragic Drama expresses both intense scepticism and hope for the eventual redemption of allegory. In order to understand what that redemption might mean, it is helpful to consider the idealist strain in Benjamin's thought.⁷⁷ He does not accept that the word is an arbitrarily constructed sign for a thing. Instead, it is a ruined or disintegrated idea, with its own potential for integrity. This does not mean that ideas are supralinguistic. On the contrary:

The idea is something linguistic, it is that element of the symbolic in the essence of any word. In empirical perception, in which words have been fragmented, they possess, in addition to their more or less hidden, symbolic aspect, an obvious, profane meaning. It is the task of the philosopher to restore, by representation, the primacy of the symbolic character of the word, in which the idea is given self-consciousness, and that is the opposite of all outwardly directed communication. ('Epistemo-Critical Prologue', *GTD* 36)

'Representation' is the most important element of this contention. The idea may be perceived only by constructing its representation, which means, for Benjamin, investigating objectively all the significations of a word. 'Phenomena are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them. Ideas are, rather, their objective, virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation. [...] Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.' (34) Such objective investigation is only possible if one believes, as Benjamin did, that it is only language 'fragmented' for communicative purposes that is subjective and arbitrary in character, and that language is itself an

independent system, in which ideas are embedded. The critic's task is to make visible this independence in the work of art, through the mediation of time, of history.

This process of representation is central to Benjamin's theory of allegory. Figures and emblems are not contained by ideas, any more than a constellation contains stars. Nor do they embody ideas: they are not vessels which contain the overflow of abstract universals into the material world. Instead, they are fragments of an idea, an idea which we will perceive only when we have constructed it out of the fragments. The exploration of each fragment's signification, the examination of its relation to all other fragments produces the dizzying movement of allegorical intention from one emblem to another. When that movement is complete, and only then, we are in a position to perceive and acknowledge ideas, not as patterns restored to their origins, but constructed in time. This is the 'redemption' which allegory offers. Benjaminian allegory is a vast undertaking in time, since its own meanings are always marked by time passing, by decay happening. Benjamin shows that allegorical forms appear atemporal only through their immersion in time. The facies hippocratica, and its surrounding petrified landscape, look like timeless emblems, but can appear to be so only because of decay, which takes place in and over time. Even though 'ideas are timeless constellations' (GTD 34) allegory does not recognise ideas as its goal or end, for to do so would be to relinquish its peculiar, time-drenched status: its melancholy, aggregative love of dead objects and esoterica, its hopelessness. That can only happen when its representation has been constructed, when we understand the idea that is 'Allegory'. As I have suggested, although an allegorical text can figure the idea and its redemptive potential (thereby fragmenting it again) it is doubtful whether this redemption is directly perceptible in allegorical texts themselves.

Benjamin's theory of allegory operates at the extremes of thinking about this figure, mode or genre. What he calls allegory in many ways is scarcely recognisable as the literary figure or genre that we have been discussing in this chapter. As Kelley

comments, he is 'the first modern allegorist to reject openly the "stable, hierarchized" world and vision that once sustained allegory's will-to-power as an engine or mechanism that grinds up narrative and character on its way to preordained abstractions.' (255) His conception of the redemption of allegory allows us a way of thinking about the form in modernity which, while bearing in mind the fragmentary, decayed and violent character of allegorical imagery, does not necessarily lead to a deconstructive closed 'turnstile' or to 'allelophagy'. In illustration of this, this section will conclude with a few thoughts on Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', which begins with one of the best-known allegories in modern critical theory and philosophy:⁷⁸

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight (*Illuminations* 245).

This, like its counterpart, the allegory on 'Angelus Novus', is structured to resemble an allegorical emblem: a picture accompanied by story and commentary. It is ornamented with faintly Orientalist details like the 'Turkish attire' and the 'hookah' which are irrelevant to the allegory's 'meaning' as described in the commentary, but are nonetheless vital signifiers of luxury, fantasy and illusionism, which, in Kelley's words, 'remind[...] us that allegory, like automata, presents theatrical doubles of human shapes [...] By way of such emblems allegory is productively laminated to a culture and reality where theology had best [...] stay out of sight.' (264)⁷⁹ Bahti points out that though Zorn's English translation allows us to conjecture that the controlling agent in this tableau is Theology, the hidden hunchback, the German text assigns more control to the

puppet, which 'takes theology into its service'. For Bahti, the image (the puppet) and the controlling agent (the hunchback) – and by extension, materialism and theology – simply reflect one another, which effectively hands over control to the visible image: 'the rhetorical "apparatus" – the puppet, historical materialism – is in control of, or masters, the philosophic topic' (Bahti 200). Kelley suggests that Benjamin's own translation of this text into French represents further complication of this issue of agency (262). Since it is clear that, whether the primary agent here is materialism or theology, one cannot function without the other – the hunchback declares the puppet's moves, while the puppet declares the hunchback's wizened, shrunken, below-stairs status – I want to concentrate not on agency, but on winning.

The game played by this odd partnership of historical materialism and theology is the writing of history; to win is to ensure that 'nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history.' (Illuminations 246) When Benjamin writes of winning elsewhere in the 'Theses', however, it is always in the context of the victory of the opponent: 'Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.' (247) This is what gives the first vignette its ironic flavour and its panache: historical materialism has plenty to fear from its opponents, even with the secret services of theology enlisted. Historical materialism is an allegorical method in that it sites history's redemption in the same ruin and decay in which allegory's is to be found. By seizing upon 'a memory as it flashes up at the moment of danger' (247) the materialist historian does (at great speed - we notice that the process of decay has speeded up immeasurably in late modernity, by comparison with its plodding, melancholy seventeenth-century counterpart) the critical and allegorical work which is necessary to construct and represent history. This is explicitly not 'additive' work, amassing data to fill a past imagined as empty (254). It is not the

work traditionally recognised as allegory's: taking the material remains of the past and stacking them hierarchically. It is the work of recognising 'a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past' and taking that chance to 'blast a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time cancelled; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history' (254). It is, analogously, the work of redeeming allegory by blasting away its attachment to dead objects, its secret knowledge, its hopelessness, its violence, its commitment to order, preserving while cancelling the things that make it itself. They are preserved because the individual allegorical text cannot achieve redemption, only its reified image; cancelled because in every allegorical emblem this potential for redemption nevertheless inheres. 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' shows us what the vehicle of modern allegory has preserved from its withered, theological tenor, and what it must discard if it is to liberate its writer or its reader. It requires only that modern allegorists attempt to catch up with it, while it is propelled irresistibly into the future.

V: NATIONAL QUESTIONS

(i)

In his attack upon the primacy afforded to the symbol by Goethe and Schopenhauer, Benjamin comments '[s]uch arguments have continued to be the standard ones until very recently. Even great artists and exceptional theorists, such as Yeats, still assume that allegory is a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning' (GTD 162). Benjamin's footnote refers to the opening of William Blake and his Illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*:

William Blake was the first writer of modern times to preach the indissoluble marriage of all great art with symbol. There had been allegorists and teachers of allegory in plenty, but the symbolic

imagination, or, as Blake preferred to call it, "vision" is not allegory, being a "representation of what actually exists really and unchangeably." A symbol is indeed the only possible representation of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame; while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to fancy, and not to imagination: the one is a revelation, the other an amusement. ⁸⁰

Largely as a result of Benjamin's own efforts and influence, 'such arguments' are no longer heard. Indeed, the reversal of prejudice in favour of 'allegory' has been so successful that 'allegory' sometimes has assumed the 'falsely evaluative function' which Fletcher, in 1964, ascribed to 'symbol' (Fletcher 14). Allegory is factitious, selfconscious, postmodern – good; symbol is totalising, monolithic, coercive – bad. This is a misreading of Benjamin's position, for if anything emerges clearly from the dense, esoteric prose of German Tragic Drama, it is that representation must involve material objects, and those material objects must decay, because they are subject to the action of time. His point is not that allegory is better or more ideologically correct than symbol, but that the distinction between them is an ideological one. In 'Symbolism in Painting', Yeats records sitting for a German symbolist painter who is hostile to allegory, and 'would not put even a lily or a rose or a poppy into a picture to express purity, love or sleep because he thought such emblems were allegorical, and had their meaning by a traditional and not by a natural right' (Essays and Introductions 147). It was this organicism that Benjamin challenged in German Tragic Drama, countering the false opposition between nature and tradition by affirming that all meaning, even the meaning of nature itself, is mediated by history: 'But if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also true that it has always been allegorical. Significance and death both come to fruition in historical development' (GTD 166). Yeats's response to the painter is interesting from this point of view:

I said that the rose and the lily and the poppy were so married, by their colour and their odour and their use, to love and purity and sleep, [...] and had been so long a part of the imagination of the world, that a symbolist

might use them to help out his meaning without becoming an allegorist. I think I quoted the lily in the hand of the angel in Rossetti's *Annunciation*, and the lily in the jar in his *Girlhood of Mary, Virgin*, and thought they made the more important symbols, the women's bodies, and the angels' bodies, and the clear morning light, take that place, in the great procession of Christian symbols, where they can alone have all their meaning and all their beauty (147, emphases added).

Yeats constructs orders of meaning (an allegorising reaction to the polysemy of Christian symbolism) so that allegory is presented as a kind of handmaid to symbolism. This suggests a route for the modernist recuperation of allegory: 'relegated to mere ciphering and deciphering' as W.J. McCormack puts it, by Romantic insistence on the primacy of the transcendent symbol, it creeps back into respectability by disguising itself as allegoresis, 'helping out' the construction and the perception of symbols.⁸¹ Redemption through ruin indeed! Nonetheless, Yeats recognises that figures can have meaning only in and through the action of language and time, and acknowledges that allegory plays a vital, if subordinate, role in the making of a striking and influential image, like Michaelangelo's horned Moses (148). He contrasts this blend of allegory with symbolism with Tintoretto's painting The Origin of the Milky Way: 'allegory without any symbolism[...] a moment's amusement for our fancy'. Here, at his most dismissive of mere allegory, Yeats approaches an articulation of its peculiar character and value. Symbol is infinitely polysemous, he claims, but 'when you have said, "That woman there is Juno, and the milk out of her breast is making the Milky Way," you have told the meaning of the other, and the fine painting which has added so much irrelevant beauty, has not told it better' (148). From recognising the connection between allegory and 'metalanguage' it is only a brief step to the recognition of its links with 'writing', its logocentric character, and the debate concerning the extent to which allegory can represent discourse.82

Yeats seems to recognise, if not quite to articulate, another aspect of allegory in his introduction to his selection from Spenser. Allegory – or at least, moral, didactic

allegory – was not natural to Spenser, but was a result of his attempt to be of his time,

or rather of the time that was all but at hand [...] he persuaded himself that we enjoy Virgil because of the virtues of Aeneas, and so planned out his immense poem that it would set before the imagination of citizens [...] innumerable blameless Aeneases. He had learned to put the State, which desires all the abundance for itself, in the place of the Church, and he found it possible to be moved by expedient emotions, merely because they were expedient, and to think serviceable thoughts with no self-contempt. He loved his Queen [...] a great deal because she was the image of the State which had taken possession of his conscience.⁸³

Spenserian allegory is, in this view, distinctively (early) modern: it is the result of the State's rejection of Church control, and the State's need for numinous forms to represent itself. It will find those forms in a decayed and distorted pre-Christian mythology, and its servants in the allegorist who is eager to let the State 'take possession of his conscience'. Teskey's account of the emergence of Renaissance allegory, published in *Allegory and Violence* in 1996, is virtually identical to this. 4 Yeats associates the moral allegorist in Spenser with the author of *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, with the colonial official, 'the first of many Englishmen to see nothing but what he was desired to see. Could he have gone [to Ireland] as a poet merely, he might have found among its poets more wonderful imaginations than even those islands of Phaedria and Acrasia' (372). Allegory, like Spenser, is prone to give 'its heart to the State' (373) and become a sign of that which is inimical to the welfare of those whom the State oppresses. 85

(ii)

The modernist reversal of prejudice with regard to allegory and symbol is firmly established in Irish literary and cultural studies. Most critics with an interest in allegory in Irish culture refer to Benjamin, whose influence on the philosophy of history has been particularly important for postcolonial historians and those with an interest in 'subaltern' movements.⁸⁶ These critics are usually optimistic about the usefulness of

allegory as a liberating device. Luke Gibbons, challenging the notion that allegory is always hostile to human particularity, comments on the dying declaration of five agrarian insurgents, hanged in Waterford in 1762, that 'by the mysterious Queen Sieve, they did not mean a poetic abstraction, but a "distressed harmless old woman, blind of one eye, who still lives at the foot of the mountain in the neighbourhood" '. This poignant declaration indicates that allegory does not necessarily have an encoding, exclusive function: these Whiteboys were trying to find figural expression for a reality which was 'too painful' even to acknowledge among themselves. Furthermore, Gibbons argues, it proves that a particular human being can co-exist in a figure with her symbolic resonance, thus offering some liberating potential; in short, that 'capture' is not always successful (Gibbons 20, 142). The first point is more convincing than the second: though some human particularity may remain in a personification of Mother Ireland, because the allegorist who invokes her also has a particular old woman in his or her mind as a model, there is also a clear hierarchy of reference between the particular and its symbolic resonance. If there were as much instability as Gibbons suggests around the figure of Queen Sieve it is unlikely that the Whiteboys would have made such a point of denying her allegorical resonance.

The questions of particularity and allegory which surround the figure of Mother Ireland, or her prettier and sexier relative, the *spéirbhean* of the *aisling* genre, continue to exercise poets and critics. The debate usually follows the lines of wider debates about the function of myth in Irish culture, summarised here by Clair Wills:

On the one hand there is the belief that myth constitutes the means of access to the primitive and 'atavistic' part of the Irish psyche (and [...] community), without which it is impossible to gain a true understanding of the political situation [...] On the other there is the view that the use of myth is a corruption of pure poetic imaginative discourse and an aestheticization of politics which leads inexorably to fascism.⁸⁷

Wills suggests that younger Northern Irish poets reject both of these views of the

political resonance of myth. Paul Muldoon and Medbh McGuckian, particularly, counter them with an attitude that suggests 'Adorno's model for understanding the political nature of modernist hermeticism [...] the hermetic nature of High Modernism preserves the specificity of the aesthetic.' (9) She continues 'This kind of aesthetic representation has an interventionist function. While engaging with the construction of political discourse in Ireland, it is saying to an inquitous system of political representation [...] the normal processes of political negotiation have failed, and I will take no part in them.' (77)

The terms of this debate, and Wills's lucid critiques of them, suggest what is missing in the critical study of allegory in modern Irish literature. Almost without exception 'allegory' is interpreted as 'allegory of national identity'. 88 It would not be an exaggeration to say that, within an Irish context, the study of literary allegory is a part of the study of colonial themes and postcoloniality in literature, and but for the emergence of postcolonial theories of Irish literary history, allegory would scarcely be mentioned. For instance, Mary Jean Corbett's recent book-length study, Allegories of Union, examines in great detail the representation of political Union between Britain and Ireland in terms of marriage plots in novels by Maria Edgeworth, Sydney Owenson, Thomas Carlyle, Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Kingsley. She also considers Trollope's depiction of the Famine in Castle Richmond (1860), and sociological and political writings on Union, Irishness and Englishness by Edmund Burke, John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold. It is a thorough, original and scholarly study of the intersection of domestic, racial and colonial discourses, so it is all the more surprising that one critical discourse, that of the theory of allegory, is barely considered at all. Apart from a couple of references to Kelley's book in her conclusion (Corbett 182), there are no considerations of either the formal or the political characteristics of allegory: 'allegory', the definition of which has been a matter of so much controversy, is treated as an entirely transparent term, its

meaning stable and agreed in advance. It is a remarkable omission: the more so because the rest of the argument is so well-informed and well-researched. The questions that are raised by even a theorist as blind to the value and pleasures of allegory as Yeats technical questions about how it produces meaning, questions about its apparently authoritarian political texture - do not arise in Corbett's book, nor, for the most part in most critical studies of Irish literature which deal with allegory. One exception to this general rule is the W.J. McCormack, who brings to discussions of seventeenth-century Gaelic history as it is appropriated by nineteenth-century fiction⁸⁹ and to analyses of modern poetry ⁹⁰ a developed sense of contemporary allegory theory and its relevance to his subjects. He has thoroughly absorbed the argument of German Tragic Drama, as the discussion in Dissolute Characters demonstrates, and is convinced that it is translatable to other baroque cultural productions than the Trauerspiel. His account in From Burke to Beckett of LeFanu's Uncle Silas establishes 'allegory' as a rhetorical figure and generic definition at work in the novel, resisting the temptation to use it as a synonym for 'representation of'. In the essay on Kinsella, he considers allegory as a polyvalent rhetorical device, which Kinsella uses to oppose 'the oneness of Death', rather than to represent an identity or a nation (72). McCormack's discussions of allegory, however, are embedded in the wider context of his work on European critical theory and Irish literary history, and do not amount to a sustained account of the politics and aesthetics of modern Irish allegory.

Neither do I claim that this thesis is such an account. It would be a far larger project than a study of this length and nature could accommodate. However, it does offer sustained close readings of the work of three Irish poets in terms of recent allegory theory. The poets discussed raise different issues in and display different perspectives on allegory. They share membership of a post-Yeatsian generation — Clarke and MacNeice directly, Kinsella at a slight remove — which is often characterised

as being overshadowed by Yeats's achievement, either in imitation of it or furious reaction against it. Although I consider briefly all three poets' relationship to Yeats, this thesis is concerned only incidentally with such literary-historical and influential connections. Each chapter should be regarded both as presenting a case study which analyses a particular area of modern allegory in an Irish context and as a contribution to the study of each poet, discussing the part allegory plays in his work. There is no published study of Clarke as allegorist, either at article or book length. McCormack's essay is the only work on Kinsella which makes a case for allegory as an aesthetic and political category in his poetry, rather than simply teasing out allegorical correspondences and representations. MacNeice, as a theorist of allegory and selfdeclared parabolist, has received most attention in this regard. However, considering MacNeice's repeated commentary on forms of allegory, fable and parable in his own and others' work, the volume of criticism is not great, and the poem that I consider most fully in Chapter 3, Autumn Sequel, is usually dismissed as substandard without consideration of either its function as preparation for the admired parable poetry of MacNeice's late career, or its claim to be an allegorical work in its own right. Each chapter of this thesis takes a long poem (or sequence, in the case of Kinsella) as its focus of attention. This is not because a long poem is 'more allegorical' than a short one, though the long poem allows space to establish the structures of order and hierarchies to which allegory is devoted, and to express unease with, disrupt and even dismantle those structures, as each poet does. These poems – Clarke's Mnemosyne Lay in Dust (1966), MacNeice's Autumn Sequel (1954), Kinsella's New Poems (1973) - are chosen for their concerns with subjects that are closely allied to allegory, as figure and genre, respectively: psychoanalysis, history and rhetoric. This is, of course, only a fraction of the encyclopaedic range of subjects with which allegory is linked in each case; however, they all offer perspectives on these Irish poets apart from, or related more obliquely and

productively to, their stances on 'national questions'.

Chapter 2, "Mind spewed": Allegories of Mind and Memory in Austin Clarke's Poetry' begins with a discussion of the relation between allegory and disordered mental states, and explores theoretical connections between them. It then traces briefly the development of Clarke's understanding of allegory from the emblematics of *Pilgrimage* and Other Poems to the more interrogative Mnemosyne Lay in Dust. The account of Mnemosyne which follows draws on Clarke's Keatsian sources to examine the relationship between the goddess of memory and the masturbatory sexuality of Maurice Devane, Clarke's protagonist and alter ego, and the effect of this on the structure and imagery of the poem. Finally, the chapter discusses Maurice's food-loathing and anorexia in terms of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory of abjection. This psychoanalytical material is applied to the structure of Mnemosyne to argue that a linear progress narrative cannot account for Maurice Devane's development and suggests instead a structure based on the boundaries and borders which characterise abjection.

Chapter 3, "The Stern Door Marked In Exile": Allegories of History in Louis MacNeice's Poetry' seeks both to reassess the critical profile of poems collected in *Holes in the Sky* (1948) and *Ten Burnt Offerings* (1952) and the long poem *Autumn Sequel* (1954) and to examine MacNeice's attitude to allegory in terms of his concern with history. It examines some issues approached in section IV above, suggesting theoretical grounds for MacNeice's allegorical treatment of the past, concluding that MacNeice's figural allegorism has historical and political resonance which has been ignored in studies of his mid-period poetry, largely because of the critical consensus that these poems are substandard. The chapter also offers an account of *Autumn Sequel*, paying particular attention to the poem's structures of sentiment and nostalgia as they manifest themselves in MacNeice's allusions to his contemporaries. *Autumn Sequel* is also considered as a quest narrative in which MacNeice works out both his unease with

allegory's potential for hypostasis and strategies for eluding it in future allegorical poems. Though the main concern of this chapter is the period 1946-1954, a brief concluding section looks at the development of MacNeice's allegorical practice in his last three collections of poetry.

Chapter 4, "Ever more painstaking care': Allegory, Rhetoric and Encyclopaedic Form in Thomas Kinsella's Poetry' looks at a poet whose close association with Clarke belies his very different attitude towards allegory's attachment to order, hierarchy and authority. Clarke mounts more resistance than either of the other two poets to allegory, Kinsella is perhaps most involved in its rage to order. Chapter 4 examines Kinsella's commitment to the de-elaboration of his language through the revision of his work and assesses Kinsella's search for psychic order, asking to what extent elaborate language might be emotionally necessary in such a search. It also considers the political place of ornamental language, and whether Kinsella's desire to uncover order in experience can be productive of political liberation for poet or reader. Finally, this chapter remarks on the theory of 'encyclopaedic form' in relation to Kinsella, addressing the idea that the poetry as a whole, but particularly the Peppercanister series, constitutes an encyclopaedia of Kinsella's personal, familial, civic and social concerns. Each chapter draws its own conclusions about these poets' practice of (and resistance to) allegory, and a final Conclusion draws these findings together and suggests directions for further research.

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In summary, then, this thesis is informed by a number of basic convictions about the nature and operation of allegory within Western and within modern Irish culture. Allegory has a distinct political texture: it is the 'hierarchizing mode'. It shows a tendency to efface, even to consume, particularity on its way to realising abstractions. With regard to a 'tradition' or a canon it is acquisitive and retrogressive, ripping off the

remains of the past to construct its own monumentality, making it as fragmented as it is It is a form that indulges desire for order and hierarchical, signifying ornamentation. Nonetheless, it also has a cultural value beyond the cautionary exhibition of violence and fragmentation. Such cultural value is possible because, as Benjamin argues in German Tragic Drama, allegory's end is already present in its beginning: the potentiality for integrity and redemption inheres in the moribund fragments of allegorical signification. Because an emblem or a fragment can signify, can participate in that abyssal free-fall of allegorical intention from object to object, it can be renewed. There is potential for optimism even in allegory's encyclopaedic project, its determination to enclose the world within its textual system. Not just because it is finally impossible to do so, as Teskey's metaphor of excretion and waste suggests, but because in engaging in such an encyclopaedic project, the form is bound to encounter, and seek to assimilate, resistance to itself. That resistance, however seamlessly incorporated and redesignated as signification, is still perceptible to the critical reader, and hence recoverable. To put it another way, it is possible for the allegorist to inscribe into his or her work unease, disquiet, even rejection of the allegorical project. Of course, these are in turn incorporated, but never to the extent that they are irrecoverable, irredeemable. Part of the task of reading allegory, consists in resisting fascination with the allegorical system and remaining alert to those chances for its redemption. Finally, I bring to this thesis the conviction that this understanding of the way allegory persists and operates in modernity should be brought to bear on Irish writing. Not because Irish history or culture is particularly suited to allegorical representation - at all costs, we must resist the facile formulation that the violence of Irish history can be equated with allegorical violence – but because allegory has been and continues to be used by Irish writers in a far more complex way than critical models devoted to the idea that allegory is always an allegory of something (usually national

identity) have heretofore provided. All three poets discussed here use and critique allegory: what follows is an account of their practice.

Notes

- ⁴ See Stephen J. Greenblatt (ed.), *Allegory and Representation*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1981) viii. The essay about which Greenblatt writes, Joel Fineman's 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire', actually argues that psychoanalytic confrontation of the origins of lack and desire constitutes the end of the allegorical impulse.
- ⁵ See Jon Whitman, Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) and Deborah L. Madsen, Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre (London: Macmillan, 1995).
- ⁶ J. Stephen Russell (ed.), *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature* (New York and London: Garland, 1988) xi.
- ⁷ See Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Gay Clifford, The Transformations of Allegory, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1974.
- ⁸ See Maureen Quilligan, The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press) 1979. Supporters of the figural tradition in allegory draw their terms from Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', trans. Ralph Mannheim, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York: Meridian, 1959) 11-76. Auerbach contrasts figura with 'allegorical interpretation' (36-39). His understanding of 'allegorical interpretation', however, refers only to those exegetes of Scripture in whom 'mystical and moral considerations seem definitely to overshadow the historical element' (36).
- ⁹ See Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics' and 'The metaphoric and metonymic poles', *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge, (New York: Longman, 1988) 32-57, 57-61. Jacques Lacan, 'The insistence of the letter in the unconscious', trans. Jan Miel (Lodge 80-106).
- ¹⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 vols, (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921) VIII.vi.44-7, XI.ii.46.
- ¹¹ Thomas Elyot, *Dictionary*, (1538), (Menton: n.p., 1970) n. pag. Elyot's definition of allegory/inversion is a translation of Quintilian VIII.vi.44
- ¹² Whitman provides a very concise etymological history of allegory (263-8), on which I draw here.

¹ Arnold Williams, 'The English Moral Play before 1500', Annuale Medievale 4 (1963), 9.

² Some recent critics who take this view include Don Cameron Allen, Mysteriously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1970); Carolynn Van Dyke, The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory, (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1985); and initially, though he modifies his position, Gordon Teskey, Allegory and Violence (Ithaca New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

³ Theresa M. Kelley, Reinventing Allegory, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

- ¹³ Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964) 224-78.
- ¹⁴ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Edward Arber (London: A. Constable & Co., 1906, facsimile reprint, Kent State University Press, 1970) 197.
- ¹⁵ Niccolo Machiavelli, *De Principatibus/ Le Prince*, (1538) ed. Giorgio Inglese, trans. Jean-Louis Fournel and Jean Claude Zancarini (Paris: Press Universitaires de France, 2000) 84-85. Fornel and Zacarini's French translation captures the strange brutality of this act better than either of the commonly available English translations. See *The Prince*, trans. George Bull, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 58, and *The Prince*, ed. Peter Bondanella, trans. Bondanella and Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 26.
- ¹⁶ Gordon Teskey, 'Allegory', *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, eds A.C. Hamilton, Donald Cheney, W.F. Blisset, David A. Richardson and William M. Barker (Toronto, Buffalo and London: Toronto University Press, 1990) 16-24; 18.
- ¹⁷ Dante Alghieri, *The Divine Comedy*, 3 vols, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).
- ¹⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton. (London and New York: Longman, 1977) III.xii.31-45.
- ¹⁹ In Chapter 2, I argue that the force-feeding of Maurice Devane in Clarke's *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust* constitutes such a scene of extraordinary resistance, the more extraordinary because the resisting subject is male.
- ²⁰ For example, see Teskey 5.
- ²¹ Austin Clarke, 'The Hippophagi', Collected Poems, ed. Liam Miller. (Dublin: Dolmen, 1974) 229-35; 230.
- ²² Though he is ahead of his time in the sophistication with which he expresses it. 'The Hippophagi' was published in 1960. Clarke's readings of texts, both in his prose and poetry, are often unexpectedly in agreement with very recent critical theory. In Chapter 2, for example, I suggest that Clarke's treatment of Keats in *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust* (1966) anticipates the reassessment of Keatsian sexuality inaugurated by Christopher Ricks's study *Keats and Embarrassment* (1974).
- ²³ See, for example, Russell (ed.) *Allegoresis*. Even this, however, is a study of allegoresis as a feature of medieval literature, suggesting that it is a historically localised occurrence.
- ²⁴ This ironic allegoresis is an almost compulsory part of the sub-genre of science fiction known as 'future regression', in which a catastrophe retards human development to a state of technological and scientific primitivism. Kelley offers an excellent example from Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (Kelley 274-7). Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, (London: Picador, 1982) 118-124.
- ²⁵ Thomas Kinsella, 'Worker in Mirror, At His Bench', *New Poems 1973*, (Dublin: Dolmen, 1973) 59-63. 'At the Head Table', *Madonna and Other Poems*, (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1991) 20-24; 22.
- ²⁶ Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Interview with Thomas Kinsella', Poetry Ireland Review 25, (Spring 1989), 57-65; 62.
- ²⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T.M. Raysor (London: Constable, 1936) 29.
- ²⁸ The Bible Societies, *Good News Bible*, (1966), British Edition, (London: Harper Collins, 1976) 659. The note in question reads 'These songs have often been interpreted by Jews as a picture of the relationship

between God and his people, and by Christians as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church.'

- ²⁹ Joep Leerssen, 'Tain After Tain: The Mythical Past and the Anglo-Irish', *History and Violence in Anglo-Irish Literature*, ed. Joris Duytschaever and Geert Lernout (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988) 29-46.
- ³⁰ See Philip Rollinson, *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture*, (Pittsburgh and Brighton: Duquesne University Press and Harvester Press, 1981) 15-24.
- ³¹ See Bernard Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Fruyt and Chaff: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories, (Port Washington, New York and London: Kennikat, 1972) and also Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, trans. D.W. Robertson, (New York: Macmillan, 1958) 39.
- ³² Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation*, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400-1200 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 25.
- ³³ Laurent Jenny, 'La strategie de la forme', *Poetique* 27 (1976) 257-281; 257. 'Without intertextuality, the literary work would be quite simply imperceptible, like the speech of a language as yet unknown. In fact, we cannot grasp the sense and the structure of a literary work but in its relationship with archetypes, themselves abstracts from long series of texts in which they are in some sense the invariable features. [...] With regard to these archetypal models, the literary work is engaged in a constant relationship of fulfilment, transformation or transgression'. (My translation: further translations are given in square brackets).
- ³⁴Jonathan Culler, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (London: Routledge, 1981) 105.
- ³⁵ Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Sequel* (1954), *Collected Poems*, ed. E.R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) 331-439; 331.
- ³⁶ John Skelton, 'Speke Parott', *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Scattergood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 230-246.
- ³⁷ Is Othello allegorical? Charles Rosen considers Othello 'the only great example of the Tragedy of Fate in English' he uses the term tragedy of fate in the sense that Walter Benjamin employed it, to describe 'an extreme form of Trauerspiel [...] in which the action moves mechanically and inexorably toward the catastrophe'. Rosen, 'The Ruins of Walter Benjamin', On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections ed. Gary Smith, (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991) 129-175, 145-6. Rosen's analysis of Othello as Trauerspiel is convincing, but this particular allusion to, or echo of Skelton is not characteristic of the allegorical allusion.
- ³⁸ Othello, The Riverside Shakespeare, eds. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 819-853.
- ³⁹ It may be argued that the medieval writers and artists who evolved this emblem believed the myth was ornithological fact. But the emblem has persisted, even though the myth has been disproved. For instance, the official logo of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service features a pelican. Every time this logo is 'read' and understood, the pelican is 'captured' and made to mean.
- ⁴⁰ 'From my own stem I was struck away'. 'The Dream of the Rood', *The Earliest English Poems*, trans. Michael Alexander (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 107 (1.30).
- ⁴¹ As MacNeice commented in 1963: 'Today across the Atlantic we find scholars like Northrop Frye and Rosamond Tuve and Edwin Honig taking it as axiomatic that reality at its deeper levels can be probed in literature only by something in the nature of what I am calling "parable". '(*Varieties* 27) To MacNeice's

list we might add (taking in both sides of the Atlantic), Auerbach and Fletcher, Graham Hough, Kenneth Burke, William Empson, art historians of the school of Erwin Panofsky, and anthropologically-inclined critics like Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade.

- ⁴² Louis MacNeice, Varieties of Parable, ed. E.R. Dodds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 1.
- ⁴³ Teskey identifies a similar phenomenon in Frye's Anatomy of Criticism (Teskey 153-7).
- ⁴⁴ Eliade asserts that for traditional, pre-modern societies, nothing is real that is not connected with an archetypal, celestial model. *The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History*, (1954), trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971) 'Man constructs according to an archetype. [...] This participation by urban cultures in an archetypal model is what gives them their reality and validity' (8) Every ritual has a divine model, an archetype' (21) 'All dances were originally sacred' (28) 'No plant is precious in itself, but only through its participation in an archetype' (30).
- ⁴⁵ Tribal or local heroes, such as the emperor Huang Ti, Moses, or the Aztec Tezcatlipoca, commit their boons to a single folk; universal heroes Mohammed, Jesus, Gautama Buddha bring a message for the entire world'. Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, (1949, London: Fontana, 1993) 38. Attempts to humanise these figures, or bring to them a historical viewpoint, are treated by Campbell with some scorn: 'Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history or science, it is killed. [...] When a civilization begins to reinterpret its mythology in this way, the life goes out of it, temples become museums and the link between the two perspectives is dissolved. Such a blight has certainly descended upon the Bible and on a great part of the Christian cult' (249).
- ⁴⁶ Ciaran Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?', *The Honest Ulsterman* 50, (Winter 1975), 184-5. Carson's irritation seems also to be provoked by *North*'s didacticism: in Puttenham's words, Heaney 'discovers withall what [...] in a full allegorie should not be discovered, but left at large to the readers judgement and conjecture.' (Puttenham 186).
- ⁴⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'Punishment', North (London: Faber & Faber, 1975) 37-8.
- ⁴⁸ Compare Fletcher's analysis of the compulsive character of Aeneas: 'The characteristic aggressions of the compulsive are here serving the "higher" ends of a cultural dream [...] but this should not deter us from perceiving the latent hostility, which is only covered up by a surface appearance of gentlemanly calm, or calm gentleness of bearing. This so-called "withdrawal of affect" is a main characteristic of the neurosis, and in literature it clearly sets the systematic, unfeeling tone of allegories, where real violence is inherent in the well-ordered meaning' (288). Chapter 2 explores psychoanalytic analogues to allegory in further detail.
- ⁴⁹ If this makes allegorical figures sound rather like zombies, or cinematic representations of Frankenstein's monster, it is perhaps worth considering a figure such as Spenser's Talus 'made of yron mould,/ Immoveable, resistlesse, without end' (V.i.12, ll.6-7), who is precisely such a galvanised creature. Like Malbecco, Talus represents one of the extremes to which allegorical agents tend.
- ⁵⁰ 'Another epic work which I home towards and linger in is Dante's *Inferno* but *not* the rest [...]; neither Purgatory nor Paradise is rich enough in *story*.' He dislikes mimetic prose fiction, though, except Dickens: 'an anti-novelist', 'too logical', 'rigid', 'over-simple', 'too large', 'too exuberant'. Only a fairly committed allegorist could use these as terms of approbation. Louis MacNeice, 'Pleasure in Reading: Woods to Get Lost in', *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 230-4; 232-3.

- ⁵¹ Franz Kafka, 'The Burrow' (1931), *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (1949, London: Random House-Minerva, 1992) 127-167.
- ⁵² Roland Barthes, 'Is There Any Poetic Writing? Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) 47-58.
- ⁵³ Casey Finch, 'Introduction', *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, trans. Casey Finch, textual eds. Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron and Clifford Peterson, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993) 15.
- ⁵⁴ This distinction is primarily borrowed from Auerbach. See *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality* in Western Literature, (1946) trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2nd edition, 1968) 23. Auerbach's distinction, though, is clearly a development of Jakobson's 'poles'. For a more recent version of it, we might look to Madsen's distinction between the figural and the fabulistic.
- ⁵⁵ 'The etymological connections of *decorum* and *decoration*, *polite*, *police* and *expolitio*, *cosmic* and *cosmetic*, *costume* and *custom*, with all their minor variants (e.g., "ornamental gardening", "proper dress") all demonstrate the same fundamental duality.' (Fletcher 109) Fletcher quotes Puttenham, commenting that the figure of the "garment of style" is 'the common generalised form of the theory of *kosmos*' (136-7).
- ⁵⁶ For more on this, see Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) 11-12.
- ⁵⁷ Teskey's account of masculine personifications is less than convincing, though: 'Male personifications in the *Faerie Queene* [...] are demonstrably physical, as if to make up for their relative insubstantiality (22, note 31). The physicality of the male personifications may be a compensation for the insubstantiality of forms (gendered masculine) but that fails to explain a figure like Argante, who is as physical as Orgoglio, Disdayne or Corflambo, but gendered female. It is true, however, that some of the personifications most resistant to physical realisation (or 'visualisation'), like Ate, are female.
- ⁵⁸ Teskey asks, of this passage: 'What is the stuff out of which Shamefastness is made? She is made of her gender' (23). She is also made of metaphor. In her study *Literary Fat Ladies*, Patricia Parker quotes a Renaissance style manual to the effect that a metaphor should direct its reader towards its figural significance in a way that is 'shamefest, and as it were maydenly, that it may seeme rather to be led by the hand to another signification, then to be driven by force'. Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies* (London: Methuen, 1987) 108.
- ⁵⁹ For more on daemons in allegory, see Roger Hinks, 'Daemon and Personification', *Myth and Allegory in Ancient Art*, (London: Warburg Institute, 1939) 106-113.
- ⁶⁰ The paradox of Malbecco, as Kelley notes, is that as he is deformed by an abstraction (his 'daemon', Jealousy), he becomes ever more grossly material in appearance. We can perhaps relate this to allegory's curious combination of 'will' and 'restraint'.
- ⁶¹ A good critique of this bland enthusiasm is Zhang Longxi's article 'Historicizing the Postmodern Allegory', Texas Studies in Language and Literature 36, (1994) 212-31.
- ⁶² See Teskey 32-4 for an excellent account of this dynamic.
- ⁶³ We might also have reservations about the wholesale value of *sophrosyne* as a 'way of being for humans', as Teskey puts it (166). See below, note 69.
- ⁶⁴ See Allen, Mysteriously Meant, Whitman 263-5, or Van Dyke 290.

⁶⁵ At the beginning of his study, Teskey finds 'it is somewhat unsatisfactory to find the origin of allegory [...] in an allegorical figure' (14). It is not, presumably, similarly unsatisfactory to find the origin of symbol in an allegorical system like Yeats's.

⁶⁶ Of Benjamin's work on allegory, Teskey only considers *German Tragic Drama* and is critical of many of its implications: 'The passing away of allegory's claims to logical order calls forth some of Benjamin's most morbidly lyrical reflections on history' – Teskey can be pretty 'morbidly lyrical' himself – 'narratives such as Benjamin's, being polysemous in the extreme, will always be vulnerable to ironic disarticulation in the realm of the subject, no amount of irony can stop their blindly aggregative work in the realm of the object, where ideological delusion, madness and stupidity [...] reign. The basis of allegory in this realm has become a theory of history in which persons are reduced to an indifferent substance – the masses – in which abstractions (tendencies, classes, forces) inhere' (69).

⁶⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940) *Illuminations* trans. Harry Zorn, (1970, London: Pimlico, 1999) 249.

⁶⁸ See above, section II, subsection (ii).

⁶⁹ To give another example, Teskey argues that Heidegger gives, in Being and Time, 'a totalizing function to the concept of care', excluding from it risk, which is the inevitable complement of true care (143). Heidegger, and allegory too, mistake 'self preservation [...] for a "pre-ontological" state' (144). This exclusion of any concept of personal care for another individual leads to the illusion of collective risk, which for Teskey is no risk at all, since the collective does not have a body or a mind that it can risk, or rather, for the individual in the collective the risked body or mind is always someone else's. One of the flaws of Teskey's argument is that it seems to be bound up in this dialectic of risk and care: he seems nervous that he will be seen, like Heidegger, to be feigning risk-taking and end, also like Heidegger, by participating in the predatory delusions that stem from the misconception that we can undertake risks collectively. He consequently shies from imputing any kind of potential for recuperation or human liberation to allegory. But the delusion of collective risk also presents a risk to the subject who is aware of it and as such must be overcome, rather than avoided. No god can save us, not even if its name is Sophrosyne. Teskey's situation is that described in the seventh of Benjamin's "Theses': the historical materialist disassociating himself from 'cultural treasures' tainted by barbarism, maintaining a position of 'cautious detachment', whereas the value of Benjamin's essay is that it suggests, with its concept of Messianic time, a way of moving beyond that necessary and prudent detachment.

In this context, compare Madsen's dismissal of de Man (127-9). Very pertinently, Madsen claims that in de Man's writings, 'concepts are signs for the discourses of which they are part. [...] So, for instance, the notion that "man", "love" or "self" are empty abstractions is presented as the conclusion drawn from poststructuralist linguistic theory rather than as the assumptions made by the theory' (128). She is on less secure ground with her endorsement of Wolfgang Holdheim's assertion that de Man's view of allegory is a strategy of evasion with its origins in his association with collaborationist journals in 1941-2. This point is barely developed, which opens it to the charge of trying to taint de Man's theory by association rather than presenting an argument against it.

⁷⁰ De Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1983) 187-228; 222.

71 Teskey, heavily influenced by de Man, makes a similar point. Antiphrasis [speech in which what is meant is the opposite of what is said], which constitutes irony, and polysemy (allegory) are hostile to one another, 'but approach chaos, and rise out of it, along similar roads.' (57) Teskey imagines a kind of primal scene of structuring out of chaos, in which forms of disorder - complete substitutability of one thing for another and complete negation of meaning - compete. Each is constrained just enough that the former produces polysemy and the latter antiphrasis, which engage with one another, polysemy acting on antiphrasis to make it appear an affirmation of sameness under apparent difference, antiphrasis acting on polysemy to break down its hierarchies into binaries. (58) Teskey's critical discourse, if anything more ironic than de Man's, deliberately disregards de Man's warning: 'One is tempted to play firony and allegory] off against each other and attach value judgements to each' ('Rhetoric of Temporality' 226) in order to politicise these formulations. For Teskey, in contrast to its abrasive façade, irony is politically impotent, whereas allegory, which presents a withdrawn front to the 'aggressive', interpreting reader, is politically coercive. Irony, wholly subjective, is limitless in possibility but useless in the face of brute power. Allegory is not impotent in this way, but it is inextricably linked to the interests of such power. (Teskey 76) This insight might allow us to problematise de Man's idea that the task of the fully developed novel is to 'seal [...] the ironic moments within the allegorical duration' ('Rhetoric of Temporality' 227).

⁷² Kelley quotes from Marian Hobson, 'History Traces', *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, eds. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 101-15; 106.

⁷³ Timothy Bahti, Allegories of History, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 285.

⁷⁴ In a wonderfully humane essay on the *Inferno*, Tim Parks suggests that the puzzles of system and scale in Hell (how does a barrator in canto XXI bypass Minos and arrive directly at his place of punishment on a devil's back? how big is the Eighth Circle? how tall is Satan?) have an anaesthetic function: '[s]creams of torture fade away behind the clamour of such intriguing questions' (16). Inured to the general torture, we are struck all the more forcefully by the pain of individuals – Francesca, Farinata, Ulysses – not just because they are in pain, but because we have been culpably preoccupied with trivialities while they suffer. In this way Parks neatly reverses the usual dicta of commentators on the *Inferno*: that the sinner will reveal her or his sinfulness in a self-serving phrase, if only the reader is alert enough to perceive it; that pity for sinners is thus redundant. Tim Parks, 'Hell and Back', *Hell and Back: Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg , 2001) 1-22. Virgil's somersault is the last of these anaesthetic trivialities: it allows us, if we wish, to forget Hell as a place of torture and chaos, and remember it as a place of system and fascination.

⁷⁵ Benjamin comments that the movement of allegorical significance from emblem to emblem is a 'technique of metaphors and *apotheoses*' (231, emphasis added).

⁷⁶ 'In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. [...] no poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.' 'The Task of the Translator', *Illuminations* 70-82; 70.

⁷⁷ Rosen's essay 'The Ruins of Walter Benjamin', offers an excellent description of Benjamin's 'Idea', which, despite *German Tragic Drama*'s appeal to Platonic and Kantian models, is most heavily influenced by, though in many respects crucially different from, early Romantic aesthetic philosophy (Smith 155-60).

⁷⁸ If it has a rival, it must surely be Benjamin's ninth 'Thesis', his allegorical reflection on Klee's 'Angelus Novus'. Kelley reads this as an 'allegory of allegory' as well as an allegory of history, which 'markes the

limits modernism places on allegorical agency, which operates as best it can [...] because the world it faces (or flees) is centrifugal, flying off cataclysmically from itself and as such alienated – such is the special, mortal intensity of modern allegorical alienation – from the theological framework of the medieval and Renaissance tradition' (258).

- ⁷⁹ The most famous automaton in Irish poetry, the mechanical bird into which the speaker of 'Byzantium' desires to metamorphose, presents a remarkably similar nexus of mechanisation, Orientalism and irony. W.B. Yeats, 'Byzantium', *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: J.M. Dent, 1990) 239-40; 240. Chapter 2 discusses Clarke's allusion to this image in 'Ancient Lights'.
- ⁸⁰ Yeats, 'William Blake and his Illustrations to the *Divine Comedy'* (1897), *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903), In *Essays and Introductions* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1961) 116-145. Yeats misquotes Blake, who writes in 'A Vision of the Last Judgment' that Vision is 'a Representation of what *Eternally* Exists, Really and Unchangeably' (emphasis added). The misquotation allows him to evade the issue of the production of meaning in and through history, and associate allegory with that which is not 'actual', fantasy, dissimulation and entertainment. See Blake, 'A Vision of the Last Judgment', *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York and London: Norton, 1979) 409-416.
- ⁸¹ W.J. McCormack, From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994) 174.
- ⁸² Benjamin quotes Schopenhauer: '"if he [a man who desires fame] now stands before The Genius of Fame [...] with its laurel crowns, then his whole mind is thus excited, and his powers are called into activity. But the same thing would also happen if he saw the word "fame" in large clear letters on the wall" 'and comments, 'this last comment comes close to touching on the essence of allegory' (162). Only the prejudice of excessive 'logic' is in the way.
- 83 'Edmund Spenser', Essays and Introductions 356-383; 370-1.
- ⁸⁴ See chapter 4 of Teskey's study, 'The Renaissance and the Classical Gods' (77-97), and chapter 6, 'Allegory and Politics' (122-147).
- ⁸⁵ Seamus Deane suggests another point of contact between Yeats and Benjamin. Discussing Yeats as a collector of folklore, he comments: 'What Adorno said of Benjamin has its application here: "He is driven not merely to awaken congealed life in petrified objects as in allegory but also to scrutinize living things so that they present themselves as being ancient, 'ur-historical', and abruptly release their significance" 'Deane, Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 112.
- ⁸⁶ See, for instance, Luke Gibbons, 'Narratives of No Return: James Coleman's GuaiRE' and 'Identity without a Centre: Allegory, History and Irish Nationalism', *Transformations in Irish Culture*, (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1996) 129-148. He also comments on the nationalist response to the death of the hunger-striker Terence MacSwiney in 1920 as a Benjaminian 'blasting open' of the historical continuum imposed by British rule (162). Christopher T. Malone, in a recent article, examines Heaney as a Benjaminian collector. 'Writing Home: Spatial Allegories in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon', *ELH* 67:4 (Winter 2000) 1083-1109.
- ⁸⁷ Clair Wills, Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 28.

⁸⁸ Some recent journal articles suggest the extent to which this is so: as well as Malone's article, mentioned above, Mary Jean Corbett writes on 'allegories' of Union in eighteenth and nineteenth century writing: see her recent book *Allegories of Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and main text for details. Eugene O'Brien, 'Anastomosis, Attentuations and Manichean Allegories: Seamus Heaney and the Complexities of Ireland', *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 7:1 (Spring 2000), 51-73. Karen Steele, 'Constance Markevicz's Allegorical Garden: Femininity, Militancy and the Press 1909-15', *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 29: 4 (August 2000), 423-47.

⁸⁹ McCormack, Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History through Balzac, Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) 45-50. See also From Burke to Beckett 12-13, 174-177.

⁹⁰ McCormack, 'Politics or Community: Crux of Thomas Kinsella's Aesthetic Development', *Tracks* 7 (1987), 61-77. John Goodby expands a little on McCormack's discussion of allegory in Kinsella's work, but his other discussions of allegory in the poetry of Muldoon, Derek Mahon and Tom Paulin, again mostly centre on questions of Irish identity and assume a transparency of correspondence in allegory. John Goodby, *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 124-125, 171-172, 189, 195, 288.

⁹¹ See Eve Walsh Stoddard, 'The Poetics of the Parable in the Later Poems of Louis MacNeice' Concerning Poetry 18:1-2 (1985), 117-131. Kathleen McCracken's dissertation offers another perspective: 'Shaping Special Worlds: Anti Parable in the Radio and Stage Drama of Louis MacNeice', PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1993. Very comprehensive in scope is chapter 6 of Peter McDonald's study Louis MacNeice: The Poet in his Contexts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 154-176.

Chapter 2

'Mind Spewed': Allegories of Mind and Memory in Austin Clarke's Poetry

'Timor Mortis was beside him.'1

1

In his 1975 essay on Austin Clarke and Padraic Fallon, Donald Davie declares 'Clarke [...] is further from mythopoeia than any poet one might think of.² Davie understands mythopoeia not simply as myth-making, but as a mode of writing which takes place 'in a visionary or fabulous time that clocks and calendars do not measure', disregarding historical time and combining past, present and future (Davie 38). Clarke's alleged rejection of mythopoeia allows Davie to open a space between myths and mythopoeia. A poet might rewrite or use myths, as Clarke did throughout his career, without necessarily participating in mythopoeia, which requires the establishment of that timeless, visionary world. Davie finds that Clarke's indignation and outrage at the Irish export horse trade can only be explained in terms of the sacredness of the relationship between horses and human beings: '[A]t the heart of Clarke's world [...] there is myth, since there is a belief in the sacred' (Davie 51). Though he does not state it explicitly, Davie creates two separate categories within the poetry of myth. There is mythopoeic poetry, which discards the 'local and contingent' in an attempt to 'shape and encompass the multitudinous variety of historical experience' (Davie 40) and what might be called poetry including myth, which 'refuses to rise above the congested heterogeneity of the world as we experience it' (Davie 41). Despite the lofty ambitions he attributes to it, Davie sees mythopoeic poetry performing an act of obeisance to timeless, universalising hierarchies; an act which poetry including myth need not perform, and in Clarke's case, resists.

It might be argued, by analogy, that Clarke's poetry is engaged in a similar involvement with and resistance to allegory. On one hand, Clarke's poems, particularly

his 'satires' of the 1950s and 1960s, insist upon the portrayal of the realities of Irish life at a particular time. On the other, Clarke has frequent recourse to allegory. Behind the local contingencies of the horse trade poems, for instance, lies the nationalistic image of Ireland as the Slight Red Steed, an image that appears again in 'Forget Me Not' and 'More Extracts from a Diary of Dreams'. (CCP 237-43, 386-94) Allegory is, moreover, a constant presence in Clarke's work, from his first long poem The Vengeance of Fionn (CCP 3-40)³, through later poems such as 'Ancient Lights' (CCP 199-201), 'The Hippophagi' (CCP 229-235) and 'Song of the Books' (CCP 310-9), to a very late poem, 'The Healing of Mis' (CCP 509-16), in which the allegorical act of dream interpretation is made the occasion for a cure. There is a tension between Clarke's need to represent the local and contingent and the self-perpetuating presence of allegorical desire in his poetry, which mirrors the poet's struggles with dualistic modes of thought.

A notable absence from Clarke's horse poems is any direct allusion to Plato's allegory of the charioteer,⁴ though in certain poems the reader might be reminded of it: the association of horses and sexual morality at the beginning of 'The Hippophagi' (*CCP* 229); the pathos of a fallen horse in 'Forget Me Not':

When horse fell down, pity was there, we saw Such helplessness, girth buckled, no knack in knee, Half upturned legs – big hands that couldn't unclench. A parable, pride or the like, rough shod, Or goodness put in irons, then soul uplifted, Bodily;

(CCP 239)

In Plato, it is the lustful black horse of appetite that threatens to deny the charioteer (human reason) a glimpse of the pure world of forms (*Phaedrus* 247), compelling the charioteer forcibly to restrain it, in the process, 'forcing his legs and haunches to the ground, reduc[ing] him to torment' (254). For Clarke, however, the fallen horse is a symbol of innocent victimhood; he further signals his rejection of Platonic dualism by insisting on the indivisible link between body and soul: 'soul uplifted,/ Bodily'. One of

the aims of this chapter is to trace the origins and the tentative resolution of these struggles, questioning whether it is possible to use allegory in a partial way, or whether any employment of the hierarchizing mode negates movements to represent human contingency and historical difference.

Of Davie's essay, Neil Corcoran comments that while the assertion that Clarke is remote from mythopoeia 'certainly holds good for the rest of Clarke's work, it does not - quite - for Mnemosyne'. 5 Corcoran suggests that the long poem displays 'an oscillating movement towards, and retreat from the mythopoeic' (Corcoran 48). At the end of Mnemosyne Lay in Dust, Corcoran argues, two related transformations occur. First of all, Maurice Devane, '[r]ememorised', sees his mythopoeic system of Gate, Garden and Fountain for the 'story' it is, and is accepted back into the local, quotidian world. Secondly, 'the fiction which separates 'Maurice Devane' from Austin Clarke is itself exploded' (Corcoran 51). This second point, though it represents accurately the experience of reading the poem in conjunction with Clarke's autobiographies, is verifiable from none of these texts. It may be possible to identify Maurice with the 'I' of the autobiographies, but he is a substantially fictionalised figure, 'Austin Clarke', rather than Austin Clarke. It may be more accurate to state that, at the end of Mnemosyne, the fiction that links 'Maurice Devane' to 'Austin Clarke' is confirmed. The international response to Clarke, following M.L. Rosenthal's influential essay on Mnemosyne, has tended to concentrate on the confessional aspects of his poetry.⁶ This chapter will suggest that this is not the only interest which Clarke's poem holds outside the field of Irish studies.

For the purposes of this study, though, the transformation of Maurice Devane's worldview from the mythopoeic and systematised to the quotidian and contingent is a more important concern. For in *Mnemosyne*, Clarke deals directly with the problem of imaginative obeisance to universalising and hierarchic systems, an obeisance he

associates with mental disorder and the effacement of self. 'Maurice Devane' can be viewed an allegory of that part of the self which responds enthusiastically to the hierarchies embodied in allegory and mythopoeia, and hence to the obliteration of the self. Nor can his acceptance back into the sane 'real world' be uncomplicated, for only a mythopoeic imagination like Devane's (and unlike Clarke's) could successfully separate the mythic from the quotidian.

The complete renunciation of mythopoeia is, clearly, not a possibility for Clarke. His late poems after classical and Irish myths try to diminish its authoritarian and universalising hold on the imagination by suggesting that it is individual, personal emotional significance that creates mythic resonance, not *vice versa*, as in this passage from 'The Dilemma of Iphis':

Wondering why her daughter delayed so long in her bed-room, Changing her clothes, Telethusa listened, quietly opened The door. Then, in astonishment, she saw her husband, Young again, stark naked, as he gazed down, waiting to show her The extent of his vigour. But as she stepped forward, burning For what he held so firmly, she knew that her prayers had been answered By Providence. Ashamed of her momentary incestuous Impulse, unseen by her son, she stole from the doorway.

(CCP 506)

This passage is literally mythopoeic – no equivalent occurs in Ovid – yet Clarke attempts to evade the systematising grip of mythopoeia by insisting on the primacy of Telethusa's experience, the fervency of her personal hope (that her daughter, raised as a boy, should really become male before her/his wedding night) and the intensity of her sexual desire for the newly transformed son. Clarke suggests that it is the conjunction of her intensely expressed (and answered) prayers and her sexual desire which creates the mythic resonance, not the echo of the Oedipal trope of mother-son incest. The same conjunction of impulses is meant as a challenge to dualism: Telethusa's spiritual effort in praying for her daughter's transformation is reconciled with physical desire in the 'momentary incestuous/ Impulse', the impulse that confirms decisively Iphis's

maleness. The passage attempts to reconcile an abstract, impersonal desire which is the propulsive agent in allegorical narrative with the depiction of individual, human desire.

Another of this chapter's aims is to approach a definition of allegory and mythopoeia in the context of Clarke's poetry. Allegory can in some respects be viewed as almost synonymous with mythopoeia; it is also different from it in some important respects. Allegory's timelessness is not necessarily the 'visionary' kind – clockless and calendar-free – described by Davie as characteristic of mythopoeia (38). It may also consist in conflating two distinct historical periods so that they exist simultaneously in the *figura*. This figural technique characterises Clarke's prose romances, which inhabit both a fictionalised Celtic-Romanesque past and a mid-twentieth century 'present'. Sometimes the narrator states explicitly the confluence of the two historical moments, as in this extract from *The Bright Temptation*:

"And did the Devil cause you to touch yourself? Did you make yourself weak, my child?"

Pious was that question and familiar to Aidan, for he had been asked it in Confession at Cluanmore. Still, still, in the dark confession boxes of Ireland, the good clergy whisper that question to young penitents who admit of faults against the sixth commandment. Stammering, clasping their sinful hands in shame, the young answer Heaven's representative in a tremble, until the very moment of absolution. 8

This episode, so similar to the traumatic experiences of confession recorded in 'Ancient Lights' (CCP 199) and in Twice Round the Black Church, suggests that another kind of figura operates across Clarke's oeuvre, one in which the same crucial event draws together works composed many years apart and in different genres. The later, and more achieved romance The Singing Men at Cashel takes this figural technique a little further. The main narrative ends happily, with Gormlai's marriage to Nial, and his death and her destitution still ahead. But towards the end of the novel, Clarke incorporates a passage in which Callachan, a monastic scribe of the century after Gormlai's death, tells the conclusion of her story, inserting quotations from Clarke's poem 'The Confession of Queen

Gormlai' (1929).¹¹ Clarke seems to see these conflations and incorporations as part of a project of liberation, for he concludes the novel: 'So far, then, the love-story of Nial and Gormlai, set down by a poor *clerk to keep body and soul together*.' (382, emphasis added) The admission of incompletion – 'So far' – and the adoption of the scribal persona are linked with resistance to dualism – 'to keep body and soul together'. The totalising power of *figura* is, paradoxically, posited as a protest against a church and culture which presume to demarcate human experience and thereby diminish it.

Clarke seems to differentiate between kinds of allegory: one that involves a mental obeisance to pre-existing emblems, like Maurice's 'Gate, Garden and Fountain' and presents a danger to sanity, and another that tries to maintain a sense of historical difference and autonomy even as it conflates and totalises, which is associated with a kind of release from the pressures that cause Maurice's mental illness. This differentiation is not so very remote from Davie's unspoken distinction between mythopoeia and poems including myth, or indeed from the venerable allegory/symbol controversy, and it may not stand up to rigorous theoretical examination. However, the attempt to forge an allegorical mode which tends towards liberation rather than rigidity and hierarchy is an important, if disregarded, aspect of Clarke's poetics. Clarke's poems, particularly *Mnemosyne*, on which this chapter will mainly focus, are extraordinary in the attention they give to the fragmentary materials of allegory and in the openness with which they consider the value of this most 'closed', most seemingly orderly mode.

To begin a discussion of the relation between allegory and mental illness, the next section of this chapter, 'Psychoanalysis', explores theoretical connections between them. Angus Fletcher characterises allegory as daemonically possessed, neurotic in motivation and compulsive in behaviour, an account of the mode which suggests that Clarke might strongly resist it. Joel Fineman's Lacanian analysis of the role of desire in forming allegorical structure, meanwhile, might imply that Clarke's abiding concerns with

desire and appetite are reflected in his choice of allegorical figures. This section offers a Kristevan modification to Fineman's theory which is elaborated upon in section IV, 'Abjection'. Section III, 'Memory', follows the development of Clarke's understanding of allegory, from his largely unquestioning acceptance of its hierarchic tendencies in Pilgrimage and Other Poems to Mnemosyne, in which the political texture of allegory is thoroughly interrogated. The account of Mnemosyne which follows draws on Clarke's allusions to Keats, arguing that Mnemosyne is a more ambiguous and polyvalent figure than has been thought hitherto, and to trace the links between the goddess of memory, Maurice's masturbatory sexuality and his visions of his lover Margaret and of Onan. The poem Mnemosyne, like the figure of Onan, is a 'self-sufficer', incorporating and developing Clarke's earlier work. This section concludes with a comparison of episodes in *The Bright* Temptation and Mnemosyne, both of which concern a man who believes he is a corpse. The fourth section, 'Abjection', looks at the connections between this terminally abject figure and Maurice's anorexia. Kristeva's theory of abjection provides the grounds for a discussion of the political and sexual implications of hunger, a discussion which addresses the question of what it means for Maurice Devane to be a 'hunger-striker' (CCP 337). The final section, 'Structure', argues that a linear progress narrative, enacting depature, intitiation and return, cannot finally be reconciled with or imposed upon Mnemosyne. Instead, Clarke resists progress narratives, constructing the poem on the basis of the borders and boundaries which characterise abject reasoning. In this way he complicates readings which would align Maurice's story with military and political events outside St Patrick's, and suggests another model for writing about and reading mental illness in modern Irish poetry.

II: PSYCHOANALYSIS

The links drawn between mythopoeia and mental imbalance in the introductory section above appear impressionistic. It is certainly true that while a number of critics have raised the issue of a connection between allegory and psychological conditions, few have explained it any detail. Fletcher devotes one chapter (the shortest) of *Allegory* to it (279-303). Here he takes a classically Freudian view of the relation of neuroses to nonneurotic behaviour, but instead of associating allegory with hysteria, Fletcher argues for an analogy between allegory and obsession-compulsion, suggesting that allegory has more in common with religious ritual than mimetic art. Fletcher's focus is entirely on the behaviour of allegory as a literary form, not, he stresses, on the psychobiographies of authors or their characters (281-6).

The typical allegorical agent, Fletcher contends, 'is a daemon, for whom function of active choice hardly exists. This appears to have a major correlate in the theory of compulsive behaviour, where it is observed that the mind is suddenly obsessed by an idea over which it has no control' (286-7). Attempts to stop obsessive thoughts or the resulting compulsive behaviour provoke anxiety, which is analogous to the daemonic agent's fear of not reaching a goal; this anxiety, however, is rarely directly visible in the highly ordered allegorical landscape. Fletcher gives us a characteristic example of such a compulsive personality, Virgil's Aeneas, who also displays the submerged aggression of the compulsive. It will be clear from this example that it is not always easy, perhaps not possible, to separate psychobiography from the study of the formal character of the text.

Allegorical imagery has a parallel in the compulsive's *idée fixe*, Fletcher explains: 'the tendency of agents to become images, which allowed agents to represent the "cosmic" order of allegories, has in psychoanalysis an equivalent in the process of "isolation" '(289) Like the compulsive personality, allegory shows an intense interest in

separating and categorising: '[t]his means that the compulsive syndrome employs ornament in the sense of *kosmos*' (290). Fletcher goes on to link compulsive ritual behaviour with allegorical action. The continual movement that ends in hypostasis, characteristic of progress narrative, is analogous to the compulsive's repetition of rituals, driven by the anxiety that a ritual has been performed improperly or incompletely. The proliferation of ritual associated with compulsive behaviour Fletcher relates to encyclopaedic allegory (292-3).

Finally, Fletcher relates the double cathexis of compulsion neuroses – the double meaning by which the object of obsession is at once most desirable and most repulsive – to the ambivalence or 'moral dualism' of allegory. It is here that his psychoanalytic model becomes most interesting for the purposes of this study, since he explicitly states the relationship of the compulsive to the authoritarian personality: 'rigid, anxious, fatalistic' (302). If allegory can be said to have a 'personality', then it is the authoritarian type described by Adorno *et al.* in *The Authoritarian Personality*. ¹² Following this model, it is easy to see why the recovered Maurice Devane (and Austin Clarke) might emphatically reject allegory.

Theorists of allegory now tend to find Fletcher's Freudian approach rather crude, where they do not find it pernicious.¹³ Anglo-American criticism that links allegory and psychoanalysis is rare. French theorists have been more active, tending however, to follow the example of Jacques Lacan's 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter" in allegorising a text rather than concentrating on allegory itself.¹⁴ One study remarkable for its attention to allegory *per se*, which nonetheless retains a Lacanian methodology, is Joel Fineman's paper 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire'.¹⁵ This dense essay interrogates two aspects of allegory: firstly 'the ways allegories begin and [...] the ends towards which they tend' and secondly, the 'desire *for* allegory that is implicit in the idea of structure itself, and explicit in criticism that directs itself towards

the structurality of literature.' (26) Allegory is driven by a self-perpetuating desire to recover a lost, irrecoverable signified, just as the psyche searches for lost origins. Psychoanalysis confronts the facts of loss and irrecoverability with interpretation and therefore is 'the extension and conclusion of the classic allegorical tradition from which it derives.' (27) Leaving aside for the moment Fineman's imputation of the end of allegory, which is not easy to reconcile with the rest of his argument, it is immediately apparent that he conflates, quite deliberately, allegory and allegorical interpretation. This is an inevitable result of the analogy with psychoanalysis, since separating the psyche from its analytical diagnosis is difficult once that diagnosis has been made, just as a text allegorised by allegorical interpretation is difficult to distinguish from an allegory. Fineman's essay counters the hygienic separation of allegories from allegorical interpretation that some critics insist upon. However, his own primary interest is in the allegorisation of texts by interpretation, as his selection of debatable allegories (*The Waste Land, The Canterbury Tales*) and what we might call pre-allegories (his epigraph is the first line of the *Iliad*) as examples demonstrates.

In fact, his essay is a playful illustration and more serious attempt at recuperation of allegorical interpretation as a respectable critical mode. Fineman discusses Jakobson's 'primal phonemes' /pa/ and /ma/, arguing that these are written into the beginnings of his chosen poems in an attempt to recover the lost object. In this example he refers to the first lines of *The Canterbury Tales*:

What we can say is that with its poeticality defined as structure superinduced upon metonymy, allegory initiates and continually revivifies its own desire, a desire born of its own structuring [...] With their piercing of March by April, then, the allegorical structure thus enunciated has already lost its center and thereby discovered a project: to recover the loss dis-covered by the structure of language and of literature. (44)

The piercing of March (/ma/) by April (/pa/), in Chaucer's opening lines, Fineman alleges, recreates a linguistic primal scene, analogous to that witnessed by Freud's Wolf

Man. The improbability of this formulation is part of Fineman's point. He is engaged in what might be best described as a secular form of aggadic midrash. As Deborah Madsen notes, midrashic interpretations contain 'interpolations and alterations that [...] are often very free and sometimes obviously fictional.' Nonetheless, '[i]t is in these interpolations that the recuperative and speculative activities of midrashic interpretation meet. Midrash not only revives prior meanings but seeks out all semantic properties of the proof text.' 16

With his hypothesis, then, Fineman appears to agree basically with Fletcher: allegory has a 'psyche' that can be described by a form of allegorical interpretation, whose terms are drawn from psychoanalysis. In this they disagree with many critics of allegory, who argue that allegorical interpretation is the least appropriate method for tackling an allegory, either because the allegory already contains the means by which it can be understood, rendering commentary superfluous, or because '[t]aken out of their literary contexts, the abstract formulations of allegory often appear unorthodox or simply wrong.'¹⁷

Fineman treats psychoanalysis as the culmination and conclusion of a two thousand year-old tradition of allegory and allegorical interpretation (49). Psychoanalysis ends allegory, for Fineman, because its method is to confront the permanent rupture between signifier and signified, halting the self-replicating desire that depends on the delusion that the signified can be recovered. Further, because he has already established that allegory is coterminous with discourse, 'allegory rapidly acquires the status of trope of tropes, representative of the figurality of all language, the distance between signifier and signified, and correlatively, the response to allegory becomes representative of criticism per se' (27). The end of allegory, in other words, implies the end of criticism. Fineman tries to work through this syllogism in an inevitably overblown conclusion to his essay (49-51). He is faced with the empirical problem that

criticism has manifestly failed to stop or be transformed beyond recognition by psychoanalysis, and with the more important intractability of his own terminology. As Carolynn Van Dyke suggests, Fineman's poststructuralist, Lacanian reading of allegory does not transform our view of it nearly enough:

It leaves untouched the assumption that allegory operates on parallel levels, one of which is now called the "signifier", while the other, implicit level is the "signified". That assumption subverts the poststructuralist attempt to normalize allegory as the condition of all textuality, for it sets up an unacknowledged equivoque. In language generally, for the poststructuralist, the signified is forever irrecoverable, an absence created by the expulsion from the signifier; but that is not the kind of distance between signifier and signified established by allegorical parallelism. (Van Dyke 27)

In short, Fineman attempts to use an ancient definition of allegory, which sets it apart as other-speech, in order to posit that very allegory as synonymous with discourse. This is bound to fail, but as Van Dyke also points out, the failure is instructive in that it points out the persistence of the presumption that allegorical speech is different from ordinary speech, even amongst those theorists who set out to prove otherwise (Van Dyke 29).

The root of the problem with Fineman's declaration of the end of allegory is not principally that it makes allegory coterminous with discourse. It is rather that he assumes the total success of psychoanalysis in confronting the fact of the irreparable split between signifier and signified and the permanent loss of the object/signified. His own conflation of signifier/signified with allegorical parallelism, however, shows that such success is not assured: the desire for a kind of language which reconciles signifier and signified persists even in his own essay. It may be that this is a deliberate strategy: 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire' is playful in its reappropriation of a midrash-like allegorical criticism which reads 'too much' into the text, so a certain amount of self-reflexiveness is to be expected. However, the point remains. The end of allegory must be delayed until the development of a theory and method of psychoanalysis that will

infallibly confront the irrevocable loss of the object. Otherwise there is always the possibility that desire for its recovery will emerge and replicate.

One final difficulty with Fineman's approach is its exclusive focus on desire. This is predictable, given his Lacanian methodology. For Fineman, as for Lacan, the subject is above all, a desiring subject. However, just as a Lacanian understanding of desire might be nuanced by Julia Kristeva's work on abjection, so Fineman's representation of allegorical desire might be balanced by a discussion of allegorical horror and loathing. Allegories are typically littered with sites of pollution from which it is necessary that the protagonist escape: abjection is as clearly a propulsive force as allegorical desire. This also applies structurally. It could be said, for instance, that Fineman's argument in this essay inhabits the borderline state of abjection: breaking away from and rejecting the pre-linguistic univoque, but yet to emerge into the 'symbolic' (in the Kristevan sense) of fully understood confrontation with the separation of signifier and signified; that is, the 'symbolic' of the end of allegory.

It is possible to conclude, however, in a much less apocalyptically exciting way, that while psychoanalysis does not end allegory, allegory is the end (the aim, or goal) of psychoanalysis: an interpretative strategy which is also an interpretable corpus, which focuses on language to explain the unconscious mind. The idea that allegory, like psychoanalysis, is both method and corpus of results involves confusion between allegories and allegorical interpretation. This confusion, far from always being a problem, is actually useful in examining Clarke's poems, which both demand interpretation from the reader throughout (i.e. are allegories) and mimic the process of allegorical interpretation.¹⁸

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III: MEMORY

(i)

Clarke's readers and critics tend to approach his representations of mental illness through the medium of Mnemosyne, an approach that in a sense falsifies Clarke's career of engagement with the subject, 19 imposing on it a continuity which the works concerned, read individually or chronologically, do not have. In another, and equally important way, however, the retrospective reading of Clarke's career 'through' Mnemosyne reflects his own preoccupation with memory. As early as The Vengeance of Fionn, Clarke was searching for a way to give his reader 'an awareness of the past – ideal in itself, yet further idealized by memory – in the present', as he puts it in his 1974 note to the poem (CCP 3). Memory, in The Vengeance of Fionn, is mediated through Grainne's feminine sensibility - a characteristic device that reappears in section III of 'The Death of Cuchullin' (1921),²⁰ where the main protagonist is not Cuchullin, who barely speaks, but Emer, in 'The Young Woman of Beare' (CCP 163-70) and 'The Confession of Queen Gormlai' (CCP 156-62). Grainne, 'the golden, the beautiful' (CCP 17), is more strongly inflected by the aisling than any of these, and a consequence of this is that Diarmuid can be read as the poet, his ominous dreams as intimations of Clarke's mental distress. Redshaw's assertion that Grainne is 'the allegorizing muse of the poem' (87), a muse 'so possessed by memory' (88) that she is also Mnemosyne, further suggests that Clarke always associated the faculty of memory with the allegorical mode: 'responding to [the] aisling dynamic of the narrative, Clarke's first legend articulates the beginning of his long "drama of conscience and inner conflict" so clearly displayed in Mnemosyne Lay in Dust' (Redshaw 88). This reading posits allegory as the galvanising agent to the creative activity of memory, which implies the mode's centrality in Clarke's poetry.

Clarke's earliest writing about his own period of mental illness and his time in St. Patrick's Hospital is a prose memoir entitled *The House of Terror*, probably written in

1920 and never published in full. The first chapter of this memoir, entitled 'The Gate', was published in a miscellary of works about incarceration by Irish writers, dedicated to Nelson Mandela on his 70th birthday in 1988.21 'The Gate' is interesting for the extent to which it reveals the persistence of the mythopoeic imagination which Maurice Devane abandons as part of his 'rememorisation'. This memoirist cannot quite be persuaded that a Gate is just a gate, though he seems aware of the dangers of the mythmaking imagination. 'The Gate is an unseen but dominant reality', he states, then in a retreat from incipient mysticism, continues '[i]t is a word used regularly' (72). He moves into the past tense to describe what the Gate meant to him in his period of mental disturbance: '[i]t to me assumed the terms of the Gates of the Inferno in Dante. It meant eternal imprisonment, the abandonment of hope which the criminal has, no counting of days or years'. After recounting an anecdote of one particular fellow inmate, he returns to the present tense, apparently without abandoning the mythopoeic mindset which in Mnemosyne signals psychological danger: '[b]ut those distinct images never give answers. The world in city lies beyond us.' (73) The boundaries between 'mad' allegorising and contingent perception are fluid here, especially in the poignant phrase 'The world in city lies beyond us'. The sense of 'the world in city' is of a microcosm, structured according to recognised hierarchies which are not subject to historical change – that is, an allegory. This city-world, however lies beyond the reach of the incarcerated mad, who are condemned to a marginal position. For all that Clarke appears to associate allegory with madness, then, it also appears here as a social form in which the mentally ill, to the detriment of their condition, cannot participate. This implies that Clarke's ambivalence about the value of allegory, so prominent a part of Mnemosyne, was present at a very early stage of the work's long gestation.

Conversely, the published poetry of the 1920s invests heavily in the notion of allegory as a force for social cohesion. "The Itinerary of Ua Clerigh' (1925), for

instance, uses *figura* to imply a post-Independence gathering of diverse aspects of Irish culture and identity. It combines old Irish forms – the curse, the praise poem, the gloss – which also appear individually in the same collection, into another bardic genre, the itinerary poem. The poem similarly conflates historical periods: Yeats and Ó Conaire appear alongside revenants from the sixteenth – 'A Spanish ship flaming' – and nineteenth centuries, 'Of brave Bonaparte/ Street singers were droning' (*CCP* 121). The final stanza of the poem enacts a movement backwards through time, from a Celtic-Romanesque milieu 'By the holy well/ And the honey house/ Of stone, I read the Gospel' to a pre-Christian heroic past, which is situated '[o]ver bright water':

I met the great horsemen with plunder And among black hills I feasted with them In the royal house of Curoi Mac Dara. (CCP 122)

This evocation of Curoi Mac Dara tells the reader about the technique of 'The Itinerary of Ua Clerigh'. Like the most famous story in which Curoi appears, *Fled Bricrenn* (*Bricriu's Feast*), the poem is a compendium of traditional material. Like Curoi, who in the tale disguises himself as a monstrous churl to challenge the assembled champions of Ireland, the poet here appears in disguise, both the light and penetrable 'disguise' of his Gaelicized name, and the more elusive disguise of the impersonal, ahistorical – indeed, mythopoeic – observer.

A second itinerary poem in *The Cattledrive in Connaught*, "The Pedlar', introduces a theme which dominates Clarke's 1929 collection *Pilgrimage and Other Poems*:

Torchlight, in Tara
Had armed the rampart at night
And I heard the harp and crowds dancing
For a queen that had been married
But the cold rain blew them away
As a story

(CCP 123)

Here the idea of mystical union between sovereignty personified as a 'queen' and a human ruler is quickly dispelled by contingent realities in the form of cold rain and dark roads, but the hierarchical vision is displaced rather than dismissed, and resurfaces in the second half of *Pilgrimage*. The first half of this collection deals with the development of a Christian Celtic identity in the early medieval period; the second half concerns itself with the destruction of that identity in the political and religious turbulence of the seventeenth century. Maurice Harmon suggests that its most explicit articulation of the *sponsalid*²² theme, 'The Marriage Night', (*CCP* 171-2) is an Irish response to Spenser's 'Epithalamion'. The Marriage Night' contains no direct allusion to Spenser, so this suggestion must remain conjectural. If it is indeed a response, then it is one which adopts a historical persona, defending the privilege of aristocratic Gaelic society and European Catholicism, rather than interrogating the colonial background to Spenser's poem.

In short, the poem tackles Spenser on his own terms, and almost inevitably fails. Spenser appropriates Irish folklore, landscape and custom as he declares the joyful reciprocity of marriage and to that extent 'Epithalamion' has an undercurrent of *apologia* for occupation and colonialism. By comparison, the understanding of marriage in 'The Marriage Night' is archaic, wholly hierarchic and dynastic. The speaker treats secular and religious power as synonymous:

Upon the night of her marriage, Confessions were devout; Murmuring, as religion Flamed by, men saw her brow. The Spaniards rolled with flag And drum in quick relays; Our nobles were encamping Each day around Kinsale.

(CCP 172)

Clarke's assonantal technique serves a Catholic chauvinism as distinct, if less accomplished, than Spenser's Protestant propagandising: 'devout' confessions produce

a nationalistic vision of 'her brow', while 'religion' is reduced to military co-operation with Spanish 'roll[ing]' and 'relays'. The failure of allegory to produce any kind of liberation is emphasised in the final stanza:

O she has curbed her bright head Upon the chancel rail With shame, and by her side Those heretics have lain.

(CCP 172)

The syntax allows the implication of rape ('by her side/ Those heretics have lain') to shade into an image of conquering 'heretics' lying by the side of deposed sovereignty in contrition or in death, and with it the transcendent *figura* shades into the consolatory nostalgia of the powerless, of which Donncha Dall Ó Laoghaire's epigram offers an example from the century after Kinsale:

The world laid low, and the wind blew – like a dust – Alexander, Caesar, and all their followers.

Tara is grass; and look how it stands with Troy.

And even the English – maybe they too might die.²⁴

Like the speaker of Heaney's 'Punishment', the speaker of 'The Marriage Night' enacts a form of violence upon a female, (or feminised) body as a direct consequence of his employment of figural allegorism. In this colonial situation, nostalgia is indistinguishable from scapegoating.

Other poems in *Pilgrimage* challenge the conservative, aristocratic understanding of the *sponsalia* expressed in 'The Marriage Night'. The Young Woman of Beare and (to a lesser extent) Queen Gormlai achieve the status of national symbols through promiscuity, not chastity, and as such represent Irish history as a matter of shifting allegiance and self-interested pragmatism: 'Yet little do I care/[...]/That Ormond's men are out/ And the Geraldine is in' (*CCP* 164). 'The Planter's Daughter' uses the visionary language of the *aisling* to describe a member of the colonising class, anticipating the 'Protestant' concerns of some later poems like 'Local Complainer' (*CCP*

211), 'The House-Breakers' (CCP 414-6) and 'In Kildare Street' (CCP 437-8). The spéirbhean of 'Aisling' (CCP 173-5) foretells a free Ireland, but disappears 'with a smile' when the poet asks what place the new nation will find for his art. As Harmon suggests, Clarke implicitly compares the cultural decline of the seventeenth century to a similar decline after the Easter Rising (Harmon 60) but more than this, the poem reveals something of the dynamics of the aisling. Clarke claimed in an essay that the aisling form expressed a basic fear of sexuality, the poet disguising sexual desire with national sentiment.²⁵ But allegories do not typically work simply to disguise, and Clarke's poem is no exception. Instead of being a cover for lasciviousness, the poet's desire for the spéirbhean is an allegory of his concern for his own position. Her cryptic words seem to represent a society which cherishes artistic achievement "Companies/ Are gathered in the house that I have known;/ Claret is on the board and they are pleased/ By storytelling" ' (CCP 174), which encourages the poet to ask "O must I wander/ Without praise, without wine, in rich strange lands?" ' (CCP 175). The skywoman then leaves, in a movement which points to the poet's emigration. The spéirbhean of 'Aisling' is related to the muses, and to Mnemosyne, in that union with her would secure the poet's place in society, as the sponsalia secures the legitimacy of the king's reign. However, this poem reveals that political sovereignty and poetic privilege are no longer analogous, as they might have been in Jacobite vision-poems: Ireland might be free from occupation and yet reject its artists.

For Clarke's most interesting manipulation of the *sponsalia* and *aisling* motifs, however, it is necessary to look to an earlier poem, the 'Frenzy of Suibhne' (1925). Where some of the poems in *Pilgrimage* appear to challenge, without really disrupting, the hierarchic conservatism of these allegorical forms, 'Suibhne' deranges it in a manner which looks forward to certain themes in *Mnemosyne*:

And bound to the rafters May three naked women drip Blood; in their hearing Strange laughter and rapine

Of shadows that tumble From nothing, till fear Empty the bladder

[...]

A juggler cried. Light
Rushed from doors and men singing:
'O she has been wedded
To-night, the true wife of Sweeny,
Of Sweeny the King!'
I saw a pale wom[a]n
Half clad for the new bed
I fought them with talons, I ran
On the oak-wood – O Horsemen,
Dark Horsemen, I tell ye
That Sweeny is dead!

(CCP 132-3)

Elsewhere, Clarke associates the Furies – the naked women bound to the rafters – with troubled sexuality and guilt:

Was I the last poet to lie under such heaviness of hair, while I clasped her in my arms? Dimly I suspected her secret, when in her passionate self-struggle, like Telisiphe, Attlis or Mergara, she forgot long after midnight that I was with her. ²⁶

This allusion is a little obscure, since Clarke misspells the names of the Erinyes – their names in Virgil are Tisiphone, Allecto and Megaera – but W.J. McCormack makes a very good case for identifying these characters as the Furies and the misspelling as a deliberate deflection of the guilt provoked by his consideration of his relationship with 'Margaret' (*Selected Poems* 4-5). Clarke's Erinyes are less vengeful guardians of familial propriety than personifications of the mental pressures caused by 'self-struggle'. They are close relatives of the harpies which inhabit Maurice's allegorical Gate in *Mnemosyne* (*MLD* I, XVII; 328, 351). It is this kind of 'self-struggle', it seems, that replaces the saint's curse as the cause of Sweeny's madness. Sweeny's flight brings him to the site of his own

sponsalia. The marriage of his 'true wife' to another signifies his loss of sovereignty and justifies his belief that he is dead. Sweeny visits the site of what he believes to be his own grave and excavates his grave-goods: 'Nailing, I dug up/The gold cup and collar'. The idea of the madman's body as corpse is revisited in *The Bright Temptation* and more graphically in *Mnemosyne*. 'Summer Lightning' (1938) similarly makes the mad body the site of an act of blasphemy and desecration.

Whereas the allegorical structures of Clarke's early work seem almost naïve in their deference to very recognisable hierarchical patterns, his post-1955 allegories have traditionally attracted critical odium for their supposed obscurity. The tendency to ask plaintively 'if any poet so good would murder language so', as one critic did in 1979, 28 is now on the retreat, though McCormack, annotating 'The Loss of Strength' in 1991, still felt it necessary to caution against it (240). This is not to say the poems do not need annotation. For readers with no Irish, or a limited knowledge of the local circumstances under which Clarke wrote these poems, such glossing is invaluable. Moreover the poems, quite deliberately, 'raise the question of legitimate obscurity in poetry'. They also make liberal use of 'allegory's most cherished function', aenigma (Fletcher 73). Misunderstandings of the purposes of aenigma can account for much of the critical confusion surrounding Clarke's middle-period work. Frazier makes a common error in assuming that aenigma invariably has an exclusive motive and esoteric import:

[Clarke's] poetry often took the form of writing messages in code so that "the enemy" would not get the point, as in "The Jest". A reader expects the labor of interpreting a dark maxim, of breaking the code, to yield deep wisdom, unsayable in any other words, but in Clarke's case such labor is often rewarded with the quotidian and prosaic. (Frazier 65)

In his *Irish University Review* essay, Kinsella suggests that the 'obscurity' of many of these poems is the result of Clarke's 'allowing his language to lie unused for too long over most of his lyric range' (135). Whether language *can* go rusty in this way must remain a matter

for debate. The example that Kinsella quotes, however, can be understood without resorting to the explanation of 'disuse':

Once as I crept from the church-steps, Beside myself, the air opened On purpose. Nature read in a flutter An evening lesson above my head. Atwirl beyond the headings, corbels, A cage-bird came among sparrows (The moral inescapable) Plucked, roof-mired, all in mad bits, O The pizzicato of its wires!

Goodness of air can be proverbial:
That day by the kerb at Rutland Square,
A bronze bird fabled out of trees,
Mailing the spearheads of the railings,
Sparrow at nails[.] I hailed the skies
To save the tiny dropper, found
Appetite gone. A child of clay
Had blustered it away. Pity
Could raise some littleness from dust.

('Ancient Lights', CCP 199-200) 30

This passage puzzles Davie also: 'neither I nor any one I have consulted has been able to say what it is that happens in the crucial fourth and fifth stanzas. Some sort of natural epiphany, undoubtedly, but what sort, and just how?' (47). These stanzas are two related fables, the first concerned with nature and art, the second with pity and 'appetite', or desire. In the first, the sparrows stand for nature as sanity, in contrast to the neurotic tension of the 'cage-bird', which might be associated with the speaker, who begins the poem traumatised by his belief that he has made a bad confession. Several critics interpret this stanza as meaning the sparrows tear apart the cage-bird (Frazier 63, Harmon 157, Selected Poems 235), but there is no evidence for this in the stanza as it is published; the cage-bird simply comes among them, already in its state of semi-dismemberment. The cage-bird is revealed as a kind of mechanical bird, with 'wires', which links it to the figure of the poet in 'Sailing to Byzantium':

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake,
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, passing, or to come. 31

For the speaker of 'Ancient Lights' the consequence of a similar rejection of nature and devotion to art has been derangement, figured in the dismemberment of the cage-bird. Clarke maintains a little Yeatsian detachment in the cruel thrill of 'O/ The pizzacato of its wires!', but otherwise the stanza's clotted diction stands in opposition to Yeats's lucidity, as a token of the speaker's emotional honesty. Where the last stanza of Yeats's poem invites a stock response, 32 which the reader discovers belatedly has been anticipated by the poet, Clarke's stanza trades on its claim to truth, its faith in the didactic purpose of Nature and the interpretative capabilities of its readers. Here, the aenigma is not an attempt to conceal, but an indication of openness, and far from being a result of insufficient familiarity with the 'lyric range', this 'obscurity' is engaged in a dialogue with Yeats's lyric concerning the extent of lyric sincerity.

The fifth stanza continues on a Yeatsian note by examining the interrelation of desire and pity. The speaker is driven by pity to rescue the sparrow that the bronze bird of prey has dropped, and as he does so, feels an evaporation of '[a]ppetite'. Almost paradoxically, it is a re-accession of '[p]ity' which 'could' raise the 'littleness' of the sparrow, a 'littleness' of the collapsed appetite. In *A Vision* Yeats writes of the twenty-third phase, under which he characterises Rembrandt and Synge:

the man must free the intellect from all motives founded upon personal desire, by the help of the external world, now for the first time mastered and studied for its own sake [...] Phase 23 receives not desire but pity, and not belief but wisdom. Pity needs wisdom as desire needs belief, for pity is *primary*, whereas desire is *antithetical*.³³

Though it is hard to imagine Clarke himself having much sympathy with the mystical theory of A Vision – Davie imagines him saying a 'venomous yes' to suggestions that Yeats's theory of history is 'consolatory and anaesthetic' (53) – Clarke's speaker aims towards just such an impersonal study (if not quite mastery) of the external world, and the need for pity in any attempt to know that world. The 'lesson' is allegorised into the fable of the bronze bird and the sparrow because allegory inscribes the fleeting epiphany into memory.

Clarke's aenigma is a mnemonic device, similar to those which Mary Carruthers describes in her study The Craft of Thought (1998).34 As noted in Chapter 1, Carruthers understands memory to mean not simply recollection, but a faculty which permits all kinds of intellectual and creative activity. Memory extends into the future as well as into the past. Late classical and medieval philosophy, Carruthers explains, did not distinguish strongly between using the imagination and recollection (70), so, as one of her section headings indicates, there would be no contradiction inherent in the idea of 'Remembering the Future' (66). The understanding of memory that Clarke develops through his work and arrives at in Mnemosyne shows a good deal of sympathy with these medieval ideas. The beginning of section XVIII, 'Rememorised, Maurice Devane/Went out, his future in every vein' (351), for instance, indicates a concept of memory extending into, and making possible the future that is almost identical to Carruthers' 'Remembering the Future', and an apparently obscure phrase from the same section, 'Illusions had become a story', describes precisely the process of creation as described above: drawing on the 'illusions' of memory to create a concrete 'story' (MLD XVIII; 351). Notably, it is only when Maurice has been 'rememorised' that he can produce these insights, and carry out fully the work of memory. Before his rememorisation, he sees stories as pre-existing, fixed in 'mysterious' patterns, and himself as their 'victim' (MLD VI; 335).

Carruthers argues strongly against interpretations of *aenigma* which ascribe to it a wholly exclusive function:

Mnemonic narratives of this sort are a common feature of many practical, technical arts before the rationalist reconstructions of the eighteenth century. [...] It is a principle of mnemotechnics that we remember particularly vividly and precisely things that are odd and emotionally striking, rather than those that are commonplace. Sex and violence, strangeness and exaggeration, are especially powerful for mnemonic purposes. (Carruthers 28-9)

Aenigma's primary function, then, is not exclusive, but affective. Its strangeness, as we saw with the fable of the birds in 'Ancient Lights' is an aspect of its emotional appeal, and equally important, a token of creative potential. The unravelling of an aenigma reveals to the reader something about the structure of the text, and Clarke is unusually generous with these structural clues:

Up the hill
Hurry me not;
Down the hill,
Worry me not;
On the level
Spare me not
In the stable
Forget me not.

Trochaic dimeter, amphimacer
And choriamb, with hyper catalexis
Grammatical inversion, springing of double
Rhyme. So we learned to scan all, analyse
Lyric and ode, elegy, anonymous patter,
For what is song itself but substitution?

('Forget Me Not', CCP 237)

The realisation that the metrical jargon of lines 9-11 describes (or rather 'substitutes', in some sense *is*) the mnemonic jingle of lines 1-8 introduces the reader to the technique of this highly affective poem.³⁵ We return to the 'anonymous patter' of the emphasised lines with a new appreciation of their complexity, emotional power, and value; an appreciation which is analogous to the reappraisal of the value and power of the horse which the whole poem prompts. But the jingle retains its enigmatic power precisely

because we no longer know which is the *aenigma*: the deceptively simple rhyme itself, or the learned jargon which is necessary to describe it. *Aenigma* is allegory's 'most cherished function' perhaps because it combines allegorical synthesis and allegorical analysis, allegory and allegoresis: this example both analyses the structure of a text and synthesises the text with a description of itself. This analysis/synthesis is inscribed into a discourse of memory by the mnemonic potential of the 'anonymous patter'. Throughout the poem, creative memory is always signified by the appearance of a form of allegory, whether that is the 'parable' of a fallen horse, the emblem of the Sagittary, or the 'allegory' of Ireland and the Slight Red Steed (*CCP* 239-242). 'Forget Me Not' does not simply appeal to us to remember the horse in a spirit of regret or nostalgia, but to do so in the context of a memory culture which recognises the possibility of memory extending into the future, a memory culture in which

The matters memory presents are used to persuade and motivate, to create emotion and stir the will. And the accuracy or authenticity of these memories – their simulation of an actual past – is of far less importance [...] than their use to motivate the present and to affect the future. (Carruthers 68-9)

The development of this kind of memory culture, associated with Judaism because of the power of Old Testament injunctions "to remember", may account for the plethora of Old Testament references in 'The Hippophagi' (CCP 229-235). A similar kind of emotive memory culture is sometimes claimed for Ireland, even by Clarke himself, as he calls it, '[t]oo much historied/ Land' ('Forget Me Not', CCP 242). But the general impression that Clarke's satires give is of an amnesiac country, forgetful of its poor, its women, its children, its religious minorities, forgetful of those who thought they were fighting for political autonomy; a country desperately in need of more, not less, memory. But the affective memory culture, because it relies to such a great extent on allegory, fable and emblem, is subject to the same political problems as allegory: it effaces accuracy in favour of memory as motivation in very distinct, very

rigid, often violent directions. It effaces those whose actions do not fit an emblematic pattern, those, in short, whom Clarke's satirical poems demand that we remember. It is with this problem in mind that we should tackle *Mnemosyne*, discussion of which occupies the rest of this chapter.

(ii)

The title *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust* – on first magazine publication, and for the American edition, the poem was de-mythicised to *The Loss of Memory*³⁶ – has attracted substantial commentary as to the poem's possible allusions and sources. McCormack suggests a parallel with Friedrich Hölderlin's Mnemosyne poems, noting that Clarke's poem also addresses the failure of heroism, and that both poets experienced institutional treatment for mental illness, found reconciliation with Christianity impossible, and 'were profoundly devoted to classical metrics yet lived through "romantic" phases of literary history' (*Selected Poems* 245). In contrast, it is *Mnemosyne*'s connection to romanticism that Neil Corcoran and John Goodby emphasise – both link the poem to Keats.

Corcoran reads Maurice's much-delayed decision (*CCP* 343) to eat a strawberry as an echo of the uneaten meal in 'The Eve of St Agnes': ³⁷ 'Maurice's delay is similarly a kind of erotic-degustatory foreplay which continues beyond the end of the penultimate line of the stanza, when the epithet "wished for" is made, gerundively, to contain, or delay, without ever releasing, its possible noun' (Corcoran, 49-50). Maurice's yielding to temptation is presented as continence, in contrast both to his hysterical refusal to eat and his distressing evacuations earlier in the poem. The paradoxical relationship of continence and indulgence here recalls Clarke's wry explanation of his mental collapse: 'There is no cure for the folly of youth or the dire consequences of over-indulgence in continence'. ³⁸ The echo of 'The Eve of St. Agnes' might also have a parodic or ironic edge to it. As Corcoran is obliged to note, Maurice has no one with whom to share his

meal: if any 'erotic-degustatory foreplay' is going on it will end not in the '"solution sweet" of the act of love' (Corcoran 49) but in masturbation. Maurice's meal is bracketed with images of masturbation: at the end of section X he sees a vision of Onan, and at the beginning of section XIV he appears in thick dungarees with 'no buttons' in the company of other 'churn-dashers' (343-5). Clarke may refer to Keats in the context not of consummation and recuperation but of adolescent, immature sexuality. Such a reading of Keats would have seemed outmoded at the time of *Mnemosyne*'s composition but only a decade later, following Christopher Ricks's *Keats and Embarrassment* (1974), the charges of perversity and vulgarity brought by Keats's earliest critics were reassessed in terms of their ability to illuminate the prevalent sexual and class mores with which Keats took issue. Clarke's ambiguous, suggestive treatment of Keatsian characters in *Mnemosyne* prefigures that development in criticism.³⁹

Goodby, on the other hand, sees 'Hyperion' and 'The Fall of Hyperion' as Clarke's main Keatsian influences. He links Keats's Mnemosyne/Moneta to Maurice's emaciation and to 'self-wasted' Onan (MLD X; 343) but retreats from this to see Mnemosyne almost entirely as a redemptive figure: '[i]n Greek myth Mnemosyne is the personification of memory, the mother of the muses and the protector of poetry. Clarke splits, or rather redefines, these functions in the mother who brings Maurice the restorative strawberries and Mnemosyne, who is memory.' Like Keats, Goodby claims, Clarke 'overcomes an oppressive archaic patriarchal mythography through the agency of an all-knowing female figure' (Goodby 327). These conclusions initiate a promising line of enquiry. First, though, it might be noted that the Mnemosyne of 'Hyperion' and the Moneta/Mnemosyne of 'The Fall of Hyperion' are not identical and interchangeable figures. Jack Stillinger suggests that the two instances in 'The Fall of Hyperion' in which Moneta is given her Greek name are mistakes; in any case 'Moneta is not the same as the character consistently named Mnemosyne in "Hyperion" ' (Keats 478).

Mnemosyne, in 'Hyperion' the freest of the Titans, with the power to bestow divinity on Apollo, comes closest to Goodby's 'all-knowing female figure', but Clarke's Mnemosyne is altogether more similar to the Moneta of 'The Fall of Hyperion'. Mnemosyne is mentioned by name for the first time in section V, as Devane climbs in imagination 'to a cobwebbed top room [...] stumbling/ Where Mnemosyne lay in dust' (334). Devane is reminiscent here of Keats's poet-dreamer, stumbling on the steps of Saturn's altar, and Mnemosyne 'in dust' also seems a possible allusion to Moneta, veiled and shrouded in the abandoned temple. Moneta is a far more weary, decadent and ambiguous figure than Mnemosyne is (Keats seems to have chosen the Roman name over the Greek for this reason). Her power to 'direct [...] psychic recuperation and socially (re)-integrate the poet-worshipper' (Goodby 327) is rather less certain than Goodby suggests. Her elusive pronouncements on visionaries and poets enrage the dreamer, and then silence him (I, 228-31). The dreamer's desire to see through (literally, as he penetrates her brain) Moneta's eyes, 'to see what things the hollow brain/ Behind enwombed' (I, 275-6) has a sexual charge, picking up on the language of Moneta's original offer of her superhuman sight and understanding:

"the scenes
"Still swooning vivid through my globed brain,
"With an electral changing misery
"Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold,"
(1, 244-7)

In her study Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style (1988), Marjorie Levinson uses this sexualised rhetoric to argue that 'The Fall of Hyperion' constitutes a 'distinctively feminine discourse' which appropriates in order to displace the self-consciously virile discourse of 'Hyperion' (or at least Books I and II of it – Book III, according to Levinson, is less successfully masculinised). The relationship between these two discourses is not modelled on sexual intercourse, but is 'something closer to [...] hermaphroditism'. Levinson finds this analogy unsatisfactory in that 'nothing comes of

the coupling'. Instead, it 'is, and is meant to be, a sterile affair: a matter of reciprocal alienation and the production of internal dissonance'. 40

Given the emphasis which Levinson places on auto-eroticism in Keats it is surprising that she does not make an explicit connection between these alienated, sterile discourses (and, further, Moneta's sterility⁴¹) and masturbation, though she does mention that the situation is an ideal enactment of D.H. Lawrence's remarks about 'sex in the head' (Levinson 216). If Clarke alludes to 'The Fall of Hyperion' in his presentation of Onan, however, it is precisely the link between Moneta and masturbation that he perceives. Onan is not Maurice's only nocturnal visitor. Apart from his sexually charged dreams, he also sees a revenant that is directly connected to the visitation of Onan:

Lo! in memory yet,
Margaret came in a frail night-dress,
Feet bare, her heavy plaits let down
Between her knees, his pale protectress.
Nightly restraint, unwanted semen
Had ended their romantic dream.
(MLD VI; 336)

Margaret appears as an aspect of memory, of Mnemosyne; as a 'pale protectress' she also performs one of the roles of Keats's Moneta, whom she resembles, robed in nightdress and heavy hair. Clarke also describes Margaret in her nightdress in his memoir A Penny in the Clouds, and here she is identified with the Furies (A Penny 44). Clarke associates Margaret with ambivalent female deities, but she is also the precursor of Onan. Maurice's sexual relationship with her involves Onanism in a precise sense—coitus interruptus practised in order to avoid breaking a societal taboo—and the frustration caused thereby provokes Onanism in the sense of masturbation. If we are to link Clarke's Mnemosyne with Onan (and with Keats's Moneta) then the figure of Margaret provides a crucial link, and furthermore, destabilises the notion of Mnemosyne as a wholly recuperative figure.

In 'The Fall of Hyperion', sterility manifests itself structurally as well as thematically. Levinson argues that Thea and Saturn constitute an emblem of 'Hyperion', which is petrified and alienated by the gaze of Moneta and the dreamer. Thea and Saturn are 'Like sculpture builded-up upon the grave/ Of their own power' (I, 384-5) because 'The Fall of Hyperion' is a sculpture on the grave of Keats's earlier, immediate, expressive poem (Levinson 218). Levinson plays on Harold Bloom's theory of influence, '2 suggesting that in the Hyperion poems, Keats is precursor and ephebe at once: 'The Fall of Hyperion' engages in a struggle of influence with 'Hyperion'. 'The Fall of Hyperion' is a 'self-sufficer', like Onan – might a similar claim be made for Clarke's *Mnemosyne*? '44

The long poem incorporates earlier, shorter lyrics: section VIII under the title 'Summer Lightning' appeared in Night and Morning (1938), section XII as 'Fragaria' in 'Flight to Africa' (1963). Since they undergo no changes, except an alteration of the first person pronouns to third person to fit the third person narration of Mnemosyne, this can safely be regarded as a gathering of poems on a similar theme into a more coherent story. That Clarke chose in preparing his 1974 Collected Poems to publish 'Summer Lightning' and 'Fragaria' in their original positions as well as in Mnemosyne implies that he did not want the lyrics to be completely effaced by the narrative poem, but nor is there a sense of struggle between the two versions. Similarities between the Glen Bolcan episode in The Bright Temptation and Mnemosyne present a more interesting case. In the prose romance, Aidan, a novice monk separated from his community by a freak accident, embarks on a journey through an early medieval Ireland which is by turns idyllic and threatening. After a number of adventures, he wanders into a valley inhabited by madmen, to which 'from every part of Ireland [...] all those who were affected in mind were drawn by an irresistible impulse' (BT 218). As well as conventional attributes of lunacy, twitching, maniacal laughter and dancing, the Glen

Bolcan madmen exhibit some of the same behaviour as those in *Mnemosyne*: apparently aimless searching (*BT* 216, *MLD* III; 330-1); blasphemy (*BT* 217, *MLD* VIII; 338-9); and, of course, 'the solitary sin, ever with insane hands that they cannot keep from themselves, wasting their pale watery substance' (*BT* 221). Aidan has some experiences comparable to Maurice's: he sees disembodied heads (*BT* 214, *MLD* X; 342), is terrified by a 'reed gatherer' who also appears as the leader of a nightly 'masquerade' in *Mnemosyne* (*BT* 219, *MLD* II; 329) and finally realises, like Maurice 'laugh[ing]/ To find he was an imbecile', that the madmen have 'faces like his own' (*MLD* XIV; 346, *BT* 221). Refracted through Aidan's superstitious fear of them, though, the Glen Bolcan madmen are much more threatening than their twentieth-century counterparts.

Two particular encounters in Glen Bolcan, however, are indicative of the way in which Mnemosyne develops and alters the earlier text. The first madman that Aidan personally encounters is dressed in gold jewellery and the rags of once-rich clothes, which appear to the novice like fool's motley. 45 At first, he appears to be praying, but as he approaches, Aidan sees that he is in 'a terrible dream from which he could not awaken'. The scholar says a prophylactic prayer to himself, to which the madman seems to reply, "He never died for us, I tell you. He never died for us. He gave His body, but not His mind. It was never broken. He did not die for us, who are lost...lost!..." ' (BT 217). Aidan, who only hears in this a denial of Christ's sacrifice, recoils from the blasphemy. What the madman is saying, though, is that Christ did not die for the mad, because he died with his mind intact. Where the death of Christ's mortal body precipitated the death of his human mind, the madman's mental death precedes his physical demise. Thus he cannot partake of the figural identification of the individual Christian with Christ and is denied the salvation of the Resurrection. Madness is portrayed as a state of extreme dualism, in which the body is irrevocably severed from the soul. The triad of blasphemy, sacrifice and dualism appears again in

section VIII of Mnemosyne ('Summer Lightning'). It begins with a cataclysmic flash of lightning, related to, perhaps precipitated by blasphemy: 'The heavens opened. With a scream/ The blackman at his night prayers/ Had disappeared in blasphemy' (CCP 190, MLD VIII; 338). The lightning acts on the patients in their beds, stripping them of their humanity, their resemblance to God: 'Ashing the faces of madmen/ Until God's likeness died'. Like the madman in Glen Bolcan, the speaker of 'Summer Lightning' assumes that, in Harmon's words, 'the madmen are excluded from divine grace; for them the elements of bread and wine are not changed into the body and blood of Christ' (214). 'Likeness' is the term around which this theological debate revolves. If we understand 'likeness' literally, almost naïvely, as a matter of mimesis, a more immediate and horrific reading becomes possible. 'Likeness' encourages such a 'naïve' reading, as 'image' - the other possibility, from imago et similitudo Dei (Genesis 1:26) with its freight of association concerning idolatry, discourages it. Christ, fully incarnate, is 'God's likeness', just as humans are (so, logically, in Glen Bolcan, the issue of exclusion from divine grace is raised specifically in the context of Christ's bodily death). In 'Summer Lightning', the madmen's bodies become Calvary, the site of Christ's death, the lightning a negative image of the darkness that fell as Christ died on the cross (Luke 23:45). The poem states a terrible irony – God can die in the mad, but not for them.

In *Mnemosyne*, this bleak conclusion is directly followed by the account of Mr Prunty, who is convinced that his body is literally the site of a death, that he is a corpse:

Timor Mortis was beside him.

In the next b[e]d lolled an old man
Called Mr. Prunty, smallish, white-haired
Respectable. If anyone went past,
He sat up, rigid, with pointed finger
And shrieked: 'Stop, Captain, don't pass
The dead body!' All day, eyes starting,
Spectral, he shrieked, his finger darting.

(MLD x; 339)

A precursor of Mr Prunty appears in Glen Bolcan. After Aidan flees from the blasphemer, his next personal encounter is with the prototype of Mr Prunty, who is also linked to the blasphemer by his apparent blindness:

A short distance away a small old man was sitting with his back against an oak. His skin was wrinkled and tougher than bark, the last rags had been flung from his filthied loins, but his face with its silver bristles, its open nostrils, was deathly white. If Aidan were terrified, the creature under the tree was even more so, for its little piglike eyes were sightless, its head was erect as it listened for every sound.

"Stand back, monk! Do not touch the dead body!"

Aidan's heel crushed a twig.

"Do not touch it, do not take it away!"

The bony finger was pointing towards Aidan, the lids of the sightless eyes were twitching. As he turned and ran the creature emitted shriek after piercing shriek. (BT 220-1)

Because the madman says 'Do not *touch* the dead body', the novel leaves the reader uncertain whether he refers to himself, to Aidan, or to some apparition visible only to him. The wording of the poem leaves no doubts. Clarke calls him a 'body' and a 'corpse', who resides in a 'vault'. The poem is franker, too, about Mr Prunty's abject condition: where his prototype has 'filthied loins', he has a specific 'fault/ In bed. Nightly he defecated' (*MLD* X; 339). The horror that is felt at the breaching of the body's boundaries is displaced in *The Bright Temptation*, onto the unshaven silver bristles of the man's face, his 'open' nostrils, his 'twitching' eyes. In the poem, that horror is restored to the more psychologically convincing location of the anal sphincter.

The technique that Clarke applies here is actually the reverse of the self-sufficing that Keats practises in the 'Hyperion' poems. Where Keats builds an emblematic, framed picture in his later poem, Clarke strips away the frame provided by Aidan's observation of the scene. The observer's role is taken in the poem by Maurice, who is not watching in horror at the transgression of bodily margins which an adult should be able to control, but waiting in fear for his own incontinence and punishment by the brutal, exasperated warder. Mr Prunty is linked to Maurice again in section XI: in May

Maurice sees Mr Prunty 'gobbling' cake in another disgusting breach of physical boundaries, an image which precedes the appearance in June of the strawberries and his own decision to eat. Where 'The Fall of Hyperion' displaces sexual desire and activity into the topology of Moneta's brain, Clarke's poem attempts to recover a less reified image. So the open nostrils and twitching eyes of the 1932 text become the gobbling mouth and relaxed sphincter of Mnemosyne. That Clarke is engaged on a project of antiallegorisation seems to be confirmed by his presentation of Mr Prunty in section IX. He begins the section as a personification - 'Timor Mortis' - which furthermore evokes the danse macabre stasis/progression of William Dunbar's 'I that in heill wes and gladnes', 46 and then gains a name and some individual characteristics. He is a kind of Malbecco in reverse, declining from a personification into a type (FQ III.ix-x). But an anti-allegorical aesthetic cannot explain Clarke's placement at the centre of his poem an image uniquely redolent of the allegorical mood: the dying body, the animated corpse, Benjamin's facies hippocratica.⁴⁷ This is one more example of the theme identified in section I: the tension between the allegorical impulse and the sense that allegorical structures are psychologically dangerous.

IV: ABJECTION

To explain Clarke's interest in the moribund emblem constituted by Mr Prunty, it might be helpful to consider the psychoanalytic idea of abjection. According to Kristeva, abjection is a borderline state between the harmony and continuity of prelinguistic experience and the intervention of the symbolic that comes with the acquisition of language. The abject results from attempts preceding the full intervention of the symbolic to reject/expel the mother, and is necessary to ensure full separation from her. The symbolic is not on its own strong enough to sustain the expulsion; there must be a parallel movement towards the abjection of the mother. After the successful imposition

of the symbolic, abjection does not disappear but remains as a prop for the maintenance of the symbolic law. A society might use abjection in a ritualistic way in order to uphold the symbolic law and ensure its survival. These rituals concentrate on the main sites of abjection: the margins of the body. Kristeva uses the example of Old Testament dietary and corporeal prohibitions to illustrate the way in which certain bodily boundaries and the wastes they produce – particularly those associated with the maternal and the feminine – are presented as unclean. The abject, '[f]rom an analytic point of view is above all the ambiguous, the in-between, what defies boundaries, a composite resistance to unity.'48 It is 'what disturbs identity, system, order'.49

The abject disturbs identity, because it is, in common with the object – according to Kristeva, this is all it has in common with the object – opposed to the self. But where the object, through the subject's desire for meaning, draws the subject into a relationship of correspondence and analogy, the abject 'is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses' (2). Or in other words, abjection is the recognition of want (=lack) and as such is preliminary to the being of the object. As desire is to the object, so want is to the abject (5). From its excluded position, the abject continues to bother the subject, as something that once – pre-linguistically – might have been familiar, but is now loathsome, 'not-I'. The subject experiences this as a kind of suffering 'not [...] repression, not the translations and transformations of desire [...] rather it is a brutish suffering that "I" puts up with [...] I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other' (2). As we see with Kristeva's example of the 'most archaic form of abjection', food-loathing, this other's desire is crucial to the confusion of identity caused by abjection. The 'skin' on the surface of warm milk occasions disgust here:

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to

listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me", who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself. [...] it is thus that they see that "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which I become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. (3)

Unable, and not wishing to emerge into the symbolic, the self is abjected. This is comparable to Maurice's food-loathing:

Weakening, he lay flat. Appetite
Had gone. The beef or mutton, potatoes
And cabbage – he turned from the thick slices
Of meat, the greasy rings of gravy.
Knife had been blunted, fork was thick
And every plate was getting bigger.
His stomach closed: He eyed the food,
Disgusted: always beef or mutton,
Potatoes, cabbage, turnips. Mind spewed,
Only in dreams was gluttonous.

(MLD IV; 333)

Maurice turns from the food that is proffered by authority, and he experiences the symptoms of disgust. The blunting and swelling of the utensils stress Maurice's surrealistic detachment from the food at the same time as they echo those symptoms – pains and spasms in the stomach, the swelling of the gorge before retching. He rejects the food as anterior to self, but recognises that there is also a desire (on the part of authority, but also internalised by Maurice himself) to assimilate that food. Out of this ambivalence a reaction emerges: 'Mind spewed'. Here the reader tends silently to expand Clarke's economical phrase to something like 'Maurice imagined spewing'. But read literally, it means the evacuation of the mind.

Maurice has spent this section of the poem (IV; 331-3) trying to recapture his identity, trying first to identify with his image in the mirror. When that fails he listens to the sound of distant machinery, which he associates with an experience from his schooldays. This is more successful as it gets 'memory afoot', but memory transforms the remembered scene into a mythic one:

The tiger muzzle
Gnarled as myriads of them bumbled
Heavily towards the jungle honey.
A sound of oriental greeting:
Ramàyana, Bhagavad-gita,
Hymnal of Brahma, Siva, Vishnu.
'The temple is gone. Where is the pather?'
A foolish voice in English said:
'He's praying to his little Father.'

(MLD V; 332)

Maurice looks to the maternal figure of memory for identity, but what memory gives him is this jumble of allusions to patriarchy. It is a scene of abjection because movements towards the expulsion of the mother are taking place (the vision concentrates exclusively on male, phallic deities) but there is a failure of the subject to emerge fully into a symbolic realm where the paternal law of language would make sense. Kristeva describes the abjection of self in terms very similar to these: '[the abject] is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject' (5). The abjected self is dominated by the drive to expel, he rejects all objects, preserving the want which, in abjection, is the precondition and correlative of desire, '[e]ven before things for him are - hence before they are signifiable - he drives them out, dominated by drive as he is, and constitutes his own territory, edged by the abject' (6). Maurice's mind spews its gluttonously collected contents – the memory of the Asylum laundry, the Orientalist decor – because they are not signifiable, not assimilable into the symbolic order. What remains is the void of want, 'edged' with prophylactic ritual in the form of food-loathing.

Conversely, when Maurice decides to eat again in section XI, he does so in recognition of his desire for his mother who, acting as the agent of a feminised Nature, has given him an object to desire; given him, psychoanalytically speaking, herself. The

abject self does not 'recognise its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory' (Kristeva 5). Maurice, in his abjection, laments:

"My mother" [...] "and my sisters
Have passed away. I am alone now,
Lost in myself in a mysterious
Darkness, the victim in a story."

(MLD VI; 335)

This, in Kristeva's terms, is the characteristic 'elaboration' of abjection: 'I imagine a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, "all by himself", and, to save himself, rejects and throws up everything that is given to him' (6). Maurice recovers desire and its object with a gesture that reaches outside his 'own territory', outside its borders of abjection: '[p]ut out two fingers toward the wished-for' (MLD XI; 343). As Corcoran mentions, the absence of the expected noun conveys Maurice's quasi-erotic play with the fruit (Corcoran 50); but more than that, the line is a grammatical joke in which the absence of the expected grammatical object signifies the restoration of the psychoanalytic object.

Before this recovery can take place, however, there is another episode dealing with food-loathing and refusal, which substantially complicates the psychoanalytic model set up above. This is the scene (section VII) of Maurice's forced feeding.

Weaker, he sank from sleep to sleep, inward, Then Dr. Leeper sprang at him. Four men Covered him, bore him into the ward. The Doctor bared his sleeve to the forearm. What was he trying to do? Arms rounding, Held down the hunger-striker, falling To terror, a tube forced halfway down His throat, his mind beyond recall. Choking, he saw a sudden rill Dazzling as baby-seed. It spilled

In air. Annoyed, the Doctor drew Back, glucosed milk upon his shoulder And overall. The rubber spewed As Maurice feebled against his holders The noise and fear of death, the throttling. Soon he lost all consciousness And lay there, all the struggle forgotten, The torture chamber and the pressure. He woke in bed. The counterpane Gentle with noon and rid of pain.

(MLD VII; 336-7)

First of all, we are not dealing just with food-loathing in this passage. It uses Maurice's anorexia to gather together other forms of abjection which are illustrated at greater length elsewhere in the poem. In her discussion of Old Testament prohibitions, Kristeva identifies 'three main categories of abomination: 1) food taboos; 2) corporeal alteration and its climax, death; and 3) the feminine body and incest' (93). Clearly, the forced feeding here points to Maurice's decision not to eat in section IV, and also his reaching out of abjection to break his fast in section XI. The depiction of Maurice as a corpse '[c]overed', borne by four men (he later sees another force-fed patient on a 'bier') point to Mr Prunty, and the way that this terminally abject character is linked with Maurice's temporary, reversible abjection. As Mr. Prunty is at the centre of the whole poem, so this force-feeding scene is at the centre of Maurice's fast — his period of abjection. Finally, the seminal consistency of the 'glucosed milk' recalls the agonised coitus interruptus of Maurice's relationship with Margaret.

No real female bodies appear in *Mnemosyne*; even the fleeting possibility of a woman's presence in Ben Kane's friendship with a female patient is removed when she is 'sent to the Asylum at Ennis/ Or Ballinasloe' (*MLD* XV; 349). Instead, Clarke displaces all the abjection traditionally associated with feminine bodies to the only tangible symbol of sexuality available in the asylum: semen. We might note in this context that contemporary psychiatric opinion in Ireland, unlike in Britain, regarded 'insanity associated with masturbation [...] as exclusively a male hazard'.⁵² This is to draw away from the Kristevan scheme, since Kristeva divides sources of pollution into two categories: excremental – that which pollutes from without – and menstrual, internal pollution. She relates both of these to the mother's body. 'Neither tears nor

sperm' she asserts, 'though they belong to the borders of the body, have any polluting value' (71). But in this passage semen is associated with the self-expulsion characteristic of abjection: 'a sudden rill/ Dazzling as baby-seed. It spilled/ In air'. Maurice spits out his generative faculty: it is difficult to think of a more precise (or more unusual) metaphor for the spitting out of selfhood. It seems that the polluting value of semen depends on its destination: if it is destined for the womb, it signifies health and fulfilment (what Maurice is denied in his relationship with Margaret); if for the air, like this 'glucosed milk' then it is as much a pollutant as excrement. In the section immediately preceding the forced feeding scene, semen has been firmly linked to faeces as Maurice wakes to find himself 'all shent' after a dream of Margaret (336). Furthermore, Dr Leeper's annoyance at Maurice spitting out milk onto his shoulder can be compared to the cruder exasperation of the warder who deals with Mr Prunty's nightly defecation and confirms the outward manifestation of Maurice's abjection by calling him "Dogsbody" (MLD IX; 339). The nightmarish quality of Dr Leeper's movement, 'sprang, incensed', (MLD VII; 337) is paralleled by the warder's action: '[c]hristened his ankles with the keybunch', which in its inversion of a Christian rite has a diabolic aspect (MLD IX; 339).

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the forced feeding episode, however, is the figure that Clarke uses first to link food refusal, bodily waste (including its ultimate manifestation, the corpse) and sexuality, and then to place these in a wider socio-political context: the hunger-striker. The level of irony involved in portraying Devane as a 'hunger-striker' is not at all easy to determine. It is clearly related to his fantasies of Republican activism in which he is a hero in a romanticised adventure story (*MLD* v; 334). The indirect style of the narrative does not allow for a wholly ironic presentation of these episodes as the hyperbole and self-pity of a young man who feels guilt at his non-participation in the struggle for Irish self-determination. In any case, Maurice's

fantasies of activism are a serious matter in that they present the same dangers and benefits as his mythology of Gate, Garden and Fountain. At once they point to a psychologically dangerous belief in a mystical order and to a need to be reunited with a society for which myths are cohesive forces.⁵³ Nor, however, can the figure be read solemnly as an indictment of a hospital regime as intransigent and coercive as the British government with regard to Irish Republican hunger-strikers. In his interrupted sleep, Maurice sees another patient undergo forcible feeding, a 'young Englishman' with whom Maurice at first wholly identifies:

Dr Leeper sprang, incensed, At him with many hands, keeping Him down, but it was someone else The men were trying to suffocate. (MLD VII; 337)

The Englishman is then presented in the conventional pose of the hunger-striking 'martyr', 'on a bier,/ Submissive to his fate' (*MLD* VII; 337). Clarke clearly means to complicate any simple analogy between Maurice's treatment and that of Thomas Ashe or Terence MacSwiney. It is worth noting that Maurice Devane's experience of hospitalisation takes place about a year before MacSwiney's death.⁵⁴

While to assert that Maurice's hunger-strike is irrelevant to the political circumstances outside the asylum would be culpably to de-politicise the poem, to claim that it 'replaces the hunger-strikes of those engaged in the Irish War of Independence' and 'refers to politico-military events occurring simultaneously and elsewhere' (Selected Poems 10, 251, emphasis added) is to ignore the element of temporal slippage which Clarke introduces to the poem. It is a device at least as significant as his misspelling of the names of the Furies, and seems to have a similarly deflective purpose. McCormack notes that the poem is 'an interiorized repetition both of non-engagement in significant moments of the nation's trauma and of particular strategies employed by those who were engaged, even to death.' (Selected Poems 10) The non-engagement extends to the the

poem's temporal frame, so that Maurice's hunger-strike might refer to the past – James Connolly's week-long hunger-strike of 1913, Thomas Ashe's death after bungled force-feeding in 1917 – or to the 'future' events surrounding MacSwiney, but not to the 'present' of the poem. This minute deflection reflects Clarke's unease with the propensity of allegory to capture historical events and incorporate them within its own systems of meaning. Here he resists the technique of *figura*, which elsewhere he uses so skilfully, in an attempt to record the political resonance of 'the hunger-striker' without at the same time exploiting those who suffered and died in this way. The resistance of *figura* becomes a device by which Clarke can tell a political truth without compromising human particularity.

Another way, perhaps, to understand Clarke's introduction of the image of the hunger-striker is as representative of Maurice's desire to engage with, indeed to embody, a political and social reality from which his situation in the hospital excludes him entirely. He protests, then, not against rough medical treatment, but against the exclusion from society that incarceration in a mental institution entails. The protest, appropriately, symbolises his exclusion by excluding everything, every object, from the empty site of the abjected body. His anorexia is an attempt to resist his incarceration, though it of course becomes merely a further element in it. Some psychoanalysts, especially those influenced by Melanie Klein, suggest that anorexia is a defence against the infantile fantasy of cannibalism, in which the infant swallows the object 'alive' and entombs it within the unconscious.⁵⁵ Maud Ellmann, in her study of anorexia and hunger-striking, *The Hunger Artists*, makes a good case for identifying imprisonment (or, as she punningly terms it, 'encryptment') with eating and incorporation:

[Klein's] Gothic fantasia of mansions, walls, crypts and dungeons, suggest that the very notion of enclosure derives from the dynamics of incorporation. In a case of claustrophobia, she argues that her patient's fears of being locked into a cage symbolize his deeper terror of the vengeful objects imprisoned in his gluttonous unconscious.⁵⁶

Maurice finds that his unconscious, as it expresses itself in his dreams, is 'gluttonous'; and, interestingly, some Gothic paraphernalia haunts his self-diagnosis of claustrophobia even as Maurice is at pains to resist it:

Shriek after shriek
From the female ward. No terror
Of clanking chains, poor ghost in sheet,
Vampire or bloodless corpse, unearthed,
In Gothic tale but only blankness.
Storm flashed.

(MLD VII; 337)

Maurice rejects food in a refusal to incorporate the hostile institution and relaxes his regimen only when finds it safe to incorporate an object – his mother, symbolised by the strawberries.

This does not, however, wholly account for the disruption to the model of the abjected self introduced by the politicised image of the hunger-striker. Hunger-strikers appear to abject themselves in the service of a political cause: as the hunger-strike progresses, the activist becomes more like 'the utmost of abjection' (Kristeva 4), the corpse, and may, if the strike is prolonged, actually become that most abject of wastes. That hunger-strikers are subsequently glorified as martyrs by their supporters does not alter this: glorification of the martyr's sacrifice stems from the need to make sense of the dead body, which in itself means nothing, 'no longer matches and no longer signifies anything' (Kristeva 4). But the hunger-striker also offers a challenge to the idea of the abjected self. The act of deliberately starving oneself to death is construed, regardless of support for or opposition to the cause concerned, as the opposite of the abjection displayed by the madmen in 'Summer Lightning'. Accounts of the progress of hunger-strikes stress the mental alertness of the strikers, in contrast to their wasted bodies; this whether the accounts mean to condemn the activists as engaged in a form of suicidal moral blackmail, or to celebrate them as sacrifices for a politico-religious cause. The

ethical problem that the hunger-striker presents is, apparently, the reverse of that which the Glen Bolcan madman identifies: a living mind in a body being allowed to die, as opposed to a dying mind in a vital body.

The 'obvious' explanation – that to go on hunger-strike is a conscious act, whereas the food-loathing provoked by the abjection of self is governed by the unconscious – is inadequate. As Kristeva points out, abjection challenges the theory of the unconscious:

The unconscious contents remain here *excluded* but in a strange fashion: not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive *position* to be established — one that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration. As if the fundamental opposition were between I and Other or, in a more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside. As if such an opposition subsumed the one between Conscious and Unconscious [...] (7)

The distinction between I and Other, already pronounced in Maurice's refusal of food, is emphasised by forced feeding, the violent invasion of the borders of abjection he has constructed around the self. This dynamic of attack and resistance subsumes consciousness: 'Soon he lost all consciousness'. 'All' stresses that this is not just a faint, but a figure for the loss of intentionality. The insentient things around him assume his human existence, his relation to the world: 'The counterpane/ Gentle with noon and rid of pain'.

Maurice as hunger-striker loses his humanity, just as the madmen of Glen Bolcan or of 'Summer Lightning' do. The hunger-striker becomes the politicised image of individual abjection. Like the abject, the hunger-striker construes the world in terms of 'T' and 'Other', embodying reactive, oppositional politics. Hunger-strikers must reorient their relationship to the Other from a model of desire to a model of exclusion. Once the act of starvation is embarked upon, for both the hunger-striker and the abjected self, the purpose of the hunger becomes irrelevant, since intentionality is subsumed under the

opposition of 'I' and 'Other'. This is something strikingly realised in a single gesture in Yeats's play *The King's Threshold*. After the entreaties of Seanchan's townspeople and his lover Fedelm have failed to get the poet to break his fast, the King offers him food with his own hand. Seanchan 'pushes bread away, with Fedelm's hand' and says, 'We have refused it'.⁵⁷ The gesture allows Seanchan to take on equal authority to the king, by the assumption of the royal plural pronoun, but it is also an abject admission that intentionality has been revoked, ascribed to another, just as the institutionalised hunger-striker voids him/herself of responsibility for his/her starvation and ascribes it to the institution.

However, while the abjected self – the anorexic – maintains the void of want in place of the unconscious/conscious 'I', for the hunger-striker, a voided 'I' is intolerable. The cause, the 'purpose' of the hunger-strike expropriates and 'fills' that void, making the increasingly wasted body a site of ideology.⁵⁸ To put it another way, the body of the hunger-striker, drawn towards 'the place where meaning collapses' (Kristeva 2) accesses meaning by a process analogous to 'capture', in Gordon Teskey's sense of the term. The body which in threatening to become a corpse threatens the system around it with its meaninglessness, is raised up into the realm of abstraction, where it can represent an ideology. Often referred to as a 'symbolic' protest, hunger-striking captures the abject for allegorical ends. As we saw in Chapter 1, the project of capture encloses resistance to itself, reinterpreting it as something which, in turn, can be made to mean. Occasionally, however, that resistance becomes visible as a narrative episode. The scene of Maurice's forced feeding is such an episode. By force-feeding him, the hospital authorities turn Maurice's inchoate, anorexic protest into a hunger-strike. He struggles to maintain his empty body, his non-identity as 'anonym', while the doctor tries to give him a self, a name, by forcibly inserting food into his abject body. Dr Leeper's violence is a ham-fisted attempt to drag Maurice into the symbolic. In one sense, it figures the

violence of the allegorist, giving a meaning ('the hunger-striker') to Maurice, reinterpreting his suffering as the resonance of that term within Western (not just Irish) political culture. Allegory needs its 'negative Others', resistant bodies like Maurice's, just as the symbolic needs the abject. Maurice's final acquiescence in the symbolic project of naming comes when he names or misnames his condition, '"Claustrophobia"', and is rewarded with removal to the social space of the dormitory (*MLD* VII; 337). Equally important, however, he is shown struggling against that capturing project: his struggle against the use of his body for signifying purposes is inscribed into the allegory.

Teskey concentrates on the capture of figures gendered feminine, comparing the allegorical project to imprint them with meaning to rape. The personification of abstractions as female figures is a means of incorporating unruly matter into an apparently orderly system. In section VII of *Mnemosyne*, however, we see the capture of a male character. This scene of symbolised homosexual rape reminds us that other instances of gender instability in *Mnemosyne* – the goddess of memory as Keatsian Moneta, the visitations of Moneta and Onan – are not entirely liberating. They too retain the traces of this allegorical violence. Maurice is feminised and immobilised by his experience of forced feeding: it turns his body into a *site*, something which is confirmed by section VIII, with its motif of madmen's bodies as the site of God's death. Some of the implications of this are explored in the final section of this chapter.

V: STRUCTURE

Drawing attention to Maurice Devane's abjection elucidates one of the most puzzling features of *Mnemosyne*: the apparent early recovery of its protagonist and the slackening of pace in the final seven sections of the poem, as well as the apparent relapse of section XVI. McCormack suggests that the use of the title 'Mr Devane' draws Maurice back to normal forms of social interaction (*Selected Poems* 254), Harmon that

Maurice's lie about his Uncle George suggests a reawakening of interpersonal perceptiveness (Harmon 218). But these are fairly small advances to set against Maurice's continued Orientalist hallucinations, his inability to make sense of the words he tries to read, the evocation of Lear and the Fool (*MLD* XVI; 349-50). Section XVI challenges our assumption that Maurice has 'recovered' in section XII, and the related misconception that recovery from mental illness comes in the form of an epiphany, instead of as a series of provisional advances and setbacks. Corcoran, clearly baffled by this, comments with regard to the final sections of the poem:

It is impossible, in these sections, to trace any process or progress of further resolution, any gradual growth towards the light, in Maurice; and eventually, his becoming "Rememorised" in the final part of the poem is bound to seem abrupt and perfunctory, especially as the rhythms of the concluding lines are casual to the point of the headlong, as they slip and tumble and gabble flatly down the page (Corcoran 50).

He argues that these tumbling and gabbling lines enact a return to a quotidian world where the imagery of Gate, Garden and Fountain is recognised for the mentally dangerous allegory it is. Corcoran recognises Clarke's unease with allegory's mystical, consolatory treatment of violence and suffering, though the quotidian, commercial world of tuns of Guinness, shares and dividends, is not Clarke's only (or even main) resource in the expression of that unease. The assertions which follow this conclusion, however, of the 'transparency' of the pseudonym (or 'mask', as Corcoran terms it) 'Maurice Devane', should be qualified with the knowledge that Devane's recovery is not Clarke's. Clarke's brief and troubled marriage to Lia Cummins followed his release from St Patrick's, rather than preceding his admission, as Corcoran seems to suggest (Corcoran 51). Clarke also continued to suffer from depressive illness for many years, though he was not hospitalised again. If a 'mask' collapses at the end of *Mnemosyne*, we should not be too quick to assume that Clarke's face is the one revealed. In fact, Clarke's representation of the quotidian, anti-mythopoeic world in section XVIII becomes all the

more interesting if it is not taken as the correlative of a confessional unmasking. Section XVIII presents a return to the 'local and contingent' by juxtaposing a number of proper names: 'Maurice Devane', 'Steeven's Lane', 'Guinness's', 'Watling Street', 'Cornmarket', 'Thomas Street' with the imagery of 'Gate', 'Garden' and 'Fountain', which are now revealed to name a particular state of mind which Maurice has apparently transcended (MLD XVIII; 351-2). The reader is prepared for this effect throughout the second half of the poem, but especially in sections XV and XVII, where Maurice's desire to name his surroundings is given a social or political context. Section XV shows us Maurice's increasing interest in identifying others not just by their appearance or actions (or by a pun, so Dr Leeper always springs or leaps), but by their race or social class, that is, by the standards of the world outside the hospital (MLD XV; 346-49). This interest in categorisation moves Maurice away from the timeless space of myth, showing him to be situated in a particular historical period and a particular geographical space in which a mixed-race man is associated with the 'jungle' or the genteel speaking of French 'for practice' is felt to be comically incompatible with homicidal tendencies (MLD XV; 347). On the other hand, considering the extent to which allegory participates in the construction of hierarchies, in categorisation, to produce the appearance of a meticulously ordered cosmos, this pageant of madmen cannot be termed entirely antiallegorical. Neither can section XVII, in which Maurice, out on day release to the Phoenix Park with Mr Rhys, names compulsively the things he sees around him. A selfreflexive facility is evident in this passage, as Maurice names the flowers he sees: 'marigold,/ Clarkia and rose-beds' (MLD XVII; 350, emphasis added), and as he re-enters the environs of the asylum, the poet names a troubling facet of his own imagination: 'Poetic Personification:/ Hope frowned' (MLD XVII; 351). The latter example points again to Clarke's ambivalence concerning allegory: he wants to acknowledge the clumsy and dangerous obtrusiveness of the mode, but finds it impossible to abandon it.

Maurice's need to name in sections XV-XVIII may represent his emergence from abjection into the symbolic law signified by the acquisition of language. The process, begun in sections XI-XII, with the recognition of the strawberries, and by extension, the mother who brings them, as an object of desire, continues as he names first his fellow patients with an awareness of their social status outside the levelling routine of the hospital, then, as he names the features of the Phoenix Park with a renewed sense of political and economic history: 'The Wellington Monument:/ Iron reliefs, old gunnage'. (MLD XVII; 350) 'Gunnage' is the money distributed among the captors of a ship, calculated in accordance with the number of guns on the vessel. In the context of Clarke's poem, it seems to refer to Ireland's military, economic and political position in relation to Britain: the division of the ship of state by an occupying power. The social power of wordplay intimated here is picked up in the rime riche of section XVIII. The pairs of homonyms couple an intangible property with a concrete one: 'Devane' / 'vein' links identity and the physical body, refuting dualism as well as abjection. '[S]tory' / 'storey' connects the 'story' of which Maurice feels himself to be the victim in section VI (335) with a prosperous mercantile edifice; a similar play joins 'sight' to 'site'. '[R]ight' (= direction) and 'right/ Of goodness in every barrel [of Guinness]' confirms the lightness of tone, playing on the advertising slogan 'Guinness is good for you' and Clarke's earlier poem 'Guinness Was Bad for Me', collected in Flight To Africa (CCP 277-80). The protagonist of that poem, John Power, ends it incarcerated in Wexford Asylum, and it shares with this section of Mnemosyne what Harmon calls a 'jocoserious' tone (Harmon 189). This is the tone that Clarke uses to counter mythopoeia: it is a knowing tone, characterised by slang, deliberately inappropriate registers, neologism, and the defiant insertion of anti-mythopoeic, but socially cohesive features such as proprietary names. It is a tone we recognise at other moments in Mnemosyne, other moments of partial recovery: Onan's '[b]alsam' partakes of this tone, as do Maurice's realisation that he 'was

an imbecile' (MLD XIV; 346) and the vignettes of the madmen in section XV. We might conclude that this tone represents an allegory of the 'symbolic', the language which signifies participation in society, or, to speak psychoanalytically, separation from the mother and the acceptance of the law of the father.

Two factors, however, intervene to complicate this tempting conclusion. The first of these is that not all moments of recovery in *Mnemosyne* are uniformly marked by the use of this 'jocoserious' tone. A scene of recovery may begin jocoseriously, and become something quite different, as in sections XI and XII. Section XI is jocoserious, with Mr. Prunty gobbling cake, literary allusions to Keats and to William Carlos Williams ('ripe, ruddy, delicious'), and the grammatical joke of 'wished for' (*MLD* XI; 344). Section XII, which explains the matter of the preceding section, is different in tone:

Nature
Remembering a young believer
And knowing his weakness
Could never stand to reason
Gave him from the lovely hand
Of his despairing mother,
A dish of strawberries
To tempt
And humble the fast
That had laid him nearer than they were
Along her clay.

(MLD XII; 344)

The little jocosity in this conceit – the melodrama of 'lovely hand/ Of his despairing mother' – throws into relief the gently expressed seriousness of the moment. Clarke creates a tableau in which 'weakness' cannot stand to 'reason', and with this, an allegory which uses images of uprightness and prostration to explore Maurice's decision to eat. His 'weakness' is both physical weakness from long fasting and Maurice's 'weakness' for strawberries, which his mother, acting as Nature's agent, exploits to get him to take food. 'Weakness' tries to be an upright property, but cannot 'stand'. 'Reason', which weakness cannot stand (up) to, is thus equated both with the taking of food, and so with Maurice's

transition from a horizontal position to a vertical one, and with Nature's products, the strawberries, which, conversely, grow along the ground. This small allegory equates reason with the acceptance of Nature's power, and confirms Maurice's status as a 'young believer', a (prostrate?) worshipper of Nature. Maurice's fast is also personified as something that has to be tempted and humbled (prostrated); the strawberries' power to do this seems to lie in their own prostration, their proximity to Nature's clay. This nearness to clay, however, signifies death for Maurice: 'the fast/ That had laid him nearer than they were/ Along her clay'. The same ambiguity regarding Nature's mortal products is a commonplace in medieval and early modern allegory, and a pressing matter in *The Bright Temptation* and *The Singing Men at Cashel*, with which section XII also shares a gentleness of tone.

A similar swerve away from the jocoserious occurs at the very end of the poem. After the play on the economic importance of Guinness Maurice's thoughts turn to family history, and the poem ends 'Shone in the days of the ballad-sheet/ The house in which his mother was born'. These lines seem different in tone both from other references to conception and birth – Goodby notes the contrast of the neutral 'born' with the 'brutal' verb 'got' in the opening line of the poem (*Irish Poetry* 96) – and from the rest of the section. Both of these examples, significantly, concern Maurice's mother. Recovery, then, cannot consist only in the assumption of the jocoserious 'symbolic', it also involves confrontation of the subject's desire for his mother, and for this Clarke employs simpler diction and a tone stripped of ironic inflection. Most interesting of all, the mother's influence in section XII seems to promote an ease with and acceptance of allegory which is hard to find elsewhere in *Mnemosyne*.

The second complicating factor is that the need to name, and the successful act of naming may not be evidence enough of the subject's abandonment of abjection. As we observed of the final lines section VII, it might rather indicate simple acquiescence in

a signifying system over which the abject self exerts no control. It might also indicate fear, the 'terror' of Clarke's early memoir, the 'falling/ To terror' that Maurice experiences as he is named as a 'hunger-striker' (*MLD* VII; 337). Kristeva reads phobia as a form of abjection; phobia is the '[m]etaphor of want' (35), that is, the basic want that constitutes the abject void. The centrepiece of her discussion of phobia is the phobic's linguistic agility, a characteristic noticed by Freud in his treatment of the phobic child whom he calls Little Hans. Adult phobics too, are verbally dextrous, though their speech differs from their juvenile counterparts' by being

as if void of meaning, traveling at top speed over an untouched and untouchable abyss [...] It happens because language has then become a counterphobic object; it no longer plays the role of miscarried introjection, capable, in the child's phobia, of revealing the anguish of original want. (Kristeva 41)

Maurice Devane is not, except by his dubious self-diagnosis, (*MLD* VII; 337) a phobic. But *Mnemosyne* is a poem possessed by fear, which manifests itself not only in frequent descriptions of Maurice's 'terror', but as the linguistic agility of the narrative. The linguistic structures of the poem resemble those of the child phobic more than the adult, but as Kristeva implies, the writer is someone who is always deprived of 'the assurance that mechanical use of speech ordinarily gives us' (38). For the writer, language is not a counterphobic object, quite the reverse:

the phobic object is a proto-writing, and conversely, any practice of speech, inasmuch as it involves writing is a language of fear. [...] Not a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges. The one who tries to utter this "not yet a place", this no-grounds, can obviously only do so backwards, starting from an overmastery of the linguistic and rhetorical code. But in the last analysis he refers to fear (Kristeva 38).

Rhetorical 'over-mastery' in order to delimit and 'edge' a void of pure, abject want: this offers a very different way of understanding the structure of *Mnemosyne*. Hitherto, the poem has always been understood as a quest narrative of the type described by Fineman,

driven by desire, culminating in a recognition of the nature of that desire and the concomitant rejection of allegorical strategies which would otherwise allow the desire to replicate unregarded and unexamined. But to read it in that way leaves us with Corcoran's problem of the early climax and 'perfunctory' ending, and we might add, the problems of sections XIV and XVI, in which, though they occur after the 'recovery', Maurice is shown as institutionalised and delusional respectively.

'[T]here are lives not sustained by desire,' writes Kristeva, 'since desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on exclusion' (6). There are poems like this too, and Mnemosyne is one of them. Read as a linear progress narrative, it fails, and fails precisely at the point when objects (strawberries, mother, Nature) appear to challenge Maurice's abjection. Instead, the poem is a group of scenes or sites arranged around a central point, so that the linear 'journey' between them is effaced. This central point is the account of Mr Prunty's belief that he is a corpse, and his nightly defecation. Mr Prunty is archetypally abject, an allegory of abjection. He is the ultimate waste product, the cadaver, his empty body bordered and delimited by institutional ritual. At the same time, the borders of Mr Prunty's 'corpse' exist only to be breached, by his anal incontinence, his screaming, and in section XI by his 'gobbling'. The reason why Mr Prunty, and not Maurice, forms the centre of this poem, is given in the first words of section IX, Mr Prunty's allegorical name: 'Timor Mortis'. Fear writes the 'no grounds' of Mr Prunty's body, of the hospital itself. Fear produces the neologism, the syntactical and linguistic enigmas which characterise Clarke's poems; fear produces writing: 'The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs' (Kristeva 38). In Mnemosyne, the signs that prevent Maurice becoming Mr Prunty are arranged in roughly concentric groups. These groups enact the poem's themes of borders and boundaries: they are the structural equivalent of

the asylum walls, the padded cell, the strait-jacket, the body – in section XIII, Maurice's ribcage is 'cage' and 'straight-jacket' [sic] (344).

The outer edges of the poem, sections I, XVII, XVIII, deal with approaches to and retreats from the 'no-grounds' of the asylum. These are the sections which beguile the reader into believing that the events which occur between them constitute a progress narrative, because they seem to follow a pattern of departure and return. Before Maurice can leave the hospital, he has to visit the sites that he encountered on his way into it:

Cabs ranked at Kingsbridge Station, Guinness Tugs moored at their wooden quay
[...]
How could Maurice Devane
Suspect from weeping-stone, porch, vane
The classical rustle of the harpies,
Hopping in filth among the trees,
The Mansion of Forgetfulness
Swift gave us for a jest?
(MLD I; 327-8)

The Guinness tugs were roped
Along the quay, cabs ranked
Outside the Railway Station:
[...]
He walked into his darkness.
Classical rustle of Harpies,
Their ordure at Swift's Gate.

(MLD XVII; 351)

As he leaves in section XVIII, the rhyme riche 'Devane/ vein' reminds the reader of 'Devane/ vane' in section I. Clearly, changes have been made in Maurice's condition in the intervening sections (we cannot forget that he has been '[r]ememorised') and the echoes of the first section in the last are meant to draw attention to this, but the parallelism of the first and final stanzas is not sufficient evidence alone for reading Maurice's story as a quest narrative which enacts departure, initiation, and return. ⁶⁰ Reading closer, we find that the one direct reference to desire in section I, 'Life burning in groin /And prostate ached for a distant joy' is immediately excluded, bracketed off: 'But nerves need solitary confinement' (327). This tendency to abjection has been

checked in section XVII, so that a desire for meaning refers Maurice immediately to the familial context of original desire:

He wondered what they meant – The Fifteen Acres, the Dog Pond. But there was nothing beyond, Only the Other Side. His family lived there. Thinking of them, he sighed.

(MLD VII; 350)

He is still, however, thinking in the terms of 'I' and 'Other' which are characteristic of abject reasoning. 'There was nothing beyond/[...]/His family lived there'. Traces of abjection accompany Maurice in a symbolic realm of names and meanings.

That Mnemosyne is structured other than to a prescription of allegorical desire is made clearer by the second group of episodes, which all deal with the institutional politics of the asylum, and Maurice's struggles to place himself within it. This is by far the largest group, encompassing sections II-V, X, and XIV-XVI. Sections II-V address Maurice's solipsism, his search for Mnemosyne, and the beginnings of the Gate, Garden and Fountain mythology in his dreams. The later episodes develop his mythography, while expanding Maurice's social awareness to include the other patients. So much of this material, again, seems to refer to quest narrative that it is tempting to conclude that is what Mnemosyne is. Section III, for example, seems to be preoccupied with the madmen's quest to find their own selves. But the jingling inanity of the rhymes in the last line of each quatrain and the tautology 'As if they had lost something/ They could not find' (MLD III; 330) make a parody of their quest. Maurice himself is not even involved in the parody: 'Looking down from the bars/ With mournful eye', slightly indignant at his exclusion, 'Why/ should they pretend they did not see him', but maintaining the boundary that keeps his abject self from others, who are '[g]esticulating like foreigners' (MLD III; 331, emphasis added). Maurice embarks on his own 'quests', but they are marked by the lack of precisely that compulsion which makes the quest

narrative itself. In each, apparent desire shades into exclusion: the memory of schooldays offers a possibility for self-identification, but becomes the boundary wall of another asylum (MLD IV; 332). Even a happy dream, like that of the 'little Jewish boys' and '[g]arlanded, caressing girls' who point towards a symbolic order which will make Maurice himself a father, 'Love/ Fathered him with their happiness', is beset by images of a 'gate', a 'pale'. (MLD V; 334) In fact, 'fathered' itself is ambiguous, meaning both 'conceived' and 'made a father', showing Maurice to be that fearful child who has 'swallowed up his parents too soon' (Kristeva 6). Maurice is really no more the systematic quester after Mnemosyne than he is the 'Daring Republican of hillside farmyards' (MLD V; 334); he is a wanderer, a stray:

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself) and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. [...] Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichean, he divides, excludes [...] Instead of sounding himself as to his "being," he does so concerning his place: "Where am I?" instead of "Who am I?" A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. (Kristeva 8)

Having spent the first sections of the poem trying to recover his identity, asking 'Who?', Maurice's first direct speech is '"Where am I?" '(MLD V; 332). Placing, separating, situating: this is Maurice's interest in the social class and former occupations of his fellow-patients (MLD XV; 346-9), it is the allegorical interest in order and hierarchy divorced from the will to progress through that hierarchy. The fluid, abject 'confines' of Maurice's space – the asylum – determine his wandering. He does not repeat ritualistically, like the neurotic anxious of making an error, he repeats to build, though what he builds breaks down, just as Mnemosyne cannot sustain, and thus rejects the progress form.

A final, innermost group of episodes, clustered around the crux of Mr Prunty, deals directly with the abjection of the patients. This may have a theological bent, as in section VIII, or political implications, as in the 'hunger-striker' of section VII, or its emphasis may be familial and sexual, as in section VI. The 'recovery' sections XI-XIII also belong to this group, since they deal with the partial recuperation of desire. But as we have seen, Maurice brings with him into the symbolic ineradicable traces of abjection. Some of the clearest articulations of his abjection occur after his decision to eat, in section XIII:

He lay there hourly, puzzled by voices Below in the forbidden Garden Beyond the Gate, from his own void. But all the summer maze was guarded.

Often he touched the hardened cage Around him with its band of steel-hoops. [...] He wondered why he had been straight-laced Straight-jacked. But soon his suture would unseam His soul be rapt.

(344)

The mythology of Gate, Garden and Fountain is undisturbed here, as it will remain until the end of section XVII. It seems that Maurice has actually enlarged upon the mythography, adding to it a guarded 'maze', which again figures abjection: a maze consists of boundaries constructed to enclose nothing, but to baffle the traveller. Maze, Gate, Garden and Fountain are productions, like the 'voices' that he hears, of Maurice's 'void', the emptiness that is where his self should be. In the second stanza, Maurice considers the physical boundaries that he has made for himself and imagines them dissolving. Although this stanza is sometimes read as hopeful in tone (see for example, Harmon 217), Maurice retains the dualism that has sustained his abjection, seeing his body as prison and strait-jacket. He imagines his release as a kind of dissolving, an inbetween, boundary-defying, abject movement. The ambiguity of 'rapt' suggests both the

release of his enraptured soul and its continued imprisonment ('wrapped') in his abjected body. Although these reflections occur after the 'recovery' of sections XI-XII, their imagery of body-as-site connects them to the innermost grouping of *Mnemosyne*'s concentric arrangement.

These suggested groupings are by no means rigid or exclusive, as even a cursory reading of the poem shows: section IV is connected with section IX through their shared use of the 'Tall, handsome, tweeded Dr Leeper' refrain (331, 341); section V contains fantasies of Republican activism that find their echo in section VII; Onan in section X might represent a burlesque of the theological concerns of section VIII. But a view of the poem as a concentric arrangement of episodes with fear at its crux makes its structure more intelligible, consistent with both its imagery of abjection and its linguistic 'over-mastery', than an attempt to impose the pattern of the progress narrative upon it. Mnemosyne is not a journey towards epiphanic recovery; it is, as Harmon comments, 'more concerned with creating the experience of incarceration and institutionalised violence' (Harmon 205). This is also true of the poem's structure, the concentric patterns of which owe more to the abject construction of borders around an empty 'self', than the questing pattern of the object-driven desire narrative. The adoption of the progress narrative for *Mnemosyne* would have made Maurice's recovery (or his death) inevitable, instead of the contingent, provisional healing it is. Clarke resists this inevitability not just out of concern for verisimilitude, but because it would be to use the allegorical violence dramatised in Maurice's confrontation with Dr Leeper, and Mr Prunty's with the warder, as a means of propulsion. It would be to conceal that violence, renaming it so that it signifies Maurice's healing.

The matter of structure in *Mnemosyne* is crucial to an understanding of Clarke's troubled engagement with allegory. The abjection-based model outlined above limits narrative movement, turning time into space, progression into pageantry and bodies into

places. It is a *petrified* model: hypostatised through fear. To some extent all allegories do this, and we may conclude that allegory, more than other kinds of writing, is an abject form. All writing, for Kristeva, is produced from, and articulates the fear and horror of abjection. However, her portrait of the deject 'by whom the abject exists', is also largely a portrait of the allegorical 'personality': a dualist who is perpetually placing, separating, situating, dividing, devising, making. And when the hierarchies thus constructed are found to be baseless, or rather, based on rifts and struggles rather than solid grounds, the allegorical edifice falls, and begins again. Without this work of simultaneous preservation and cancellation, the 'symbolic' aspect of allegory, that which imposes meaning upon recalcitrant bodies, could not exist, just as without abjection there can be no desire.

As noted above, regarding 'Forget Me Not', and in Chapter 1, with reference to 'The Hippophagi', Clarke is unusually willing to expose the structures underlying his poetry, to embed a debate concerning the value of certain forms into the narrative, or to reveal a poem as a made thing, and critique it from that viewpoint. Critics are only now beginning to understand that his addiction to rime riche, ⁶¹ his 'obscurity', the density of his syntax (or conversely, the loose, lax poems of *Old-Fashioned Pilgrimage* (1967) and *The Echo at Coole* (1968)) are part of Clarke's refusal of the organicism of well-made poetry, part of a project to pack the mythopoeic and the quotidian, allegory and allegoresis, abject and symbolic, into verse. ⁶² Just as allegorical polysemy does not guarantee equality between alternative meanings and therefore dismantle hierarchies – rather the reverse – so this project creates struggle and division. His work differs from encyclopaedic allegory, however, in its resistance to the concealment or 'capture' of negative others, of the abject. In *Mnemosyne*, he allegorises the abject itself, rather than drawing on its repressed power to move Maurice away from pollution and towards healing. In doing so, he creates a hypostatised, petrified poem that effaces goal-oriented movement. It is a

monument to metaphor, 'builded up on the grave' of a resisted ideal of naturalised progress. In *Mnemosyne*'s refusal of the progress form, in its set-pieces of struggle, we see how it might be possible for the writer, frightened to death, paralysed and petrified, to 'come to life again in signs'.

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In general terms, this chapter has dealt with allegory in relation to myth and psychoanalysis. Though Clarke often resists mythology which seems to him politically or mentally dangerous, his work is suffused with mythic imagery, and he is attentive to the structures which support such imagery. His poetry emphasises the necessity of revealing its structurality, not just that it is made, but how it is made. This suggests Clarke's resistance to allegory, which typically presents an orderly cosmos whose sustaining struggles and violence are concealed, re-interpreted as the resonance of a truth. Clarke challenges this concealment, dramatising directly those struggles which result from imposition of meaning on nature or on bodies designated meaningless and imprintable. Related to this concern with structurality is his attention to memory. Clarke's concept of memory as the source of intellectual and creative activity suggests a sympathy with pre-Enlightenment mnemotechnics which goes far beyond a conventional use of Mnemosyne to 'represent' memory. A mnemonic purpose informs his 'obscurities' and leads him to examine a national culture of convenient forgetting and selective memory. As for Mnemosyne herself, she has suffered too long from critics who give her a solely redemptive, transcendent function. Clarke recognises the dangers of a memory culture which uses memory as a spur to (sometimes violent) action, and his Mnemosyne is a more ambivalent figure than is usually credited.

Another important purpose of this chapter is to examine the relation of allegory to psychoanalysis in a way which analyses allegory rather than uses psychoanalytic techniques to allegorise a text. This subject has received less critical attention than it

deserves, and this chapter suggests some possible forms that such attention might take. Joel Fineman builds a psychoanalytic description of allegory from structuralist linguistics and Lacanian psychoanalysis: it is a convincing one, despite its excessive rigidity and occasional hyperbole. But it describes allegory exclusively in terms of the progress narrative and ascribes allegorical motivation solely to desire. Following Kristeva's modification of Lacan, this chapter suggests a modification of a theory of allegory based entirely on desire. Allegory also involves exclusion, rejection and abjection. Clarke's Mnemosyne Lay in Dust is a poem of abjection, one which has an abject figure at its core, and is structured to reflect that abjection, not as a linear progress narrative but as an abject body, with its own imposed boundaries, constructed and sustained not by a sense of self but by a void. Although such a model effaces narrative, creating set-pieces which hypostatise and 'petrify' the poem's movement, it allows a fuller sense of Maurice's liberation to emerge. Where the progress narrative draws on the repressed power of pollution to achieve its compulsive propulsion, Clarke's poem dramatises and allegorises the abject. He presents us with numerous abject figures: Margaret, Onan, even Mnemosyne; the patients, including Mr Prunty, Maurice himself. He represents the struggles of the abject with the linguistic, social 'symbolic', and shows how abjection is retained as a prop for the symbolic. Through immersion in, rather than repression of, the abject, Clarke illustrates how allegory, despite its links with authoritarianism and hierarchy, might also supply the signs by which the petrified self is restored to life.

Notes

¹ Austin Clarke, 'Mnemosyne Lay in Dust', *Collected Poems*, ed. Liam Miller (Dublin and Oxford: Dolmen and Oxford University Press, 1974) 327-352; 339. Further references to *Mnemosyne* are given in the following format (*MLD* section number; page number in *Collected Poems*). Other references to the *Collected Poems* are indicated by *CCP*.

- ² Donald Davie, 'Austin Clarke and Padraic Fallon', Two Decades of Irish Writing, ed. Douglas Dunn (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1975) 37-58, 38.
- ³ Thomas Dillion Redshaw makes an excellent case for reading *The Vengeance of Fionn* as Clarke's allegorical response to the Easter Rising, and as establishing the poet's lifelong preoccupation with memory. 'The "Dominant" of Memory in Austin Clarke's *The Vengeance of Fionn* (1917)', *Etudes Irlandaises* 10, (December 1985), 77-92.
- ⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, *Letters VII and VIII*, trans. Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 50-66, [*Phaedrus* 246-57].
- ⁵ Neil Corcoran, 'The Blessings of Onan: Austin Clarke's Mnemosyne Lay in Dust', Irish University Review, 13: 1, (Spring 1983), 43-53; 48.
- ⁶ M.L. Rosenthal, 'Austin Clarke's Mnemosyne Lay in Dust and W.D. Snodgrass's "Heart's Needle" ', The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genesis of Modern Poetry, eds M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 408-15.
- ⁷ See Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', Scenes From the Drama of European Literature (1959, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 11-76.
- 8 Clarke, The Bright Temptation: A Romance (1932, Dublin: Dolmen, 1965) 229.
- ⁹ Clarke, Twice Round The Black Church: Early Memories of Ireland and England (1962, Dublin: Moytura, 1990) 129-30.
- ¹⁰ Clarke, The Singing Men at Cashel (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936) 307-322.
- ¹¹ The Singing Men at Cashel 314, 316. See also CCP 156-62.
- ¹² Theodor Adorno et al, The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper, 1950).
- ¹³ See Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1996) 35, and Lynette Hunter, *Modern Allegory and Fantasy* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1989) 107-117. Hunter argues as if Fletcher approves of and promotes the authoritarian aspect of allegory, though his reference to Adorno indicates the reverse.
- ¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter" ', trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, Yale French Studies 48, (1972) 39-71.
- ¹⁵ Joel Fineman, 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire', *Allegory and Representation.*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1981) 26-60.
- ¹⁶ Deborah L. Madsen, Re-reading Allegory: a Narrative Approach to Genre (London: Macmillan, 1995) 37.
- ¹⁷ Carolynn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory*, (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell UP) 1985, 45.
- ¹⁸ See Chapter 4, section 1 for a related perspective on Kinsella and psychoanalysis.
- ¹⁹ Whether Clarke can be said to have a 'career' at all is a vexed question. John Goodby suggests that the irregular shape of his achievement offers a parallel with the 'broken and interrupted' careers of many women writers, and as such is disruptive of the 'masculine template' of the poetic career. See John Goodby, ' "The Prouder Counsel of Her Throat": Towards a Feminist Reading of Austin Clarke', *Irish University Review* 29:2 (Autumn/Winter 1999) 321-40; 323.
- ²⁰ Revised as section II of 'The Music Healers' (CCP 87-104).
- ²¹ Clarke, 'The Gate (from *The House of Terror*)', *In The Prison of His Days: A Miscellany for Nelson Mandela, on his 70th Birthday*, ed W.J. McCormack (Gigginstown: Lilliput, 1988) 72-5.

- ²² Redshaw uses this term to describe the ritual and custom of marriage, which binds Grainne to Fionn, as opposed to the love-match implied by the *aithed* (=elopement) with Diarmuid (82-3) It is a convenient term to suggest the mystical 'marriage' between a ruler and a feminized personification of the land and of sovereignty.
- ²³ Maurice Harmon, Austin Clarke: A Critical Introduction (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1989) 73.
- ²⁴ An Duanaire: Poems of the Dispossessed 1600-1900, ed. Sean Ó Tuama and trans. Thomas Kinsella (Mountrath, Portlaoise: Dolmen, 1981) 194-195. Kinsella's translation also appears in One Fond Embrace, Dublin: Peppercanister, 1988, N.pag. Kinsella, Collected Poems 1956-2001 (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001) 280.
- ²⁵ Clarke, 'Love in Irish Poetry and Drama', Motley 1:5, (October 1932), 3-4.
- ²⁶ Clarke, A Penny in the Clouds, (1968, Dublin: Moytura, 1990) 44.
- ²⁷ Clarke's Sweeny has little in common with Eliot's '[a]peneck' except his interest in the *Oresteia*: one of the epigraphs to 'Sweeney Agonistes' has Orestes describing the Furies' relentless pursuit and that of 'Sweeney and the Nightingales' is Agamemmon's death cry. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1969) 115-26
- ²⁸ Adrian Frazier, 'The Cod-Bewildered Schoolboy: Austin Clarke's Later Poetry', *Eire Ireland* 14:2 (1979), 52-67.
- ²⁹ Thomas Kinsella, 'The Poetic Career of Austin Clarke', *Irish University Review*, 4:1 (Spring 1974), 128-36; 136.
- ³⁰ CCP contains a number of misprints. Most of these are obvious spelling errors. I have indicated with square brackets corrections accepted by Clarke's editors.
- 31 W.B. Yeats, The Poems, Ed. Daniel Albright (London: J.M. Dent, 1990) 239-40; 240.
- ³² Typically, this stock response is the one articulated, with not a little Yeatsian knowingness, by W.H. Auden: 'When Yeats assures me, in a stanza of the utmost magnificence, that after death he wants to become a mechanical bird, I feel that he is telling what my nanny would have called "A story" '. W.H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963) 281.
- ³³ W.B. Yeats, A Vision and Related Writings, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Arena, 1990) 187-189.
- ³⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation*, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400-1200 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- ³⁵ Among Clarke's sources for this poem must be numbered a snatch of song remembered by Stephen Dedalus in the third chapter of *Ulysses*:

Won't you come to Sandymount, Madeline the mare?

Rhythm begins, you see. I hear. A catalectic tetrameter of iambs marching. No, agallop: deline the mare.

James Joyce, Ulysses, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 37.

- ³⁶ Selected Poems 245.
- ³⁷ John Keats, *Complete Poems*, Ed. Jack Stillinger (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Belknapp Harvard, 1978) 229-39.
- ³⁸ A Penny 43. It might also remind the reader of Keats's defence of Porphyro, as quoted by Richard Woodhouse: 'that he [Keats] sh^d despise a man who would be such an eunuch in sentiment as to leave a

maid, with that Character about her, in such a situation: & sho^d despise himself to write about it &c &c &c &c' (Keats 455).

- ³⁹ MacNeice has one of his characters in *Autumn Sequel* see Keats's poetry as characteristic of immature sexuality, though in a rather more simplistic way. See below and Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Sequel*, *Collected Poems*, ed. E.R. Dodds, 2nd ed., (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) 327-439; 335.
- ⁴⁰ Marjorie Levinson, Keats's Life of Allegory: the Origins of a Style (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1988) 216
- ⁴¹ See K.K. Ruthven, 'Keats's *Dea Monetà' Studies in Romanticism* 15, (1976), 445-54. Ruthven argues that Moneta is the last of her kind because 'gold is sterile and cannot breed' (251). Levinson also argues that Moneta can be identified with money (255-6).
- ⁴² Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford, 1997).
- ⁴³ From this perhaps one can extrapolate the reason for Moneta's increasing pallor (and the dreamer's, when he watches the tableau of Saturn and Thea, for then he shares Moneta's physiology): she is representative of an immortal tradition which nonetheless grows weaker in the hands of every ephebe.
- ⁴⁴ Discussion of Clarke's influences tend to centre on his debt to Yeats, though no thorough account of his Yeatsian sources has yet been written. It is tempting, because of biographical circumstance Clarke's premature reception as a new Yeats, his omission from the 1936 Oxford Book of Modern Verse perhaps to read more influence, and more Bloomian struggle, into the relationship than there is evidence for in the poems.
- ⁴⁵ Apart from the usual association of the madman with the jester, this might be a way to figure a middle-class identity in the early medieval milieu. The majority of the patients featured in *Mnemosyne* have middle-class backgrounds: one is 'a Doctor's son', another 'a buyer from Clery's', and another 'a wealthy distiller'. (MLD XV; 347-8) This doubtless reflects accurately the demographics of the institution: Richard Leeper funded his reforms of St. Patrick's by replacing poor non-feepaying inmates, who also tended to be chronic cases and permanent residents, with short-term, curable patients whose families could afford to pay for their treatment. In 1919, 96% of patients paid something towards the cost of their care. Elizabeth Malcolm, Swift's Hospital: A History of St. Patrick's Hospital, Dublin 1746-1989 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989) 222, 234. However, we might also recall the links made by Keats's early critics between middle class identity and perversity, auto-eroticism, vulgarity and insanity (Levinson 1-38), and more important, the definition of abjection as a middling, borderline, neither/nor state. It might also be valuable to consider that one of the patients Clarke mentions is of mixed race: 'Sandow A. Jackson, powerful fellow, half-caste' (MLD XV; 347).
- ⁴⁶ William Dunbar, 'I that in heill wes and gladnes', *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. R.T. Davies (London: Faber & Faber, 1966) 250-2. The poem is sometimes known as 'Lament for the Makers', but that title is a late and inaccurate addition. See below for MacNeice's treatment of this poem.
- ⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 1928, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977) 166.
- ⁴⁸ John Lechte, Julia Kristeva (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) 161.
- ⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans Leon S. Roudiez (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.
- ⁵⁰ Harmon gives a helpful note to the mythic allusions (209).

- 51 Kristeva notes that within a Christian context, pollution is internalised in the form of sin, and analyses the shift in theological emphasis from reparation for sin to confession of sin. 'An acknowledgement, a covenant with the one who absolves, thanks to the words of another in the name of the Other and lust, erroneous judgment, fundamental abjection are remitted not suppressed, but subsumed into a speech that gathers and restrains' (131). The power of confessional speech acts to remit the subject's abjection and aid (re)entry into the symbolic what Kristeva refers to as *felix culpa* is an opportunity largely missed by the Church, which regards it as a form of denunciation and so reinforces abjection. Clarke's anguished confessional speakers in *Night and Morning* illustrate and testify to the extent of this missed opportunity.
- ⁵² Joseph Robins, Fools and Mad: A History of the Insane in Ireland (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1986) 112.
- ⁵³ See above for an instance of this particular tension between the social powers of allegory and its mystical aspect in Clarke's early memoir *The House of Terror*. It may also be interesting to note that in the same passage he draws a distinction between the inmate of the mental hospital and the criminal, the terms of which recall Republican prisoners' demands for political status.
- June he breaks his fast by eating the strawberries. MacSwiney was arrested on 12th August 1920 and died on 24th October 1920, on the seventy-fourth day of his hunger-strike. R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (1988, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 499. The debate among republicans over whether the hunger-strike was a legitimate political tactic or a counterproductive and, in Hannah Sheehy Skeffington's words, 'womanish thing' continued until the last stages of MacSwiney's protest; his death ending both the debate and Republican use of the tactic for many years. Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, 'Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette', *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke *et al*,vol. 5, 91-99, 97. In view of Maurice's sexual disorders, particularly his expulsion of the milk he sees as semen, these contemporary reservations about the value and, especially, the virility of hunger-striking may be relevant to its portrayal in *Mnemosyne*.
- ⁵⁵ We might relate this to Teskey's concept of 'allelophagy': allegory is a response to, elaboration of and a sustaining factor in the horror of bodies engaged in mutual consumption (Teskey 8).
- ⁵⁶ Maud Ellmann, The Hunger Artists, (London: Virago, 1993) 41
- 57 W.B. Yeats, The King's Threshold, Collected Plays (1934, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992) 107-143, 140. Clarke's oeuvre, particularly his plays, is nearly as rich in 'hunger artists' as Yeats's. Where Yeats treats his ascetics fairly seriously, in Clarke they are often subjects of farcical action. The Son of Learning (1927), for instance, is a burlesque on the themes of The King's Threshold, something which Yeats, in rejecting Clarke's play for production at the Abbey, seems to have recognised. Black Fast, another play which makes farce out of the demands of religious asceticism, was produced by the Abbey in 1941. See Roger McHugh, 'The Plays of Austin Clarke', Irish Uuniversity Review 4:1 (Spring 1974), 52-64, 64. Clarke's more serious treatments of askesis include Sister Eucharia (1939) and The Moment Next to Nothing (1953).
- ⁵⁸ This is the process that Edna Longley seems to have in mind when, in her essay 'From Cathleen to Anorexia' (1990), she describes 'the terminal condition' of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Longley takes the image of the hunger-striker as a starting point for an examination of nationalist activism in relation to

feminism. Edna Longley, 'From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands', *The Living Stream* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994) 173-195; 173.

Longley identifies nationalistic ideology and activism as part of a sexualised 'male death-cult' inimical to feminist thought (192). She reads Paul Muldoon's poem 'Aisling', in which the *spéirbhean* turns out to be 'Anorexia, who left / a lemon stain on my flannel sheet' as a critique of the same starvation-sexuality-activism nexus, 'blaming the hunger-strikers' emaciation on their idealised cause' (Longley 173). Muldoon's image takes the argument a step further than this:

In Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital a kidney machine supports the latest hunger-striker to have called off his fast, a saline drip into his bag of brine.

Voided by the abandonment of his fast, the withdrawal of the 'cause' which made his body into an ideological site, this hunger-striker is being filled by something else: saline, a gift of 'Victoria', both British Empress and (ironically) ideological victory. His body - 'bag of brine' - becomes identical with that which fills him. As Muldoon says, 'It's all much of a muchness', no matter who fills the hungerstriker with meaning, no matter what that meaning might be. The speaker himself ends the poem 'All Clear', primarily of the venereal disease given him by 'Anorexia', but also in echo of the hunger-striker's cleansed and emptied body. See Paul Muldoon, Quoof (London: Faber & Faber, 1983) 39. Differences between the political circumstances to which the two poets allude notwithstanding, we can develop a comparison between these poems. In both poems, personifications are juxtaposed to abject male bodies. However, Muldoon conforms to, albeit while playing on, a naïve allegorical convention with his Cathleen-Anorexia-Victoria. She is not a polyvalent, disruptive figure like Clarke's Mnemosyne. Mnemosyne does not give ideological meaning to Maurice's wasting body. Instead, the she seems to offer enigma, in the form of some garbled Hindu mythology, the curious misdiagnosis of "Claustrophobia" (the only time Maurice experiences claustrophobic symptoms is when he is in the padded cell - hardly secure evidence on which to ascribe a phobia), and a regression to childhood which seems idyllic, but is bracketed by two terrifying visions: of John the Baptist's severed head and the 'Twangman' (MLD X; 342). In her other aspect, as Onan, Mnemosyne disrupts the heterosexual orientation of the relationship between protagonist and personification and with it any secure notion of the meaning for which Maurice's body has become a locus.

⁵⁹ Busirane chains Amoret to a brazen pillar before '[f]iguring straunge characters of his art' on her body (FQ III.xii.31, 1.2). Dante has temporarily to stay Francesca from the d(a)emonic propulsion of the Second Circle so that he might make her body and her story part of his wider system of meaning (Inf., canto V, ll. 78-87). Kafka's 'In der Strafkolonie' plays on the idea of the signifying, inscribed body being immobilised: the body which is eventually inscribed belongs to someone who, in the power system of the penal colony, should be doing the inscribing; the machine then malfunctions, and kills him quickly, making him an immobile but quite meaningless corpse. Franz Kafka, 'In the Penal Settlement' [sic], Metamorphosis and Other Stories, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (1949, London: Random House, 1992) 169-199.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 1, section II above for a more detailed discussion of Joseph Campbell's analysis of the progress narrative. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1949, London: Fontana, 1993). Within Campbell's 'monomyth', masculinity is associated with desire and narrative movement, femininity with sites of pollution or recovery: 'Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know.' (Campbell 116) Progress narratives involving a female hero – the legend of Cupid and Psyche, books III-IV of *The Faerie Queene* – often break down into comedy or encyclopaedic anatomy: allegorical desire, it seems, works within defined gender parameters. The tendency of allegorical progress towards stasis – structurally, the tendency of its self-replicating desire to fix itself in hierarchical patterns, what we might term the *danse macabre* effect – means that the masculine body is always on the verge of becoming a site, becoming abjected, feminised. Fear of this outcome is a propulsive agent which precedes desire, indeed is the precondition for the existence of desire. Clarke, by abjecting his masculine bodies from the beginning, accepts the centrality of fear, and while he metaphorises it as *Timor Mortis*/Mr Prunty, he also strips away some of the hierarchising mystique which co-opts terror to desire.

⁶¹ '[S]illy, awkward and unclear' chides Frazier (61). Corcoran, puzzlingly, thinks the device 'favourite but sparingly used' (50); perhaps he means in *Mnemosyne*, compared with other late poems.

62 New understandings of Clarke's aims are presented in Goodby's *IUR* article ("The Prouder Counsel of her Throat" '336-7), which also contains the first published analysis of Clarke in terms of Kristevan theory, and in Pascale Amiot-Jouenne's essay on Clarke and ex-centricity. "Inward-Outness" : Ou le Rapport au Centre dans *Mnemosyne Lay In Dust* d'Austin Clarke', *Etudes Irlandaises*, (Spring 2002) 49-63. The study of Clarke's poetry is still hampered, however, by a widely-held view of the poet's moral honesty and his craftsmanship as indistinguishable aspects of his achievement. McCormack rightly criticises this viewpoint, though he is prone to it himself, suppressing his unease with 'The Last Republicans', which appears to support the corrupt and fascistic IRA of the 1930s and 1940s, to argue that it upholds (because the members of the IRA are in more need of forgiveness than most) the 'universalist eschatology made explicit in the final lines of "A Sermon on Swift", where Jove's condemnation of all mankind is followed by his Jovial forgiveness of all'. This is not entirely convincing, though McCormack usefully points out the European relevance of 'The Last Republicans' (*Selected Poems* 17).

Chapter 3

'The Stern Door Marked In Exile': Allegory and History in Louis MacNeice's Poetry

'And the whole story is other.'1

I

Louis MacNeice's most sustained exercise in allegory was not well received on publication in 1954.² Where the critical response to *Autumn Sequel* was not cautious to the point of obscurity, as in the *TLS* review, in which the anonymous reviewer sensed 'an area of unused force outside the poem', it was scathing. A. Alvarez in the *New Statesman* used the poem to mount an attack on the Thirties poets as a generation which had become outmoded without realising its potential:

Or perhaps it is that that vast popularising medium is the logical end to what Auden started, and that the Oxford poets of the Thirties have nearly always demanded such a banality of response [...] Autumn Sequel, like The Age of Anxiety, shows they have become weary and knowing and bored with it all. All we can do is, with them, lament the makers they might have been.⁴

Alvarez's review is, as Peter McDonald notes, 'a determined misreading of a generation'5 as well as an attack on *Autumn Sequel*. Alvarez seems interested in MacNeice's poem only in as far as it offers opportunities for taking a smack at Auden. Despite its partisan tone, it is this kind of assessment of *Autumn Sequel* which has set the tone for later critics. Alvarez's criticisms: 'smart, irreverent, quick with his cultured references, one of the Auden gang', 'mere jingles', 'modish', find echoes in Terence Brown's diagnosis of 'ostentatious bravura diction [...] too flashy, too contrived [...] non-structural and unsatisfactory'6 and Robin Marsack's sense that the poem is 'wilful, contrivance is sometimes painfully apparent'.⁷ Edna Longley's cursory treatment of *Autumn Sequel* in *Louis MacNeice: A Study* – seven references to it, all except one dismissive, as opposed to a whole chapter on *Autumn Journal* – remains closest to the pattern set by Alvarez: 'The mechanically picturesque speech of *Autumn Sequel* had travestied his genuine demotic

inspiration'. The sense of all these assessments is that MacNeice has a genuine voice, which is self-evidently that of Autumn Journal, and which is superseded in Autumn Sequel by an ostentatious, contrived one. This critical tendency establishes a false view of Autumn Journal, which has its moments of ostentation and bravura, and endorses MacNeice's appropriation of the values of l'homme moyen sensuel. It indicates the extent to which MacNeice's reputation has been (and sometimes still is) pegged to his Thirties poem, and moreover, to the bluff utilitarianism of some of his Thirties criticism. I would have a poet able bodied, fond of laughter, fond of talking, capable of pity and laughter, informed in economics, appreciative of women, involved in personal relationships, actively interested in politics, susceptible to physical impressions' appears in these critics' assessments as an authentic standard against which the cultivated allusiveness of Ten Burnt Offerings (1952) or Autumn Sequel can be measured, to the detriment of the later poems.

Only very recently has there been a move to reassess MacNeice's 'middle stretch'. Peter McDonald has done a great deal to restore interest in these 'unlyrical' poems, commenting that '[i]n particular, *Autumn Sequel*, which MacNeice himself always defended, has been done a critical disservice which obscures the importance of myth and parable in the poet's work as a whole.' (McDonald 130) Even McDonald, however, is cautious about proclaiming the value of this mid-period poetry in its own right, seeing it primarily in terms of its importance for the development of MacNeice's *lyric* voice. He concludes his chapter on the 'middle stretch':

The grappling with the tensions between self and other, unity and diversity, or stability and change is matched by a testing of the limits and possibilities of form as an integral part of meaning – the 'dialectic' of *Ten Burnt Offerings*, or the sustained, open voice of *Autumn Sequel* – which later, when applied to the 'lyric', enabled MacNeice to give structural expression to the 'dream logic' that has always been present in his imagination. Myth, too, became an indispensable part of MacNeice's poetry during these years: again, this is a matter of

possibilities and limits, explored further by the poet as 'parable' (McDonald 153).

Although 'grappling with the tensions between self and other, unity and diversity, or stability and change' is (as observed in the two previous chapters) highly characteristic of allegorical expression, McDonald is reluctant to introduce 'allegory' as a critical term with some bearing on these poems. For this he has, of course, MacNeice's own sanction, in *Varieties of Parable*. It would seem perverse to use, in place of MacNeice's (somewhat reluctantly) chosen term, 'parable', another which he explicitly rejects:

I don't like the word 'parable' and it suggests something much to narrow for my purpose, namely the parables of the New Testament. On the other hand the other possible words seemed even less satisfactory. [...] there is 'allegory' but this is a word to which many people today are allergic and if one uses it too widely one has no word left for the category of allegory proper.¹¹

MacNeice does not explicitly define 'allegory proper', but seems to have in mind historical rather than formal criteria for recognising it: '[w]hen we have crossed the Great Divide [between pre- and post-Romantic literature] I shall prefer not to talk of allegory but of parable [...] For such allegories as do appear will be, unlike *The Faerie Queene* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, drifting rather than anchored.' (*Varieties* 50) Such an argument was discussed in Chapter 1: broadly, it states that allegorical making may take place in modernity, but cannot, because of the breakdown of a unified culture 'of the sign' or 'of the word', be assigned to a broader category known as allegory. On occasion MacNeice combines this historical definition with a certain deference to his audience's presumed 'allergy':

The reader's experience, however, will be greatly enriched if he knows something of what Miss Tuve calls "the whole system of traditional and publicly known correspondences" implicit in much of Herbert's imagery. It is the same with Spenser: the Cave of Despair is universal and so are the lovely ladies like Amoret and Florimell (whose sheer sex appeal proves they are not purely allegorical) but there is much in *The Faerie Queene* which may fall flat or even repel unless one is acquainted with the Elizabethan world-picture. (*Varieties* 22)

Here, MacNeice regards 'allegory' both as a historically limited genre within a homogeneous sign culture and as a shorthand for that which is unreal, didactic, abstract, lacking in 'sex appeal'. For MacNeice when he writes in this vein, allegory is most successful when it is least 'obtrusive' and partakes most fully of 'the haunting quality of a dream' (*Varieties* 37). If it must be 'blatant', then it should be easy to 'envisage', if 'crude', like the workshop of Care in *The Faerie Queene* (FQ IV.v.32-45). The figure of Ate (FQ IV.i.19-31), which MacNeice cannot visualise, is thus unacceptable to him (*Varieties* 35-6). MacNeice also denies that his own work could be described as allegorical, claiming that his failed radio play *The Queen of Air and Darkness* was an uncharacteristic venture into the mode (*Varieties* 111-113), and that 'In poetry [...] I have more often than not worked at the opposite pole to Spenser [...] at times becoming a journalist rather than a creative writer.' (*Varieties* 8)

However, Varieties of Parable also returns often to the similarities between MacNeice's contemporaries and the authors of The Faerie Queene, Everyman and Pilgrim's Progress, despite the 'great gulfs' that separate them, and to the inadequacies of realist literature in twentieth-century contexts (Varieties 25, 102-103). At these points in his argument he blurs the distinction between allegory and other forms of parabolic writing, as he blurs the historical scheme which posits literary Romanticism as the greatest barrier between his contemporaries and Spenser. Despite his intention to abandon the term 'allegory' with Spenser and Bunyan, it is in his chapters on Romantic and post-Romantic writing that MacNeice argues most forcefully in favour of the allegorical mode. He attacks the assumption voiced by W.H. Auden and Norman Pearson that allegorical imagery means 'a one-to-one correspondence', ambiguity being the sole preserve of symbolism.¹³ He continues by reversing their condescending concession that 'in nearly all successful allegory the images used do in fact have a symbolic value over and above their allegorical use', suggesting that '[i]n most

successful symbolical writing, such as *The Ancient Mariner*, there tends to be a hard core or rather a spine of allegory. The spine may be buried deep but it holds the poem up.' (*Varieties* 53-54) Picking up the metaphor in his discussion of modern verse and drama, MacNeice notes that 'those poets of our time who would seem to be temperamentally predisposed to parable have generally gone in for a good deal of symbolism which contains a noticeable spine of allegory.' (*Varieties* 104) It proves impossible for MacNeice to confine 'allegory' either to a historical period or to a category of abstract, transparently unreal writing: it is a 'noticeable' feature of modern poetry, and, the spine metaphor would suggest, an integral part of parable writing, not unreal, but palpably physical.

It is this contradictory attitude to allegory that has been effaced or elided even by MacNeice's most acute critics. McDonald equates allegory with 'one-to-one correspondence' in order to suggest how MacNeice's parables differ from it (163). He also implies, in his concluding remarks on 'Parable', that MacNeice's practice of parable-writing is distinct from allegory because it engages with 'events' and 'facts' (176). This misrepresents both allegorical making and the place of abstraction within it. As we saw in Chapter 1, allegory's didactic and coercive force is a result not of the simplicity of a one-to-one correspondence (if such a thing can even exist in literature) but of the complexity of polysemy. Nor is allegorical abstraction to be distinguished by its remoteness from the actual, 'events' and 'facts': its power, and its political dangers, are a consequence of the involvement of abstractions in temporality and actuality. Nowhere is this more evident than in *The Faerie Queene*, both in the books that MacNeice found especially congenial, books I and VI, and in those he rather disliked, such as book V.¹⁴

This chapter explores MacNeice's ambiguous attitude to allegory and the place of allegory within his parable writing through his most neglected work, the 'middle

stretch' poems of Holes in the Sky (1948), Ten Burnt Offerings and Autumn Sequel. These 'dialectical' poems constitute a group of allegorical meditations on history, the action of time, melancholia, nostalgia, and sentiment. Their preoccupation with structure and their 'architectural'16 qualities tell us much about MacNeice's impulse to create allegorical order, even as they display unease with such hierarchies as that impulse invariably constructs. The following section, 'History', pursues more closely some issues approached in section IV of Chapter 1, in order to suggest a theoretical framework for MacNeice's allegorical treatment of historical themes. MacNeice, like Clarke, practices a figural technique whereby particular concerns appear in different historical or generic contexts, so that when the poet's work is viewed as a whole, these different occasions appear to be figurae for one another. Where Clarke's figurae tend to take the form of episodes, MacNeice, for whom cosmic imagery exerts a much greater attraction, deploys his figurae in image clusters. MacNeice displays a preoccupation with the past's tangible presence in modernity, which manifests itself in Ten Burnt Offerings as a series of figural connections between figures from Greek, Biblical and English history. These imaginative 'reconstructions' of the past establish a dialectic which is pursued in Autumn Sequel in the poet's 'debates' with Thucydides: is the past 'unimaginably different', and efforts to imagine it at best exercises in sentimental nostalgia, or conversely, is there an obligation upon us to imagine the past, in order that those effaced by defeat or oppression retain some historical existence? MacNeice's figural allegorism has a politico-historical application which has hitherto been unrecognised in studies of his mid-period poetry, obscured by disdain for what critics have seen as empty, meretricious allusion and rigid, predetermined structuring.

Section III, 'Courtesies', offers an account of *Autumn Sequel*, paying particular attention to MacNeice's ambiguous attitude to allegorical order and hierarchy.

MacNeice maintains that allegorical meaning is produced by engagement with the past,

history and tradition. In Varieties of Parable he suggests that the most effective parable writing is produced by the writer's reference both to the historical past and to his or her personal past: he attaches immense importance to popular imagination, 'nursery horror stories and [...] travellers' tales' (37). But in the poems of the mid-period the allusions seem to have no broader significance than the desire to parody or simply to hear the muffled dream-like echo of familiar words. As suggested in Chapter 1, the emptiness of allegorical allusion can be attributed to the form's improvisatory hostility towards the materials of tradition: the allegorist might treat the past as a mere grab-bag from which to fashion a new monument. What Marsack calls Autumn Sequel's 'painstaking plotting' (104), its attempts at hierarchical monumentality, is disrupted by a system of values based on the poet's private criteria of friendship and sentiment: he levels, for instance, differences of achievement between Yeats, Dylan Thomas, and William Empson, making them all objects of nostalgic reminiscence and gentle parody. Nostalgia and sentiment are revealed as strategies in the attempt to 'marry myth to actuality' rather than lapses of judgement, though MacNeice was aware of the dangers of nostalgia, its tendency to 'nourish' and be 'nourished by accidie'. Finally, this section will assess Autumn Sequel as a quest narrative articulated in an 'unfinished idiom [that] is of itself unfinishable' (MacDonald 176). McDonald argues that some of the least successful passages of the poem, cantos XIV-XVI, which narrate an formally structured Quest within the framework of Autumn Sequel's many journeys, are unsuccessful precisely because they abandon this unfinishable aesthetic and engage in allegoresis: 'MacNeice is [...] allegorizing his own poem [...] parable cannot afford to undergo this kind of process' (170), 'the completed quest [...] can only be flat and disappointing' (171). These arguments can be taken further, to suggest that in Autumn Sequel MacNeice is working out both his unease with allegory's potential for hypostasis and strategies for eluding it in future allegorical poems.

The success of these strategies can best be judged by consideration of the late lyrics which follow Autumn Sequel, poems collected in Visitations (1957), Solstices (1961) and The Burning Perch (1963). In a brief concluding section, 'Parable', I argue that these parable poems develop MacNeice's reservations regarding 'the hierarchizing mode', which in the mid-period poems are sporadic and inchoate, into a fully-formed aesthetic practice. The dialectical, discursive, uneconomic structures of the mid-period give way to paratactic or asyndetonic lyrics in which the cosmic links between allegorical images are effaced. Indeterminacy and incompletion are highly valued in this late poetry. Thematically, the parable poems are marked by an achieved articulation of the action of time upon allegorical emblems. This awareness of temporality is distinct from what many critics have identified as a 'celebration' of flux and movement.¹⁹ (Since, in MacNeice's poetry, change implies the individual's confrontation with the passage of time, which must eventually lead to stasis and death, it is doubtful whether even the earliest poems uncritically celebrate flux).²⁰ It is rather as if MacNeice's preoccupation with history's palpable presence comes to inhabit his allegorical imagery: the figurae of these poems are no longer (if they ever were) touchstones, but material objects subject to decay. In the strongest of them, 'Sunday in the Park' (MCP 496) or 'Soap Suds' (517), for instance, we come to understand how a kind of liberation might inhere in the moribund emblem.

II: HISTORY

Figural allegory presents a problem for the representation of history. The *figura* depends on and maintains an idea of historical reality which it simultaneously dismantles. As noted in Chapter 1, the typological *figura* insists on the real existence in history of both its imagery and that which the imagery represents. It is based upon the premise that a person or event or location might retain its identity while at the same

time being a pattern or fulfilment of another. Confusingly, though, figural allegory may include the fantastic, the transparently made-up, what Deborah Madsen calls 'fabulistic' allegory.²¹ Fabulism is incorporated into figuralism by another appeal to history: the fabulistic image attains the status of a figure by having once been (said to be) the object of belief. Within the logocentric system of allegory, it is not even necessary that such a belief should really have existed: the formula 'men believed it once' is excuse enough. For instance, the classical gods are allegorised as belief in their ability to affect human affairs wanes; diminishing belief in fantastic travellers' tales makes the form available to house full-scale political and social allegories such as those in *Gulliver's Travels*; animal fables appeal to adults' sense of childhood anthropomorphism. Fabulism is figuralism in a state of decay: figuralism marked by the passage of time and attendant cultural change.

From this point of view, allegory defers to not only history, but 'history' which has declined into 'tradition' or 'folklore'. The importance MacNeice attaches to tradition in this sense can scarcely be overstated: in *Varieties of Parable*, for instance he declares 'a fairy story, at least of the classical folk variety, is a much more solid affair than the average naturalistic novel, whose roots go little deeper than a gossip column.'

(7) In *Autumn Sequel* such mythic or folk material becomes a signifier of poetic sensibility (the 'he' here is 'Gwilym', MacNeice's pseudonym for Dylan Thomas):

he has powerful friends Who are his own inventions—the one-eyed hag

Whose one is an evil eye, the maiden goddess who sends Her silver javelin straight, the Knave of Fools Who cocks his snook and blows his dividends,

[...]

the endearing crook
Who says his name is Noman, the talking fox
(AS II, ll.97-100, 103-104; 338)

As I will use the terms in this chapter, however, figural allegory (or *figura*) involves a conflation of two or more distinct periods of recorded history, or of distinct historical persons. It disrupts concepts of historical difference in its capacity to suggest not just that one historical moment is comparable with another, but that one moment (or event, or individual) is the fulfilment of a pattern established by the other. Figural techniques undermine the very notion of historical reality upon which they are based: they efface temporality in favour of a declaration that one event, epoch, or person 'is', to all appearances, another. For allegory, the difference of the past is an 'other' (the negative type) which must at all costs be assimilated to the textual system, turned into a positive 'Other', the pattern or fulfilment of a *figura*. We might recall from Chapter 1 Gordon Teskey's characterisation of allegorical making 'as the perennial assault of the generated on what is established before it in time, on that which has given it substance'.²² In that such allegorical making might have a didactic or coercive purpose, this assault on the difference of the past is also perpetrated upon the future. Viewed in this way, MacNeice's most well-known figural allegory gains another dimension:

So the humanist in his room with Jacobean panels
Chewing his pipe and looking on a lazy quad
Chops the Ancient World to turn a sermon
To the greater glory of God.
But I can do nothing so useful or so simple;
These dead are dead
And when I should remember the paragons of Hellas

I think instead

Of the crooks, the adventurers and the opportunists

Of the crooks, the adventurers and the opportunists, The careless athletes and the fancy boys,

The hairsplitters, the pedants, the hard boiled sceptics And the Agora and the noise

Of the demagogues and quacks; and the women pouring Libations over graves

And the trimmers at Delphi and the dummies at Sparta and lastly

I think of the slaves

And how one can imagine oneself among them I do not know;

It was all so unimaginably different
And all so long ago. (AJ IX, ll.61-80; 118-9)

The familiarity of these lines has obscured for many readers their double irony. Longley claims MacNeice 'nails' a 'lie' about the exemplary qualities of the classical world, a lie related to the 'heroic and patriotic myths' that distorted classics teaching in English public schools before the First World War (Longley 68). But scorn for such jingo myths was itself a cliché by the time MacNeice composed Autumn Journal, and more than cliché, part of a popular resistance to belligerence which, however unwittingly, helped to legitimise the policy of appeasement. The accommodation of this cliché creates a side-effect of temporal slippage, which prepares the reader for the longer figural allegory of lines 67-80. The 'humanist in his room with Jacobean panels' is a consciously outdated figure, a revenant from the speaker's 1910s schooldays or his 1920s undergraduate career. His equivalent in 1938, rather than turning sermons, would more likely accept 'unimaginably different' at face value, concurring with MacNeice's older contemporary H.D.F. Kitto on the inconceivable remoteness of the classical past: '[a]s far as Greece is concerned the most Hellenic of us is a foreigner, and we all of us know how wide of the mark even an intelligent foreigner can be. 23 Conversely, the caustic irony of MacNeice's 'unimaginably different' suggests that the classical world can indeed 'point a moral/ For the present age' (AJ XI, Il.53-54; 118). The worst of Ancient Greece - its adventuring, demagoguery and superstitious punditry, its dependence on slavery – becomes a figura for Europe after the Munich agreement. In the logic of this passage, disdain for the kind of figuralism practised by sermon-turning humanists, however justified, however much MacNeice's speaker or MacNeice himself might endorse it, nonetheless directly provokes an allegorical evocation of Europe's cynicism and smugness in late 1938. This (il)logical movement, which the sympathetic speaker of Autumn Journal naturalises so effectively (it is not, after all, as if rejection of humanistic historical distortion obliges support for Munich) is itself a figure for the trajectory of

public opinion during the 1930s, a figure for the ease with which a principled resistance to jingoistic distortions of history might slip first into cliché and then into moral cowardice. MacNeice manipulates the contradictory aspects of figural allegory with exceptional skill, first utilising its apparent deference to historical truth to engage the reader's sympathy with the speaker, against the 'humanist'; then deploying its disruptive power to negate historical difference, implicating both his speaker and his reader in the cynical, corrupt political *milien* of ancient Athens as it stands for post-Munich Britain.

Autumn Journal, unlike its sequel, is not primarily an allegorical poem, and excursions like this into figuralism are comparatively rare. There is an intriguing moment in section XVI, in which the speaker, having read Maud Gonne's memoirs, suggests her nationalism is based on a kind of allegorical making:

I note how a single purpose can be founded on A jumble of opposites:

Dublin Castle, the vice-regal ball,

The embassies of Europe,

Hatred scribbled on a wall,

Gaols and revolvers.

(*AJ* XVI, ll.11-16; 131)

Gonne's nationalism, like an allegory, seeks to unify a divided consciousness into a 'single purpose', yet it is nourished by the very ambivalence it seeks to repress. At the same time, the 'opposites' of established power and revolutionary insurgency come to represent one another, in the first stage of the abyssal descent of allegorical intention which characterises the Tragedy of Fate: 'the throne-room is transformed into the dungeon, the pleasure-chamber into a tomb'. In the rest of the section, however, MacNeice develops the motif of divided consciousness in a more familiar direction, denouncing Irish sectarianism and its attendant violence. There are hints that the speaker's imagination is still working in an allegorical way: a snappish dismissal of 'Kathaleen ni Houlihan! Why/ Must a country, like a ship or a car, be always female,/ Mother or sweetheart?' (AJ XVI, II.41-43; 132) follows a more interesting

characterisation of 'the Orange bands/ Drawing an iron net through darkest Ulster/ Flailing the limbo lands' (ll.25-27; 132), which seems to draw on Spenser's Talus, the 'yron' man who wields a 'flale' (FQ v.i.12, ll.6-9). Broadly, though, allegory in Autumn Journal is subordinate to other forms of expression. Section XII suggests that a resistance of figural allegory is part of MacNeice's larger resistance of Platonism and 'pure' art:

[Plato's] world of capital initials, of transcendent Ideas is too bleak;
For me there remain to all intents and purposes Seven days in the week
And no one Tuesday is another and you destroy it If you subtract the difference and relate
It merely to the Form of Tuesday. This is Tuesday The 25th of October, 1938.

(AJ XII, Il.41-48; 124)

Though MacNeice never abandoned his hostility to Platonism, throughout the poems of the 1940s and 1950s, his rejection of figural allegory becomes more nuanced. The stridency of a poem like 'Plain Speaking' – 'In the beginning and in the end the only decent/ Definition is tautology' – becomes rather a consideration of how to manage 'when caught between the beginning and the end' when images '[t]urn other than themselves [...]/ Flapping and overlapping—a tree becomes / A talking tower, and a woman becomes world' (MCP 187). While he never loses sight of the dangers of cosmic thinking, such as might be involved in making a human being 'world', the abiding preoccupation of the mid-period is not the assertion that 'I am I even though the dead are dead' (MCP 188), but the question of how 'I' can possibly be 'I' when the dead are dead, yet persistently haunting the speaker.

The rest of this section is concerned, then, with 'middle stretch' poems. To illustrate the relation of MacNeice's image clusters to his figural allegory, I begin by discussing 'The Stygian Banks' (MCP 257-267). This poem is held even by McDonald to be one of MacNeice's weakest, perhaps deserving of the dispraise which critics have

piled on the mid-period as a whole. It is certainly not a compelling work, but MacNeice, in the essay 'Experiences with Images' (1949), singles it out as an example of his changing style, of a new control in his 'quasi-musical linking of images' (*Criticism* 153-164; 163). On this evidence, and on the principle that an unachieved poem may sometimes be more revealing, because less artful, of the poet's patterning than an achieved example, 'The Stygian Banks' provides a useful stepping-off point and point of comparison for the discussion of figural allegory in *Ten Burnt Offerings*. This discussion pays particular attention to MacNeice's sense of temporality and of history's presence in the contemporary world. Finally, an analysis of the Thucydides cantos in *Autumn Sequel* (AS I, Il.116-142, VIII, Il.212-142, XIX, XXVI, Il.102-104; 334-335, 365, 407-410, 438) will suggest some of the political implications of an allegorical representation of the past.

As its title²⁵ suggests, 'The Stygian Banks' treats themes of mortality, metaphysical uncertainty and desire as well as others, identity, heredity and generation. Its structure is established by the repetition in related contexts of various images and phrases. A number of these images are typically MacNeicean: the Edenic hortus conclusus in spring, the cradle which is also a coffin, playing cards, wineglasses raised to ring in a toast, sculpture and masonry as signifiers of stasis and death. As this list (it is very far from exhaustive) might imply, the patterning is very dense: in a poem of some 430 lines there are several dozen repeated images or image clusters. This extreme density seems to push the poem in two opposite directions. On one hand, it attempts, in McDonald's words, to 'strip[...] disparate images of their otherness [...] break [...] down apparent barriers between them.' (141) On the other, the persistent reappearance of certain motifs hypostatises them, turning them into discrete cosmic signifiers which become increasingly difficult to relate to others. This hypostasis is an established characteristic of allegorical art, and not in itself the reason for the failure of 'The Stygian Banks'. That

rather resides in the poem's inability to integrate with its structuring imagery moments of profound unease with the structure thus established.

The poem begins with a meditation on generation – 'To keep themselves young—is that why people have children?' – which develops in figural terms, '[u]nscrolling history'. Childhood is equated with the Middle Ages as a time when sense experience was intensely vivid, adolescence representing the 'New Learning'. Figuralism, MacNeice implies, can make such historical generalisations because it is essentially heedless of history: it regards persons as interchangeable within a larger and unchanging pattern: 'the rondel of the years/ Never changing its burden, only the leader/ Changing his lines and time changing the leader'. Figuralism upsets chronology: 'follow your/ Child in his fourteenth-century dance' (257). Despite these hints of figural allegory's disruptive qualities, the speaker appeals to a conception of historical reality in order to elaborate his *figura*:

Oh we know that the word merry Is vulgarised and Chaucer's England was not All cakes and ale nor all our childhood happy;
Still there is something lost. The very limitedness
Of childhood, its ignorance, its impotence,
Made every cockcrow a miracle [...]

as the medieval winter
Slow and dense with cold made March a golden avatar

(258)

The conceit which connects childhood to the Middle Ages makes an appeal both to a real past, where something of real value (that such value is qualified rather enhances than diminishes our sense of its reality for this speaker) has been lost, and to a fantasy (or a decayed history, decayed as the word 'merry' has declined) of medieval England, a fantasy that, appropriately enough, resembles an illustration in a children's history book, full of masons, wandering clerks, monks writing love-songs, and jongleurs. The fantasy is clearly inadequate to represent the loss, and MacNeice locates the reason for this with figural allegory itself, its aggregative conflation of persons, regardless of difference. He

attempts to resist it: 'A different body/ Yours from your father's and your child's from yours' (258). Yet it proves impossible to relinquish the figural notion – a delusion, really – that bodies are essentially interchangeable, that they can retain their individuality while being the pattern or fulfillment of another:

But now it is Spring and the roll of the drums of the Judgement Muffled with foliage, so you can fool yourself justly, Playing the jongleur; that your songs are an artifice Is of your nature; that the blossom must fall Is what keeps it fresh; that lives and pieces of lives Are cut off is needed to shape them, time is a chisel So what was is.

(258)

While the speaker argues that a belief in figuralism is a delusion, the imagery of the earlier figural link between childhood and the medieval has taken possession of this passage. He spends more time elaborating his folly than demolishing it; we might recall that the industry of the building and ornamenting allegorist typically draws readers' attention away from the violence which gives rise to and sustains allegorical making. That elaborated folly or fantasy proves tenacious; even in the face of dawn and 'Reality', 'Fantasy holds.' (258)

Throughout the poem, MacNeice's ambiguous attitude to figural allegory emerges in the context of medieval imagery. The figure of 'Alison' links this theme with the sexual desire implied by the Shakespearean epigraph. Alison is explicitly allegorical from the beginning, an abstraction who 'is forever aged fifteen/ Though leasing different bodies' (258). 'Leasing' combines a positive metaphorical sense, though such a phrase as 'a new lease of life', with a more disturbing literal sense of a blurring between sexual and economic transactions. ²⁶ Alison is an object of 'capture', in Teskey's sense of the term (see above, Chapter 1), a body made to contain significance. The violence that typically accompanies capture is, also typically, elided or displaced, so that she is a symbol of almost eerie serenity: 'in her arms are flowers, long hours of flowers/

And her smile serene as young and the horned head-dress/ Cuts the enamel sky.' (264) The violence that has been repressed to create this serenity emerges towards the end of this fifth section, linked to Alison by the horns of her head-dress:

As in the little church the fresco above the rood-loft
Has lost its percussive colours but though faded
The bearded Judge and the horned figures with prongs
[...] still can give. And take.
(265)

A similar displacement seems to be going on as Alison's poise is set in opposition to the noise of her 'rowdy' age, comparable to the poise of Socrates in the agora or of gladiators in the arena (266). The treatment of Alison suggests that MacNeice recognises the violence inherent in making a body a vessel for abstractions. That she appears in a poem so much concerned with the dangerous delusion that one can live in and through one's children implies, moreover, that he sees 'capture' and figuralism as part of the same, hazardous allegorical project. However, the resistance that he offers against the coercive force of figural allegory is generally couched in rather verbose discursive terms:

Fantasy holds the child in the man, the lover in the monk, the monk in the lover,

The arbour in the abbey, the ages together

But as notes are together in music—no merging of history [...]

We must avoid

The haunting wish to fuse all persons together

Even that compère of wax who now it is Spring
Jogs your elbow as the blossom falls
Whispering: "Fulfil yourself. But renounce the temptation
To imbrue the world with self and thus blaspheme
All other selves by merging them. Rather fill,
Fulfil yourself with the Give and Take of the Spring
And honour the green of the grass, the rights of the others,
Taking what they can give, giving what they can take ["]

(258-9)

There are some indications here of an attempt to integrate this discursive material with allegorical imagery that does exactly what the discursive passages argue against, merging persons, imbruing the world with self. For instance, the theme of reciprocity – 'the Give and Take of the Spring' – is complicated, even compromised, by its re-emergence in the context of the Last Judgement fresco where the imagery of judgement – 'give. And take.' (MCP 265) – carries strong overtones of the re-emergence of suppressed allegorical violence. Largely, however, the reader is left with a sense of unresolved conflict, of irresolution that cannot be channelled into the productive ambivalence of allegory.

In Varieties of Parable MacNeice expresses his frustration with artificial syntheses of conflicting critical interpretations of a text (in this case The Book of Thel):

I find this broadmindedness worrying and rather reminiscent of the doctrine fashionable in the 1920's that a poem can mean whatever meaning you can find in it: [...] I cannot see how Thel can be at one and the same time a soul that fears to be embodied and a soul that fears to be disembodied. (57-9)

Many commentators would take issue with MacNeice regarding this particular example: conflicting interpretations of a text do not have, as he puts it, to 'coalesce' (*Varieties* 59) in order to be equally valid. MacNeice's objection is more applicable to his own poem than to Blake: the inconsistencies between image and meaning in 'The Stygian Banks' do not amount to the stark, deliberate ambivalence represented by *The Book of Thel*. For example, the falling blossom image, first used ironically to refute the delusion that mortality confers value upon life (258), is found some 150 lines later, implying that mortality really does confer value upon life:

And the blossoms fall like sighs but we can hold them Each as a note in the air, a chain of defiance, Making the transient last by having Seen it And so distilled value from mere existence (262)

Contradictions like this are not entirely indefensible: instability in the speaker's thoughts is to be expected in a poem whose subject is the uncertainty of identity, the self changing in time as it moves towards death. But for an image to reverse its meaning

without structural rationale must provoke the suspicion that the poem's thought is not complex, but confused. A comparison with a more artful example from Autumn Sequel is illustrative. In that poem MacNeice twice uses the Virgilian image of the Gates of Dreams (AS II ll.5-7; 335 and XVIII, ll.5-7; 403 – some patterning is involved in placing them in the same position in each canto). In the first example the speaker imagines his dead friend Gavin chivvying him out of his habitual melancholia. Gavin's speech is lifeaffirming, pragmatic: 'to be dead/ Is really no alternative[...] The Gates of Horn/ Are good enough for me' (ll.3-4, 6-7). The speaker sympathises broadly with Gavin's rather bluff humanism, and the reference to the Gates of Horn seems to mean what it has traditionally meant: that it is through them that true dreams appear. In Canto XVIII it is the Gates of Ivory which have become the source of Gwylim's true visions: 'his like is seldom born/ Being admitted through the Ivory Gate/ Where most must enter through the Gates of Horn' (ll.5-7). The poem's structures of sentiment make this inconsistency and violation of traditional significance acceptable, even logical: Gavin and Gwylim are both truth-tellers, but they approach the truth in different, opposing ways. By another neat piece of patterning Gwilym already acts as a foil to Gavin in Canto II, arriving to cheer the speaker after his meditation on Gavin's unexpected death.²⁷

It seems, in any case, that MacNeice's uncertainty concerning the value of allegory contributes considerably to the confusion of 'The Stygian Banks'. In terms of clarifying the reasons for such uncertainty, the poems of *Ten Burnt Offerings* represent a considerable advance on the earlier piece. The number of repeated images and image clusters is greatly reduced in this collection, and they are for the most part related to the collection's central theme of sacrifice. McDonald calls these poems 'painstakingly unlyrical' (130): their imagery certainly owes little to lyric economy. Relationships between connected images develop slowly, over the course of four or five of the four-part poems. Misperceptions are corrected not by strenuous argument, as in 'The

Stygian Banks', but by allusion, the re-presentation of a familiar image in an altered context.

'Suite for Recorders', the first of the ten, is a poem about nostalgia, and as such prepares some of the ground for *Autumn Sequel*, as well as other of the 'burnt offerings'. In a movement reminiscent of the 'medieval' material of 'The Stygian Banks', MacNeice explores twentieth-century nostalgia for a sixteenth century imagined as vital because it is also intensely dangerous:

the Elizabethan

Mayflies in a silver web which dangled over chaos Twirling round and round, Waited for the silent headsman, countering his silence With arabesques of sound.

. . .

Golden age? Age of discovery? Age of madrigals and liars, Age when men died young. We envy what we think an innocent ardour, What in fact was staged revolt upon a tightrope (MCP 284-5)

Again, this seeks to pit a 'real' history against a fantasy, but it becomes clear that twentieth-century mythologizing of the 'Elizabethan' is a mere echo, in its turn, of sixteenth-century nostalgia for an ancient bucolic past:

Violent men with salt in their nostrils, blood on their hands, whose gentler

moments

Conjured up, for lack of sleep, a land which ancient literati, Careless of the starved and sweaty facts, had filled with mimic Shepherds fluting to their sheep

For Spenser, Sidney, Kit and Will to loll and count and then recounting Their antics fall asleep.

[...]

Yet still they pipe and still from No Man's Pastures trip their white, their

ringstraked
Their black sheep through the gap.
(MCP 285)

These sheep are simple props in a pastiche pastoral, but as traditional animals of sacrifice, they intimate a broader significance in a collection preoccupied by the role of sacrifice in both polytheistic and Judeo-Christian religion. In subsequent poems,

MacNeice develops the significance of the pastoral and sacrificial associations of sheep and cattle. In 'Day of Returning' (MCP 314-317), Odysseus on Calypso's isle suffers an attack of homesickness for 'rights of grazing or wood-cutting; aye, it is time/ I heard the bleat of my goats and smelt the dung of my cattle'. The timelessness of Ogygia makes Odysseus 'really No Man' (MCP 316). This is in contrast to the secure patriarchal identity of Jacob, with whom the poem associates him through the figure of his craftiness: 'They call me crafty Odysseus/ I have used my craft on gods and nymphs and demigods'. Jacob aims his 'craft' in more familiar directions: 'They call me crafty, I robbed my brother/ Hoaxed my father, I am most practical' (MCP 316).28 For all Jacob's pastoralist security, though, he has Odyssean moments of existential doubt.²⁹ He has a nightmare in which he relives his night spent wrestling with the angel of God: 'I know this time I have no chance of holding my own/ My own is nowhere' (317). Odysseus and Jacob assume the archetypal roles of trickster and patriarch, roles which MacNeice shows in 'Day of Returning' to overlap. This development is prefigured in other poems: the phrase 'No Man's Pastures' in 'Suite for Recorders' combines Odysseus's philosophical uncertainty with Jacob's pastoralist practicality to establish the figural grounds on which ancient Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions meet, the space in which other poems in this sequence, most notably 'Areopagus' (MCP 287-290), are also set.30

In 'The Island' (MCP 304-308), meanwhile, the visitor to Ikaria, ³¹ trying to sleep under a walnut tree, is bothered by 'the sawmill noise of cicadas':

Were he to count a thousand, a hundred Thousand sheep they would all be scraggy and stare at him with the stare

Of refugees, outraged and sullen,

Who have no gap to go through, who even if free are free as air Long since exhausted.

(MCP 306)

Here the sheep signify the humanitarian consequences of political violence. At the time MacNeice visited Ikaria, there was a prison camp on the island whose 'political prisoners', many of whom were women and children suffering from tuberculosis, had apparently been forgotten by the authorities. Stallworthy notes '[t]hese, strangely, find their way into only one indifferent line of "The Island" ' (383). In fact, though, "The Island' keeps returning to ideas of freedom and its limitations. The absolute freedom offered Icarus, that '[l]opped his wings like a knife', is contrasted with relative forms of freedom: the visitor notes the 'labouring wisdom' which asks '[n]o freedom, only reprieve' (305) and sees a 'timeworn baker/ Burnt out of Smyrna' (306). Under the walnut tree, he reflects: 'Idyllic? Maybe. Still there is hardly/ Such a thing as a just idyl.' (306), and finally falling asleep, dreams of being chased towards rocks, among which sits a 'judge in his glory/ In a wig like a dirty sheep, frightened himself, with a nerve in his face/ Ticking away' (307). The inmates of the camp are only the least free inhabitants of an island where the metaphysical freedom of Icarus no longer exists: 'there are prisoners really, here in the hills, who would not agree/ To sign for their freedom, whether in doubt of/ Such freedom or having forgotten or never having known what it meant to be free.' (307) These three lines (the evocation of the psychological consequences of prolonged imprisonment upon its victims does not seem 'indifferent', but perhaps Stallworthy means that it is not poetry of high lyric quality) refer back to the sheep that the visitor imagines as he tries to sleep: in their inability to recognise freedom even if it were offered them, the prisoners 'have no gap to go through, [...] are free as air/ Long since exhausted.' The 'gap' refers back still further, to the prop sheep of 'Suite for Recorders': 'trip their white, their ringstraked,/ Their black sheep through the gap.' (285) The sullen degradation of the inmates of the prison camp, linked to 'Suite for Recorders' through the image of sheep at a gap, acts as an implicit rebuke to a reading of the first poem which attributes the cultural vitality of

Elizabethan England to its hazardous political climate, and is thereby tempted to excuse its authoritarianism. As in section IX of *Autumn Journal*, MacNeice is suspicious of a historical method which seeks to explain away injustice and brutality by an appeal to the past's unimaginable difference.³²

This brings us, then, to the concern in Ten Burnt Offerings with the authoritarianism of allegory itself. As noted above, in this chapter and in Chapter 1, the allegorical method of representation presumes a secure hierarchy of power relationships. The resemblance of an allegorical image and the thing represented by it depends on a resemblance between the power relations in each case. To take MacNeice's example from 'The Stygian Banks', childhood is like the Middle Ages because a child's power relative to an adult's is like a medieval person's relative to God or Nature. In a figural allegory, difference between historical epochs or between the different understandings of time constituted, for instance, by the word 'childhood' and the phrase 'the Middle Ages' is effaced, recycled into the textual system as the allegorical 'incoherence' that keeps the reader interpreting throughout. This erasure of difference is not something that can successfully be argued against within the text, at least not if the argument is explicit. In 'The Stygian Banks' MacNeice's struggle with '[t]hat haunting wish to fuse all persons together' (MCP 259) finds itself possessed by allegorical imagery that does precisely that.³³ In Ten Burnt Offerings resistance to the 'haunting wish' is necessarily offered in more oblique ways.

The pithy tetrameters of the third section of 'Suite for Recorders' state the position of the individual with regard to history:

Pride in your history is pride
In living what your fathers died
Is pride in taking your own pulse
And counting in you someone else.

Which someone, though long dead before, Scrabbles and chirps on your own floor.

The orange he can hardly hold Contains a world of Spanish gold. (MCP 285)

This presents a similar conceit to '[f]ollow your/ Child in his fourteenth-century dance' (257): any attempt to imagine the self as the product of the past, or the self extending into the future, unhinges chronology, giving in, to some extent, to the 'haunting wish'. In 'Suite for Recorders', however, the implications of that 'haunting wish' actually haunt the poem, and the body of the speaker. To take pride in the past is both to experience the past as a kind of ghost within oneself, whose 'pulse' is tangible and countable, and to see it as a scrabbling, chirping homunculus or poltergeist, 'long dead before'. This revenant, we recognise only in the seventh line, is also a child (the speaker's child and 'your', the reader's, child, in the poem's colloquially inclusive rhetoric) whose hands are too small to hold an orange. This horror-image, worthy of anything in the 'nightmare and cinders' late poetry (MCP 515), indicates what is at stake in any attempt to represent history figurally, or indeed to represent nature in microcosm, the world in an orange: these allegorical images have the power to erase identity, not only that of the unstable self, but also of others. And yet such representation is necessary, or irresistible, at least:

Members of one another? Who Could prove by reason that gag true? But reason, if it were a lie, Should counsel us at once to die.

For pride in being alive is what? Is being what yourself are not, Is being a world which must outlive All you take from it or give.

[...]

In and of the world and yet
Distinct from it, our task is set
To become Atlas while we can
And bear the world which made us man.
(MCP 285-286)

These lines are delicately poised between the irrational allegorical urge to 'imbrue the world with self (259) and an anti-allegorical impulse to regard the world and the self as incommensurate, the prudent restraint Teskey calls sophrosyne (Teskey 166). We cannot avoid entirely allegorical conflation of the self with another, being '[m]embers of one another', and this leads inevitably to human 'pride in being alive'. That, though, is pride in being 'what yourself are not', pride in 'being the world', the kind of pride which justifies the allegorical desire to devour the world. MacNeice's figure for the mean between allegory and sophrosyne, for being '[i]n and of the world and yet/ Distinct from it' is of Atlas bearing the world, an image whose inadequacy perhaps reflects the impossibility of finding a mean where the problems of allegory are concerned. It reflects also the liability of arguments against allegorical making to be possessed by allegorical imagery. Nonetheless, though Atlas is a type of macrocosmic man, and any attempt to imagine a world that could be borne by such a creature inevitably partakes of macro- and microcosmic thinking, it is an image of human distinctness from the world, and MacNeice recognises the reversal of cause and effect that produces it: 'bear the world that makes us man' (emphasis added).

The effects of this caution with regard to allegorical making are visible in the strongest of the *Ten Burnt Offerings*. For instance, 'Areopagus', 'Didymus' and 'Day of Returning' all employ figural techniques to suggest that historical periods and persons can be templates and fulfillments of one another; they also offer resistance to the totalising *figura*. Crucially, though, the resistance is offered in and through the figures used, rather than in explicit argument against their use. We have already seen how the allegorical intention of a particular figure might change as it is alluded to in another context. The sheep of 'Suite for Recorders' signify an aspect of the artistic vitality of sixteenth-century England, those of 'The Island' aspects of authoritarian repression in

twentieth-century Greece. The two poems' shared context of political violence means that the latter might serve to correct a misperception in the former poem: authoritarianism cannot be condoned because it might produce a vital society; it more typically produces the unfreedom of the island, whose 'idyl' is marred by displacement and imprisonment. While in each case the success of the image depends on an essentially emblematic understanding of what sheep signify – bucolic contentment or lack of individual freedom – the shift of allegorical intention allows at least an acknowledgement of contextual difference.

The subject of 'Areopagus' is difference as it is produced by culture and by time. The poem dramatises the events of Acts 17:15-34, St Paul's missionary visit to Athens, drawing figural links and contrasts between Christ and the Furies, Paul and Orestes. The figural allegory of 'Areopagus' initially seems to be based on geographical location, the same hill being in myth the site of Orestes' trial, the founding act of Athenian civil society, and in (somewhat mythologised) history the place where Athenians were first converted to Christianity by St Paul. The Areopagus could be read as a type of sacred mountain, a hieratic figure familiar from many kinds of parable literature.³⁴ MacNeice discourages such a reading, which implies that the significance of the symbol is universal and transhistorical, by suggesting that the events he dramatises determine the meaning of the place; a meaning that, moreover, changes with time: 'Unkind was early, clear was classic,/ Now it was late. But for Paul was early/ And the trumpet about to sound' (MCP 288). Two time-scales, an Athenian and a Pauline, overlap to give Areopagus its figural significance. It is 'late' for a decadent Athenian population for whom 'early' means the heroic age when the Eumenides were 'unkind'. It is 'early' for Paul because the religion he preaches is new, but Pauline time is also possessed by apocalypse, 'the trumpet about to sound'. Pauline time, with its emphasis both on the new dispensation of Christ and the imminent end of time, represents a

compromise between old and new, and so, in its different way, does Athenian time the Athenians, in their end-time decadence, love 'slomething new' (MCP 287; Acts 16:21). These compromises find their way into the poem as a theme of sacrificial exchange: 'Old testaments for new. New blood for old.' (MCP 288) Apocalyptic Pauline time is disruptive of the Athenian understanding of history: 'Scale from the beam, beam from the eye, scales from the eye had dropped in Damascus/ For a trap had snapped in a flash on a lonely dust-white road/ While in a limestone cave the past was not dead but sleeping.' (MCP 289) Paul's instant conversion, a seized moment, is set against a conception of time as continuity, the continuity of the Eumenides inhabiting their cave-shrine beneath the Areopagus. Paul's apocalyptic time disrupts Athenian continuity, but it also deranges allegorical signification, equating the beam and scales of Justice with words suggestive of hypocrisy and ignorance. The abyssal shift in allegorical intention is again, as so often in MacNeice's poems, an indicator of cultural difference and conflict. This disruption of allegorical signs is, however, perpetrated with a recognisably allegorical intent. Paul's conversion is represented by the transformation of a symbol with a high level of intercultural penetration (many cultures use the scales as an emblem of justice or judgement) into two signifiers which are culturally specific to English Christianity. MacNeice implies that Paul brings with him the beginnings of a logocentric religion and culture, something which is anticipated in his discovery of the altar to the Unknown God:

Paul
Scouring the market found an altar
Clearly inscribed but between the words
Was the ghost of a Word who runs may guess
(MCP 288)

The altar to the Unknown God, 'clearly inscribed' but definitely other in its consecration to an absence, is captured and subjected to allegoresis by Paul: 'but

between the words/ Was the ghost of a word'. In this way too, Paul prefigures later Christianity, prefigures the doctrine of *figura* itself.

'Areopagus' also assumes a modern perspective on both Pauline and Athenian time. This modern perspective is that of the allegorist, selecting from among the material remains of the past fragments with which to build a new poem. It asserts figural decorum in that it represents the decay of Paul's new dispensation from apocalypticism into quotidian tameness as a fulfillment of the pattern set by the transformation of the Furies into the Kindly Ones. In this passage the radicalism of Christ is conflated with that of the untamed Furies:

Poet and builder
Paid off the Avengers. Then came Christ
Speaking a sword that was red from his own
Lungs and his arms sprawled on the cross
To strangle the world; till bishop and builder
Gilded the nails, adjourned the verdict,
And boxed the cross in a square.

(MCP 289)

The work of poet, bishop and builder is to construct a framework in which to contain this radicalism, indicated here by strategic enjambment and a paratactic effect 'Then came Christ/ Speaking a sword that was red from his own/ Lungs and his arms sprawled on the cross'. It is allegorical work in that it suppresses violence, while drawing on the power of that violence, to create a stable system of signification. It is allegorical work in which the speaker also participates, particularly in the triplets which conclude the poem: 'Could we too lead our Furies to their shrine?/ Forget them sprung from blood, remember them divine?/ Nurses of fear and hope, come taste our honey, taste our wine!' (MCP 290) Figural decorum finally totalises the different time-frames into a single pattern: as Athens to its Furies, so the Church to Christ, so modernity to its demons. The rhyming triplets of the fourth section, and the attendant strain these rhymes place on line length, reflect the effort required to achieve figural closure.

'Areopagus', in that it is a figural allegory, is not immediately conducive to the representation of historical and cultural difference. Its abiding concern with the cultural changes brought by time, however, shows that the totalised unity of *figura* has its origin in difference and conflict and is sustained by them. That MacNeice perceives a political resonance in the operation of figural allegory is suggested by the poem's themes of escape and judgement, which maintain the atmosphere of political violence established in 'Suite for Recorders' and anticipate 'The Island' and its meditation on liberty. Paul and Orestes, both on the run 'from a fate unclear, unkind', find themselves before courts which neutralise the threat that each fugitive brings with him by institutionalising it. Any otherness that remains in the tamed Eumenides or 'boxed' Christianity is experienced as a residue, or as Teskey might put it, as 'noise': 'So the words of Paul were swamped in rock/ To hiss like the snakes that hissed in their sleep/ On the heads of the sleepers, daughters of Night' (*MCP* 289).

The effect of such a poem, in which irreconcilable otherness animates a structure otherwise based on analogy, is to provoke the question of how the difference of the past can be imagined in the present. The antiphrastic force of 'unimaginably different' works so well because it is possible literally to believe it: so many of MacNeice's own poems, from the very early, like 'August' ('Our mind, being dead, wishes to have time die/ For we, being ghosts, cannot catch hold of things' (MCP 24)) to a late poem such as 'Soap Suds' (517), reiterate the impossibility of returning to the past, of imagining it as it was. Yet to believe in the past's unimaginable difference is also to disown memory of the past's wrongs, to refuse any power of moral judgement over institutions or customs (like Athenian slavery) with which one cannot empathise. The need to empathise, to understand a historical period as if one were there, paradoxically, is an obstacle to recognising the full humanity of every person involved in it. Empathy attaches itself to power; it effaces the powerless. It is not accidental that

MacNeice's speaker thinks 'of the slaves' before declaring 'And how one can imagine oneself among them/ I do not know'. Imaginative empathy in history is analogous to allegory in its eclectic tendency to tear appealing features from the past regardless of their context and in its hostility to human particularity. Simple denials of imaginative empathy with the past, saying (unironically) the past is 'unimaginably different', however, have a similarly analogous effect. As denunciations of allegory tend to be possessed by allegorical imagery, so falling back on the 'unimaginably different' position reproduces the indifference to past wrong and past suffering that empathic history promotes.

Personal empathy is important to MacNeice, even when, as in one of the more telling passages of 'The Stygian Banks', he cannot see how it can exist: 'We have no word for the bridges between our present/ Selves and our past selves or between ourselves and others [...]/ Yet we must take it as spoken, the bridge is there' (MCP 259). Nonetheless, where historical imagination is concerned, he is acutely aware of the dangers of an empathic understanding of the past. In the first of his 'Notes on the Way', written for the journal Time and Tide in June 1952 (Prose 176-179) MacNeice contemplates an exhibition of replicas of mosaics from Ravenna churches, which provokes a consideration of the nostalgia of intellectuals for the unknown past. He notes that 'the more alien mentality of the Ravenna mosaics may excite in us a profounder nostalgia than more humanist works which easily 'click with one's self but not one's whole self' (Prose 178). A poem, 'Ravenna', written a decade later, puts a similar point more economically: 'after Tintoretto's illusory depth and light/ The mosaics knocked me flat.' (MCP 527) The potential of such non-'humanist' art to provoke nostalgia and by extension imaginative investment in a hierarchical and unjust world is evoked in his description of the empress Theodora who 'could have people impaled' as well as more obliquely in the closing lines: 'What do I remember of

Ravenna?/ A bad smell mixed with glory and the cold/ Eyes that belie the tesselated gold' (527).

Commenting more generally on nostalgia for a particular era, in 'Notes on the Way', MacNeice comments that the Middle Ages excites interest among 'intellectuals' for its seeming simplicity and vividness, but most of all for hierarchy and system:

[O]nce they have grown out of a starry-eyed adolescent anarchism, most of our intellectuals begin to long for *system*, even for a ruthless system in which their intellect is sacrificed to "ends" outside itself.

Hence the obvious cases of oblation to Moscow or Rome but for every one of such oblates there are thousands who, unable to dedicate themselves fully to the liberalism or humanism which they still, at least partly, believe in, sublimate their self-dedicatory urge into mere day-dreams of systems to which they can never belong and for which they need never do a hand's turn. For there is really no question of returning to the Middle Ages [...] And so our nostalgias nourish and are nourished by accidie [...] our moral or rather our spiritual paralysis. (*Prose* 178-9)

The links between melancholy nostalgia, love of system and accidie are unmistakable and directly applicable to MacNeice's interest in and distrust of allegory. In poetry and prose contemporary with this essay, he recognises both his susceptibility to nostalgia and his need for order. A brief statement on belief from 1953 claims 'all human beings have a hankering for pattern and order [...] There are of course evil patterns or orders—which perhaps is the great problem of our time [...] it is my duty to make patterns and contribute to order—good patterns and a good order.' ('Statement on Belief', *Prose* 187-188; 187) *Autumn Sequel*, almost contemporary with this slightly sententious statement, is more alert to the potential of even 'good' order to fix, hierarchise and reify its agents. While this poem contains many moments of figural allegory, some of which themselves represent concepts of order, there are also putatively anti-allegorical moments, such as this, from canto IV. The poet remembers his wartime work with the BBC, reporting on the vaults of a bombed museum. He finds one exhibit of an original eighteenth-century collection:

an unborn

But eighteenth-century baby, groomed and glossed

Like a small soapstone Buddha, his clouts unworn But hooded in half his cowl. I threw him back In his tank; he seemed too odd a fish to adorn

A twentieth-century war.

(AS IV, II.98-103; 347)

The impulse to make a symbol of this 'odd fish' is reflected in the simile '[l]ike a small soapstone Buddha', so redolent of museum exhibits, 'cultural treasures'. But despite the figural play which the preserved foetus enacts - 'unborn/ But eighteenth-century' the sense of the past's otherness is too great to complete the symbol. Voraciously, though, the allegorical structures of Autumn Sequel manage to capture even this: the baby becomes a symbol of the difference of the past - a figural illustration of something to which figuralism is intensely hostile. Allegory's ambition encyclopaedically to encompass the world, to envelop bodies which are radically unlike itself and make them meaningful within its system, has its hazards for the allegorist, who can find him or herself endorsing the system for the reason that the 'intellectuals' of 'Notes on the Way' endorse Rome, Moscow, or decorative medievalism: it offers security and order to the individual beset by accidie. The same encyclopaedic ambition also provides an opportunity deliberately to include an image which confounds the system. The allegorical system is large enough to accommodate the contradiction, taking up the confounding image and recasting it as an allegorical sign of resistance to allegory, but a residue of the original, confounding intention remains. The altar of the Unknown God in 'Areopagus' and the preserved foetus of canto IV are both figures of this kind: MacNeice relishes the friction or 'noise' caused by the capture of imagery resistant to allegorical intention.

Autumn Sequel also sees a return to the explicit debates about representation and signification which failed in 'The Stygian Banks'. These are framed as dialogues

with a 'Master', Thucydides; the ironic disputes of Mephistopheles and Faust on similar subjects, adapted by MacNeice four years before (see note 32), have an enabling influence on these passages. There is evidence of the influence of allegory less 'free-style' than Goethe's, ³⁶ the influence of allegories 'proper'. Thucydides personifies History: there is a strong hint of *Piers Plouman* or of Bunyan's Interpreter's House in this figure, despite MacNeice's reservations about the latter: '[o]ff the road and out of the open air, I find that here we are back too obviously near the pulpit: there is a rustle of sermon notes' (*Varieties* 44). Like the Interpreter in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or Alma in *The Faerie Queene*, Thucydides is a figure of allegoresis within the allegory. He first appears in Canto I, glimpsed in '[t]he black bureau of history' behind a door 'grained and glum/ And marked In Exile' (I, ll.114-118; 334). He embodies balance and MacNeicean 'impurity':

that all things are mixed Or have two sides had taught Thucydides

How little, a precious little, in life is fixed On the one hand this but on the other that; Justice must lie between and truth betwixt. (I, 123-129; 334)

Already emerging, however, is a tension between celebration of the 'mixed' nature of experience, and longing for order, 'a *precious* little [...] in life is fixed' (emphasis added). To be truly and justly balanced, the historian must include that which is the opposite of balance: the fixed, didactic and coercive, bringing us to the realm of allegory.

Canto VIII, in which Thucydides next appears (and this time speaks) continues to explore how equilibrium might shade into ambivalence, the divided consciousness which is a prerequisite of allegorical expression. It begins with the poet's visit to a gallery, where he considers the anarchic energy of art and the Muse. Remembering his friend Devlin's comment on a Rembrandt, and hence Devlin's interest in folklore, he contrasts traditional crafts and folk art with London and its 'Unseasoned efficiency too

much in season/ Communications too good, each sub-committee/ Making our joys a trespass, our toys a treason.' (VIII, ll.118-120; 365) The link between viewing 'cultural treasures' in a gallery and the nostalgia implied by Devlin's championing of 'the Folk' (l.87; 364) is suggested (typically for this poem) by a fade effect borrowed from radio programming: 'as Devlin spoke/ the usual silence splintered on the ear,/ The sober gallery filled with oaths and smoke' (ll.83-85; 364). Thucydides' entrance completes the nexus of art, nostalgia and politics (particularly political violence) which we saw sketched in 'Notes on the Way' and which is also expressed more economically in the later poem 'Ravenna'. Thucydides compares parliamentary democracy to Athenian democracy:

A limestone slope In the fierce light of Athens in my day Was crowded with the people's faith and hope

And mine as well; we thought we could have our say But the words, the roars that filled our throats were not Our own; Plataea and Melos had to pay

For the freedom of our ears.

(VIII, ll.130-136; 365)

Thucydides is bluntly sympathetic to the poet's hankering for a traditional way of life: "On the one hand", said the Master, "it is a pity/ things should be so; on the other hand they are/ So and not otherwise." (ll.121-123; 365) Nonetheless, his evocation of Athenian democracy contains an implicit rebuke of nostalgia, reminding poet and reader of the costs incurred by any idealised way of life. These were costs that Athenians, as well as their subjugated neighbours, eventually had to pay:

what we got

Was the Syracusan quarries, the right to die On a daily half-pint of water. A word to the wise: Such are political ends. And yet I cannot deny

That, though Athenians died, Athens no longer dies. (ll.138-142; 365)

In these, the canto's closing lines, the historian repudiates nostalgic idealisation of the past with a reminder that injustice and suffering were inherent in the most idealised of political systems. However, the demand of MacNeicean terza rima for a pithy line to stand alone at the end of a canto leads him to express nostalgia; moreover, allegorical nostalgia, in which 'Athens' means more than the sum of its Athenians.³⁷ The tension between these two positions reflects a well-known feature of Thucydides' historical method: the discrepancy between his reporting of events, which is above all concerned with accuracy, and his accounts of speeches, in which 'my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation.³⁸ Not only does Thucydides report oratory in a different way from action, but his method of recording speech is riven with contradiction. As M.I. Finley comments in the introduction to Rex Warner's translation of the History of the Peloponnesian War:

There is no way to get round the incompatibility of the two parts of that statement. [Thuc. 1.22, quoted above] If all speakers said what, in Thucydides' opinion, the situation called for, the remark becomes meaningless. But if they did not always say what was called for, then, insofar as Thucydides attributed such sentiments to them, he could not have been keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words used.³⁹

MacNeice is astute in his choice of a tutelary spirit for the historiographical sections of *Autumn Sequel*. The ambivalence, the 'otherness' enshrined by allegory, is echoed in the uncertainty of Thucydides' method of reportage. That such a method might lend itself to a certain nostalgia is intimated in canto I, the speaker claiming that Thucydides 'could love his Athens' despite its political (and physical – MacNeice refers to the outbreak of plague in 430 BCE) corruption: 'thick fogs/ Of fear and greed deluded and decayed/ And made each fiery speech a fading ember.' (I, l.132; 334, ll.135-137; 335)

These themes are amplified in canto XIX, generally overlooked by critics eager to savour MacNeice's 'powers of elegy' (Longley 116) as they are displayed in cantos XVIII and XX. However, canto XIX plays an important part in contextualising these elegies for Gwilym and in complicating the contrast between public and private discourse which is one of *Autumn Sequel*'s main themes. McDonald's discussion of this contrast is revealing. He identifies 'a problem' which the poem's '"rhetorical" resources' can solve only partially:

namely, that of how far the personal sphere can accommodate the public, along with which, and against which, it must exist. MacNeice's mythopoeia sometimes comes close to sealing one sphere off from the other, using the tension between the two, particularly as manifested in death, to provide rhetorical momentum. Thus celebration and elegy depend upon each other, but this can lead to a simplified scheme [...] (McDonald 149)

Though McDonald presents it as a 'problem', the situation he describes here is wholly characteristic of allegorical making. Rhetorical energy is generated by opposition, sometimes contrived opposition, 'sealing one sphere off from the other', classifying and ordering. Tension between the parts of an ambivalent, divided self do not necessarily promote complexity, but can lead to its opposite, a simplified and stratified scheme (we might recall here Teskey's comments about the retrogressive character of allegorical making).

As a representative of balance, '[o]n the one hand this/ But on the other that' (XIX, Il.17-18), Thucydides is involved in this generation of energy from opposites. He balances the elegiac making of canto XVIII with an objective assessment of Gwilym's deficiencies as a public artist and discriminates between elegy's consolatory function and its propensity simply to make excuses: 'to condole// Should not condone' (Il.18-19; 407). The poet, remonstrating with the Master, produces yet more oppositions: between poetic and historical ways of recording experience, between ancient and

modern versions of civic duty (ll.21-35; 407). This contrast of methods and world-views creates an allegorical figure:

We share the word democracy but what Is Demos now? A muse or two might play His game at moments, but play cold and hot;

Those poets born all fire, what truck can they Have with this huge and lukewarm monster, why Should they remake their many-coloured day

In its ungendered image and decry Their own clairvoyance for its book of rules? Let Demos rule the streets, they own the sky. (ll.25-33; 407)

The equipoise of good historical practice can generate, with terrifying speed and ease, the macrocosmic man, suggestive of all that is coercive and illiberal about allegory. Demos, the macrocosmic man - 'lukewarm' to the poet, 'temperate' to Thucydides - is the essence of balance. As the Shelleyan and Yeatsian echoes in this passage intimate, he is also the essence of political violence, an argument that is developed in specifically allegorical terms.⁴⁰ Thucydides replies to the poet, again seeking a balance between art's private and public functions, "Demos at his best supplied a temperate zone/ In which the arts could flourish and unfold/ You would agree they flourished?" ' (Il.45-47; 408). While the poet agrees, he points out that classical Athens was careless of its Archaic artefacts, using old statues as 'mere/ Rubble to plug your gaps' (ll.54-55; 408). It is appropriate that Athens, in this poem primarily an allegorical figure, should engage in allegorical bricolage, using the remains of the past in an act of self-fashioning. We might even say that our interest in MacNeice's 'Athens' is an interest in its allegorical construction. As Teskey comments: 'what excites interest in allegorical agents is their seeming to be built up out of the material remains of the past in a manner that violates the original state of those remains' (Teskey 45). Thucydides' incredulous response to the

poet's complaint that Athens failed in its curatorial responsibilities links the violence of allegorical making and political violence:

"Those works were primitive and our supplies

Of masonry were short, nor had we long To fortify the citadel. After all We were solid practical men."

(11.57-60;408)

In confirmation, a chorus of 'too too solid Athenians' asserts its colonial privilege (l.61; 408):⁴¹

"One vote

By Demos and self-interest wins the day

Over those pleas for mercy that connote A failure to keep up to date." "Aye! Aye!" Shouts Demos in his haste, and cuts each throat

In Melos.

(11.71-76;409)

Canto XIX of Autumn Sequel revisits not just the subject-matter of section IX of Autumn Journal but also its technique: a reasonable and popular ethical position (rejection of moralising anachronism in the earlier poem, support for balance and moderation in the later) descends easily into complacency, self-interest and repressive violence. Also familiar from the earlier poem is the conviction that the past is not 'unimaginably different', that patterns established across time are animated by certain shared values and are in themselves culturally valuable. The poet's encounter with Thucydides prompts a reflection on the results of modern colonialism:

I read
In the evening paper that the opening phase

Of experimental bombing should proceed Quite equably in Kenya.

(11.101-104; 409-410)

In this case, however, the contemporary example is simply juxtaposed to the ancient, rather than, as in *Autumn Journal*, being symbolised by it. Still convinced of the value of

drawing parallels between past and present, MacNeice seems reluctant to conflate them in a full figural allegory. This can be accounted for partly by the speaker's sense of the racist nature of British colonialism in Africa, to which he alludes, using stereotypes of 'devil-dancers [...] rattles and dark drums' (ll.111-112; 410), and for which there is no ancient Greek equivalent, it being different from the unfreedom represented by the 'slaves' in *Autumn Journal* IX. There is also, however, a formal rationale for MacNeice's reluctance to inflate parellelism into figuralism. Having demonstrated the propensity of balanced judgement to capitulate to the 'huge and lukewarm monster' Demos, and having revealed the ahistorical *bricolage* that passes for civic (and allegorical) order, the poet's will to establish the rigid patterning necessary to figural allegory has evaporated. Thucydides' exit line anticipates this failure. Asked by the poet how Alcibiades, colonialist, architect of the subjugation of Melos, eventual traitor, fits the harmonious pattern of Athenian life, he replies:

"I fear

That pattern was dissolving long before Alcibiades ruined it. Is that not clear

From my own history of the war, the war Which broke both Athens and me?" He turns his back And leaves us gaping at a famished door

Still marked In Exile

(11.85-91; 409)

The dissolution of the pattern of Athenian life implies the dissolution of Thucydides' role as History personified. His next appearance, in canto XXV, sees him 'struck deaf, struck dumb' by the ringing of church bells, a sound which always has negative connotations in MacNeice's poetry (l.84; 433). Finally, in canto XXVI, as simply 'another Greek who makes/ A virtue of necessity' (ll.103-104; 438), he is a reassuring, rather than adversarial presence. This dissolution of figural patterns enables the poet-speaker's turn towards private concerns at the close of canto XIX. He concludes 'history makes bleak

reading after all/ And exile is the place for it', but this gruff gesture is only possible in the context of what has come before it: history can be exiled because allegory allows it to be personified and that personification deconstructed. Similarly, the rejection of *figura* as a means for understanding public and civic life makes it available as a way of making sense of the private connections between the self and others:

It is the time when someone we know dies That life becomes important; it is the same Time that leaves fall and the trees rise

In their own right, articulate as flame, It is the same time that time is a crime And virtue all in one, when pride and shame

In their own time blend and transcend their time. (XIX II.124-130; 410)

The success of such a strategy of private, familiar allegorism is crucial to our understanding of *Autumn Sequel*, and it is with this that the following section, 'Courtesies', is concerned.

III: COURTESIES

Assessing the work of his contemporaries in the 1935 essay 'Poetry To-day', MacNeice identifies three notable modes in Auden, Spender and Day-Lewis: 'the topical, the gnomic and the heroic' (*Criticism* 34). The topical and heroic modes are linked by a 'personal element', he notes, 'these poets make myths of themselves and of each other (a practice which often leads to absurdity, e.g., Day-Lewis's mythopoeic hero-worship of Auden in The Magnetic Mountain).' This personal element connects to their political outlook 'via the concept of comradeship'. MacNeice has hard (and slightly cranky) words for comradeship, which is 'the communist substitute for bourgeois romance' and 'leads to an idealization of homosexuality' (35). The direction of these thoughts implies reservations concerning mythopoeic poetry, particularly where

the kind of myth being made is that of a contemporary coterie. The attention given to friendship and sentiment in *Autumn Sequel* might suggest that those reservations had been laid aside by 1953. The prefatory note to the poem states: 'Autumn Sequel contains a number of characters drawn from my personal friends. All these, for mythopoeic and other reasons, are represented under pseudonyms.' (MCP 329) These pseudonyms afford some protection to those of MacNeice's friends who were not public figures, and offer an ironic courtesy to those who were. 'Mythopoeic' reasons, however, suggests that MacNeice felt that this poem, less 'occasional' than Autumn Journal, required the creation of the sort of 'special world' which he recognises as the mark of 'parable'. (Varieties 5) Some of the pseudonyms suggest a 'special world' by being a muffled echo of the real name: MacNeice's BBC colleague Jack Dillon becomes 'Buck Devlin', the artist George MacCann is 'Maguire', Dylan Thomas 'Gwilym', Auden 'Egdon'.

Other pseudonyms combine an echo of a real person's name with cratylism. The suggestion of Hardy's Egdon Heath in Auden's pseudonym seems to refer to the distinctive symbolic landscapes which both Hardy and Auden made in their writing; in the allusion to Hardy's renaming of his familiar landscape to create 'Wessex' there may be also a reference to MacNeice's own renaming of his friends. MacNeice's first wife, Mary Ezra, becomes 'Esther', a name which emphasises her Jewish origins whilst also suggesting that her friendship with the poet is over, something 'of yesterday' ('hesternal'). 'Gavin', MacNeice's name for his friend Graham Shepard, who was killed in action in 1942, refers to MacNeice's 1947 play *The Dark Tower*. In that work, Gavin is the sixth of seven brothers to attempt a mysterious Quest. After his disappearance, only Roland remains to attempt the pointless labours. In the poem, Gavin is, like the poet, a quester not always sure of the merits of his quest, but driven towards it nonetheless, suggesting that MacNeice identifies himself with the surviving youngest son, the Roland figure. Even where a pseudonym seems mostly descriptive in intent,

the stress-pattern of the name is typically preserved, which implies that MacNeice kept the original names in mind while composing *Autumn Sequel*. Thus Anthony Blunt is 'Hilary', a unisexual name meant to denote effeminacy and hilarious wit, and E.R. Dodds becomes 'Boyce', the anglicised form of Boethius, ⁴³ appropriately enough for one who offers the poet the consolations of philosophy in Canto XIII.

With these pseudonyms, the techniques of the roman á clef enter the allegory. Roman á clef might be considered a kind of allegory, one with an unusual proportion of 'deictic' to 'non-deictic' significance. 44 As in all allegory, the non-deictic is still valued above the particular; the cratylism of some pseudonyms suggest that an individual character represents an abstraction, and many characters are also given identifying epithets, cosmic ornaments which place them for both poet and reader, such as these from canto VI: 'Calum with surf and heather in his voice' (1.120; 356), 'Hilary with green fingers for works of art' (l.122; 356), 'driving a spotted pig in a gimcrack cart/ Egdon the bad third son, the conjuror, the skald' (ll.126-7; 356), 'Isabel in her turret of ice and fire' (1.135; 357). Nonetheless, the reader senses a certain equivalence between these figures and their counterparts in MacNeice's biography, as opposed to the sense in 'allegory proper' that real life and real bodies are being subjugated to a textual system which asserts itself more real than they. One of the appendices to Stallworthy's biography lists the 'dramatis personae of Autumn Sequel' as if the pseudonyms were exact equivalents of MacNeice's friends, 'Egdon: Auden', for example (Stallworthy 487). This procedure might raise many questions - is Egdon to Auden as the speaker of Autumn Sequel to MacNeice? - but that it does not seem absurdly reductive suggests that this poem, insofar as it uses the techniques of the roman á clef, manipulates a feature often ascribed to 'allegory proper', a one-to-one correspondence between image and meaning, to challenge the logocentrism of allegory and the hierarchising aspect of polysemy. The roman á clef, by insisting on the importance of a coterie and its private,

sentimental connections, mitigates the valorisation of non-deictic abstraction characteristic of allegory. It is a kind of allegory, in short, which carries some resistance to power struggles between kinds of otherness.

However, the motif which MacNeice uses to connect characters who do not, as he admits, form a literary or political community - this 'choir/ That never were all together.' (I, ll.52-53; 332) – seems to be an explicitly literary one, returning the reader to more familiar allegorical and logocentric territory. This is the 'makers' motif, which has both celebratory and elegaic modes: 'Fanfare for the Makers' (VII, 1.106; 360) or 'Lament for the Makers' (XVIII, 1.1; 402). As the allusion to the traditional title of William Dunbar's poem 'I that in heill wes and gladnes' might suggest, the lists of friends' names in cantos I, (ll.49-60; 332) VI, (l.115-48; 356-357) VII, (ll.52-106; 359-360) and XXVI, (ll.16-35; 435-436) resemble medieval list forms such as the testament, the complaint and the dance of death.⁴⁵ These forms exhibit the conflicting impulses of encyclopaedic art: a paratactic levelling impulse is set against an interest in cosmic hierarchy and ornament; an apparent commitment to historical sequence against the allegorical ambition to encompass the world.⁴⁶ Some of these tensions can be felt in Autumn Sequel, too, though it is more difficult than one might expect to pinpoint particular instances. Paratactic passages such as 'Gavin and Gwilym, and Aidan, Isabel, Calum, Aloys/ Devlin, Hilary, Jenny, Blundell, McQuitty, Maguire/ Stretton and Reilly and Price, Harrap and Owen and Boyce' (I, Il.49-51; 332) contrast with the careful differentiation of persons by means of cosmic ornament:

Costa finds Byzantium again,

And Gwilym and Gorman the Unholy Grail Of poetry, and Isabel a view Of the dark side of the moon and Maguire a hail-

Fellow-well-met-againship

(VII, ll.84-88; 360)

A particular concern in Dunbar's poem, with its refrain 'Timor mortis conturbat me', is the centrality of personal, individual fear to the work of public memorial, a concern which is also important in Autumn Sequel. There are a number of instances in the poem when the poet-speaker's celebratory or elegaic rhetoric seems to be prompted by unease or fear: canto VI, for instance, amasses horror imagery (ll.73-93; 355) before turning to the roll-call of the 'makers'; the last canto of the poem, XXVI, oscillates between nightmare – 'Each window sweats with horror and disease' (l.94; 438) – and commemoration.

The differences between MacNeice's 'makers' and Dunbar's are more remarkable, however, than their similarities. Absent from Dunbar's poem, but heavily emphasised by MacNeice, is a sense of 'making' as a humane and vital activity, a positive value to set against oblivion: 'our Obiit/ Cannot disprove our skill, if we were skilled,/ Our lives if we ever lived.' (VII 99-101; 360) In emphasising the varieties of making that his cast of characters set against death, MacNeice forgoes the starkness of the contrast between *Timor Mortis* and dispassionate enumeration of the dead that makes Dunbar's poem so striking. The psychological link between fearing and remembering, repressed to great effect in Dunbar, is always tangible in MacNeice, sometimes shading into simplified and sentimental thought.⁴⁷

But MacNeice's allusion to Dunbar is, in its own way, rather unsettling also. It is not really an allusion to Dunbar's poem, only to its traditional title, a phrase which has passed into language as a cliché. It is an empty allusion of the kind discussed in Chapter 1, with regard to MacNeice's use of Skelton's 'Speke Parott'. Like that example, this allusion or pseudo-allusion to Dunbar sends the reader back to a source-text, only to discover that, not only does the allusion not fulfil or transgress the original, it regresses from its insights. Skelton's Parrot is an allegorist, MacNeice's an allegorical character. Dunbar suppresses any sense of a human community in the face of death, MacNeice sentimentalises it. These allusions are raids on the past, on that which has

been previously made, returning with material which may be the merest fragment of a source ('Speak parrot') or a spurious addition to one ('Lament for the Makers'), in order to improvise the textual system of Autumn Sequel. Allusion makes a theoretical appeal to tradition, but the practice of allusion is hostile to the integrity of traditional material. The empty echoes that constitute allusion in Autumn Sequel are a textually embedded threat to the values of 'making' which MacNeice explicitly celebrates. The Parrot is not simply a straw adversary against which the speaker and characters of Autumn Sequel can make their positive gestures: he is an allegorical expression of an impulse at work within the speaker and within the poem's structure. Conflict between these two types of making, the empty, retrogressive allusion and the valorised, humane activity accorded a 'Fanfare' at the close of canto VII, is a form of the collision between positive and negative Others which produces and sustains allegorical expression:

On a grave as wide As the world there is no need to carve or gild

An epitaph; for neither time nor tide Invalidates the lives and deaths of those Who turned their cosmic guilt to cosmic pride. (VII, ll.101-105; 360)

Making, construed as positive, vital activity in opposition to death, constitutes its own monument. The speaker repudiates the need for any further commemoration, but the wordplay, 'carve' appearing out of 'grave', 'guilt' out of 'gild', suggests an awareness of an empty, decorative kind of making, making under the sign of the Parrot. The repetition of 'cosmic', meanwhile, suggests another split meaning: kosmos signifies both universal order and order in the sense of adornment or decoration. Underlying the makers' triumph of 'cosmic pride' is a sense that their monument may be merely ornamental, as empty as parroted allusions to the 'Old Masters' ('Prefatory Note' to Autumn Sequel, MCP 329).⁴⁹ In The Poetry of W.B. Yeats, MacNeice discusses 'cosmic pride' in terms of the poet's split self:

The poet is always quarrelling with himself, perhaps because he half-remembers himself in a past life as having been some one different. The quarrel is partly, but only partly, resolved in his poetry. He knows, however, that [...] this is not his only day. [...]

[T]hese doctrines [...] make a good vehicle for that cosmic pride which is common among artists. The artist is proud to be of the world but it enrages him to know himself such a small part of it. (Poetry WBY 116)

There are various ways of 'gloz[ing] over' the uncomfortable fact of the individual's smallness in the world: a humanist philosophy which places man at the centre of it, a mysticism which allows the self to transcend physical boundaries. Yeats, MacNeice continues,

who liked a processional order and hierarchies, preferred neither to be all things at once, like the mystic, nor to be all things by proxy, like the philosopher. He preferred to think of history as an enormous kaleidoscope where each man in the changing but recurring patterns can play all the different roles: only there must be no fusion, the pattern is always the pattern. (116-117)

'Cosmic pride', in this account, is at the root of the allegorical worldview, in which 'the pattern is always the pattern'. *Autumn Sequel*'s celebration of 'making' always risks sanctioning that which is most repressive, coercive and hierarchical in allegory.

Insofar as the poem explores 'makers' and 'making', it emphasises very different aspects of allegorical expression from those which incline it towards the *roman á clef*. Its 'makers' theme, in distinguishing between negative making by allusion and positive, humane making, endorses logocentrism, textual hermeticism and allegorical conflict between kinds of otherness. The *roman á clef* aspect of the poem, by pointing clearly to an extra-textual world, minimises the extent to which that world is captured and coopted to allegorical meaning. The knowledge that the character Gwilym represents Dylan Thomas, while it can tell us little about the nature of the representation, might modify MacNeice's tendency to ascribe to Gwilym his own preoccupation with traditional wisdom and folklore:

Now all our childhoods weep and all our early Loves, the deep-bosomed goddesses of corn,

The Celtic heroes playing chess and hurley, The dancers in the nursery fire, the fauns And satyrs at their ancient hurley-burley

Among the woods of Wales.

(AS XVIII, 6-13; 403)

An instance like this of the 'haunting wish to fuse all persons together' by ascribing to 'all our childhoods' a single imaginative corpus can be viewed more objectively with the information that Gwilym represents a person with an existence outside Autumn Sequel's textual scheme. MacNeice facilitates our sense of Gwilym as the textual equivalent of an extra-textual person by quoting Thomas, "After the first death there is no other" at the close of his elegy (AS XVIII, 1 129; 406).50 An acknowledged, unparodied quotation (there is no other example of this in Autumn Sequel, apart from the epigraph) marks MacNeice's respect for Thomas, but also reminds the reader that he was a poet very different in his use of traditional material and allusion from MacNeice, not quite 'A jester and a Quester and a bard', nor quite so dependent on folklore as Autumn Sequel's Gwilym (AS XVIII, 1.21; 403). This oscillation between the textual system of Autumn Sequel and an acknowledged extra-textual world which contains Dylan Thomas and his poetry can only take place, ironically, after Gwilym's death, and lends a peculiar poignancy to the poet's reflection on his physical absence: 'Gwilym without his body, his booming voice,/ Would simply not be Gwilym.' (AS XX, 101-2; 413) It is ironic, also, that the passage uses literary quotation to point to an extra-textual presence; it is important, furthermore, in that it suggests that the 'makers' theme might be reconciled with roman á clef techniques, despite the different understanding of allegory encapsulated in each.

In the Prefatory Note to Autumn Sequel, MacNeice draws attention to the quotation from Thomas' 'A Refusal to Mourn', but also to allusions 'to the works of my

contemporaries, e.g. parody echoes of Yeats and William Empson' (MCP 329). The note is meant to emphasise the private criteria upon which influence and allusion are based in this poem: three poets, whose achievements differ radically, are offered equality of influence within the textual space of Autumn Sequel. This is a poem, we feel, for which the hierarchies of literary-historical value have been suspended in acts of courtesy by a poet to his fellows. The designation of both Yeats and Empson as 'contemporaries' represents a particularly striking instance of this courtesy, and as if in earnest of it, the 'parody echoes' of each poet are similar in that they are regressive, lacking in intertextual depth. ⁵¹

MacNeice renders Empson's refrain from 'Aubade', 'The heart of standing is you cannot fly' with considerable reduction in effect as 'The art of falling is you cannot stand.' (AS XI, 1.4; 374) 52 Apparently in recognition of Empson's assessment of his early poems, many of which he refers to as love poems 'with the author afraid of the woman' (Empson 316), MacNeice develops the canto into a meditation on sexuality. Immature sexuality is designated by a reference to 'On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer' (AS XI, 1.22; 374), Keats having been already associated with masturbatory and perverse sexuality by 'Gavin' in canto II (ll.4-16; 335). Indeed, shortly after the reference to 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', Gavin's death at sea is evoked: 'This is that western sea where ships go down/ Think twice, Leander' (ll.29-30; 374), creating a pattern of intertextual and self-allusion within the broader scope of the allusion to Empson. But where Empson's 'Aubade' is an oblique acknowledgement of the various circumstances which hinder communication between the sexes, MacNeice ornaments and explicates tirelessly. Seemingly triggered by the allusion to 'Aubade', his citations multiply throughout the canto: not only to Keats but to Byron, to numerous Greek myths, to Shakespeare, and to MacNeice's published plays and his unfinished and (at the time) unpublished autobiography. A representative example, 'The strings, my lady, are

false. Each minute is out of joint' (l.99; 376) splices a quotation from *Julius Caesar* (IV.iii.291) with one from *Hamlet* (I.v.l.188). MacNeice used the quotation from *Julius Caesar* as the title of his autobiography and, as Stallworthy notes, alluded to it in his plays *The Administrator* and *They Met on Good Friday*, as well as in an unpublished script, 'Let's Go Yellow' (Stallworthy 442).⁵³ These instances are relevant only in the most general sense, or not at all, to the reference in *Autumn Sequel*.

Such wealth of seemingly directionless allusion might appear to justify Longley's complaint:

While would-be simplicity falls flat, would-be colour is hectically overapplied. The conceits and colloquialisms cover banality with a jerky vivacity:

And now it is August, fading what was green Forgetting what was death, jogging along, Two plain, two purl, to end the Augustan scene

More sock than buskin, more cheap wine than song. Shortly we must turn over an old leaf To prove the year goes round while we go wrong.

In default of true informing energy, the phrases seem separate units within a static frame. (Longley 116)

Leaving aside the value judgement, this is an accurate description of an allegorical poem. 'Jerky vivacity' captures the reader's sense that allegorical persons are galvanised by something not inherent to them – the effect Fletcher calls 'daemonic' – while the 'banality' that it supposedly conceals is another way of referring to the way in which 'other-speech' excites expectations (and as often as not disappoints them) of élite discourse. '[S]eparate units within a static frame' is as concise a description as can be imagined for allegory's tendency to isolate individual signifying images within a changeless, immutable hierarchy, a 'chain of being', for example. What to Longley is hectic over-application of colour, meanwhile, might to the allegorist be the propensity of imagery to generate further imagery: wherever a power-structure is replicated in

allegory, new signifying ornaments must be generated to represent it. Finally, lack of 'true informing energy' in an allegory might be also be read as deliberate resistance to visualisation,⁵⁴ or as allegory's typical privileging of its textual system over the extratextual world it purports to represent. Indeed, underlying Longley's attack seems to be a certain dismay at MacNeice's abandonment in *Autumn Sequel* of a technique whereby poetic energy is distilled in diction and syntax, appearing to inhere in the poem, for one in which it is diffused into a plethora of evocation and reminiscence of other texts, neither forming or informing the text at hand. The passage which Longley quotes from canto I distantly evokes Yeats's 'Coole and Ballylee 1931' (Yeats 293-295), perhaps the most oblique of a number of Yeatsian echoes in that canto. MacNeice's 'jogging along' comments on the racing water of Yeats's first stanza, while the second of the stanzas which Longley quotes refers to:

For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on And all the rant's a mirror of my mood: At sudden thunder of the mounting swan I turned about and looked where branches break The glittering reaches of the frozen lake.

Another emblem there! (Yeats 294)

As Paul de Man notes in his essay 'Image and Emblem in Yeats', the technique of 'Coole and Ballylee, most obvious in the first two stanzas, is to present a group of apparently natural images and then abruptly reveal these as hieratic emblems:

The last line [of the first stanza] makes it clear that every detail in what sounded like a realistic description is chosen for its place in an emblematic picture. [...] The very discomfort one experiences in thus destroying a wonderful picture is an essential part of Yeats's statement.⁵⁵

This allusion quietly supports the first canto's denunciations of 'slice of life' realism – 'there is no such thing' (I ll.20-21; 331) – and suggests, minutely, that beneath what we might call the 'wonderful picture' of *Autumn Sequel*, the celebrations, elegies and Utopian

friendships of its *roman á clef* mode, are the hierarchies and power-struggles of allegorical making.

The allusions to Yeats in canto I have the further purpose of tracking the impact of the older poet's influence on MacNeice's own work. The result is a compound of allusion to texts outside the body of MacNeice's own work and self-allusion. Near the beginning of the canto, the Parrot is 'loose on the world' (I, I.11; 331) in a parody of Yeats's interest in unrest and misrule and his concomitant attraction to power, order and hierarchy. This quotation alerts the reader to the other references to Yeats in the first canto. The symbol of a broken doll for horrific sterility and petrifaction: 'I hate the grey void which crams the guts of the doll' (I, I.3; 331); 'how do you know you wake?' You may be puppet or parrot, doll or dead' (I, II.27-8; 331) conflates Yeats's poem 'The Dolls' (Yeats 177) with an incident described in *The Strings are False*:

Later I took my sister's doll [...] and built her a house of coloured bricks on the table but she was too heavy for the house, the walls fell down and over the edge of the table and she went with them and broke and was hollow inside. And my mother kept being ill and at last was ill all the time. ⁵⁶

Of Yeats's poem, MacNeice comments:

The dolls, who represent intellectual Being in opposition to physical or physiological Becoming, make an indignant uproar because the doll-maker's wife has had a baby. She, vacillating – like Yeats himself – between the values of life and thought, apologizes to her husband that it was an accident. (*Poetry WBY* 116)

The 'accident' MacNeice describes in his autobiography is also the result of a conflict between life and thought, between the child's symbolic house and the laws of physics; and the way in which MacNeice presents his mother's illness as a consequence of his carelessness evokes the family romance of 'The Dolls'. (A poem roughly contemporary with *The Strings are False*, 'Christina' (MCP 174-5), also relates the doll story, again in the context of sexuality). Again, the allusion indicates allegorical struggle and violence: the

doll-maker's child signifies that which is unassimilable to allegorical meaning; his wife's apology has eerie force because in calling her baby 'an accident' she is, paradoxically, attempting to give it a meaning, and thereby sanctioning the dolls' illegitimate rage against and desire for power over the child.

Some fifty lines on in the canto, a dead friend, the sculptor Wimbush, is described as 'already away', 'away' in this context having something of a Yeatsian resonance. MacNeice elaborates on this resonance in his account of the death, filtering it through the idiom of *The Dark Tower*: Wimbush walked through one plain arch unseen/Leaving some dumb stone blocks for his goodbye' (AS I, Il.77-78; 333). In the play, Roland's mother recalls him from his quest: 'On my deathbed I have changed my mind/I am bearing now a child of stone' (*Plays* 143), which seems to allude directly to a remark Yeats makes in the autobiographical fragment 'The Death of Synge', quoted in MacNeice's critical study: 'Women, because the main event of their lives has been a giving of themselves and a giving birth, give all to an opinion as if it were some terrible stone doll.' (*Poetry WBY* 130). MacNeice suggests that this remark has resonance outside questions of gender and politics; the allusion is a comment on Wimbush's single-mindedness, perhaps in contrast to the jackdaw aesthetic of *Autumn Sequel*.

Autumn Sequel's allusions, whether to Thomas, Empson, Yeats or to other writers, have one overriding purpose: to indicate to the reader what kind of a poem Autumn Sequel is. If we define intertexuality relatively strictly, as a relationship of thematic or formal fulfilment, transformation or transgression between two texts, its governing principle is not intertextual. Its allusions might have spurious grounds, like the 'Lament for the Makers' motif, are often thematically empty, like the 'strings are false' reference, or formally regressive, like the bathetic parody of Empson's 'Aubade' or the theme of psittacism. A thematic feature of another text might be alluded to in order to draw attention to a formal feature of Autumn Sequel, as in the allusions to 'The Dolls' and

'Coole and Ballylee 1931', where themes in Yeats's poems point to the allegorical machinery of MacNeice's. If *Ten Burnt Offerings* is 'architectural' in its construction of parallels and connections between the ten poems, then the technique of *Autumn Sequel* is more like do-it-yourself, *bricolage*. It piles up textual fragments, quotations, empty allusions in order to represent the continuity of the literary past into the present, just as Thucydides' Athenians fortified their city with outmoded statues. The question, as in canto XIX, is whether allegorical *bricolage* is a democratic or hierarchic technique, or, more precisely, whether its democracy can offer equality and liberation or simply an equivalent to 'Demos', the mob rule of 'too too solid Athenians', essentially hierarchic in its desire for strong government and endorsement of brute power (*AS* XIX, 1.61; 408).

Autumn Sequel does not offer a full answer to this question. In canto XIX, where an answer becomes imperative, the speaker responds by exiling history to the shelf or wastepaper basket. Among the massed cultural treasures of the British Museum in canto XXIV, the subject of their relation to political violence again arises, and is evaded. The speaker reflects that traditional Christmas-card snow should be a museum artefact:

under the bitter

Gaze of the granite gods and among the shards Of broken epoch; ours is merely breaking And, as for real snow, in Russia perhaps the guards

Have some such on their boots in the raking, aching Wind as they watch the firing squad prepare For this day's task of making or remaking

Or perhaps unmaking history. Unaware
Of which event as yet, I leave these labelled blocks
(AS XXIV, ll.99-106; 430)

Again, MacNeice withdraws just at the point when he must decide on the legitimacy of his own poem's amassing and display of artefacts (both the literal ones he describes, like 'these labelled blocks' and the eighteenth-century foetus, and the allusions and quotations which buttress *Autumn Sequel's* fragmentary structures), though obliquely he

revisits 'Notes on the Way' and its nexus of culture, political violence and nostalgia, leaving '[t]he Roman busts in the next [gallery] to dust their locks/ And rub their elegiacs up and grieve/ Over the fall of Rome' (XXIV, ll.111-113; 430). By leaving before he can view the busts (and by implication the nostalgia and violence they represent) he consigns them to a liminal space, where their presence is acknowledged but not confronted. Their position is analogous to that of history in the poem as a whole: recognised only in acts of evasion and equivocation.

McDonald compares MacNeice's parable idiom to that of The Faerie Queene, in that it appears to embrace an aesthetic of incompletion, and quotes Varieties of Parable in endorsement: "The questions...admit of no answer: the nearest one gets to an answer is in the phrasing of the question itself" '(McDonald 176, ellipsis McDonald's; Varieties 124). In a 1944 letter to T.S. Eliot, outlining his plans to write a long poem, MacNeice acknowledges the influence of Spenser's poem: 'the total pattern will be very complex and in fact rather comparable to the "Faerie Queen" [sii] in its interlocking of episodes, sub-plots and digressions which aren't really digressions.' (Stallworthy 400) The poem as published a decade later is not as Spenserian in tone as this projection might suggest, despite MacNeice having produced The Faerie Queene for radio only the year before embarking on Autumn Sequel. Apart from desultory mentions of Spenserian figures, Acrasia (AS x, 1.115; 373) or the Blatant Beast (XVI, 1.55; 395), MacNeice's debts to Spenser are generalised and refer mostly, as the 1944 letter suggests, to the plotting of the poem. Primarily, MacNeice evokes Spenser in his casting of his speaker as a quester pursuing a permanently deferred goal. Final repose is denied the speaker of Autumn Sequel, who ends the poem still moving 'Quickly. Slowly.' towards London and home (XXVI, 1.133; 439). In this he is comparable to one of MacNeice's favourite Spenserian heroes, the Redcrosse knight, who after his betrothal to Una departs for Gloriana's court 'her to serve six years in warlike wise'. (FQ I.xii.18, l.7) McDonald is right, however, to

locate MacNeice's aesthetic of incompletion within the context of allegory, though perhaps not for the reason he gives: the failure of the allegorical play *The Queen of Air and Darkness* and the allegory within an allegory of cantos XIV-XVI of *Autumn Sequel*, McDonald implies, impelled MacNeice away from the completed correspondences of allegory towards 'indeterminate parable' (170-171). Though it cannot be considered a success, the explicit quest-allegory of cantos XIV-XVI can be read as more than an instructive failure.

At the end of canto XIII, the speaker sets out some of the purposes of his allegory, one of these being to 'prove at least that man is man' (l.133; 385), a traditional object of didactic literature, with an ironic glance at the corresponding tradition in allegory of representing man as something other than man. 'The proof may need big guns', he continues, 'but one who is in the van/ And only has a grenade, the pin being out, must throw it.' (ll.135-6; 385) In canto XIV a group of young men choose their destinies, which are depicted as Spenserian or Bunyanesque locations: 'the Bridge of Booze/ Into the Castle Crapulous' being self-evident, while 'the Church of Arc-Lights' is a figure for political enthusiasm, and 'the temple of Aesthetic Bliss' for the fruitless pursuit of pure art (XIV, Il.4-70; 386-388). The narrative then focuses on one of these young men, who rejects all the allegorical locations and instead steps through a painting, where he is caught in a liminal space asking and answering questions about art and identity (XIV, ll73-116; 388-9). Escaping from this place, in canto XV he sees a hive of insects performing ritualised work and finally witnesses the mating of the queen insect. In the second half of this canto he enters a fairground ride which becomes a journey back to a womb-like place of inactivity and undifferentiation. Here he is tempted to remain by a 'worm' or serpent:

> The weak voice says Give up your feet of clay Give up your feet, your hands, your sex, your eyes, your brain, And follow me—I am the only Way.

[...]
I do no work for ever; in the van
Of nature I am I,⁵⁹ who live both in
And on man's guts and so have conquered man.

Progress, my friend! Would you rather call it original sin?" (XV, 121-3, 127-130; 393)

He refuses the temptation and is released into the quotidian once more, '[a]nd yet the Quest goes on' (XVI, 1l.38-9; 395). This is followed by a sententious bit of moralising, about which it is hard to disagree with McDonald, 'humanist bathos [...] MacNeice at his weakest' (170). It is worth considering, however, what has brought us to this bathetic moment. Cantos XIV-XVI allegorise a young man's psychological development in terms of the recent history of allegory: we see a movement from medieval and early modern didactic personification narratives (represented by the Bridge of Booze, the Church of Arc-lights, the Temple of Aesthetic Bliss), through romantic challenges to its aesthetic validity (signified by the episode within the painting), to modernist 'parable' which finds the closest parallels to human life in that which is apparently most remote from it. Up to the point of his embarking on the fairground ride, this young man's progress tells essentially the same story as Varieties of Parable. Finally, however, the protagonist is faced with the problem of all allegory, the temptation, as voiced by the worm, to dissolve individuality in cosmic structure. As the worm says, 'there are darker cells/ Enclosing blinder lives. Guess where. Why, inside Me.' (XVI, ll.8-9; 394) That all allegory, no matter what its content, tends towards this relentless consumption of nature (the 'allelophagy' described by Teskey) is implied by the bracketing of the Quest narrative by the same rhyme words 'van' / 'man' (XIII 133-135; 385, XV 127-129; 395). At the end of canto XIII, this rhyme represents a benevolent and courageous stance; by canto XV, it has become a signifier of malignancy and cowardice, again indicating the abyssal shift in allegorical intention which concerned MacNeice as far back as Autumn Journal. Having identified the worm, and its negation of identity, as the logical conclusion of allegory's

'haunting wish to fuse all persons together' (MCP 259), the bathos implicit in continuing the Quest is inevitable. Recognition of what the worm's cosmic thinking entails threatens the allegorical structures of the whole poem: to reject allegory, as rejection of the worm implies one should, would destabilise the hierarchies of cultural value carefully established in the *roman á clef*, in the 'makers' theme, in the *bricolage* of allusion. The moralising conclusion to the Quest narrative of cantos XIV-XVI represents not exactly a forced completion of something that should remain incomplete, but the rather clumsy 'capture' of a radical and unsettling revelation about allegory's nature. The disruption or 'noise' that this realisation creates is re-interpreted – re-cycled into the allegory's textual system – as a maxim. The sententiousness with which this maxim is expressed is an index, perhaps, of the power of the suppressed truth to overturn the values of the poem.

The problem that the worm presents, clearly, cannot be solved within Autumn Sequel's textual system. For all its changes of scene, the poem is committed to a kind of allegory which seeks permanent value or meaning in persons and objects (and actions, which like 'making', have been hypostatised into objects). Such allegory is always vulnerable to an abyssal shift in intention, to a change in the signification of its permanent values, which in turn makes it liable to the forms of allelophagic violence that the worm enacts on nature, consuming it in order to make itself identical with the macrocosm: 'darker cells[...] blinder lives [...] inside Me'. The direction of MacNeice's poetry after Autumn Sequel indicates that he was aware of this problem. In order to solve it, he turned his attention to the action of change on fixed allegorical persons and things as a subject for poetry. The characteristic poem of MacNeice's last decade is concerned with the gap between the fixity of emblems and the constant change of material objects, between stasis and kinesis, petrifaction and decay. A reading of a few late lyrics, which concludes this chapter, suggests how intuitions perceived (if not fully achieved) during

MacNeice's 'middle stretch' are deployed to solve the problems posed by that 'difficult time'.

IV: PARABLE

The claim that MacNeice's three final collections are a development of the sprawling, discursive mid-period may seem odd at first; formally, the late poems seem like a new departure, or at least a return to techniques which MacNeice appeared to have abandoned in the late 1940s for 'architectural' form. This sense is reinforced by a number of the poems in Solstices, which are thematically related to the period of Plant and Phantom and Springboard, while sometimes, as in 'The Messiah', with its 'great new surgeon', employing very a 1930s kind of parable (MCP 479-480). It is undeniable that the texture of Solstices and The Burning Perch, in particular, does recall earlier outings in parable idiom, and in shape these last collections suggest anything but the long poems discussed above. Critical attention to this lyric return has had unfortunate effects, reinforcing the impression that MacNeice's middle stretch is a blind alley that readers may safely avoid. The difficulties which MacNeice encountered in allegorical expression in the long mid-period poems in fact feed productively into the last lyrics, answering questions which for the most part are not so relevant to earlier excursions into parable. The poet's note to The Burning Perch, written for the Poetry Book Society Bulletin not long before his death in September 1963, concludes with the observation that his poems have returned to the concerns of twenty or twenty-five years before. 'I myself,' he notes, 'can see both the continuity and the difference' (Criticism 247-248; 248). 'The continuity and the difference' between MacNeice's last works and those of the late 1930s and early 1940s is a subject too large for adequate treatment here. 60 The purpose of this brief final section is simply to suggest the direction in which MacNeice took his ambivalent feeling concerning the 'hierarchizing mode', allegory. The mid-period is beset by problems

arising from the use of allegorical forms: the poet finds himself trying to reconcile his respect for tradition with a mode that treats the past as raw material for improvisation, articulating themes of friendship and sentiment within structures which treat people as mere substance that can be captured and co-opted into meaningfulness, working out a liberal, pragmatic political stance while the mode he uses is apparently implacably committed to establishing a changeless order. MacNeice began to tackle these problems formally before articulating themes which could be considered to deal with the problems of allegorical expression. Formal effects which mitigate allegory's hierarchising tendencies, while still operating inside recognisably allegorical parameters, are already developed in *Visitations* and *Solstices*; with a few exceptions, however, the need to modify allegory's rigid ordering of persons and things becomes a fully formed *thematic* concern only in *The Burning Perch*.

The reader of *Visitations* is made very aware of MacNeice's abandonment of discursive syntax, and its replacement by a tighter, starker construction which looks forward to the parataxis which overwhelmingly characterises *Solstices*. The effect of the shortening line lengths and pithier sentences is sometimes to make these poems more emblematic, rather than less: 'The Tree of Guilt', for instance, seems less disruptive, less aware even, of the hierarchies inherent in allegorical order than very many of the midperiod poems (*MCP* 461-462). It is concerned, as are many of the late poems, with change in signification over time, but the change that is effected here is from one highly ordered emblematic meaning to another: 'The dove's is now the raven's day' (462). 'House on a Cliff', similarly emblematic, uses a more irregular rhythm – Tom Paulin notes its 'cross between stress and quantitative metre' – in order to suggest that 'Indoors' and 'Outdoors' are not simply equivalents, reflecting and contrasting in a hypostatised world. The resonances begin by being temptingly close: 'Indoors the tang of a tiny oil lamp. Outdoors/ The winking signal on the waste of sea' but end obliquely:

Indoors ancestral curse-cum-blessing. Outdoors The empty bowl of heaven, the empty deep. Indoors a purposeful man who talks at cross Purposes, to himself, in a broken sleep.

(MCP 462)

'Outdoors' cannot be captured to signify 'Indoors', nor *vice versa*: the noise of their resistance is deafening. But the poem is still an allegory, in that the reader is encouraged by verbal clues – 'the locked heart and the lost key', the play on 'purpose' in the last two lines – to interpret that noise of resistance as a truth. We are still, just about, in the realm of 'You shamefast are, but *Shamefastnesse* itself is shee': the lesson is not spelled out, but we are heartily encouraged in the belief that it is there.

Visitations also, however, contains acknowledgements of the more expansive structuring of MacNeice's mid-period poetry. Some of these mark less successful moments in the volume, like part III of 'Donegal Triptych', though even this is valuable for its consideration of a master-image in allegorical writing: the macrocosmic man: 'let the rain keep sifting/ Into the earth while our minds become, like the earth, a sieve/ /A halfway house between sky and sea, being of the water earthy'. Long lines and leisurely pace belie an encyclopaedic and encompassing desire: 'having entered solitude once more to find communion/ With other solitary beings, with the whole race of men' (MCP 448). Another less concise poem, 'Wessex Guidebook', revisits Autumn Sequel, if not 'The Stygian Banks', in creating a figural bricolage of historical artefacts. Its personification of the seasons turns from an endorsement of an anthropocentric view of nature to a challenge to it: 'though they fostered man, they never loved him' (MCP 452). In its resignation to time disrupting and overturning the patterns we call 'history', it is a less taut and more explanatory forerunner of some of the poems in The Burning Perch.

In her extensive consideration of *Solstices*, Longley remarks on its syntactical innovation and development (127-8). She finds MacNeice in this collection exploiting parataxis – sometimes, as in 'Sunday in the Park', in its extreme form, asyndeton – to

suggest a break with the conjunctive, discursive structures of Autumn Journal (and, we might add, those of the mid-period) which imply, for Longley, 'high humanism'. The later poetry shows an increasing mistrust of 'high humanism' as a way for its speakers and selves to encounter and engage with the world; it would be fair to say, though, that even in The Burning Perch, MacNeice does not relinquish humanism – it is just no longer quite so 'high'. The relation of parataxis to allegory has been considered by Angus Fletcher, who considers paratactic syntax particularly appropriate to daemonic, allegorical propulsion. 63 To ascribe to a genre or a mode of representation particular technical features is as a rule problematic, and Fletcher's formulation is no exception to that rule. He finds himself having to include some kinds of hypotaxis under the rubric of parataxis in order to account for the range of allegorical expression he discusses. While it is true that parataxis might represent very well allegory's aggregative, encompassing, 'allelophagic' aspect, its withdrawal of affect from bodies which it intends to contain and make meaningful, this kind of syntax, which does not use relative clauses to reflect higher and lower orders of interest, is subversive of allegory's hierarchical structuring of ideas and persons.⁶⁴

The asyndeton of 'Sunday in the Park', as Longley comments, seems directed towards such a subversion of allegorical order: '[i]t suggests that there are black holes rather than cosmic links between phenomena' (127). Cosmic links between phenomena do appear in 'Sunday in the Park', however, and within the four poem sequence of 'park' poems (MCP 494-496). 'The Park' begins with an allusion to I Corinthians 13:12, 'Through a glass greenly', (MCP 494) which is picked up in 'dark glasses mirror ironies' in 'Sunday in the Park' (MCP 498). In the light of this allusion, the '[c]hildren who never had seen the country' ('The Park') gain an allegorical significance, and the 'prams [...] big with doom' ('Sunday in the Park') offer an ironic commentary on the biblical text. 'Prams' indicate 'childish things'; 'doom' that moment when we will see not

'through a glass, darkly', but 'face to face': the Pauline analogy is collapsed into a nightmare vision in which 'childish things' are swollen out of proportion and instead of the clear sight hoped for, there is only the irony of reflection. An allusive clue like this might contribute nearly as much to the reader's sense of apocalypse as the structural patterns of what Longley calls 'squash-court syntax' (127), as might the 'Stone Age' motif in 'The Lake in the Park' and 'Dogs in the Park', which implies that the park contains and collapses all human existence, from prehistory to Doomsday.

A further instability centres around the device of repetition, which MacNeice uses to great effect in 'Sunday in the Park', 'Windowscape' (497), 'Reflections' (503) and 'All Over Again' (513). Longley notes that these repetitions constitute neither rhyme nor refrain (128); more than that, do the repetitions strip signification from the words, or do they reify them as talismans? The repetition of 'ironies' in 'Sunday in the Park', appropriately enough, does the former, so that by the time we read 'The Tree/ Forgets both good and evil in irony' the moral force has been drained from 'good' and 'evil' in a literal act of antiphrasis. In 'Reflections', by contrast, the repetitions build a talismanic concept of 'home' which is then dislocated into 'the scene of the self's disintegration' (McDonald 184).⁶⁶ The indeterminate aesthetic of *Solstices* is one that operates 'as if/ This one Between were All' ('All Over Again'). Indeterminacy may challenge allegorical hypostasis; it may sometimes, being truly indeterminate, also endorse or reflect it.

This intuition – that the hierarchical rigidity of allegorical structure must be worked through, rather than argued against, as in 'The Stygian Banks', or opposed to another hierarchy, as with the 'makers' motif in *Autumn Sequel* – is perhaps the most important development from MacNeice's mid-period. It feeds into *The Burning Perch* as a sense not that emblematics should be rejected, but that allegorical imagery should be invested with a sense of its own materiality, its propensity to decay. A wonderful, if minute, instance is the play on 'obols' in 'Charon':

his hands on the oar Were black with obols and varicose veins Marbled his calves and he said to us coldly: If you want to die you will have to pay for it.

(MCP 530)

The primary sense of 'obols' is simply 'money', the ferryman's traditional wage. But the obol, for classical scholars, is also a textual mark signifying a lacuna; Charon's hands 'black with obols' imply the decay of myth into textuality (and a kind of textuality which marks an absence at that) which makes myth available for allegorising. The poem comments on the fragmentation that makes its allegory possible.

In 'After the Crash', the protagonist's sense that time has passed, and that objects, including his own body, have decayed, undermines any intimation of a cosmic hierarchy:

Then he looked up and marked
The gigantic scales in the sky,
The pan on the left dead empty
And the pan on the right dead empty,
And knew in the dead, dead calm
It was too late to die.

(MCP 524)

The emblem of the scales is not protectively sealed from temporality, from the decline implied by '[t]he asphalt high with hemlock' and the protagonist's 'wrinkled hand'; that decline has actually taken possession of its meaning. This bears comparison with the scale imagery in the second part of 'Areopagus'. The application of apocalyptic Pauline temporality to the scales of justice fostered an increasing logocentrism, marked by wordplay on 'beam' and 'scale'. Here, however, the action of time, instead of modifying the meaning of the emblem, comes to inhabit it. The cosmic, hierarchic significance of the scales is experienced as the merest residue (the reader's obscure, abstract sense that they *should* mean more than the poem allows them), having been literally emptied from the emblem. While we might contrast the material decline which represents time in 'After the Crash' with Pauline time, which privileges the instant of conversion,

resurrection or apocalypse, it is in its different way, equally apocalyptic. In the second stanza, the speaker notes, 'life still seemed going on' but 'After the Crash' is set in an end-time, a time beyond apocalypse, when a signifier of judgement can no longer have meaning: '[i]t was too late to die.'

Apocalyptic time is a theme in *The Burning Perch*, either as a fast-motion cinematic effect: 'the human/ Race recedes and dwindles, the giant/ Reptiles cackle in their graves' ('Budgie', MCP 539), or as in 'Star-gazer', something more concerned with poetic meaning itself. The title of 'Star-gazer' establishes one kind of significance: a star-gazer being not just a person who gazes at stars, but who finds meaning in them. The first stanza elaborates, suggesting other kinds of meaning. There is purely personal meaning: 'Forty-two years ago (to me if to no one else/ The number is of some interest)', and metaphorical meaning: 'intolerably bright/ Holes, punched in the sky'. The stars 'excited' the speaker's younger self for mythical ('their Latin names') and for scientific reasons: '[h]ow very far off they were, it seemed their light/ Had left them (some at least) long years before I was'. These kinds of meaning are not exclusive, but related to one another. The metaphor of '[h]oles/ [...] in the sky' incorporates some self-referentiality, looking back to a 'middle stretch' volume. The younger self's scientific curiosity is provoked by personal, even solipsistic, concerns of identity, while the mature speaker's claim that the number forty-two is of only personal significance is rather wry, in that speaking of years at all entails reference to a 'number' which is of total significance, the speed of light. From this point of universal meaningfulness, the speaker then begins to deconstruct what he has established:

> And this remembering now I mark that what Light was leaving some of them at least then, Forty-two years ago, will never arrive In time for me to catch it, which light when It does get here may find that there is not Anyone left alive To run from side to side in a late night train

Admiring it and adding noughts in vain. (MCP 544)

Again, 'Star-gazer' evokes the passage of time in order to empty signifiers of their meaning: in its end-time world there is no astrological or astronomical significance attached to stars (or years) because there is no-one left to bestow significance. The personification of light implied by the verb 'find', meanwhile, acknowledges the resistance of the human mind to imagining a world which does not contain it – humanism has ceased here to be a 'high' political and philosophical stance, and become a poignant delusion, a delusion, it must be noted, with value nonetheless. The poem's vision of an end-time acknowledges that though the stars – the cosmos – are subject to decay and change, the consequences of such change are different from those of decay and change upon humans. When there is 'not/ Anyone left alive', light will still be travelling, moving, 'find[ing]'. It avoids the temptation of the man-macrocosm image, presenting nature as different from us, also subject to time but not equally so. In a poem collected in *Solstices*, MacNeice wrote 'the world, though more, is also I' ('Selva Oscura', *MCP* 513). 'Star-gazer', and *The Burning Perch* as a whole, dramatise that crucial 'though more'.

In Chapter 1 we noted that a conjunction of the decaying – 'the *facies hippocratica*' – with the petrified – 'as a petrified primordial landscape' – marks, in Benjamin's *German Tragic Drama*, allegory's entry into modernity (*GTD* 166). In MacNeice's last poems we see stasis permeated by decay and change, hierarchy penetrated by knowledge of its own materiality, nature modified by historicity – all conditions, in Benjamin's terms for allegory's 'redemption'. With its redemption, allegory loses everything that made it itself: its dire, aggregative attachment to decaying emblems and secret knowledge, its love of order, its suppressed violence. Such redemption is elusive – an end-time, apocalyptic property if ever there was one – and it would be vastly inappropriate to suggest that

MacNeice's poems in any way fulfil an archetype established by Benjamin's passionately morbid terminology. I evoke it here because it offers a way of understanding how a poet preoccupied by allegory might produce poems that begin to pass out of the realm of allegorical making through having been so thoroughly immersed in it. Unlike Clarke, whose encounters with allegory are marked by furious resistance to its structures of capture and order, and unlike Kinsella, who acquiesces in those structures, MacNeice works through allegory's ordering impulses to achieve liberation from them. In the poems of *The Burning Perch*, he comes close to success.

80 03

This chapter has been concerned with allegory's relation to time and history in MacNeice's poetry, particularly in the neglected middle period poems. My purpose has been to show that critical unwillingness to discuss these poems in terms of allegory has contributed to their neglect and to examine the poems' engagement with allegorical making. A secularised concept of typology or figura was the starting point for the extended consideration of history in MacNeice's mid-period poems presented in section Beginning with a brief consideration of section IX of Autumn Journal and its manipulation of shifts in allegorical intention, this section then concentrated on 'The Stygian Banks' and Ten Burnt Offerings. The first of these poems is a failure, not for the reason usually suggested - an excess of abstract thought - but because MacNeice, having recognised allegory's potential for fixed order and denial of individualism, tries to argue directly against this, rather than investing his allegorical imagery itself with resistance to it. Ten Burnt Offerings, similarly concerned with the authoritarianism of allegory, is more successful. Contrapuntal relationships between the ten poems, suggested by connecting images and image clusters, challenge the figural totalisation of historical periods and the concomitant erasure of historical and contextual difference. Imagining difference is an

important concern in MacNeice's poetry, particularly where it involves imagining the past. The challenge his speakers face is to find a way of figuring history which neither engages in nostalgia for the past, identifying with power and order in a capitulation to accidie, nor dismisses the wrongs and sufferings of history by declaring it 'unimaginably different'. The nexus of art, nostalgia and political violence suggested by a prose piece from 1952, 'Notes on the Way', is introduced into *Autumn Sequel*, written the following year, through the device of the speaker's debates with Thucydides. The historian, who is the personified image of history in *Autumn Sequel*, is also a figure by whom the shortcomings of an allegorical view of history are understood. Finally the speaker rejects allegorism as a way of understanding public and civic concerns, whether as history or current affairs, consigning it to the exile to which Thucydides was subjected for most of his life. As McDonald comments, MacNeice allows history an important place in his long allegorical poem, even though in many ways allegory is inimical to it:

History itself need not owe its allegiance to 'the Parrot' for MacNeice, but it is also far from consoling for the celebrant or elegist, the maker proper. Taken to an objective extreme, history undermines patterns, although it bears witness to the capacity of humanity to repeat its own mistakes. All of this is unsettling for the makers of patterns in life and art whom MacNeice celebrates, but *Autumn Sequel* allows it an important place, analogous to (though perhaps more threatening than) the antiphonal voice that sounds in parts of *Autumn Journal*. (151)

This rejection of allegory as a mode for understanding public matters makes it available as a means for examining private ones. Section III discussed the depiction of friendship in *Autumn Sequel*, and the challenges that private hierarchies of value offer to more public, acknowledged ways of understanding culture. The *roman á clef* aspect of *Autumn Sequel* mitigates to some extent the logocentrism of allegory, but this is more than outweighed by the poem's massing of empty allusion. Allusion in *Autumn Sequel* does not have an intertextual purpose so much as a structural one: its allusions do not comment on their sources by fulfilling, transforming or transgressing them. Instead

allusion is used to suggest the kind of a poem that *Autumn Sequel* is, to build a structure of fragments which is absolutely characteristic of improvisatory, acquisitive allegorical making. Finally, this section examined the Quest narrative of cantos XIV-XVI, and concluded that although MacNeice recognises and rejects the denial of individualism and humanity implicit in allegorical ordering, *Autumn Sequel* does not have the resources to mount a challenge to it within the parameters of allegory.

That is something that it attempted in the final poems, however. A necessarily brief survey in section IV of MacNeice's last three collections suggested that these poems, while still examples of allegorical making, find ways to oppose the rigid ordering and denial of individuality typical of allegory. These usually take the form of investing seemingly changeless emblems with a propensity to material decay and change over time. In these poems humans are represented as part of, but not identical with or containing their world. The 'haunting wish' to fuse persons together or with nature is acknowledged but quashed. In conclusion, MacNeice's poetic career is informed at every juncture by kinds of allegorical making. Of the three poets discussed here, he comes closest to discovering allegory's potential for liberation – what Benjamin calls its 'redemption' – precisely because of his immersion in it. His late poems are exciting because they seem on the verge of passing out of allegory altogether, having thoroughly worked through its possibilities. This chapter, however, has also proposed that the process of working through, accomplished in poems like *Autumn Sequel*, be given due recognition in its own right.

Notes

¹ Louis MacNeice, Autumn Sequel, Canto XXIV 1.25, In Collected Poems, ed. E.R. Dodds, rev. ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) 329-439; 428. All further references to Autumn Sequel are given in the text, in the form: '(AS Canto number, line number; page number in the Collected Poems)'. References to Autumn Journal are given in the same format – (AJ section number, line number; page number in the Collected

Poems). Further page references to the Collected Poems are also given in the body text, preceded by MCP.

- ² A rare exception is the brief review in *Irish Writing*, by Thomas Kinsella. Kinsella, '[review of *Autumn Sequel*]' *Irish Writing* 29, (December 1954) 65-67. He praises MacNeice's honesty, 'ease and style' in terms which are more revealing about Kinsella than about MacNeice (67). He notes, in a characteristically Kinsellan formulation, that MacNeice's imagery 'has reached a high state of order' and commends MacNeice for finding that 'if anything is to be gained, problems must be lived through, not solved' (66). Kinsella's review is notable, however, for its acceptance of the poem on its own terms, commenting that 'its main virtue [is] a scattered beauty which runs steadily from page to page, rising easily to its maximum pitch.' (66)
- ³ 'The Poetry of Consciousness', Times Literary Supplement (26 November 1954) 754.
- ⁴ A. Alvarez, 'Lament for the Makers', New Statesman and Nation (11 December 1954) 794.
- ⁵ Peter McDonald, Louis MacNeice: The Poet in His Contexts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)152.
- ⁶ Terence Brown, Louis MacNeice: Sceptical Vision (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan 1975), 175-6.
- ⁷ Robin Marsack, The Cave of Making: The Poetry of Louis MacNeice (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982), 102.
- 8 Edna Longley, Louis MacNeice: A Study (London: Faber & Faber) 1988, 132.
- 9 MacNeice, Modern Poetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1938, 198
- ¹⁰ The phrase, 'conveniently enough' as McDonald comments (130), is MacNeice's own, from the poem 'Day of Renewal': 'This middle stretch of life/ Is bad for poets: a sombre view/ Where neither works nor days look innocent' (MCP 309-13; 309). Its use to suggest that MacNeice knew the poems of *Ten Burnt Offerings* were substandard, his imaginative and lyric powers on the wane, is a misquotation. 'Day of Renewal' is a moderately optimistic poem occasioned by the poet's birthday; '[t]his middle stretch of life' is more likely to be an ironic reference to the opening lines of Dante's *Commedia*.
- ¹¹ MacNeice, Varieties of Parable, ed. E.R. Dodds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1965), 1.
- ¹² Compare his comment on Calidore: 'one of the least allegorical knights, better able to relax than most of them, and also appreciates poetry.' (*Varieties* 29)
- ¹³ MacNeice took the opportunity of the Clark lectures to emphasise to an academic audience his independence from the Thirties group: he also attacks documentary realism in literature, using the famous first sentence of Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* as an example of the point of view he rejects: "I am a camera" is not a good starting point for an artist." (*Varieties* 130)
- ¹⁴ Though it is possibly true that Spenser confronts the issue of abstractions as coercive forces in the world most fully in books ¹¹ and ^V, MacNeice's least favoured. MacNeice's unease with politically authoritarian aspects of allegorical making might be indicated by this preference. There is no record, to my knowledge, of MacNeice's view on the Irish material of book ^V.
- ¹⁵ MacNeice wrote, in his Poetry Society Bulletin introduction to *Visitations* (1957), of the *Ten Burnt Offerings* that they were 'experiments in dialectical structure'. 'Louis MacNeice Writes...[on *Visitations*]', Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice, ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 211-12; 211.
- ¹⁶ MacNeice quoted in Jon Stallworthy, Louis MacNeice (London: Faber & Faber, 1995) 390.
- ¹⁷ 'Louis MacNeice Writes...', Criticism 211.

- ¹⁸ 'Notes on the Way [1]', Selected Prose of Louis MacNeice, ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 176-179; 179.
- ¹⁹ See Edna Longley, 'Louis MacNeice: The Walls are Flowing', *Across a Roaring Hill: The Protestant Imagination in Modern Ireland*, eds Gerald Dawe and Edna Longley (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1985) 100.
- ²⁰ Peter McDonald comments: '[i]f flux ever really represents a positive value for MacNeice, it does so with the significant qualification that it makes the concept of the self finally untenable' (184-185). Note also *Autumn Sequel*, where the Heraclitan motto 'everything flows' is attributed to the Parrot (XII, ll.83-85; 380).
- ²¹ Deborah L. Madsen, Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre (London: Macmillan, 1995).
- ²² Gordon Teskey, Allegory and Violence (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 162.
- ²³ H.D.F. Kitto, *The Greeks*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), 223
- ²⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977) 231.
- ²⁵ From *Troilus and Cressida* (III.ii, l.8). MacNeice's epigraph quotes Troilus, anticipating his meeting with Cressida.
- ²⁶ In the context of '[p]laying the jongleur', deluding oneself with clichés about mortality and value, it is perhaps worth noting that 'lease' (or 'lees') has an obsolete sense, common in Middle English poetry, of 'untruth, falsehood, lying' (OED).
- ²⁷The epigraph to *Autumn Sequel* is 'Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then, I contradict myself...'. With characteristic modesty, MacNeice leaves it there, but a claim for largeness is implicitly made. Readers have been slower to recognise, however, that the quotation equally describes allegory's rift in consciousness, its ambivalance, its ceaseless production of otherness.
- ²⁸ In the 'Proteus' chapter of *Ulysses*, Joyce similarly conflates the myth of Jacob with that of Odysseus. Stephen recalls Kevin Egan's remark on the similarity of his voice to his father's: 'You're your father's son. I know the voice', an allusion to both the Homeric tradition that Telemachus' voice resembled his father's and to Jacob's trickery to obtain Esau's birthright. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 43.
- ²⁹ The theme of doubt refers the reader back to 'Didymus' (*MCP* 295-99). The central conceit of this poem, which deals with the tradition that 'doubting' Thomas reached India in his missionary work, is a manipulation of the cliché of pagan plurality set against monotheistic unity. Thomas confronts a 'banyan riot of dialectic' which is founded in the unity of the 'unsculptured lingam', Shiva's symbol. His own monotheistic faith, by contrast, is based on doubleness: both in his own resemblance to Jesus, which gives him his name, 'Didymus' ('the twin') and in the divided consciousness implied by doubt.
- ³⁰ One of the most remarkable images in *Ten Burnt Offerings* is essentially a development of the 'No Man's Pastures' conceit. In the second section of 'Day of Returning' the speaker moves from Odysseus' homesickness on his timeless island to the role of time in producing a sense of home. This leads him to contemplate the stillness of Sundays in an evangelical Christian household: 'The street is curtained off that up and inwards the mind may count the golden rungs'. What, he wonders, will he find at the top of this mental Jacob's ladder: 'Will Wesley hand us a gold/ Chalice of nectar—immortal and islanded life, / A home from home.' (*MCP* 315) McDonald comments 'A Protestant Grail filled with the food of the

Greek gods makes a fittingly ambiguous goal for the religious aspect of "home" (146). The conflation of Greek and Christian, Odysseus and Jacob suggests the contested space which is the poet's (and his society's) imaginative territory.

- ³¹ Or Ikarios, in myth the island where Daedalus buried his fallen son. MacNeice associates it with Calypso's island of Ogygia: 'here, one might think, is a closed/ Circle, cave of Calypso' (MCP 305).
- ³² A somewhat later poem, 'Donegal Triptych' (*MCP* 445-448) also uses the image of sheep at a gap to represent human freedom, again in the contexts of life extending though time and, perhaps, political violence ('fathers/ dying proud'):

age means change and change renewal, And herds of immemorial sheep Will find new gaps to break through always,

While high in the west one wool-white cloud Marks a yet thornier gap and greater Through which our fathers, dying proud, Broke out like rams

(MCP 447)

³³ Dialogue offers another medium in which to air these questions of representation, one in which, furthermore, both positions in the argument can be ironised. MacNeice's version of *Faust* includes such a dialogue. Faust makes his contract with Mephistopheles not for knowledge but for experience, the encyclopaedic experience that allegory, too, offers: 'And what is allotted to the whole of mankind/ That I will sample in my inmost heart[...]/ To extend myself to embrace all human selves'. Mephistopheles replies that if that is his ambition, he needs a poet, not a devil. The poet is explicitly evoked as an allegorist:

You could do with a little artistic advice. Confederate with one of the poets And let him flog his imagination To heap all virtues on your head, A head with such a reputation: Lion's bravery, Stag's velocity, Fire of Italy, Northern tenacity.

[...]
Such a person—I'd like to meet him; 'Mr. Microcosm' is how I'd greet him.

MacNeice and E.L. Stahl, *Goethe's Faust: Parts 1 and 11*, (abridged), 2nd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) 61-62.

MacNeice had some reservations about sacred mountain imagery in the work of his contemporaries. For his reaction to *The Ascent of F6* see *Criticism* 86, 101, 109, and to Cecil Day Lewis's poem *The Magnetic Mountain* see the 1935 essay 'Poetry To-Day', *Criticism*, 10-42; 25, 35. His own uses of similar tropes are often ironised. Canto III of *Autumn Sequel* records the poet's journey to a film studio, where he was to devise a commentary for a film called 'The Conquest of Everest' (Stallworthy 402). MacNeice contrasts the suburban location of the studio with the sublime mountain, suggesting that his script is a bathetic travesty of its beauty and danger: 'a cheap couvade or proxy paradise' (*AS* III, 1.39; 341). Stallworthy suggests that Yeats's introduction to *The Holy Mountain* by Sri Purohit may have inspired this canto: 'that

book and MacNeice's glimpse of Nanga Parbat in 1947 have merged with the mountain and water of his own mythological terrain.' (Stallworthy 402) The allusion is less likely to be directly to Sri Purohit, whose doctrine MacNeice dismisses as atypical of Eastern religion in The Poetry of W.B. Yeats, than to Yeats's own 'Meru'. See W.B. Yeats, The Poems, ed. Daniel Albright (London: J.M. Dent, 1990) 339. See also MacNeice, The Poetry of W.B. Yeats (London: Oxford University Press, 1941) 150. In an essay written in 1941-2, but unpublished until 1988, meanwhile, 'the Holy Mountain' stands for abnegation of political responsibility: 'we Victorian liberals are frightened of getting ourselves corrupted. So we wash our hands of any shadow of power & trek for the Holy Mountain'. 'Broken Windows or Thinking Aloud', (Prose 136-142; 140). Conversely, an 'Unholy Mount' appears in 'Hiatus' as a place where political responsibility might be attained (MCP 218). This reference is interesting for its combination of the sacred mountain image with another MacNeicean motif: the 'hold-up', in which '[t]ime is away'. ('Meeting Point', MCP 167-8; 'Hold-up', MCP 503-4) A 1957 review of G.S. Fraser's anthology Poetry Now, which included the poetry of many 'Movement' writers, obliquely revisits the territory of canto III of Autumn Sequel. MacNeice makes exceptions for Philip Larkin and Elizabeth Jennings, but is otherwise unimpressed: 'with what docile arrogance, with what lowered but polished sights; roped together, alert for falling slates, they scale their suburban peaks - the Ascent of C3.' ('Lost Generations?', Criticism, 206-211, 210). Pace Stallworthy, the 'mountain and water of [MacNeice's] own mythological terrain' (which has its own allegorical significance) should probably be distinguished quite sharply from archetypal sacred mountains, which receive ironic treatment in poetry and prose.

To historians who wish to relive an era, Fustel de Coulanges recommends that they blot out everything they know about the later course of history. There is no better way of characterizing the method with which historical materialism has broken. It is a process of empathy whose origin is indolence of the heart, *acedia* which despairs of grasping the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly.

Empathy in historical thinking is inevitably empathy with the victor and the ruler, Benjamin asserts, because the material objects which we use to evoke and empathise with the past, the 'cultural treasures', have been claimed by the victor as his 'spoils'. The 'anonymous toil' to which such objects owe their existence – the toil of slaves, for instance – is effaced by empathic contemplation of the 'great minds and talents' which have created them; 'great minds and talents', Benjamin implies, being a figure for the victorious ruler and his claim upon the cultural treasure. Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, London: Pimlico-Random House, 1999, 245-254; 247-8.

- ³⁶ MacNeice uses Northrop Frye's terms 'naïve allegory' and 'free-style allegory' a number of times in *Varieties of Parable*. See in particular his oddly approving analysis of Graham Hough's excessively reductive scheme for classifying types of allegory. (*Varieties* 17-18)
- ³⁷ In this case, MacNeice's habit of ending a canto with an epigrammatic single line works well. Other final lines approach the territory of greeting card verse. See *AS* XXIII, 1.127; 427 for a particularly gruesome example.
- ³⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 47 [Thuycidides 1.22].

³⁵ Walter Benjamin comments:

³⁹ M.I. Finlay, 'Introduction' to History of the Peloponnesian War, 26.

- ⁴⁰ For MacNeice on Shelley see *Varieties* 51-65. MacNeice regards Shelley as interesting because of his extremism: 'he carried further than any of his English contemporaries the Romantic superimposition of his ego on the world' (65), a remark with obvious relevance to our discussion here.
- ⁴¹ The anachronistic feel of the quotation from *Hamlet* reinforces our sense that figural allegory is disruptive of chronometric time.
- ⁴² MacNeice, *The Dark Tower, Selected Plays*, eds Alan Heuser and Peter McDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1993, 111-48.
- ⁴³ It is the form Skelton uses. John Skelton, 'Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell', *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Scattergood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 312-357; 322, 1.359.
- ⁴⁴ For 'deictic' and 'non-deictic' in the context of allegory, see Carolynn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth:* Stuctures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatic Allegory (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) and Chapter 1 above.
- ⁴⁵ MacNeice had used such forms before. The title of 'Auden and MacNeice: Their Last Will and Testament' acknowledges a debt to Villon, while the *terza rima* form of this ironic testament looks forward to similar lists in *Autumn Sequel* (*Letters from Iceland* 228-250) A late poem, 'Goodbye to London' quotes another Dunbar refrain (*MCP* 544-545).
- ⁴⁶ See above, Chapter 1, section IV, and below, Chapter 4, section IV for more on allegory and encyclopaedia.
- ⁴⁷ McDonald notes: 'celebration and elegy depend on one another, but this can lead to a simplified scheme [...] The danger [...] is that the difficult and shifting tension between self and other is being simplified into one between us and them, a black and white presentation for the sake of, or even generated by, rhetorical effectiveness' (149-150).
- ⁴⁸ The title 'Lament for the Makers' is a later and somewhat misleading addition, since over half of the poem is not concerned with poets at all, and when he does consider them, Dunbar pays scant attention to their poetry.
- ⁴⁹ 'Old Masters Abroad', a poem that reflects on lecturing on English literature in the British Empire and former imperial colonies, suggests that the literary canon is an empty, futile, petrified monument in a world that no longer needs it. The parallel with the Empire itself is obvious: 'It is overtime now for the Old Masters.' (*MCP* 501)
- ⁵⁰ Dylan Thomas, 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London', *Collected Poems 1934-1953*, eds Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: J.M. Dent, 1988) 85-6.
- ⁵¹ See for example, 'Tread softly because you tread on the dreams which are not there' (XIV l.126; 389), which has no resonance with 'He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' (Yeats 90) and suggests, rather unfortunately in the circumstances, a speaker who believes dreams are insubstantial and meaningless.
- ⁵² William Empson, The Complete Poems, ed. John Haffenden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000) 69-70.
- ⁵³ See MacNeice, *The Mad Islands and the Administrator* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964) 78, and 'They Met on Good Friday', *Plays*, 267-301; 301.
- ⁵⁴ Compare the effect of Ate in The Faerie Queene, to which MacNeice expresses antipathy in Varieties (35-
- 6). Notwithstanding this hostility, the sheer volume of allusion in *Autumn Sequel* can have a remarkably similar anti-visual effect.

⁵⁵ Paul de Man, 'Image and Emblem in Yeats', *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, New York: Columbia UP, 1984, 195. For Benjamin, 'destroying a wonderful picture' for emblematic purposes would signify the presence of 'symbolism' rather than 'allegory': 'in the symbol destruction is idealised and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption' (*German Tragic Drama* 166). Allegory, meanwhile, presents aeons of decay collapsed into a moribund countenance. It is a distinction worth bearing in mind for its nuanced attention to the respective ideologies of the modes, but it is not easily transferable from its own very specific context. Benjamin cannot, as noted in Chapter 1, be *used*: his criticism resists condensation into a model.

⁵⁶ MacNeice, The Strings are False, ed. E.R. Dodds (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) 37.

⁵⁷ See W. B. Yeats, 'Away', *Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats*, eds John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976) 267-82. The essay deals with Irish folk beliefs about animated corpses, changelings and persons who have had their souls stolen by fairies.

⁵⁸ W.B. Yeats, 'The Death of Synge', *Autobiographies* (1955, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980) 499-527; 504.

This apparent punctuation error appears in *Autumn Sequel* as it was originally published in 1954 and in the first edition of the *Collected Poems*. It is not corrected in the 1979 edition of the *Collected Poems*. The sense of the phrase would be clearer if the comma were moved thus: 'in the van/ Of nature I am[,] I who live both in/ And on man's guts'. MacNeice and his editors seem to have wanted to preserve the blasphemy of the worm's utterance (see Exodus 3:14). Thus the legitimate tautologous speech celebrated in 'Plain Speaking' is also subject to an abyssal shift in allegorical intention: an assertion of individuality in the face of death 'I am I although the dead are dead' (*MCP* 188) becomes the complete denial of individuality in the later poem.

⁶⁰ Critics have addressed it: the fullest account at present is, typically, McDonald's: see especially his first, second and seventh chapters, 10-64; 177-202.

⁶¹ 'Variation on Heraclitus' is the most significant of these, in that in its adoption of the 'Everything flows' tag, it recognises the contradictory premise of allegorical signification. The assumption that meaning emerges from and can return to a singularity is deconstructed by the realisation that time changes and degrades the singularity also. See above Chapter 1, section IV and Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1983) 187-228.

⁶² Tom Paulin, 'The Man from No Part', Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays 1980-1996 (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 68-73, 72. Paulin's reading of 'House on a Cliff' is rather confused on the question of whether it is or is not an allegory. He deplores the 'demand for "meaning" [that] will discover and insist that "the blind clock" is the pulse of an indifferent and mechanical universe', nonetheless claiming that 'the house is Ireland'. This attempt to eat one's allegorical cake and have it is characteristic of the tendency among many Irish critics to draw attention to allegories of nation while deprecating or ignoring the mode when it has an abstract significance, or even a political significance unrelated to national identity. Paulin's assertion that 'the poem is best appreciated in terms of voice, atmosphere and a pure symbolism' (emphasis added) falls back on the aesthetic ideology of the allegory/symbol controversy in order to avoid tackling the allegorical mechanics of this poem.

⁶³ Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode, (Ithaca: Columbia University Press, 1964) 162-

173.

- ⁶⁴ Fletcher raises this point, but cannot find an answer to it, except to say, effectively, that parataxis is not a kind of syntax at all, but 'a style by which feeling is withdrawn from a danger situation [...] or else so strictly channelled that it no longer shows the variability of normal instinct and drives' (172).
- MacNeice wrote of this collection 'I notice, to my own surprise, that *Solstices* contains practically no allusions to either Graeco-Roman or Christian legend'. 'Louis MacNeice Writes...[on *Solstices*]' *Criticism* 223-224; 224. The park poems, with their strong connotations of apocalypse, constitute an exception, along with 'Jericho' (*MCP* 482-3), 'Idle Talk' (487), 'The Wall' (506), 'The Blasphemies' (507-9) and 'Good Dream' (510-512). MacNeice might have meant 'Christian legend' narrowly, referring only to the life of Christ, or more likely, these allusions to Genesis, Joshua, Corinthians and to the doctrine of the sin against the Holy Ghost were so much a part of his imaginative corpus that he had trouble recognising them as allusions.

⁶⁶ See McDonald 184-187 for more on 'home' and the uncanny in MacNeice's parable poetry.

Chapter 4

'Ever more painstaking care': Allegory, Rhetoric and Structure in Thomas Kinsella's Poetry

'Allegory forms of itself'

I

Critics seem to agree, broadly, that Thomas Kinsella writes some sort of allegorical poetry.² Geert Lernout, for instance, sees a 'Dantean Paradigm' in poems as various as 'Thinking about Mr. D.' and 'Songs of the Psyche'.³ John Haffenden, in an interview with Kinsella, identifies the speaker of 'Baggot Street Deserta', 'Nightwalker' and 'Downstream' as 'a figure in allegorical movement, tracing an inductive path through experience'.⁴ In *The Whole Matter: the Poetic Evolution of Thomas Kinsella*, Thomas H. Jackson evaluates both Haffenden's interview and other critical accounts of allegory in Kinsella in terms of the 'polyvalence', 'resonance' and 'lines of force' that he discerns in *A Technical Supplement*.⁵ Jackson draws particular attention to one of these accounts, W.J. McCormack's 'Politics or Community? Crux of Thomas Kinsella's Aesthetic Development'.⁶ McCormack's essay is probably the fullest assessment of the allegorical element in Kinsella's work, despite the fact that it is arranged not as a fully developed study, but as a series of brief notes. In keeping with this arrangement, the tone is sometimes tentative: 'For Kinsella a necessary development at this stage [the late 1960s] was recourse to what *some will call allegory*' (McCormack 63, emphasis added).

Taking his cue from theory which follows Walter Benjamin in its valorisation of allegory over symbolism, McCormack pits them against one another: '[Allegory's] origins lie 'in commentary and exegesis', and in this way – I would add – it distinguishes itself from the religious Logos on which its rival (symbolism) depends' (McCormack 66). The appeal to allegory's 'origins' in this context is over-deterministic: the origins of allegory in allegoresis do

not determine its subsequent development, or rather, determines it in a way that ensures that its origins are irrecoverable. Allegory is a mode that dramatises, in Paul de Man's epigrammatic phrase, 'truth's inability to coincide with itself'. As Gordon Teskey wryly comments of de Man's theory of allegory, however, it is also perfectly possible for allegorists to proceed as if truth *could* coincide with itself and to incite the reader to pursue that moment of universal comprehension which he calls the 'singularity'. So allegory is also profoundly involved with the religious Logos; it is a logocentric system. Kinsella's interest in Jungian psychology and Gnosticism illustrate the uneasy interdependence between the logos-discourse which McCormack calls 'symbolism' and the gloss-discourse he calls 'allegory'.

As noted in Chapter 2, psychoanalysis is both method and corpus of results. It is analogous to allegory in that as the structures of allegory must make themselves manifest through the reader, so the unconscious, imperceptible in itself, must be seen through the conscious mind. As allegory suppresses disordered meaning, so that there is neither complete substitutability nor complete negation of meaning, so psychoanalysis suppresses the oppositional relationship of conscious and unconscious to create a structure of multiple correspondences which analyst and analysand experience as revelation. Commentary and interpretation thus constitute the grounds for the appearance of the Logos. To take the example of Gnosticism, we might note that while the revealed Word (Logos) is central to Gnosis, so central in fact, that in many Gnostic traditions the Word can redeem without assuming personified form, this same centrality of the Logos creates the conditions for a vast body of exegesis, even for what the historian of Gnosis Kurt Rudolph calls "protest exegesis", which runs counter to the external text and the historical interpretation."

McCormack's account – inevitably in such a short article – lacks nuance, but his distinction between 'symbolism' and 'allegory' is based on close attention to Kinsella's poetry.

For although, as noted in Chapter 1 and elsewhere, the distinction between symbolism and allegory is primarily an ideological one, without formal basis, there is a similar ideology at work in Kinsella's poems, discriminating politically between logos- discourse and gloss-discourse. McCormack concludes, 'history and myth, Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft are neither absolute rivals nor mutually endorsing tokens. Each necessitates the other, demands our reading of all while conceding the incompleteness of the whole.' (McCormack 77) His description of the relationship between these pairs is highly applicable to the tensions between logos and gloss within Kinsellan allegory. Unfortunately, his valorisation of allegory over symbol prevents him from including them, closing down a line of enquiry that might allow for a more objective assessment of allegory as a rhetorical resource and structuring principle in Kinsella's poetry.

This chapter attempts just such an assessment. It takes rhetoric and structure as crucial concerns in understanding Kinsella's work. Particularly in his middle and later poetry, but perceptible in even in the very earliest work, is a tonal ambiguity, an exploitation of the possibilities of irony that necessitates close critical examination. Equally ambiguous is the poet's attitude to order: at once authoritarian – he speaks in interview of his 'abolition' of 'bad material' in revision¹⁰ – and expansively liberal. 'Kinsella's [...] aesthetic is content to display its own construction', notes McCormack; 'content' being something of an understatement. These poems are often positively eager to acknowledge their non-organic, made status.¹¹ Attention to structure, then, is as important as a perception of the way Kinsella 'bring[s] together the Sublime and the Crass' (McCormack 73) in getting a grip on his allegorical poetics. Indeed, it is not always easy to distinguish between the poet's rhetorical and his structural patterning: they interpenetrate to create a sense of structure-in-rhetoric and rhetoric-in-structure which I have tried to express using the terms 'ornament' and 'order'.

The following section, 'Ornament', looks at allegory as temporal rhetoric in its examination of Kinsella's compulsive revision of his work.¹² His poetic development has been regarded as a process of paring down from the linguistically elaborate forms of his early volumes to the spare structures of his latest work. The poet expresses this process as a search for 'totality of imaginative response with the merely linguistic characteristics deleted so that one is brought closer [...] to the form and unity embedded in the data' (PIR 65). Using the four different versions of Notes from the Land of the Dead (or, as it is titled in both editions of the Collected Poems, 'From the Land of the Dead') this section attempts to define what Kinsella means by 'merely linguistic characteristics' and evaluates the results of their abolition. The third section, 'Order', which is closely related to the second, though broader in scope, taking in some of the Peppercanister series as well as earlier work, relates Kinsella's search for psychic order to his creation of allegorical order. Of the three poets discussed in this thesis, Kinsella is most devoted to allegorical patterning as a means of understanding and directing experience; allegory's coercive force is more apparent and irresistible in these poems than in either Clarke's or MacNeice's. This section looks at the five versions of 'Downstream', composed over a period of forty years, suggesting that the poem is both a progress allegory and an allegory of the poet's progress in dealing with forms of allegorical order. We then consider how these forms of order manifest themselves in the context of personal relationships, in 'Phoenix Park' (1968), and their political consequences in that poem and in A Technical Supplement (1976) and Out of Ireland (1987). The fourth section, 'Encyclopaedia', deals with Kinsella's Peppercanister poetry in terms of encyclopaedic form, suggesting that for all the formal paring-down of Kinsella's poetry since 1973, it retains allegory's encyclopaedic, encompassing ambition. A short final passage derives some conclusions from these themes.

II: ORNAMENT

(i)

'Ornament' may seem an odd term with which to approach Kinsella's use of figurative language and his process of revision. In a specialised sense it is firmly associated with Renaissance studies, while in general and popular usage it has pejorative connotations of superfluity and unstructured decoration. However, in Chapter 1 we saw how Puttenham's treatment of allegory as 'ornament' anticipates (perhaps unwittingly) the mode's anteriority, the slippage of meaning from one signifier to the next in a chain of being. 13 The theory of the Renaissance need not be regarded as a curiosity, nor hermetically sealed from its modern counterpart. The pejorative sense of 'ornament', meanwhile, is both a useful starting point for examining the structure of allegory and a crucial part of Kinsella's own critical discourse with regard to his poems and revision. Dismissively applied, the notion of 'ornament' is part of an ancient tradition of moral valuation of figurative language. Angus Fletcher notes that medieval theorists divided figures into 'mere' ornament, there to satisfy the reader's sensuous demands; and 'difficult' ornament, which leads the reader to a fundamental truth through the labour of deciphering.¹⁴ That this is a distinction easy to make in principle, but difficult to sustain when faced with a text, has not stopped literary theorists and critics from evolving many different versions of it. It is equally a component of Romantic valorisation of 'symbolism' and modernist reversals of prejudice in favour of 'allegory'. Even a very recent study, Deborah L. Madsen's Re-reading Allegory, which purports to have an empirical, textbased viewpoint, casts the history of allegory as a debate between 'fabulistic' allegory and 'figural' allegory, the latter valued over the former. 15

In Allegories of Reading Paul de Man acknowledges the power of such oppositions, seeing their origin in a persistent but unhelpful metaphor 'of literature as a kind of box that

separates an inside from an outside, and the reader or critic who opens the lid in order to release in the open what was secreted but inaccessible inside.' (De Man 5) This is a tenacious metaphor, as de Man illustrates, on occasion ironically slipping back into the easy, seductive terms it offers (De Man 12, 17). This model of intrinsic and extrinsic meaning, de Man suggests, should be replaced by close attention to rhetoric and grammar, language's ways of speaking about itself. However, despite his emphasis on rhetoric's instability (De Man 17) and its destructive effect on closed systems (De Man 61), the model of textuality outlined in *Allegories of Reading* requires a certain fixity from its texts. De Man presents the text as self-contained and auto-critical:

The deconstruction is not something we have added to the text but it constituted the text in the first place. A literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode, and by reading the text as we did we were only trying to come closer to being as rigorous a reader as the author had to be in order to write the sentence in the first place. (De Man 17)

'Simultaneously' asserting and denying its own rhetorical mode, this version of the 'literary text' comes close to being a closed system in itself, albeit one which is self-aware and aware of the self's lack of control over language. Indeed, de Man's eventual solution to the problem of confusion between the literary and the moral, the aesthetic and the ethical, is to designate them separate spheres which the self will inevitably, but destructively and erroneously, try to merge. '[N]othing could be more destructive' than the application of linguistic realities to the non-textual world and vice versa, but since it is bound to happen, our only option is a constant vigilance to the suppression of discontinuity between the textual and empirical worlds (De Man 158). Moral valuation of linguistic structures carries with it the political difficulties of allegory: didacticism and coercion, the dangerous involvement of textual abstractions in temporality, and the withdrawal of affect which permits bodies in the world to be captured and turned into signifiers in the text.

Both in his poems and in statements about his poetic practice, Kinsella repeatedly returns to ideas of ornamentation and elaboration to explain how he revises his poems, how he places a value on them. As noted above, he characterises his method of revision as one of 'abolition' of 'bad material' (*PIR* 63). His working definition of 'bad material' seems to be anything that is irrelevant to a strictly defined poetic purpose or simply over-elaborate:

It's not so much that I'm looking for anything laconic or lapidary, it's just that the notion of decorative language, of poetry as linguistic entertainment, seems to me a trivial exercise. I'm not talking about something necessarily elaborate, as with Rilke. What I mean is facile rhetoric, or 'music', or mimesis for its own sake. (*PIR* 65)

This statement focuses on specifically linguistic ornament – Kinsella is not, it seems concerned with imagery here, but with 'linguistic entertainment', linguistic 'mimesis' – and supports completely the traditional division of ornament into mere and difficult, 'decorative language' as opposed to 'necessary elaboration'. There is a general reluctance to define the terms or to give examples, beyond that brief mention of Rilke. This reluctance might stem from a genuine instability surrounding this discourse of ornament, a similar instability to that encountered by Puttenham in his exposition of the garment of style trope (Puttenham 149-150). Terms exhibit a tendency to change their meaning, signifiers become empty or ironised. Earlier in the same interview, Kinsella discusses the 'music of poetry' in enthusiastic terms, quite different from the scornful dismissal of '"music" 'quoted above:

The music of poetry, however understood, is of primary importance. [...] the rhythm of form – not merely the audible rhythm line by line but the achievement of a totality and the thematic connections amongst one's material – all of that is absolutely primary. (PIR 63)

What is 'primary' at one moment can become a signifier of superfluity – ' "music" ' – the next. These unstable shifts in critical idiom are often accompanied by reference to a stable

'totality', an organic unity of consciousness. Almost a decade after the interview with O'Driscoll, Kinsella made a similar point in conversation with Donatella Abbate Badin:

D.A.B. – In his writings about creativity, G.M. Hopkins draws a distinction between inspiration and "masterly exection" without which, he writes, the product is "one of those hen's eggs that are good to eat and look just like live ones but never hatch" [...] Aren't you yourself more concerned in execution than in the meaning of the poetry? T.K. – Surely Hopkins was thinking of himself. His own poetry is full of disproportionate "masterly execution". Language flourishing its qualities – drawing attention to itself at the expense of the meaning. Good poetry is a matter of organic balance [...] Important thoughts are welcome, but not necessary any more than a special diction. ¹⁶

Against this sketch of Kinsella as a moraliser of ornament and champion of poetic organicism, we might set his willingness to display poems as *inorganic* constructs, modified over time by revision, incorporating social as well as stylistic change. The poem 'Downstream', for instance, exists in five different versions, the first published in 1962, the last in 2001.¹⁷ Kinsella is also concerned for the fate of the poetic 'waste' he generates in the course of writing and rewriting. In an interview with Philip Fried, Kinsella stresses the importance of waste, dissolution and entropy for his project: 'waste is a significant part of the process, and [...] the process would have no significance unless the observing entity was present, making some sense of it.¹⁸ This implies that poetic waste, including superfluous ornament, is recyclable. The process of consideration, or digestion, as Kinsella often terms it, means that the 'observing entity' may reject that which is irrelevant or unnecessary, but it also means that the waste matter has come under scrutiny, re-entered the poet's experience, from which new poems might be made. Derval Tubridy suggests persuasively that whole poems might be assimilable waste matter in this way:

Some of the Peppercanister volumes, like *One Fond Embrace* and *Open Court* appear to squander the energies of criticism on ill-judged or out-of-date targets, but yet, when read in the context of the sequence as a whole, their tone and subject matter finds a level among other volumes as examples of the waste or detritus which must be assimilated[...]¹⁹

This suggestion, however nicely it accounts for what the reader might find boring or unpalatable in Kinsella, is finally untenable because of the prejudice it shows against public poetry, designating it a mere by-product of more psychologically 'inward' writing.

The ambivalence at the heart of Kinsella's confusion of ethics and aesthetics is registered in lapidary form in a recent poem, "The Design", quoted here in its entirety:

Goodness is required. It is part of the design. Badness is understood. It is a lapse, and part of the design.

Acknowledgement of the good and condemnation of the bad are required. Lapses are not understood.

(KCP2 341)

How we understand this poem depends very much on whether the two stanzas are meant to express attitudes held simultaneously or in sequence. Read as if the two positions are maintained simultaneously, as if the poem is a self-contained totality to be taken at a single gulp, the artist's position is presented as one of syllogistic self-contradiction. The parodypedantic diction begs the question of whether, in artistic and moral terms, this squib is good or bad material, and if the latter, whether it should be abolished or tolerated. That this question is put in terms of understanding or not understanding rebounds on the reader's own capacity for ambivalence – the poem asks if comprehension and tolerance can co-exist with their opposites. However, if the poem is read as a sequence of two positions, registering change over time, then its point is something rather more like MacNeice's in the historiographical sections of *Autumn Journal* and *Autumn Sequel*: the best and most liberal of intentions, particularly if they are expressed through a belief in order and 'design', can easily decline into prohibitive authoritarianism. The brevity of this poem then suggests not

ambivalent unity, but a time-lapse, fast-motion effect in which freedom and forgiveness decay almost instantaneously into their opposites. This tiny poem is, in fact, large enough to accommodate both readings. As it encompasses both tolerance and coercion, so it is both a finished artefact and an example of temporising rhetoric, housing a poetics of structure and a poetics of sequence. To put it another way, the 'design' is allegory.

For the reasons outlined above, ideas of 'ornament' and their connotations of superfluity and decoration are useful in an analysis of Kinsella's revisions. The notion of ornament touches upon many issues vital to the discussion of allegory: its anteriority and temporality, its coerciveness and authoritarianism, in short, its problematic involvement in selves, bodies, and nature. The rest of this section is concerned with ornament and revision, elaboration and de-elaboration, in successive versions of Kinsella's sequence 'Notes From the Land of the Dead' ('From the Land of the Dead' in both editions of the Collected Poems) and in the 'Other Poems' which accompanied it in 1973's New Poems. There are four versions of 'Notes From the Land of the Dead'. The Cuala Press version of 1972 was the first publication and includes the uncollected poem 'Invocation'. A slightly revised version of the sequence published by Cuala appears in New Poems 1973, with nine 'Other Poems' and 'A Selected Life'. In the 1996 Collected Poems the sequence is reduced to ten poems and re-titled 'From the Land of the Dead', a (misleading) suggestion of finalisation. The poems excluded from the sequence are now arranged before and after it, along with the nine 'Other Poems'. All the poems included in 'an egg of being', in addition to 'The Liffey Hill' and 'Good Night' now precede the sequence (NP 14-29, 49-53; KCP1 98-111). 'From the Land of the Dead' begins with 'Touching the River' and ends with three poems formerly designated 'Other Poems', 'The Clearing', 'Death Bed' and 'The Dispossessed' (112-123; NP 66, 68-70). 'Ely Place', originally part of the sequence, now follows it (126-127). Collected Poems 1956-2001

incorporates minor textual alterations to the 1996 version (KCP2 95-130). The arrangement of the poems is the same, except that 'Good Night' and 'The Liffey Hill' have now been deleted entirely.

(ii)

A starting point for a discussion of Kinsella's revisions is suggested by an interesting and little-remarked example of deletion and re-use. In the Cuala Press edition of *Notes from the Land of the Dead* a fairly long poem (over 100 lines) entitled 'Invocation' (*NLD* 9-15) appears between the poem 'hesitate, cease to exist' and the section entitled 'an egg of being'. It has not been reprinted in any subsequent collection. Despite its title, the poem does more to interrupt and delay than to summon its muse. The speaker concludes his invocation on a note of commitment to poetry, heavily inflected by deferral: 'Yes!/ Yes! Tomorrow: you'll see!' (*NLD* 15). Kinsella has commented that 'Invocation' 'is actually a kind of put-off and not much of a guarantee'. Its omission from *New Poems* clarifies the relationship between the drawing of an oval shape which concludes 'hesitate, cease to exist' (*NLD* 7; *NP* 12) and 'an egg of being', which begins with 'Hen Woman'. The tone of 'Invocation', uneasily poised between an arch, knowing attitude to the *aisling* or muse-figure and lush, overheated sexual fantasy, certainly has some interruptive qualities which the poet in search of a 'totality of imaginative response' might want to erase:

Suddenly awake, I upheaved deliciously choking in a moist wood, a narrow place.

[...]
Plucked through a fault
up vanishing out of dreamland
to reappear here
dragged rude upright
A man of my age!

 $[\ldots]$

Far off between me and the night I heard limbs moving upon each other, fragrant tresses lift and sway whispering

Come

(NLD 9-10)

On the other hand, interruption, desire stymied by self-consciousness, is a fully-formed thematic concern in 'Invocation', enacted in the speaker's false starts and premature ejaculations. As such, the poem is in keeping with the halting aesthetic laid out in 'hesitate, cease to exist' and followed up in the slow-motion moment of 'Hen Woman' and in the fragmentary structures of the 'Notes' as they appear in *New Poems*. Furthermore, 'Invocation' is actively useful to readers of 'Notes', acting as a key to the rest of the sequence. For instance, a reference to Proserpina, 'seeing again the fearful Proserpina/ [...]/ drop her poppies' (*NLD* 13), anticipates the allegorical importance of the pomegranate in 'A Hand of Solo'; and the muse-figure of 'Invocation' balances the grandmother/cailleach who also appears in 'Tear' and 'Ancestor' as well as the primal woman of 'Nuchal (a fragment)' and 'Touching the River'. So why omit 'Invocation' from *New Poems* when it is not an insupportable interruption, and in fact, offers another perspective on the allegories and archetypes in the rest of the work?

One answer might be that, by cutting this poem, the poet limits the reader's potential for allegoresis: by not mentioning Proserpina, he allows the later pomegranate to have an importance of its own. This would seem to be the implication of Kinsella's insistence, in an interview with Haffenden, that 'A Hand of Solo' 'obey[s] the facts – as in not calling the fruit a pomegranate unless it had been one'. That the fruit the child buys from his grandmother with a penny is a pomegranate is significant, but also coincidental: 'If the pomegranate had

been a less allegorical fruit that would have been quite all right' (Haffenden 109). Kinsella is concerned to present his allegory as an irruption of mythological significance into the temporal sequence of memory, rather than as a structuring of experience to conform with the allegory. The deletion of 'Invocation', with its muse-figure of Proserpina and an attendant clue to the dynamics of 'A Hand of Solo', is a minute signal that 'A Hand of Solo' should be read without prejudice. Revisions to 'Hen Woman' display a similar hostility to facile or formulaic allegoresis, as noted below.

A further reason for the omission of 'Invocation' is that the poem is very uncertain in tone, containing a lot of 'bad material'. Although the *New Poems* version of 'Notes' is receptive to what McCormack calls 'the Crass', 'Invocation' is in places insupportably arch. Kinsella acknowledges this, recycling the lines beginning 'Suddenly awake...' (quoted above) into a later poem:

XIII

I woke suffocating slipped through a time fault into total dark.

No.

I came to myself in the middle of a dark wood electric with hope.

Please...²⁴

As Floyd Skloot puts it, that 'Please...' is a 'Puh-leeze' (Skloot 176) of boredom and exasperation at finding oneself the sort of poet who makes facile allusions to Dante. The passage from *Songs of the Psyche* finds a way to incorporate 'bad material' without abandoning the principles that made the material seem bad in the first place. Such a procedure reinforces the reader's sense of the temporality of Kinsella's allegory, the sense that these poems are

structures constructed and modified from different viewpoints in time. This is particularly pronounced in the Peppercanister version. All subsequent versions omit the word 'time', correcting the anomalous sense of science fiction time-travel, but also effacing an acknowledgement of that temporality and an allusion to Dante's concern with the operation of time in the *Commedia*.

'Invocation' is also reworked in a poem which appeared nearly thirty years after the first publication of *Notes*, 'The Familiar' (1999).²⁵ Sections IV and VI of that poem are made up entirely of reworked material from 'Invocation'. 'The Familiar' preserves those parts of 'Invocation' which do not defensively ironise the muse or her relationship to the poet, so, for instance, the tender picture of the tough-footed nymph advancing towards him is retained, but not the uneasy characterisation of him as a comic blunderer ('modest run') nor Proserpina's squeals of rape!/ rape!:

on a field, or, floating
a nymph, fragrant; with gown
bellying, fertile.

I throw my hands
up in wonder, and break into
a modest run across the dew
to meet and greet you dancing
advancing in your flowers
as you spurn the very tops of the droplets
with your little tough feet...

Do I falter a little?
No more. It was only seeing again the fearful Proserpina

(rape!
rape!)

Again! In full view

(NLD 11-12)

On a field *or*:

a decorative flicker.

A nymph advancing

spurning the blades of the grass with little tough feet (KCP2 331)

The pun 'on a field or' (d'or = of gold) suggests the difference in tone between the two versions. The brittle, inflected tone of 'Invocation' ('on a field or, floating') deflects with irony the sense of the heraldic Field of the Cloth of Gold, whereas the less facetious mood of 'The Familiar' emphasises it. The evocation of pageantry works because it chimes with other allegorical or stylised elements in the later poem: the two crows and eucharistic breakfast in section VII (KCP2 332) and, in the chapbook, the reproduction of a medieval illustration of an Irish priest. The textual history of 'Invocation' – omitted from New Poems, broken up and reintroduced in Songs of the Psyche as a commentary on the failings of the 1972 poem, reincorporated into 'The Familiar' to signify abandonment of defensive irony and a renewed emphasis on abiding familial love – suggests how temporising rhetoric might coexist with Kinsella's repeated emphasis on the unity of his poetry. On one hand, his work can be regarded as unified, self-sufficient, revisiting the sites of previous poems for recyclable material, on the other, he does so with a sense of the change wrought by time, the later material commenting upon and modifying the earlier.

The exegetical freedom afforded the poet by these temporising structures is not necessarily extended to the reader. Revisions to 'Hen Woman' suggest that Kinsella wants to achieve an effect similar to the removal of 'Invocation' and its Prsoerpina, to limit exegetical possibilities, particularly where these concern mythological or esoteric imagery:

Then her eyes came to life, and she laughed and let the bird flap away. "It's all the one.
There's plenty more where that came from!"

Hen to pan! It was a simple world.

(NP 17)

Then her eyes came to life, and she laughed and let the bird flap away.

It's all the one.

There's plenty more where that came from!

(KCP1 100)

Then her eyes came to life, and she laughed and let the bird flap away.

"It's all the one. There's plenty more where that came from!"
(KCP2 99)

As numerous critics have told us, 'hen to pan' is a rough transliteration of a Gnostic slogan in Greek, meaning 'one is the all'. Pecifically, the slogan 'hen to pan' was associated with the ouroboros or world-snake, a figure that might connect with the serpent in the epigraph to Notes from the Land of the Dead (NLD 8, NP 8)²⁸ and similar imagery in One. In Gnostic cosmology the ouroboros divides the evil cosmos from the realms of light, and is thus an ambivalent figure, involved in both redemption and damnation. Jackson links this ambivalence to the ambiguities in Kinsella's treatment of feminine figures: Gnosticism was generally a misogynistic creed, but a few traditions preserved a redemptive place for the feminine. (Jackson 98) One small alteration to the ending of 'Hen Woman', the removal of the quotation marks from the woman's words in the Oxford Collected Poems changes the way the poem fashions femininity. 'It's all the one./ There's plenty more where that came from' could, in the 1996 version, be attributed to the poet-speaker as well as to her, making the statement less obviously that of a feminised Nature envisioned as a creator-destroyer goddess, and more of a general, gnomic utterance. In the 2001 Collected, the gendering

attribution returns. The larger change, the deletion of the lines 'Hen to pan!/ It was a simple world' also relates to Kinsella's sense of the importance of the feminine. The 1973 version is content that the poem be read in the context of Gnostic cosmology and Jungian esoterica, accepting the possibility that some heavy-handed exegetes might think the poem is about those things. In both Collected Poems this possibility is decisively removed, registering the effect of nearly three decades of criticism in fixing a meaning to the poem. The implication of the deletion is similar to the omission of 'Invocation' from New Poems: Kinsella wants the cailleach in each poem to be read, not in the context of a network of allusions to Greek mythology, Gnosticism, neo-Platonism and Jung, but in a precisely realised domestic setting, albeit one which continues to refer to Irish literary and folkloric traditions. Kinsella writes in his introduction to the New Oxford Book of Irish Verse:

Certain domestic images out of my own childhood insisted on sharpening until they found the image of the *cailleach*. I believe that these are processes at a level beyond the use of local colour, the ethnic as entertainment. And they are accompanied [...] by an amount of personal repossession in the form of commentary and translation. (xxix)

The Collected Poems versions repossess 'Hen Woman' for the poet (not for the female subject) from an exegetical, academic readership. These repossessions, in their renewed emphasis on Irish traditional material, are tinged by the prescriptive mood of the 'Introduction' to the Oxford Book, an indication of how a certain authoritarianism may come to inhabit a temporising gesture.

Finally, 'hen to pan' is simply duplication, a 'linguistic entertainment' that says nothing not said by 'It's all the one'. Its deletion is an opportunity for Kinsella to apply the tough, even utilitarian standards of relevance that he often outlines in interview: ²⁹ possible allusive connections between 'hen to pan' the final stanza of 'Phoenix Park', and to the ouroboric speaker in 'Up and awake' from One, (KCP2 159) clearly do not contribute

sufficiently to the 'totality of imaginative response' (*PIR* 63) to warrant the phrase's retention. This relatively small change to 'Hen Woman', then, signals a number of points about the ways we should read Kinsellan ornament and its removal. It signals a change in the poet-speaker himself: the poet of 1996 and 2001 is confident of the importance of his themes and does not, as his 1973 self did, have to rely on esoteric allusion to add depth or significance to his poetry. This growth in confidence is not necessarily accompanied by an expansion of possibility for the reader or a nuancing of the poet's conservative position regarding femininity: the revision is about the poet-speaker asserting control, the self taking possession of the text in a way that might be described as allelophagic.³⁰ It implies the rejection of certain sorts of learned wordplay, though not of simpler puns,³¹ and demands that allusion be precise, as far as possible not introducing subsidiary ideas or tonalities that are irrelevant to the main subject or voice of a poem.

The New Poems undergo some formal revisions, but these are generally less striking than Kinsella's deletions and abbreviations. In both editions of the Collected Poems line-length increases, perhaps most obviously because by the time of the revisions, the poet no longer needed to assert so strongly the difference between the measured form of the 1950s and 1960s work and the new, more open forms used in the 1970s. For the most part, Kinsella's lineation is more studied in the revised versions, at times approaching the sort of enactment that he seemed to condemn in O'Driscoll's 1989 interview as 'mimesis for its own sake'. In the 1973 'Irwin Street', for instance, 'A sparrow cowered/ on a doorstep. Under the broken door/ The paw of a cat reached out.' (NP 29) In the Oxford and Carcanet editions this is tidied to 'A sparrow cowered on a doorstep./ Under the broken door the paw of a cat/reached out.' (KCP2 108) In other revised poems, enacting gestures are more subtle, but the mimetic impulse is still present. Comparing 'Nuchal (a fragment)' in the New Poems (32-33)

and in the *Collected Poems* (KCP2 109-110), the reader notices that the short lines of the first stanza, which make the poem run down the page like a river, have been replaced in the later version with longer lines, which concentrate a sound pattern based on a short 'i' sound suggestive of glitter and dazzle, while anticipating the langour of the dreaming woman described in the second stanza: 'a half buried vase brimming over/ with pure water, a film of clear brilliancy/ spilling down its sides, rippling with reflections' (109).

Other revisions seem concerned to diminish rhythmic and phonic interest, more in line with Kinsella's repudiation of 'mimesis':

Draughts creep: shelter in them.

Deep misery: it is a pleasure.

Soil the self,

lie still.

Utter dread
of moving
the lips
to let out
the offence simmering
weakly
as possible
within.

Something crept in once
Was that a dream?
A flame of cold that crept under the back
and under the head huddled close
into the knees and belly.

('Survivor' NP 35-6)

Draughts creep: shelter in them.

Deep misery: it is a pleasure.

Soil the self, lie still.

Something crept in once. A flame of cold that crept under the back and under the head huddled close in to the knees and belly. Was that a dream?

('Survivor', KCP2 111)

The first change in this passage, from 'Soil the self,/ lie still' to 'Soil the self, lie still' is surprisingly significant. The antithetical arrangement of the previous lines leads the reader to expect another paradox along the lines of 'Draughts/shelter', 'Misery/pleasure', but the next image is actually one of simple, profound degradation, reinforced by repetition, not destabilised by oxymoron. The protagonist's self is soiled in the sense that he has become part of the earth, and also in the sense that he is lying in his own excrement. The first usage is grammatically eccentric, though a parallel with 'to earth' (= 'to neutralize') gives a clue as to how it came about; the second is oddly euphemistic in a poem that foregrounds sexual predation, fear of sexuality and grotesque disease. Both the grammatical eccentricity and the oddness of the euphemism are highlighted by the line break in the 1973 version, but in the later text the retention of the antithetical structure means that 'soil' is linked quite firmly to 'lie' (as 'Draughts' to 'shelter', 'misery' to 'pleasure') and the only sense which emerge with any force is that of the protagonist lying in his own faeces. 'Soil the self' is primarily a euphemism in the Collected Poems version of the poem, adding a note of rather misplaced decorum. Decorum, or appropriateness, seems to be the reason for the wholesale deletion of the next verse paragraph: 'Utter dread'. The verse paragraph is an instance of verbal mimesis of an emotional state: the poet figures the protagonist's dread of speech as a thin stuttering caption. Enactment, a way of making the text and the world it describes coincide, is rejected in favour of a renewed concentration on uncertainty of perception (Was that a dream?') and the disjunction of self and world.

The place of mimetic enactment is a rather vexed issue in Kinsella's poetry: sometimes his procedures endorse it, at other times resist it as a form of 'mere' ornament or illusion. This can be related to the basic division in his poetics, between authoritarian-inflected organicism and a rhetoric which acknowledges change wrought by time. As de

Man remarks with regard to Rilke (Kinsella's example of a 'necessarily elaborate' poet), the poet engineers the circumstances whereby an organic totality of meaning and experience appears:

But it is not surprising that, in evoking the details of the metaphorical instrument or vehicle[...] the metaphor comes into being before our eyes, since the object has been chosen exactly for this purpose. The correspondence does not confirm a hidden unity that exists in the nature of things and entities [...] Perfect adjustment can take place only because the totality was established beforehand and in an entirely formal manner. (De Man 37-8)

Kinsella's rejections of mimesis, meanwhile, suggest a commitment to demystifying the mechanics of his poems, a laying open which also receives thematic treatment in numerous poems, the most well-known of which is *A Technical Supplement*. To conclude this section, however, and to point towards some of the themes of section III, 'Order', I offer a number of reflections on a poem which both experiments with phonic mimesis and undergoes very considerable revision, 'Good Night' (NP 51-53; KCP1 109-110). The last poem in 'Notes from the Land of the Dead', it is appears in the group of poems preceding the sequence in the Oxford *Collected Poems* and is deleted altogether from the Carcanet.³²

The original poem is somewhat confused, appearing to offer a grotesque picture of a psychological entity, interrupted by portentous voices from outside it. The revision minimises the contribution of the voices, but at the same time maximises their importance, because voice – or more precisely – sound is actually a structuring principle in this poem. Not sound that is fitted to semantic meaning, but the reverse: in this poem meaning often seems to be subordinated to phonic gratification. This may seem an odd claim to make of a poem that seems primarily visual and tactile in its preoccupations, but some comparative examples from the revised and unrevised versions make the underlying sound-structure apparent:

It is so peaceful, at last: the heat creeping through the house the floorboards reacting in the corner. The voices in the next room boom on in their cabinet. How it brings out the least falseness! There is one of them chuckling at a quiet witticism of his own.

(NP 51)

It is so peaceful at last: the heat creeping through the house, the floorboards reacting in the corner.

The voices in the next room boom on in their cabinet. Would you agree then we won't find any truths ...

How it brings out every falseness. There is one of them laughing at a remark of his own.

-that we need as we don't need truth ... (KCP1 109)

In addition to a chastened diction, the revision clarifies the interplay between the front vowels in 'peaceful', 'last', 'heat', 'creeping' and 'reacting' and the back vowels of 'floorboards', 'voices', 'room' and 'boom' by dividing the first five lines into two stanzas. By lifting the phrase 'that we need as we don't need truth' from its position near the intensely felt end of the poem and replacing it here, near the beginning, Kinsella also adds phonic interest. Back vowels in 'would', 'you', 'won't', 'truth', almost alternate with the front vowels in 'agree', 'then', 'we' and 'any'; and the diphthong in 'find' starts as a back vowel and finishes in a front position. 'That we need as we don't need truth' first alternates open and closed front tongue positions: 'that we need as we' (open-closed-closed-open-closed) and then front and back vowels again: 'don't need truth' (back-front-back). Not only does this phrase sound less portentous, less defensively and bitterly ironic in its new location, it also introduces the idea that this is a poem about movement, particularly movement in a

confined space (house, room, cabinet) like the human mouth. The house, room or cabinet, then, in the most fundamental metaphorical movement, is a macrocosm of the human body or mouth.³³

The poem's meaning is very often subordinated to its sound. In the 1973 version phrases such as 'human thighs growing out of the smooth rock/ and moving over each other down near their roots' (52), or the final line of the poem, 'and ungulfs a Good Night, smiling' (53) do not so much mimic the image's meaning as determine it, as if the word 'smiling' is organically, intrinsically determined by the spread lips necessary to articulate it. The same vowel in 'thigh' does a similar job metaphorically: the spread mouth mimicking the moving 'root' of the thigh. The revised poem retains this sense of meaning subordinated to sound ends 'a low cry echoing: Camacamacamac...' (110). The cry certainly has a meaning: the Camac is an underground river in Dublin, and its chattering appearance here appropriately concludes a poem about the darker presences in the human psyche. It also sounds like 'comebackcomebackcomeback', suggesting a further kind of movement, back into a more primitive mode of consciousness. Nonetheless, the reader feels that these explanations are secondary in comparison to the need of the speaker-poet to make noise, to move tongue and lips. Communicative purpose defers to the simple transfer of sound through air. Sound also enters this poem in the form of the booming voices which the speaker hears from the next room. They precipitate his vision and, later, interrupt it. A phrase that seems to come from a human source in the 1973 version: 'Oblivion, our natural condition...' (NP 51), is reassigned in the Collected Poems to

> essences disturbed from what profounder nothingness, where monsters lift soft self-conscious voices, urgent yet mannerly:

Please, I would remind...

Oblivion, our natural condition... (KCP1 110)

Reading the versions in conjunction, we note that the *Collected Poems* version assumes an ironic perspective on its 1973 counterpart. The pomposity that the speaker irritably condemns in *New Poems* — 'How it brings out the least falseness!' (51) — is no longer a source of irritation, but of grotesque comedy, when it is imagined emanating from the 'monsters'. However, this temporising gesture, whereby we have a sense of the older poet satirising the preoccupations of a younger self, is persistently undercut by a movement to establish, in earnest, an organic-seeming totality.

The speaker of 'Good Night', to quote de Man on Rilke again, uses a language that is 'devoid of semantic depth', in which

Possibilities of representation and of expression are eliminated in an askesis which tolerates no other referent than the formal attributes of the vehicle. Since sound is the only property of language that is truly immanent to it and that bears no relation to anything that would be situated outside language itself, it will remain the only available resource. (De Man 32)

Sound is important for the poet trying to rid his compositions of the things that Kinsella castigates in interview: 'decorative language', 'linguistic entertainment', 'facile rhetoric', 'mimesis for its own sake', because sound is the only property of language which can convincingly be presented as inherent, organic. Paradoxically, the attempt to represent psychic depths 'below' the fully conscious self who produces decorative language, necessitates the adoption of a language that resists 'depth', if 'depth' is understood to mean those semantic structures which determine relative importance of words and clauses. The elimination of elaboration and ornament leads to a paratactic natter whose only 'meaning' resides in the transfer of sound from one space to another:

and feed us and feed in us and coil and uncoil in our substance so that in that they are there we cannot know them, and that, daylit, we are the monsters of our night, and somewhere the monsters of our night are here, in nightnothing that our daylight feeds in and feeds, wandering out of their cavern, a low cry echoing – Camacamacamac... (KCP1 110)

This poem deliberately inverts the usual relation of language and its referents, whereby we feel that poetic language represents something which is not language. Visual imagery is marshalled to represent the movement of sound. The reader comes to realise that the space which 'Good Night' presents is not primarily a metaphor for a psychological entity but an allegorical representation of the echo chamber of metaphor itself. In some ways this is a rather dismaying conclusion. Here, instead of a poem whose primary purpose is communication with an audience, is yet another ironised, self-reflexive commentary on writing poetry. Kinsella's work is full of them, hermetically sealed from the world like the reclusive figure Kinsella describes in 'hesitate, cease to exist' and 'Worker in Mirror, At His Bench'. However, 'Good Night' can bear a much more politically engaged interpretation, which I want to suggest with an analogy between resonance – noise – and reflection.

New Poems is a collection preoccupied with glitter and surface sheen, from the opening invocation to 'hesitate, cease to exist, glitter again', through the glimmering gifts given the speaker of 'The High Road' (NP 21; KCP2 102) and 'Ancestor' (24; 104) and the dazzling waters of 'Nuchal' and 'Touching the River' (NP 48; KCP1 112; KCP2 109), to the self-reflexive ironic rejection of 'depth' in 'Good Night' and 'Worker in Mirror, At His Bench' (NP 59-63; KCP2 123-126). The collection concludes with a short poem, 'Wyncote, Pennsylvania: a gloss':

A mocking-bird on a branch outside the window, where I write, gulps down a wet crimson berry, shakes off a few bright drops from his wing, and is gone into a thundery sky.

Another storm coming.
Under that copper light
my papers seem luminous.
And over them I will take
ever more painstaking care.
(NP 75, KCP2 130)

The play on earlier images of reflection and luminosity is clear. The poem is a 'gloss' on the rest of the book, in the sense that it invites the reader to weigh the other poems in the light of it. As Jackson comments, 'this is the lee shore gained, gained not without cost [...] the horrors passed through in earlier poems confer a highly moving intensity' (Jackson 94-95). The poem is also an imitation of medieval monastic 'glosses', in the sense not of hermeneutic notes, but of short lyrics felicitously preserved in manuscripts to which they might have only a tenuous connection. Kinsella translated some of these for the New Oxford Book of Irish Verse, fresh, immediate observations on natural subjects, sometimes with a corollary thanking God for the bounty of his creation, sometimes not. One of Kinsella's translations, composed in syllabics, consciously echoes haiku form: 'How lovely it is today!/ The sunlight breaks and flickers/ on the margin of my book' (30).

Wyncote, Pennsylvania', is rather different from these. For a start, the figure of Ezra Pound – Wyncote was his birthplace – hovers over the poem, reminding us of Kinsella's ethical struggles with Pound's fascism in 'Downstream' (see below, section III). We are very conscious, from the title, and from the 'mocking-bird' of the first line, that a figural transition has occurred, a medieval Irish form has been translated to a modern (or modernist) American setting. Finally, and most importantly, Kinsella goes further than his medieval models in appropriating the natural world to individual consciousness. Where the monastic glosses, even at their most anthropomorphic, present a nature which is other to

the poet – in dialogue with him, perhaps, but not part of him – the speaker's brief sighting of the mocking-bird and the pre-storm light are captured in order to signify something about him. Because it is a *mocking*-bird, we understand that the speaker feels himself both a figure of fun and a satirist – also, perhaps, an imitator, 'mocking' in the sense of repeating, parroting. The luminosity of his papers becomes not an attribute of the approaching storm, but of the poet's painstaking care – or, to take it to an extreme, the storm is an extension of the ruminating, brooding persona with which Kinsella has satirical fun in 'Good Night' and 'Worker in Mirror'. This is a wholly anthropocentric poem, a poem which imposes human order upon nature while making it appear that nature is revealing its intrinsic order to the human observer.

This is not a politically neutral act, as Kinsella's concern to present his poetic practice as one of discovering order, rather than imposing it, indicates. Shaping nature to the will of the self involves the reduction of all that is not the self to the status of matter that can be made to mean something, matter imprintable by form. This is the act of allegorical capture, an act of violence which attempts to make the world coincide with the self. Though that violence is concealed, re-presented as revelation of a natural order, traces of it remain. The resistance of the indifferent matter (to which the ordering consciousness has reduced nature) to its being made to signify creates a kind of white noise, a hum of struggle which exists just out of the reach of that ordering consciousness. All the authoritarian self can do in this situation is to insist that this noise is, in fact, the resonance of truth. This situation is the one dramatised in 'Good Night'. The speaker attempts to organise the 'sounds of the house' into meaningful groups, often sounding ridiculous as he does so, while the sounds mount increasingly tangible resistance to him, producing automatic cliché phrases 'and the voices of a norm/ that is in course of (NP 51), 'Please, I would remind...' (KCP1 110) then a kind of

intricate chatter which culminates in 'Camacamacamac...' One of the subjects of this poem is the violence individual selves do to that which is not the self in order to create psychic order, and pass that violent creation off as a natural and benign revelation. 'Good Night' reveals the signifying resonances of *New Poems* for what they are – the by-products of the violence that assimilates nature to the self, contradicting Kinsella's determination to uncover 'form and unity' in his poetic 'data' (*PIR* 65). It comes as little surprise that the poem has itself been suppressed in the latest *Collected Poems*, though it has an afterlife in poem 10 of *A Technical Supplement*:

It is so peaceful at last: sinking onward into a free reverie – if you weren't continually nudged awake by little scratching sounds and brushing sounds outside the door or muffled voices upstairs. (KCP2 183)

This poem is forthright, in a way that 'Good Night' is not, about the speaker's desire to impose order, and impose himself, upon his surroundings. Although it may still be read as an allegory of poetic composition or psychic self-renovation, a muscular engagement with an other, recognised as such, has replaced the ambition of the speaker of 'Good Night' to experience a psychic revelation by coinciding with his environment:

We have to dig down, sieve, scour and roughen; make it all fertile and vigorous – get the fresh rain down! (KCP2 184)

III: ORDER

(i)

In his review of *Autumn Sequel*, Kinsella remarks approvingly on the conclusion of MacNeice's poem: 'the knot is cut, not opened, which is symptomatic and a good ending.

This poet has found that, if anything is to be gained, problems must be lived through, not solved'. 34 This strikes a stoical note which the reader might particularly associate with Kinsella's poems of the 1960s, Wormwood and 'Phoenix Park', the relationship of which to allegory is addressed below, in subsection (ii). '[S]ymptomatic and a good ending', however, raises a rather different set of issues. MacNeice's poem leaves its speaker suspended between motion and stasis, 'This train approaches London. Quickly. Slowly.' (AS XXVI, 133; 439), in a manner which theorists have commented upon as characteristic of allegorical structure. Fletcher notes the tendency of allegories to infinite extension - analogical correspondences are 'incomplete and incompletable' (Fletcher 177) - and as a result, 'arbitrary closure' (175). Balanchandra Rajan, discussing the unfinished aesthetic of The Faerie Queene, remarks that 'closure is foreseen but deferred, with the poem remaining receptive to and even infiltrated by the finality it cannot attain.³⁵ Kinsella experimented with this possibility in the allegorical progress form in a number of progress poems composed during the 1960s, including 'A Country Walk' (1962), 'Nightwalker' (1967), and most troublesome and troubling of all, 'Downstream'. The deferred resolution of 'Downstream' - 'Searching the darkness for a landing place' (KCP2 50) - is just about all that has remained unchanged over four decades of revisions. The changes register shifts in Kinsella's attitude to the 'poet's or artist's eliciting of order' (Fried 15).

In its first, 1962 incarnation, 'Downstream' is an intensely ornamented poem. Robin Skelton notes 'the almost decadent romanticism of the imagery', ³⁶ the demands of *terza rima* occasionally overwhelm narrative propulsion:

Past whispering sedge and river-flag that lined The shallow marshlands wheeling on the furrow And groups of alder moving like the blind;

By root and mud-bank, otter-slide and burrow

The river bore us, with a spinal cry Of distant plover, to the woods of Durrow. (D 50)

Few critics have regretted the loss of such passages. Kinsella's 1964 and 1968 revisions are welcomed as bringing rigour and discipline to the poem (Skelton 104), while John commends the 'universal relevance' afforded by the erasure of references to Durrow (68). Jackson strikes a note of unease with Kinsella's revisions, finding 'Downstream II' 'more limited in scope than the original', which is a 'compendium of the thematic concerns of Kinsella's earlier work' (24). 'Downstream II' is an oddly truncated poem compared with its precursor, which traces a progression in the speaker's attitude to nature and history which is analogous to the poet's response to allegory.

The first version of 'Downstream' gradually implicates its speaker in an authoritarian, hierarchical cosmos with allegorical devices. These include Yeatsian emblematics: 'A ghost of whiteness broke into life, upheaved/ On crest of wing and water out of hiding/ And swanned into flight' (D 51), and more problematically, the pageantry of Ezra Pound's 'China Cantos' (Cantos LII-LXI)³⁷:

I chose the silken kings,

Luminous with crisis, epochal men
Waging among the primal clarities
Productive war. Spurred by the steely pen

To cleansing or didactic rages, these Fed the stream in turn

(D 51)

His choice might seem 'curious', as Alex Davis remarks in his essay on Kinsella's debt to Pound: the China Cantos are 'among the driest', in which polyphony is replaced by monologic listing. Although the passage that Kinsella's speaker reads refers only implicitly to Mussolini's Italy, the rest of the China Cantos are scattered with appeals to Fascist and

anti-Semitic ideology; they are, as one critic quoted by Davis comments, 'a glaring example of regime art, or [...] "fascist realism" '.³⁹ The pleasure Kinsella's speaker evinces in these poems is pleasure in their allegorical structures, in the establishment of hierarchies which give the impression of 'primal clarities', in the way that they make 'men' characterise epochs, in the luminosity – compare the 'noise' of 'Good Night' – emitted by suppressed violence, in the text's involvement in the world: 'these/ Fed the stream in turn'. As it grows too dark to read, 'The gathering shades beginning to deceive/ Night stole the princely scene' the speaker is vouchsafed a vision of order, the importance of which is suggested by its use as an epigraph to 'Downstream II':

Drifting to meet us on the darkening stage A pattern shivers; whorling in its place Another holds us in a living cage

And drifts to its reordered phase of grace; Was it not so?

 $(D 51)^{40}$

Davis finds in these lines an 'interpretative crux [...] Do these shivering "phase[s] of grace" provide a natural correlative to the "epochal men" [...]? This question leaches into the central problematic of Kinsella's poetry, early and late: the relationship between poetic "order" and the vagaries of lived experience.' (41) The 'central problematic' of Kinsella's poetry in this account, then, is an allegorical one: can the 'hierarchising mode' ever be other than hostile to human particularity; is it possible to wrest any kind of liberation from its ordering structures? Davis suggests that the question which immediately follows the revelation of pattern and grace ('Was it not so?') dispels or at least disrupts the Poundian illusion of timeless order and textual agency in the world (Davis 41). But 'Downstream' continues in the illusion for another thirty lines, bringing its speaker to a point of embarrassing intensity in his desire to control and order the cosmos:

I stood on the strange earth and stared aloft,

Urmensch and brute, in glassy unconcern, Where specks of alien light icily hung Sprinkled in countless silence —there to learn

How the remote chaotic, far outflung
In glittering waste, may shiver and become
A mesh of order, every jewel strung!
(D 52-53)

This revelation of order places the speaker in a chain of being: he partakes of demi-god ('Urmensch'⁴¹) and 'brute', and thus occupies the place traditionally ascribed to humans in such cosmic arrangements. His 'glassy unconcern' is a device characteristic of allegory: as Teskey notes in *Allegory and Violence*, the mode presumes an intelligence below its coded discourse, and is anxious to present that intelligence as benign and reclusive, withdrawing before the probing of a reader it posits as aggressive. In fact, the presiding intelligence of allegory is seductive, ideologically coercive and desires coincidence with the world (Teskey 62), something Kinsella's speaker finds it impossible to conceal beneath 'unconcern':

Mind shifted in its seed; with ancient thumb I measured out above the Central Plain The named heavens bright continuum,

And, knowing the birth of soul again, The dim horizon uttered a word of thunder A soft flash of far Promethean pain. (D 53)

The second movement of the poem rebukes the desire to control and ultimately consume one's environment by presenting grim images of man coinciding with nature in decay: 'A man one night fell sick and left his shell/ Collapsed, half-eaten, like a rotted thrush's' or in a Boschian phantasmagoria inspired by the speaker's recollection of first hearing about the Holocaust: 'the evil dream where rodents ply,/ Man-rumped, sowheaded, busy with whip and maul // Among nude herds of the damned.' (D 54) The deceptive

'glassy unconcern' of the speaker, secure in the hierarchy between god and animal, is ironically juxtaposed to the corpse's gaze: 'It searched among the skies/ Calmly encountering the starry host/ Meeting their silver eyes with silver eyes' (D 55). '"Downstream" subjects to quizzical scrutiny the "pattern" after which it nonetheless hankers' (Davis 42), but its power to scrutinise is fatally damaged by the implications of its own allegorical making. The speaker claims that the anecdote of the corpse 'like a rotted thrush's' made him realise that each of the victims of the Holocaust, whom he had previously imagined as a collective, 'a formal drift of the dead/ Stretched calm as effigies on velvet dust/ Scattered on starlit slopes with arms outspread' were equally particular, individual beings, whose corpses would make 'actual mess' (D 55). By the end of the poem, this insight has been forgotten and allegorical order has taken possession of the speaker once again, in terms that recall his positioning of himself as 'Urmensch and brute':

The phantoms of the overhanging sky Occupied their stations and descended; Another moment, to the starlit eye,

The slow, downstreaming dead, it seemed, were blended One with those silver hordes, and briefly shared Their order, glittering.

(D56)

Such a return to hierarchical allegory ('stations'), which legitimises the desire of the self to order the other ('were blended/ One') aids the poem's 'arbitrary closure'; as in Rajan's account of allegorical closure, the permanent deferral of 'Searching the darkness for a landing place' is enabled by these infiltrations of hypostatised finality into the progress narrative. The shape of the original 'Downstream' is distinct: it builds to a point of fixed allegorical order, attempts to dismantle that order, fails, starts to build again, but defers forever the consequences of that second attempt to build. It illustrates the political problems that allegory brings with it, suggesting that they are, unfortunately and

uncomfortably, a function of the mode's appeal, and the extreme difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of disrupting allegorical hierarchy within allegorical frameworks.

'Downstream II', by omitting the first movement, in which the fascination of allegory is acknowledged through allusions to the China Cantos' 'silken kings', foreshortens this allegorical shape. The poem now focuses roundly on the story of the corpse and the speaker's horror at the Nazi genocide; we no longer have a sense of how the speaker's pleasure in allegorical pageantry and his positioning of himself in allegorical terms permits and produces his vision of horror, and by inference, the 'calamity' itself (D 54). Order and pattern function as benign instruments of a necessary and instructive revelation of death and violence, and the return to hierarchical ordering at the poem's close simply mirrors its epigraph, making 'Downstream II' a more conventional essay into the heart of darkness than its antecedent.

In apparent recognition of these limitations, subsequent revisions reintroduce elements of the original poem. The Oxford Collected Poems restores the narrative (not the form: the terza rima is only resumed with the anecdote of the corpse) of the first movement, the speaker reading from the Cantos, then getting out of the boat, 'Naming old signs above the Central Plain./ Distant light replied, a word of thunder.' The speaker of this version is less enchanted by Poundian pageantry, its heroes being 'silken kings/ Luminous with crisis' but not 'epochal men', and there are no 'primal clarities' in which to wage 'productive war', no 'princely scene'. He also seems more aware of and resistant to its seductive power: 'I closed the book/ The gathering shades beginning to deceive', though he is not impervious to the allegorical delusion that by naming, he can impose order upon nature, and reinscribe arbitrary events as a response to that imposition, an answering light or a 'word of thunder' (KCP1 48). The restoration of the first movement of the narrative refocuses 'Downstream'

on artistic problems, on the responsibility entailed by any claim to represent nature or the historical past. The change in its form and diction means that it is harder to draw instructive parallels, for instance between the speaker's gazing at the stars and the corpse's empty upward stare. The disappearance of distancing poetic diction⁴² makes the speaker a more sympathetic and thoughtful figure; his implication in the problems of 'regime art' less immediately perceptible but more effective when it is perceived.

The version of 'Downstream' in *Collected Poems 1956-2001* restores more features of the original poem. The opening line, 'The West a fiery complex, the East a pearl', returns, the boat is a 'skiff' again (47). Although the form of the first movement is still looser than the *terza rima* of the second, there is less of an attempt than in 1996 to form longer, independent stanzas. The first movement is now arranged as a kind of fragmented *terza rima* which develops coherence as the anecdote of the corpse approaches (47-48). Most surprising of all, some of the speaker's enthusiasm for the 'silken kings' has been restored: 'Luminous with crisis, waging war/ Among the primal clarities. Their names dying/ Behind us in the dusk' (*KCP2* 47). Kinsella emphasises allegory's nostalgia and anteriority, its assaults upon the already made to forge new meanings, which make appeals to 'primal clarities' probable, if not inevitable, in allegorical expression. There is a certain self-reflexivity in his emphasis; the most recent 'Downstream' makes return calls on forty years of alteration and revision. The speaker's naming of the stars is also embellished:

Night voices: soft Lips of liquid, while the river swept Its spectral surface by.

He coughed, Standing against the sky. I took my turn Standing on the earth, staring aloft

At fields of light sprinkled in countless silence;

I named their shapes, above the Central Plain, With primal thumb.

Low on the horizon A shape of cloud answered with a soft flash And a low word of thunder.

(KCP2 48)

A deliberately unshowy diction, with apparently artless repetitions of 'soft', 'Standing', 'shape', 'low', replaces the noisy rhetoric of 'Urmensch and brute' (the rhyme 'coughed/aloft' no longer seems bathetic) but with regard to his political stance, this speaker positions himself exactly where his 1962 counterpart stood. He participates in the chain of being, '[s]tanding on the earth, staring aloft', he orders the world with an allegorical anteriority – 'primal thumb' – and his reinscription of natural noise as acquiescence in his ordering project is now unmistakable: where the Oxford edition had 'Distant light replied, a word of thunder' (KCP1 48), which could be interpreted as a rebuke or warning, the response is now 'soft', 'low', an excellent thing in personified and feminised Nature.

'Downstream' is an allegorical progress narrative which also describes the progress of allegory. The poem details the mode's aggregative ambition, gradually taking possession of a textual space and the text itself, capturing the other to make it signify within its system. Resistance to the signifying system is posited, in the form of objects like the corpse, which might appear to be radically other, unable to signify. Such resistance is ultimately captured in its turn, the 'slow downstreaming dead' becoming a token of order to inspire the speaker's quest. The textual history of 'Downstream' is also a form of progress allegory, self-reflexively charting the progress of a particular allegory, as it develops across time. Kinsella's other progress allegories of the 1960s, 'A Country Walk' and 'Nightwalker', might also be productively considered in this way, though the revisions made to 'A Country Walk' are less extensive and those to 'Nightwalker' less clear in intention than to 'Downstream'.

The Peppercanister publications are often considered to mark something of a turn away from progress allegories articulated as physical journeys, towards psychic quests. In Davis's words:

Jung's discussion of the process of individuation draws its inspiration from the procedures of medieval and renaissance alchemy, and structurally speaking, constitutes a variety of quest-romance: the alchemist's *decensus ad infernos* and culminating *hierogamos* or chymical wedding afford a formal analogy for a wholeness of being attainable through the integration of consciousness and unconsciousness. (Davis 51)

While the influence of alchemy and Neoplatonic esoterica on Jung (and on Kinsella) is undeniable, this assertion is similar to Fletcher's blithe assurance that progress narratives need not involve a physical journey (Fletcher 153), 44 and is troubling for similar reasons. A psychoanalytic procedure is only a 'quest' insofar as it has already been allegorised, even if it is heavily dependent on the archetypal imagery or mythic narrative from which allegories typically draw their material. Although Kinsella does use quest narratives, he usually employs other metaphorical structures to represent intense psychic scrutiny: vivisection, consumption and digestion, domestic scenery. The wandering, journeying persona in Kinsella often signifies the accommodation of the self in society, a theme which grows very prominent in his poems of the late 1980s and 1990s: Peppercanister publications from St Catherine's Clock (1987) to The Pen Shop (1997) feature journeys and quests to a greater extent than anything since 'Nightwalker'. Four Peppercanisters is perhaps too few to mark a trend, but Kinsella's publications since The Familiar seem to be returning to more introverted and static concerns while maintaining a mobile lightness that we might associate with the kinetic societal self. Some of these chapbooks read like digests of the dense psychic explorations of the late 1970s and early 80s. The glosses which frame 'Godhead', 'High Tide: Amagansett' and 'Midnight, San Clemente: a gloss' (KCP2 335, 340) preserve a tension between inside and

outside which is reminiscent of *Song of the Night and Other Poems* and its productive contrast between physical journey – 'Tao and Unfitness at Inistiogue on the River Nore', for example (KCP2 205) – and psychic 'quest'. 'Migrants' records a moment of equilibrium between stasis and movement, 'Migrants. Of limited distribution.' (KCP2 343), which brings a light touch to a characteristically Kinsellan image of 'insistent animal life confronting unknown immensities, the language of a blind groping and twisting, and the expressed need to sacrifice the supports of the self in order to sustain an inward progress'. The rest of this section, then, is concerned with exploring Kinsella's forms of allegorical order and their political implications, and with describing models – including, but not confined to, the quest – for those ordering structures.

(ii)

In his early study of Kinsella's poetry, Maurice Harmon comments:

Fundamentally, the problem is one of language, or of translating a concept of existence, of endurance, into words, since the quest for order, for love, for moral values amid appalling conditions of action and feeling necessarily involves the search for a language adequate to the terms of that search and the nature of its motivations. ⁴⁶

Harmon's emphasis on language might also serve as a caution against making too simple an equation of the search for order and poetic form. The use of traditional measures and forms does not necessarily indicate a greater degree of order sought or achieved, nor is the opposite true. An assertion such as Ian Flanagan's 'the latent disorder which is present in the early work and the formal disordering which is embraced consistently in the work written after 1968 can be seen as deeply subversive' misreads Kinsella's political position with regard to his search for order. Linking closed form with order (or 'latent disorder') and open form with disorder means that a critic sympathetic to Kinsella's later work must

embrace subversion and disorder as positive values, which seems contrary to the mood of all the poet's work, early and late. Moreover, to suggest that Kinsella has been a constant advocate of 'disorderly' open form is to marginalise much of his satirical poetry. 'Nightwalker', which rests on a blank verse foundation, and is 'more closed than it looks', as Kinsella remarks (PIR 63), Butcher's Dozen and 'Open Court' all fall foul of an equation of open form with valorised subversion and radicalism.

So, following Harmon, the reader might look to diction, tone or imagery rather than to form in trying to establish the terms of Kinsella's ordering structures, since allegorical making can take many formal shapes. This prose-poem preface to *Wormwood* adopts the stilted tone and abstract diction that often signal an artistic or moral *credo* in Kinsella's poetry, reflecting his ironic attitude towards preordained patterning, even as he seems to desire it:

This bitter cup is offered, heaped with curses, and we must drink or die. And even though we drink we may also die, if every drop of bitterness – that rots the flesh – is not transmuted. [...] But if we drink bitterness and can transmute it and continue, we resume in candour and doubt the only individual joy – the restored necessity to learn. Sensing a wider scope, a more penetrating harmony, we begin again in a higher innocence to grow towards the next ordeal. (*KCP2* 62)

The passage suggests a Christian image of communion in suffering, inflected by agony that must be faced alone – Christ's cry in Gethsemane: 'Father, [...] take away this cup from me' (Mark 14:36) – but also a secular philosophy which attributes value to learning, 'candour and doubt'. The bitter cup is Socrates' hemlock as well as communion chalice; the tone, curiously poised between high seriousness and pompous absurdity, a kind of Socratic irony designed to trap the earnest exegete. The same tone recurs in 'Phoenix Park':

Love, it is certain, continues till we fail, Whenever (with your forgiveness) that may be – At any time, now totally, ordeal Succeeding ordeal till we find some death,

Hoarding bitterness, or refusing the cup; (KCP2 91)

'Love, it is certain continues until we fail' is an amplified version of *Wormwood's* 'Love also, it seems, will continue until we fail'; 'ordeal/ Succeeding ordeal' echoes 'ordeal after ordeal' in the earlier preface. Lofty diction is mitigated by moments of intimacy: 'What was on your thoughts...saying, after a while,/ I write you nothing, no love songs, any more?' (*KCP2* 87), but the 'we' and 'you' of both these poems is indeterminate, referring specifically to the speaker and his beloved and to human beings in general, so that the poems are held in tension between confessional discourse and a more abstract mood.

This indeterminacy also affects the allegorical structures of the poem. 'Phoenix Park' begins with a prologue in which the speaker addresses his beloved, remembers her serious illness, and offers her a gift of one thing he knows to be enduring: the dream-vision he subsequently recounts, and the episode of psychic or spiritual 'preparation' that he undergoes before the dream. This structure of prologue, preparation and dream overlaps with a structure of numbered sections, section 1 including the prologue and most of 'The preparation' (KCP2 87-88), section 2 encompassing the final three stanzas of preparation and the beginning of 'The dream' (89-91) and sections 3 and 4 completing the dream (KCP2 91-94). Each of the four sections begins with a departure: 'One stays or leaves' (KCP2 87), 'We leave the Park' (89), 'we finish and rise to go' (91), 'The road divides and we can take either way' (92), 48 which as well as being a physical departure from a location in or around the Park is also a departure into meditation and abstraction. This, Jackson comments, makes the poem an 'oddly literalized [...] quest-romance: each of its four sections involves departure from a place into a condition' (50). The overlap of this structure of departures with prologue, preparation and dream, however, complicates the extent to which we can see it as 'literal'.

The couple's arrival at a bar in Lucan, for example, precedes the dream-vision of the cup of order, but they drain their glasses, 'finish and rise to go' as part of the dream (KCP2 89-91). The dream-vision structure, with its inflection of mysticism and secret knowledge, is laid on top of a more profane configuration of departure, adventure and return, the two structures establishing contact as the speaker discovers with each departure that his adventure is an abstract and mystical one, 'mere idea' (KCP2 91). A linguistic layer of structuring is apparent in the speaker's compulsive return to certain words: 'order', 'hunger', 'flesh', 'ordeal', 'give, 'tear', 'love', 'waste', 'dark(ness)'; an imagistic layer in his reminiscences, of a child picking mushrooms, of a woman who stopped him on the street, of 'Sara' in 'her Communion finery' (88). These layers connect in the hypostatised allegorical imagery of the crystalline ordeal-cup and the torn body in pain, but remain independently visible as structuring elements. The cup and the torn body, which, recalling Wormwood's uneasy confluence of Christian and Socratic or stoic sacrifice, are set in secular, sometimes eroticised, opposition to the body and blood of Christ, are also troubling, politically speaking, in ways which we have particularly associated with allegory. The secular is a speaker of the dream of the d

The cup produces a kind of order which is allegorical in its anteriority, its reference elsewhere: 'Figure echoes/ Figure faintly in the saturated depths', in its encyclopaedic desire to 'gather everything into [its] crystalline world' (KCP2 89) and in its prescriptive, didactic relation to the other: 'And the crystal so increases/ Elicting in its substance from the dark/ The slowly forming laws it increases by' (Nightwalker and Other Poems 77). It also presents a political difficulty related to allegorical 'withdrawal of affect', the 'glassy unconcern' which conceals the coercive action of allegorical figures in the world. Siting common humanity in a common 'ordeal' risks making that suffering appear abstract, in all cases inevitable, timeless, without historical or cultural cause, of immeasurable magnitude. It asks us to take comfort

in pain; the reader might justly suspect that figures like the ordeal-cup can be used by a repressive social order to suppress dissent, anger and activism with the consolation of universal suffering. The 'tissues of order' that that develop within the cup are concerned to maintain hierarchies:

life is hunger, hunger is for order, And hunger satisfied brings on new hunger

Till there's nothing to come; – let the crystal crack On some insoluble matter, then its heart Shudders and accepts the flaw, adjusts on it Taking new strength

(KCP2 90)

Refusal of those hierarchies entails failure, loss of love and appetite, death:

till we find some death

Hoarding bitterness or refusing the cup; [...] the thin Mathematic tissues loosen, and the cup Thickens and order dulls and dies in love's death And melts away in a hungerless no dream. (KCP2 91)

Towards the end of the poem, the vision of order intimated in the cup becomes allencompassing, a strictly regulated Manichean structure of alternating darkness and light, a mechanised universe organised on the allegorical principle of macrocosm. 'Loneliness drew into order', the speaker declares:

The orders of stars fixed in abstract darkness,
Darknesses of worlds sheltering in their light;
World darkness harbouring orders of cities,
Whose light at midnight harbours human darkness;
The human dark pierced by solitary fires...
(KCP2 93)

These intimations of order are facilitated by allegory's carelessness of human individuality and of the body. Jackson notes the changing significance of 'tissue' in the poem: at first a

highly abstract term, 'tissues of order', it grows increasingly concretised as it is associated with morality, then with sexuality (63). The opposite might well also be true, however: that once the association of tissue with ideal order is made, the bodies of the protagonists, their tissue, become irrevocably abstract. The hard, crystalline structures of the cup, which contain human tissue as the poem contains its persons, enact a shuttle between abstraction and concretion in which it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the bodies of the protagonists from their allegorical representations. In addition to this, both the speaker of the poem and his beloved have doubles, distorted representatives of themselves, and in both cases an encounter with a double implies the literal tearing apart of flesh, signified by the mantra 'Giving without tearing is not possible' (88, 90). The beloved's double is the spéirbhean-like streetwalker who accosts the speaker:

I studied her and saw shame does not matter Nor kindness where there's no answering hunger

And passed by; her eyes burned... So equipped to learn I found you, in feverish sleep, where you lay. Midsummer, and I had tasted your knowledge, My flesh blazing in yours; Autumn, I had learned Giving without tearing is not possible.

(KCP2 88)

The *spéirbhean* is an object of allegorical capture in its most obvious form: a body made to signify. In this appropriation of the *aisling* trope, the *spéirbhean* equips the speaker with the experience he needs to 'learn'. She is an instructress, but the position brings with it no power: the speaker passes her by, declaring that her 'kindness' (her tenderness, but also her kinship in humanity with him) 'does not matter'. Her anger at her lack of power and resistance to being co-opted into signification are signalled in her 'burning' eyes, but even this minute gesture ⁵² is reassigned to the speaker's 'blazing' flesh. A play on 'blazing' might evoke the 'vogue in the sixteenth century for the blazon, the detailed enumeration of

the parts of the woman's body [which] can be seen as reflecting the new scientific mentality with its mastering gaze, its passion for mapping the world in order to gain power over it'. Jonathan Sawday notes that the blazon turned the woman so described into a dissected corpse. Giving without tearing is not possible, in this context, implies the literal rending of flesh. But in this passage it is the speaker's flesh that blazes and is 'blazoned' or torn apart (Sawday ix). Kinsella's 'blazon' gathers even the blazon's mastering focus on female flesh to the troubled and central male: '[M]y flesh blazing in yours'.

Phoenix Park' depends on the equation of femininity with body and matter, masculinity with mind and form, but as Kinsella's variation on the blazon suggests, the association is complicated by the speaker's assertion of his male flesh. A classical instance of form imprinting matter – the speaker, having learnt his ordering laws at his beloved's hands gives them back to her – is complicated by his fascination with the body:

I give them back not as your body knows them – That flesh is finite, so in love we persist;
That love is to clasp simply, question fiercely;
That getting life we eat pain in each other.
But mental, in my fever – mere idea.

(KCP2 91)

This is worth remarking for the attention paid to the way the speaker is *not* going to give, the space it gives to the alternative, bodily doctrine that he supposes is hers. Unsurprising, perhaps, given the theme of reciprocity (albeit a reciprocity enacted on the speaker's terms) but conspicuous nonetheless, is the speaker's attribution of the value of communal suffering to her credo: 'That getting life we eat pain in each other'. It is he, however, who repeatedly insists that pain can be shared. The female protagonist endures the physical pain in this poem: she is fragile, 'delicate distinct flesh'. In contradiction of that distinctness, her lover persistently attempts to partake of her suffering. Kissing her when she is lying ill, he finds

'your body's fever leaped out at my mind' (87) and later he declares 'We'll perish in each other' (92), the erotic implications of which are recognised in a recollection of a post-coital moment when the speaker saw '[m]y past alive in you, a gift of tissue/ Torn free from my life' (93). The impossibility of shared pain is only acknowledged by the speaker's double, who seeks to 'accommodate' his body in annihilating union with the crystal cup, but cannot. He is a grotesque 'phantasm', 'in old lewd nakedness', and the inability to annihilate the self in the communal agony and communal order of the ordeal-cup is presented as a moral failure:

aching to plant one kiss
In the live crystal as it aches with fullness
And accommodate his body with that kiss;
But that forever he will pause, the final
Kiss ungiveable. Giving without tearing

Is not possible; to give totality
Is to be torn totally

(KCP2 90)

Pain cannot be shared, though, any more than can risk. Teskey attributes allegory's propensity to give its conscience to the prevailing regime to the delusion that risk can be collectively experienced. The *agora*, envisioned allegorically, is not a place where political voices can be heard, not a place where the integrity of the body from which the voice issues is respected, but a place in which bodies are organised into a political spectacle. He notes that the spectacle arranged by the souls in the circle of Jupiter in the *Paradiso (Par.*, canto XVIII) might equally illustrate 'two phases in which the *agora* is transformed into a place without freedom: that in which bodies compose a symbol of the collective [...] and that in which bodies enter into one body' (Teskey 125-126). 'Political discourse' by contrast, 'is speaking with the body at risk and something to be cared for at stake' (130). Under a regime which treats the body as part of a collective, the person who can speak while concealing his

body is in a position of power. Other-speech deflects the allegorist's voice from his body, freeing him from risk and rendering him able to enact meanings upon other, collectivised bodies. Every element in the allegory of 'Phoenix Park' is designed to separate the speaker's body from his voice: the shuttling between concretion and abstraction manifested in the cup imagery, the attribution of bodily wisdom to the other, the doubling of protagonists. However much the speaker protests that his body is being torn or burnt, we sense that real tearing and burning is happening elsewhere, to someone else.

A partial acknowledgement of the political dangers of the concept of communal pain expressed in 'Phoenix Park' appears in *Out of Ireland*. The 1987 chapbook begins with a quotation from Giraldus Cambrensis which suggests a reading within a framework of allegorical exegesis:

...the perfection of their art seem to lie in concealing it, as if it were "the better for being hidden. An art revealed brings shame." Hence it happens that the very things that afford unspeakable delight to the minds of those who have a fine perception [...] bore, rather than delight those [...] who look without seeing and hear without being able to understand. (KCP2 253)

Kinsella's quotations from 'Phoenix Park' in Out of Ireland imply doubt of the old doctrines: the beloved's bodily certainty 'that love is to clasp simply/ question fiercely' is now one of a number of 'half-certainties'. Art is now perilously, not redemptively, connected to violence and pain, represented here by the pens with which Eriugena was stabbed to death: 'and the artistic act.../ Long library bodies, their pens/ distinct against the sinking sun' (254). Similarly, in 'The Furnace', the idea that bodies (even in their resurrected form) could constitute a collective is

Eriugena's notion matching my half-baked bodily own

who have consigned my designing will

stonily to your flames

(KCP2 257)

'[H]alf-baked' parodies, if not Eriugena's doctrine, the 'Rosicrucian imagery' of 'Phoenix Park' (John 110). Rather than seeking to 'Burn down around one love' (92), the couple in 'The Furnace' are glad to be able to separate again after a transcendental orgasm which intimates resurrection. Their pleasure at being distinct individuals is presented as a transgression, a felix culpa:

and we were made two again

Male and Female in punishment for Man's will and reminded of our Fall.

In token of which I plant this dry kiss in your rain-wet hair.

(KCP2 257)

Kinsella is preoccupied with signifying bodies, and his poetry increasingly shows an awareness of the violence entailed in making a body a vessel for an idea. Such allegorical violence is a consequence of the poet's conviction that 'the artistic act has to do with the eliciting of order from significant experience' (Haffenden 113) and 'the real sin is the imposition of order' (*PIR* 62): metaphors of exploration, attrition and dissection suit this discourse of underlying, latent order that awaits revelation. But they also rebound upon it, for they involve the protagonists and speakers in activities – digging, placing, scouring, cutting, even eating – which are impositions upon the matter, material or 'data' they seek to order. This metaphorical intractability becomes a theme in *A Technical Supplement*, the collection in which Kinsella most fully acknowledges the violence of artistic creation.

The political ramifications of this sequence's allusions to William Petty and Denis Diderot have been explored by a number of critics. ⁵⁶ Section III, below, presents a fuller

assessment of these arguments in the context of allegory as an encyclopaedic form. As such allusion would suggest, however, *A Technical Supplement* persistently draws analogies (and contrasts) between scientific analysis and artistic making, between the desire to order and classify and the desire to possess and consume. '[L]et our gaze blaze' declares the speaker of the first poem, (an ironic invocation of William Petty), which looks back to 'Phoenix Park' and its association of immolation and dismemberment. The scientific, anatomising gaze is analogous to allegorical 'glassy unconcern' in that it conceals with detachment its problematic involvement in the world it attempts to analyse. Deconstructing the implications of objective, scientific detachment provides Kinsella with a way to demystify the equivalent processes in his art. 'Phoenix Park' naturalises images of a body contained within another '[m]y flesh blazing in yours' (*KCP2* 88), 'we eat pain in each other' (91), '[m]y past alive in you' (93) as erotic tokens. *A Technical Supplement* presents the containment of a body by another without deflective abstraction, originating not in erotic but gustatory desire:

How to put it... without offence – even though it is an offence, monstrous, in itself.

A living thing swallowing another.

Lizards.

One lizard swallows the other:

A tail.

Then a leather-granite face unfulfillable.

(KCP2 182)

The lizards are an ideal exposition of the underlying motivation of allegory: the desire to master the world, and all its possible meanings; to make the world the self by taking it into the self. Questions of order elicited or order imposed, of an aesthetic of totality or one of

incompletion recede (though they are not resolved) as the insatiable 'leather-granite' face -a facies hippocratica fully invested with allelophagic rapacity - fills our field of vision.

IV: ENCYCLOPAEDIA

It has already been remarked that where Kinsella's Peppercanister poems are concerned above all with the self in society, the poetic persona tends to be a figure in progress, walking through the city, observing and recording. At the same time, this persona cannot be satisfactorily separated from the stationary anatomist, the recluse, the painstaking worker at his bench. These two figures, the static and the mobile, interrelate to produce the panoramic perspective which for instance, begins *One Fond Embrace*⁵⁷ and concludes *The Pen Shop*:

Toward the thought of voices beyond Liverpool, rising out of Europe and the first voices

clear in calibre and professional self-chosen, rising beyond Jerusalem.⁵⁸

This panoramic outlook, since it does not preclude intense attention to detail, suggests one way of approaching Kinsella's encyclopaedic concerns, a way of reconciling the allegorical quest with the allegorical anatomy. It also raises questions of agency, of how, for instance, the panoptic gaze relates to allegory's consumption and containment of the other, and what effect changes in viewpoint have upon allegorical structures.

A remarkable poem, 'Night Conference, Wood Quay: 6 June 1979' is just such an examination of the implications of looking, literalising the dead metaphor of 'viewpoint' or 'outlook' used to mean 'political opinion'. The poem's textual history suggests a mixture of activism and introspection: its first publication was in an activist context, a newsletter produced by the protesters against the development of Wood Quay;⁵⁹ it then remained

uncollected until 1990's Personal Places, allowing time for 'digestion', a process continued in the revision of the poem for the Oxford Collected Poems. 60 The poem describes protesters meeting in a shed on the site, a promise of a 'truce' between them and the developers, which is greeted with gruff caution "You couldn't trust their oath." A tired growl: hand-clapping. The protestors are optimistic and confident of their effectiveness: 'the swift crane locked/ – and its steel spider brain - by our mental force.' The poem's viewpoint then wheels around to the Corporation officials and speculators: Where are they, looking down. At what window./ Visages of rapine, outside our circle of light./ Their talk done. The white-cuffed marauders.' (KCP2 291). Without relinquishing his association with the protestors or altering his condemnation of their enemies, the poet-speaker suddenly perceives the existence of another perspective, in which the protestors, who believed themselves powerful enough to lock the cranes by sheer force of will, are the objects of calculated observation by their unseen adversaries. The circle of light created by their brazier is to the protestors a signifier of their political enlightenment and participation in a worthwhile cause. From the alien viewpoint of the powerful, however, it is simply the means by which the protestors can be observed more clearly, and themselves remain unseen. The protestors see their surroundings from ground level, believing they are participants in an agora, a political space where their voices count, even if that space is full of signs of filth, 'brimm[ing] with matter' (291). The '[i]nvisible speculators',61 see the world quite differently, from above, as material for consumption. There is no place for the political voice here ('Their talk done') and the invisibility of the officials' bodies preserves them from risk (keeping their white cuffs clean), while transforming the protestors into a lighted spectacle. Of the two worldviews, it is theirs, the developers', which is closest to that of allegory, and theirs which represents political realities - it is their panoptic outlook that the reader takes away from the poem,

though the poet-speaker deplores it. In their brutish political world, the belief of the protestors that they have voice or influence is a delusion akin to believing that a crane could be locked by 'mental force'. 'Night Conference' records a moment of poise before an act of capture and consumption, and like poem 8 of *A Technical Supplement*, is worth bearing in mind as we explore Kinsella's panoramic and encyclopaedic ambitions.

One Fond Embrace begins with the speaker looking up from his work, 'poring over that organic pot'. Acknowledging that he 'never wants[s] to be anywhere else' (KCP2 273) he then assumes a panoramic outlook on Dublin. As in 'Night Conference', his perspective becomes peculiarly entangled with that of the planners and speculators he detests:

planners of the wiped slate labouring painstaking over a bungled city to turn it into a zoo:

Southward into the foothills to where the transplanted can trudge [...]

To Shangri-La for a bottle of milk Northward past our twinned experimental piss-towers for the underprivileged (KCP2 274)

Here the enemy is engaged in Kinsellan 'painstaking' activity, while the poet-speaker takes their panoptic perspective. The reason for this confusion of viewpoints is epochal: 'we were the generation/ of positive disgrace' (275), suggesting a highly ordered cosmos in which the speaker's opposition to the planners is subsumed beneath the guilt incurred by his generational relationship to them. Even within the ironic and hyperbolic structures of *One Fond Embrace*, this seems excessive, but an echo of it later in the poem suggests what is really at stake:

Tara is gr[a]ss; 63 and look how it stands with Troy...
And we were the generation also of privilege

to have seen the vitals of Empire tied off in a knot of the cruel and the comic.
[...]

A modest proposal: Everything West of the Shannon,

women and children included to be declared fair game. Helicopters, rifles and night-glasses permitted.

The natives to have explosive and ambush and mantrap privileges. Unparalleled sport

and in the traditionthe contemporary manifestation of an evolving reality.

(280)

Kinsella confronts the mystifying ideology that would attribute to 'the generation/ of positive disgrace' a symbolic significance as the first to grow up in an independent Ireland. The logic of the passage suggests that generational, familial conceptions of the past – the relationship of Ireland and England is also compared to 'the bully marriage next door' (280) – endorse a view of history as cyclic violence perpetuated into the present, and therefore accommodate the brutality of Kinsella's 'modest proposal'. The poet himself, however, draws historical analogies which might also sanction ideas of cyclic repetition in history. His 'proposal' reprises the imagery of political power outlined in 'Night Conference' and the opening stanzas of *One Fond Embrace*: the panoptic gaze appears here as murderous night-sight, while the ground-level viewpoint which is a signifier of political virtue (albeit also of naïve optimism) in 'Night Conference' has been brutalised.⁶⁴ The sense of geographical and historical slippage in this passage, whereby the contemporary realities of conflict in Northern

Ireland take place in a version of seventeenth-century Connacht heavily inflected by heritage-industry fantasy, is consistent with allegory's disruption of place and chronometric time in the creation of a 'special world', and because of this, ends up unable to challenge the erasure of historical difference by the concept of cyclic, repetitive history. These lines suggests some of the complexities of irony's involvement with allegory: how does the reader begin to distinguish materially between a relatively unironic evocation of generational, analogic history, such as the statement 'we were the generation/ of positive disgrace' and a bitterly satirical one, in which such understandings of the past underwrite bland, organicised explanations of imperialism — 'circumstance saddled' Ireland with Britain because 'the Creator's Anti-Christ was at him' (280) — and bloodthirsty politics alike? There are many examples of this kind of ambivalence in Kinsella's poetry: it should not come as a surprise, however, that one of the most contested concerns his exploration of encyclopaedic classification and anatomy in A Technical Supplement.

One Fond Embrace concludes with quotations from the earlier sequence, from the epigraph, a translation of a letter from Diderot to Voltaire, and from poem 15:

Enough.
"That there is more spleen than good sense in all of this, I admit

and back to the Encyclopédie I go.' Diderot, my hand upon it. The pen writhed

and moved under my thumb and dipped again in its organic pot.

(KCP2 281)

A return to the writhing pen and 'organic pot' after the excursion into satire and public life represented by *One Fond Embrace* might be taken as an indication that subsequent

Peppercanisters will mark a turn inward. Indeed, Personal Places and Poems from Centre City treat many of the themes raised in One Fond Embrace – friendship and betrayal, participation in civic and public life, ecological and environmental matters – but are more accommodating of 'organic', mythical and psychoanalytic material, forging more stable political commentary than the intemperate thirteenth Peppercanister. Tubridy suggests that 'back to the Encylopédie I go' is Kinsella's acknowledgement of the essentially peripheral nature of One Fond Embrace to the Peppercanister project (174). Though its tone is unlike One Fond Embrace's saeva indignatio, A Technical Supplement is equally troubled by problems of irony and representation, something that is intimated by the phrase 'Diderot, my hand upon it.' It is both a signature, meant to identify the speaker, this anatomist of Irish public life, with Diderot, author of the Encyclopédie, the great rationalist project 'to collect all the knowledge that now lies scattered over the face of the earth', 66 and gesture of reconciliation: the poet offers the encyclopaedist his hand after perpetrating, in A Technical Supplement, a series of attacks on the classifying, ordering mentality that Diderot represents.

These attacks are well documented by Flanagan in his article 'Tissues of Order': Kinsella and the Enlightenment Ethos'. Flanagan argues that *A Technical Supplement* is a work of decolonisation, which repudiates the racism that characterised the analyses of Irish landscape and culture by writers such as Spenser and Petty. In addition, the sequence interrogates the Enlightenment passion for classification and order, represented by the figure of Diderot, by assuming for itself that very rage to order. It is not just a supplement but a *supplément*, in Derrida's sense, the adjunct to a text which supplants or replaces it:

Kinsella has internalized his thematic concern with the previous "anatomisers" to the to the extent that it has become perhaps the dominant feature of his own artistic process [...] Kinsella himself seeks, literally, to absorb and 'incorporate' these previous accounts; [...] he intends his work

not merely to supplement but (as Derrida argues) to *supplant* theirs. (Flanagan 74)

Flanagan asserts that the Peppercanister series aims to interrogate the idea of knowledge itself, revealing 'all humankind's striving and so-called "progress" to be essentially worthless.' (76) He reads 'Night Conference' as a replay of the abattoir observation scene in poem 6 of *A Technical Supplement*, with the roles reversed; those who were the observers in Swift's slaughterhouse are now the threatened prey: 'The Rationalist [...] project has failed', he concludes (77).

While Flanagan's research is often illuminating, and his basic intuitions sound, he does his argument no service by misrepresenting both the texts which A Technical Supplement is supposed to supplant and Kinsella's own position regarding order and classification. He presumes a monolithic 'Enlightenment ethos' encompassing Spenser, Petty and Diderot, without considering the historical and circumstantial differences between these anatomisers, and the different attitudes which Kinsella's speakers adopt towards them. Kinsella's personae are typically hostile to Petty and the Down Survey, for instance, but much more sympathetic towards, and ready to identify with Diderot, as the epigraph to A Technical Supplement and its quotation in One Fond Embrace demonstrate. Flanagan suggests Kinsella's affinities with deconstructionist theory, but does not consider the discrepancy between that mode of thought and Kinsella's repeated characterisations of his poetry as a way of eliciting order from a pre-existing substance, and revision as the paring away of disposable ornament from essential material. Flanagan's commitment to the Derridean supplément as a paradigm for Kinsella's poetry also leads him to reject apt postcolonial models:

Kinsella's work is not merely a *complement* but a *supplement*, effectively a substitute, designed to replace the original. In reaching this conclusion I am of course, to an extent, arguing against the strand of post-colonial thought encapsulated by Gayatri Spivak's view that 'the subaltern cannot speak'. (61)

Kinsella is less optimistic: the tenor of his critical writings, which also finds many echoes in his poems, is precisely that 'the subaltern cannot speak', that the Irish literary inheritance 'is mine, but only at two enormous removes – across a century's silence and through an exchange of worlds.' The Dual Tradition, essentially an expansion of the two lectures collected in Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? and other critical pieces such as 'The Divided Mind', dwells on the 'loss' of the Irish language to the majority of Irish writers and the silence enforced by colonialism. ⁶⁸

At the same time, Flanagan seems preoccupied, to a greater extent than his subject, with the consequences of a poetics of order in a specifically Irish context, venturing that Kinsella's indictments of imposed order reflect an 'uneasy recognition that his earlier urge to order replicates previous attempts at classification, all of which on some level served to sanction the categorization both of his own family ancestors and of Ireland itself, as racially inferior' (56). Flanagan is right to note the unease, but his attachment to the equation of closed form with order and open form with valorised 'subversion' (as noted above), in addition to his conviction that 1968 marks a formal watershed for Kinsella (55), renders him oblivious to the negotiations with order which characterise 'Downstream', for instance. That poem records a journey through an Irish landscape, during which the protagonist reads poetry by Pound, an expatriate American, about ancient China, which implies support for the values of fascist Italy, and which prompts the protagonist to contemplate the relationship of 'regime art' to the Holocaust. As this internationalist background suggests, postcolonial models confined to Irish contexts can explain only in small measure Kinsella's attraction to and disquiet at ordering systems and hierarchies.

Kinsella is implicated more deeply and less strategically in a poetics of order, classification and hierarchy than Flanagan suggests. Flanagan sees him 'toy[ing] with the

rhetoric employed by Spenser and Petty' but concludes too easily that Kinsella is simply 'turning it back on the colonising observers' (70). It is far from clear, though, that echoes of Spenser's A View in poem 10, for instance, 'scraping and scraping/ down to the wood/ making it good, treating it.' should necessarily be read as a refutation of Spenser, nor is it obvious that the persona, or Kinsella, values the incompletion caused by '[g]rowing unmethodical after a while/ letting the thing stain and stay unfinished.' (KCP2 184). Kinsella's allusions to ordering systems are not uniformly antiphrastic, simply meaning the opposite of what they say, or existing only to repudiate classifying ideologies. Rather, they explore and exploit the potential of antiphrasis to distinguish the poet from his persona and both from their forebears, Spenser, Petty and Diderot, and its potential to undo that distinction and conflate them. The level of irony varies poem by poem, sometimes even line by line, ensuring that the poet can never just 'turn it back' on these tutelary figures. Their influence, particularly that of Diderot, spreads beyond A Technical Supplement, and the poems do not represent it as entirely baleful. In illustration of the affinity that Kinsella's personae have with Diderot, (though the high humanism of Diderot's rhetoric is subject to Kinsellan scepticism) I want to suggest some confluence between a number of Kinsella's poems and Diderot's definition of 'encyclopaedia', included in the fifth volume of the Encyclopédie, before returning to a consideration of A Technical Supplement as an element in the encyclopaedic allegory of the Peppercanister series.

Diderot's definition has in common with a number of Kinsella's poems an elegiac and temporising tone: 'People [...] do not realize that they occupy only a single point on our globe and that they will endure only an instant' (Diderot 306); his definition is dotted with references to the brevity of human life, a mood recognisable in 'Phoenix Park' and in the inclusion of Ó Laoghaire's mournful epigram: 'The world laid low' in One Fond Embrace. Both

writers try to counter these moments of nostalgia: Diderot with a renewed concentration on the power of man and his centrality to the universe, Kinsella with the opposite, a focus on pain, weakness and savagery. There is a curious confluence of the apocalyptic and utopian in Diderot's imagining of the future use of the *Encyclopédie*. He imagines a great catastrophe that would

plunge a portion of our hemisphere into darkness once again. What gratitude would not be lavished by the generation that came after this time of troubles upon those men who had discerned the disaster from afar, who had taken measures to ward off its worst ravages by collecting in a safe place the knowledge of all past ages! [...] I may say this without being immodest because our *Encyclopaedia* will perhaps never attain the perfection that would make it deserving of such an honour (Diderot 290).

Imagined post-apocalyptic scenes are useful in examining questions of knowledge and cultural value, accommodating as they are to allegoresis. The dramatic irony of a regressed future misreading texts whose meaning seems obvious to us focuses attention both on how we might be in danger of misreading the past and on the temporality of signification itself: how our deductions and discoveries, made in time and in series, mark 'truth's inability to coincide with itself' (De Man 78). Even Diderot's optimistic prognosis, which would seem to assert that the future's truth can return to coincide with his, is inflected by this temporality, as he acknowledges the imperfection of the *Encyclopédie*, and as he semicomically imagines a monument raised to the fame of its authors, 'where one would see in turn the honors accorded to their memory and the signs of posterity's reprobation for the names of their enemies' (Diderot 291).

The post-apocalyptic as a signifier of temporality is exploited in 'Dream', a witty allegory of literary production and reception. This enigma-poem (it is subtitled 'a puzzle' in the Peppercanister⁶⁹) opens with an barren scene: 'a stony desert, baked and still' (*KCP2* 321), onto which emerge two monstrous figures. The waste land signifies Dublin's literary

scene in the depressed mid-twentieth century, a more realist portrayal of which is the subject of the other poem in Peppercanister 17, 'Open Court'; the monsters represent the split, deformed dual tradition of Irish poetry, which consumes those who attempt to engage with it:

A group of human figures makes an appearance, some seemingly at home in the pitiless waste. One of their number is smiling all around him. With another, bolder than the rest, he approaches the first two creatures, misjudging their apparent preoccupation. He is caught by the first and swallowed in an instant. His companion is seized by the second as a support. (321)

These human figures are perhaps identifiable as Austin Clarke and Patrick Kavanagh, both of whom, in their different ways, were limited in their poetic development by the dismal literary environment: the lack of Irish poetry journals and publishers, the threat of censorship, and a public distrust of and disdain for modern poetry. The second phase of the dream-vision takes place '[t]hree years – ten years –' later. Some superficial improvements have been made – vegetation grows on the barren plain and it is 'full of voices' – but the tradition is still in a state of malformation. The allusion to the colonial atmosphere of *The Tempest* suggests that this revival is the 'journalistic entity' of enthusiasm for the Northern Irish poets of the 1960s and 1970s. The 'man-eater', which can tentatively be identified with the strain of Irish poetry that identifies with English and Britain, is surrounded by the bones of poets it has eaten, while the monopod Irish tradition plays jester, or stage-Irishman: 'decked in bittersweet, [...] garrulous'. A critical school of 'ghosts' has developed, for the most part distrustful of and uninterested in their subject: 'There is some excitement in one corner,/ but most of the ghosts are merely shaking their heads' (322). The acts of interpretation that the ghosts are engaged in are distorted representations of the reader's own

allegoresis: our expectation that allegory should be élitist, concealing a kind of higher wisdom, is disappointed by the realisation that this is a poem which appears to 'squander the energies of criticism on ill-judged or out-of-date targets' (Tubridy 229). The temporality which characterises our allegoresis is a factor in the allegory also, as if while we have been working it out, the subject of the allegory has become outdated.

As his nostalgia and his capability to imagine a future regression suggest, Diderot was neither as cold-eyed a rationalist nor as implacably devoted to progress as it might be convenient to portray him. He also shows a concern with the limitations of encyclopaedic form that prefigures twentieth-century writing on the subject:

As for a general system from which all that is arbitrary would be excluded – something we mortals can never hope to possess – it might not, perhaps be so great an advantage to possess it. For what would be the difference between reading a book in which all the hidden springs of the universe were laid bare, and direct study of the universe itself? (Diderot 291)

The textual 'mapping' of the universe which Diderot suggests here recalls many of Kinsella's poems which 'map' real and imaginative territory, poems which draw on the *dinnseanchas*, 'the lore of prominent places', which was the cartography of early Ireland. Like many ancient and/or non-Western topographies, *dinnseanchas* treated the land as a mutable, unstable, vital entity, in contrast to the method of cartographers like Petty, who sought by mapping to stabilise the features of the landscape for ownership and exploitation. Diderot's textual map is something different from the stabilising glare of the colonist; it acknowledges that any mortal system must have its flaws, and by extension its gaps, gaps that the fragmentary diction of the first poem of 'Song of the Night', 'Philadelphia', brings into direct confrontation with the other, 'stable' sort of map:

Metropolis in the ear soft-thundered among the towers below breaking in a hiss of detail but without wave rhythm
without breath-rhythm
exhalation without cease
amplified
of terrible pressure
interrupted by brief blasts and nasal shouts
guttural diesels
a sky-train waning in a line of thunder.

I opened the great atlas on the desk.

The Atlantic curved on the world. (*KCP2* 205)

The view of the speaker is the ground level view which we earlier associated with political good faith. 70 It collides sharply with the panoptic plan of the atlas on the desk, in an action rather like the rearing up of the river which prevents its crossing by the speaker of 'The Route of the Táin' and his companions (KCP2 120-121). Diderot's mappable territory is similarly mobile: the closer humans come to uncovering the mechanisms of their universe, the more the territory rears against their texts, eventually coming to the point of producing that impossible map which is its terrain, text and referent becoming one another. That impossible unity of text and referent is the allegorical singularity, the elusive point outside the textual system which serves both to draw readers into the allegory's textual world, and to keep them there, seeking the receding singularity. Diderot's method, and Kinsella's, are allegorical in that they see human endeavour as the pursuit of the singularity, while recognising the impossibility, even the undesirability, of achieving it. The speaker of second poem in 'Song of the Night', 'Carraroe', persistently approaches a point where text and referent, self and world coincide, then uses textual and thematic strategies to retreat. His vision of '[t]he great theatre of Connemara' (KCP2 207) is repudiated by devices which draw attention to the poem's textuality,

("...darkly expressive, coming from the innermost depths...") That old body music. Schattenhaft. SONG OF THE NIGHT. A long horn call, "a single note that lingers, changing colour as it fades..."

(KCP2 208)

When even this discourse of quotation, emphasis, foreign language (*Schattenhaft* means shadowy, vague or fuzzy) and irony threatens to unify into an image of coincidence with nature, 'The bay – every inlet – lifted and glittered toward us in articulated light', Kinsella uses an image of fragmentation, and a return from panorama to periplum to defer the movement towards the singularity: 'A part of the mass/ grated and tore, cranking harshly/ and detached' (208).

In Diderot's discussion of the cross-reference, the intrusion of the arbitary, deferral or referral elsewhere, becomes another device for pursuit of the allegorical singularity:

Cross references clarify the subject; they indicate its close connections with other subjects [...] as well as its more remote connections that might otherwise be thought irrelevant [...] they will confront one theory with a contrary one [...] they will always have the double function of confirming and confuting, of disturbing and reconciling [...] by giving cross references to articles where solid principles serve as the foundation for diametrically opposed truths, we shall be able to throw down the whole edifice of mud and scatter the idle heap of dust [...] This is the way to lead people, by a series of tacit deductions, to the most daring conclusions. (Diderot 295)

A Technical Supplement leads the reader by a temporal process, 'a series of tacit deductions', to conclude the inequities and iniquities of that most common of allegories, that of the 'body politic'. It cross-references the cool, serene surgical engravings of the Encyclopédie with the hot brutalities of the slaughterhouse (KCP2 180-181);⁷¹ the domestic comfort of hot bread with the 'Man-meat' of ancient battlefields (KCP2 187); the agony of crucifixion with the easy ubiquity of the cross as a sign: 'on car bonnets, on the prows/ of ships and trains / stood on shelves, in fanlights' (KCP2 179), the Kinsellan persona with his tutelars. Diderot

suggests that the cross-reference makes encyclopaedic knowledge ambivalent, at once 'confirming and confuting', 'disturbing and reconciling', the 'impartial' author enclosing contradictory modes of understanding in the hope of offering readers guidance toward new conclusions, new singularities. Towards the end of *A Technical Supplement*, Kinsella's speaker finds himself in the predicament of that 'impartial' figure:

From that day forward I knew what it was to taste reality and not to; to suffer tedium or pain and not to, to eat, swallowing with pleasure, and not to; to yield and fail to note this or that withering in me, and not to; to anticipate the Breath, the Bite, with cowering arms.

(KCP2 192)⁷²

The impartiality of encyclopaedic knowledge parts him, that is, it dismembers him: 'a great private blade/ was planted in me from bowels to brain' (192). The rift in consciousness evoked by the very word 'allegory', the schism opened by speech that is other to its meaning and meaning that is other to its expression, is located in the speaker. 'I knew it was not going to go away' he comments (192), and indeed, the sectioning of his mind is a productive basis from which to move towards a singularity, as the last poem of the sequence records:

It is time I continued my fall.
[...]
Turning slowly and more slowly
we drifted to rest in a warmth of flesh,
twinned, glaring and growing.

(KCP2 193)

The possibly infinite extension of the movement towards truth is coupled with an image of union and growth, reflecting again, the master imagery of allegory: the self that grows to consume and contain its surroundings.

A Technical Supplement is full of the imagery of consumption, its speakers preoccupied with how the other becomes assimilated to the self. This is most explicitly articulated in poem 8, but the consequences of that frank exposition of alellophagic desire are felt throughout the poem, such that an injunction to 'sltomach that' (KCP2 185) or a contrast drawn between 'a romance devoured' and 'a serious read' (189) carry a visceral charge. Poem 6 describes abattoir workers immersing themselves in the bodies of animals 'his hands disappeared/ in the fleshy vulva and broke some bone.' (181) in order that these animals might be eaten, incorporated into other bodies. In poem 9, a leopard shark chases herring, and two morays raise their 'bird-beaked heads/ peering up at a far-off music of slaughter' (183). The deranged metaphors, whereby eels are described as birdlike, and 'music' can be seen, peered at, through water, suggest surrealistic melding together of bodies, and confirm the fate of the herring. At a central point in the sequence, the end of poem 11, the speaker posits a highly suggestive antithesis, 'The mind flexes.' The heart encloses.' (185) The intransitive verb - what does the heart enclose? - implies the scope of the encyclopaedic desire to contain. The heart encloses everything. Poem 18 again refers to the sheer scale of this allegorical urge:

Asia: great deserts of grass
with poppies and distant cities trembling
in the golden wind.
[...]
Ah well.
Grind it up, wash it down,
stoke the blind muscular furnace,

This is a colonial machine that is being stoked – 'poppies' suggest an allusion to the iniquitous British involvement in the nineteenth-century opium trade – but it is also a literary one, the body of the poet and the body of his work. The faux-naïf voice comments:

It isn't the kind of job you can do properly without a proper lunch;

[...]

Enjoy it

on your deafening bench.

Outlandish
the things that will come into your mind.

(188)

These speakers seem compelled to implicate themselves in various forms of constraint and violence, not in order to *supplément* or supplant them with more liberal or more peaceful forms, nor even to reveal their iniquities, for the very process of revelation is tainted with Petty's illiberalism and brutality: 'thou whose definitions – whose insane nets – / plunge and convulse to hold thy furious catch [...]/ let us see how the whole thing/ works' (177). It seems that this compulsion is a consequence of encyclopaedic form itself, a consequence of the need to get it all in.⁷³ Flanagan notes that

Kinsella himself seeks, *literally*, to absorb and incorporate these previous accounts [...] As Spenser and Petty sought to contain and order Ireland and the Irish in every possible sense, especially textually, psychologically and linguistically, so now does Kinsella's own work similarly 'contain' the original texts (74, emphasis added).

Literally – to the letter. The actions of Ireland's colonists upon the land and people are replicated by Kinsella upon their works, and not just upon their works, but upon the matter, material, 'data', of his own poems. His method is aggregative, assimilating the other to the self, absolutely characteristic of allegory. Critics have tended to gloss (over) this method as a quest or a battle. Skloot is typical: 'our victories over disorder are always temporary, our structures bound to erode or dissolve before us to demand new struggles towards order'. Kinsella is franker about the ultimately allelophagic nature of his encyclopaedic project: poems are to him 'a contribution to something accumulating', (PIR 59) or part of an 'organism' (PIR 61). Writing a long poem or series is 'the whole process of [...] the absorbtion [sic] or dismissal of material [...] It's a very wasteful process' (PIR 61). These are

the choices that allegory offers its 'others' - be part of the textual system or be waste - but even the waste, as Kinsella's reuse of poetic material abandoned in revision shows, is subject to capture. His encyclopaedic allegory aims to create an encompassing man-macrocosm; he is, unlike Clarke or MacNeice, mostly uninterested in wresting liberation for his protagonists or the reader from unpromisingly hierarchic, ordered allegorical material. The escapologist manoeuvres by which Clarke's Maurice Devane evades capture and inscription into allegorical meaning, or the limpid awareness of the otherness of nature evinced in MacNeice's last poems, are not part of Kinsella's poetics. His figures mostly acquiesce to the meanings given them and desire coincidence with their surroundings. When we do encounter resistance to allegorical capture in Kinsella, however, it has an unusually pure quality, as if it were there quite by accident, outside - not a lapse in, not understood - the design. You will note firstly that there is no containing skin/ as we understand it, but "contained" muscles' comments the pedantic speaker of poem 2 of A Technical Supplement. The germ of resistance is there in the scare quotes "contained", as if casting doubt on the organicism of the structure, the desire of the component to be contained. But it is firmly suppressed: '[t]his one, for example, containing - functioning as - a shoulderblade'. 'Containing' equates to function, because in allegory, the system works best when it contains as much of the other as possible. But then, in a dramatic moment of resistance, the system simply comes apart, and for a moment, the poem seems to exist outside allegorical ordering:

It would seem possible to pick the body asunder, to pick off the muscles and let them drop away one by one writhing until you had laid bare four or five simple bones at most.

Except at the first violation the body would rip into pieces and fly apart with terrible spasms.

(KCP2 184)

This signifies only the autonomy of the body, and is therefore not allegory. That such autonomy can be asserted only at the expense of the body's integrity indicates the rigidity of the surrounding 'tissues of order'.

80 03

Allegory forms of itself:
The line of life creeps upward
Replacing one world with another
The welter of its advance
Sinks down into clarity,
Slowly the more foul
Monsters of loss digest.

(KCP2 57)

Thus Kinsella's speaker describes the processes of allegory in 'Ballydavid Pier'. He asserts its organicism and its artificiality: one can hear (though not read) 'forms' as a verb or a noun. Allegory both develops of its own accord and constitutes self-reflexive 'forms of itself', '[r]eplacing one world with another'. It produces 'clarity' out of a 'welter' of violence and noise. It is a way of accommodating 'the more foul/ Monsters of loss', or a mode in which those monsters consume us and the world, depending on how one reads the verb 'digest'. This stanza summarises most of the main concerns of this chapter. It indicates Kinsella's valorisation of elicited order over imposed order and his consequent hostility to ornamental diction and decorative formalism, and revisions that seem motivated by these aesthetic judgements, it implies allegory's production of clear hierarchies from chaos, and consequent dependence on the continuation of violence and disorder, and it points to the structures of containment and consumption which motivate allegory's encyclopaedic desire to take everything into its own textual system, to assimilate the world to the self.

In section II of this chapter we considered the confusion of ethics and aesthetics which marks much of Kinsella's commentary on his own poetry, his moral valuation of

certain types of diction. This moralisation of ornament brings with it many of the political difficulties of allegory: it is politically coercive, involves abstractions in the world and sanctions the withdrawal of compassion that allows bodies to be used as signifiers in a text. Kinsella, on the one hand involved in this stern aesthetic, which demands that poems seem to be organic totalities, also displays a concern for the waste material he generates in the course of revision and with his poems as temporal structures, establishing their meanings through and in time. This ambivalent attitude was examined in the second part of section I, which deals with revisions to New Poems. Temporising gestures - the re-use of discarded material in ways which comment on the revised poem, for instance - contrast with a more authoritarian attitude that reserves exegetical rights for the poet, the self taking possession of the text. With regard to formal changes to the poem, we noted Kinsella's vexed attitude to enactment, and the ways in which that becomes part of the rationale behind the revisions and eventual 'abolition' of 'Good Night'. 'Good Night' expresses a desire for coincidence with the surrounding environment which is simply too revealing of allegory's basis in allelophagy to be included in the most recent Collected Poems: its afterlife, in poem 10 of A Technical Supplement, addresses that desire in more acceptable terms of exerting power over inert matter.

Negotiation with power constituted the subject of the first part of section III, 'Order' as we traced the shape of 'Downstream' through forty years of changes. The original poem, despite stylistic excess, moves from establishing allegorical order, to deconstructing it, to building it again, before ending on a note of permanent deferral. The less interesting structure of Kinsella's radical revision of 1964-68 has in its turn been revised to accommodate more of the poems' original features. The second part of 'Order' turned away from questions of revision to look at the political implications of allegorical order as they are

expressed in an ostensibly personal context, in 'Phoenix Park'. The poem's doctrine of stoical communion in suffering and its vision of an organic order developing in an 'ordeal-cup' are troubling in their carelessness of the body of the other, but typical of allegory, which is content to transform bodies into signifying spectacles, while allowing the allegorist to protect his own body from risk by deflecting his voice from it.

The relation of other-speech to the body was again a concern in the final section, 'Encyclopaedia'. This section began with a consideration of viewpoint in some of Kinsella's public and satirical poems. The panorama is often associated with power and its abuses in these poems, whereas a ground-level viewpoint is a signifier of political good faith. In One Fond Embrace, questions of viewpoint have an impact on the representation of history, but the attitude that emerges is inconsistent and ambivalent, seeming to satirise and to endorse a view of history as cyclic repetitions of violence and pain. Such ambivalence is an even more contested issue in A Technical Supplement, again centring on Kinsella's attitude to order. The tutelary figures of that poem - personifications of Order - represent both the poet's own impulse to order and classify and the colonial rapine perpetrated by Britain upon Ireland. In an attempt to nuance this conclusion, which has been asserted by a number of critics, I suggested some affinities between various Kinsellan speakers and Diderot's definition of 'encyclopaedia' in his Encyclopédie. Finally, this section addressed the relationship between encyclopaedic knowledge and the allegorical desire to encompass the world in the self, suggesting that the imagery of consumption in A Technical Supplement reflects that desire in Kinsella's poems. In many ways the most allegorical of the poets considered in this thesis, in that he is relatively uninterested in forging forms of freedom from allegorical hierarchy, and not at all in giving the reader a sense of liberation, Kinsella is also capable of remarkable moments of resistance to allegorical structures. The rarity of such moments and their

destructive consequences bears witness to the extent to which Kinsella's poetics is a poetics of allegory at its most demanding.

Notes

¹ Thomas Kinsella, 'Ballydavid Pier', *Collected Poems 1956-2001* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001) 57. Further references to this edition are indicated by the abbreviation *KCP2*.

² The claim that Kinsella's poetry includes 'a growing mythical and allegorical element' is made on the jacket of *Collected Poems 1956-1994* (1996), but dropped from the Carcanet *Collected Poems 1956-2001* (2001). Further references to the 1996 Oxford *Collected Poems* are indicated by the abbreviation *KCP1*.

³ Geert Lernout, 'The Dantean Paradigm: Thomas Kinsella and Seamus Heaney', *The Clash of Ireland: Literary Contrasts and Connections*, eds C.C. Barfoot and Theo D'haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989) 248-64; 250-7.

⁴ John Haffenden, '[Interview with] Thomas Kinsella', Viewpoints: Poets in Coversation with John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 1981) 100-13; 104.

⁵ Thomas H. Jackson, *The Whole Matter: the Poetic Evolution of Thomas Kinsella* (Dublin and Syracuse, New York: Lilliput and Syracuse University Press, 1995) 127.

⁶ W.J. McCormack, 'Politics or Community? Crux of Thomas Kinsella's Aesthetic Development', *Tracks* 7, (Kinsella Special Issue) ed. John F. Deane (Dublin: Dedalus Press, 1987), 61-77.

⁷ Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 78.

⁸ Gordon Teskey, 'Allegory', *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, eds A.C. Hamilton, Donald Cheney, W.F. Blisset, David A. Richardson and William M. Barker (Toronto, Buffalo and London: Toronto University Press, 1990) 16-22; 22.

⁹ Kurt Rudolph, Gnosis, 2nd ed., ed. Robert McLachlan Wilson, trans. P.W. Coxon, K.H. Kuhn and Robert McLachlan Wilson (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 54.

¹⁰ Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Interview with Thomas Kinsella', Poetry Ireland Review 25 (Spring 1989) 57-65, 63.
Further references to this interview are indicated by PIR.

¹¹ A point of contact with Clarke, though as I have indicated, their attitudes to allegory's hierarchising potential differ greatly.

¹² Kinsella's publication history is complex. From 1954 to 1973, he published with Liam Miller's Dolmen Press. 1973's New Poems was his last publication solely with Dolmen. Since 1972, Kinsella has published chapbooks with his own Peppercanister Press 'as a substitute for magazine publication'. 'A Conversation [between Kinsella and John Deane]' Tracks 7 86-91; 87. Between 1979 and 1994 he revised and collected the first 17 Peppercanisters into four volumes published by Dolmen in association with OUP in the case of the first two, and by OUP alone in the case of the remaining two. Collected Poems 1956-1994 collects these, along with revised versions of the earlier work. After OUP wound up its poetry list, Kinsella moved to Carcanet,

who published his *Collected Poems 1956-2001*, which includes Peppercanisters 19-23, as well as yet more revisions to already collected work. The prose Peppercanister 18, *The Dual Tradition* (1995) was also published by Carcanet.

- ¹³ See above, Chapter 1, section III, 'Ornament and Order'.
- ¹⁴ Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press) 1964, 125.
- 15 Deborah L. Madsen, Re-reading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre (London: Macmillan, 1995).
- ¹⁶ Donatella Abbate Badin, 'An Interview with Thomas Kinsella', *The European English Messenger* VIII: 1 (Spring 1999) 38-40; 39.
- ¹⁷ See Kinsella, 'Downstream', *Downstream* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1962). Further references to this collection are indicated by *D*. Kinsella revised this poem considerably, cutting almost half its length, removing ornamental *chiaroscuro* and local colour, and published the result in the *Massachusetts Review* in 1964. Kinsella, 'Downstream', *Massachusetts Review* 5 (Winter 1964) 323-325. A finalised version of this poem, its imagery and diction tightened still further, appears as the final poem ('Downstream II') in *Nightwalker and Other Poems* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1968), in *Selected Poems* 1956-68 (Dublin: Dolmen, 1973) and in *Poems* 1956-73 (Portlaoise and Winston Salem, NC: Dolmen and Wake Forest University Press, 1980). *KCP1* 46-54 abandons some of the *terza rima* patterning and shortens the poem still further, while *KCP2* 47-50 restores certain features of the 1962 text.
- ¹⁸ Philip Fried, "Omphalos of Scraps": An Interview with Thomas Kinsella", Manhattan Review 4 (Spring 1988) 3-25; 17.
- ¹⁹ Derval Tubridy, Thomas Kinsella: The Peppercanister Poems (Dublin: UCD Press, 2001) 229
- ²⁰ Thomas Kinsella, *Notes from the Land of the Dead* (Dublin: Cuala, 1972) Further page numbers are given in the text, indicated by *NLD*.
- ²¹ Kinsella, New Poems 1973 (Dublin: Dolmen, 1973) 9-53. References to this collection are indicated by NP.
- ²² Kinsella, letter to Brian John (1st February 1986), quoted in John, Reading the Ground: The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella, (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1996) 124.
- ²³ See for example, 'All is emptiness/ and I must spin' (NP 44-45):

We were made to separate and strip. My urine flowed with mild excitement. Our hands touched lightly in farewell.

(44; with variation KCP2 166)

²⁴ Kinsella, Songs of the Psyche (Peppercanister: Dublin, 1985) 34.

A note on the Peppercanister chapbooks: Where the Peppercanister version differs from either *Collected Poems*, and this is significant to my argument, the chapbook is cited. Many Peppercanisters have no page numbers: where necessary, I have indicated in square brackets a suggested page number (title page is assumed to be page 1). However, where there is no significant change between the Peppercanister chapbook and either the Oxford or Carcanet *Collected Poems*, I use only the *Collected Poems* page reference.

²⁶ A line from Clarke's 'Beyond the Pale' (1963) – like 'The Familiar', a love poem celebrating marriage – seems to have suggested this pun:

Pleasant to climb the rock of Dunamace, A goat upon a crag, a falcon swerving Above: heraldic shield of air, chevroned With brown and *or*: later the rounded walls And bastion were raised

Austin Clarke, Collected Poems, ed Liam Miller (Dublin and Oxford: Dolmen and Oxford University Press, 1974) 289.

²⁷ Carolyn Rosenberg was perhaps the first. See 'Let Our Gaze Blaze: The Recent Poetry of Thomas Kinsella', PhD dissertation. Kent State University, (1980) 270. Kinsella's interest in Gnosticism seems to have been sparked by his reading of Jung. Kinsella alludes specifically to Gnostic cosmology and eschatology on occasion, but the real relevance of Gnosis for Kinsella's poetics seems to lie in its peculiarly textual and exegetical nature. The importance of the Word and 'protest exegesis' for Gnostic writers has already been noted; a similar aesthetic of the subversive gloss seems to animate Kinsella's treatment of cartography and anatomy in A Technical Supplement, family lore in The Messenger and Madonna and Irish myth in Notes From the Land of the Dead and One. It might also go some way to explaining Kinsella's controversial critical pronouncements, the most famous of which is his assertion that the late twentieth century renaissance in Northern Irish poetry was 'a journalistic entity'. Kinsella (ed. and trans.), 'Introduction', The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) xxx.

²⁵ Kinsella, 'The Familiar', The Familiar (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1999) n.pag.; KCP2 329-332. Critics have been slow to comment on this reappearance of apparently discarded material. Ruth Ling painstakingly traces allusions in 'The Familiar' to Kinsella's translations from Irish, to the 'muse-poetry' of Another September and Downstream, but most of all to 'Phoenix Park', in which she senses Kinsella's decisive alienation from the muse to whom he would return in the 1999 chapbook. These allusions are no doubt there to be found, but Ling seems unaware of just how far 'Kinsella's process of re-harvesting and redrafting of past work' extends. She sees 'The Familiar' as Kinsella's return to elegiac love poetry after years of chilly funeral art ('effigy'), but the fact that a substantial proportion of 'The Familiar' is culled from Notes From the Land of the Dead — the volume which first outlined Kinsella's interest in 'effigy' — suggests that the relationship between earlier and later work is more complex than she acknowledges. Ruth Ling, 'Refamiliarizing the Familiar: From Effigy to Elegy in the Recent Marriage Poems of Thomas Kinsella', Irish University Review 31:1 (Thomas Kinsella Special Issue) (Spring/Summer 2001) 153-171; 169.

²⁸ This epigraph is also the final lines of 'Phoenix Park'. See KCP2 94-95.

²⁹ In the *European English Messenger* interview Kinsella remarks of Wordsworth: 'All in balance: the necessary thing said straight, avoiding the rhetorical temptation. Yeats is comparable in emotional and visionary range, but his palpable pleasure in his own skills can interfere. This self-satisfaction is part of his creative nature, but it can get in the way.' (39) Kinsella's controls on ornament seem to be aimed at reducing the possibility for self-satisfaction in both reader and poet.

- ³⁰ See above Chapter 1, section I and Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996) 8.
- ³¹ Writing on Kinsella's wit, O'Driscoll is obliged to remark on the unrevised 'Hen Woman' to illustrate Kinsella's '[d]eadpan humour'. He fights shy of actually saying that the new versions aren't as funny, but the possibility is certainly in the air. Dennis O'Driscoll, 'His Wit: Humour and Satire in Thomas Kinsella's Poetry', *IUR* 31:1, 1-18; 13.
- ³² 'Good Night' has a precursor in a rather sententious squib of the same title, included in the mini-sequence 'Time's Mischief', part of *Moralities* (1960):

Good night re-echoed in the hall. Armchair And grate, the lamp he touched as he got up, Locked timeless gaze with hers. She faced the stair. The last to go will leave an empty cup.

Kinsella, Moralities (Dublin: Dolmen, 1960) 11.

For fairly obvious reasons, this was never collected. 'Time's Mischief' is reduced to a four line 'interlude' in all subsequent versions. This quatrain retains its interest as an early example of a preoccupation with temporality in relationships and of the cup as a signifier of marital or familial order.

- ³³ An example of 'the most classical of metaphors, conceived as a transfer from an inside to an outside space (or vice versa) by means of an analogical representation. This transfer then reveals a totalising oneness that was originally hidden but which is fully revealed as soon as it is named and maintained in the figural language.' (De Man 35) This 'most classical of metaphors' might also be valuably applied to MacNeice's emblematic poem 'House on a Cliff'. See above Chapter 3, section IV and MCP 462.
- ³⁴ Kinsella, '[rev. of Autumn Sequel]', Irish Writing 29 (December 1954) 65-67; 66.
- 35 Balanchandra Rajan, 'Closure', The Spenser Encyclopedia, 169-170; 170.
- ³⁶ Robin Skelton, 'The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella' Éire-Ireland 4:1 (Spring 1969) 86-108; 101.
- ³⁷ Ezra Pound, The Cantos (London: Faber & Faber, 1994) 257-340.
- 38 Alex Davis, 'Thomas Kinsella and the Pound Legacy: His Jacket on the Cantos', IUR 31:1, 38-53; 39.
- ³⁹ Massimo Bacigalupo, *The Formèd Trace: the Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 98. Quoted in Davis 40.
- ⁴⁰ See Massachusetts Review 323, Nightwalker and Other Poems 83, Selected Poems 56, Poems 58. The words 'Was it not so?' appear only in D.
- ⁴¹ The term used by historians of Gnosis to signify the primal man who is the creator, saviour and divine inner being of humans (Rudolph 92-4).
- ⁴² For the distancing function of poetic diction in 'Downstream' and other early Kinsella, see Jackson 27-28.
- ⁴³ The corpse is 'that thing that no longer matches and no linger signifies anything'. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4. For Clarke's treatment of significance in death and the challenges abjection poses to allegorical making, see above Chapter 2, section IV.
- ⁴⁴ See above, Chapter 1, section II, subsection (iii).

[...]the Common Dish, that vessel of common human sufferings, joys, disappointments, tragedies and bare sufficiencies from which most people have to eat in this world, and from which some choose to eat in order to keep faith with them. This dish is the opposite of the medieval Grail, which was a vessel attained only by a spiritual élite. To refuse the common ration, or fail to recognise and respect it, earns one the contempt and rejection of battlers and all who live under the laws of necessity.

Les Murray, 'Some Religious Stuff I Know about Australia', *The Paperbark Tree* (Manchester. Carcanet, 1992) 142-162; 158.

Similarly, Kinsella's cup resists identification with the Grail: when it appears in the Peppercanister poems, it is usually disguised, though readily identifiable by its centrality and importance in mundane settings. In 'His Father's Hands' the speaker 'set[s] the glass down between us firmly' in order to begin an investigation into his troubled relationship with his father, and into a more distant, but painful past of dispersal and dispossession (KCP2 171-173). The father, in The Messenger, 'knock[s] the last drops of Baby Power/into his glass and carrie[s] the lifewater/to his lips'; the bitter cup here is the diminution ('Baby Power', in a neat transformation of colloquial usage and the proprietary name into a comment on the dying father's strength) of his 'own half fierce force' (KCP2 210).

It is in connection with a mother figure, however, that the cup receives another full allegorical treatment. The larger part of 'At the Head Table' is a toast, spoken in ironic celebration of a mother whom the speaker regards as 'the source of trouble', and by extension, of art. He describes a cup which could be a parody of the vessel in 'Phoenix Park':

A fit vessel also for ornament and pattern—these shapes of sand and water that pass for decoration, the marks of waves and footprints somewhere by the sea. In fact, a web of order covering the surface with movement and real meaning a system of living images inscribed in the material or modelled and imposed [...] making increased response to each increased demand

⁴⁵ Peter Denman, 'Significant Elements: Songs of the Psyche and Her Vertical Smile', *IUR* 31:1, 95-109, 95.

⁴⁶ Maurice Harmon, The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1974) 44.

⁴⁷ Ian Flanagan, "Tissues of Order': Kinsella and the Enlightenment Ethos', *IUR* 31:1, 54-77; 55.

⁴⁸ In Nightwalker and Other Poems and KCP1 section 4 begins with the next stanza, 'The tyres are singing'. Nightwalker and Other Poems 80, KCP1 92.

⁴⁹ Fletcher notes that allegorical (kosmic) imagery frequently isolates its constituent parts, producing diagrammatic or surrealistic effects (Fletcher 98-108).

⁵⁰ Les Murray explains his use of a cognate figure to Kinsella's cup in the following terms:

in the eyes of the beholder with a final full response to a full intense regard.

'At The Head Table', *Madonna and Other Poems* (Peppercanister: Dublin, 1991) 21-22. The Peppercanister is quoted in preference to later versions because it preserves the speaker's verbosity, emphasising his difference from the poet.

The cup that the speaker describes appears to offer illuminating truths about the poet's art, but the impression proves deceptive. He is actually re-stating central and familiar Kinsellan tenets: the importance of an organic, natural type of ornament, 'the marks of waves and footprints' and the demands of active readership which good art imposes on 'the beholder'. This speaker is rather more tolerant of order imposed on poetic material than Kinsella himself appears to be, allowing that images might be 'inscribed in the material/or modelled and imposed'. This marks not so much a softening Kinsella's strictures against 'imposed' order but the ambivalent regard in which the poet holds the prolix, self-conscious speaker of 'At the Head Table'.

- ⁵¹ KCP1 and KCP2 both print 'slowly forming laws its increases by' (KCP1, KCP2 89). The version in Nightwalker and Other Poems is more grammatical and more intelligible.
- ⁵² Compare Shamefastnesse's blushing (FQ II.x.43).
- ⁵³ Ian Flanagan notes a similar play in the opening poem of *A Technical Supplement*: 'let our gaze blaze, we pray/ let us see how the whole thing/works' (*KCP2* 177). See Flanagan 58-59.
- ⁵⁴ David Norbrook and H.R. Woudhuysen (eds.), *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse 1509-1659*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) 43.
- ⁵⁵ Jonathan Sawday, The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture (London: Routledge, 1995) 191.
- ⁵⁶ See Tubridy 77-93; Tubridy 'Difficult Migrations: The *Dinnseanchas* of Thomas Kinsella's Later Poetry', *IUR* 31:1, 172-185 and 'Flanagan, 'Tissues of Order' 54-77.
- ⁵⁷ Kinsella, One Fond Embrace (Peppercanister: Dublin, 1988) n.pag. [4-6]. See KCP2 273-275.
- ⁵⁸ Kinsella, *The Pen Shop* (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1997) n.pag [10]. *KCP2* omits 'clear in calibre and professional' and makes small changes in lineation (327).
- ⁵⁹ Ian Flanagan, 'An Interview with Thomas Kinsella', Metre 2 (1997), 108-115; 110.
- 60 Kinsella, Personal Places (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1990) 18. See KCP1 302; it remains unchanged in KCP2 291.
- ⁶¹ The phrase is from One Fond Embrace ([4], KCP2 274)
- ⁶² The title page of *One Fond Embrace* states: 'The persons and circumstances in this poem are real, but their parts have been redistributed so as to make them unrecognisable' [4]. The suggestion of dismemberment 'their parts have been redistributed' evokes *A Technical Supplement*, but also posits the text's allegorical status: allegories frequently imply the dismemberment their signifying bodies, as noted above in section III and in Chapter 1, sections I and III.
- 63 KCP2 280 actually reads 'Tara is gross', which is tempting to read as a deliberate emendation, but is probably a misprint. The lines are quoted from Kinsella's own translation of Donncha Dall Ó Laoghaire's epigram 'Do

threascair an saol is shéid an ghaoth mar smál'. *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed*, ed. Sean Ó Tuama, trans. Kinsella, (Mountrath, Portlaoise: Dolmen, 1981) 194-195.

⁶⁴ The despairing nostalgia embodied in Ó Laoghaire's epigram, from which Kinsella omits the wry final line 'And even the English – maybe they might die' (*Duanaire* 194-195) might contribute to this brutalisation: see Chapter 3, section III for the relation of allegory, nostalgia and political violence.

⁶⁵ The Peppercanister version of One Fond Embrace includes a similar reductio ad absurdum on the theme of Partition which emphasises Kinsella's point, but which is omitted from subsequent versions:

A channel a mile in width

to be dug along the Border; link with the loose material Fair Head and the Mull of Kintyre;

69 Kinsella, 'Dream', Open Court (Dublin: Peppercanister, 1991) 16-17.

at the noon Angelus on St. Patrick's Day exchange governments.

([13])

See Chapter 3, section II for MacNeice's use of this kind of historical and figural slippage.

- ⁶⁶ Denis Diderot, 'The Encyclopaedia', Rameau's Nephew and Other Works, trans. Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen, (New York: Macmillan, 1964) 277-307; 277.
- ⁶⁷ 'The Irish Writer', *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson?: Tradition and the Irish Writer* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1970) 59. The phrase is an echo of 'Nightwalker' 'A dying language echoes/ across a century's silence' (*KCP2* 82).
- ⁶⁸ Kinsella, The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland (Manchester and Dublin: Carcanet and Peppercanister, 1995). 'The Divided Mind', Irish Poets in English, ed. Sean Lucy (Cork: Mercier, 1973) 208-18.
- Tubridy associates this viewpoint with Kinsella's study of Pound, and Pound's conception of 'the periplum, not as land looks on a map/ but as sea bord seen by men sailing'. Tubridy, 'Difficult Migrations: The *Dinnseanchas* of Thomas Kinsella's Later Poetry', *IUR* 31:1, 172-185; 186. See Pound, 'Canto LIX' (*Cantos* 324-327, 324). It might be worth noting here that a sympathy with *dinnseanchas*-like cartographies is not prophylactic against the articulation of racist ideology, and that the phrase about the periplum occurs in that notorious piece of 'regime art', the China Cantos.
- ⁷¹ The illustrations are not reproduced in *KCP1* or *KCP2*. See *A Technical Supplement*, (Peppercanister: Dublin, 1976) n.pag. The chapbook includes a note on the illustrations, a quotation from John Viscount Morley's *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists*: 'The animation of these folios of pictures is prodigious. They affect one like looking down on the world of Paris from the heights of Montmartre. To turn over volume after volume is like watching a splendid panorama of all the busy life of the time' [32].
- 72 The Peppercanister version of the poem reads 'with cowering arms/ and not to' [28].
- ⁷³ David Perkins' essay 'The Postmodern Encyclopaedia' offers a refreshing critique of encyclopaedic form. He begins by suggesting that encyclopaedic form is useful because it does not impose a narrative structure on the past, a structure that readers might be tempted to regard as the way events actually occurred:

Encylopedic form is free[...] what all discursive form actually is, encyclopaedic form obviously is, a form erected alongside the unknowable form of reality. Like any form, it distorts the past as it presents it, but that the past is distorted is, in encylopedic form, blatant, even if we do not have in mind an alternative form in which the past might be given.

David Perkins, Is Literary History Possible? (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 54-55.

He states the value of the encyclopaedia in terms similar to Diderot's on cross-referencing: If we are presented with separate essays, we must connect them for ourselves in our own minds and can explore different possibilities of doing so' (55). The supposition of postmodernity, that not only are historical narratives multiple, heterogeneous and discontinuous, but the past itself is those things, makes the encyclopaedia the most sophisticated and most appropriate form of history. Perkins senses a certain bad faith, though, in many encyclopaedias which claim discontinuity as a formal principle but allow that readers might find their own continuities: 'the editors do not really mean this, perhaps because they do not want to close the possibility that literature develops continuously' (Perkins 57).

Perkins also conceives the class hierarchies implicit in the encyclopaedic work in a very different manner from most commentators on Kinsella: 'To emphasize that historical reality is an array of particulars, heterogeneous and unstructurable, is typical of postmodernist cultural criticism. It is also an extreme version of a mode of historical perception that [...] characterizes a politically dominant class' (Perkins 59). He quotes Karl Mannheim in support of this view:

A class which has already risen in the social scale tends to conceive of history in terms of unrelated, isolated events. Historical events appear as a process only as long as the class which views these events still expects something from it.... [With] success in the class struggle ... there appears a picture of the world composed of mere immediate events and discrete facts. The idea of a process and of the structural intelligibility of history becomes a mere myth.

See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), trans. Louis Wirth and Edward A. Shils (London: Routledge, 1991) 129-30. Mannheim's remarks are made in the context of an explanation of how 'the a-historical spirit of fascism' (Mannheim 129) develops from the bourgeois indifference to historical process described above. While he does not suggest that the postmodern encyclopaedia is actually fascistic, Perkins' aim is clearly to remind the reader that encyclopaedic form is not as 'free' politically as it is structurally. 'Because it aspires to reflect the past in its multiplicity and heterogeneity, it does not organize the past, and in this sense, it is not history' (Perkins 60). Non-interference and non-organisation of the past may be as tyrannical as organisation of it: this is the bind in which Kinsella's speakers repeatedly find themselves.

⁷⁴ Skloot, '[Rev. of A Technical Supplement]', Éire-Ireland 12:3 (Autumn 1977) 143-147; 145.

Conclusion

There is this specific machine & there is that specific machine & what you say I say they say 'on the other hand...'

The attention given in the preceding chapters to infinite analogical extension and permanent deferral of closure indicates the difficulties of adequately concluding a study of allegory. In an intriguing formulation, the Spenser scholar Isabel MacCaffrey suggests that abrupt or arbitrary closure is a way for the allegorist to avoid the 'procrustean' demands of poetic structure: 'the abrupt conclusion [...] is, among other things, a sign that the poet has allowed Proteus to triumph over Procrustes.' The traditional association of Proteus with matter, on which MacCaffrey remarks, suggests that this 'triumph' is another form of allegorical capture, the transformation of nature into imprintable substance in order that it might be 'raised' into allegory's signifying system. However, the idea that allegory oscillates between procrustean and protean aesthetics, suggesting both the violent imposition of standard forms and a transformative poetics of resistance to capture, has informed this thesis throughout.

Even leaving aside allegory's inherent resistance to completion, it must at least be said that with so much research yet to be done on allegory in Irish poetry, any conclusions that this thesis could reach must be of the most provisional nature. This study of Clarke, MacNeice and Kinsella represents only a proportion of the work that could be undertaken on allegory in their poetry, and only a tiny fraction of that which might be done on allegory in modern Irish poetry. The methods of this study could be extended to many poets, contemporaries of Clarke and MacNeice such as Thomas MacGreevy, John Hewitt and Denis Devlin, Kinsella's peers John Montague and Richard Murphy, and a slightly younger generation of poets including Seamus Heaney, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Derek Mahon, Eavan Boland, Paul Muldoon, Medbh

McGuckian, Paul Durcan and Maurice Scully. Modern Irish poetry is rich in long poems with a substantial allegorical element, poems such as Murphy's *The Battle of Aughrim* (1968), Montague's *The Rough Field* (1972), Heaney's *The Haw Lantern* (1987) and very many of Paul Muldoon's longer poems, among the most significant of which are *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990), and 'Yarrow' (1994). Maurice Scully's serial poem *Livelihood* ensures the continuation in Irish poetry of the encyclopaedic and satiric remits of Kinsella's Peppercanister sequence, while moving away from Kinsella's identitarian concentration on 'blood and family', and from the older poet's acquiescence in the rigidity of allegorical structures, towards a poetry which maintains constant vigilance to the politics of its form and assumes what Keith Tuma, quoting Scully, calls 'a posture of receptiveness, a "Waiting Posture" '. A survey of allegorical expression in modern Irish poetry, while it would forego some of the close readings privileged here, is one direction further research could (and should) take, but this thesis might also lay foundations for a monograph on Clarke, MacNeice or Kinsella, or suggest some models for further monographs on the poets mentioned above.

Such speculations have a tendency to imply, however, that this thesis, and other possible work in the same area, operate in one direction only, examining how allegory theory can enlarge our appreciation of modern Irish poetry. In emphasising the need for critical studies of the field, the Introduction to this thesis and Chapter 1 above are perhaps guilty of the same fault. The process is, of course, reciprocal, and in recognition of that, it is fitting to conclude with some reflections on how the poetry studied in the three preceding chapters might also enlarge our understanding of the theory of allegory. The necessarily limited survey of theories of allegory in Chapter 1 revealed a number of attributes of the mode, one of which might be that it is not always understood or named as a mode, but also as a figure, form or genre. Allegory is ambivalent: our feeling that there is something contradictory in its derivation from both

allos and agorenein is reproduced at every stage of an investigation into an allegorical text. At the same time, however, the form encourages its readers to strive towards a point of unified signification. On the way to that point of revealed truth, the allegory valorises abstract meaning. To use the terminology of positive and negative 'others' common to a number of critics: we speak other (say something different from what we mean) in order to speak of the Other (mean something different from what we say). The valorisation of certain kinds of 'other' and certain kinds of other-speech makes allegory a hierarchising mode, a mode which fixes its agents in a chain of being. Allegory effaces difference, between order and ornament, decorum and decoration, but also between agency and imagery, and finally between persons themselves, as one body is made to stand for another, or for an object or thought. Such bodies are not 'abstract' or 'imaginary', but material.

One of the most important insights of twentieth-century allegory theory is that the signifying bodies and objects of allegory do not appear from nowhere, but are drawn from our world, and have implications in that world. MacNeice writes, 'We should read Spenser as we read Kafka, accepting his symbolic world as a real one and letting its underlying meanings infiltrate into our consciousness without too much forcing or ferreting on our part.' The contradiction inherent in this statement – we should accept the allegorical world as 'real', but not allow ourselves agency in it – comes close to the problem at the heart of allegorical expression. The presiding intelligence we apprehend when we read an allegory presents itself as benign, orderly, organic, withdrawing before a reader it posits as aggressive, 'forcing', 'ferreting'. But what allegory actually does – making objects and, more importantly, persons, signify something else – is the reverse of this perceived intelligence: it is violent, deranging, artificial and assertive. It seeks to enclose that which is not itself within its system. It is not the reader who forces and ferrets in the allegorical world but allegory which forces and ferrets in ours. However,

precisely because allegory is aggregative and rapacious in this way, seeking to take the world within its system, it encounters resistance from bodies which refuse to be coopted to significance. Allegory will usually assimilate this resistance to signify an especial meaningfulness, but the residue of resistance is there, recoverable to the critical reader. Furthermore, allegory's dependence on material objects – it cannot be done without the bodies it needs to make signify – means that allegory has its appearance of order and timelessness only in and through time. It should be possible for signifying objects and bodies to decay out of meaning altogether, to escape capture through progressive decline and thus regain autonomy and integrity. This is what Walter Benjamin refers to as the 'redemption' of allegory, and though such redemption is not possible within allegories, it is implied in their analogous shift of meanings and deferral of closure.

These formulations are nuanced by the readings advanced in Chapters 2 to 4 of this study. In Chapter 2 we noted Clarke's resistance to mythopoeia and his association of allegory with mental disorder. The dangers that allegory presents to mental health are analogous to its propensity to meddle with bodily autonomy, as we see, for instance, in 'The Frenzy of Suibhne' and 'Summer Lightning', where attempts to understand the world symbolically have catastrophic – fatal – effects on the protagonists' bodies, transforming them into corpses. Clarke's personae are given to allegorical expression; in his unkind summary of Clarke's career, Denis Donoghue quotes 'The Flock at Dawn': 'poetry is what we dare express/ When its neglect has been personified' and comments 'Personified, exactly. Everyone who irritated Clarke was treated as the personification of some horrible Law or Principle.' This is part of Maurice Devane's personality also: we see it both in his mad mythography of Gate, Garden and Fountain and at moments when his recovery is supposed to be nearly complete: 'Poetic personification: Hope frowned'. At the same time, Clarke's poems mount furious resistance to the use of the

body for signifying purposes: attempts to construe the world allegorically end so often in the protagonist becoming a corpse precisely because of the corpse's immunity to signification: it 'no longer matches and no longer signifies anything'. Resistance to signification might function within allegory as abjection functions within the 'symbolic', logocentric world: a distinct Other, which though it may be captured to prop the structures which have come to contain it, is nonetheless *not-I*. Such a conclusion is complicated by Kristeva's contention that writing itself is abject, both produced out of and articulating the horror of abjection. *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust*, having examined the mechanics of resistance to signification, then casts allegory itself as a form of abjection, a residue of mentally dangerous desire for unity of meaning which accompanies Maurice into a quotidian world where Gates are gates and fountains horse-troughs. The poem shows us a model of allegory which is concentric, enclosing, but at every stage leaves traces of the possibility for resistance and liberation.

MacNeice's poetry enacts a more linear model of allegorical action, a working through of the possibilities and problems of allegory which in his last poems emerges as something other than allegory in that it anticipates the restoration of integrity to signifying bodies and objects. The tight, well-wrought lyrics of MacNeice's last three collections emphasise the action of time on their own emblematic structures, recording decay and change until the imagery approaches a point at which it means nothing: 'The pan on the left dead empty/ And the pan on the right dead empty/ [...] in the dead, dead calm'. These poems are exhilarating because they register the imminence and the immanence of the reversal out of allegory that Benjamin called its redemption: the signifying objects of a late MacNeice poem seem on the verge of release from capture, even as they reveal that the potential for such release was there all along.

This sense of allegory as process to be worked through, a structure against which explicit argument fails, and which must be unravelled from the inside or not at all,

is developed in MacNeice's mid-period poems. Their large, uneconomic forms appear more like the received idea of the poem of process than the late lyrics, which seem to be quintessential product poems, but they are less successful in their confrontations with allegory's potential to limit freedom. 'The Stygian Banks' attempts overt argument against 'the haunting wish/ to fuse all persons together', but it is simply absorbed by the analogy of history with human maturation. Ten Burnt Offerings and Autumn Sequel repeatedly approach the problem of allegory's violence towards the individual and the body, but withdraw when the recognition threatens to destabilise the values on which the poems are based. These retreats are in themselves significant, because they create a resonance which alerts us to the presence of a political problem in allegorical making and to the immanence of its solution in the very structures which create the difficulty. MacNeice's poetry, always animated by questions of the self's relation to the other, demonstrates that immersion in allegorical structures need not mean total submission to them, and that allegory has cultural value beyond warning us of its own authoritarianism.

Kinsella's approval of the procedure of *Autumn Sequel*, 'problems must be lived through, not solved', his conception in *Wormwood* and 'Phoenix Park' of life as an ordeal, and finally, his clear formal commitment to the process-poem might encourage us to believe that, even more than MacNeice, he is sympathetic to a poetics in which working through allegory's most problematic aspects procures transformative liberation. However, Kinsella's interest in ordering 'significant experience', and his presentation of that ordering as 'form and unity embedded in the data' means that the model of allegory found in his work is actually less interested in resisting its potential for violently imposed hierarchy than in exploring it. The various revisions to 'Downstream', whereby the original structure of two movements investigating the consequences of the speaker's desire for control over and coincidence with nature is gradually restored,

closing of exegetical possibility for the reader, with a concomitant expansion of potentiality for the poetic self, while the position of the signifying bodies – often, in Kinsella, female bodies – remains unchanged, forced into signification within an allegorical scheme. Kinsella's fidelity to allegorical structure belies attempts to interpret his work as part of a decolonising impulse in Irish writing. Of none of the poetry discussed in this thesis is Joel Fineman's maxim more applicable: 'allegory is always a hierarchizing mode [...] however subversively intended its contents may be'. The discontinuity of the values expressed by the poet and his personae with those implied by the mode in which he works, a feature of all three poets' work, is yet more pronounced in Kinsella, illustrating the dangerous autonomy of allegory, its propensity to interfere in our lives and works. Finally, Kinsella's negotiations with 'imposed' meaning and his fascination with allegorical violence, result in unusually stark expositions of both the voraciousness of encyclopaedic allegory and the autonomy of the resisting body. He is attentive to the materiality of literary making.

Such attentiveness brings us to the conclusion of this thesis. I hope to have shown that far from being unreal or abstract, allegory is a pressing and material concern in these poets' work. When an allegorist makes objects or bodies signify, real objects and real bodies are at stake. I began this Conclusion with MacCaffrey's suggestion that allegory allows Proteus to triumph over Procrustes. A substantial part of this thesis has been concerned to explore the nature of that 'triumph'. Allegory is indeed a protean form: transformative as it is deceptive. But it also imposes upon its persons and imagery Proteus' predicament: when they are captured, they must speak, and signify. In their different ways, the three poets discussed in this study interrogate the means by which the signifying bodies of allegory are captured and bound, and the consequences of freeing those protean bodies from signification.

Notes

¹ Maurice Scully, 'There is this specific machine', *The Basic Colours* (Durham: Pig Press, 1994) 51-54; 51.

² Isabel MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976) 331.

³ Keith Tuma, ed., Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 831. For details of Livelihood, a 300-page serial poem which will include material published as The Basic Colours (1994) Prelude, Interlude and Postlude (1997) and Steps (1998) see Wild Honey Press.com, ed. Randolph Healy, 2003, http://www.wildhoneypress.com.

⁴ Louis MacNeice, 'Spenser's Symbolic World', Radio Times (26 September 1952) 15.

⁵ Denis Donoghue, 'Austin Clarke', We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986) 242-252; 250

⁶ Austin Clarke, *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust, Collected Poems*, ed. Liam Miller (Dublin and Oxford: Dolmen and Oxford University Press, 1974) 351.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans Leon S. Roudiez (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.

⁸ MacNeice, 'After the Crash', Collected Poems, ed. E.R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) 524.

⁹ Thomas Kinsella, [Rev. of Autumn Sequel], Irish Writing 29 (December 1954) 65-67; 66.

¹⁰ John Haffenden, '[Interview with] Thomas Kinsella', Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 1981) 100-113; 113

¹¹ Dennis O'Driscoll, Interview with Thomas Kinsella, Poetry Ireland Review 25 (Spring 1989) 57-65; 65.

¹² Joel Fineman, 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire', *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 26-60; 32.

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