



## **Terms and Conditions of Use of Digitised Theses from Trinity College Library Dublin**

### **Copyright statement**

All material supplied by Trinity College Library is protected by copyright (under the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 as amended) and other relevant Intellectual Property Rights. By accessing and using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you acknowledge that all Intellectual Property Rights in any Works supplied are the sole and exclusive property of the copyright and/or other IPR holder. Specific copyright holders may not be explicitly identified. Use of materials from other sources within a thesis should not be construed as a claim over them.

A non-exclusive, non-transferable licence is hereby granted to those using or reproducing, in whole or in part, the material for valid purposes, providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. Where specific permission to use material is required, this is identified and such permission must be sought from the copyright holder or agency cited.

### **Liability statement**

By using a Digitised Thesis, I accept that Trinity College Dublin bears no legal responsibility for the accuracy, legality or comprehensiveness of materials contained within the thesis, and that Trinity College Dublin accepts no liability for indirect, consequential, or incidental, damages or losses arising from use of the thesis for whatever reason. Information located in a thesis may be subject to specific use constraints, details of which may not be explicitly described. It is the responsibility of potential and actual users to be aware of such constraints and to abide by them. By making use of material from a digitised thesis, you accept these copyright and disclaimer provisions. Where it is brought to the attention of Trinity College Library that there may be a breach of copyright or other restraint, it is the policy to withdraw or take down access to a thesis while the issue is being resolved.

### **Access Agreement**

By using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you are bound by the following Terms & Conditions. Please read them carefully.

I have read and I understand the following statement: All material supplied via a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of a thesis is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

A Lesson in Presents: Social Change in the Writing of Brendan Kennelly,  
1980-2000

Katelyn Ferguson

Presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy, School of English, Trinity College Dublin, September 2012



## DECLARATION

*I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.*

*I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.*



Thesis 9884

Katelyn Ferguson

September 2012

## SUMMARY

This thesis explores the relationship between form in the writing of Irish poet Brendan Kennelly and social change in Ireland between 1980 and 2000. Using the ideas of postmodern theorists including Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and Charles Jencks, I employ a number of close readings in order to illustrate how Kennelly subverts traditional narrative and poetic forms and treats Irish national symbols, themes, historical and popular narratives in a way that encourages his readers to reevaluate them again and again. I argue that the fluidity of form and symbol in Kennelly's more recent writing implicates the reader in its authorship in a way that is similar to the processes of participatory design used in some postmodern architecture and urban planning. The shift in narrative authority that Kennelly creates in his poetry and drama reflects the changing relationship of the Irish people to traditional authorities like the government and the Catholic Church at the turn of the twenty-first century. It also serves as a correlative to a culture in a state of rapid change. The works covered at length in this thesis include the poem sequences *Cromwell*, *The Book of Judas*, *Poetry My Arse*, and *The Man Made of Rain* and Kennelly's translations of the Greek plays *Antigone*, *Medea*, and *The Trojan Women*.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of contemporary critical responses to Kennelly's writing.

Chapter 2 addresses Kennelly's treatment of language, narrative, and cultural iconography the poem sequence *Cromwell* (1983) with reference to the growing public interest in historiography in Ireland in the 1980s. The chapter argues that Kennelly uses the poem sequence to reflect and affirm the plurality of contemporary Irish culture.

Chapter 3 explores Kennelly's portrayal of Judas Iscariot in *The Book of Judas* (1991) and describes how Kennelly's characterization of Judas reflects the changing role of the individual, the community leader, and the Catholic Church in contemporary Ireland.

Chapter 4 tracks the evolution of female characters over the course of Kennelly's career and highlights some of the ways in which his recent representations of women call attention to the limitations of institutionalized misogyny.

Chapter 5 describes how Ace de Horner, the central character of *Poetry My Arse* (1995), develops from a caricature of the poetry establishment in Ireland to an affirming icon of a loss of artistic subjectivity.

Chapter 6 investigates Kennelly's representation of the body in *The Man Made of Rain* (1998). The chapter compares Kennelly's treatment of the physical body and its processes to that of traditional vision genres including.

The conclusion reviews the conceptual concerns of the thesis with reference to the conclusions drawn in the preceding chapters.

My thesis relies heavily on close readings of the texts in question.

Consequently, I have quoted at length from several of Kennelly's poems and plays in order to provide a context for my analysis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I present this thesis with wholehearted thanks to the many friends, colleagues, and benevolent strangers whose efforts and encouragement have made it possible. Firstly, to my advisor Gerald Dawe, whose guidance, humor, and good example have improved both the process and the product of my research. To the duty librarians at the Berkeley, Lecky, and Ussher libraries, who have helped me navigate the day-to-day with kindness and competence. To my examiners, Paul Delaney and Lucy Collins, for their generous and insightful readings of this work. I thank Trinity College Dublin, whose provision of a Ph.D. studentship has allowed me to undertake my doctoral studies. To my family and my inimitable partner-in-crime Adam Atherton, the prospect of celebrating with all of you makes the completion of this thesis that much sweeter. Finally, I thank Brendan Kennelly, whose gift of a copy of *The Man Made of Rain* was the impetus for this project and whose genial presence in his poetry, criticism, and around Dublin has sustained me throughout its writing.

## DEDICATION

*For Adam*

*He, darkly conscious, touched her darkened will,  
Grew grim, suspicious, furtive; loved her still.  
("Adam", EBK 19, lines 13-14)*



*"He taught me the meaning of presence, what it means to be truly and fully in somebody's presence, a process of complete dreamsurrender to another's emotional and intellectual reality at its most articulate and vital." (MMOR 7)*

## CONTENTS

Title	1
Declaration	2
Summary	3
Acknowledgements	5
Dedication	6
Contents	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1: Kennelly's Critics	17
Chapter 2: "A Running Battle": Historiography and Form in <i>Cromwell</i>	35
Chapter 3: "An O.K. Guy": Heroism and Betrayal in <i>The Book of Judas</i>	60
Chapter 4: Imagined Women	81
Chapter 5: "The River He Would Become": Redefining the Poet's Role in <i>Poetry My Arse</i>	108
Chapter 6: The "Singing Wound": Vision and the Healing Body in <i>The Man Made of Rain</i>	126
Conclusion	148
Bibliography	151

## INTRODUCTION

... *Though we live in a world that dreams of ending  
That always seems about to give in  
Something that will not acknowledge conclusion  
Insists that we forever begin.* (FS 478, lines 21-24)

In this thesis I will explore how Brendan Kennelly's more recent writing engages with social change in Ireland, especially in the years between 1980 and 2000. The turn of the twenty-first century has seen a number of sea changes in Irish culture: the election of Mary Robinson as the country's first female president, the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the legalization of divorce, the decriminalization of homosexuality and the cycle of rapid economic growth often referred to as the "Celtic Tiger." These years have also seen changes in the relationship of Irish people to traditional authorities like the government and the Catholic Church, as a series of scandals and the rise of global capitalism challenged the existing social order and replaced it with what historian Roy Foster calls "history in fast-forward mode" (*Luck and the Irish*, 1).

If the years between 1980 and 2000 were a time of extraordinary cultural change in Ireland, so too did they see a major alteration of the country's topography. Following the financial successes of the 1990s, political leader Eamon De Valera's vision of an Ireland where "material wealth would be valued only as a basis of right living and whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads" received a millennial "Extreme Makeover" (De Valera 466). Corporations including Dell, Intel, and Microsoft built sprawling headquarters and developments of clustered single dwellings sprung up en masse across the countryside as local councilors sought to capitalize on a number of government-funded road schemes and the increased mobility of the population in general. Cranes dotted the skylines of Ireland's cities and then gave way to areas of development Dublin's Docklands and International Financial Services Centre (IFSC). Throughout the time period in question, Irish writers attempted to carry forward Ireland's great literary tradition in an age enamored of novelty.

In my 2005 dissertation for the M.Phil in Anglo-Irish Literature I use a number of close readings to investigate how Kennelly deconstructs the self, language, and the body in his poem sequence *The Man Made of Rain*. In that study I am particularly interested in how Kennelly challenges traditional conceptions of these three entities, against the backdrop of his own recovery from heart surgery in 1997, in a way that encourages his readers to reevaluate

them again and again. I argue that the process of reevaluation that Kennelly implicates his readers in in *The Man Made of Rain* lends the poem an atmosphere of vitality. In an environment where nothing can be pinned down, it becomes necessary for the reader to engage with the text and consider all of its parts as they transform in ways that surprise even as they ring familiar. It is a particularly beautiful touch that the reader's process of grappling with *The Man Made of Rain* as a body of poetry coincides with the poet-character's process of reconsidering his own body as it heals following his surgery (and indeed, continues to degenerate).

An area of enormous potential that I failed to address in my early research is the way that *The Man Made of Rain* and other of Kennelly's works factor as a response to the experience of living in contemporary Ireland, a body of sorts that is, itself, growing into a new phase of being in the twenty-first century. A moment of intellectual genesis for this project came as I was reading a book by two Irish sociologists on the train from Dublin to Cork. The book in question compares the experience of living in "Celtic Tiger" Ireland to that of driving along a road that is always being rebuilt and changed and where the signs, signals and rules of the road change accordingly. Although Brendan Kennelly is a walker rather than a driver, the motif of the transforming and transformative road is one that he uses again and again in his poetry. In *Collision Culture: Transformations in Everyday Life in Ireland*, sociologists Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling discuss in a number of essays how:

... we have the individual and collective experience of social transformation in contemporary Irish society, marked by people's individual and collective living through the collisions of elements of traditional and modern forms of life-- a dangerous, perilous experience, exemplified by the car crash; and following this crisis, we can find recuperation, the constitution of a new identity, reintegration, and the restoration of social order. (29)

Of course, the more I considered the nature of social transformation in the process of writing this thesis, the more it occurred to me that *all* ages and a great many countries experience the kind of perilous social transformation highlighted by Keohane and Kuhling in their work. What makes Kennelly's treatment of this process particularly relevant to the experience of living in contemporary<sup>1</sup> Ireland is the way that he captures a culture where the speed and variability of life has made it difficult to restore social order, and so achieve the kind of recuperation that Keohane and Kuhling describe as the ideal outcome of "collision culture."

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will use the term 'contemporary' to indicate the time period that coincides with the writing and publication of the texts at hand: the years between 1980 and 2010.



In Kennelly's 1966 poem "Moments When the Light" the speaker watches a "moving throng" of Dublin commuters as the sun sets over Portobello Bridge and concludes:

... If moving men could  
See where they are going, they would  
Stop and contemplate the light  
And never move again until  
They understood why it should spill  
A sudden benediction on  
The head of every homegoing man. (FS 351, lines 16-22)

There is a tone of sadness, even of anger, at the condition of these commuters as they head homeward, ignorant of the magic that is unfolding all around them. As his career progresses, however, Kennelly becomes less frustrated with these "moving men" and more interested in seeing the world through their eyes.

In the 1995 poem "The river he would become", from *Poetry My Arse*, the speaker grapples with an environment that is far more diffuse than that of his antecedent. As he walks along the River Liffey the poem's antihero, Ace de Horner, contemplates the nature of poetry. Kennelly personifies Ace's thought process in the form of a small boy swimming in a river, describing how his antihero's questions:

... leap from [his] head  
  
like a boy  
swimming towards a rock that seemed miles away,  
a land as distant as the tantalising stars  
  
winking like older boys who know so much more than he  
would ever; yet the day will come when he, returning  
from the city, will see the rock a few simple strokes away,  
so near he wonders how once it sent him burning  
with adventure, so far beyond his reach in the river  
where he must wade and watch, learning  
  
to kill eels, tickle trout, see shadows bend and stretch  
in colours he'd no words for but admired with all  
his heart, the same heart that would cavil and bitch  
  
envy and evilspin, love and yearn and to protect and nourish while  
the river failed in memory but not in fact, making its  
seaward way in the old implacable style  
  
he dreamed of, longed for, worked for in the shaping



time when praise and blame were blessedly unknown  
and he could walk the streets or sit alone, pondering

the life that had the right to breathe in its own  
way, not his. (*PMA* 214, lines 6-25)

In this passage we can see how a variety of different perspectives, time periods and territories converge in the mind of Kennelly's streetwalking protagonist. The swimming boy is both a product of Ace's mind and an independent character with a consciousness of his own. This consciousness shifts between the moment when the boy swims from riverbank to rock and a moment, somewhat later, when he seems to be reflecting on the experience as an adult. The physical distance between riverbank and rock is elastic, stretching as far as "... miles away, / a land as distant as the tantalising stars" and then covering the space of "a few simple strokes." The swimming boy's context is first rural and then urban, as he walks the streets and, later, traces the shapes of Dublin's cathedrals and pubs in his mind's eye (*PMA* 214, lines 26-28). The emotional state of the boy is curious, spellbound, envious, vindictive, nurturing, loving and a variety of other things all at once. He is an observer, watching the river as it flows through time and space, throwing shadows and making shapes in the light. He is also observed: winked at by stars who become older boys and, later, by himself.

Where the lens of the speaker in "Moments When the Light" is fixed, the lens in "The river he would become" shifts constantly. In the latter poem the benediction that we see poured on the heads of the commuters by some higher power in the former comes from *within* the swimming boy, out of his persistent sense of wonder and ability to conceive and re-conceive the world around him. Here, as in much of his later work, the moments that Kennelly examines and celebrates are those for which there are no precedents, when the minds of his subjects are forced to engage actively with their surroundings rather than defer to the prescriptions of the familiar. Through the metaphor of Ace's-question-as-swimming-boy Kennelly recognizes the potential for inquiry to carry us out of ourselves into the unknown. He invests Ace's question with a life of its own, allowing its particularity to disrupt and fragment his antihero's consciousness. The abstract quality of the metaphor, in concert with the poem's many other unconventional features, also serves to disrupt the consciousnesses of the reader, so that the act of reading itself becomes an impetus for the kind of discovery that Kennelly is advocating.

This change in Kennelly's poetic voice, away from a singular, authoritative mode toward something more mutable is relevant to the experience of living in

contemporary Ireland because it reflects an extraordinary change in the nature of cultural consciousness. Besides being an increasingly culturally diverse people<sup>2</sup>, the Irish of the twenty-first century are, in keeping with the rest of the globalized world, bombarded with information. The digital age has brought us into contact with such a variety of customs, ethics, perspectives, and possibilities for change, that it has become difficult to navigate and classify experience through culture, or to locate it in a single geographical or historical place. Novelist William Gibson describes contemporary consciousness valuably when he observes:

... I think that the present has gotten very, very brief indeed. At one time, the present was about a week long. Probably many years before that, the present could be a year or a decade. You could say "now" and really know what you meant.

But today, you don't even know what you mean. If you say "now," it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with what it's going to be like tomorrow. In that kind of world, we don't really have the luxury or even the ability to dream up fully articulated fantasy futures the way we once did, because they just get their legs knocked off the very next day by some new emerging technology or some new disease or something that could totally change the whole game. (Parish 3)

This ability to dream up the future, to envision it as a kind of point of arrival toward which the present is leading us, is central to the creative practice that lies behind culture. Part of the role of culture, in its various forms, is to help us find our way into the future using the insights and experiences of those who came before us. The evolution of traditional cultural consciousness in Ireland is evident in the way that the systems and institutions that Roy Foster calls “the old authoritarian formations”— patriarchy, politics, the Catholic Church, even the voice of the poet— have begun to lose ground in contemporary Irish society (*Luck and the Irish*, 37). Through his experimentations with form and treatment of iconic national symbols and stories, Kennelly addresses the anomie and confusion that follows the breakdown of these old authorities in a way that is instructive and, I think, uniquely hopeful.

As the literature review that follows will demonstrate in detail, many of the critics who have preceded me in examining Kennelly’s work have focused on how it fits into an Irish postcolonial tradition. Many of these critics have described Kennelly’s work as part of a second wave of postcolonial writing that seeks to restore the legitimacy of non-nationalist cultural forces and ideologies in discussions of Ireland’s national development. Where these descriptions of how Kennelly works as a postcolonial writer have been very important to my understanding of his work, I will approach this project by asking not how

---

<sup>2</sup> Brown notes that, in the years between 1996 and 2002, 153,067 people immigrated to Ireland, a reversal of the country’s long history of mass emigration (*Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 385)



Kennelly's work is postcolonial but rather how it is postmodern.

The term 'postmodernism' encompasses a range of ideologies and so demands some explanation with reference to Kennelly's work. Literary critic Robert Eaglestone argues that, before it is a style in art or a description of an era, postmodernism is an ethical response to a Modern "metaphysics of comprehension" that seeks to understand and articulate the Other in terms of its generality rather than its individuality (184). The pattern by which the Modern mind comprehends, in other words, is by assimilating the unfamiliar into an existing frame of reference, rather than by identifying what makes it unique. Undoubtedly, this impulse to compare and ultimately to systematize has led to some of the greatest achievements of the Modern Age: advances in medicine, technology and communication that have come about thanks to humanity's ability to efficiently test and share information. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas suggests that this method of comprehending the world promotes freedom because, once the Other is absorbed into one's own concept of the world, impediments to the activation of that concept cease to be. Levinas is also critical of the Modern "metaphysics of comprehension", connecting it with totalizing social frames of reference that address humanity as if the multitudes were one individual (Eaglestone 186).

To varying degrees, the 'success' of social enterprises like fascism and Nazism in the twentieth century exemplifies the terrible power of Modern systems when they are used to categorize and manage people. Many of the disasters of the Modern age— colonial expansion, the Holocaust, wage slavery— demonstrate the terrible degree to which the Modern "metaphysics of comprehension" involves a betrayal of the variety, contradictions, and instability of social enterprises to the requirements of a dominant frame of reference (Eaglestone 188). In his article (and later book) "The Postmodern Condition" pioneering postmodern theorist Jean-François Lyotard describes a counterpart to the Modern "metaphysics of comprehension", which is the degree to which its promotion of sameness (especially in social contexts) relies on the creation and exclusion of difference. He characterizes the postmodern response to the extremes of the Modern age as a sense of "incredulity toward metanarratives": a feeling of skepticism toward the stories that cultures tell themselves that claim to explain history or knowledge definitively (Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition," 123). Where this sense of incredulity is almost certainly the result of Modern social movements that have investigated the human cost of such metanarratives, it is not limited to social contexts. The postmodern perspective also extends to the very "metaphysics of comprehension" described by Eaglestone: the idea that it is possible to isolate

any 'truth' unproblematically. One of the challenges of this postmodern perspective is that, in placing all principles under scrutiny of skepticism, postmodernists must realize that even their own 'truths' are not beyond questioning. What results is an environment in which the signs and symbols that once represented the experiences of any given culture have become unstable, and so must be re-evaluated again and again. Instead of seeking out comprehensive, definitive frames of cultural reference, postmodern agents must navigate among a variety of perspectives and principles continuously, never failing to question any of them.

In her extensive study of parody (a form that has been reclaimed by many postmodern artists, including Kennelly) literary critic Margaret Rose identifies two distinct schools of postmodern thought: one which is devoted to deconstructing the mechanisms of Modern society's obsession with systems and one which seeks to describe the nature of society in the absence of Modern logic. She notes that "some theories of the postmodern have moved from the negative functioning of describing the end or failing of modernism, or of other theories of the postmodern, to describing something more creative and innovative" (197). This thesis will demonstrate how Kennelly's work tackles both of these projects, deconstructing traditional narratives of Irishness in poems like *Cromwell*, *The Book of Judas*, and *Poetry My Arse* while, at the same time, attempting to capture the flux and possibility of a culture in which a variety of forms of life exist in concert and are equally valid. It is the tone of Kennelly's writing that I would argue makes him a postmodern writer as well as a postcolonial one. Rather than presenting the chaos of social transformation as something negative (as Kuhling and Keohane do with their presentation of contemporary Irish life as a collision) Kennelly characterizes Otherness as a revelation, and celebrates its disruptions of the familiar as a source of vital energy (Keohane 29).

In the end the qualities that made Kennelly's work a valuable example of postmodern philosophy are the same qualities that make it such an important characterization of contemporary Irish life. For all of its openness to the triumphs, the disgraces, the outbursts and barely whispered utterances, the clichéd and the unspeakable, Kennelly's work never stops questioning. In the poem "Crossing the bridge", which is also from *Poetry My Arse*, one of Ace de Horner's walks is interrupted by a Dublin woman on O'Connell Bridge. This woman questions him, saying:

'What is a poem, Mr de Horner?' ...  
'Whenever I hear or read a poem



I feel as if I'd a friend somewhere  
who surprises me in the strangest ways,  
I see pictures in my mind which I  
haven't seen since childhood days,  
I hear music sweet as my father's fiddle  
in the house I was born in down the country.  
But, Mr de Horner, when I read your twaddle  
I'm listening to the squeaks of a lost and lonely

soul. (*PMA* 98-99, lines 2-12)

Here the perspective of the poet is upstaged by the aggressive interpretive agencies of his reader. The old woman's description of what poetry means to her is poetic in its own right, and emphasizes the importance of her particular frame of reference to her experience of hearing and reading poetry. She makes sense of the imagery and sound effects of poems, in other words, in terms that she has taken from her own life. Ace, for his part, is "flummoxed" by the old woman's question and fails to come up with an appropriate response (*PMA* 98, line 3). Increasingly in his later work, this subordination of the poet's privileged perspective to that of the reader is a feature of Kennelly's form as well as his storytelling. It is in the conglomeration of the many perspectives of Kennelly's audience that the meaning of his work really takes shape.

By retreating from the sameness that defines the Modern "metaphysics of comprehension" and leaving room for the unique perspective of each reader, Kennelly leads us all to engage critically and imaginatively with the Ireland that he presents in all of its complexity, and not to rest in doing so. This is undoubtedly important in an Irish literary context, since Irish characters and settings are the central preoccupation of Kennelly's body of work. It is also significant far beyond Ireland, as the dominance of non-Irish critics among those who have written at length on Kennelly suggests. In a world that is changing with a rapidity unknown to the poets and sages of the past, the ability to take ownership of the proverbial road by interpreting its signs and signals is an invaluable skill. As Kennelly offers up the iconic symbols, stories, and characters of Irish literary and popular tradition for interpretation, Kennelly also preserves them for posterity. At its best, Kennelly's work both reflects the complicated plurality of contemporary Irish life and provides a model for how to negotiate it with curiosity, creativity, and compassion.



## CHAPTER 1: Kennelly's Critics

*The wave libertied up from the Liffey.  
Ace escaped the murderous water  
and thought, 'I'd rather be assassinated for  
my barbing  
than honoured for my caution.'* (PMA 165)

A concern with what Robert Eaglestone calls the Modern “metaphysics of comprehension” has been present in Brendan Kennelly’s work since before the 1980s. The following overview of critical responses to his writing demonstrates that an attraction to eccentricity, an interest in the relationship between language and individual consciousness, and a sense of skepticism towards social frames of reference that privilege conformity are present even in his early works. It also indicates the degree to which a Modern aesthetic based on conformity has affected the critical response to much of Kennelly’s writing, particularly those works that do not display the historical outlook and lyrical quality that have lately characterized Irish poetic tradition.

In his 2000 book-length study *Betraying the Age: Social and Artistic Protest in Brendan Kennelly's Work* Åke Persson argues that Kennelly’s body of work, into which he groups Kennelly’s activities as a teacher, anthologist and media presence, constitutes an act (or various related acts) of social protest. The foundation of Persson’s argument is laid in his account of “Brendan Kennelly’s Ireland” which he characterizes as stultified by a protectionist cultural nationalism and by the oppressive authority of the Catholic Church in all aspects of political, social, and domestic life. He suggests the extent of the Church’s influence during the first fifty years of Ireland’s independence:

If the Church had the kind of political power, as Roy Foster puts it, to ‘short-circuit the social welfare schemes’ on the national level, and if it was able to shorten politicians’ careers if they became too outspoken, its power on a local level, that is, the level at which people’s everyday lives were affected, was even greater. There are many stories, that now seem comical, of how the priests controlled their parishioners’ behaviour at dancing halls by checking how closely together men and women were dancing. More seriously, the Church directly or indirectly controlled public appointments in many areas. Those who, in some ways, did not or were seen as not to conform to the ideals set up and advocated by the Church, of those who did not pledge alliance with its beliefs, were simply not employed. (*Betraying the Age* 9)

This exercise of social control by the Catholic Church, in concert with periods of extreme poverty and a custom of succession that called for the whole

of a family's land to pass to its eldest son and discouraged early marriages, led to what historian Terence Brown describes memorably as a "massive haemorrhage of emigration" of those who had little hope of finding a livelihood within such rigid parameters (*Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 9-13). Persson cites the passage, in 1929, of the Censorship of Publications Act as another contributing factor in what he calls the "impoverishment of Irish cultural and spiritual life" (*Betraying the Age* 6). He also notes the primacy of the family as a social unit, the dominance of the conservative Fianna Fáil political party, and the exclusion of women from political and public life as key features of Irish culture in the twentieth century. The picture of "Brendan Kennelly's Ireland" that all of these phenomena suggest is a bleak one, where nonconformity of thought and behavior seems literally to have been expelled. Kennelly confirms this picture of Ireland, to a degree, in a 1981 interview regarding his collection *The Boats are Home*, recalling that "when I was growing up you never enjoyed the fertilizing and illuminating friction of a different idea" (qtd. in Carty "Enemies of true learning"). The atmosphere seems to have been ripe for the kind of social intervention that Persson sees Kennelly engaging in through his life and work.

Although Persson's central approach is an affirmative and thorough description of the shape that social protest takes in Kennelly's life, his subchapter on the critical response to Kennelly's work from 1959-1982 mirrors his description of "Brendan Kennelly's Ireland" as a place resistant to nonconformity. Persson's subchapter shows how Kennelly's deviation from an Irish poetic tradition characterized by formal precision and the exploration of historical-political subject matter in personal terms has led a number of Irish critics to dismiss him as an overly prolific bull in the china shop of their craft. Gerold Sedlmayr, whose 2005 study of Brendan Kennelly's work I will discuss shortly, notes Kennelly's absence from a number of anthologies of contemporary Irish poetry including Maurice Harmon's *Irish poetry after Yeats* (1979), Thomas Kinsella's *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986) and Paul Muldoon's *Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1986) (*Brendan Kennelly's Literary Works*, 3). Several important critical surveys of Irish poetry have also overlooked Kennelly's contributions, including John Goodby's *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History* (2000), Dillon Johnston's *Irish Poetry After Yeats* (1985) and Neil Corcoran's *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature* (1997). It should be noted that there are several anthologies of Irish poetry that *do* include selections of Kennelly's work including John Montague's *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (1974), Anthony Bradley's *Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1980), and *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse* (1981), edited by Kennelly



himself. Where Kennelly is certainly not the only significant Irish poet to be omitted from an anthology (consider the controversial scarcity of women poets in the original *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*) it does seem that his work has largely escaped consideration in terms of the Irish literary canon and that those few of his poems that have made it into anthologies generally conform more closely to the subject matter and lyrical refinement celebrated by some of his more heavily anthologized contemporaries. The poem "My Dark Fathers," which is the only of Kennelly's poems included in the Faber and Penguin anthologies, deals with the continuing effects of famine and colonial repression in contemporary Ireland and maintains a fairly consistent meter and rhyme scheme from beginning to end.

In his discussion of what *has* been written about Kennelly's work, Persson gives several examples of reviews that describe Kennelly's poetry as technically unsophisticated and in need of more rigorous editing. He quotes poet Michael Longley's verdict that Kennelly's *Dream of a Black Fox* presents the reader with a series of poems that are:

Slapdash, cheerfully careless, stubbornly unpolished. Kennelly can't quite decide between a cursive ballad-style utterance where the reader automatically accepts the occasional shock epithet or superfluous adverb, and the poised lyric where every word must do more than it says. (qtd. in Persson 31)

Critic Allan Bell notes with regard to Kennelly's collection *A Kind of Trust* that the poet "should never have allowed the last six poems in this collection to go to a publisher and the publisher should never have allowed them to go to a printer" (qtd. In Persson 34). In a 1992 review of the poem sequence *The Book of Judas*, Rory Brennan asks "What led Kennelly on to this gargantuan act of repetition?" and condemns what he sees as a lack of editorial discretion:

... [Kennelly] is a master at exposing the irony inherent in so many of the assumptions of common speech. But it is a method that has led to dementia, to an unbalanced pile of literary-historical reference mingled with the agonies from Amnesty's casebook. The enterprise wanders so far from its purgative intentions that the bare facts of human grief and the lucidities of artistic undertakings are both devalued. Too much talk stinks up the room, said Duke Ellington; too much verbosity stinks up the poetry. ("From U2 to Utopia")

Interestingly enough, the positive criticism that Persson includes in his survey tends to focus similarly on Kennelly's blending of forms and disregard for linguistic and narrative boundaries. This point of view can be seen in an essay by Anthony Roche on *The Book of Judas*:

*The Book of Judas* does not claim to tell the whole truth or to offer a complete, coherent narrative. It is, as Spike Milligan once entitled a collection, *A Book of Bits or A Bit of a Book*. It does not so much demand from its reader the unflagging physical and mental consideration to get through its 378 pages: it is an arduous read because it

demands of its reader the same unflinching honesty, to say 'yes' to some of its poems and 'no' to others, to admit those into our hearts which speak directly to the fears, secrets, and betrayals which are lodged there. ("Parody, Double Cross & Betrayal" 112-113)

Roche, like Persson, interprets Kennelly's treatment of poetic form and narrative structure as an exercise in challenging a poetic tradition promoted by W.B. Yeats in his poem "Under Ben Bulbin" when he declares, "Irish poets, learn your trade, / Sing whatever is well made" (qtd. in *Betraying the Age* 23). Persson suggests that, where Kennelly has been widely faulted for failing to concentrate on poetic form, many of his contemporaries (he cites Seamus Heaney, Longley, and Derek Mahon in particular) have been lauded for their technical command. Referring to Kennelly's position among Irish poets of the twentieth century, Persson notes:

Form certainly appears to be a powerful tradition in Irish poetry. It is a tradition that apparently weighs heavily on the shoulders of Yeats's successors. This seems to be the case both with poets and with critics who are steeped in the poetic values in which perfect form and formal aspects are privileged. Consequently, it is not particularly surprising that Kennelly's poetry has been judged according to these dominant criteria that, for at least several decades, have been the norm of what 'good' poetry should be. Thus, if these criteria are insistently applied ... one (unsympathetic) version of 'Brendan Kennelly' may be construed. Indeed, it does not seem an exaggeration to claim that this taste takes on a hegemonic function. (*Betraying the Age* 25)

Far more strikingly than unsympathetic reviews, the relative critical neglect and limited presence of Kennelly's work in anthologies supports Persson's charge of gatekeeping in the Irish poetic community, especially when we consider Kennelly's prominence as a university professor and public figure in Ireland.

Roche and Persson are joined by a number of other critics in their insistence that Kennelly's poetic style constitutes an intentional act of resistance of formal traditions rather than a disregard for form altogether. Kennelly's experimentation with form is most vibrantly demonstrated in the observations of a number of critics regarding the poem "Master" from the poem sequence *Cromwell*. "Master" features a fictionalized version of Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser, who we find agonizing over the unruly nature of his epic poem *The Faerie Queen* while eating his breakfast. Persson and John McDonagh both discuss the parallel nature of narrative and form in "Master" (McDonagh in his 2004 book *A Host of Ghosts*, which I will address shortly), noting how the central character's anxiety with the proportions of his poetry plays out formally both in the poem itself and elsewhere in *Cromwell*. Persson recognizes that a number of *Cromwell*'s short poems (or hybrid sonnet forms, as he refers to those poems that bear some of the sonnet's basic characteristics as well as evidence



of experimentation) exceed the traditional fourteen lines, stretching to fifteen or sixteen lines, and that they often integrate 'low-brow' subject matter and idiom into the territory of a traditionally elevated form (*Betraying the Age* 124-130). McDonagh notes the Elizabethan interest in matching poetic style to artistic intention and comments that "Kennelly's use of sonnets would appear to mirror his parallel intellectual intentions of disruption and intervention" (68).

It is notable that Kennelly does not employ the Spenserian sonnet form in "Master", a poem which seeks to imagine how the 16th century English poet Edmund Spenser (who spent much of his life at an estate in Doneraile, County Cork) might have thought about his artistic process. The Spenserian sonnet, which is characterized by a rhyme scheme of *abab-bcbc-cdcd-ee*, adapts the rhyme scheme of the traditional Shakespearean sonnet by linking each of its quatrains with a rhyming couplet. This extra repetition of end-rhymes allows for the even more tightly controlled development of an argument in anticipation of the final couplet than is achieved by the more conventional English form (Fuller 20-22). In "Master" Kennelly fuses the pattern of alternately rhymed couplets characteristic of the Shakespearean sonnet (*abab-cdcd*) with a final sestet comprised of two tercets (*efg-efg*), which is typically found in Petrarchan sonnets. The meter in "Master" is inconsistent and many of the rhymes are slant (buttermilk, bulk; out, it; directions, intentions), which detracts from the musical pacing that distinguishes more traditional sonnets. In place of this traditional pacing, "Master" derives something of a rising rhythm from the series of questions that Spenser asks himself in lines 7-8 ("Am I losing control? Am I bugging it / All up? Ruining my best intentions?"). This rising rhythm heightens the effect of the volta that takes place after the opening octave when Spenser turns from thinking about *The Faerie Queene* and starts thinking about sonnet writing in general. It is significant, I think, that Kennelly incorporates the imbalance (between octave and sestet) characteristic of the Petrarchan sonnet alongside the looser Shakespearean rhyme-scheme in "Master", since the poem's central tension is Spenser's sense of being threatened by the unrestrained nature of his literary subjects. Throughout "Master" the looseness of rhyme and meter captures Spenser's anxieties in a way that is chaotic and unpredictable rather than measured, which makes it nearly the antithesis of the Spenserian sonnet. Both McDonagh and Persson suggest that, in "Master" and elsewhere, Kennelly conflates the imposition of poetic form on language with the efforts of Spenser, Oliver Cromwell and others to impose English order on their (rebellious) Irish subjects. Kennelly's loosening of the formal conventions of the sonnet can be read, then, as both embodying and claiming the terrifying potential of the Irish people in the imaginations of their colonizers.



In her Master's thesis *The Artistic Nightmare: An Analysis of the Sonnet Form in Brendan Kennelly's Cromwell* Jennifer Belshaw explores how Kennelly's use of the sonnet throughout *Cromwell* speaks to the artistic process, arguing that the tension between the rigid conventions of the sonnet form and the expansive, uncontrollable nature of the nightmare portrayed in the poem sequence "reflects the tension that exists when the poet attempts to convey in words an emotional concept that is non-verbal, inner violence. In doing so the poet is aware that he is creating an act of violence upon himself, he must compromise his integrity in some way in order to relate his thoughts in a coherent manner. This compromise is the nightmare of the artist" (2). Where Persson, McDonagh, and others emphasize how Kennelly addresses postcolonial anxieties through his use of form, Belshaw is more interested in poetic form as a break with the self, through which the poet confronts the violence that is "endemic in all men" (14).

It is worth noting, in the context of these claims about Kennelly's use of form to disrupt poetic tradition, some insights from critic Edna Longley regarding the shape of Irish poetry in the twentieth century. In her article "Poetic Forms and Social Malformations," Longley argues that where poetry by Northern Irish writers such as Paul Muldoon and Heaney is characterized by a highly developed sense of place or desire to locate itself in the specific, poetry by Southern Irish poets like Kennelly seeks to dislocate, deconstruct, and outgrow the local:

One factor impeding a united Ireland and a uniform Irish poetry— if the latter phenomenon were either possible or desirable— is refusal to acknowledge disunity or diversity, to predicate unity on the recognition of differences. One can be accused of 'Partitionism' for drawing any distinctions at all between Northern and Southern, Protestant and Catholic literary expression. To describe is not to prescribe. Words and forms usefully insist on cultural and social realities, if at the expense of ideologies and ideals... Take three often unexamined buzz-words: 'crisis,' 'colonialism,' 'identity.' Republicans and Marxists insist on their undifferentiated application to the whole of Ireland, but the poetry discussed in this essay supports plural usages. Contrasting vocabularies define 'crisis' as chiefly territorial in the North; chiefly one of faith and identity in the South: 'Holy Ireland' battling it out with forces of pluralism, secularisation and liberalisation. (158, 176)

What Longley describes through an examination of various poems from Northern and Southern Irish poets, as well as by looking at the poems chosen for a number of anthologies of twentieth-century Irish poetry, is a Northern Irish poetry that "upholds the spaciousness of specificity" while Southern Irish poetry is characterized by "an imaginative trajectory [that] has to do with growing up and out" ("Poetic Forms and Social Malformations" 166). From this vantage point Kennelly's poetry is carrying on a literary tradition, linked by Longley through

this imaginary trajectory to poet Patrick Kavanagh, that seeks to move beyond traditional frames of reference. Certainly Kennelly's use (or misuse, depending on the critical point of view) of poetic form supports this assessment.

A key element of Brendan Kennelly's social protest, according to Åke Persson, is his redefinition of the heroic ideal. Persson notes that the subject of Kennelly's doctoral thesis was the Irish epic in modern Irish poetry, and draws parallels between the Christian and Pagan epic heroes that were the subject of Kennelly's first major critical project and the social outcasts that inhabit his poetry:

Kennelly's heroes and heroines also exist on the periphery of society, but they are not leaders, warriors or kings, as are the traditional epic heroes, nor do they take part in battles and contests to prove their strengths. Instead of finding them on the battle-fields, we find them in the back streets, in back gardens, or in hospitals. Yet, the poet insists, their dignity and their glory are the same as those of the epic heroes and heroines. (61)

Persson outlines the heroic qualities of central figures from several of Kennelly's poems including "The Blind Man" (*Collection One: Getting Up Early*), "Johnny Gobless" (*My Dark Fathers*), and "The Fool's Rod" (*My Dark Fathers*) and shows that, in addition to possessing the wit, strength, and bravery of the traditional epic hero, the social marginalization of Kennelly's heroes and heroines gives them a heightened perspective on the society from which they are excluded. Persson uses this liminal perspective criterion to rein artists and poets into his definition of the Kennellian epic hero, since the very nature of their artistic calling requires that they be "awkwardly involved but still outside" (*Betraying the Age* 65). For Persson, the struggle at the root of most of Kennelly's poetry is a struggle against an exclusive society and the role of the hero is to expose and resist social injustice. In Kennelly's Ireland, characters like Mad Peggie, the blind man, and Patrick Kavanagh constitute an ideal because of the "fertilizing and illuminating friction" that they create in their communities (Kennelly, qtd. in Carty "Enemies of true learning").

In *Brendan Kennelly's Literary Works: The Developing Art of an Irish Writer 1959-2000*, Gerold Sedlmayr's project is primarily to trace Kennelly's development from what he sees as a neo-Romantic poet into something more postmodern, although it is questionable whether Sedlmayr believes that Kennelly ever really sheds a Modern humanist belief in the existence of essential truths. In service to this end Sedlmayr proposes several "poetologies" which he uses to describe Kennelly's artistic belief system. These include a "poetology of voices," a "poetology of the moment," a "poetology of space," and a "poetology of violence." Sedlmayr does not identify where he takes the term "poetology" from but, in light of his expressed intention to focus on



identity formation in this study, I take the term to be indicative of Kennelly's efforts to define himself within his poetry and of its underlying principals. In his description of these "poetologies," Sedlmayr basically highlights characteristic features of Kennelly's poetic style, namely his polyvocalism, a tendency to focus on revelatory moments in his poetry in a way that suggests a world in flux and an interest in widening social margins. Kennelly's "poetology of violence" describes the reciprocal relationship between violence and art, beauty or love in his work (332).

Sedlmayr also goes to great lengths to describe how he sees *The Book of Judas* as an example of a deconstructive "clôtural reading" as defined by English philosopher Simon Critchley. Sedlmayr describes the "clôtural reading" as having been informed by Levinas's idea that attempts to conceive of the Other always involve a betrayal of the Other into the self, which I discuss in my introduction to this thesis (*Brendan Kennelly's Literary Works* 202-205). Sedlmayr latches on to the use of the word 'betrayal' to describe the intellectual process by which a thinking subject conceives of the Other, and uses it as justification for presenting deconstruction (the practice referred to by Critchley when he describes the "clôtural reading") in terms of the relationship between Jesus and Judas Iscariot. Where I would agree that *The Book of Judas* is haunted by an awareness of the sort of betrayals that Levinas describes, and where it is certainly fruitful to read Kennelly's work in terms of the "clôtural reading", the connection that Sedlmayr draws between Kennelly and Critchley gets fairly muddled in his explanation of the former's poem sequence. Critchley himself emphasizes that a "clôtural" interpretation of a text "is provoked by an act of reading whereby two irreconcilable lines of thought open up within a text" and culminates in "the production of a dislocation within a text, dividing the latter along the inseparable yet irreconcilable axes of belonging and not belonging to the metaphysical tradition" (*The Ethics of Deconstruction* 62). One of the key components of the "clôtural reading" is the "suspension of choice"; a refusal to choose either the traditional meaning of the text in question or the Other meaning implied by a reading of alterity into the text. This suspension of choice defers the betrayal of the text to a single meaning and maintains the possibility for multiple Other meanings to emerge from it (*The Ethics of Deconstruction* 88-89).

Some of the trouble with Sedlmayr's explanation of Kennelly's interpretation of Judas in *The Book of Judas* might stem from the fact that, when *The Book of Judas* was published in 1991, Irish religious identity was in a state of flux. Sedlmayr's understanding of Kennelly's reading of Judas presupposes a stable and uniform interpretation of "the central text of Western metaphysical



culture, the Bible" in Ireland:

Since *The Book of Judas* proffers a commentary of the literary kind, it does not so much concern itself with the reproduction of scholarly, for example historical, theological, or philosophical, interpretations of the biblical Judas as with those 'common' notions of 'Judas' that are a part of our daily lives. (Brendan Kennelly's *Literary Works* 201)

The text being interpreted in *The Book of Judas*, then, is not a text at all but a kind of collective religious consciousness of which Judas's role in the demise of Jesus forms a key part. Although it is valid enough to acknowledge that Kennelly's reading of Judas in *The Book of Judas* derives from a cultural consensus that Judas was a betrayer, I would argue that what makes Kennelly's reading of Judas distinctive is the way that it exploits the growing instability of religious identity in Ireland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Kennelly's plural and often inconsistent portrayals of Judas and his characterization of the relationship between Jesus and Judas are rooted in traditional notions of Judas as a betrayer even as they suggest the possibility of another reality, and they are supported by Kennelly's attempts to represent Judas through a number of contemporary guises. Kennelly does not so much produce a dislocation within those common notions of Judas that Sedlmayr sees as a part of Irish daily life as capitalize on the varying degrees of skepticism, confusion, and ambivalence to expressions of religious authority playing out around him in order to do so.

Sedlmayr roots his explanation of how *The Book of Judas* constitutes a "clôtural reading" of Irish religious consciousness in a reading of the poem "Lips":

... here Kennelly's subversion of the biblical meta-discourse begins, the lips are also a sight (sic.) at which the authoritative story, the truth about Judas the betrayer, is interrupted. Just like the orifices in *Poetry My Arse*, the lips mark a point where the closure of the body reveals an opening, an opening, however, which does not solely indicate devouring, by which, on the contrary, also brings about an acknowledgement of the outside-ness of the outside ... While Judas is touching Jesus' face, maybe even his lips, with his own lips, for a moment the strict oppositions, the propositional distinctions between right and, good, truth ('Jesus') and wrong, bad, lie ('Judas') merge and dissolve in the liminal zone in between. It is here, at this very place, and now, at this very moment, that the other is acknowledged as an utterly other without identifying him. (Brendan Kennelly's *Literary Works* 226, author's parenthesis)

This reading of "Lips" focuses on the symbolism of Jesus and Judas's physical contact in the moment of the Judas kiss, an iconic encounter that, although the subject of Giotto di Bondone's painting *The Betrayal of Christ*, which is detailed on the cover of *The Book of Judas*, is only obliquely referenced in "Lips." Sedlmayr emphasizes the "strict oppositions" between Jesus and Judas, suggesting that these are suspended in the moment of the kiss.

He does not, however, specify how Kennelly's treatment of the relationship between Jesus and Judas, in "Lips" or elsewhere, serves to introduce a train of thought into *The Book of Judas* that is irreconcilable with religious tradition (the Judas kiss is part of religious tradition, is it not?). Sedlmayr concludes, incorrectly I would argue, that "by witnessing the possibility of Judas being an utterly other himself in his ethical relation with Jesus, we, the readers, suddenly are obliged to recognize Judas's equality with all of us. This means that we have to attempt to demythologize him as much as possible by treating him as a human being that really existed, to stop abusing him as a label" (*Brendan Kennelly's Literary Works* 229). Here Sedlmayr succumbs to the difficulty with ethical deconstruction when he is tempted to identify Kennelly's Judas as "a symbol for humanity in general, a humanity which constantly yearns for a transcendental otherness while stuck in the earthly mud of egoisms" (*Brendan Kennelly's Literary Works* 239). Jesus becomes "as much a human being as Judas is, a man who continually manages to interrupt Judas's self-centredness and seclusion" (ibid.). By forgetting about the suspension of choice that is central to the "clôtural reading" and by characterizing Judas and Jesus as human in this way, Sedlmayr limits the possibility that they could be something else and misrepresents their treatment in *The Book of Judas*. Although Judas in particular takes on many human incarnations throughout *The Book of Judas*, both he and Jesus are expressed in the poem sequence as absences rather than anthropomorphic, consistent presences. Take the poem "No Image Fits":

I have never seen him and I have never seen  
 Anyone but him. He is older than the world and he  
 Is always young. What he says is in every ear  
 And has never been heard before.  
 I have tried to kill him in me,  
 He is in me more than ever.  
 I saw his hands smashed by dum-dum bullets,  
 His hands holding the earth are whole and tender.  
 If I knew what love is I would call him a lover.  
 Break him like glass, every splinter is wonder.  
 I had not understood that annihilation  
 Makes him live with an intensity I cannot understand.  
 That I cannot understand is the bit of wisdom I have found.  
 He splits my mind like an axe a tree.  
 He makes my heart deeper and fuller than my heart would dare to be.  
 He would make me at home beyond the sky and the black ground,  
 He would craze me with the light on the brilliant sand,  
 He is joy of the first word, the music of the undiscovered human.  
 Undiscovered! Yet I live as if my music were known.  
 He is what I cannot lose and cannot find  
 He is nothing, nothing but body and soul and heart and mind.



So gentle is he the gentlest air  
Is rough by comparison  
So kind is he I cannot dream  
A kinder man  
So distant is he the farthest star  
Sleeps at my breast  
So near is he that the thought of him  
Puts me outside myself

So one with love is he  
I know love is  
Time and eternity  
And all their images.  
No image fits, no rod, no crown.

I brought him down. (*BOJ* 53)

The paradoxes that comprise this poem neutralize each other much in the same way that Sedlmayr sees the images of Jesus and Judas canceling each other out in the moment of the Judas kiss. Significantly, and as with many of the poems in *The Book of Judas*, the subject of this poem is not named, making it unclear whether it is Jesus or Judas and allowing for the possibility that it could be either, or both. The reader is obliged to engage with the figure of Judas in this poem and throughout the poem sequence not so much because we recognize him as human and therefore are compelled by an ethical imperative to relate to him, but because by virtue of his *lack* of definition in the text we are in a situation to create him by, as Anthony Roche would have it, saying “‘yes’ to some of its [*The Book of Judas*’s] poems and ‘no’ to others, to admit those into our hearts which speak directly to the fears, secrets, and betrayals which are lodged there” (“Parody, Double Cross & Betrayal” 112-113). By failing to coordinate the scattered energies of the poem sequence or identify which Judas is the ‘real’ one Kennelly leaves room for multiple meanings to be drawn from the text, and in this way *The Book of Judas* can be seen as a “clôtural reading” of a Christian tradition. The relevance of such a reading is that it validates the plurality of religious identity in Ireland and elsewhere and creates a space for multiple interpretations of the Bible to exist in complicated, fruitful concert.

Sedlmayr is more on the mark in his discussion of Kennelly’s heroic ideal in terms of what poet and critic Eavan Boland has dubbed the “Romantic Heresy.” Sedlmayr quotes Boland’s assertion that this concept is:

rooted in a powerful, subliminal suggestion that poets are distinctive not so much because they write poetry but because in order to do so, they must have poetic feelings about poetic experiences. That there is a category of experience and expression which is poetic and all the rest is ordinary and therefore inadmissible. In this way a damaging division is made between the perception of what is poetic on the one hand and, on the other, what is merely human. (qtd. in Sedlmayr, *Brendan Kennelly’s Literary Works*)



In her essay "The Woman Poet: Her Dilemma," Boland's argument is that this elevation of 'poetic' subject matter is an exclusive act. Boland's particular focus in her essay is on how the relegation of matter such as mothering, domestic activities and suburban life to the hinterlands of the 'ordinary' has led to the exclusion of women from poetry in a canonical context as well as in the psyches of female poets themselves (Boland 241). Sedlmayr argues that Kennelly commits this "Romantic Heresy" with his promotion of social outcasts as the heroic ideal (as argued with conviction by Åke Persson in *Betraying the Age*) because:

It is in the blind beggar or the 'gibbering lunatic' in whom the Neo-Romantic poet discerns his own image, detects a spark of a special gift... By romanticizing the ordinary beggar, this figure is converted from what Eavan Boland calls 'merely human' to a super-human figure and so to an image of the poet-priest himself. Yet by losing his ordinariness, the outcast also loses his reality. And, up to a certain extent, he is therefore also denied the reality of his suffering (*Brendan Kennelly's Literary Works*, 106).

Where, in Persson's view Kennelly's socially marginalized outcasts gain a unique and necessary perspective from their liminal view of society, in Sedlmayr's their very potential as literary subjects is lost through Kennelly's persistent affirmation of their exceptional natures. Both Persson and Sedlmayr discuss their interpretations of the Kennellian heroic ideal in terms of a Romantic heroism, where the hero's separation from society-at-large allows him to represent a primal, honorable force that society has rejected in the name of progress. I would argue that Kennelly is interested in this aspect of his heroic outcasts as well as the parts of them that are abject, challenging and undeveloped. The poetic value of Kennelly's heroes also lies in the unique music of their speech, which Kennelly draws on directly in the language of his poetry, and in their tendency to bewilder and polarize.

John McDonagh's 2004 book *Brendan Kennelly: A Host of Ghosts* is less organized around a central thesis than Persson's or Sedlmayr's studies, but serves instead as a critical introduction to several of Kennelly's major works. Essays are presented on the collections *Collection One: Getting Up Early*, *The Boats Are Home*, *Cromwell*, *The Book of Judas* and on Kennelly's translation of the Greek tragedy *Medea*. An interesting component of McDonagh's study is his comments on the role of violence in education in *The Boats Are Home*. The use of the stick, strap, and buckle as educational 'tools' is a recurring theme in Kennelly's poetry and Richard Bizot joins McDonagh and other critics in observing how the poet's depiction of violence against children fits in with his larger artistic project. In the essay " 'Mastering the Colonizer's Tongue,' Yeats,

Joyce and Their Successors in the Irish Schoolroom” Bizot discusses Kennelly alongside several other Irish authors who present the interactions between teacher and student as a major site of colonial indoctrination in Ireland. Bizot argues that this paradigm is complicated by a host of Irish protagonists who begin as inarticulate, brutalized students and who grow, in spite of the violence inflicted on them, into a mastery of their colonizers’s language. In Brendan Kennelly’s poems “Catechism” and “Master” this mastery can be seen in Kennelly’s manipulation of the sonnet. Bizot notes Kennelly’s invocation in “Catechism” of what he calls a common trope in Irish literature, the student who is beaten for not being able to provide the right answer to a question, and notes how Kennelly’s poetic voice absorbs the anger of the beaten students. He writes of the poem’s form “This sprung sonnet, all but bursting at its seams, is fit vessel for Kennelly’s barely controlled anger” (Bizot 63-75). This mastery of the oppressor is not acquired but rather seems inherent according to John McDonagh:

The children [in Kennelly’s poems] are not beaten because they do not understand but because they have failed to rote-learn the answers. However, the collection, and Kennelly’s work as a whole, does not simply present life as a series of irresolvable contradictions but rather stands as a testimony to the survival instinct of the human psyche. It is in this gritty determination to carry on regardless that the essence of a community or individual is found and no matter how negative the childhood experience, the poems exhibit an irrepressible urge to seek the positive, the good (59).

McDonagh has already noted the implicit distinction in Kennelly’s poetry between self-discovery and self-definition, which must be “troubled into” and the easy answers promoted by Kennelly’s teacher figures. The rod in the hands of these teachers becomes a substitute for the painful process of character development. Both Bizot and McDonagh demonstrate how many of Kennelly’s students grow beyond the violence of their youths. One cannot forget, however, the image of the beaten students from “Catechism” in adulthood with which Kennelly leaves the reader: “Years killed raving questions. Kane stomped Dublin / In policeman’s boots. Flynn was afraid of himself. / Maguire did well out of whores in Liverpool” (*ATFV* 21). I would argue that “Catechism” both celebrates the positive quality of Kane, Flynn, and Maguire’s resilience and, like the Irish student-protagonists discussed in Bizot’s essay, highlights their dubious replication of the mastery that they experienced as children at the hands of their teachers.

Like Sedlmayr, Bizot and McDonagh, critic Gerard Quinn highlights the interrelated nature of violence and creativity in Kennelly’s early poetry. In his essay “Brendan Kennelly: Victors and Victims” Quinn discusses the traumatic/instructive effects of psychological violence against children with



reference to the poem "The Kiss" from the collections *A Time for Voices*, and *New and Selected Poems*. In "The Kiss" the speaker remembers his extreme discomfort when he is asked by his father to kiss an old man. Quinn says of "The Kiss:"

Seen in the general context of Kennelly's poetry, the kiss has brought something home. The poem is an apologia of a boy stepping out of a doomed tradition, opting for his own survival and independence, leaving victims to their own fate. He is saying that beyond a certain point, one stops kissing the incurably lonely. (50)

For Quinn the boy in "The Kiss" demonstrates the ingenuity of the Irish people; their ability to cast off the uncomfortable legacy of previous generations and create something different. "The Kiss" is also a celebration of the fear that comes from stepping outside of oneself and confronting something that is wholly alien to you. After registering his discomfort with Jack Boland, the dying old man that he has been sent to kiss, the poem's speaker remembers the lasting effects that the encounter had on him:

... Every bone

In my body chilled as I bent my head  
To the smell and feel of the sickspittle on his lips.  
I kissed him, I find it hard to say what I kissed  
But I drank him into me when I kissed him.

I recognized something of what in him was ending,  
Of what in me had scarcely begun.  
He seemed without fear, I think I gave him nothing,  
He told me something of what it is to be alone.

There is no way to say goodbye to the dying.  
Jack Boland said 'G'wan, boy! Go now.'  
I shivered away from his hands, his smell,  
The wet blobs of pain on hair and brow,

The weak, eager touch. My childfear  
Went with me out into the corridor, stayed  
Inside me till I stood again at my father's side,  
Head down, thinking I was no longer afraid

Yet feeling still the deathlips rummaging at my lips,  
The breath a sick warmth mingling with my breath.  
It's thirty years since I bent my head to the kiss.  
Ten thirties would not make me forget. (*FS* 65, lines 20-40)

If this poem is critical of the older generation's sentimental deference to the past, a deference that leads the young boy's father to force him into a terrifying situation, it also emphasizes the impression that the kiss itself makes



on the speaker. The young boy does not just leave death behind when he leaves Jack Boland's bedroom, he incorporates the old man's loneliness and fearlessness into his own, immature sensibility. In this way a cyclical movement develops in the poem, with Jack Boland's transition into death and the young boy's state of having "scarcely begun" informing and supporting one another. The idea of assimilating the past as a means of self-creation is something that Kennelly focuses on in his early studies of Irish epic poetry, and is one of the features that distinguishes him as a postmodern poet.

Another key element of McDonagh's study is his presentation of the concept of "blitzophrenia", which Kennelly uses to describe:

the multiplicity of voices struggling for expression in [*Cromwell's* protagonist] Buffún's psyche, rather than the traditional psychiatric condition of schizophrenia. These voices generally coalesce in what Kennelly's refers to as the 'selfswamp' and it is precisely in the resistance to this imaginary gravitational whirlpool that Kennelly's work acquires a vital literary and cultural significance. (150)

In his conclusion, McDonagh identifies how Kennelly infuses many of his works with a sense of "blitzophrenia" in a way that helps him to problematize the colonizer/colonized duality in an Irish context and to emphasize the role of each in the formation of the other's identity. "Blitzophrenia" is also perceptible, in a more subtle and personal sense, in characters like the boys from "Catechism" or the young speaker from "The Kiss" who vacillate between their roles as victim and victor, innocent and actor, because their personalities have not yet fully formed. Unlike McDonagh, I would argue that Kennelly's best work gains vitality and cultural significance by *embracing* the chaos inherent in his characters's "blitzophrenia", rather than by resisting it. By capturing the tension between a multiplicity of voices, Kennelly represents characters and cultures in transition and, as such, he creates an honest experience of the human experience.

Like McDonagh's study, Richard Pine's 1994 book *Dark Fathers Into Light: Brendan Kennelly* presents essays on a number of topics related to the poet and his work. These include an article by Jonathan Allison on poetic voice and Irish history in *Cromwell*, another by Gabriel Fitzmaurice on the influence of Kennelly's Kerry upbringing on his work and a third by Terence Brown on Kennelly's novels *The Crooked Cross* and *The Florentines*. Kathleen McCracken adds her essay "Rage for a New Order: Brendan Kennelly's Plays for Women" to a number of essays by other critics regarding the feminist implications of Kennelly's translations of the Greek tragedies *Medea*, *Antigone*, and *The Trojan Women* (McCracken's essay also addresses Kennelly's translation of Federico García Lorca's play *Blood Wedding*). Many of these, including essays by

Anthony Roche and Kelly Younger, compare Kennelly's *Antigone* with versions of the tragedy produced by Irish writers Aidan Carl Mathews and Tom Paulin in the same year. Others, including Marianne McDonald's essays "'A Bomb at the Door': Kennelly's Medea" and "Rebel Women: Brendan Kennelly's Versions of Irish Tragedy" explore Kennelly's Greek trilogy in terms of women's roles in postcolonial Ireland. Although most of the essays in *Dark Fathers Into Light* address a limited selection of Brendan Kennelly's works, many of them provide insights that speak to his work on a much broader level. In "Kennelly as Novelist" for example, Brown observes how *The Crooked Cross* and *The Florentines* "supply telling evidence of how deeply rooted is this [Kennelly's] impulse to escape the limitations of any given form and to transcend even the less than obviously constricting implications of anecdote, narrative but also of any kind of stable text or unmixed mode" (Pine 53). Brown's examination of where this evidence can be found in Kennelly's prose sheds light on the experiments in poetic form that culminate in Kennelly's more recent poetry.

All of the critical responses that I have discussed thus far have focused on how Kennelly's work resists certain aspects of Irish culture such as the taste for formal perfection in poetry or rigid interpretations of religion or social stratification. It is interesting, then, to note Frances Gwynn's 1979 thesis *Theme and Craft in the Poetry of Brendan Kennelly: 1959-1968*, which sees Kennelly's poetry as promoting, rather than fighting against, a certain Irish, Christian ideology. Gwynn's interpretation of Kennelly's poetic ethos is best seen in her explication of the poem "The Black Cliffs, Ballybunion," from the collection *Dream of a Black Fox*. The aspect of this poem that most strikes Gwynn is God's attempt to be heard over the deafening bustle of daily life. She says:

Kennelly realizes that God tries (here he uses the symbol of the lonely curlew's cry) to make man understand his situation, what God gives man and the mysterious dual nature of the world that kills and yet provides the source of life, but that men do not try to penetrate the nature of God because they dare not. To understand the divine pain and love of God is something we men prefer not to have to face up to, because knowledge might destroy our daily life and our daily pattern of society... To accept the claims of behaviour that an apprehension of God's purpose may lay on us, is something that only great saints have been prepared to do. Here, as so often, Kennelly is sensitive to the elements that make up his experience— here of the Atlantic shore— but his real response to this experience lies in the perception of the ideas and symbols contained in this experience. (24)

This understanding of Kennelly as operating within a framework that rejects the excesses of society in favor of a clarity of mind that comes from adhering to Christian values is again highlighted in Gwynn's reading of the poem "A Kerry Christmas", also from *Dream of a Black Fox*. Gwynn highlights how this poem celebrates what she characterizes as the religious sincerity of its



central character, Mollie Conner, by contrasting her stark solitude with the indulgent Christmas celebrations that surround her. Gwynn develops this argument by describing how the natural imagery invoked by Kennelly in “A Kerry Christmas” supports an interpretation of “Goodwill [that] dribbles from the swilling mouth” as deceptive and antithetical to the Christian values that it should be celebrating (*DBF* 13, line 7; Gwynn 26).<sup>3</sup>

In Gwynn’s later analysis of poems from Kennelly’s collection *Good Souls to Survive*, she presents several instances in which people are either saved by an ability to surrender to the (inherently dangerous) unfamiliar or hindered by a repugnance for it. She writes of this theme in Kennelly’s early poetry “this is of course a very Christian vision— of sacrificing defense, of living without protection, without protecting oneself with small concerns, without worrying about living, for example” (83). If Gwynn sees Kennelly as keeping an ear out for messages from a Christian God whose influence has been obscured by the requirements of modern life, and laboring in his art to capture shades of that God in the socially dispossessed, no wonder she sees Kennelly collection *Moloney Up and At It* as “an interesting failure”, for in *Moloney* we find a character for whom debauchery is the primary means of escaping from the patterns and expectations of modern life (50).

Brendan Kennelly’s work can inspire such polarized interpretations because of its ability to admit uncertainty. Even in his early work Kennelly is more interested in challenging the familiar than in circumscribing the events and characters that his poetry presents<sup>4</sup>. Persson, Sedlmayr, McDonagh and the other critics that I have reviewed in this chapter are primarily interested in the ways that Kennelly’s work challenges hegemonic aspects of Irish culture. The resistance to conformity that most of these critics characterize as the central impulse of Kennelly’s writing— be it through his experimentations in poetic form, his redefinition of the heroic ideal, his unwillingness to privilege the Romantic ethos over any other, or his refusal to reconcile the myriad perspectives that inhabit his poetry and drama— is not just the mark of a

---

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note, in this context, an article written by Kennelly for the *Irish Independent* in 1991, entitled “We Need This Orgy”, which is a commentary on the importance of Christmas celebrations as an escape from the daily routines that hinder Irish people’s ability to enjoy living.

<sup>4</sup> An interesting apostrophe to this statement are Kennelly’s prefaces, which Persson discusses at length in *Betraying the Age*. In many of his prefaces, Kennelly presents his impetus for writing the work that will follow. Persson argues that Kennelly uses his prefaces to reach out to the reader directly, an analysis with which I am inclined to agree. By describing how he has come to conceive of his subject, Kennelly models the process of inquiry that his works encourage to engage in. By reaching out to the reader on an individual level, he affirms each reader’s appropriateness and agency as an interpreter of his work



rebellious spirit repudiating the rigid social structure of his youth. It is also indicative of a larger cultural shift of consciousness. In the chapters that follow I will trace how Kennelly's more recent poetry and drama develops his early interest in undercutting truths that claim to be absolute, moving ultimately toward forms that reflect the plurality and fluidity of Irish culture.

In her conclusion to *Theme and Craft in the Poetry of Brendan Kennelly*, Gwynn notices that "so often in early Kennelly there was a desire to teach (as has been said) and that involved the necessity to sum up, to determine, to encapsule, to define and so to limit ideas and experience, in order to present them with force and clarity to the reader" (197). I would argue that Kennelly does not abandon the desire to teach that Gwynn identifies in his early poetry. Instead, he shifts his focus so that his writing can demonstrate the viability of an increasingly heterogeneous Irish culture. By reading his more complex poem sequences, we practice and develop our ability to pick and choose among a variety of competing, and sometimes contradictory frames of reference, saying 'yes' to those that we find valuable and 'no' to those that we do not. What Kennelly has to teach us, then, is not just how to read the situations that he presents in his writing but how to engage consciously and creatively with a transforming and chaotic world.

## CHAPTER 2: “A Running Battle”: Historiography and Form in *Cromwell*

*Because of history, an Irish poet, to realize himself, must turn the full attention of his imagination to the English tradition. ('note' to Cromwell)*

John McDonagh notices that Brendan Kennelly's 1983 poem sequence *Cromwell* was published at a moment when issues of historiography were being hotly debated in Ireland. He describes an atmosphere in which the historical narratives of an older generation, which sought to rectify a long history of colonial occlusion by placing 'indigenous' Irish experiences at the center of historical record, were being displaced by a growing popular concern over the subjectivity of much Irish history. Undoubtedly this shift in consciousness had something to do with the political climate of the period. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the relative hope that followed the Republic's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 give way to growing unemployment and economic recession. Escalating violence in the North compounded political instability in the South, as key political figures bickered over how to address the issues at hand. In 1981, Irish Republican Army (IRA) inmate Bobby Sands died at the Maze prison at Long Kesh, Northern Ireland following a hunger strike to achieve political status for republican prisoners. Nine of his associates followed. The deaths of these hunger strikers captured the attention of Irish people not just because their project failed to compel the action of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, but also because of the symbolic value of hunger and martyrdom in a country with a painful history of famine and colonial discord. Sands and his brethren capitalized on ideals of heroism and sacrifice celebrated by the revolutionaries of Ireland's 1916 rebellion in order to make their political statements, even as their actions demonstrated the limitations of those ideals. That the rhetoric of 1916 still resonated with such force was cause for concern for many who saw the mythology of Ireland as a "most distressful nation" as self-defeating and dangerous (Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 316-326).

McDonagh himself seems to sympathize with those historians who sought to revise the nationalist bias out of Irish historical narrative, and he promotes *Cromwell* as a useful literary counterpart to their efforts:

*Cromwell* effectively portrays Irish history as a complex and non-reductive record of the interplay of competing forces and ideologies and Kennelly's brilliant chronological

interstices serve as crucial contemporary correlatives. The process of history is primarily one of interpretation and Buffin's problems with history arise when he confronts the interpretations that have been forced on him by virtue of his education and upbringing (96).

Where Kennelly's approach to the portrayal of historical narratives in *Cromwell* certainly calls into question the objectivity of historiography in a way that is valuable, McDonagh's analysis downplays the backlash that came from what was interpreted as revisionism's lack of sympathy for Irish nationalism and the effects of Ireland's colonial experience. In his article "We Are All Revisionists Now" Roy Foster notes that, in the 1980s, the term 'revisionist', which had once been used to describe a particular approach to historical study, "[had] come to be used as a smear word for those supposedly unsound on the national question ... It carries, and is intended to carry, pejorative connotations which are designed to erode [the historian's] professional authority in the popular mind" (2). The tension at the heart of these debates, between political interests and historical methodology, signals a different development in contemporary consciousness altogether, which is a growing association of authoritarian social phenomena with traditional methods of seeking and presenting knowledge.

Jonathan Allison and Terence Brown both reference A.T.Q. Stewart's 1977 work *The Narrow Ground* in essays on Kennelly's 1983 poem sequence *Cromwell*, discussing how Stewart's suggestion of the pre-determined and cyclical nature of violence in Ireland was mirrored in contemporary literary works dealing with the role of history in the Northern Irish conflict (Pine 88). Brown writes:

... In academic and journalistic circles, A.T.Q. Stewart's work of 1977, *The Narrow Ground*, did much to confirm the view of the present crisis as the re-emergence in modern times of an antique struggle rooted, as Stewart seemed to hint, in an almost Jungian collective unconsciousness which drives Ulstermen and women to deeds of desperation in generation after generation: 1641 is 1886 is 1912 is 1969, implies the structural organization of his deeply depressing book.

The view of history which underpins these several literary and academic interpretations of the recent Northern Irish past is essentially a static one. It presumes that the 'plot' of Irish history means that events at different periods are merely recurrent manifestations of an underlying theme. And, as such, these interpretations consolidate the historiographical awareness of most Irish people, an awareness which has remained constant since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century. For in the last two centuries nationalist Ireland has told itself an oft-repeated tale which emphasizes the recurrent nature of Ireland's historic dilemma as that of a subject people, and it is a vision of 'a most distressful nation' which governs popular historical consciousness despite recent social and political advances north and south, and despite the revisionism of modern Irish historiography. (Brown, "Awakening From the Nightmare," 245)

At first reading, the tendency of the 254 poems that comprise *Cromwell's* whole to return to themes like linguistic colonization, hunger, and religious



conflict could appear to be in keeping with this interpretation of Irish history as static and driven to repeat itself by some fundamental component (in an article on *Cromwell* in the *Irish Literary Supplement* Mark Patrick Hederman calls it “a pain expectant kink”) of the Irish psyche. Robert Johnstone explains *Cromwell*’s scope and its approach to history, saying “the main thrust of the book must be a catharsis of Irish hangups by way of their embodiment in their own personae. The mosaic presented is properly complex, unafraid to examine — and say—the worst, and, for all the brutality, alert and elucidatory” (165). Hederman seems to agree with this assessment of *Cromwell* as an act of cultural exorcism when he argues that the poem suggests “a fundamental shedding of the inauthentic and vicarious being which is made of either hatred for the facilitating oppressor or permanently housed within our psyche, or the many character parts designed for us by the makers of an ideal Irish nationality” that ultimately becomes a “journey back through the dark night of the Irish soul, which is a ‘dirt road’ because of all the twisted deformities effected in us ... the hope is that this and other such poems of catharsis and purgation are preludes to the speaking of that reality which is truly our home” (15). Désirée Hirst notes in this vein that “Kennelly’s aim is clearly to try to exorcise the preoccupation with Cromwell’s ghost which has obsessed Irish traditional mythology for so long: while calmly facing the facts of the monstrous actions for which Cromwell was responsible” (205).

Where these critics offer valuable insights into one of *Cromwell*’s central thrusts, its interest in destabilizing cultural narratives of historical struggle that are deeply sedimented in Irish cultural identity, I will argue that the tendency to see this process as clearing the way for the reconstruction of a *new* Irish national identity is actually somewhat at odds with Kennelly’s project. What is striking about *Cromwell* is not the way that it condemns one particular view of history and gestures approvingly towards another, but the co-existence of a number of historical perspectives in the absence of any explicit or implicit signals that one view is any more legitimate (or, more appropriately, any less spurious) than any other. As Edna Longley observes of *Cromwell*’s approach to history “Kennelly does not let atrocities merely cancel each other out (1641 justifies Drogheda-and-Limerick justified Mountbatten). Each side is **always** worse than the other”; and yet each side also retains qualities that allow the reader to understand, if not sympathize with, the forces that contribute to and construct each of the poem sequence’s varied perspectives (Longley, “Beyond the Incestuous Irish Anger” 21, author’s emphasis).

The subject of Kennelly’s 1967 doctoral thesis *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic* was the revival of ancient Gaelic mythology in English verse by

several poets including Samuel Ferguson, Mary A. Hutton and W.B. Yeats. In it, Kennelly offers some insights that are a valuable context for reading his treatment of history in *Cromwell*. Kennelly defines the epic form in his thesis as a "single long narrative poem in which well defined characters are involved in actions of importance and grandeur, often of a violent nature, such as war, in such a way as to affirm our confidence in the essential greatness, dignity, and nobility of man" and though he observes that there are no surviving epic poems in Irish literature, he unpacks fruitfully the various ways that poets translated epic material from the Gaelic tradition into a modernist mode (MIPIE 5). In the end a key concern of Kennelly's is what he sees as the tendency of poets like Ferguson, Aubrey De Vere, and Æ (George Russell) to evade the more grotesque elements of the Gaelic tradition. He writes in his conclusion:

... Ancient mythology proved itself capable, in the hands of competent poets, of meeting the challenge of our complex modern world. Cuchulain and Deirdre are centuries old, but as these poets have shown, they are also in the hearts of modern men and women.

Nevertheless, one is impressed also by the fact that none of these poets captures the full violence and extravagant savagery of the ancient sagas. One might deduce from this that sophistication not only refines the imagination, it also tames it; civilization, as well as bringing technical finesse and expertise, involves also a lessening of imaginative vigor and daring. There is no gain without loss. (MIPIE 329)

Kennelly worries that by striving to achieve this level of sophistication, which he describes elsewhere in his thesis as an "attempt to present a total view of the growth of the Irish mind and character from the early pagan world to the modern Christianized race," modern Irish poets fail to realize the potential of the epic form, which Kennelly sees as providing a framework "to work vigorously outwards towards the long, allusive poem rather than towards the embarrassed compression and obscure condensation of so much modern poetry" (MIPIE 48, 329).

In *Cromwell* Kennelly takes issue with the tendency of historical narratives to impose hierarchies of authenticity on perspectives of the past, in much the same way that he finds fault with the subjects of his thesis for 'taming' the complexity out of ancient Gaelic sagas. The ordering principle that Kennelly finds fault with in reference to poeticized Irish epic is actually a feature of Modern narrative itself, which by its very nature provides a logical structure to events and moves toward the resolution of any questions or conflicts raised in the course of those events. Kennelly's response to the challenges of contemporary Irish history, then, is two-fold. At the same time that he deconstructs limiting narratives of Ireland as a 'most distressful nation' Kennelly also alters the structure of traditional literary forms. Throughout *Cromwell*



Kennelly re-frames traditional poetic and narrative forms in a way that highlights their capacity to “work vigorously outwards”, absorbing elements of prose, drama, scattered internal monologue, political rhetoric, gossip, and visual art in ways that are pleasing and instructive. Where traditional narratives create a logical sequence of events, Kennelly fills *Cromwell*'s constitutive poems with anachronisms and arranges them in a manner that is “imagistic, not chronological”, an issue to which I will be returning later in this chapter. Where traditional narratives work towards the achievement of an authoritative representation of historical events, Kennelly depicts history in a way that leaves it open to a variety of responses. In an age when some segments of the Irish population, at least, were beginning to make a connection between social injustice and the Modern “metaphysics of comprehension” that lies behind traditional narrative structure, Kennelly's attention to the implications of form is uniquely appropriate.

The destructive potential of language is embodied in *Cromwell* by the poem sequence's title character. In his many speeches and exchanges with other characters, Cromwell presents himself as a source of universal truth and reason, a presentation that exists in fraught tension with his historical legacy and with Kennelly's frank and unflattering representations of his antihero's brutality and opportunism. In the poem “Oliver's Power Of Reflection,” for example, we see Cromwell re-framing the parameters of his relationship with the people of Kerry in a way that is ludicrous when we consider the tyranny with which he has seized their lands:

Oliver's fishing was going so well  
In Kerry that he decided to make  
Two rivers his own, the Cashen and the Feale.  
A huge notice, printed on Listowel oak,  
Proclaimed that trespassers would be prosecuted  
and, if found guilty, fined or jailed  
Or worse. A Subversive Organization took  
Exception to this and wrote to old  
Oliver saying they'd blow him up, set fire  
To his house, kill his cattle, poison his lands.  
'The rabble!' rumbled Oliver, 'The foul sods!'  
Yet when he reflected on the matter  
He replied, 'Comrades! My grounds are your grounds,  
My rivers too. Please bring your hounds, your lines and rods.' (C 33)

The deftness with which Cromwell turns the outrage of the “Subversive Organization” on its head in this poem is impressive, even as the substance of his actions is ruthless in the extreme. Throughout the poem sequence Kennelly captures Cromwell's ability to establish himself as master of his circumstances



in a number of scenes which show him using force, money, political power, claims of being God's chosen vessel or maniacal charm to achieve his will. Cromwell's foremost skill, however, is his command of language. In spite of his protestations in the poem "Oliver Speaks to His Countrymen" that "... / The Dispensations of God upon me / Require I speak not words, but Things" Cromwell's language is transparent, fluid, and eminently effective at shaping reality in a way that coincides with his interests.

The poem "Oliver to the Catholic Bishops of Ireland" is a rich example of Cromwell's ability to break apart the language used by his critics and re-frame it to serve his own purposes. In "The Catholic Bishops to the People of Ireland," a poem that precedes "Oliver to the Catholic Bishops of Ireland" by two pages and to which the latter seems a direct response, the speakers criticize Cromwell for prohibiting the celebration of Catholic Mass, warn Catholic people that Cromwell will sell their lands to the English, and implore them to oppose his interests in the name of God (C 130). In "Oliver to the Catholic Bishops of Ireland" Cromwell directs his attack at the bishops's language specifically.

I wonder not at swirling thoughts and words  
At divisions and discontents  
Where so anti-christian and sundering a term  
As 'Clergy and Laity' is given and received:  
A term unknown to any save the anti-christian church  
And such as derive themselves from her.  
It was your pride gave birth to this expression,  
It is for filthy lucre's sake you keep it up.  
You make the people believe  
They are not as holy as yourselves  
So that they, for their penny, may purchase sanctity from you.  
You bridle, saddle, ride them at your pleasure.  
The obedience of beasts is such  
They can't know false from true.  
So you dub the people by the name of 'Flocks'.  
How dare you call these men your 'Flocks'  
Whom you have plunged into rebellion  
Till they and their country are one ruinous heap.  
These men you have fleeced, polled, peeled hitherto  
And make it your business to do so still.  
You cannot feed them! Their hunger is true  
While you poison them with false, abominable  
Doctrine. You keep the Word of God from them,  
You stuff them with senseless Orders and Traditions  
Making certain, always, that they cannot choose.  
You feed your 'Flocks'  
With fear of 'losing their religion'.  
Alas, poor creatures! What have they to lose! (C 132).

In lines 4-11, Cromwell frames the ecclesiastical terms "clergy" and

“laity” in terms of an economic relationship in which the people are in thrall to their religious leaders and must pay for a salvation that they cannot do without. Later, he turns the bishops’ use of the term “flocks” to refer to their people in “The Catholic Bishops to the People of Ireland” on its head to suggest that the Catholic clergy of Ireland dehumanize their constituents by controlling their access to scripture. He builds on the image of sheep introduced in “The Catholic Bishops to the People of Ireland” with his use of the pun “These men you have fleeced” in line 19 to suggest that the Catholic clergy have cheated their constituents out of money and autonomy. This strategy is ultimately effective because Cromwell’s argument plays off the Irish-Catholic Church’s equation of piety with poverty. Statements like “You cannot feed them! Their hunger is true,” which refer explicitly to the Irish people’s spiritual constitution, implicitly promote Cromwell’s religious ethos as a righteous and abundant answer to their lives of hard work (this is implied by his liberal exploitation of the Catholic clergy’s animal metaphor throughout the poem) and privation. Cromwell’s manipulation of language in this poem also serves to mask the reality of his own economic and political interests in the mitigation of Irish Catholic support for the monarchy and to frame him as a friend to the people in their own terms.

If Kennelly highlights the linguistic virtuosity of his antihero in order to show the capacity of language to shape meaning and subdue adversaries, he also adopts it in order to signal the power dynamics embedded in language. Åke Persson, McDonagh, and Seán Lucy have all written in depth about how Kennelly plays with the sonnet in *Cromwell*, comparing the imposition of poetic form on language with the efforts of Oliver Cromwell and others to rule over the Irish people. Persson also notes that a number of Kennelly’s pseudo-sonnets exceed the form’s prescribed fourteen lines, stretching to fifteen or sixteen lines, and that they often integrate grotesque subject matter and idiom into the territory of a traditionally ‘elevated’ convention (*Betraying the Age* 124-130). A great many of the lines that make up Kennelly’s pseudo-sonnets also eschew the form’s conventional iambic pentameter, consuming extraneous sounds or content matter like the characters the giant or the Belly, who consume onions, houses, tracts of land, or each other. An example of this metrical congestion can be found in the poem “System”:

It’s not enough to demoralize; we must degrade.  
 Let’s deprive them of elective suffrage, exclude  
 Them from corporations, magistracy, the bar,  
 Bench, juries, vestries. They cannot be  
 Sheriffs, solicitors, gamekeepers, constables.  
 They cannot have arms. If they have a gun, whip them.



If they have a horse worth five pounds, take it from them.  
 The law cannot suppose that any such person  
 As an Irish Catholic can be said to exist.  
 Listen, the mere Irish do not exist,  
 The world will know they do not exist,  
 These Irish must never go to school,  
 Offer ten pounds for a Popish teacher's head,  
 If Paddy believes he exists, poor Paddy's a fool. (C 110)

Like many of *Cromwell's* other poems "System" has the fourteen lines of a traditional sonnet, but its technical similarities with that form end there. The lines of this poem are heterometric, beginning with thirteen beats and growing shorter successively by a beat for each of the first four lines, then holding twelve beats each for the next five lines before retracting again for four more lines. The poem then ends as it started, with thirteen beats. The rhyme and metrical stress of "System" derive largely from the repetition of words like "them," and "exist," although the final three lines adopt the *aba* rhyme scheme of a regular sonnet. The effect of this apparent metrical disorder and substitution of repetition for rhyme at the end of lines is that some of the theatricality, threat, and disdain that fill the letters and speeches of the historical Oliver Cromwell are allowed to invade the familiar rhythms of the sonnet.

In the poem "The Enemy" Kennelly quotes directly from one of these letters, translating a 1649 account of the Siege of Drogheda from Oliver Cromwell to fellow Parliamentarian William Lenthall into a fourteen-line pseudo-sonnet:

'Divers of The Enemy retreated into Mill-Mount'  
 Chronicled Oliver, "A strong place, difficult of access,  
 Exceedingly high, having a good graft,  
 Firmly palisadoed. I captured the place  
 And ordered my men to put the Governor,  
 Sir Arthur Aston, and considerable officers  
 To the sword. Indeed being in the heat  
 Of action, I forbade my men to spare  
 Any of The Enemy in the town.  
 A hundred such sought refuge in St Peter's  
 Church-steeple. I offered mercy to each in turn.  
 They refused. I ordered the steeple to be burned down.  
 In the midst of the flames, one of the creatures  
 Shrieked: "God damn me, God confound me; I burn, I burn."  
 (C 52, compare to Abbot 126)

Kennelly arranges fourteen lines from Oliver Cromwell's letter to William Lenthall so that an organic, largely slant end-rhyme develops amongst words like "Governor" and "officers," "St Peter's" and "creatures," "turn" and "burn." Iambic pentameter is abandoned here in favor of the spondaic meter of



Cromwell's own idiom ( ... I CAP-TURED the PLACE / and OR-DERED MY MEN). As it does in "System" Kennelly's alteration of the sonnet's traditional meter in "Enemy" allows some of the forcefulness of Oliver Cromwell's imperative speech to break into the poem. By transforming the material of Cromwell's letter into a pseudo-sonnet in "The Enemy" Kennelly not only blurs the lines between seemingly non-literary language (in this case the language of politics and professional correspondence) and that of poetic artifice, he also reinforces his conflation of poetic form and colonial force.

Another example of Kennelly's experiments with the sonnet form can be found in the poem "Gas":

The Devil fucked Oliver Cromwell  
 In a cottage at the edge of Birnham Wood.  
 He fucked his body first, then he fucked his soul  
 And after that they sampled each other's blood.  
 Nine months later, gas poured from Oliver's hole.  
 An ambitious Austrian corporal came and harnessed it  
 For the good of the European, white soul.  
 Certain desolate thoughts result from that.

A quick fuck in a cottage can change the world,  
 An infernal frolic can scuttle a king  
 And no cosy poet need ever write it down.

Was the devil disappointed? Did he hoof  
 Home to hell and wank off, cursing  
 Oliver for his superior cunning? (C 100)

Although the meter of this sonnet is irregular and the rhyme is relatively loose (rhymes like 'Cromwell' and 'soul,' 'it' and 'that' are slant) "Gas" maintains the rhyme scheme of the traditional Elizabethan sonnet through its opening octet and culminates in a couplet of sorts. As he does in several other of *Cromwell's* pseudo-sonnets, Kennelly combines the less tightly controlled rhyme scheme of the Elizabethan sonnet with the octave/sestet division characteristic of the Petrarchan tradition in "Gas". The division is carried out by separating the two final tercets from the initial octave spatially on the page. The pace of the poem quickens in the first of the final two tercets as the octet's proliferation of long vowel sounds (O-liver CrOmwell; BI-UH-d; HOle) gives way to a series of clipped words and consonant sounds (quick fuck; frolic). This quick pacing heightens the imbalance between the opening octet's establishment of the poem's narrative and the final sestet's attempt to sum it up. An internal interplay of assonance and consonance dominates the poem rather than its patterns of rhyme, and the effect of this is to heighten the feeling of disorientation that is established through the poem's grouping of historical and

mythical characters, its terse treatment of sex and violence, and its messy throwing together of narrative action (“The Devil fucked Oliver Cromwell ... / Nine months later”) and trite poetic moralizing (“... / A quick fuck in a cottage can change the world”). The final couplet is comprised of a rhyme that is particularly weak, befitting the anticlimactic ending of the poem, which culminates in a bitter wank. Throughout “Gas,” a poem that deals with authoritarian figures and sex acts that are dominated by control, the atmosphere is one of chaos. This disjunction between narrative content and formal effect demonstrates the psychic chaos that accompanies acts of sexual and physical violence, social change (as indicated by the birth of the gas and the presence of the Austrian corporal, who we could imagine is there to manage and control the process of social change) and poem writing.

In the poem “Gusto” Kennelly alters the heroic couplet form so that an account of retaliatory religious violence transforms into mock puppet theater:

The Catholic bombed the Protestant home  
 The Protestant bombed the Catholic’s home  
 The Protestant castrated the Catholic  
 The Catholic castrated the Protestant  
 The Protestant set fire to the Catholic Recreation Centre  
 The Catholic set fire to the Protestant Recreation Centre  
 The Catholic cut the tail of the Protestant dog  
 The Protestant cut the tail of the Catholic dog

The Protestant hanged the Catholic  
 The Catholic hanged the Protestant  
 As they dangled like dolls from the freshly-painted  
 Protestant and Catholic gibbets  
 They held hands in mid-air and sang  
 With spiritual gust, ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers!’ (C 128)

The first eight lines of this fourteen-line poem are constructed, in keeping with the form of the traditional heroic couplet, from a sequence of rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter and alexandrine lines. The masculine end-rhyme that characterizes the heroic couplet is achieved here, with the exception of lines 3-4, through the repetition of the final word of each line. Until it disintegrates in lines 11-14, the extreme formal order of “Gusto” serves to turn the contradictory Catholic and Protestant movements into balanced antitheses of each other. This effect is emphasized by the substitution of the words “Catholic” and “Protestant” at the end of lines 3-4, where the surrounding couplets end with repeated words. The use of closed couplets in lines 1-8 could trick the reader into mistaking the moments of violence described in each closed couplet as distinct, since each couplet forms a logical whole. As with the



traditional heroic couplet, however, each couplet derives a deeper meaning from its association with the larger poetic structure. The use of closed couplet persists following the line break between lines 8 and 9, but then dissolves as the Protestant and Catholic parties begin to come together in the narrative of the poem. This merging of religious opposites is emphasized by Kennelly's use of enjambment in lines 11-14. At this point the narrative of the poem has shifted from a matter-of-fact description of retaliatory acts of violence to a scene where the terrorists become performers. The implications of both form and narrative here are to assert the dependence of individual acts of religious terrorism on a larger cultural narrative of resistance and retaliation. Without such narratives the acts of violence described in "Gusto" would dissolve and become isolated incidents of perversion or pathology rather than accreting meaning as expressions of cultural heroism.

In each of these examples, themes of tyranny, immorality, and social injustice are heightened by Kennelly's use of form. Traditionally, the sonnet and the heroic couplet both provide the poet with a means of demonstrating his artistic virtuosity by conforming to rigorous conventions in order to produce a language that is 'elevated.' Although Kennelly's experiments with form are often intended to expose, deform, and debase this sense of 'elevation', there are many moments when *Cromwell's* blend of forms demonstrates the beauty of 'low' speech. In "Lettering", for example, the spacing and capitalization of words give the poem a visual quality like the prose writing of a newspaper or the political graffiti referenced in the poem's narrative: "... / This morning when, getting on the 16A / And lurching through the city / Of Parnell, O'Connell, Emmet, Grattan, / I saw, scrawled in the wall in red lettering, / BOOM WENT MOUNTBATTEN! / (Signed: Loving care)" (C 107, poet's parenthesis). Here the guerilla art form of graffiti is an appropriate medium for responding to the IRA's guerilla war tactics, and Kennelly co-opts it in "Lettering" in the same way that he co-opts Cromwell's political speech in poems like "Enemy," and "Oliver to the Catholic Bishops of Ireland." Through references to renowned political orators (Charles Stewart) Parnell, (Daniel) O'Connell, (Robert) Emmet, and (Henry) Grattan Kennelly plays with notions of 'high' and 'low' art as well as accepted and renegade forms of political speech in order to suggest how notions of what constitutes these things changes according to who is in power. In these instances, Kennelly's blending and loosening of verse conventions does not detract from the beauty of his poetry and often adds a dimension to it that would otherwise go missing.

It bears acknowledging that Kennelly's use of extreme examples of social control to suggest how poetic forms sacrifice complexity and imagination in



order to achieve sophistication, is heavy-handed. As many of his contemporary critics have underlined, it is characteristic of Kennelly to dispense with subtlety in the name of thematic richness and dramatic effect. Furthermore, it is far more effective to read Kennelly's work not as an exercise in achieving balance, so that he seems to be comparing the experience of reading a poem to those of being colonized, castrated, or bombed, but as a use of hyperbole to parody the capacity for language to shape social and historical consciousness.

In the same way that Kennelly remakes forms in order to expose the instability of language, so too does he present Oliver Cromwell's historical legacy in a way that exposes its provisionality. Oliver Cromwell was the English military and political leader whose Irish Campaign massacred thousands of Irish people (troops and civilians alike) and sent scores of others into slavery. In his essay on *Cromwell* in *Dark Fathers Into Light: Brendan Kennelly*, Allison quotes W.E.H. Lecky's assertion that "the name of Cromwell even now acts as a spell upon the Irish mind, and has a powerful and living influence in sustaining the hatred both of England and Protestantism" (66). Kennelly offers countless examples of the forms that this influence takes, from his invocation of the Irish epithet '*Scrios Cromwell ort*' (the curse of Cromwell on you) (C 122 line 14), to one character's confession to the Cromwell of the poem that "I hate and fear you like the thought of hell. / The murderous syllables of your name / Are the foundation of my nightmare... / A fucked up Paddy is what I am. Right?" (C 117 lines 4-9), to his depiction of a school teacher's rage as he teaches a lesson on Cromwell's export of Irish Catholics to work as slaves in Barbados (C 16).

Many of Cromwell's appearances in the poem sequence uphold his legacy as an unrepentant monster. In "Honest-to-God Oliver," for example, Cromwell offers a rapturous account of his Irish Campaign in which he transforms violent acts of war into pleasurable sex acts: "... / Screams of surrender tickle my balls. / Flames shooting up from a Catholic spire / Make a noble erection" (C 106, lines 8-10). In "Oliver's Wexford" he speaks in rosy terms of the city of Wexford, mentioning the brutal massacre that his army carried out there only in passing and laying the blame firmly on his victims: "... / Of the inhabitants, those who did not die / Ran away. Your coward always runs" (C 69, lines 7-8). Even Cromwell's praise of Edmund Spenser's poem *The Faerie Queene* in the poem "Delight" can be read as a sly affront to the the Irish people if we consider Spenser's antagonistic treatment of them in the prose tract *A View of the Present State of Ireland*<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> The pamphlet *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, published after Spenser's death in 1599, painted the Irish as racially inferior and advocated for the destruction of indigenous Irish

This view of Cromwell as a figure of pure evil is complicated, however, by the suggestion that he is mad. The poem "Oak" depicts the genesis of Cromwell's project (and, perhaps, the source of his confidence as a speaker and writer) in a tree "... / On a hill behind Godmanchester" (C 17, line 7). Here Cromwell receives instructions from God to "... / Make men of blood account for the blood they'd shed, / For the mischief they'd done to the people of God" (C 17, lines 20-21). This representation of events is in keeping with Cromwell's repeated claims to the authority of God, his firm adherence to his vision, and his willingness to use violence to bring about his will in the rest of the poem. What surprises in "Oak" is the moment in the last stanza when Cromwell uncharacteristically questions his own sanity:

Abysses, pits, chaotic black whirlwinds,  
Madness ticks close as madness must  
To the mind of a wise man.  
But this is not mad, this mind  
Is the mother of lightnings and splendors,  
This is sane, this, yes, this is most sane. (C 17, lines 23-28)

Indeed, there are many moments in *Cromwell* when the force and clarity of Cromwell's voice seems to be driven by a dangerously disordered mind. In poems like "Honest-to-God Oliver," "A Condition," and "Praise the Lord" Cromwell's sense of his purpose and how it should be carried out takes on pathological characteristics. "Honest-to-God Oliver" makes him a sexual sadist (C 106). In "A Condition" he is a psychopath who bashes his opponent's head in rather than discuss his terms of surrender (C 93). In "Praise the Lord" (and arguably throughout *Cromwell*) he exhibits delusions of grandeur and remorselessly describes killing in the name of God (C 83). This suggestion of madness both heightens the image of Cromwell as a figure of pure evil (his insanity means that he is not in thrall to normal human inhibitions or social or moral consciousness) and compromises any tendency we might have to read him as opportunistic and motivated by a conventional desire for power and wealth.

Cromwell's historical legacy is also complicated in poems like "Oliver to the Catholic Bishops of Ireland" when, for all of the self-serving theatrics of his rhetoric, Cromwell succeeds in making us question the black-and-white dichotomy of Irish-Catholic and Anglo-Protestant interests and at promoting himself as a friend to the people. There are many moments in *Cromwell* where Cromwell is a surprisingly benevolent figure. In "Oliver's Army" he is the moral

---

language and customs, by violence if necessary. *A View of the Present State of Ireland* also promoted the use of scorched earth tactics to create famine and subdue guerrilla warfare.



compass of his men ( "... / None shall kill an Enemy who yields and throws down his Armes / Rape, Ravishments, Unnatural abuses shall meet with death / Let God be served, Religion be frequented") (C 51, lines 9-11). In "Oliver to His Brother," "Oliver to His Daughter," "Oliver to a Friend" and many other poems he is a source of sage advice and a patient friend ("... / Loving brother, I am glad to hear of your welfare / And that our children have so much leisure / They can travel far to eat cherries ... Cherries and exercise go well together.") (C 22, lines 1-3, 8).

As I have already suggested, central importance of Cromwell's character is the way that his exploits in the poem sequence dramatize the dangerous and exciting facilities of the English language. Cromwell's language captivates the reader (Terence Brown calls it "a voice of thunder") and reminds us of the formative and emotional potential of a well-constructed narrative (Brown, "Telling Tales..." 145). His wrath symbolizes the English language's role as an implement of power. Those aspects of Cromwell's personality which appeal to the sympathies of the reader demonstrate language's ability to nurture, instruct and enchant. The relative continuity of Cromwell's character, even as he moves through disparate time periods, settings and circumstances, lends the poem sequence a degree of narrative unity in the same way that language itself unifies the present with the past and future, allowing history to exist in all of its complicated forms. Kennelly's manipulation of Cromwell's historical persona in ways that suggest its transformation into an artifact, which has been interpreted, appropriated, and fetishized parallels the potential of language to be transformed to suit the needs of those who know how to use it.

An important counterpart to Oliver Cromwell's striking intensity is Kennelly's characterization of *Cromwell's* "little hero", Michael Patrick Gusty Mary (M.P.G.M.) Buffún. McDonagh observes how Buffún's name is a hybrid construction of English and Irish and suggests that the many voices and characters that consume his mind constitute competing versions of national identity (62). As his name (and Cromwell's tendency to refer to him as "Buff") suggests, Buffún is also a figure of post-revisionist Ireland, stripped of any authentic identity, national or otherwise. Buffún's struggle to reconcile all of these factors can be read in the lumbering and interrupted narrative of poems like "Good-Midnight, Ass-Face":

I'm making a hell of an effort to think  
Tonight, I think, but what's the use when one  
Of my old friendenemies, Oliver, Mum,  
He, Ed Spenser down in Cork or even  
Balder and the wife in hell, a locked spot





"A Host of Ghosts" adheres to the rhyme scheme of the traditional Elizabethan sonnet for the first fourteen lines of the poem. Lines 13-16 are set off from the rest of the poem both by their shortness and by their doubling of the *gg* rhyme scheme that characterizes the Elizabethan couplet. This moment constitutes a movement in the poem away from Buffún's description of the landscape of his nightmare deeper into the realm of his psyche. From here forward the poem's structure disintegrates for fifteen lines as Buffún contemplates his identity and allows the nightmare to invade his mind. The end-rhyme that dominates the first sixteen lines of the poem weakens, but the assonance of the poem intensifies suggesting a kind of internal resonance that mirrors the movement of the poem's host of characters deeper into Buffún's psyche.

Where Cromwell's commitment to his personal mythos is singular and unyielding, Buffún is never able to consolidate the visions of history that cycle through his consciousness (represented in many cases by characters like Cromwell, Mum, and Edmund Spenser) into a unified and unifying narrative experience or convey them in an un-mixed mode. If Cromwell is unfazed by the accusations of history, Buffún retains his Irish "hangups" in spite of the fact that he has engaged in an extended exchange with Cromwell and has found a surprising disparity between what he thought he knew and what he determines to be Cromwell's "understanding" (C 117, line 16) and "fluent inevitable pity" (C 15). Indeed, Buffún's hangups seem to inform the plural and often contradictory sense of self that replaces his emptiness in the penultimate poem "Am". Where Christy Mahon and Stephen Dedalus ultimately reconcile and relinquish some of their feelings of alienation and subjectivity in the achievement of their voices, Buffún taps into his as a means of understanding the world around him in a deeper and more profound way:

When I consider what all this has made me  
I marvel at the catalogue:  
I am that prince of liars, Xavier O'Grady,  
I am Tom Gorman, dead in the bog,  
I am Luke O'Shea in Limerick prison,  
I sell subversive newspapers at a church gate,  
Men astound me, I am outside women,  
I have fed myself on the bread of hate,  
I am an immigrant whose brain  
Ireland bleeds and cannot cease  
To bleed until I come home again  
To fields that are a parody of peace.  
I sing tragic songs, I am madly funny,  
I'd sell my country for a fist of money  
I am a big family,

I am a safe-hearted puritan  
Blaming it all on the Jansenists  
Who, like myself, were creatures on the run.  
I am a home-made bomb, a smuggled gun.  
I like to whine about identity,  
I know as little of love as possible  
To know, I bullshit about being free,  
I'm a softie crying at the sound of a bell,  
I have a tongue to turn snakespittle to honey,  
I smile at the themes of the old poets,  
Being lost in myself is the only way  
I can animate my foolish wits.

Do I believe myself? I spill  
My selves. Believe, me, if you will. (C 159).

In this speech, Buffún is professing not the transcendent consciousness of his race (as Stephen Dedalus hopes to do at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) but *many* consciousnesses of his race that include perspectives marked by anger and suffering. In spite of the horrifying nature of some of Buffún's encounters with history, the moments when history reaches into his contemporary consciousness open him up to a new level of sensitivity and vitality. He is a living channel for an emotional engagement with history. In "Am" he notes the effect of such moments saying "... / Being lost in myself is the only way / I can animate my foolish wits" (C lines 26-27). Buffún's irreconcilable plurality is Kennelly's answer to the suggestion that the Irish consciousness is something stable that can be captured in its totality even within a single cultural moment.

*Cromwell* is also visited by characters like the giant, the Belly, the Hand and Mum who embody Irish themes of hunger and consumption, religious and colonial authority, and nationalism in the poem to exaggerated and even monstrous proportions. Kennelly's treatment of traditional motifs, like his use of forms or popular history, is not meant to deliver the reader a 'pure' experience of Irish culture. His icons are composites, whose effectiveness in the poem sequence is dependent on their openness to new associations, thought-patterns, and cultural frameworks. Mum, for example, is a parody of Mother Ireland figures like Cathleen ni Houlihan, Dark Rosaleen, and the *Shan van Vocht* (the poor old woman), who have traditionally symbolized Ireland's subject, colonial experience. The Mother Ireland paradigm has manifested itself in a variety of different characters from Irish culture, but her origins lie in the Gaelic sovereignty goddess tradition. The sovereignty goddess was an anthropomorphic figure of the Irish landscape at the center of a pre-Christian festival called the *bhanfheis rígi*. She evaluated the prosperity of the landscape by changing shape from old and ugly to young and beautiful according to the



virility of the king who was her conquest (Johnson and Cairns 3). Symbolic representations of a female character who embodies the material conditions of the Irish people persist in Modern versions of the Mother Ireland paradigm, and are often coupled with celebrations of blood sacrifice and martyrdom. A famous example is the title character of Yeats's 1902 play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, who lures young Michael Gillane off to war on the eve of his wedding. As the two depart, the Gillanes's younger son arrives at the family home and reports seeing a young girl in place of the old woman who has just left, noting that "she had the walk of a queen" (141). This version of the paradigm supports a view of violence in Ireland as inherited and cyclical by suggesting that the events of the play might be repeated by the younger brother. In Seán O'Casey's 1926 play *The Plough and the Stars* Mother Ireland is invoked by Dublin men in a public house leading up to the Easter 1916 Rising:

CLITHEROE: Three glasses o' port!  
 CAPT. BRENNAN. We won't have long to wait now.  
 LIEUT. LANGON. Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution.  
 CLITHEROE. You have a mother, Langdon.  
 LIEUT. LANGON. Ireland is greater than a mother.  
 CAPT. BRENNAN. You have a wife, Clitheroe.  
 CLITHEROE. Ireland is greater than a wife  
 LIUET. LANGON. Th' time for Ireland's battle is now — th' place for  
 Ireland's battle is here. (200-201)

As with *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, "Ireland" promises the men in this scene a level of excitement and personal fulfillment that they cannot access in their day-to-day lives, even as she incites them to war. In Patrick Kavanagh's 1942 long poem *The Great Hunger* the sovereignty goddess figure is protagonist Paddy Maguire's own domineering mother, as well as the fields of the farm that he tends in lieu of starting a family. Each of these Modern versions of the Mother Ireland paradigm frame Ireland's postcolonial struggle in terms of an Oedipal personality crisis: in order to return to a pure experience of Irishness, the male heroes of these stories must resolve their infantile, colonial, or ideological dependence on a paternal (or an imperial or, in the case of *The Great Hunger*, a Catholic-nationalist) figure and achieve an autonomy that will justify their participation in the activities of a normative adult life. In the process they repress their attachments to their real wives and mothers, sacrificing them to versions of the nationalist ideal with varying degrees of success. Violence is often an essential part of this process. Many versions of the Mother Ireland paradigm employ a complicated rhetoric of heroism and romantic advance coupled with sexual refusal that invites disenfranchised male characters to express their power by symbolically dominating the female embodiment of

national territory through acts of war. In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, for example, the title character declares "If any one would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all" but then qualifies that invitation by assuring her audience that "With all the lovers that brought me their love I never set out the bed for any" (138). The conflation of war with courtship and death with sexual climax and male potency in this way (couched though it might be in evasive language) masks the violent and patriarchal nature of the nationalism that Mother Ireland advocates, and the dangerous legacy of her use as a means of equating virility with martyrdom can be seen in the activities of the Long Kesh hunger strikers.

Kennelly's Mum serves both to invoke this paradigm and to destabilize it. She is oppressive and aggressive; a dangerous shapeshifter devoid of emotion whose sexuality is overt rather than symbolic. In "Coal-Dust" the speaker recalls her brutal abuse with a kind of sadomasochistic glee, describing the "succulent darkness" of the coal-bin where he retreated for safety and noting: "... / Mum prodded my belly with a break-knife / (Stainless Sheffield) an inch below my little button. / Nothing lethal, you understand. After all / These years, it's the scar I like most in life / And have grown to peek at with some affection." (C 25, lines 10-14). In "Mum's Tongue" Mum takes the form of a giant tongue who stalks the speaker "... / Screaming kiss me kiss me kiss me" (C 48, line 7). In "Grinning" she appears as a skeleton and tempts the speaker with an incestuous rendezvous before re-materializing in her fleshed form. Through these repeated portrayals of Mum as a bully and rapist Kennelly redirects the model of gendered sexual inequality that traditional depictions of Mother Ireland exploit and makes his Cathleen ni Houlihan an agent of the kind of violence and dominant sexuality that her antecedents implicitly advocate. It is interesting to note, additionally, that the name "Mum" has been translated from the Irish tradition into a British idiom; she is not "Mammy" or "Mam." This subtle alteration of the paradigm serves as a reminder of the English language's role as mediator of the sovereignty goddess tradition of which Mum is a manifestation.<sup>6</sup>

Kennelly's characterization of the giant is similarly rich with allusive

---

<sup>6</sup> Philip Coleman observed, in a discussion with the writer, that the term "Mum" also suggests silence, as in the phrase "keeping mum," as well as mummies. These observations emphasize further the richness of Kennelly's re-interpretation of tradition here: the former interpretation of Mum's mane reinforces the silencing of Irish women's perspectives that coincided with the promotion of Mother Ireland figures (Eavan Boland writes on this topic at length in her book *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*) while the latter pokes fun at the grotesque message of the Mother Ireland tradition and suggests its inadequacy by associating it with a figure of the living dead.



potential. Allison associates the giant by degrees with the destructive power of Cromwell's army in Ireland, the confiscation of its countryside by English forces, the consuming energies of war, hatred, and humanity's capacity for evil in general (Pine 83). More immediately, the giant is characterized by his tendency to eat everything in sight. In "Tasty" the giant meets The Belly, a more localized if not entirely distinguishable figure, in the middle of a vibrant natural landscape and then eats him. The carnage that accompanies this moment of the poem sequence recalls Mum's comic savagery ("... the giant stuffed The Belly in / His gob, chewed his screams, swallowed all / And mumbled 'Not bad. In fact, unusually tasty'") and is even presented in a sing-song pattern of alternating end-rhymes (C 144, lines 14-16). If the giant represents war, as Allison suggests, then this portrayal of him eating The Belly in the Irish countryside can be read as yet another variation on the Mother Ireland paradigm, which represents landscape as a bloodthirsty figure who spurs young men of Ireland to war.

I am tempted to read the giant not only as a figure of war and evil, but also as symbol of a country in search of identity. Cuchulain, the hero of Irish sagas like the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, is often portrayed swelling to gigantic proportions in convulsions of grief, rage, or embarrassment. The scene of the young Cuchulain's tempering in the *Táin*, which culminates in his being drenched with three tubs of water to cool his temper, is similar to the image of the giant in the poem "Party" standing in Dun Laoghaire harbor: "... / Cooling off. The giant is not at home in crowds" (C 28, line 9). Cuchulain's convulsions are an extreme expression of his need to demonstrate himself and they happen when his formidable physical powers eclipse his adolescent reason. The giant's indiscriminate and ravenous consumption is a similar act of self-assertion that reflects contemporary Irish society's hunger for a stable identity. Much of the nationalist discourse of the twentieth century promoted a vision of heroism that was informed by Catholic ideals of self-sacrifice, so that male heroes in particular were encouraged to shed blood or refuse food in order to demonstrate their commitment to the nationalist cause. These heroic figures ostensibly rely on their faith in God and sense of national identity to steel them against the cravings of their bodies. The giant and The Belly embody the force of hunger in the absence of a stabilizing identity during moments of personal or social change. That "Tasty", the poem which shows the giant eating the Belly, is immediately succeeded by the poem "Hunger", a poem that refers peripherally to the Long Kesh hunger strikers and their reception in popular culture, complicates the theme of hunger even further.

In addition to Oliver Cromwell, Kennelly imagines several other notorious figures from Irish history in ways that derive texture from, but are not defined

within the limitations of, their roles in historical events. There is no mention in *Cromwell* of the poet Edmund Spenser's inflammatory pamphlet *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, although that tract's themes of linguistic colonization, famine and colonial violence are certainly relevant to Kennelly's project and relate to Spenser's appearances in the poem. Instead Spenser is portrayed in poems like "Dedication" and "A Position of Praise" perfecting his epic poem *The Faerie Queene* and lamenting his inability to escape from "fucking Cork" (C 49, line 14). William of Orange, memorable in Ireland for his role in the Glorious Revolution and the Battle of the Boyne and as the symbolic progenitor of the Protestant Orange Order, features in *Cromwell* as an imaginative tycoon concerned on more than one occasion with the potential of Irish industry. In "A Bit of a Swap" we find him convincing the Pope to trade Italian bulls for Irish horses in order to stimulate the Irish economy (C 78), in "Plans" he envisions a factory for the manufacture of rosary beads (C 83), and in "A Running Battle" Kennelly imagines him in contemporary Ireland "... / polishing pianos / In convents and other delicate territories, / His nose purple from sipping turpentine (C 151, lines 9-11). Although there are moments like the one in "A Bit of a Swap" when the Pope tells him "... / ... 'My child, your sales / in horses are about to soar" that hint at William of Orange's battles with Irish Catholic people, his role in *Cromwell* is more as a cartoonish vision of Protestant industriousness than as an embodiment of aggressive Protestant opposition to Irish Catholic ways of life (C 78, lines 12-13). The effect of these imaginative interventions is to reinforce the vulnerability of historical narratives to the ideological commitments of those who interpret them. Just as Kennelly uses poetic forms to emphasize themes of tyranny and social injustice in poems like "System", "Gas", and "Gusto", so too does he use the oversized, deviant, and caricatural physical forms of characters like Mum, the giant, and to underscore that historical and cultural narratives are, themselves, deformed by the ideals, goals, and prejudices of those who write them.

Kennelly's response to history is rooted in the way that he structures *Cromwell's* narrative. A poem of this length, which deals with characters and events from history, carries with it some expectation of a narrative structure that will progress logically, rhythmically, chronologically or otherwise toward some type of conclusion. Instead of providing this type of structure, the congruence between one poem and another in *Cromwell* is commonly signaled by the conspicuous recurrence of certain tones of voice, motifs, words or images (as is hinted at by Kennelly when he describes his method as "imagistic, not chronological" in the poem's introductory note) across a whole spectrum of time periods, narrative perspectives, and literary modes. This method can be



seen in the poems "An Old Murderer's Gift," which considers the violent origins of the English language's use in Ireland, and "What Use?" in which a present day worker regrets the remnants of his native language in his speech. Although "An Old Murderer's Gift" and "What Use?" depict different time periods, capture the perspectives of different speakers and generally retain their integrity as individual poems, Kennelly links them by way of a common interest in linguistic colonization as well as through the manipulation of certain stock images and words. Note how aspects of "An Old Murderer's Gift" like its confessional quality and imagery are repeated in the poem that follows it:

#### **An Old Murderer's Gift**

'Mister Buffún' lisped the old murderer  
From under his tattered ancient cape,  
Twisted fingers twisting his cloth cap,  
'I'm your friend, a thousand-year-old soldier  
With fond memories of looting and rape,  
Gutting of cities, towns and villages  
And, best of all, terror on the faces  
Of men, women, and children with no escape.  
Yes, I throttled words in many a throat  
And saw the blood boiling in their eyes  
When they stared into the face of silence.  
I've witnessed this for centuries. Not  
A pretty sight. But out of it, for you, this  
Language I bring, blood-born, for your convenience.' (C 39)

#### **What Use?**

'What use is that language to a man out of work?  
A fat bastard of a teacher rammed it down my throat  
For eight years before I could quit  
That school where I learned nothing  
But Sorrowful, Joyful and Glorious Mysteries  
And answers to questions I never understood  
And that damned language bringing tears to my eyes  
Every time I struggled to say a word.  
Can you see me facing a foreman in England  
Equipped with my native sounds, asking for a start  
To prove I can use my hands  
Like any other man from any other land?  
That language should have been choked at birth  
To stop it wasting my heart and mind.' (C 40)

Here Kennelly has portrayed personalities from opposite ends of the language problem as mirror images of one another: the first poem's speaker, "... a thousand-year-old soldier" who "... throttled words in many a throat / and saw the blood boiling in their eyes / When they stared into the face of silence"

could nearly have been observing the contemporary speaker of the second poem who remembers “/ ... that damned language bringing tears to my eyes / Every time I struggled to say a word.” This pattern of explicit cross-references and subtler tension building between poems continues in poems like “A Language,” “That Word,” and “Someone, Somewhere” that fill the surrounding pages and also deal, in various ways, with the theme of linguistic colonization. In “A Language,” for example, the speaker remembers “I had a language once. / I was at home there. / Someone murdered it / Buried it somewhere / I use different words now/ Without skill, truly as I can ...” (C, 39, lines 1-6). The speaker’s assertion that his language was “murdered” calls to mind the speaker from “An Old Murderer’s Gift.” The frank observation that he uses the new language “Without skill” expresses the sense of alienation that the speaker from “What Use?” will develop later on. In “That Word” another unnamed speaker declares “/ ... I forbid you / to use that word. / Banish it from the language / Into exile where certain words pine and die / Like members of your own family who / Couldn’t find work at home ... ” again recalling the speaker from “What Use?” (C, 40, lines 9-13).

The continuity of image and tone that we find in this cluster of poems creates an atmosphere in which the central problem of linguistic colonization starts to feel ubiquitous. It also allows problems and ironies to unfold that might not come to light in the perspective of a single speaker. The old murderer’s lisp, for example, is a feature that paints his brutal acts of linguistic colonization in a new light (he knows what it is like to stumble over words) and connects him to the speakers in the other poems who testify to their individual struggles with language. The old murderer’s vulnerability is emphasized by his passive bearing; he holds his hat and says to Buffún “... / I’m your friend.” Language figures in “An Old Murderer’s Gift,” ironically enough, as a kind of peace offering. The irony reaches its height with Kennelly’s use of the word “convenience,” which is allowed to resonate in the context of the old murderer’s own acts of violence as well as with the accounts of linguistic repression from the other poems. The speaker’s repudiation of his native language in “What Use?” both separates him from the other image of exile in this cluster of poems, those family members from “That Word” who “pine and die” in foreign countries for the lack of work at home, and places him tacitly in league with the old murderer. Kennelly has cleverly used a familiar narrative of cultural suffering, the story of Ireland’s linguistic colonization, and used it to destabilize the divisions between colonizer and colonized.

Kennelly employs this method throughout *Cromwell*, using the sequential structure of the piece to reinforce similarities between successive poems in a



way that invites the reader to make connections between voices that switch erratically among a variety of settings and cultural allegiances. Not only does Kennelly invite the questioning participation of the reader through his placement of individual poems, he requires it by refusing to resolve conflicts presented in the text or provide answers to the questions that it raises. In this way he resists the hegemonic function of traditional narrative and makes *Cromwell* itself into a living and plural response to history.

In the end, Kennelly offers several responses to history in *Cromwell*. Firstly, *Cromwell* underscores the relationship between 'correctness' in form and social values. Kennelly's treatment of various literary conventions demonstrates his understanding of how they have traditionally been used, replicated, and responded to in Irish culture. His adaptation of the larger-than-life characters and allusive style of Gaelic epic, for example, reveals his knowledge of how epic material was co-opted by modernist writers like Yeats, Æ, and Clarke and subsequently re-evaluated when the Irish nationalist movement drew the attention of revisionist historians (there is a parallel, I think, between Kennelly's attraction to the grotesque aspects of traditional Irish epic and the revisionist historian's need to reveal the unseemly side of Irish national heroes like Pádraic Pearse). Kennelly's repeated destruction and reconstruction of the sonnet form exhibits feelings of alienation in the English language tradition (of which the sonnet, especially by way of its association with Edmund Spenser, becomes a symbol) expressed by many postcolonial Irish writers. As the proliferation of blood, shite, and disease in *Cromwell* attests, Kennelly is ever aware of the contamination of language by the system of logic within which it operates. By altering traditional forms to suit the particular needs of each poem, however, he reminds us that by using language we make it new and our own. Secondly, *Cromwell* exposes the difficulty of creating an authoritative view of history by capitalizing on Cromwell's historical legacy (Richard Kearney writes of Cromwell, "A more fitting emblem for the divided interpretations of Anglo-Irish culture could hardly be found. Cromwell is a redemptive hero for one ideological community, satanic marauder for the other") in order to demonstrate how essential cultural allegiances are to the meaning that emerges from his life (Kearney 22).

It is tempting to read *Cromwell* as a lengthy expression of Irish cultural disorder. Such readings suggest the existence of a singular and unifying frame of reference (or, to borrow yet again from Hederman, an "Irish soul") that is waiting to be expressed as soon as the inauthentic one has been cleared away. The contemporary critical responses to *Cromwell* that I have cited in this chapter indicate the persistence of a Modern way of thinking that expects its

cultural and historical narratives to boil complex experience down to singular, definitive expressions of 'truth'. Kennelly's construction of *Cromwell* out of a multiplicity of relevant voices affirms that valuable insights can emerge from the points of convergence that develop when contrasting views of history are grouped together. *Cromwell's* value lies not in its exposure of cultural illegitimacies but in its attempt to re-interpret and reconstruct Ireland's historical struggle in a way that reflects, sometimes uncomfortably, the increasing audibility and legitimacy of a variety of times and places and states of consciousness in contemporary Irish culture.



### CHAPTER 3: “An O.K. Guy”: Heroism and Betrayal in *The Book of Judas*

*And [the tale] started all over again in a sad parody  
Of what cannot be understood  
Only followed as a blind man follows his expensive dog  
Through visionary streets of fluent slavish traffic  
Calmly-crazily living the rhythms of my mechanical blood  
Yearning occasionally, nevertheless, for a dialogue with God.  
(BOJ 378, lines 28-34)*

In his book *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change*, Roy Foster describes how the years leading up to the publication of Brendan Kennelly’s 1991 poetry sequence *The Book of Judas* saw many Irish people turning away from traditional cultural and social models:

‘Conversion’ might be a metaphor for the Irish experience from 1970 to 2000, if not in the strict religious sense of a mission to heretics. Those thirty years saw a transformation of cultural expectations, based not only on a new confidence in the wider world but also on the rejection of old authoritarian formations; patriarchy and the Catholic Church ... In the widest sense the transformation of attitudes to authority, which found its way into the mainstream of politics with surprising speed, suggests a reassertion of attitudes in some areas of life in the Republic that are— with a lower-case *p* at least— protestant (*Luck and the Irish* 37)

Foster cites several social changes that demonstrate this rejection of old authoritarian formations, including the rise of liberal women’s movements, a drastic drop in the number of people taking up vocations and attending church on a regular basis, and efforts by groups like the Irish Women’s Union and the Dalkey School Project to challenge the role of the Catholic Church in public services like education and medical care.

As was the case in modernizing countries around the world, improvements in communications technology were, by the 1980s, increasingly bringing Irish people into contact with the institutions, practices, narratives and symbols of distant cultures of the past and present. At the same time that the accessibility of information in a variety of forms (social and economic statistics, television commercials, foreign films, investigative journalism) was making distant cultures seem familiar, global consumer culture was increasing the demand for novel-seeming artifacts and experiences. Terence Brown writes of Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s that:

As Irish people began to sense their changing circumstances, and as the Northern crisis challenged much that they had taken for granted about the national life, it was the artist and particularly the writer who was often expected to provide some kind of guidance as to the way forward. Writers were therefore asked to reflect quite specifically on their intuitive sense of the substance of Irish identity and on how that bore on the struggle in the North. But with very few exceptions, most writers were wholly resistant to the demand that they provide anything like answers to the kinds of questions which were (as we saw) debated so strenuously. Rather, they resolutely continued to explore the private worlds of their own obsessions, regarding their work in the context of modern literature as a whole, and at most offered experimental works (the sequence of poems of John Montague and Thomas Kinsella, *The Rough Field* and *Nightwalker*, the experimental novels of Francis Stuart, *Memorial* and *A Hole in the Head*, the plays of Brian Friel, are all examples) which suggested the complex, variegated, transnational nature of Irish experience. (*Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 307-308)

As Kennelly's use of traditional figures and forms in his earlier poem sequence *Cromwell* shows, cultural symbols were being adapted to suit the private worlds of individual obsessions with ever greater frequency. Philosopher Fredric Jameson links this privatization of experience, in conjunction with the rise of global capitalism, with a widespread and troubling fragmentation of social and individual consciousness. He argues that modern culture's focus on abstract ideas and privatized discourses has created an environment that is so individualist and so heterodox that the institutions, practices, narratives and symbols that once gave people part of their sense of community identity have ceased to be actively reproduced on a large scale, resulting in the deterioration of historicity and social consciousness. This has, in turn, resulted in a loss of individual identity, since it takes the presence of a dominant culture to make the conception and expression of difference necessary.

The state of mind that Jameson describes is fruitfully demonstrated by Kennelly's treatment of history in *Cromwell*. Buffún's fixation on the relationship between the past and the present means that Oliver Cromwell's Irish Campaign of 1649-50 seems to be happening in concert with the Irish Rebellion of 1641, which seems to be happening in concert with the self-reflexive undertakings of contemporary characters in the context of his nightmare. Since Buffún's psyche has been structured to encapsulate all of the cultural, moral and individual conflicts and ambiguities inherent in contemporary Irish life, he is never allowed to materialize into a coherent character with a distinguishable voice. In the chapter on *Cromwell* I discuss how it is possible to read Kennelly's failure to resolve or synthesize the conflicting perspectives that emerge in the course of Buffún's nightmare as reinforcing a view of Irish life as locked into a kind of passive momentum. We have seen how several contemporary reviewers read the recurrence of themes like linguistic colonization, hunger, and religious conflict across *Cromwell's* fluctuating temporal settings as indicative of a cultural condition of suffering that links the horrors of 1649-50 to those of the



Northern Irish conflict. From this point of view Kennelly's efforts to destabilize enduring narratives of historical struggle function as a cultural exorcism, or as Mark Patrick Hederman puts it "a fundamental shedding of the inauthentic and vicarious being" or "The Monster in the Irish Psyche", in order to make room for a 'true' Irish soul.

Buffún's ultimate lack of resolution suggests to me that Kennelly locates cultural identity in the plurality and process of responding to the horrors of history, rather than calling for the constitution of a new, fixed, national identity. Kennelly builds on this fluid approach to representing the Irish experience in *The Book of Judas*, creating a network of disparate voices and perspectives that is even more expansive and loosening the thematic linkages that he uses to forge narrative unity in *Cromwell*. In this thesis chapter I will discuss how Kennelly's fragmented (or, to recall McDonagh's term 'blitzophrenic') characterization of *The Book of Judas's* central figure reflects the loss of identity that Jameson attributes to the experience of contemporary life. Kennelly's Judas takes the place of the traditional hero, a character who is responsible in his epic, Romantic, and modernist forms, for performing deeds and exemplifying morals that are valued by the society from which he originates. Judas's exploits across an array of time periods and settings, dramatize the failure of "old authoritarian formations" to meet the needs of an increasingly individualistic and global society. Rather than driving the action of the poem sequence that bears his name (as the Catholic Church and Fianna Fáil drove Irish culture through much of the twentieth century) Judas is undone by it.

Kennelly's Judas is a fluid figure who adopts a bewildering number of incarnations. In "Beautification" he is cast as a chat show host, in "Towards Dawn" an academic, in "Before My Time" a terrorist, in "Riot" a priest. In "An O.K. Guy" he is described as an unlikeable character with "a seedy sneaky voice" and "darting ratty eyes" who tops off an unsuccessful television appearance by picking his nose (*BOJ* 22, lines 6-7). In "Some Creature" he charms the audience at a dinner celebrating the Businessman of the Year by dropping a few well-placed jokes into his acceptance speech. In "Despite Such Moments" he is named " ... / ... the ultimate male / Chauvinist pig" and in "The Twelve Apostlettes" he questions the gender equity of the Apostle's organization (*BOJ* 85, line 8). He reads tea leaves ("Teabags"), founds a poison factory ("Need"), rubs elbows with Marilyn Monroe and Hitler ("The Wrong Finger"), is both part of and outcast from the Apostles's inner circle.

In the poems that deal most directly with Judas's time as one of the Apostles, many of which are found in the sequence's fifth section, "The Chosen

Few in the Heavenly Know," Kennelly lifts Jesus and his followers out of the biblical context where they are represented as members of an alternative, impoverished, social group and places them in a contemporary setting where they constitute an ambitious social elite ("Parody, Double Cross & Betrayal" 101). Instead of healing the sick and keeping track of the Apostles's money box we find Judas acing an interview with Jesus for the position of Apostle ("Interview"), praising *Time* magazine in his role as the Apostles's poet laureate ("Laureate") and investing in the stock exchange ("Little Jewel," "Limits," "Quicksilver"). Kennelly locates Judas and the Apostles in an Irish cultural context through references to iconic Irish people, places, and pieces of writing. The poem "As I Splashed and Swam", for example, mimics the opening scene of James's Joyce's *Ulysses* by having the Apostles go for a constitutional swim in Dublin's Forty Foot swimming hole. In "Dingle" Judas mentions that he loves to vacation in County Kerry (*BOJ* 122, line 2). After he is awarded the Nobel Prize for Treachery in the poem "The Prize" Judas buys himself "... / ... a hideous Spanish bungalow outside Skibbereen" in County Cork and in "Lough Derg" he re-enacts the Donegal pilgrimage captured by Patrick Kavanagh and Denis Devlin in their poems of the same name (*BOJ* 106, line 12). The atmosphere that pervades these poems is one that makes life among the Apostles seem tense and contentious. There is a bomb scare at the Last Supper, the Apostles suffer "... / many broken ankles, cracked shinbones, sprained backs" trying to convert the people of rainy Ireland to Christianity and the organizational politics among Jesus's disciples are intense (*BOJ* 131, line 13). In the first of two poems entitled "The Job" Judas observes "I survive in a city of boiling envy. / When Peter got the job of First Pope and Bishop of Rome/ Certain of the apostles got apoplexy / Because they felt the job was theirs and theirs alone" (*BOJ* 145, lines 1-4). If these anecdotes tell us little about Judas's personality, they do invoke an Ireland where the ethos of Christ and his followers has been absorbed into a more secular, material ideal of success.

Kennelly pokes fun at the Catholic Church's "special position"<sup>7</sup> in Ireland in the poems "Dingle," "The First Time" and "Guilty But Insane" which personify the Church in the form of a cunning woman who engages in an on-and-off flirtation with Judas and loves to hear him sing Irish songs. Although Judas and the Church have an affable relationship, he does not hesitate to call her out for her sins. In "Dingle" he smiles and tells her "... / ... 'we both

---

<sup>7</sup> The Constitution of Ireland specified the "special position" of the Catholic Church and of certain other named religious denominations until the Fifth Amendment removed the stipulation in 1973. The Catholic Church remained a powerful moral authority in Ireland through the end of the twentieth century



betrayed an innocent man" and in "Redundancy Plan" he asks her "... / 'How do you always manage / To be so authentically wrong?' (BOJ 141, line 14, 142, line 14). The Church's plucky denials of her own wrongdoing have a beguiling effect on Judas and his elite comrades. In "Guilty But Insane", for example, the Church is charged with "... / Using the sacraments and the Ten Commandments / As the major instruments of oppression" and although the trial judge acknowledges the gravity of her misdeed and finds her guilty but insane he instinctively crosses himself when she smiles at him at the end of the poem (BOJ 142, line 3-4).

Judas is a character whose life has been eclipsed by his popular myth. In the course of the poem sequence he is lauded ("Beautification"), dressed down ("A Lambasting"), dissected ("Neck"), put on trial ("On a Stand"), given the evil eye ("That Smile") and celebrated by the Judas Conservation Society ("Alive and Well"). But for all of the judgements cast at him by other of the poems's parties we get only a vague impression of Judas's role in the crucifixion. In "So Lost" he says of his fellow Apostles "I will sit here in the dark and name their names / To see if they ever lived in me, / These men I knew and travelled with, / Images in memory / So lost they lack even the power to accuse / Me of what I know I must accuse myself" (BOJ 131, lines 1-6). In "I Meet Myself" we get a sense of Judas as a man far removed from his definitive bad act but still reckoning with its outcome:

After twenty centuries of vigilant sleeplessness  
I am alive and well  
As your average unfortunate traveller who has  
Sidled through hell.  
I thought I'd put an end to me  
When I dangled like a doll  
In my agony-ecstasy.  
Ach! Not at all!

I meet myself in Houses of Parliament,  
Brothels, churches, pubs, igloos, bungalows,  
Funeral parlours where old friends lie in state.  
I am solving a teenager's bewilderment  
I am the first suggestion of an overdose  
I am a whisper in bed to an opening mate. (BOJ 275-276)

Here Judas's predicament mirrors that of Kennelly's Lazarus, who is brought back to life amidst a media frenzy in "Photograph" and re-emerges in poems like "The Original Is Lost" and "A Table for Two" lamenting the lack of direction the loss of his death has visited upon his life. One of the concerns of the Lazarus poems in particular, but certainly of *The Book of Judas* as a whole, is the potential of media images and stories to create endless simulacra of

individuals, to the degree that (as the title of one poem featuring Lazarus suggests) the original or authentic version is lost. Lazarus is endlessly photographed by the paparazzi following the miracle of his resurrection and so is endlessly consumed and reincarnated in derivative forms. The frenzied exchange and careful preservation of these productions throughout the poem sequence serves to highlight the inaccessibility of the originals. In "My Production Notebook" detailed notes taken by Judas at the crucifixion are sold to the University of Texas "for an undisclosed sum" (*BOJ* 76, line 14). In "A World Record" his self-portrait fetches thirty-three million pounds at auction, more than any other painting in history. In "The Fundamental Question" he becomes the subject of the Judas Iscariot Summer School. The value attached to these miscellanea contrast with Judas's persistent loneliness across the poem sequence.

Judas's reproduction in countless, inauthentic forms is reinforced through plural accounts of his death. Section nine of the poem sequence, "I know I've arrived, can you tell me why I'm here," provides no fewer than fifteen different versions of his demise. In "Sounds" the razor-sharp shriek of his mother's cry, the crack of the stick the first time he was ever beaten and a host of other sounds ring out in Judas's ears as he hangs from the noose in Potter's Field. In "Creatively Buried" men in balaclavas shoot automatic weapons over his body. In "The Stony End" his heart cracks at the moment when an unnamed character says 'I love you.' Several of the poems in section nine show Judas as an observer of his own death. In "As You Might Expect" he watches his mother crying beneath his hanging body. In "I Shall Not Forget" he takes the clothes off his corpse and washes them in a nearby stream. In "An Adjusting Experience" he watches from "the clergy-politicians's box in the Hogan Stand" in Dublin's Croke Park as a beautiful woman knifes his body to pieces (*BOJ* 259, line 19). Anthony Roche writes of Judas that "by witnessing the moment of his death, he can record the fright in his own heart and directly face the crowd's appetite for blood" and that this experience invests him with a "harrowing self-awareness" ("Parody, Double Cross & Betrayal" 107). I would argue, however, that what the poems in section nine record is not Judas receiving justice for his betrayal of Jesus but the death of his subjectivity as the world penetrates and takes possession of his being. Kennelly's characterization of Judas throughout the poem sequence collapses conventional conceptions of the self as located inside the body, separate from an external Other. Judas's dispersal in a variety of derivative forms makes it possible for him to reflect on his own 'end' and displaces the singular mode of existence that would make a definitive death possible. In this context, where anything and everything is encapsulated within



the realm of Judas's consciousness at the same time, the dead and the living coexist and there is no past or future. Since Judas lacks a self, the emotions of fear, confusion and violation that emerge from the repeated accounts of his death become a statement on the anomie of the contemporary life: a kind of free-floating primal scream against the impossibility of grasping or expressing the human spirit in its entirety.

Judas's 'blitzophrenic' characterization is supported by the structure of the poem sequence-at-large. *The Book of Judas* is divided into twelve sections, each of which is ostensibly devoted to a particular theme. In his essay "*The Book of Judas: Parody, Double Cross, and Betrayal*" Roche offers a helpful description of how these twelve sections are organized, but even his sensitive and loose categorizations are tested by the poem sequence's disruptive and wildly imitative energies. Roche identifies section three, for example, as involved with examining "how in the space of two thousand years Jesus has become the god of insult ..." and although the transformation of Jesus's name into a verbal tick is certainly one of the concerns addressed in this section, it is also developed elsewhere in the poem sequence ("Parody, Double Cross & Betrayal", 97). In section two, the character ozzie raises the issue in "Skool", pondering "everywun sez jesus dis an jesus dat / pay de jesus rent by us a jesus pint / till I get de jesus dole / but who de jesus hell was he" (C 42, lines 9-12). In section eight, in "Us" and "Jesus I mean", Jesus's name becomes an exclamation of sexual excitement ('While he was riding me he kept gasping / Jesus Jesus as if he were praying ...') and then embarrassed exasperation ('Ah well Jesus I mean when the Assistant Principal / Starting having an affair with the Principal's wife / It was all right you know fair enough for a while / But Jesus I mean ...') (BOJ 213 lines 1-2; 215 lines 1-4). In section six's "Name" the speaker ruminates on the various casual and malignant uses of 'Jesus' (BOJ 162, line 1). There are also several poems in the sequence's third section that have nothing to do with contemporary uses and abuses of Jesus's name whatsoever.

The repetition of similar scenarios with very little variations of character, setting or perspective is a characteristic feature of the poem sequence's structure and a contributing factor to the breakdown of its constitutive sections. "A Pleasant Evening" (section three), for example, details the menu of a dinner shared by Jesus and Judas at "The Merry Bó" restaurant, and "The Dinner" (section ten) notes that James Joyce and the Holy Family ate "Virginsoup" together in Nazareth. "Table for Two in a Hurry" (section ten) tells the story of two newly escaped prisoners who dine on turkey and ham at the "New Paladin" restaurant, and "Heaven" (section ten) outlines what Barabbas and Lazarus had to eat during a particularly liquid three-course "Table for Two." "A

Stirring Account" (section eleven) details the menu at a dinner shared by Jesus and Christy Hannitty. Whatever differences in theme these poems develop, the repetition of the central scenario in the absence of anything striking enough to differentiate between the various dinners and dinner venues serves to confuse in a sequence as long as *The Book of Judas*<sup>8</sup>. There are also several poems in the sequence that share titles ("Deep," "Experiment," "Holiday," "I Was There," "Miracles") and many more that have very similar titles ("Golden Age" and "Golden's Cross," "Lips," "Lip Service" and "Lipstick Letters").

If the division of *The Book of Judas* into sections helps to give it some shape and suggest the progression of a narrative, it more conspicuously highlights how repeated scenarios fail to develop as the sequence progresses. As with earlier poem sequences including *Shelley in Dublin* and *Cromwell*, Kennelly eschews more traditional means of linking the *The Book of Judas*'s poems together, so that they do not proceed chronologically, maintain a consistent narrative perspective, develop or deconstruct an argument. In my chapter on *Cromwell* I discuss how Kennelly ties apparently dissimilar poems together in that work by carrying certain subtle emotional charges, motifs, words or images through poems with varied settings, narrative perspectives and literary modes in a way that is central to that work's exploration of the relationship between language, history and the present. In *The Book of Judas* these kinds of linkages are much less striking, and so it can seem almost as though individual poems, and the twelve sections into which they are divided, have been constructed to evade description in conventional critical terms. Peter Sirr contextualizes this approach valuably when he writes of *The Book of Judas* that "each individual poem works on the reader as a kind of betrayal— of formal expectations, of narrative interest, of felicity of phrase, of there being any reason for the ending of one line and the beginning of another" (A9).

An eminent example of this narrative betrayal can be found in the poem "Being Someone" in which the subject transforms over the course of 115 lines from an overcoat to an old man to a circus clown to a fat woman to a blind man to a statue to a personification of nothing to "Hitler's visionary sidekick" to a novice player of the Jew's Harp (*BOJ* 256, line 87). For the most part, the focus of "Being Someone" is on the inner world of this constantly shifting subject and the metaphors that Kennelly uses to convey the overcoat/circus

---

<sup>8</sup> Kennelly carries the theme of excessive consumption over from his earlier poem sequence *Cromwell*, where the disproportionate hunger of many characters including the giant and The Belly is indicative both of the spirit that fueled Oliver Cromwell's conquest of Ireland and contemporary Irish society's hunger for a stable identity. The latter theme, in particular, is relevant to the issues of cultural disintegration developed by Kennelly in *The Book of Judas*.



clown/fat woman's or the blind man/statue/harp player's thoughts as he/she/it registers his/her/its social and physical experience of the world are vivid and bewildering. The circus clown observes, for example:

Long ago I gave up daring to think.  
Now awaiting the ringmaster's wink,  
I tumble through every laughable bone  
Of my being into the swallowing eyes,  
I'm Jackass, greased lightening, rainbow joke,  
Bonfire baggy pants chuckling up in smoke,  
Let me never again be conscious-awake  
Cowed by what is and is not a mockable mistake,  
But I am, and I look, and I lie  
To the children escaping the massacre  
For the moment, lost in the funny thunder.  
There's nothing as funny as a man  
Who's not quite human (BOJ 254, lines 21-33)

The imagery that Kennelly employs here and throughout "Being Someone" suggests many things without actually describing anything directly. In lines 23 and 24, for example, the circus clown could be describing the physical effects of pre-performance nerves ("I tumble through every laughable bone / Of my being into the swallowing eyes") or his feelings of self-hatred ("every *laughable* bone") or self-pride (it is good to be "laughable" when you are a clown), or brooding on what will happen when he steps into the ring once he receives "the ringmaster's wink." Although many of the symbols used here belong to the archetypal imagery of a circus (the ringmaster, the rainbow color scheme, the baggy pants costume, the puff of smoke) they are employed in unconventional ways and few hints are offered as to what feelings, events or objects, if any, they refer. If conflicts or themes are suggested throughout the poem they are never followed up directly. The poem begins:

I said to myself, Supposing my life  
Were a comfortable overcoat  
Capable of resisting the worst winter cold,  
Would I have the heart to give it  
To an old man shivering at  
The edge of the village or in the dead  
Centre of a Christmassy city street,  
Shoppers lusting for goodies like Romans for blood? (BOJ 254, lines 1-8)

From the very first question that the speaker poses every detail that is presented in "Being Someone" requires a certain degree of imaginative construction. In what way does an overcoat equate to a life? What conditions would possibly make the speaker give his life in the same spirit that he would give an overcoat? At line 15 the narrative of overcoat/stranger/Christmas

shopping/charity/bloodthirst is promptly abandoned as the subject transforms into the circus clown. Many of the questions that are raised implicitly in the opening lines (the value of charity, the heartlessness of consumerism) are revisited indirectly later in the poem. For instance, in lines 51-54 a good samaritan helps a blind man cross the street and lines 63-77 deal with a statue that is positioned outside of a bank. Yet no clues are ever given to suggest how one moment of emotional intensity relates to another.

The evasive effects of metaphor and narrative in "Being Someone's" are complemented by the poem's rhyme scheme, which shifts among and breaks a number of different patterns. The first fifteen lines have no apparent rhyme scheme apart from two whole rhymes that stand out against the prosaic diction of the section in general, albeit at uneven intervals (lines 11 and 14, 10 and 15). The circus clown section starts from line 15 with an *abab* rhyme scheme before switching to couplets, which are interrupted occasionally (at lines 23, 24 and 29) with unrhymed lines before switching back to an alternating *cdcd* rhyme scheme following line 35. The next six lines then adopt a whole new, *abcacb*, rhyme scheme. In the sections of the poem where whole rhymes occur almost randomly the effect is to suggest that the narrative is about to undergo a shift from the atmosphere of chaos to one of greater structure and cogency; suggestions that are never quite realized. In moments like the circus clown section, which are conspicuously dominated by whole rhymes, the effect of the rhyme scheme is to force a feeling of order onto the scattered narrative, but even these sections are often interrupted inexplicably. Sometimes these shifts in the pattern of rhyme mark a change in the direction of the narrative (couplets overtake the poem just as its subject switches from old man to circus clown) but just as often they do not. The effect of these shifts and interruptions of rhyme scheme is that the pace of the poem is never quite allowed to build steam or settle into a consistent rhythm. Kennelly's use of whole rhyme is too striking for the poem to fall into a natural rhythm and too inconsistent to lead the reader anywhere.

The paradox of Judas's characterization is that by encapsulating everything he amounts to nothing. The responses of several contemporary reviewers suggest how challenging can be the experience of reading *The Book of Judas* in the absence of a well-defined hero or cohesive narrative thread to tie the poem's disparate voices together. In his article "The Book of Judas: History is What Hurts" John Goodby argues:

Kennelly's earlier scapegoat, Cromwell, was both a mythologized hate figure *and* the historical Lord Protector; the tension between the two was what *Cromwell* exploited and the more imaginative flights were underwritten by enough material fact to allow the irony to



work. The figure of Judas is ahistorical, curiously medieval: as the pretext for 364 pages he seems too slight. The line 'I'm up to my bollox in sonnets', Spenser said' occurs in *Cromwell* and (some) readers of *Judas* might feel like echoing Spenser's complaint. In addition there is the difficulty of detaching the poems from what they attach— what Kennelly calls the Irish tendency to 'label' and relentlessly trivialize, the general begrudger of 'this Christian culture [which] is a parody of what once might have been a passion'. Despite the reformist intentions, *Judas* soon reads as a symptom of this state of affairs rather than a critique of it, and the reason for it is that while the poetry is willing, the language is weak. The subtleties necessary for survival in the world described by Kennelly cannot survive in the welter of crude abstractions and slapstick action. Language used without respect for its qualities as language, as George Orwell pointed out, indicates a lack of real thought behind it. (182)

Rory Brennan similarly links the multiplicity of *The Book of Judas's* central character with what he sees as the weakness of its language:

Kennelly's method is to allow a variety of voices to impersonate the central figure. This, as likely as not, turns out to be the politician, priest or sportsman who proceeds to put forward a proposition that from his point of view is the essence of sweet reason. His complacency/hypocrisy/greed is unwittingly revealed; poet and reader have entered into an uneasy collaboration. Perhaps the persona is really one— or both— of them?

There is no doubt that Kennelly frequently manages to do this superbly, that he is a master at exposing the irony inherent in so many of the assumptions of common speech. But it is a method that has led to dementia, to an unbalanced pile of literary-historical reference mingled with the agonies from Amnesty's casebook. The enterprise wanders so far from its purgative intentions that the bare facts of human grief and the lucidities of artistic undertakings are both devalued. Too much talk stinks up the room, said Duke Ellington; too much verbosity stinks up the poetry. Bad art repeats itself. There is only one *Aeneid*, one *Divine Comedy*, one *Ulysses*; there are plenty of *Omen Twos*, *The Godfather Threes*, and shelfloads of the same thriller or novelette. Kennelly and his readers are worthy of far more than a bloated *Cromwell Two*, which this most assuredly is despite minor alterations in tone. (109)

In *Cromwell* Kennelly avoids the atmosphere of pastiche that Goodby and Brennan attribute to *The Book of Judas* by presenting Buffún's plural consciousness as a response to the tightly controlled fanaticism of the title character. Kennelly's adaptations of poetic forms like the sonnet and the heroic couplet in *Cromwell* rely on conventional understandings of how their particular structures influence meaning and function in society in order to mount a response that is subversive. In *The Book of Judas* Kennelly does away with all such constitutive frames of reference so that the meta-textual codes that would conventionally suggest how we are supposed to read Judas (as well as the ambiguous language that we find in poems like "Being Someone") become unverifiable.

Judas's prohibitive plurality serves an important function in Kennelly's characterization of Jesus. Like *Cromwell* and Buffún or Mr. Knott and Watt in Samuel Beckett's novel *Watt*, Judas and Jesus are defined in relation to one another in *The Book of Judas*. Gerold Sedlmayr notices how Kennelly elaborates on the image of Judas and Jesus face-to-face in the moment of the Judas kiss in poems like "Lips", "The Prize" and "Kisses" (229). This oppositional posture serves as a kind of red herring context for the poem sequence, with Kennelly

exploiting the reader's expectation that there will be tension between the two characters in order to collapse it. The poem "If I, If You" is indicative of how Kennelly's failure to name the participants in many of the poems in which they appear together makes it unclear whether the speaker is Judas or Jesus, or both:

If I had not betrayed you  
How would you have accomplished that miracle  
In unspeakable cities  
Where children develop a killing style

Early? Would men have been so brave  
Or women so given up to your memory?  
Who would have dreamed it possible to save  
Vanishing humanity from the hard-earned grave?

And if you had not betrayed me  
How could I ever have begun to know  
The sad heart of man? How could I,  
Watching seas of greed lick the shores of the  
World and vanity all the human show,  
Have found the courage to die?

If we swapped questions, o my brother,  
Would we know why we betrayed each other? (BOJ 156)

The reference to betrayal in the first line of this poem makes it seem as if it is Judas who is speaking. As the poem continues, however, allusions to miracles, knowing "the sad heart of man" and other activities more readily attributed to Jesus than Judas work against that assumption. Judas's plural characterization, and participation in miracles and acts of treachery alike in the course of the poem sequence, make it possible that he is talking to himself here. Like Beckett's Mr. Knott, Judas appears in so many guises that his counterpart materializes in the poem sequence as an un-locatable locus (Watt = 'What?'). As Beckett does in *Watt*, Kennelly uses paradox in *The Book of Judas*, in this case by defining something in terms of something else that eludes easy perception, in order to point to a god who exceeds human perception; who cannot be articulated in the terms of our languages.

Like Beckett's Knott or Godot, Kennelly's Jesus inhabits the poem as an *absence présente*: a figure whose loss is widely felt in Irish culture. I have already discussed some of the ways that Judas embodies a variety of cultural responses to this loss through his persistent loneliness and inability to access an original, authentic self. This remoteness of an authentic Christianity also manifests itself in many characters whose marginalization at the hands of a society that espouses Christian values provokes the reader's sadness and



confusion. For Beckett, the responses of characters like Watt, Vladimir and Estragon to their *absences présente* signal the failure of modern culture's sense of individuality. There are undoubtedly grounds for reading *The Book of Judas* in the same vein, as testament to the failure of contemporary culture. In the preface Kennelly writes that his interest in Judas was motivated by a desire to capture what he calls "Judasanity," the belief-system that has displaced Christianity in contemporary culture:

In this poem I wanted to capture the relentless, pitiless, anecdotalism of Irish life, the air swarming with nutty little sexual parables, the platitudinous bonhomie sustained by venomous undercurrents, the casual ferocious gossip, the local industry of rumour-making and spreading, always remembering that life is being parodied, that Christian culture is itself a parody of what may once have been a passion ... The Judas-voice is odd and ordinary, freakish and free, severed and pertinent, twisting what it glimpses of reality into parodies of what is taken for granted, convinced (if it's convinced of anything) that we live in an age almost helplessly devoted to ugliness, that the poisoned world we have created is simply *what we are*, and cannot be justified or explained away by science or industry or money or education or progress. To this extent, Judas knows nothing is external: where we are is who we are, and what we create is merely the symmetry of our dreams. It is therefore insane to blame anybody but ourselves. (*BOJ* 10, author's italics).

Kennelly's attention to contemporary anecdote results in a poem sequence that bears witness to the inequities and hypocrisies of Irish society. Roche notes how the poem "A Pit of Dead Men," in which the speaker scoffs at his young female students's attempts to write poetry about their experiences of sexual abuse, "eerily and accurately predicts what occurred when the singer Sinead O'Connor published a long poem (at her own expense) in the Irish newspapers in late 1993, recounting her experience of abuse and seeking to retrieve the lost child within her" ("Parody, Double Cross & Betrayal" 96). Other poems in *The Book of Judas* have proven similarly prophetic. In "A Mystical Idea" skilled castrater Christy Hannitty offers to cut the balls off of all of the Bishops of Ireland " / ... because debollicked Bishops are less / Prone to the terrible temptations of love / Than those who are well hung" but is rebuffed (*BOJ* 329, lines 3-5). Just one year after the publication of *The Book of Judas* Eamonn Casey, the Bishop of Galway, heralded the coming to light of many more clerical sexual misdeeds when it was revealed that he had fathered a son with an unwed American woman who had been staying at his home following a difficult divorce (Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 367). In "Trial by Television" an investigative journalist exposes Pontius Pilate's excessive hand-washing, adversely affecting his credibility with the people. In 1994 Ulster Television (UTV) program *Counterpoint* brought details of Father Brendan Smyth's sexual abuse of minors to light, which would ultimately lead to the traumatic undermining of the Catholic Church's reputation in Ireland (Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 368).

To read *The Book of Judas* as a poem that deconstructs Irish society without offering any way forward is to mistake the didactic impulse that lies beneath all of Kennelly's work. If *The Book of Judas* lacks a well-defined central character, its constitutive poems are filled with minor characters who display the grit and eccentricity of Kennelly's early heroes. In *Betraying the Age* Åke Persson argues that Kennelly redefines the heroic ideal in his early poetry in a way that constitutes an act of social protest, drawing parallels between the heroes of Irish epic and the social outcasts that pervade Kennelly's poetry:

[Like the heroes of Irish epic] Kennelly's heroes and heroines also exist on the periphery of society, but they are not leaders, warriors or kings, as are the traditional epic heroes, nor do they take part in battles and contests to prove their strengths. Instead of finding them on the battle-fields, we find them in the back streets, in back gardens, or in hospitals. Yet, the poet insists, their dignity and their glory are the same as those of the epic heroes and heroines. (61)

Persson separates Kennelly's socially marginalized heroes and heroines into three groups: those who show their endurance through a "quiet resistance" to rigid social norms, those who are (controversially, Persson notes) characterized as "mad" and writers and poets who resist hegemony through their work (ibid., 57). As part of his analysis Persson discusses the central figures from several of Kennelly's early poems including "The Blind Man" (*Collection One: Getting Up Early*), "Johnny Gobless" (*My Dark Fathers*), and "The Fool's Rod" (*My Dark Fathers*) to demonstrate how their exclusion from society seems to invest them with a heightened perspective. Reading Persson's analysis, it seems to me that although characters like Mad Peggie, the blind man, and Kennelly's Patrick Kavanagh are found within rather than outside of the boundaries of normative social space they *do* seem to take part in battles of a sort, which overwhelmingly show how they possess the wit, will, and bravery of their counterparts in ancient epic stories. Persson describes, for example, the poem "A Man I Knew" (*Dream of a Black Fox*) in which the poet Patrick Kavanagh is depicted having it out with an "interfering lout" who has behaved rudely toward a young girl that he has asked to sing. The struggle that ensues (Kavanagh spits in the face of the lout and wishes him "to the floor of hell") is nothing if not a defense of the poet's invitation to song over the lout's desire for silence (ibid. 69). Ultimately, Persson argues that what he calls Kennelly's redefinition of the heroic ideal presents the reader with an "alternate mythology" that celebrates the essential dignity and nobility of socially marginalized characters and demands that the reader take notice of them (ibid. 64).

If this assessment sheds some light on the heroes and heroines of Kennelly's early work it could use some development. In his extensive survey of



epic heroism Dean Miller explains of the traditional epic hero's alienation from conventional social forms and spaces: "Precisely because the hero is easily detached from the social matrix, he is often as dangerous to the social fabric as he is useful in defending it. Indeed, in the end, he is more useful outside of society and displaying his excellences elsewhere— that is, on a quest" (163-164). Where Persson's reading correctly locates Kennelly's early heroes and heroines on the margins of society it overlooks the fact that few of them are wholly sympathetic in the way that Romantic heroes tend to be. Mad Peggie of "The Fool's Rod" is a flasher, Johnny Gobless's street-shouted blessings are born of an overwhelming fear of the world and we have seen how Patrick Kavanagh's heroism is expressed through antisocial behavior. Where a more Romantic writer would likely emphasize the beautiful, honorable, and enlightened qualities of his heroes (as Persson has done to a certain degree in his analysis of Kennelly's early protagonists) Kennelly explores what is abject, challenging and undeveloped about them. *Shelley in Dublin* (1974/1982), for example, deals with the failure of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Address to the Irish People" which sought to advance truth and intellectual freedom in Ireland and inspire an oppressed Irish Catholic people to organize against their government. Shelley's reaction to the apathy that his tract is met with and his horror at the poverty he finds in Dublin reveal how little awareness he had, upon writing the address, of the complicated conditions that his audience were facing. What saves Kennelly's Shelley from reading as a dilettante is the profound process of self-questioning that his experiences in Dublin inspire. In the collection's title sequence he wonders:

Who am I  
 To have pity for these damned  
 Who lurch and sway  
 In the light and dark of nightmare?  
 Who am I  
 To have come to this city  
 Of the beaten dead  
 Where it is a crime  
 To lay hungry hands on a loaf of bread?  
 Who am I  
 To have committed myself  
 And every dream of human betterment  
 To the discovery of such waste? (*SID* 18, VI. lines 51-63)

Shelley's ultimate decision to leave Dublin is not a total failure since it involves a choice not to succumb to the repugnance that he feels for the conditions that he finds in Ireland and because it demonstrates his commitment to the idealism that informs his best work. In *Shelley in Dublin*, however, it is

not the triumph of Shelley's idealism that is highlighted but his struggle to reconcile feelings of alienation and disgust that he experiences when faced with the realities of social injustice.

Persson's use of the term "social outcast" to describe the motley crew of outsiders featured in Kennelly's early poetry suggests that his heroes are the passive recipients of their communities's disdain, but just as often Kennelly's characters exist on the periphery of society because they reject social norms. In the preface to *The Book of Judas* Kennelly writes:

I wonder if many people feel as I do— that in the society we have created it is very difficult to give your full, sustained attention to anything or anybody for long, that we are compelled to half-do a lot of things, to half-live our lives, half-dream our dreams, half-love our loves? We have made ourselves into half-people. Half-heartedness is a slow, banal killer. It is also, paradoxically, a creepy pathway towards 'success', especially if the half-heartedness is of the polished variety. I think it was D.H. Lawrence who said that the real tragedy of modern man is the loss of heart. I don't think so. I believe our tragedy is the viability of our half-heartedness, our insured, mortgaged, welfare voyage of non-discovery, the committed, corrosive involvement with forces, created by ourselves, that ensure our lives will be half-lived. (*BOJ* 11).

Almost without exception, Kennelly's outcast heroes reject the half-heartedness that he pinpoints here, and often their excess of feeling and failure to conform figure prominently in their narrative development.

In the conclusion of *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic* Kennelly emphasizes the relevance of ancient Irish heroes like Cuchulain and Deirdre to the experiences of modern Irish life. Kennelly's thesis outlines several characteristics that modern poets reconstituted in their construction of a modern Irish ideal:

There is a distinct kinship between the pagan hero and the Christian saint. Both desire a brief life of significant achievement; both love the concentrated vigor of youth, and, scorning the inevitable feebleness of old age, choose an early death rather than experience what they consider the shame of senility. Both are inspired by a single consuming aim, immortal glory. In the decisions of both, a stern individual will plays a major part; with [the Pagan] Cuchulain, the will works towards the violent exaltation of the self; with [the Christian] Columcille, towards the constant rigours of self-mortification ... Finally, both struggle endlessly against the oppressive limitations of their nature, thus affirming man's essential nobility (*MIPIE* 40).

It is this final aspect, the hero's vulnerability, that Kennelly identifies as the key to his role as a mediator of cultural meaning. The possibility that the hero could fail grounds his struggle in reality and allows his triumph to speak to the greatness of humanity rather than the accepted and unattainable superiority of the gods. Kennelly compares the essential humanity of the Pagan epic hero Cuchulain (whose great battles are sometimes accompanied by inner conflicts) with the conspicuously flawless nature of the gods of the Old Irish mythological cycle (who tend to solve their problems with magic) and argues that is it



because of Cuchulain's humanity that he is the more enduring figure (ibid. 19-20). In the case of Kennelly's outcast heroes, the poetry often gives precedence to the characters's battles with themselves over their material and social circumstances. In his early poetry as well as in longer works like *The Book of Judas* Kennelly seems particularly interested in the aspects of heroism that are messy, exceptional, abhorrent, forgotten and transient, since it is these things that he sees as the axis around which the heroic journey revolves.

In his description of the twelve sections of *The Book of Judas*, Roche notes how the entire second section of the poem sequence, entitled "Are the poems honest, doctor?" is devoted to imagining the voices of the dispossessed and socially marginalized (95). In this section in particular, although certainly throughout *The Book of Judas*, the socially marginalized heroes of Kennelly's early poetry emerge in new incarnations and we can see how Kennelly uses them to demonstrate the quality of heroism that confounds social norms. The character ozzie is captured in the poem "madmanalive" in a fit of rage that mirrors those of Cuchulain: "sumtimes ozzie get this fierce urge / ta go fast tru dublin really fast man/ so he cum over ta my place in a surge / of anger or sumtin and he say kummon ... / god help anyone get in our way tonite" (*BOJ* 39, lines 1-4, 14). Ozzie's location on the margins of society is marked by his rude way of speaking, his preference for cheap drink ("... / fifteen pints o' cider a man I never lied / about drink in me life ...), and the fact that "... / he just draws de jesus dole / in tree diffrent playces" (*BOJ* 40 lines 11-12; 42, lines 2-3). In many ways ozzie fits the epic heroic archetype: he is young and driven to carry out his will with spectacular acts of force, he seeks immortal glory ("ozzie herd sumwun in a pub / sayin ireland shud be yewnighted / de man who did dat wud be faymuss / ozzie was delighted / so he joined de i.r.a."), and he fails to recognize the essential niceties, rituals, and rules of society (*BOJ* 41, lines 1-5). Ozzie's dereliction reaches unpalatable heights when he steals an old woman's purse in "sumtimes ozzie," assaults police officers in "no trubbal" and "ozzie smiled," and cheats the social welfare system in "work," but it also manifests itself in more than one moment of subversive insight. In the poem "words," for example, ozzie considers language and counters the notion that "... / words are to kumminyinate" and concludes "... / like shit sez ozzie won good bomm / blow de whole fukken world ta hell" (*BOJ* 38, lines 12-14). Ozzie's flippant attitude toward language is very much in keeping with Kennelly's approach to language and literary form in his more recent long poems. In "words" Kennelly disrupts the sonnet's traditional meter and rhyme scheme in order to convey the volatile quality of ozzie's speech (the traditional iambic pentameter is replaced with largely spondaic lines of irregular length) and maintain the loose,





whole-heartedness. The Coolun's little triumph in this poem makes it all the more tragic when she dies alone in a field in childbirth two poems later ("The Coolun"). Like the traditional epic hero, however, the Coolun has an immortal quality and reappears following the account of her death. It is in these subsequent poems that the limitations of her nature are developed in more detail. In "She Muttered," and "She Knows the Smell" it emerges that the Coolun is plagued by aggressive sexual propositions and that she does little to resist these. Where Kennelly arranges ozzie's idiom into a series of pseudo-sonnets in ways that highlight its musicality and challenges traditional notions of what constitutes poetic language, he strips the Coolun of her voice almost entirely. Her only utterance comes in the poem "She Muttered" in a scene where she is taking a boat to England to procure an abortion: "... / She had sad eyes but crying had no meaning, / She muttered something about a random fuck / and the right to choose."

In her memoir *Meatless Days* Pakistani author Sara Suleri recalls an incident where, following the arrest of her journalist father for sedition, her mother printed and distributed blank copies of the newspaper that he edited. Suleri recalls how the blank newspapers served as a potent symbol of her father's silencing at the hands of the Karachi authorities (118). The Coolun's silence throughout the eighth section of *The Book of Judas* is similarly conspicuous in light of her general portrayal, and constitutes a powerful contrast to the petty gibbering of the speakers who tell her story. Throughout her brief appearance in *The Book of Judas* there is a certain ambiguity surrounding the Coolun's ability to choose her choices, as it were. On the one hand she is a bright and active figure, she participates in the life of the streets in which she lives, she engages with "a thousand drunken Irishmen" rather than guarding her chastity and personal safety, she has her baby on her own at her ultimate peril (*BOJ* 205, line 3). It is unclear, however, whether the Coolun's choices come from a lack of alternatives or from an intrinsic quality of defiance that leads her to disregard the values of her community.

The last of the heroic character types identified by Persson with regard to Kennelly's early poetry is also well represented in *The Book of Judas*. Persson observes of Kennelly's early poetry: "A sense of fierce resistance is the dominant element in most of Kennelly's poems focusing on writers, whose aim, it would seem, is social change through a far reaching re-shaping of ideas and values in the cultural and political spheres" (*Betraying the Age* 66). In *The Book of Judas* Kennelly's representation of writers has become less about celebrating the social change that his literary heroes have effected and more about their objectification as cultural artifacts alongside their work. And so a drunk and

disorderly Brendan Behan appears as a guest at the Last Supper: “ ... / The man was pissed out of his borstal mind, / His trousers at half-mast, blood bubbling his face. / ‘Where’s the fuckin’ drink?’ he shouted at Jesus” (*BOJ* 136, lines 5-7). The poem “Stains” imagines James Joyce’s fascination with Nora Barnacle’s dirty underwear and “Baptism” tells of Patrick Kavanagh being thrown into the Grand Canal by three Dublin businessmen. All three of these characterizations play off of the popular mythologies surrounding their subjects (Behan the drunk, Joyce the sex-maniac, Kavanagh the grouch) and reduce some of the more memorable themes and symbols from their work to simple, titillating character attributes. Although it is possible to read these portrayals as celebrations of the writers in question and their resistance to social norms, it is much more interesting (and in keeping with the tone of the poem sequence as a whole) to consider the way that Kennelly’s representations of Behan, Joyce and Kavanagh imagine them as inflated, necessarily eccentric literary personas instead of plumbing the challenging and innovative depths of their work.

In *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic* Kennelly identifies the impulse to “struggle endlessly against the oppressive limitations of their nature” as the definitive characteristic of heroism in Irish epic. I have already suggested some of the ways that some of *The Book of Judas’s* peripheral characters embody this spirit in a contemporary context where their limitations are often an effect of inadequate or unjust social structures. Characters like Ozzie and the Coolun commune passionately with a world that overlooks and rejects them. Heaven and Hell, personified in section ten as a married couple, struggle against the institution of marriage to keep their love alive. In the poems “The Dinner” and “Parodies” Kennelly allows his writers to respond to their popular mythos, and by parodying the language and imagery used by them in a way that reminds us of their unique messages. Although these peripheral characters do not entirely fill the gap left by *The Book of Judas’s* lack of a distinct and unifying central character, they do coalesce to form a complicated but distinctive character type that Kennelly carries forward from his early collections. Kennelly’s reiteration of this character type, with slight variations, in a number of different characters in *The Book of Judas* allows a narrative of resistance to a social order that stresses an evasive “insured, mortgaged, welfare voyage of non-discovery” to emerge in contrast to Judas’s lack of integrity.

Kennelly also asks the reader to adopt a heroic posture through his use of form and characterization of the poem sequence’s central characters. The ambiguity of metaphor, lack of narrative consistency, and irregular organization of rhyme and meter that we find in poems like “Being Someone” requires the reader to interpret and partially construct the text in his or her own terms. Such



a form can seem to amount to nothing, but it can also have the novel effect of communicating differently to different readers: in the absence of a clear narrative or any other meta-textual codes that suggest how we *should* read the mixed metaphors presented in the course of the poem sequence, we are free to attach our own meanings.

Kennelly provides plenty of clues that this is how he hopes *The Book of Judas* will be read; in section titles like "You" and "Do It" which incite the reader to action, and in statements like "The best way to serve the age is to betray it" (*BOJ* 17, line 1). In the sequence's final poem "The True Thing" the speaker meditates at length on the imbrication of art, religion and social structures with violence and tragedy. In spite of this, we find him in the final stanza of the poem "Yearning occasionally, nevertheless, for a dialogue with God" (*BOJ* 378, line 33). The forces that have shaped the speaker's understanding of God, and that complicate his search for a communicative connection with God, have been highlighted in the preceding stanzas, cannot be forgotten, and yet do not necessarily detract from the beauty his (doomed?) attempt to understand the world around him. It is this perpetual search for meaning that Kennelly posits as the ideal of the human experience, and it is by struggling against the unknowable and undoable that we align ourselves with the heroes of the past.

## CHAPTER 4: Imagined Women

*Does the man define the woman he is trying to imagine into being?  
Or does the imagined woman define the limitations of the imagining man?  
(Ireland's Women xxii)*

When Mary Robinson was elected as the Republic's first female president 1990, her inaugural emphasized her symbolic role as leader of an increasingly plural and inclusive Ireland:

Symbols give us our identity, our self image, our way of explaining ourselves to ourselves and to others. Symbols in turn determine the kinds of stories we tell and the stories we tell determine the kind of history we make and remake. I want Áras an Uachtaráin to be a place where people can tell diverse stories — in the knowledge that there is someone there to listen.

She was in the midst of a feminist revolution in Ireland. The country, which had once recognized a woman's place as within the home and which had legislated it as such on a constitutional level<sup>9</sup>, was beginning to view women in a new light. The 1980s and early 1990s saw significant changes in Irish women's rights to avail of social welfare schemes, gain access to contraception and challenge inequality in schools and universities. Referenda on abortion and divorce were held in 1983 and 1986 respectively, and were revisited in the 1990s, culminating in a constitutional ban on abortion (which was loosened in 1992) and the legalization of divorce in 1996 (Connelly 322-326). Robinson's election to Ireland's most visible public office was seen by many as the pinnacle of women's longstanding efforts to re-legitimize their roles in public life. Terence Brown explains how Robinson's capable handling of the presidency changed the popular conception of what women could do:

In office she quickly came to symbolize at home and abroad the new kind of Irish woman the women's movement had helped to create since the 1970s— highly capable in professional life, liberal in social attitudes, politically adroit, even tough, but bringing to public affairs a true appreciation of how the human dimension must always be respected. She also understood how the cultural sphere is the zone in which politics is often conducted in modern and post-modern societies (*Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 361)

It was not only liberal-leaning women whose voices were at the center of the cultural debates of the 1980s and 1990s. Women from groups like Family

---

<sup>9</sup> The Irish Constitution recognizes the family as "the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society" and pledges that the state will "guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the family is founded, and protect it against attack". (Connelly 330)



Solidarity and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) led the charge to preserve the status of the traditional nuclear family in Ireland (Hill 157-158). In 1986 Fine Gael Teachta Dáila (TD) Alice Glenn distributed a pamphlet declaring that “A Woman Voting For Divorce Is Like a Turkey Voting For Christmas” which predicted that divorced women in Ireland would likely be expected to forfeit their rights to marital property and financial support from their ex-husbands (Bourke et al 274).

The advancements made by women in the 1980s and 1990s were not without their concomitant setbacks. If Robinson became Ireland’s most visible political figure in 1990, women made up only eight percent of Dáil seats in 1982 and only twelve percent in 1992 (Hill 232). Although women could obtain legal separations from their husbands from 1989, and divorces a few years later, they were not immediately guaranteed an equal share in the family home and household goods (Connelly 326). A survey of women in the Republic in 1993 showed that, in spite of the changes in their legal right to access contraception, only half of the women evaluated found family planning advice easily accessible in their local communities (Connelly 193). The wage gap stood at twenty percent for workers in the Republic in 1998, and had increased to 22 percent by 2009 in spite of the improved protections secured for female workers by the Employment Equality Act (Hill 210). Whatever the hitches, the Irish women’s movement, in its various incarnations, played a central role in the “phase of profound self-questioning” that characterized the turn of the twenty-first century in Ireland (*Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, preface to the second edition).

Brendan Kennelly’s awareness of women’s issues does not begin in the 1980s. In his preface to his version of Euripides’s *The Trojan Women*, Kennelly writes of a childhood filled with the company of “hard-working ... women whose husbands had gone to England to find work, to send money back home” and whose “tremendous powers of endurance and survival” made an impression on him at a very young age (*WTIN* 138). Gabriel Fitzmaurice writes of the impact that one of Kennelly’s teachers, Jane Agnes McKenna, had on his formation as a scholar and teacher (Pine, *Dark Fathers* 32). Female characters play a prominent role in Kennelly’s early poetry, often as enigmatic heroes, unexpected ciphers, or sources of ceaseless kindness.

With the rise of the Irish women’s movement in the 1980s and 1990s Kennelly begins to turn his attention more directly to the political implications of gender in Ireland. By adopting the voices of complex female characters including the girl at the center of his 1978 song sequence *A Girl*, *Antigone*, and

Medea, Kennelly unpacks his own assumptions about what it means to be female in an Irish context. He writes in his preface to *The Trojan Women* that “A man is trapped in his own language. How could I find the words to let [the women of Troy] express the ever-deepening reality of their natures? Well, I tried” (*WTIN*). Kennelly is not always entirely successful in his attempts to capture female experience. Many of his female character never quite lose a sentimental association with plain-spokenness and heightened sensitivity to the emotional needs of those around them. In spite of this, Kennelly’s efforts to write in a female voice do attempt to delineate between femininity as viewed by men, and what women think it means to be female. In *Cromwell* and *Poetry My Arse* he uses parody to repudiate some of the ways that women have traditionally been symbolized in Irish culture.

Many of Kennelly’s early poems uphold traditional representations of women as defined by the features and requirements of their bodies. In the 1971 poem “The Swimmer,” for example, Kennelly conflates the Shannon river with the female body (“For him the Shannon opens / Like a woman”) and makes the swimmer’s movement through the water into an act of sexual union:

... How easily  
He mounts the waves, riding them  
As though they

Whispered subtle invitations to his skin,  
Conspiring with the sun  
To offer him

A white, wet rhythm. (*FS* 250, lines 1-2, 7-13)

The interaction between the swimmer and the Shannon is represented here as a kind of ritual, which announces the interdependence of man and river solidifies the former’s claim on the latter. The “Rising and falling” of his limbs brings the swimmer into contact with a sensual, almost supernatural realm where the limitations of the body are downplayed, if not temporarily suspended (“... this river dies not bleed for / Any man ... The deep beneath / Gives full support / To the marriage of wave and heart”) (*FS* 250, lines 6-7, 13-15). Immersed in this realm, the boundaries that separate the swimmer’s embodied self break down and he is allowed to absorb something of the Shannon’s presence in both the physical and the psychic sense. The imagery that Kennelly uses in the poem makes the scene into something like a cubist painting, with limbs, hills, plumes of water and the sex of the river/woman stacked on top of one another so that they blend and fuse. When the swimmer returns to shore he is described as having “... / A river in his bones / Flowing forever through his head” (*FS* 250, lines 27-30). He has also consolidated his exchange with the



Shannon into an artistic product, emerging from the water with "... / A new music in his heart" that is drawn implicitly from the non-verbal rhythms and "singing" of his conquest (*FS* 250, line 26).

The exchange between swimmer and river is reminiscent of the sovereignty goddess tradition, which (as we have seen in the chapter on *Cromwell*) centers around a female personification of the Irish landscape who changes from young and beautiful to old and ugly according to the virility of her royal paramours. In some variations on this tradition (such as Yeats's "The Song of Wandering Aengus" and Seamus Heaney's "Digging" and "Ondine") the woman/landscape figure becomes the site of an ancient, authentic cultural knowledge, which she embodies but cannot articulate without the intervention of a third party. In this formulation the subject's mastery over the woman/landscape, although often dramatized in fairly explicit sexual terms, is ultimately achieved through language. Instead of acting as the record of material pressures that have frustrated the Irish spirit, the body becomes a symbol of the physical landscape's great sensory and psychic currency.

Although we never see the swimmer's "new music" find its way into language, Kennelly's poem implies that it is out of such pre-verbal, sensuous stuff that poetry must be rendered. The swimmer is analogous with the poet insofar as his exertions "break" and give context to the river's movement, changing it from something that happens in a symbolic vacuum to an event that is stared at and witnessed. The distinction that Kennelly draws between the consciousness of the swimmer and the material, intuitive and pre-verbal presence of the Shannon is minimal. At the end of the poem the limitations of the swimmer's physical body come back into focus and he must "Return to shore" in contrast to the river, which we can assume will go on flowing in ecstasy forever. In this regard "The Swimmer" circumvents the trajectory of self-actualization through opposition (male poet as self-conscious and self-determining in contrast to the feminized landscape as mute and reliant on the poet for expression) that taints similar adaptations of the sovereignty goddess tradition. Kennelly almost seems to prefer the private, pre-verbal realm of existence shared by the swimmer and the Shannon, associating it with a freedom and purity of being that is inevitably compromised by language.

A great many of Kennelly's early poems perpetuate this traditional conception of the female body as a kind of text. In "The Brown Man's Woman" (1966) the title character's creative powers are encapsulated in her physical capacity to bear and then nurse her child. Instead of language, her milk becomes the medium through which she "... make(s) immortal legends of her

love" (*GUE* 14, line 24). In "Eyes" (1972) the central character's eyes record her personal history, suggesting the pain and exhaustion that she has experienced without her ever having to say a word: "I want to speak of Moya Dyver's eyes— / Wrecked lines on white, / Charts of pain's intricacies, / Maps of a strange country where the light / Dwindled among rivers of blood / Gone to God in a blink / There again in a tick." (*FS* 97, lines 1-7). In "Ella Cantillon" (1980) the heroine's body literally transforms in the imagination of a character called "the watcher" to fit his sense of the beauty of her name:

The watcher saw her walk the empty street  
 The crinkled yellow scarf about her head.  
 Her face had the waxen polish of the dead  
 And her walk was crooked. She dragged her feet  
 As though in pain or shame  
 Anguished parody of movement. Across  
 His mind slipped the sweet syllables of her name—  
 Ella Cantillon. Then he was  
 Standing about five yards from the stage  
 In an open field on an August day,  
 One with that summer crowd entranced  
 By the slight girl waiting, purely  
 Poised. The sunlight became homage  
 When her body married music and she danced. (*FS* 75)

Throughout this poem Ella's body is presented as an expressive medium, which "the watcher" reads as she walks down the street. In the first seven lines of the poem the disarray of her dress, the pallor of her complexion, and her labored movement suggest "pain" and "shame" to him. When the musical quality of her name occurs to "the watcher" Ella's body becomes youthful and easy in its movement. Aside from her choice of a yellow head scarf (is it meant to suggest that some of the sunlight attributed to her youthful guise is also present in her aged form? ) the poem provides us with no clues about what might be going on in Ella's mind; her personality is channelled through her body by "the watcher."

In other of his early poems Kennelly is interested in the various ways that women communicate, either consciously or unconsciously, in the absence of language. In "The Smell" (1971) a small boy perceives the story of an old woman's life in her body odor:

... I knelt by her side, my shoulder brushing her black,  
 Her lips surrendered visions of her private heaven and hell.  
 Drugged by her whispers, my head sank into her side,  
 My body and soul, in that instant, entered her smell,

Not merely the smell of her skin, but the smell



Of her prayers and pain, the smell of her long loss,  
The smell of the years that had whitened her head,  
That made her whisper to the pallid Christ on his cross,

The rent, dumb Christ, listener at the doors of the heart,  
The pummeled Christ, the sea of human pain,  
The sated Christ, the drinker of horrors,  
The prisoner Christ, dungeoned in flesh and bone.

Her smell opened her locked world,  
My closed eyes saw something of mine,  
My small world in her infinite world  
And did not drown but rose where the sun shone

On silence ... (FS 46-47, lines 13-29)

In lines 21-24 (the third stanza of this excerpt) the smell takes on an aural life in the small boy's imagination, mimicking the old woman's whispered prayers. In "The Work Was Coming Out Right" (1985) Anne Mulvihill writes the story of her life by ironing her funeral shroud:

... She pressed every inch of of the brown shroud  
As though her life depended on it,  
Not once did she lift her eyes  
But pressed the cloth with her mind  
As if she would get her death in order  
Or consecrate her ignorance  
Of past and future dying,  
She pressed  
With her heart's patience in her face  
Her working days  
Love-making nights  
Beasts's and children's cries  
The season's rhythms in her fingers  
Fields changing colours  
Like tired beliefs  
Impassioned from within,  
She pressed her knowledge of sin  
Her taste of grace  
Her bargaining power with heaven  
Her struggle with one who struggled with earth... (FS 154, lines 12-31)

In the poem "Warning" (1972) it is the tone of a woman's voice, rather than the substance of what she says, that impresses the speaker and returns to him in moments of heightened urgency. The speaker describes the woman's voice in terms that make it sound like a force of nature ("when she spoke — / salmon muscle the waters ... Rain of cancer / corrodes the wheat, / soaks into the grass") (FS 127-128, lines 2-4, 13-15). In all of these examples, the bodies of Kennelly's female characters convey meaning in a way that their voices cannot.

Although Kennelly presents the mutability and sensuality (and, in poems like Ella Cantillon, the responsive openness to external intervention) of the female body in a positive light, the ambiguous historical connotations of these characteristics should not be overlooked.

In her book *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*, Susan Canon Harris discusses how many Modern adaptations of the sovereignty goddess tradition present the (female) body as the point that renders 'the Irish spirit' vulnerable to coercion by non-Irish forces. In reference to Ireland's colonial history, the paradigm's use of the body to reflect material prosperity or adversity becomes a powerful symbol of the forces that Irish people had to rise above in order to preserve their culture. Where Modern male characters in these narratives often choose the ideal over the material, denying themselves food or sacrificing their personal safety in service to 'Irish' principles, female figures are used to symbolize that complicated and compromise-forcing realm of existence in which body and soul are inseparable. Both of these formulations present physical needs and sensations as threatening forces, which beg to be mastered.

In reference to this tradition of representing the body, the efforts of Kennelly's swimmer to "cut the water / with his body", and of "the Watcher" to reconstruct Ella Cantillon's aged body in his imagination, take on a new significance. The view of the female body that these examples subscribe to characterizes it as expressive but also eminently accessible to (and even reliant upon) male intervention. At its worst, the gender stereotypes that Kennelly's early female characters replicate romanticize force and normalizes sexual violence by presenting it as something that the female body/feminized landscape entices and enjoys. At best, they places the agency of Kennelly's female characters somewhere between their physical gestures and the mediating impulses of a male interlocutor.

By the 1980s Kennelly has become more aware of the personal and political implications of the symbolized female body. If works like the 1978 song-cycle *A Girl* and Kennelly's translation of Eibhlin Dubh Ni Chonail's "A Cry for Art O'Leary" (1985) do not quite constitute a significant change in his approach to writing about women, they do show him trying on a female voice in the spirit of exploration rather than focusing his attentions primarily on the female form. In his preface to *A Girl* Kennelly explains the origins of his central character in an event from his childhood: a quiet local girl who "worked for different people in the village where I was born ... walked out of the village and into the river that we all knew so well" (*WTIN* 98). Kennelly's prose description of this girl exhibits many of the traits of his early heroines: she was something of



an outcast in his neighborhood, always refusing “to be drawn in to what [the adults of the community] said” choosing instead to remain “deferentially apart” from the people in the village. She was a girl of few words, who had a habit of responding with a simple ‘Yes, sir’ and ‘Yes, ma’am’ to the garrulous adults of the community and was visually striking. Kennelly remembers “the quick, dark way she had of throwing a glance over her shoulder at you as she moved away from you. A quick, shy glance, at once searching and fugitive” (FS 98)

Kennelly’s reconstruction of the girl’s interior monologue is more nuanced. Although the girl equates herself with the physical landscape of the village several times in the course of the song sequence’s twenty-two poems (“November cloud is the colour of my mind” ... “my own heart is ... / Poised like a gull on the wind” ... “There are times when I think my body / Is made of birds’ wings— Thrushes and larks and blood-breasted robins”) these acts of self-definition seem driven by a desire to disembodify herself and access a wider range of experience (G 1:1; 2:5-9; 7:1-3). Kennelly deftly suggests the awkwardness of coming to grips, in adolescence, with a fraught adult body in moments when he has the girl ask “My room is ... small and dark / One of the walls is a picture / Of the Sacred Heart. / If my own heart is sacred / How can I tell?” or when he magnifies the space of her womb into an all-encompassing and frightful darkness in poem 13 (G 2:1-2, 5-6). By locating herself outside of the boundaries of her physical body (“O world beyond my skin / Shall I choose how to grow out of myself, / Shall I choose how to let you in?”) or else by dissolving into the fluid realm of the river, the girl is able to free herself from the connotations of her physical form (G 3:10-12). This violent and tragic act of de-gendering anticipates the more conspicuously public acts of Kennelly’s Grecian heroines.

In the years between 1985 and 1993 Kennelly created versions of three Greek tragedies to be performed on the Dublin stage: Sophocles’s *Antigone* (1985) and Euripides’s *Medea* (1988) and *The Trojan Women* (1993). Part of the impetus for engaging with these plays came from events in his personal life. In the preface to *When Then Is Now*, the Bloodaxe Books’s collected volume of Kennelly’s Greek tragedies, he admits to writing *Antigone* following the breakup of his marriage and *Medea* during a stint in St. Patrick’s psychiatric hospital, where he was treated for alcoholism in 1986 (WTIN 7-8). Kennelly attests to having been inspired by real women to recreate the heroines of ancient Greece: Antigone was written in honor of his daughter, Medea’s rage was inspired by the conversations of women that he met in St. Patrick’s, and the women of Troy take their “tremendous powers of endurance and survival” from women that Kennelly knew as a child (Younger 111; WTIN 71, 138). Adapting *Antigone*,

*Medea*, and *The Trojan Women* for contemporary audiences also allowed Kennelly to raise issues of public speech, female agency, marital responsibility, and maternal rights that were undoubtedly relevant to an Irish father grappling with the dissolution of his marriage in the mid-1980s.

The Athens of Sophocles and Euripides was a place where the private realm of the *oikos* ("household" or "family") and the public realm of the *polis* were sharply differentiated and kept separate along gender lines. When *Antigone*, *Medea* and *The Trojan Women* were performed for the Theater of Dionysus in the fifth century B.C.E men played all of the roles. Attic women, although not a homogenous group, led restricted lives. Wives of citizens were expected to remain indoors and, where women of other social classes sometimes had greater freedom of movement than their privileged counterparts, most still had to rely on a male guardian if they wanted to make significant contact with the public sphere (Blok 98-100). In her article "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*" Margaret Williamson points out that, because of this gendered division of space, the presence of female characters in Greek tragedy can be seen as a means of exploring the relationship between public and private life as much as relations between the sexes (16-17). She also suggests that women's possession of the interior space of the womb made them particularly well suited to represent the experiences of domestic life according to the ethos of Greek theater (27).

Sophocles's *Antigone* is built around the opposition between the title character's sense of familial duty and Creon's commitment to the rule of law. Like her ancestor, Kennelly's *Antigone* is highly sensitive in a way that makes her adept at what Brown calls (with reference to Mary Robinson's approach to politics) "the human element" of governance. Where the fluency of Sophocles's *Antigone* is mostly symbolic— her speeches are a means of giving voice to a highly conventional sense of duty in order to call the masculine realm of public discourse higher— the eloquence of Kennelly's *Antigone* is a key contributing factor to her plight (Griffith 135). Kennelly's version of *Antigone* not only showcases a patriarchal *polis* whose faith in tradition blinds its leaders to the needs of their constituents, it also highlights how *Antigone's* speech is limited by the male privilege of her opponent.

One of Kennelly's strategies in his version of *Antigone* is to repeat certain words over and over again so that it becomes clear, as contexts and connotations play off of each other, how unstable meaning can be. *Antigone* repeats the word 'word' more than twenty times in the course of the play, and only three times does she use it to refer to something other than a binding



judgement or oath. Most often she uses the word 'word' to refer to Creon's proclamation concerning her brothers. Antigone's repeated use of 'word' reveals her fixation with language's use as an agent of official power. Early in the play Antigone shares a fear with her sister Ismene that if Polyneices's body is left unburied "Children can throw sticks and stones / At our second brother's bones" echoing the children's rhyme and illustrating what could be the profoundly hurtful ramifications of Creon's word (*WTIN* 14). The moment when she varies her use of the word 'word' is instructive. When confronted by a lengthy speech in which Creon condemns her decision to bury Polyneices, Antigone responds:

Your **words** repel me.  
My **words** must be the same to you.  
I sought to bury my brother.  
That is my **word**, my deed  
**Word** and deed are one in me.  
That is my glory.  
And that is what the people think  
And would say  
If they were not afraid of you  
Who have the power  
To say what **words** you will,  
Do what deeds you will,  
And call it law. Law! (*WTIN* 28, my emphasis).

Antigone's use of the word 'word' to refer to her personal decisions emphasizes her commitment to matching her words with action. When she speaks of Creon's "words" and "deeds" her tone is one of disdain; she contrasts the weakness of his proclamation with her own passionate determination to bury her brother. In contrast, Ismene's use of the word 'word' reflects an understanding of language that is more fluid. Ismene begins the play by saying to Antigone:

Antigone, not a single **word** of friends,  
Not a single happy or miserable **word**,  
Has reached me  
Since we two sisters  
Were robbed of our two brothers,  
Killed in a single day.  
Since the Argive host fled  
I might as well be dead  
Because I know nothing more,  
Not, as I have said, one solitary **word**. (*WTIN* 13, my emphasis)

Ismene's use of 'word' here refers to condolences or news. Later, when she tells Antigone "You have a hot heart full of cold words" she uses the word 'word' to signify an insult (*WTIN* 16). When she warns Antigone of her plan to

bury Polyneices that “Creon’s word forbids you. / Creon’s word is law” the gravity of her tone shows that she is not insensitive to the regulatory power of language. For both Ismene and Antigone language, encapsulated throughout the play in the word ‘word,’ has the potential to be imbued with the full force of authority. Ismene’s varied uses of the ‘word’ word reflect her ability to switch registers and play different roles according to the needs of her situation. Antigone, in contrast, cannot or will not conceive of her private consciousness as separate from the way that she engages with the world. Her use of the word ‘word’ represents the power of the state as a rigid and unbreachable obstacle: “a court of sinister stone” or “stones / that batter me to death” (*WTIN* 13, 44).

Antigone’s unshakeable commitment to her own words denaturalizes Creon’s law and exposes it as an instrument of his personal ambition. In the source text Creon’s opening speech acknowledges the trauma that his countrymen have just suffered, thanks the gods for returning the state to rights, and appeals to the Chorus for counsel (Sophocles 61-62, lines 181-215). Kennelly’s Creon is more of a villain than his classical counterpart. His opening speech repeats variations of the word ‘loyalty’ four times in the first eight lines and then twice more in the final two lines, signaling an almost obsessive need to confirm the obedience of his subjects (*WTIN* 18-19). Kennelly also omits the part of the source text’s opening speech where Creon thanks the gods for restoring order to Thebes, making it seem as though his Creon is claiming sole responsibility for the renewed stability of the state. All of these alterations suggest an antagonist whose concern for his people is fueled by personal ambition rather than a sense of public responsibility.

Like Kennelly’s Oliver Cromwell, Creon uses the power of his language to represent his own interests as the interests of the people. When the Chorus questions whether Polyneices burial could have been the will of the gods, Creon overturns the suggestion that his judgement might have been wrong. Rather than acknowledging the complexity of the situation, which has forced him to choose between political and religious protocol, Creon makes the issue about the greed and disloyalty of his officers:

From the beginning  
There were certain people in this city  
Who resented my words  
And spoke against me,  
Muttering in secret.  
That they were not content to obey  
Like all people happy with my rule of law.  
It is they  
Who have bribed others  
To commit this crime, this blasphemy.



They have spent money on this crime.  
Money is the greatest evil men have known.  
Money destroys cities  
Maddens men from their homes  
Twists decent souls till they  
Will do any shameful thing.  
Of all evils, money is the King.  
It offends the gods  
Because money is godlessness.  
And it makes a slave,  
A dangerous slave, of the man who gives his mind to it.  
Whoever did this deed for money.  
Will pay the price. (WTIN 22-23)

Creon makes agreeing with his point of view a matter of morality, so that the members of the Chorus cannot question his decision without having to admit their own greed and depravity. Importantly, he also employs his authority as king to threaten anyone who might act on their 'immoral' impulses by disagreeing with him. This authority to punish allows him to solidify his personal perspective into an official party line, and he meets with little opposition. If Antigone is not completely alone in her ability to see through Creon's rhetoric (when Creon demands that the Chorus declare their loyalty, they respond "That is your word, Creon / Regarding the city's enemies and friends. / You have the power to turn your word to action") she is singularly driven to expose his treachery by her love of her brother (WTIN 20).

Antigone's ability to articulate her outrage in a way that will inspire action has its limitations. Like her predecessor, she is disqualified from participating in public life by her gender. Creon's repeated, disdainful references to her as 'girl' and 'woman' enforce her marginalization and inscribe her point of view as subjective, even hysterical, in contrast with his own vision for Thebes (WTIN 27, 37, 43). Antigone responds in kind by pointing out the ways that Creon's vision works against the interests of his people and by appropriating his tone of condescension. When Creon first meets Antigone on stage he attacks her, saying "You girl, staring at the earth, / Do you admit, or do you deny, / This deed?" to which she responds "I admit it, man" (WTIN 27). With few exceptions, Antigone's use of the words 'man' or 'men' in the play frames masculinity as undesirable, representing it as consistent with foolishness, human limitation, vanity, greed, or a lack of consciousness (WTIN 27, 41). If Antigone's use of language mocks the way that her uncle's rhetoric invalidates the perspectives of everyone around him, it cannot override his social authority. When Creon derides Antigone for being different from other Thebans she responds saying "my words are theirs, theirs mine, / But they seal their lips for fear of you / And the high-and-mighty horror of your law" (WTIN 29). The

unwillingness of Ismene or the Chorus to challenge Creon's perspective in spite of their better instincts proves her assertion right.

Antigone's disaffection with language is such that she sees direct action as a preferable means of expression. When Ismene offers to share responsibility for Polyneices burial with her, Antigone echoes her earlier condemnation of Creon when she says:

... it is I  
Who covered the corpse of my brother  
With dust.  
Your words must not belie that fact.  
A sister in mere words  
Is not a sister that I love. (*WTIN* 31)

Antigone recognizes the potential of language to defer action and rejects Ismene's claims to have participated in the forbidden act accordingly. It should be noted that in spite of Antigone's words to Ismene in the exchange quoted above she does not relinquish the capacity to love her sister. Unlike her counterpart in the source text, Kennelly's Antigone is not so overcome by her convictions that she loses the ability to empathize with those who fail to act as she does. Ultimately Antigone acknowledges the validity of Ismene's actions, saying:

There were two worlds, two ways.  
One world approved your way.  
The other, mine.  
You were wise in your way,  
I in mine. (*WTIN* 31)

Kennelly also attributes Ismene's impassioned defense of Haemon in the source text to Antigone, so that it becomes a declaration of romantic love rather than a means of showing how Antigone's sense of duty has eclipsed everything else in her life (*WTIN* 32). Kennelly's development of these little details, which demonstrate Antigone's enduring capacity for empathy and love, provides for a contrast between the moments when Antigone expresses her understanding and those when she lets loose her rage. This contrast suggests that Antigone's anger is not a demonstration of feminine hysterics but rather the result of attempting to negotiate a system that does not recognize the validity of her voice.

Antigone's suicide is her final appropriation of Creon's tools to undercut his agenda. His refusal of her right to speak the difference that she envisions is ostensibly rooted in her body, and by hanging herself she removes the object that ties her to all of the limiting characteristics that Creon attributes to femininity. Anthony Roche observes how Antigone's suicide enacts her



insistence that word and deed are one in her:

For the male Creon as for [Kennelly's earlier antihero] Oliver Cromwell, his power to translate his words into deeds has a crucial reliance on external agency, on the deferral of an edict on to the instruments of sword, servants or words required to convey and enact that command. But there is no such deferral or displacement in the woman's claim; it is absolute and made good through her body. This is the sense in which Antigone is finally unassailable and before her all words, those of Creon or the male Chorus, must fall. The inevitable gap or lack in the male theatrical version of carnal immediacy reaches vanishing point when in the enacted presence of the female body ("Ireland's Antigones" 245).

The prerogative that allows women to embody the interests of the group independent of language, weaponry or the trappings of social hierarchy is procreation, and Roche's reading of Antigone's suicide requires us to understand the act of giving birth as not just a personal choice but a process invested with cultural symbolism. If we see the female body as a material reflection of collective wellbeing, then motherhood carries with it not just the responsibility of bearing and raising a child, but of reproducing the ideas and values of the dominant culture. Antigone's choice to forego motherhood and destroy her body rather than submit to Creon's authority, then, is a powerful demonstration of her opposition to his leadership. It is also a refusal to allow her body to become a symbol of his truth; to carry the abjection that he imposes on her through the language of his final verdict into eternity.

Antigone's suicide can also be read as an affirmation of Creon's truth, however, if the most powerful way that she has of expressing her perspective is to appeal to the meanings that he has attached to her body. In the context of this particular Antigone, who understands and so clearly gives voice to the transformative power of difference, it is misleading to prioritize suicide as the pinnacle of the heroine's subversive achievements. Roche calls Antigone's confinement in the black hole among the rocks the apotheosis of the play's movement "away from the garish light of Creon's *realpolitik*, from the discredited life and activities of the daylight world, towards the dark, physically circumscribed but in many ways open possibilities of a personal feminist space" ("Ireland's Antigones" 244). Although Kennelly's description of Antigone's tomb among the rocks as a dark, deep, wet hole has a certain erotic resonance, Creon's decision to remove Antigone to "the loneliest place in the world" rather than kill her outright stems from his desire to isolate and control her means of expression (*WTIN* 39). Where she welcomes death on several occasions leading up to Creon's final verdict, she is repelled by the idea of remaining indefinitely in the space that her nemesis has imagined for her. She describes her fear for the future in terms that suggest both domestic existence and the big house of the ruling class: "Why do I think of eternity / As choking me / Like ivy choking a

house? / My hands leap to cover my eyes" (*WTIN* 41). Not only does Antigone fear the fate that Creon has dreamed up for her, she resists it.

Kennelly's most important adaptation of Sophocles's *Antigone* is his attempt to imagine and articulate the title character's frustration with the social structure that makes her act of self-sacrifice necessary. When, in her final speech in the source text, Antigone rails against " ... what things, / From what men / I must suffer / For having been / Reverent toward reverence" the effect is to highlight the rift between human law that has passed judgement on her and the divine law that has dictated her actions (Sophocles 96, lines 1008-1012). Kennelly's *Antigone* directs her criticisms far more explicitly at the hierarchy of gender that has led to her exclusion from public life and the specific men who have enforced it:

Men are leading me to my death.  
Men made the law that said I'm guilty.  
Men will place me  
In a black hole among the rocks.  
Men will deny me the light.  
Yet all I did was for a man  
Whom other man called evil.  
Because I would not kill my love,  
My love kills me.  
In this place, killers of love go free. (*WTIN* 44)

Absent the divine and royal authorities in whose name Antigone claims to have acted in the source text, her passionate expression of anger becomes all the more courageous because it stems from a personal sense that all is not right with the world rather than an inherited moral code. Since Antigone's objections are personal, she speaks them without standing to benefit from the divine protection that her ancestor receives in the source text. Far from stopping short of a woman-centered space, as Roche suggests that male playwrights must do when attempting to adapt Sophocles's narrative for contemporary audiences, Kennelly begins the important work of imagining how it must feel to be subject to the effects of pervasive cultural sexism. Antigone's final speech is even more significant if we consider that, unlike cultural stereotypes that discourage women from speaking, leaving the home or acting against the wishes of their husbands, many of which have been mitigated by the work of various women's movements, women's anger is still often equated with weakness, aggression or hysteria. Although Antigone is described by her sister as "broody and wild", her rage is ultimately rooted in an extraordinary ability to perceive the behaviors, tricks of language, and patterns of thinking through which her particular patriarchal culture operates. Antigone is surrounded by people who profess to



see the injustices that she sees and whose refusal to act secures her demise. Her expression of anger is an intentionally provocative and prophetic response to a community that has betrayed itself in its betrayal of her. If Kennelly's *Antigone* fails to overthrow the male dominated political regime of his Creon, she succeeds in updating the transgressive powers of her classical counterpart by presenting women's anger as a legitimate and necessary political tool.

Anger is also a key feature of Kennelly's *Medea*. Kennelly updates Euripides's tale of betrayal by honing in on themes that have particular relevance for contemporary Irish audiences: Jason's ambition, Medea's separation from her homeland, the culture of gossip that surrounds the actions of the primary characters and, most importantly, the value of the marriage oath. Classicist Margaret Williamson describes how, in Euripides's version of the play, Medea's movement from the private space of her home to the public space where the play takes place corresponds with a shift in the type of language that she uses. Before Medea emerges from the depths of her house her language is dominated by two of the types of speech that are characteristic of female characters in the Greek tragedy: lamentation and curses. After she comes out onto the stage where she can be seen by the audience Medea adopts several masculine forms of language, including the *agon* ('contest' in Greek). Euripides's *Medea* engages a series of these traditional rhetorical contests with the play's primary male characters and, in spite of her status as a barbarian, a combination of rhetorical skill and energetic emotion allows her to get the better of her male adversaries.

This is also the case with Kennelly's *Medea*. When she is inside her house, Medea laments her betrayal at the hands of Jason in terms that mimic the form of a traditional Irish *keen*, repeating the terms of her outrage over and over again ("Wronged, wronged, I am wronged in every deepest corner of my being") in order to emphasize the depths of her despair (*WTIN* 84; *Ó Madagáin*, 81-82). The Chorus describes her inarticulate bawling as almost inhuman: "It is like the cry of Nature itself, the cry of creatures / losing their young in the wilderness, the cry / of a woman who knows she has a dead child / in her womb, the cry of a hare / when the hound's teeth sink into its neck" (*WTIN*, 85). When Medea steps out of her house, in contrast, she contradicts the ideal of marriage that led her to leave her homeland for Jason in scathing and highly stylized language:

Till the day he marries,  
a man can conceal his true nature  
by the careful exercise of style.

Style— that elegant lie.  
After marriage, his true nature begins to emerge.  
Marriage, happy, horrible, or dull, is revelation.  
If separation follows, the woman  
is often the object of sniggers,  
the man, the object of sympathy.  
If the marriage remains intact,  
a woman needs second sight in order  
to handle this stranger who is her  
Bedmate. (*WTIN* 89)

This first public speech on the harsh realities of marriage closely follows a speech made by the Teacher, in which he ruminates on the essentially selfish nature of humankind. Medea's speech copies the Teacher's narrative style: both the Teacher and Medea root their discussions of social issues (the ideal of marriage specifically, in Medea's case) in stories of a rhetorical individual, whose physical sensations and psychic processes they illustrate in order to convey a larger truth about humankind. The Teacher claims this allegorical style as the prerogative of his kind, whose profession endows them with "the knowledge that all things happen at the same time, / to the same people (though they all die) / as the centuries flow by, smiles on their lips / at the spectacle of honest, helpless repetition"; a comment that reflects metatheatrically on the play's appropriation of an ancient text to address contemporary issues (*WTIN* 82). Medea makes the Teacher's style her own, however, using a litany of generalizations to frame marriage as a chore.

Medea often switches registers in order to maximize the effect of her words on the person with whom she is speaking. When she speaks with Creon her language is measured and reassuring. With Aegeus she is familiar and discerning. In her apology to Jason she is self-deprecating and complimentary and a little ashamed. If, in the source text, Medea's command of public discourse signals her final rejection of the private sphere, in Kennelly's version her private rage and her public powers of persuasion are inextricably connected. Kennelly characterizes Medea's anger as a compliment to her powers of reason, rather than an impediment to them. Following her exchange with Creon, Medea describes her anger and fear as factors that have inspired a personal breakthrough:

All these days when I cried and cried  
something in me said  
Justice will not be denied.  
So, let me  
imagine them dead ...  
This is hard work. Hard work—  
the source of all true happiness.



Never before  
did I feel the fullness of womanhood,  
the danger emanating with every breath.  
It is exhilarating, irrepressible, new,  
as though I were an army in myself.  
Gentleness, timidity, have buried my ferocity.  
What men call 'charm' has quelled my real talent. (WTIN 96)

Medea's anger leads her to confront the destruction of her prescribed role as wife and mother, a process that prepares her to transgress (as Euripides's Medea has before her) the realm of her private experience. In Kennelly's version, however, Medea's transformation is not only marked by a shift in register from feminized curses to masculinized discourse but also by a change in her state of mind from despair informed by her social status ("Men speak of good. Tell me, o tell me what is good? / Tell me, truly, what is the good of living?") to a sense of outrage that drives her to articulate her experiences on a public stage (WTIN 86).

Medea's anger is not only directed at Jason (although he is certainly its immediate cause); she is also outraged by a whole culture of masculinity that presents callousness as a feasible route to success. Like *Antigone's* Creon, Jason exploits gender stereotypes in order to rationalize his behavior, calling Medea "intractable" and laying the blame for her exile on her inability to hold her tongue (99). If Jason's remarks are not enough to illustrate his insensitivity to the audience, the commentary provided by the Chorus underscores the chauvinism that enables his ambition. In a statement that could serve as an epigraph to Kennelly's portrayal of men across these versions of Greek tragedy, the Chorus criticizes Jason's treatment of Medea as symptomatic of a larger cultural problem, calling 'manhood' "A hood worn over / the head of a man so that he / can be willfully blind" (WTIN 98). Although her interest is certainly in exacting vengeance from Creon, the primary purpose of Kennelly's Medea is to make Jason see the effects of his 'manhood.' In an addition to the sentiments expressed in the source text she resolves:

The time has come  
to turn Jason's world upside down  
and inside out.  
The time has come  
for me to act out my grief  
and for Jason to discover  
that in certain unsuspected ways  
death may be a matter of relief  
from a woman's annihilating pride  
when she knows, at last, that she's been cast aside. (WTIN 108)

Medea's act of filicide succeeds in getting Jason to empathize with the

sense of betrayal that she feels by breaking a private oath that Jason has taken for granted. If Medea's crime is her glory, as the final line of Kennelly's version asks, it is so partly because she succeeds in raising Jason's consciousness of the human cost of his ambition. Medea's crime is also exceptional (if not glorious) in this context insofar as she enters into it with a full understanding of the emotional consequences that she will suffer for killing her children. The speech in which Medea weighs her love of her children against her desire to challenge the willful blindness of her enemies is indicative of the price that she is willing to pay in order to achieve her purpose. Williamson claims that Medea's silent act of filicide in the source text shows the impossibility of integrating the experiences of the private sphere with the public stance that she has taken through her language and presence outside the *oikos*, except on the condition of the former's destruction. To kill off the sons that tie her to her humanity and family, then, is to claim her role as representative of a higher cultural purpose.

Kennelly's version of *Medea*, like the original, takes great pains to present the narrative in such a way that we are compelled to take Medea seriously, even sympathize with her plight. Medea's criminal history, her foreign enemies and inability to return to her homeland are presented as evidence that she has sacrificed everything for Jason, even on several occasions as acts of creation (*WTIN* 82, 87, 101). The complicity of the Chorus, even as they beg Medea not to go through with her murderous plan, demonstrates their sympathy with the social conditions that have brought about Medea's situation, if not their support of her horrendous actions. The treatment of Medea's filicide in Kennelly's version of the play frames her decision as the rejection a moral code that is universal (the natural law which says that a mother's need to nurture and protect her children is instinctual) in order to preserve an ideal that is essential to her sense of self and freedom. The violence involved with Medea's choice, and indeed with Antigone's choice to commit suicide rather than submit to Creon's punishment, is of no little consequence. The willingness of both these women to destroy what is for Medea represented as a part of herself (she repeatedly calls her sons "children of my womb") and what for Antigone is her literal body, is a shocking testament to their need to be agents of their own bodies and maternal capacities.

Unlike *Antigone* and *Medea* the focus of *The Trojan Women* is not on the exchanges between the central female characters and male authority figures, but on how Hecuba, Cassandra, Andromache and Helen interact with one another. Kennelly capitalizes upon the source text's conflation of the female body with the walls of the city in order to demonstrate how deeply imbricated with traditional gender roles the women of Troy are, following a long and



devastating period of war. Kennelly's Hecuba presents her body as containing the intangible cultural material that was housed within the city before its destruction:

Look at my city, look at my body,  
this head, this neck, these hands, these lips, these eyes,  
my city is lost, so is my country.  
My body, heavy, waits, packed with the cries  
of my dead husband, my dead children,  
my dear friends.  
My body waits— for what?  
A man's eyes! (*WTIN* 146-147)

Hecuba's equation of her body with the city walls indicates the sense of responsibility that she feels for carrying on her culture. It is also an effect of memory: when she closes her eyes and retreats into herself it is the cries of her dead husband, children and friends that she sees. This view of her body as a vessel for the continuation of Trojan culture is the thing that makes the prospect of slavery so hard for her to bear and differs markedly from the way that Hecuba understands her body to be seen by the Greeks. Where one relies on Hecuba's creativity, memory and voice the other silences and objectifies her.

Kennelly's Cassandra presents herself in a way that recalls the female character in Yeats's "To Ireland in the Coming Times" whose "flying feet" and "red-rose bordered hem" form the elusive subject of countless Irish poets's search for a means of expression (lines 11, 6, 30, 48). In Cassandra's version the white flowers of her garland become the icon that Agamemnon will follow to his destruction:

Love will kill a king, and kill a king, and kill a king.  
When he governs me in bed  
shall I pray for words to praise him right?  
Shall I whisper and sigh and cry in passion?  
Or shall I lift the black axe out of the swamp?  
Shall I wipe the bloodstains from the blade?  
Shall I become the black axe  
in my mind, in the bed  
where Agamemnon rides me in the dark  
or in the light? (*WTIN* 159-160)

Like the main character from *A Girl*, *Antigone*, and *Medea* (if we recognize her children as part of her body), Cassandra chooses to do away with her physical being rather than see it conquered by her enemy. She imagines her body as a beautiful weapon that will be the means by which he is able to destroy Agamemnon, even if it means that she will have to destroy herself in the process.

Andromache's aversion to the idea of sleeping with her new master, which is figured in the source text as instinct as well as a matter of principal ("I abominate a woman who marries again and forgets her first husband in the arms of a second. Why, even a draught-horse, separated from his old partner in the yoke, will pull reluctantly. And yet brutes have neither speech nor use of reason and are lower than man"), shows how deeply she is invested in her role as a wife (*TW* 190). Kennelly's Andromache is freer than her Classical counterpart: she portrays herself as a lively mare and asks "Will not a lively mare run on, run on to another stallion, when her mate is gone? (*WTIN* 172-173). In spite of this slight alteration in the way that she views herself, Kennelly's Andromache still testifies to Hector's centrality in her life, carrying forward metaphoric use of her body to represent the walls of Troy. Referring to the efforts that she made to build a comfortable home for Hector, Andromache says "I created a life with my own, deliberate style. I created a space in which his vanity might move like a beautiful, confident cat" (*WTIN* 172). This comment also refers to the space that Andromache has created in her body and her life for Hector.

In Hecuba, Cassandra, and Andromache, Kennelly represents women whose senses of self rely on their complicity with the traditional roles of wife, virgin, mother, and grandmother, to the extent that they see their own physical beings as constituted by the men (or in the case of Cassandra the God) to whom they are devoted. Hecuba, Andromache, and the other women of Troy also frame Helen's beauty as a reflection of her virtuous male conquests. Hecuba accuses Helen of running away with Paris in order to revitalize her own waning spirits: "When you saw his youth and beauty, his vigorous, magnetic fire, you wanted him to add to you, to increase your beauty, deepen your desire, fire the passion that was dying in the comfortable house of Menelaus" (*WTIN* 190). This accusation again recalls the sovereignty goddess tradition, in which the body of the central female figure reflects the virility of her conquest. In her own speeches, however, Helen does not lay claim to any of the self-defining relationships claimed by the other women of Troy. On the contrary, she laments the way that her beauty has disqualified her from existing as anything other than a trophy:

Do you know what it means to be alone?  
Alone as a mad woman  
Who in her madness  
Has moments when she knows she is not mad?  
Alone as a cry for help too obvious to be heard?  
Alone as a whisper in a sick room?  
Would you rather go to war



than be alone?  
Would you rather sink your sword  
in the back or belly of another man? ...  
Why blame me  
for your own pride, your own bafflement,  
Your need to own me?  
Nobody owns me. (WTIN 186-188)

The other women of Troy are just beginning to come to grips with the negative consequences of the patriarchal social structure in which they have lived, prosperously, for so long. Helen has long been aware of these consequences. Rather than act against her male oppressors, Helen actively uses her beauty to manipulate Menelaus into taking her back with him to Greece. The responses of the other women to Helen's actions parallel the disdain that Kennelly's Medea has for Jason. Hecuba upbraids her for her "style ... [that] twists men to her designs" (WTIN 196). The key difference between Helen and Jason is that Helen is not blind to the forces that contribute to her subjugation. She acts with a very keen awareness of gender stereotypes and exploits them in order to survive.

Kennelly's most powerful addition to the source text is a scene in which the women of Troy encircle Helen and hurl curses at her "like stones" (WTIN 193-194). The language that the women use in their attack is shocking and dramatic ("Pricktease! Wagon! Cocksucker! Cow! ... Cunt!"); the victims of war have become the aggressors of a different, but not unrelated, form of violence. Helen is hardly blameless, her willingness to become Menelaus's fantasy rather than face her own death implicates all of the women in a system that presents sexual exploitation as something that women benefit from. By creating her as a scapegoat figure, however, Hecuba and the rest of the Trojan women conceal the compromises that all of them have made in order to survive the desperate straits of war. Hecuba herself becomes an agent of patriarchal oppression, pleading with Menelaus to "make a law for women everywhere: / Whatever woman betrays her husband, dies!" (WTIN 192).

The climax of Kennelly's *The Trojan Women* comes when Hecuba begins to recognize her own complicity in the patriarchal social structure that has made her a slave. Hecuba's final speech reads like a warning to be cognizant of the willful blindness in all of us:

There's a man at your side,  
there's a man in your mind,  
there's a man in your bed:  
these men are strangers you've decided to grow used to  
because you know them too much, too much.  
What are we to make of the strangers

we are to each other and to ourselves? (WTIN 210)

In what remains of the speech Hecuba locates a possibility for re-integration and renewal in this inherent strangeness: the destruction of her social framework has proven to be a platform for self-reflection. In Euripides's version of this speech Hecuba questions the gods, asking whether Zeus is an omniscient being to whom human beings are subject or whether he is a device that humans invent to explain their actions to themselves? Kennelly's alteration to the source text reflects what Roy Foster calls the conversion of contemporary Irish society at the turn of the twenty-first century, away from conventional authorities like the Catholic Church and patriarchy and toward a more individualist ideal (*Luck and the Irish*, 37). Kennelly maintains the confrontational tone of Euripides's *The Trojan Women* by having Hecuba question her own privilege; a far more unconventional stance in Kennelly's contemporary context than to challenge the nature of God.

In the source text the successive speeches of each of the Trojan women form a kind of narrative that records the collective rage and sadness of the group over the loss of their way of life. By giving voice to various aspects of female experience, youthful commitment to a cause, mothering, marriage and middle age, Kennelly allows Hecuba to confront the ways that femininity has defined her life. As she moves ever closer to the sea Hecuba begins to lose some of her imbrication with her Trojan and her feminine identity:

The darkness deepens. Deep as the sea.  
My mind is clear.  
What's before me?  
The sea! The sea!  
Let whatever must happen, happen to me.  
I am Hecuba, I am  
what life and death have forced me to be.  
I know love is a wound and its blood is life. (WTIN 211)

Besides representing Hecuba's relinquishment of her former life, this moment when we find her advancing into the sea is a revelation. The image of love being a wound that bleeds life mirrors the imagery that we have seen the god Poseidon use at the play's opening. The fluidity of the sea contrasts with the once rigid architectural boundaries that previously defined her life. Because of Cassandra's prophecy we know that Hecuba is moving toward her death, but Kennelly presents this moment as a kind of birth.

In all of his Greek tragedies, Kennelly gives voice to women who are grappling with their prescribed roles and with their lack of access to a public sphere that directly affects their private lives. Kennelly's versions of *Antigone*,



*Medea*, and *The Trojan Women* make relatively few radical changes to the source texts. The act of translation is a means of engaging with tradition: a process that we have seen Kennelly taking part in in *Cromwell* and *The Book of Judas*. By allowing the characters of these ancient texts to confront issues of male privilege, language, family, and feminine objectification, Kennelly confronts these things himself. Translation is also a way of orienting oneself in the present: by reframing traditional forms, narratives and characters to suit contemporary needs Kennelly asserts the openness of social and cultural models to a variety of interpretations and responses.

In *Cromwell* (1983) and *Poetry My Arse* (1995) Kennelly uses parody to demonstrate the limitations of normative femininity. I have discussed how Kennelly's characterization of Mum (and, to a lesser extent, the giant and The Belly) in *Cromwell* invokes the sovereignty goddess tradition in order to displace it. Kennelly's representation of Mum's sexual agency, in particular, makes her a perpetrator of the violence and dominant sexuality that the sovereignty goddess tradition implicitly advocates. Mum's sexually voracious, pathological presence also dramatizes the limitations of a historical method based on narrative by aping the metaphoric contamination of the Gaelic tradition by a variety of mediators.

Kennelly's treatment of female sexuality in *Poetry My Arse* operates similarly. *Poetry My Arse's* Janey Mary is, in many ways, the epitome of the plainspoken, highly intuitive sensibility that distinguishes so many of Kennelly's female characters. At the beginning of the poem "Poems are cheeky bastards" she espouses a rigid view of language ("A prick is a prick, a fuck is a fuck, a cunt / Is a cunt, a shit is a shit, / And that's true in and out of a poem") that disqualifies her from participating in what she calls the "tyranny" of poetry (PMA 147, lines 13-15). It is only by equating poems to physical gestures in the final stanza that she is able to understand the poetic process in terms of a sexual exchange and therefore accept it. Where Ace finds beauty and freedom in the projected world of his art, Janey Mary finds these things in concrete elements of the world around her. We find her stopping to pick up leaves off of the road in "Who knows her touch," laughing out loud as Ace gets shat on by a seagull in "On the mark" and stripping naked in the middle of Saint Augustine Street in "The eyes of God." She advises Ace repeatedly to forego the creative ambiguity that we see him cultivating in "A Workable Clarity," telling him (and alluding to Heaney at the same time) in the poem "By the ears" "whatever you say, say something!" (PMA 75, line 4).

Much of Janey Mary's role in *Poetry My Arse* revolves around sex: it is

her reason for being in the presence of the poem's antihero, Ace de Horner, and the topic of most of their conversation. Like many of Ace's other conquests, Janey Mary is the dominant sexual partner. In "Question to a rolled-over poet" she flips Ace onto his back and demands of him "'Put me ... as they say in the Bible, with child'" hilariously overthrowing the model of passive virginity put forth in that good book (*PMA* 140, line 2). In "Sandymount Strand" she helps Ace recreate the infamous scene from Joyce's *Ulysses* by masturbating him on the beach. In "The art of pinning" she holds him up against the bedroom wall in a moment of disgust. Janey Mary's confrontational physical presence is complimented by the style of her speech. In "A modest proposal", for example, she responds to romantic overtures from a character named the Mouth by saying "Piss off, a ghrá" (*PMA* 190, line 4). In the poem "Whore" she redirects Ace's half-hearted identification of the muse as "... a whore / and sleeps with shites" by responding "So do I" (*PMA* 223, lines 3-4, 6). In "Two sides" she gives voice to her sexual arousal in explicit terms, telling Ace "'my nipples are erect for you / my clit is hot and wet.'" Janey Mary's rough approach to sex and her dirty mouth overturn conventional representations of women as docile and pure and amplify the misogynistic implications of traditional female iconography.

Like more traditional muses, Janey Mary's body is treated as a valuable tool in Ace de Horner's endeavor to write poetry. It is her earthiness, her immediate, intuitive sense of her own relationship to the world that Ace is impressed by. His own need to cultivate a style, his metaphorical pen and in many cases his penis, alienates him from experiencing the world in the way that she does. In more traditional versions of this relationship the muse character remains inaccessible to the poet, so that the impossibility of capturing the fleeting qualities that she embodies in language is expressed through the poet's sexual frustration. In *Poetry My Arse* Janey Mary's violent and erotic ministrations stimulate Ace's creativity and allow him to experience the world in an ecstatic, sensual way. In "Thanks to the mad fires" Kennelly elaborates on Janey Mary's role in Ace's poetic process:

Janey Mary was the pain in his testicles  
the deepest joy his heart had ever known ...  
She made his words tremble, rise, dance  
and when she said he was a dunce  
he took it, knew its truth, pursued her again,  
blind old boy driven by the testicle-pain.  
When she took his prick into her mouth to suck  
he came, and shook and shook  
like an old manquake. Old and blind, he grew  
to a new man, the old blind thing was new



and stunning as the young sun breaking through  
to the quaked earth. (PMA 306, lines 1-2, 14-23)

Here the pain and arousal that Ace experiences at the hands of Janey Mary help to draw him into his body in a way that facilitates a higher level of poetic fluency. Later, when Janey Mary castrates Ace in "Bubbles," the brief absence of masculinized poetic sensibilities (literally his penis) actually serves to improve them in the long run. After reconstructive surgery and a few months of healing Ace describes his penis as "... Better than ever. Stronger / and, as God as my judge, longer.'" (PMA 347, lines 170-171).

Although Janey Mary retains many of the characteristics of the traditional muse, she fits better into the unrestrained, even grotesque, aggressive tradition of representing women exemplified by Brian Merriman's *Cúirt An Mheán Oíche* (*The Midnight Court*) and Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. The female characters in these works subvert expectations of female modesty and submissiveness in ways that have significant cultural implications. Merriman's Clare, like the Mayo countryside where *Playboy of the Western World* is set, was a place where marriage for love often took a back seat to practical considerations, as men married late and were in relatively short supply. In the 1790s (Merriman's poem dates to the later half of the eighteenth century) the Catholic Church had already become a powerful advocate for pre-marital celibacy and general chastity. The pugnacity of Pegeen Mike and the women of *The Midnight Court* expresses the frustration and disappointment that must have come out of these conditions, and also alludes to a Gaelic social system in which women were relatively autonomous.

Kennelly is, however, writing in a notably different context than his predecessors. In the eighty-eight years between the first performance of Synge's play and the publication of *Poetry My Arse* Irish women battled public opinion and the government over divorce, contraception and homosexuality and amply proved their ability to fight unfavorable circumstances with language and the legal system. A sexual politics which sees the difference between men's and women's relationships to language as an effect of nature rather than history and ideology have been overthrown. In this context Janey Mary's violent sexuality ceases to be subversive and teeters on the verge of being pornographic. In an environment where many women no longer subscribe to the model of feminine energy as inherently opposed to the ordering faculty of language, the invocation of this paradigm by men, even to convey the emptiness of the artist's role in contemporary society, feels outdated and weak. Kennelly only very narrowly avoids this weakness in *Poetry My Arse* by virtue of the poem sequence's over-arching use of caricature. In light of the grotesque proportions of all of the

symbolism in *Poetry My Arse*, the relationship between Ace and Janey Mary can be read as a parody of the persistence with which male Irish poets cower in fear, or overcompensate, in the face of their female characters.

The value of Kennelly's more recent attempts to write female experience lies in the various ways that they distinguish between the way women have traditionally been symbolized, in Irish culture and abroad, and the complexity of female experience. Where Kennelly's early female characters are highly expressive in a manner of speaking, his more recent female characters are extremely capable of articulating their perspectives and needs. The stories of Antigone, Medea, the Trojan Women, and even Janey Mary emphasize that it is a limited and limiting public sphere, and not a natural feminine disinclination toward language that prohibits many women from participating fully in public life. That so many of these characters feel the need to disembodiment themselves, casting off the material form that ties them to their normative femininity, is a depressing comment on the consequences of gender in contemporary culture.

As it has been in *Cromwell* and *The Book of Judas* the relationship between form and social justice is central to Kennelly's more recent representations of women. Through translation and caricature, Kennelly asserts the continuity between traditional and contemporary symbols, narratives, and motifs. In his translations of Greek drama the language of all of his characters is filled with rhymes and repetitions that echo through their speeches, making it seem as if they are channeling all of the voices imagined for them in ancient and modern translations and adaptations of their story. In *Cromwell* and *Poetry My Arse* the amplified intensity of Mum, Janey Mary, and other female characters calls the reader's attention to the persistence of outdated gender stereotypes in contemporary culture.

More importantly, Kennelly presents the ability of female characters like Antigone, Medea, and Janey Mary to see past the limitations of masculinity, envision and articulate a "possible difference" (as Antigone does in his version of her story) as a force of emotional change and power in Irish culture. The forces that fear and repress the power represented by these characters—language, the state, institutionalized religion—are the same orthodoxies that Kennelly rails against through form, parody and satire elsewhere. Kennelly's representation of his female characters in an Irish context asserts the necessity of rebellious, if flawed, female voices to challenge tradition and revitalize the way that Irish people explain themselves to themselves.



## CHAPTER 5: “The River He Would Become”: Redefining the Poet’s Role in *Poetry My Arse*

*The power of poetry is directly linked to, and measured by, its capacity for surrender. (FS 18)*

In the previous chapters of this thesis I have discussed some of the ways that Kennelly seeks out threatening or marginal voices in his poetry and uses them as an impetus to engage with Irish society in all of its complexity. In the 1995 poem sequence *Poetry My Arse* Kennelly shifts his attention away from the voice of the Other and directs it towards the poet’s voice. The Irish have long looked to their poets to interpret and qualify social life. In pre-Christian Ireland *fili* (‘poet’ or ‘seer’ in Irish) were responsible for narrating histories, composing the biting satires that helped to maintain social order (it was thought that satire had the ability to shock the leaves from the trees, reverse the currents of rivers and raise boils and scars on the faces of its human victims), performing eulogies and interpreting the law (Randolph 363). When monastic historians brought the written word to Ireland in the sixth and seventh centuries, it was to these *fili* that they looked to discover the past achievements and adventures of the Gaelic people (Flower 4). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries bardic poets chronicled the decline of Gaelic society and initiated a major reassessment of community identity through their responses to war and the English state (Flower 165-173). At the turn of the twentieth century social ramifications of the Irish Literary Revival were so powerful that Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, left the organization that he felt had become too political in 1915 while poets Pádraic Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Mary Plunkett went on to lead the Easter Rising (Kiberd 152-153). In *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic*, Kennelly argues of his subjects:

... there can be little doubt that these poets, exploring an ancient barbaric and noble world, helped to create a modern heroic climate of struggle in thought and action. It would be foolish to assert that this epic literature was responsible for the 1916 rebellion but it is certain that the spirit of these poems, with their emphasis on the idea of a brief, magnificent period of self-assertion, is at the very core of Pearse’s thought. (MIPIE 327)

W.B. Yeats, Louis MacNeice and Seamus Heaney, and countless other poets have also responded to Irish civil war, the Emergency (as World War II was known in the Irish Free State), the experience of partition and countless other historical events in ways that continue to shape the reception of those

events in Ireland and abroad.

Guided by a modernist respect for individualism, the poets of the Revival and many of their successors have carried on their role as interpreters of the national experience by cultivating a critical distance from mainstream society through exile, contrariness, or a refusal to conform to the preferred literary modes of their predecessors. The feelings of alienation and outrage expressed by Irish writers at home were exacerbated, in many cases, by rigid censorship laws. Declan Kiberd explains that:

... by censoring modernism the Irish authorities maintained it at the level of an heroic opposition, long after it had begun to lose that status in other countries and especially after World War Two. Though censorship made it harder than ever for writers to make a living in Ireland, it also managed to endow the profession with a conspiratorial glamour: the writer was easily seen as a subversive, a magician, a user of dark hidden powers. (581)

By the 1980s, however, attitudes toward art were changing in Ireland. Where modern writers like James Joyce and Samuel Beckett had previously been received with suspicion by a largely conservative public, aspects of their work that were once regarded by many of their contemporaries as disruptive, obscure and antisocial began to be assimilated into mainstream culture. In 1987 Minister for Justice Brian Lenihan introduced a bill that would allow for the unbanning of books after a period of twelve years, permitting thousands of titles that had previously been prohibited to be made available on the Irish market (Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 284). As the 1990s approached, growing public ambivalence toward traditional authorities, most especially the Catholic Church, meant that Irish people were increasingly looking to writers to evaluate and define community values and articulate a sense of the common good. In 1995 Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, raising the profile of Irish poetry internationally (ibid. 386). Poet Gerald Dawe reflects of the period:

... it was much easier to get a poem published in Ireland in the '80s than it was to find a job. Indeed there may be some kind of curious link between an economic recession and the number of people who *started* to write poems or short stories. For those who may well have been quite happy living their lives thinking of 'some day' becoming writers, many have actually made that commitment, possibly on the basis that there was little else to do. Ireland is, we are told, a literary culture, so why not, what is there to lose?

Consequently, poetry is everywhere. Books are published by the new time— first collections are launched, sold on the night, occasionally reviewed, stockpiled and some times poets are interviewed, given prizes, but, more than likely, books are forgotten within the year. The speed of turnover has become mind-boggling for a country the size of Ireland, with its concentration of media in Dublin (or Belfast) producing high visibility screenings of one writer or another, usually in the form of light entertainment. As one normally unacerbic writer remarked in a fit of pique 'you can't throw a stone over your shoulder without hitting a poet in the head.'



... It often looked as if poets were being turned into commercial representatives who had to sell their 'selves' as wares. The critical interventions were based increasingly around polemical agendas with little relation to artistic achievement. It also involves, prosaically, state and private patronage, access to the media and the struggle to establish 'a reputation.' (*False Faces* 83, 86 author's italics)

With this re-popularization of poetry came increased state support. The Arts Council was overhauled in 1973, allowing for some additional funding to be made available for writers. A tax shelter for artists had been in existence in the Republic since 1969 and the artists's collective *Aosdána* was founded in 1981, guaranteeing its members a basic income so that they concentrate their energies full-time on the pursuit of their art (Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 300, 346). As the public profile of poetry rose the oppositional stance adopted by many writers in relation to mainstream culture became harder to effect. In my chapter on *The Book of Judas*, I note that the increasingly nonconformist Irish public of the period was reflected in literature that rejected the self-consciously nationalist modes of the Irish Literary Revival to focus on more personal experiences and preoccupations. Echoing Yeats's dictum that "we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry," Heaney explains his view of the craft in an exchange with Seamus Deane:

I believe the poet's force now, and hopefully in the future, is to maintain the efficacy of his own 'mythos,' his own cultural and political colourings, rather than to serve any political momentary strategy that his political leaders, his paramilitary organization or his own liberal self might want him to serve. I think that poetry and politics are, in different ways, an articulation, an ordering, a giving of form to inchoate pieties, prejudices, world-views, or whatever. And I think that my own poetry is a kind of slow, obstinate, papish, burn, emanating from the ground I was brought up on. (62)

It makes sense that Heaney and many of his contemporaries would be reticent to assume an authoritative stance on political issues in an environment where the public at large was becoming less favorably disposed to authority in general. This shift was undoubtedly bolstered by some writers's ambivalence toward the nature of the public role that was available to them as the nineties approached. There is a sense, detectable in Dawe's account of the eighties, that the attention of the culture and the media either compromised the integrity of the craft or misrepresented it in the name of making poetry and poets accessible.

In my chapter on *The Book of Judas* I also discuss the effect that a widespread privatization of cultural experience has had on the abstract development of Irish social and personal identity. In an environment dominated by distinct private voices and styles, the institutions, practices, narratives and

symbols that have traditionally consolidated people's sense of community have begun to lose some of their meaning, making the discursive reinterpretation of old forms that is central to the project of modern art more difficult to carry out. Thus far this thesis has addressed some of the ways that Kennelly addresses this loss of unifying cultural products in his poetry and drama, either through his use of form, through his reorientation of the protagonist's role, or through his repudiation of patriarchy. With each of these gestures, Kennelly's method has been to redistribute the authority of a conventional structure, character, or ethos so that insights can flow from the chaotic congruence of a variety of voices, rather than from the mouth of a single mediator. In *Poetry My Arse* Kennelly challenges the authority of the poet, creating a carnivalesque atmosphere in order to interrogate some of the "inchoate pieties, prejudices, world-views" inherent in contemporary Irish poetry. At the same time, he redistributes the authority of the poet, as an interpreter of social life, imagining poetry as a conversation between the poet and his public, which develops continuously through the friendly antagonism between both.

In *Ace de Horner* Kennelly gives us a poet who is conspicuously of the official Irish arts culture of the 1980s and 1990s. His name is a homophone of the artists's collective *Aosdána*. He hangs around Merrion Square, where the headquarters of the Irish Arts Council is located ("The Prize", "Real Balls", "Rings"), compiles an anthology of his friends's poetry ("The Woozy Sun") and is called "The greatest Irish poet since Yeats." He drinks his way through a poetry conference ("Poetry Conference"), lunches at Bewley's ("once," "A Bewley's sticky bun"), offends women<sup>10</sup> and worries about his reputation.

Many of the poems in the sequence's first section, "Through the eyes of a prim little prick, much of the time", depict Ace's attempts to define his public role. In the first stanza of the poem "The man he is" we find him surveying the contents of his room: "... he casts his eye on his IRA trenchcoat / unscorched by petrol-bomb, unmarked by bullet, / happy to hang on the wall of the Bluebell pad, / happy to hang like a Kevin Barry lad" (*PMA* 83, lines 7-10). Ace has, in fact, acquired this trenchcoat at an auction (a detail that we discover later in the poem "That Garment"). His anxiety about the relatively undamaged condition of the coat is a hint to readers that its role is, at least partly, to contribute to a poetic facade. In the next stanza Ace ponders his hearing aid thinking it "... makes him look like a great poet too, / distinguished, a little

---

<sup>10</sup> When the influential Field Day Theatre Company released its *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1991 feminist critics reacted strongly against its lack of female writers and questioned the absence of women on the anthology's editorial team. Field Day was founded by poet Seamus Deane and counted among its board members Heaney and Tom Paulin.



deprived, eagle-sharp, / vigilant, eager to hear, attentive as hell, / nodding in meticulous understanding, slow to carp / and witty as well" (lines 15-19). He also fixates on the sound of his own voice, appreciating in the third stanza how the enclosed spaces of corridors " ... like him and conserve his whisperings" and finally murmuring his own name over and over as he identifies himself in the final stanza as "... the man / who plays several leading parts in his own plan, / his own poem, his own play" (lines 20, 25-27). Ace's willingness to literally wear the trappings of cultural conflict (the IRA trenchcoat) and personal disability (the hearing-aid) are indicative of his desire to place himself in an Irish cultural context that is, for the purposes of caricature at least, preoccupied with suffering. The image of the corridor, which reads as relatively abstract in the immediate context of the poem (there is no explicit sign in the narrative that Ace has moved from his room out into the corridor), conveys Ace's attempt to close in on, bound and define himself. The definite space of the corridor serves as a physical frame for his presence, where the "testing mountains and cathartic moors" mentioned as unfavorable alternatives in stanza two offer no such security.<sup>11</sup>

For all of the careful consideration that goes into Ace's public persona, his interactions with other people reveal the shallowness of his character. Besides announcing to the world that Ace has suffered, the hearing-aid that we see him wearing in "The man he is" is a humorous indicator of his metaphorical deafness. In "Adam's Apple," for example, he listens to a woman tell her story of rape and responds that he'd "... like to write / a poem about it, a vivid poem that would be widely read" (*PMA* 24, lines 11-13). His unconsciousness of (or indifference to) the violation that this reproduction of her story for mass consumption would entail is offensive and her response, "Poetry my arse," equates his intrusion to the original act of rape (line 16). In "On Dalkey Hill" Ace and his dog Kanooce (whose name is a homophone of *Cnuas*, the stipend received by *Aosdána's* members) pass by a masked ball on a walk through the south Dublin suburbs. Kanooce attacks the revelers with characteristic voraciousness "... feasting on buttocks, on calves / of legs, on bits of belly too" (*PMA* 81, lines 20-21). Only very slightly distressed by the situation, Ace wonders why the revelers, who had been celebrating a financial windfall, chose

---

<sup>11</sup> There are also, perhaps, further cultural implications for the image of the corridor. In her 1990 article "From Cathleen to Anorexia" Edna Longley memorably refers to Northern Ireland as "a cultural corridor, a zone Ireland and Britain permeate one another" (195). The image of the corridor that Kennelly offers in "The man he is" transforms Longley's analogy into the setting of Ace's comic self-possession in order to mock the way that cultural conflict, media attention and a close-knit poetic community have helped to define and distinguish poets of the Northern School.

to don animal masks:

... de Horner brooded on the meaning of it all,  
thought of writing a poem about being too fond of money  
and how this might account for our fall  
from grace. And why, he wondered, wear animal-masks  
when you go for a dance and a feast?  
Kanooce was snoring happily. How much of the meat  
of moneymen was changing into shit in the belly of the beast?

Staring at Kanooce, Ace brooded on these things  
and concluded there was no answer.  
Then he, too, fell asleep by the fire and dreamed  
of a masked, confident, succulent dancer

dancing on Dalkey hill  
bacchanalian Dalkey hill  
where the sun is allowed to shine  
and the rain privileged to fall. (PMA 81, lines 30-44)

This final section of the poem adapts imagery from Yeats's poems "The Mask" and "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" (Yeats, *Poetry Drama and Prose*, 39, 71). In "The Mask" Yeats introduces the idea, later developed in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, of external "anti-selves" (symbolized in the image of the mask) which become a vehicle for truth by allowing the poet to detach himself from personal subjectivity and project values that he admires. The figure of the dancer functions similarly in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" (as do women across Yeats's collection of the same name) as an embodiment of pure style, free from self-consciousness or intellectual conflict, that the character Michael Robartes covets in an exchange that symbolizes the poetic process. Unlike Yeats, or Kennelly himself in works where he adopts the voice of a persona, Ace's public image does not free him from unwelcome personal neuroses or liberate his imaginative energies. Instead, Ace's masks constitute him in the absence of any 'authentic' voice. Neither are the revelers freed from their social positions by the animal masks that they wear to the ball: Kanooce, who is notoriously hungry for money, attacks them without hesitation. That Ace locates his bacchanalia in the upscale suburb of Dalkey, "where the sun is allowed to shine / and the rain privileged to shine", and imagines himself a well-fed dancer, suggests that he channels the privilege of the revelers even as he imagines writing a poem condemning them. The spectacle of "beating breast ... vigorous thigh ... dreaming eye" staged by the Dalkey bacchantes is facilitated by their wealth, and so are the visions of poetic potency that their performance inspires in Ace (Yeats, *Poetry Drama and Prose*, 71, lines 23-25).

Role-playing is an important theme in the first section of *Poetry My Arse*,



and the ineffectuality of Ace's public persona contrasts with the fruitful role-playing of several minor characters who appear in his midst. The speaker of "A possible solution" explains that a little bit of creative self-invention can be a good way to succeed with women, saying: "Best to take the bored fragments of self / mould them into a story / that'll give a woman a bit of a laugh / while she sees through me" (PMA 44). "Home" tells the story of a woman who changes her name from Bernadette to Norma Jean O'Flaherty (a detail that aligns her with Marilyn Monroe, who famously changed her name from Norma Jeane Mortensen) and travels through Europe "acting and reading / singing and living / drinking and loving," before returning home and taking back her original name (PMA 39, lines 8-10). The subtext of this poem is that Bernadette/Norma Jean's names facilitate different experiences of the world: her famous name allows her to cast off the expectations and connotations of her family history (we discover in the course of the poem that Bernadette was her mother's name; it is also the name of a Christian saint) and engage in romantic pursuits. The title character of "Daisy" engages in a brief, kinky tryst with the speaker, who encounters her later "... all in white, a bride / beautiful beyond all talk-to-me-dirty. 'Twas Eastertide." (PMA 98, lines 4-5). Here the virginal connotations of being a bride allow Daisy to be reconstituted, as Christ was on Easter, and divest her of the associations that she previously held in the speaker's mind.

If Kennelly casts a fool in the role of poet in *Poetry My Arse*, he also subverts notions of poetry as elevated language. We rarely see Ace producing finished poetry, but his writing process is characterized as an exercise in grotesque pleasure seeking. In my chapter on Kennelly's depictions of women I discuss how Ace's primary love interest, Janey Mary, is a parody of muse characters like Yeats's dancer. Janey Mary's violent sexual potency facilitates Ace's writing by drawing him out of the intellectual realm of high poetry. In the poem "Thanks to the mad fires" Kennelly represents the exchange between poet and muse quite literally, by having Janey Mary punch Ace in the testicles and then recording her wounded lover's impressions as the blood moves away from his brain. In "Bubbles," Janey Mary castrates Ace after discovering him in bed with another woman, jolting him out of the world of poetic evasions represented by his pen and penis, and locating him firmly in the reality of her rage. In "Partition" her body becomes a symbol of personal and political conflict, which she allows Ace to eradicate by having sex with her.

Ace's poetic vision is often achieved at the expense of women, and the effects of his insensitivity are heightened by the presence of many other misogynistic voices in the poem sequence at large. In "Garlic," for example, a character named MacAnnassbie jokes: "'What do a fridge and a woman have in

common?' / 'I don't know, MacAnnassbie.' / 'They both leak when they're fucked.'" (PMA 49, lines 3-5). In "My adjoining sexist" the speaker declares 'If it doesn't offend some stigmatical bitch / it's not worth saying.' (PMA 42, lines 3-4). In "The Good News" an unnamed voice responds to news that the speaker is getting married by asking "'Will she take the whip?'" (PMA 130, line 4).

These misogynistic voices ring out in concert with the perspectives of women who have been victimized in various ways. The poem "Pram" begins with the image of an abandoned baby carriage, which lies on the banks of the River Liffey "like a broken marriage. / Not even the all-knowing Liffey / will ever know the full story" (PMA 30, lines 2-4). The poem then quickly shifts focus to the figure of Maggie MacDonagh, who begs on a bridge above the riverbank "her eyes deeper than the river / housing a broken pram" (lines 13-14). Kennelly layers several images on top of one another in the poem in order to suggest the complexity of Maggie's situation: the pram suggests a lost childhood, the reference to a broken marriage points to turbulent relationships, the condition of the pram implies Maggie's physical condition and outcast status. These metaphors are tied together loosely enough that it is possible to construct a variety of different scenarios to explain the emotion in Maggie's eyes: perhaps she felt abandoned as a child, perhaps she lost a child herself, perhaps the empty pram signifies the loss of her procreative potential. "On the School Wall" describes a young girl who isolates herself because she is being molested by her father and cannot bear to engage in the lighthearted games of the other children. "Morning for Alice Gladden" gives us a brief glimpse into the consciousness of a woman who has been beaten. The presence of these exploited and overlooked women qualifies the sexist language that suffuses the rest of the poem sequence, much of which is used in a cavalier manner.

Although the voices of women who have been sexually exploited feature prominently across *Poetry My Arse*, many more of the women who appear in the poem sequence seem to be agents of their sexuality. In the poem "Masterpiece," for example, Ace is charmed by a female character called the Administrator:

... She just wanted to fuck  
and go crack  
with Mahler and Mozart  
far in the back-  
ground.  
She tossed her Raven head.

'That's what I love about masterpieces,' she said  
'They're genuinely supportive of the real thing.'



She smiled up at the ceiling  
neatly scratching her bum,  
comely as they come,  
something of a masterpiece herself, stealing  
into Ace's heart, lightly taking it over,  
creating there  
a more than musical feeling. (PMA 43, lines 6-20)

"She and the machine" tells the story of a woman who gets accepted to Trinity College and proceeds to sleep "... with every don / she could lay her hands on / or throw her legs across" (PMA 135, lines 4-6). She loves widely and wildly, takes drugs liberally, is voted "FUCK OF THE YEAR" by the men of the Business Studies program and travels to Europe where she contracts (the virus that causes) AIDS. In spite of the woman's prognosis, the poem ends with a tribute to her irreverence (line 8):

*Somewhere in Bluebell  
she walks alone  
enjoying the air,  
enjoying the way  
the cool September breeze  
plays through her hair*

*while she moves towards the Liffey  
as if she didn't care*

*as if she didn't care. (PMA 136, lines 43-51)*

In "A consequence of good fortune" a Dublin woman celebrates winning the Lotto with an odd ritual:

Ever after, in the pub,  
she'd order two drinks  
sip one herself  
and pour the other down her knickers.  
When asked by a fascinated bystander  
what in God's name she'd do a thing like that for  
she replied  
'It's a mean world, brother.  
There's only one cunt  
I'll buy a drink for!' (PMA 105, lines 2-12)

Although these women (and countless others who emerge in the course of the poem sequence) seem to command and genuinely to enjoy their sexuality, Kennelly's attempt to portray a woman-centered experience of sex through them is deeply flawed. In "Masterpiece" the Administrator's carefree eroticism makes her a curiosity for Ace, and becomes a feature of her objectification. This is also the case with the central character in "She and the machine", whose

story is told with relish by gossips, who relate the community's every vicious response to her sexual escapades. In both "Masterpiece" and "She and the machine" a flip of the hair becomes an aestheticized representation of social rebellion, which Kennelly uses to support his characterization of the central female characters as aware of, and indifferent to, the voyeurism at play. Rather than portraying this rebellion as empowering, or even a means to a subversive end, Kennelly associates it with callousness. The Administrator is described in the beginning of "Masterpieces" as having "... given up work, having landed the job" (PMA 43, line 5). Her flippant airs and lack of emotional attachment to Ace seem to be symptomatic of a larger pathology that, the poem lightly hints, manifests itself in social status that is based more on charm than commitment or competence. In "She and the machine" the central character's single-minded pursuit of a good time reads as self-destructive rather than passionate. The speaker of that poem observes of 'she' that there is "Nothing she wouldn't do for money, / no pill / she wouldn't swallow / More pricks went up that woman / than pikes up Vinegar Hill" (PMA 135, lines 17-21). The imagery that the speaker uses here to describe the woman's sexual encounters makes them seem like acts of self-immolation: the violent associations of the word 'prick' are obvious and Vinegar Hill is the site of a bloody battle in the Irish Rebellion of 1798. In light of the woman's penchant for self-harm, her blasé reaction to her own AIDS diagnosis (a condition that would have merited even greater alarm in the 1990s when *Poetry My Arse* was published than it would today) reads as a part of the great sadomasochistic performance that is her life. In "A consequence of good fortune" and many other poems Kennelly employs sexist language to articulate the frustrations or sexual desires of his female characters. Instead of portraying female characters who are agents of their own sexuality, then, Kennelly merely replaces one form of objectification with another.

Ace's dog Kanooce also figures prominently in his poetic process. Kanooce first appears in the poem "The prize" where Ace wins him in "the only doglotto / ever held in Ireland" (PMA 36, lines 2-3). Ace collects Kanooce from a shop in Merrion Square (the home of *Aosdána* and the Irish Arts Council) and is delighted to find that (like Irish artists's royalties) he is tax-free. The protective role that Kanooce plays in his master's life caricatures the intellectual freedom that the Cnuas is intended to secure for worthy artists. Kanooce keeps Ace company, eats anything that threatens his delicate sensibilities, licks his wounds, and consoles him when thoughts of his reputation become too grating. In spite of the excellent companionship that he provides, Kanooce is hardly an uncomplicated steward of Ace's craft. Like the giant and the Belly from *Cromwell*, Kanooce is characterized by his tendency to eat everything and



everyone in sight. Where the giant and the Belly consume out of hunger (a hunger that symbolizes a deep-seated cultural craving for identity and self-expression), Kanooce's eating is often an expression of brute force. In "Real Balls" Kanooce chews up a critic "who'd shat upon [Ace's] verses" (PMA 46, line 4). In "Something about the gods of prose" he "[sinks] his fangs" into the "left buttock" of a prominent novelist (PMA 169, line 1). In "Brothers" Ace enters Kanooce in a dog fight, places a bet, and looks on as his companion tears the other dog to shreds. If Kanooce embodies a cultural will to consume, he also represents the use of money to dominate and destroy.

For Janey Mary, sex expresses the unadulterated life force to which poetry aspires. For Kanooce, it is mastication and digestion. In Kanooce's jaws everything from the body, to the sin of the world, to Ace's verses is reduced to lumps of flesh and blood, and in his belly they transform into shit, urine, and flatulence. Ace's admiration of, and oft professed desire to become his animal counterpart, demonstrate how eager he is to claim the unfettered animal passion that Kanooce embodies. That the embodiment of carnal vitality in the poem sequence is a dog, a creature traditionally associated with servility, speaks to the paradoxically passive nature of a self-expression that is achieved, in contemporary culture, through material consumption. Kanooce's presence comes to constitute Ace's identity as well as his poetry. In "The biting life" Ace imagines himself in a dream "with the kind of bite / which, applied to any of God's creatures / puts out the light / that may once have been the light of heaven" (PMA 242, lines 2-5). In "A new metre" and "Reflection on howls" the rhythms and screams that accompany Kanooce's murderous chewing become the basis of poems that Ace is writing. In "The colour" he barks at Kanooce. In "Strength" he gets a tattoo of his friend on the bicep of his right arm and thinks "... 'I know I'll never come to harm. / I know I've earned a spot in his pitbull heart / as he is engraved on my skin / I'm part of him, he of me. Thank God for the beast within.'" (PMA 342, lines 4-8).

The influence of Janey Mary, Kanooce, and the many other colorful characters that Ace comes into contact with in the course of *Poetry My Arse* manifests itself in poetry that is profane, idiomatic, and composed of 'low' imagery. In "Once before" Ace finds the subject for a poem by picking his nose. In "Shakespeare and crisps" a performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is drowned out by people crunching potato chips and gossiping. In "That way" Ace encounters Latin poet Catullus, who has abandoned his work to get "pissed out of his tree" and gamble on horses at the Galway races (PMA 171, line 4). With this anecdote Kennelly re-presents an icon of Classical poetic craft by implicating him in disreputable activities. In "The very stuff of poesy"

the speaker calls the content of a conversation between Ace and “The porter at the gate” poetry (*PMA* 240, line 1). The way that Kennelly casts the porter’s memories of drunken brawling emphasizes the congruence between bar story and poetic adventure, and also capitalizes on the pleasing construction of the man’s idiom: “From the rage and weariness of Jack McIlvanney / Ace plucks the knowledge / if a man is born to be hanged / he’ll never drown” (*PMA* 240, lines 4-7). In “The Song of Ace de Horner” Kennelly replaces the pantheistic strains of Amergin’s poem “The Mystery”<sup>12</sup> (“I am the wind which breathes upon the sea, / I am the wave of the ocean, / I am the murmur of the billows, / I am the ox of the seven combats”) with features of Dublin city, and so locates divinity in the mundane social interactions that characterize contemporary Irish life:

I am the wind on the Liffey

I am the youngster fleeing the policeman on O’Connell Bridge

I am the Warrington Daycare Centre

I am the fire plan, the smoke alarm, the smoke that kills in seconds

I am the woman up from the country rambling among bargains, fingering

I am the paperback written to lighten the journey

I am the newest rumour in the streets of Dublin, take  
me to bed, spread me with the relish of prophecy, taste  
me like a juicy honeymoon but above all add to me  
add to me like a parody of the myth  
you were born to hunger for (*PMA* 22, lines 1-11)

Kennelly also addresses the contamination of conventional language in *Poetry My Arse*, reforming the sonnet form in several poems including “What it must feel like”, “Play” and “Career”. In “The Dirty Word” Ace attempts to get to the heart of a particular word by boiling and scrubbing it over a period of hours. Ace reflects in the midst of it all “The word was getting less / dirty but by no stretch of the tongue or imagination / could it be called spotless” humorously suggesting how language has been tainted in the course of its own use over eras (*PMA* 205, lines 16-19). In “Without flaw” the speaker observes “The obscenest thing I ever heard / was a most sophisticated word / uttered without flaw / by a gentleman of the law” (*PMA* 184, lines 1-4).

By treating the abject matter of messy sexuality, misogyny, defecation, and profanity so explicitly throughout *Poetry My Arse*, Kennelly exposes the boundaries of what constitutes art by breaching them. The vision of art that

---

<sup>12</sup> Translated by Douglas Hyde.



emerges is of a construct deeply imbued with the rules, preferences, and stratification of everyday social life. Kennelly's immersion in the realm of bad taste allows him to interrogate aspects of contemporary culture, if not with authority, then with a freedom not allowed to poets whose truth is achieved by conforming the interests of a Pagan king, or the moral orthodoxies of the Catholic Church, or the oppositional individualism valued by modernist poets. To what degree, for example, does contemporary art manifest the sexual repression of the Catholic Church, or carry forward misogynistic representation of women? In what ways does it mask the financial interests that facilitate it? How true is contemporary Irish poetry to the particular melodies of a variety of Irish dialects? To what degree is originality in art possible? Kennelly's approach to writing poetry in *Poetry My Arse* is not afraid of devaluing the craft by acknowledging its limitations.

As he has in earlier poem sequences, Kennelly also breaks down the boundaries between the poet and his audience. He does this both within the narrative of Ace de Horner's evolution as a poet, and on a formal level. In the poem sequence's second section, "A question without an answer, an answer without a question" the focus of Ace's consciousness shifts so that he becomes less interested in cultivating his poetic voice and more concerned with confronting his personal and poetic limitations. This process of self-reflection is partly instigated within the narrative of the poem sequence, as Ace begins to commune more openly with the physical features, sounds and inhabitants of Dublin. In poems like "Wave," "He almost does but does not" and "Bewley's coarse brown bread" he observes the Liffey as it flows out to the sea, watches the birds land and fly, or listens to the city's cadences as he makes his way through the Dublin's streets and laneways. There are brief moments in each of these poems when the features of the landscape that have caught Ace's attention seem to breach the boundaries of his embodied self and become part of him. In "Considering," for example, Ace watches a crow navigate in and out of an abandoned building and finds himself with an understanding of what it is like to fly. In "Reading lesson" he "... reads the Dublin gutter / and finds what can't be written on paper" (*PMA* 133). In "wave" he encounters "... the murderous water" of a Liffey wave and develops a sense of daring (*PMA* 165, line 2).

It is also in the poem's second section that Ace begins to go blind. The first hint of his blindness comes in the poem "Out of the visioncloud" when Kanooce allows his master to see the world through his eyes. Ace initially recoils from the spectacle:

... No! No! No! screamed Ace, not now, not here,

I want to see it as I see it, not  
as you think I ought to, and certainly  
not as you do.  
The way I see it is the way that's true  
for me  
and therefore  
everyone I see. (*PMA* 174, lines 25-32)

The poem ends prophetically, with the announcement that "Three people go blind in Ireland every day" and the image of Kanooce smiling while Ace "... opens his eyes and drowns in his own style" (line 40). Ace's blindness originates not as a physical symptom but rather as a realization of how his perspective has been limited by a tendency to seek truth by looking inward. Shortly thereafter he decides to allow the consciousness of a young girl who is playing the fiddle on the corner of Grafton Street to fill his mind. This attempt to see the world through someone else's eyes manifests itself more explicitly in the sensation of blindness. In spite of some initial trepidation, Ace's experience of his own blindness ultimately fills him with joy:

... For once, he stopped looking at himself  
And looked at her. Her, she filled his mind,  
He walked through street after street, crossing the gulf  
In his heart and began to know how blind

He was. For a moment he thought he'd be terrified  
But his seeing his blindness filled him with joy  
And made him see people for the first time, (*PMA* 178, lines 5-11)

In the same way that Janey Mary's physical attention allows Ace to detach from the 'poetic' sensibilities that keep him closed off from the world around him, so too does this encounter with the consciousness of the fiddle-playing girl allow a pure experience to take precedence over his preoccupation with style.

Increasingly, as Ace's blindness becomes more acute, his voice becomes indistinguishable from the voices of others. In the poem "Stage" he performs himself by allowing the worried voices of his audience to invade his mind:

the drink is a killer  
the taxmen are watching  
not a tosser for Christmas  
de Horner is dancing

landlord is knocking  
pub is demanding  
doctor is angry  
de Horner is dancing

...O who ever dreamed that ever



there might be an answer?  
on the stage of no-knowing  
de Horner is dancing (PMA 200)

This self-performance varies markedly from the self-conscious performances that Ace stages throughout *Poetry My Arse's* first section. Here, instead of functioning as a kind of constitutive outside against which Ace determines and defines himself, the voices of others become the substance of his being. The slow dissolution of Ace's individual consciousness continues throughout the sequence's third section. In “, once,” for example, he eats too many Bewley's chocolates and finds himself suddenly in thrall to a variety of different sensations: he is a recipient of the miraculous loaves and fishes, a hungry Dubliner heading home from work, the voice of an anthropomorphized Phoenix Park that has just witnessed the murder of a gay person by a group of youngsters. In “Ifology” Kanoocé's consciousness invades his mind, freeing him from persistent questions that have been stifling his work. In “Another voice” he is trying to make sense of the chorus of voices in his head when one breaks through the din, urging him to “Write it down, you snivelling bastard, write it down!” (PMA 264, line 16).

It is not only the voices of other characters in *Poetry My Arse* that breach the boundaries of Ace's mind. Kennelly's own voice breaks into the poem sequence on several occasions. In poems like “In and Out” and “Home and away” he claims Ace as a persona, attesting to the foolish poet's ability to breach the boundaries of his self in a way that predicts Ace's ultimate dissolution into a boundless, plural figure. In “Front Gate” Kennelly constructs a hilarious caricature of himself in which Ace and an unnamed character (perhaps Kennelly himself) outline some of Kennelly's charms: “You'd see him there / arsing like an ape across Front Square / a big smile on his foolish face / He used to be a fuckin' disgrace / in the old days, a hoor for the drink ... he's a cute Kerry hoor ... a womanising prick ... He advertises Toyota cars / and the bollocks can't even drive!” (PMA 275).

The language, characters and titles of notable Irish texts also make their way into Ace's language. We have seen how Ace unconsciously mimics Yeats in “On Dalkey Hill” and Amergin in “The Song of Ace de Horner”. The poem “September, 1991”, which addresses the politics of abortion in Ireland, invokes the title of Yeats's iconic repudiation of Irish-Catholic bourgeoisie. “Digging” shares its name with a widely celebrated poem from Seamus Heaney's collection *Death of a Naturalist* and pokes fun at that collection's equation of the poetic process with male virility:

Ace sniffed and probed the centuries like laneways

Tasting the bits and bobs of the pre-Irish dig.  
No man has lived, he thought, that has not prayed  
In the cunt of Sheila na Gig (*PMA* 200)

Like Heaney, Ace equates the textures and smells of the damp Irish landscape with the female body here and compares his craft to a sexual act in a way that is rather more graphic way than the approach of his predecessor.<sup>13</sup> The two-part poem "Imitations" tells the story of "... a shithouse at the back of a National School / in a remote part of rural Ireland" recalling the famous scene in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where Stephen Dedalus gets pushed into the slurry pit behind Clongowes Wood school. Like Derek Mahon's poem "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford," which adopts the perspective of its title structure, "Imitations" gives us the shithouse's perspective on the passing of time. In the poem "A line" Moran, a character from Samuel Beckett's novel *Molloy*, belittles Ace before receiving his comeuppance in the form of a one-liner. Beckett himself appears in six poems from the sequence's first section, as Samantha, a writer from Foxrock who charms Ace and enjoys gambling. In "The blindness of poetry" Ace refers to Christ as a tree, an image that Kavanagh uses memorably in the third section of *The Great Hunger*<sup>14</sup>.

Ace's evolution from self-possessed neurotic to many voices within one voice caricatures the loss of artistic subjectivity theorized by postmodernists like Fredric Jameson: the conceptual boundaries that separate him from the rest of the poem's voices literally dissolve as the poem sequence progresses. At the same time Kennelly manages to satirize the part of Irish society that expects its poets to be romantics, heroes, and celebrities rather than listeners and teachers. Ace is sexual without really expressing love, provocative without being heroic and famous without being obviously relevant. Most importantly, we only very rarely see him writing.

---

<sup>13</sup> A sheela-na-gig is a carving of a naked female figure with an exaggerated vulva. Although they can be found on churches, castles and other buildings all over Europe, they are most often found in and generally associated with Ireland.

<sup>14</sup> "No worry on Maguire's mind this day  
Except that he forgot to bring his matches.  
'Hop back there Polly, hoy back, woa, wae,  
From every second hill a neighbour watches  
With all the sharpened interest of rivalry.  
Yet sometimes when the sun comes through a gap  
These men know God the Father in a tree:  
The Holy Spirit is the rising sap,  
And Christ will be the green leaves that will come  
At Easter from the sealed and guarded tomb." - Kennelly discusses this passage of *The Great Hunger* in his article "Patrick Kavanagh's Comic Vision", published in his collected volume of prose *Journey into Joy*.



Åke Persson makes a compelling argument about the relationship between Ace's blindness and the evolution of his poetic sensibilities. Citing Walter J. Ong and Paul Zumthor, Persson outlines a fundamental difference in the character of oral and written texts. Where oral culture depends on human social interaction the written word relies on (and Ong argues was central to the development of) the author's sense of himself as a separate subject imbued with a distinct, private consciousness. Because of the collaborative nature of oral culture, oral texts are often antagonistic, situational and open-ended where written texts are authoritative, exclusive and finite. Persson argues that, because of his inability to access the visual symbolism of modern culture, the blind poet becomes a symbol of the pre-literary world:

The modern world is dominated by a value system in which observation as well as scientific and empirical data are cherished, but blind poets are linked to another system. Because of this, they pose a potential threat to our world view: 'Cut off from the symbolic and moral values attached to the eye, the blindman is the old King Lear of the Celtic legend, mad and cruel — or else, somber translucidity, the Seer beyond the body, the man *forever free of writing.*'" (171, author's italics)

In section three of the poem sequence, "Holy Mary, mother of God, plant a laugh in this poor sod," Ace literally rejects the finite morality of the written word by destroying the manuscripts of his poems. In "Published at Last!" he casts poem after poem into the Liffey, surrendering his textual authority to the fluid, dirty, indeterminacy of the river. Throughout he is confronted by characters who take issue with his poetry: the economist in "Penny" who asks Ace to explain the worth of poetry before kicking him in the guts, the woman in "Pondering the situation" who calls him "... the crook / of crooks, shyster of shysters, conmen to outdo / all conmen", Molly the waitress from "Everything Molly said" who questions the relationship between poets and "killerdogs" (PMA 64, lines 4-6; 168, line 22). Spurred on by his encounters with Janey Mary, Kanooce and these others, Ace confronts the limitations of a poetic process that is solidified through isolation and becomes a vital channel for the voices of Dublin city.

This rejection of the mentality that lies behind written culture is also rooted in the structure of *Poetry My Arse*. As he does in *Cromwell* and *The Book of Judas Kennelly* employs the poem sequence as a way to achieve the intratextual antagonism of oral literature, using the form to link poems with a variety of different styles, central voices and perspectives. Where it is possible to trace the development of Ace's poetic consciousness across the sequence's three sections, the poems of *Poetry My Arse* do not otherwise proceed chronologically or mount an argument in any consistent way. *Cromwell* and *The Book of Judas* both employ anachronism heavily and are made up of

individual poems that vary conspicuously from the ones around them. In *Poetry My Arse* the tendency is toward shorter poems that convey the fleeting nature of human interaction in a society that is on the move. These shorter poems present the perspectives of their central characters without clever names, physical descriptions or historical counterpoints to serve as context. Instead Kennelly offers the voices alone, detached from the people who have spoken them.

Five poems in the poem sequence's second section feature a character called The Mouth who "... chews / not with teeth but with scandal, / yarns of money, drugs, violence, sex, lewd / accounts of bonds and buggery from Dublin to Donegal"; speaking of the good old days, spreading rumors about politicians and hitting on Janey Mary. This method of reducing the entirety of a performance to one iconic image recalls Beckett's play *Not I*. *Not I* takes place in a pitch-black space where only an actress's mouth is visible. Beckett's Mouth, who has not spoken in seventy years, experiences a vision, which compels her to utter a logorrhea of fragmented, jumbled sentences at a ferocious pace. By singling out the mouth of his female speaker to the exclusion of everything else, Beckett highlights everything that is missing from the stage and demonstrates the force of what exists (the countless untold histories of women like she to whom the mouth belongs) but is denied. In Kennelly's poems the Mouth functions similarly, as a representation (among many others) of language that has become divided from the subjective essence of its speaker; that is recalcitrant in the absence of motive or effect. In concert, the proliferation of voices in *Poetry My Arse* call our attention to the striking lack of speaking subjects behind them.

Kennelly's references to the oral tradition, both through the narrative of Ace's blindness and through his construction of the poem sequence, highlight what I think is a fundamental assertion of his later work. *Poetry My Arse* stresses the similarity between a postmodern condition in which the fundamental conceptual structures of modern life (time, truth and individual subjectivity) have become fractured and a pre-literary one in which narratives are re-told and improvised by generation after generation of oral poets. The echoes of Amergin's "The Mystery" in *Poetry My Arse*'s opening poem are significant if we consider that "The Mystery" is one of the oldest surviving texts in the Irish tradition. Amergin is a figure of early pre-literary Ireland who is both the purported author of the story of the Milesian invasion and one of its heroes. Functionally Amergin represents the various poets and scribes who have been involved in telling and shaping the works that are attributed to him. Douglas Hyde writes of Amergin's importance in Irish culture:



The three short pieces of verse ascribed to Amergin are very ancient and very strange. But, as the whole story of the Milesian invasion is wrapped in mystery and is quite possibly only a rationalized account of early Irish mythology (in which the Tuatha de Dannann, Firbolgs, and possibly Milesians, are nothing but the gods of the early Irish euhumanized into men) no faith can be placed on the alleged date or genuineness of Amergin's verses. (28, author's parenthesis).

Couched in the discontinuous language and sketchy authorial origins of "The Mystery" is the evidence of the adaptation of ancient systems of worship and social organization for the needs of successive generations. These errors in logical progression, which betray the history of the verses at hand, are not that very different from the purposefully disjointed forms that Kennelly creates in poems like *Cromwell*, *The Book of Judas* and *Poetry My Arse* itself. An obvious difference is that, where the moments of disunity found in oral poems are an unintended effect of their construction over time at the hands of many authors, Kennelly's forms are deliberate and intended to convey the ability of conceptual forms like the community, language and (as we will see in chapter six) the body to sustain plurality and change all at once.

The theme of role-playing that develops across *Poetry My Arse* functions partly to satirize how the contemporary arts culture of the 1980s and 1990s reduced the process of writing poetry to a character type, a variety and depth of experiences to an ideal. The role-playing that is carried out by so many characters across the poem sequence also indicates a social structure in which individuals are less confined to a singular identity or cultural role than they have been in the past. Kennelly's own life is a perfect example of the role-switching that characterizes contemporary culture: he is both poet and teacher, public figure and recluse, feminist and chauvinist, father and bachelor, beloved friend and keen critic. Most importantly, Kennelly's dissolution of his poet-caricature by the end of the poem sequence asserts the exchangeability of the poet's role. If it is the poet's job to compose material that will illuminate social life (perhaps in the mode of Kavanagh, by "record[ing] love's mystery without claptrap"), the life of a poem does not end when the poet lifts his hand from the paper. Where this is eminently true of all poetry, *Poetry My Arse* ultimately promotes the loss of artistic subjectivity inherent in the postmodern condition by reframing it as welcoming in of the voices, and interpretive energies, of countless reader-poets.

## CHAPTER 6: The “Singing Wound”: Vision and the Healing Body in *The Man Made of Rain*

‘What is my body?’ I asked the man made of rain.  
‘A temple,’ he said, ‘and the shadow thrown  
by the temple, dreamfield, painbag, lovenscene,  
hatestage, miracle jungle under the skin.

*Cut it open. Pardon the apparition.’ (MMOR 11, lines 1-5)*

Brendan Kennelly wrote the poem sequence *The Man Made of Rain* after undergoing quadruple bypass heart surgery in 1996. In the preface to the poem sequence, he explains that he had a number of visions following the operation:

... I saw a man made of rain. He was actually raining, all his parts were raining slantwise and firmly in a decisive, contained way. His raineyes were candid and kind, glowing down, into, and through themselves. He spoke to me and took me on journeys. His talk was genial, light and authoritative, a language of irresistible invitation to follow him wherever he decided to go, or was compelled by his own inner forces to go ... He taught me the meaning of presence, what it means to be truly and fully in somebody's presence, a process of complete dreamsurrender to another's emotional and intellectual reality at its most articulate and vital. (MMOR 7)

Later in the preface Kennelly frames the problem at the heart of *The Man Made of Rain* as one of language: how will he capture the surreal experiences of his sickbed visions using that system of communication by which we actualize our thoughts and feelings so that we can share them with other people? Reflecting on his motivation for writing the poem sequence, Kennelly continues in the preface “I wanted to see the dream absorb and transfigure its own violation by the real.” He is speaking of language here, but *The Man Made of Rain* also hinges on the relationship between the abstract, ephemeral field of his vision and another ‘real’ form: the body. Many of the poems that constitute the sequence are devoted to recording the various sensations, limitations and rituals that Kennelly's body experiences following his surgery. These shape Kennelly's vision as definitely as does the process of translating his encounter into language. There is also the spectacular, unbounded, flowing body of the man made of rain, which compels Kennelly's attention, challenges his powers of description and leads him toward whatever insights on the meaning of presence the poem sequence has to offer.

In a 1998 review of *The Man Made of Rain* Anthony Roche notices the similarities between Kennelly's poem sequence and traditional Gaelic vision tales:



In the Irish tradition, when someone appeared to be absent from their physical body or on leave from their normal everyday selves they were said to be 'away (with the fairies)'; and an extensive literature developed in both the folklore and mythology concerning what happened to such people while they were 'away,' being brought by a visionary figure on an extended visit to an Otherworld where they encountered an abundance of all good things. The term most often used to characterize the Celtic Otherworld was *ildathach* or 'many-colored' and when the very first poem of the 43 comprising *The Man Made of Rain* spoke of 'seeing colors I'd never seen before' I remembered that Brendan Kennelly has written his Ph.D. on the poetry of the Irish epics and that the experience of those poems was in his blood. But the traffic between these two worlds, as in Irish legend, is two-way; and those colors have room for the blues and browns of his scarred body ("An Affair of the Heart" 20).

Roche seems to be referring to Irish folktales like the story of Oisín<sup>15</sup>, which Kennelly analyzes in his doctoral thesis, but there are a number of other vision genres that are also relevant precursors to the contemporary vision narrative that Kennelly presents in *The Man Made of Rain* (MIPIE 34-37).

The context for Kennelly's discussion of Oisín in *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic* is the version of his story that appears in the *Colloquy of the Ancient Man* from the *Book of Lismore*. In this version of his tale, Oisín returns from the land of youth and meets Saint Patrick, to whom he tells the stories of Fionn and the Fianna.<sup>16</sup> Kennelly admires the *Colloquy's* blending of pagan and Christian narrative traditions, saying that "it is [the] balance between the dramatically remembered heroic past and the quiet assertion of the Christian vision that gives the *Colloquy* its special character" (MIPIE 34). In the same vein, Kennelly references the *imram* genre<sup>17</sup> in *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish*, noting how the eighteenth century *Emmram Brain* (*The Voyage of Bran*) takes "the form and framework of pagan sagas and [uses] them to express the Christian vision" (MIPIE 37). The success with which Irish folklorists and writers merged the *aisling* genre,<sup>18</sup> (of which the story of Oisín is an example), the *imram*, and Christian scriptural visions is helped, at least in part, by the way that these different storytelling traditions have used the trope of vision similarly. In Christian and Pagan vision narratives alike, the indefinite and unfamiliar states of being that the poet, religious figure or hero encounters when he is 'away' lead him toward insights on the nature of his waking life, often culminating in a message or lesson that is relevant to a broader social experience.

---

<sup>15</sup> In "The Story of Oisín, the title character meets Niamh, the daughter of the king of the land of youth, and follows her back to her otherworldly homeland, where he remains without aging for 300 years.

<sup>16</sup> The mythical band of warriors led by Oisín's father Fionn mac Cumhaill. Fionn and the Fianna feature prominently in the Fenian Cycle, another of the Gaelic epics that Kennelly discusses in *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic*.

<sup>17</sup> In Irish *immrama* ("rowings about"), a hero travels by sea to an otherworld in search of spiritual enlightenment, stopping on several fantastic islands before reaching his destination

<sup>18</sup> In stories and poems of the *aisling* genre, a poet or hero is visited by an otherworldly female figure or *spéirbhean* (sky-woman) who leaves him with a prophesy.

Physical forms seem to have served a central purpose in these vision tales: they are the substance out of which the storyteller translates the abstract concepts that he is trying to express into a form that is recognizable to his audience. Gerard Murphy explains, for example, that pre-Christian *aislingí* served as a vehicle for ancient *fili* to praise patrons or outline the community's hopes and expectations for new leaders (43). In the stories and poems of the *aisling* genre, the beautiful physical form of the *spéirbhean* and the fecund splendor of the otherworld that is her domain literally embody cultural ideals of fertility, productivity, youth, and security. In an article on the *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis* (*The Voyage of St. Brendan*) Tom Moylan discusses how the island functions similarly in the *imram* genre:

... there is a tendency in the Irish imaginary that brings to people's social dreams a *topos* wherein those dreams can be located and, more or less, fleshed out, so that they can function as distanced (estranged) re-visions of what life could possibly bring. Indeed, as both John Gillis and Antonis Balasopoulos aver, these privileged spaces (in their versions the island especially) are not simply sites *wherein* such yearning is expressed; rather, these spatial figures are the very way *by which* their creators *think the possibility* of salvation, peaceful return, hopeful satisfaction, or indeed Utopia. That is, as Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith put it, such spatial features are 'figures for figuration itself'. As imagined spaces they *work* as 'surfaces which reflect back to the mind an image of its own meaning-making process.' (300, author's parenthesis and italics).

Moylan's analysis of the *Navigato* uncovers how the various islands encountered by St. Brendan in the course of his travels reflect and facilitate the states of uncertainty and confusion that constitute his spiritual journey until, finally, he achieves spiritual enlightenment on an island utopia. Moylan also highlights how Brendan's experiences of these islands change, in later versions of his story, in ways that reflect the consolidation of the Christian Church. In the same way that the creators of the *aisling* poem locate their hopes for an improved social situation in a desirable female body or lavish otherworld, the creators of the *imram* reflect the progress of their heroes's spiritual journeys in the physical features of the landscapes that they happen upon.

In spite of this widespread traditional use of physical forms to fashion inchoate cultural ideals, the body still retains its association, in Western culture generally, with an objectivity that, at its best, has the capacity to shield the 'soul' from invasion by threatening external forces. In his book *The Body in the Mind* philosopher Mark Johnson describes the experience of embodiment as defined by the contrast between the constancy of the physical body and the flux of the surrounding world:

Our encounter with containment and boundedness is one of the most pervasive features of our bodily experience. We are intimately aware of our bodies as three-dimensional containers into which we put certain things (food, water, air) and out of which other things emerge (food, water wastes, air, blood, etc.). From the beginning,



we experience constant physical containment in our surroundings (those things that envelop us). We move in and out of rooms, clothes, vehicles, and numerous kinds of bounded spaces. We manipulate objects, placing them in containers (cups, boxes, cans, bags, etc.) In each of these cases there are repeatable spatial and temporal organizations. In other words, there are typical schema for containment. (21)

According to Johnson, the ability to project patterns of corporeality like the experience of containment onto the non-physical allows humanity to conceptualize abstract phenomena. He argues, among other things, that an awareness of being enclosed within a body makes one feel protected from the outside world and gives shape to the emotional and intellectual matter that constitutes personality (Johnson 22). The body, therefore, acts as a kind of compass that roots the mind in objective reality and allows us to orient ourselves spatially, emotionally, and philosophically in the world. An interesting counterpart to this concept of the mind-body experience is Emmanuel Levinas's theory of alterity. Levinas argues that attempts to conceive of difference always involve a betrayal of the Other into the self (Levinas 45). The Other exists in Levinas's formulation as existing outside of the self, which is manifested physically in the form of the body. In order to exist within the realm of the self, the Other must change shape so that it conforms to the philosophical frameworks of the conceiver. In the model of mind-body containment put forward by Johnson, these philosophical frameworks are naturalized through association with the body and its processes. The language that Levinas uses to describe alterity reflects the same patterns of containment described by Johnson: the Other exists outside of the body and the self exists within it.

There are many cultural productions that suggest the validity of Johnson's containment schema in Ireland. In Edmund Spenser's prose pamphlet *A View of the Present State of Ireland* the character Irenaeus uses the mutability of the male body to explain the 'barbarity' of many Irish customs. Irenaeus explains of the Irish that, among other things, "they weare once eurie yeare turned into wolues and it is written of the Irishe Thoughe mr Camden in a better sence do suppose it was a disease Called lycanthropia so named of the wolfe" (lines 1837-1840). This anecdote portrays the wild sensibilities of Irish men as expressed by the dangerous instability of their physical forms, and is used by Spenser to justify England's colonization of Ireland. Susan Canon Harris describes how the rhetoric of what she calls the "Irish Ireland" movement at the turn of the twentieth century equated the boundaries of the female body with the boundaries of the Irish countryside, so that cultural acts of colonization were often represented as acts of rape (130-132). Many feminist criticisms of the sovereignty goddess tradition note that, in their Modern iterations at least, depictions of the sovereignty goddess often equate the penetrability of the female body with a feminized vulnerability of mind and spirit. As I note in my

chapter on *Cromwell*, the success of the Long Kesh hunger strikes was due, in part, to the way in which they responded to the British government's perceived use of physical hunger to dominate the weakened Irish-Catholic masses (Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, 320-326).

In ancient vision genres like the *aisling*, the *imram*, and the Christian scriptural vision, the poet or hero retains his authority in spite his fluctuating states of mind and body because he is often portrayed as absent from his actual physical form. A.C. Spearing explains that the common feature of all dream-vision genres is their hyper-fictionality:

... essentially a dream poem, from the fourteenth century on, is a poem that has more fully realized its own existence as a poem. Compared with other poems, it makes us more conscious that it has a beginning and an end (marked by the falling asleep and awakening of the narrator); that it is has a narrator, whose experience constitutes the subject-matter of the poem; that its status is that of an imaginative fiction (whether this is conceived as a matter of inspiration, or of mere fantasy, or somewhere between the two); in short that it is not a work of nature but a work of art. It is a poem that does not take for granted its own existence, but is consciously aware of its own existence and of the need, therefore, to justify that existence (since it is not part of the self-justifying world of natural objects). (4-5, author's parenthesis)

The conscious artifice of the vision helps to create an environment where the narrator is active, but not subject to the natural sensations and processes of his body. Free of the body-container that roots him in the material world, the narrator can move through time and space and encounter wonders with supernatural speed and powers of perception. Although the existence of the visionary outside of his physical body has not widely been linked to his heightened susceptibility to the influence of the Other, it is common for him to meet with a spirit guide (like the *spéirbhean* of the *aisling* tradition or the saints and angels of scriptural vision tales) who leaves him with a lesson or prophesy. Because these Others are often representatives of a heavenly realm, the insights that they offer are received as positive, unlike those offered by the colonizer in the rhetoric of the Edmund Spenser, the Irish Ireland movement, and the Long Kesh hunger strikers. It stands to reason, in light of the many ways that we have seen the body used to represent abject difference, that ancient vision genres capitalize on traditional associations of the body with objective reality. Absent the body, the poets and heroes of vision tales can think beyond the familiar and access a level of insight not immediately accessible to their audiences.

In *The Man Made of Rain* Kennelly alters tradition by presenting the visionary body as eminently real. Kennelly's encounters with the man made of rain are not prompted by divine inspiration or fantasy, but by a surgical procedure that fundamentally alters the way that he perceives his body. In the



aftermath of his quadruple bypass, Kennelly experiences the processes of his own body (the circulation of his blood, his inspiration and expiration, fluctuations in his temperature and the beating of his heart) as curiosities. He uses a variety of poetic devices to convey the depth, breadth, and novelty of these processes as they occur to him in the midst of his post-operative visions. In poem 18, for example, the pain that Kennelly expresses extends beyond his somatosensory perception and manifests itself visually, aurally, and through his sense of taste:

Birds of pain hover about my bed this darkness  
singing their song to my rubbed flesh.  
I taste the masterful blackbird, the gritty yellowhammer,  
the passionate thrush

celebrating  
my wish,

my trapped yet flying wish.(MMOR 48)

Kennelly's description of the pain that he is experiencing here resonates through multisyllabic names of the birds, which throb (GRIT-ty YEL-low HAM-mer, / PASS-ion-nate) and gush (THRUSH) like swollen flesh. This rhythmic effect is heightened by the repetition of words that end in -esh or -ish at the end of lines 2,4,7 and 8. Kennelly also recognizes his pain visually in the darkness of his hospital room and in the form of the birds. The name of the "gritty yellowhammer" suggests a colorful contrast to the room's darkness, and anticipates the moment in poem 21 when Kennelly observes the striking "Black yellow red brown / and vaguely disgusting white" colors of the leg that supplied the veins that were grafted onto his coronary artery. Kennelly attests to tasting the birds of pain, and there is something in the sibilance of the words 'flesh,' 'thrush' and 'wish' that suggests the richness of his pain's flavor. He hears his pain in birdsong, in the rhythms of the bird's names and in the poem's slant end-rhymes. Kennelly's pain seems to permeate his hospital room, altering the scale of the world within and beyond his flesh so that the birds sound and feel as if they are singing just above his bed and his ribcage feels like a birdcage.

In poem 37 Kennelly's repetition of the word 'cold' suggests how completely preoccupied he is by the sensation of coldness in the moment of this particular vision:

... It was entering me, this cold  
was taking me over, so cold, pure possession,  
so cold I didn't feel cold anymore  
and never would again, it seemed,

I didn't even think of it, you think of it only  
when you're humancold, or halfcold,  
or cold enough to shiver or weep,  
that's when you feel it, that's when you say  
'I'm cold'. (MMOR 78, lines 78-86).

In this passage, the word 'cold' punctuates Kennelly's train of thought, occurring at different places in each line and drawing out the sentence in which it appears so that the sentence covers more than fourteen lines. Each time that the word 'cold' is repeated, it takes on a slightly different meaning: "this cold" is indicative, "so cold" is emphatic, "so cold I didn't feel cold anymore" is paradoxical, "humancold" and "halfcold" stretch and compress the meaning of coldness, "I'm cold" lays claim to the feeling. Kennelly also repeats cold's long 'o' sound in the words "over" "so" "possession" "only" and "you're", so that the sound of coldness permeates the surrounding words. Kennelly's meditation on coldness has the mixed effect of suggesting the paucity of language when it comes to expressing the range of sensations that he experiences within the coldness of his body: the statement "I'm cold" conveys a far more limited physical feeling than the meandering journey through coldness that unfolds in poem 37. On the other hand, Kennelly's manipulation of lines 78-86 in order to highlight the subtleties of coldness is a celebration of how language can be recovered, opened up and vitalized when its limitations force the speaker to adopt another mode.

As with many of the physical sensations and processes that Kennelly represents in *The Man Made of Rain*, the coldness that he experiences in poem 37 becomes a conduit for memory. Through several stories of people that he has met or heard about in the course of his life, pre-surgery, Kennelly equates the coldness of his body with the horror of Manning, a man from Limerick who murders a young girl in the throes of a sexual encounter, the resolution of the judge who sentenced Manning to death, the feigned humility of the beggar who tells Manning's story to Kennelly on the Ha'penny bridge, and the ambivalence of the passers-by who drop pounds and pence into the beggar's outstretched cap. As these variations of emotional coldness unfold in the successive stories that constitute Kennelly's vision in poem 37, Kennelly continues to return to the physical sensation of coldness, mentioning the coldness of Manning's body and of his limestone grave, the coldness of the hands of the passers-by, and of John the beggar himself.

As poem 37 progresses, Kennelly's coldness increasingly allows him to empathize with the emotional and physical conditions of other people. Beginning at line 60, Kennelly registers the death of the girl from the Isle of Wight who "[went] into a bath / shoving a clothes hanger up herself" through



the coldness of his own flesh (*MMOR* 77, lines 63-64). When the coldness of Kennelly's body proves an insufficient portal into the experience of the girl ("One day you see a woman, one day you don't / she vanishes ... / How cold is she now, after thirty years?"), he is drawn into another sensory memory:

... 'I'm cold'.

But I was not.

Gone beyond it, gone  
into  
blue, I would say.

A bit like the kind of goodbye  
you will never describe to anyone,  
but let me say there was a white door  
and herself  
and goodbye  
and splitting forever and maybe for good ... (*MMOR* 78, lines 91-96)

This passage is strikingly similar to a poem in *Poetry My Arse* entitled "The Cries of Time" which deals explicitly with the breakup of a long-term romantic relationship. In "The Cries of Time" Kennelly creates an enjambment between lines 5 and 6 ("Why Ace left the house in the suburbs / with the woman standing at the door / bidding him farewell, a serious farewell / believing he was going nowhere / since that's what their attempts to live / together proved beyond all doubt"), so that the reader hangs on the word 'live' and the couple's togetherness is interrupted in the syntax of the sentence (*BOJ* 95, lines 1-6). This small detail initiates the poem's extended representation of Ace's romantic relationship as a life that is ending (as opposed to a way of life that is ending). As the speaker does in the passage of poem 37 that deals with the girl from the Isle of Wight, the speaker in "The Cries of Time" equates Ace de Horner's attempts to come to grips with the loss of his relationship with the feeling of his body becoming "ice" (*BOJ* 96, line 37). In order to recover from his loss, Ace must rid himself of this ice and "melt / back into mankind" (*BOJ* 96, lines 38-39).

In poem 37, the physical and emotional symptoms that follow the end of a long-term relationship, coupled with the trauma of Kennelly's heart surgery, become a framework for him to identify with the girl's attempt to end her pregnancy. The references that he makes to "herself" could refer to either the proverbial "woman standing at the door" or to the girl from the Isle of Wight. Both divorce and abortion were taboo subjects in Ireland in the period leading up to the breakdown of Kennelly's own marriage in the 1980s, and a sense of

social stigma resonates with poem 37's references to the unspeakable nature of the "goodbye" that is the speaker is remembering. Undoubtedly, the personal and emotionally complex nature of abortion and divorce also lie behind Kennelly and the girl's reluctance (or inability) to publicize their experiences of loss. The sense of "splitting forever and for good" that Kennelly invokes in the last lines of the passage could refer either to the separation of romantic partners or to the literal splitting of the girl's body as she attempts to rid herself of her pregnancy. In poem 37 Kennelly's memory of his own trauma runs into his sense of curiosity regarding the fate of the girl from the Isle of Wight. The corporeality of his vision allows Kennelly to experience the anecdotal clues about happened to the girl through his own body, so that abortion becomes an experience that he can understand, rather than an abject and unthinkable act.

In poem 9 Kennelly accompanies the man made of rain on a trip across the landscape of his own body. The scars on Kennelly chest take the shape of geographic landmarks: a castle, a cross that marks the spot where his friend Jackie Carroll was killed, the house of a beloved teacher. Just as the sensation of coldness is tied to memory in poem 37, these scars are also physical manifestations of events in Kennelly's life that formed his personality, opened, altered or marked his body. Time is elastic throughout the poem, shifting between moments in Kennelly's youth when he passed through the landmarks in question ("You made love here when you were seventeen. Nobody heard your words / except herself and the Shannon" ... "That's where Moriarty and yourself were beaten up" ... "A woman taught you here. Try not to lie, she said"), moments of vision when he encounters these places again alongside the man made of rain, and moments in the future when he anticipates his attempts to make sense of his vision ("When I wake, I'll go back the roads I came. I'll meet the hearts") (*MMOR* 34, lines 5-7, 10; 35 lines 37, 44-45). Kennelly also represents his scars as roads in poem 9, which creates a sense of direction through these diffuse memories and moments of reflection and premonition. Rather than representing the hardening of tissue, Kennelly's scars accrete meaning as markers of activity and forward movement, and allow him to re-experience the past in a way that is vital, rhythmic and physical. The act of re-tracing his scars also allows Kennelly to recover his past and make sense of it in terms of a body that is actively engaged in a process of healing.

The journey through his own scars that Kennelly takes in poem 9 is also an important reinterpretation of traditional Irish landscape imagery. I have discussed some of the ways that representations of the landscape have been colored by gender stereotypes in Modern Irish culture. The Irish landscape is also heavily imbued with colonial and nationalist discourse. In the same way



that the *imram* genre uses the island as a “figure for figuration,” many British colonial productions have characterized the rolling Irish countryside as uncultivated in order to explain the need for British oversight and farming methods. Nationalist rhetoric commonly uses Ireland’s ‘four green fields’ to represent the ‘natural’ incongruence of the Irish people with urban, industrial, and colonial values. Kennelly’s sexually experienced, aged, and post-operative body is almost the opposite of the virginal hills and rivers that emerge in both colonial and nationalist paradigms, either to inspire colonial farmers to work the land or to express the desirability of the West. By reversing tradition in this way, Kennelly upends the aberrant and heteronormative symbolic impulses that lie beneath it. The healing process of his own body becomes a characteristically generous metaphor for the development of Irish identity in the midst of colonial, nationalist, patriarchal, religious, and many other influences. The conspicuously changeable nature of Kennelly’s body as he travels the roads of his scars allows the Irish landscape to emerge within the poem as a shifting strategic source of identification; one that resists being tied to a single, fixed, or presumably authentic identity. The proliferation of images associated with movement (roads, rivers, canals) on Kennelly’s body adds to this sense of the country itself as vital and ever-changing.

Although Kennelly remains conscious of his body throughout *The Man Made of Rain*, many of his vision journeys involve a breaching of the body-container described by Johnson. In poem 32, for example, Kennelly attempts to reorient himself in a body and sense of self that have been compromised by the events of his surgery. Fear personified visits Kennelly as he lies in bed and asks to be admitted into his heart. In the exchange that ensues, Kennelly’s body becomes a stage where his negotiations with fear play out farcically. Kennelly retreats into his body, which he portrays as a house, in order to protect his heart from advancing fear. Fear implores Kennelly from outside the boundaries of his body to let him in out of the cold: “I like your heart, bad an’ all as it is, / let me take up residence there, / I’ll be a decent tenant, I’ll earn my keep, / pay my way, what does your old heart say? (*MMOR* 70, lines 20-23). Kennelly responds by telling fear to “... g’wan take to the roads, / hit the streets, find another heart to live in, / you’re not welcome here” (lines 26-28). This exchange between Kennelly and fear caricatures the trauma of getting reacquainted with the post-surgical body by transforming it into a melodramatic interaction with a slippery villain. At the same time Kennelly is perhaps attempting to capture the sensation of inhabiting a body that, in the aftermath of his surgery, has begun to feel comically dislocated from his consciousness. As Kennelly banishes fear from his house/body/consciousness he thinks to himself “I’m a callous bastard at times.”

This play on words signals the physical processes of healing that lie beneath his emotional upheaval.

In poems 34 and 41, Kennelly's sense of dislocation from his body takes on an even more comic turn, as his mind runs away from him down a hill of blood. In both poems, Kennelly portrays his mind as simply too obstinate to remain within the bounds of an infirm body that his mind characterizes in poem 34 as a "silly old lump of cotton wool" and "a damp old house full of stuffy furniture" (*MMOR* 74, lines 12, 14). These scenes employ the symbolism of space and containment articulated by Johnson and employed by Levinas in his theory of alterity. The decision of Kennelly's mind to move outside of his body renders him mentally unstable: he has literally lost his mind. The quickness of Kennelly's mind as he "join[s] a fox in a merry dash on a sudden green run of the hill" and "run[s] in the living air" in poem 34, and as he "[takes] off down the hill of blood, running full pelt into the morning" in poem 41 contrasts with the slowness of his body as he continues to grapple with the processes of healing (*MMOR* 74, lines 6-7; 87, lines 9-10).

Even as Kennelly expresses his frustration with the newly strained relationship between his mind and body, he highlights how a sense of dislocation has made him conscious of whole new range of sensations. The departure of Kennelly's mind in poems 34 and 41 has a vitalizing effect on him. In poem 34 the former says to the latter "you've no idea what fun it is / to escape from you / and run in the living air" and returns to view the "damp old house" of his body with fresh eyes (*MMOR* 74, lines 15-17). Absent the logical and emotional substance of his mind, Kennelly becomes deeply aware of what he describes as:

... something else—  
a driven thing, a force, a rip, a kick,  
a lick, a bite. A wandering, a honing-in,  
a taste for things hurtfully sudden and quick  
and the heaven-hellish out-of-it  
View of things

you get when you're bloody sick. (*MMOR* 74, lines 23-28)

The visceral awareness that Kennelly is registering here is heightened by the iambic meter (a FORCE, a RIP, a KICK / a LICK a BITE ) and crisp consonance of the lines, which replicate the throbbing of his blood. By diffusing elements that would normally be contained within his body (the hill is composed of his blood, the air around him lives, his mind exists beyond his reach) and infusing his language with the rhythm of his pulse, Kennelly and the



reader experience the sensations of Kennelly's body as features of the external landscape. Kennelly's representations of the mind outside the body are an important analogue to the divine inspiration experienced by the heroes of traditional vision tales when they are 'away' from their bodies. Whatever transcendence Kennelly experiences in these moments is not achieved by escaping his humanity but through consciousness of his physicality and presence within an imperfect earthly realm. Just as Kennelly uses the feeling of coldness to identify with other people in poem 37, in poems 39 and 41 he makes the countryside complicit in his own processes of respiration and circulation so that he emerges in the poem sequence as a part of the physical landscape.

Kennelly uses this capacity to locate himself within some other environmental, cultural and emotional frame of reference to cope with the physical, intellectual and emotional intensity of his visions on several occasions in the poem sequence. In poem 5, for example, Kennelly's consciousness moves out of his body and reconstitutes itself as two mushrooms growing under a tree outside his hospital window. The hearty "maturity" of the mushrooms, as they grow in the shadows of late October, contrasts with pervasive "whispers" that he is dying. By adopting the quality of the mushrooms Kennelly is allowed to focus on the present until his fear of death dissipates. In poem 42 Kennelly recognizes the sky as a wound that starts to bleed as he bleeds. In the last poem of the sequence Kennelly watches the "pigeons invigorate themselves / beaks working breast and back and wing / before they test the hardy air / of this March morning" and finds the form that his post-operative, waking self will take (*MMOR* 95 lines 137-140). The beating of his strengthening heart is audible in the short syllables and alliteration of lines 138 and 139.

In the preceding chapters I discuss Fredric Jameson's argument that Modern culture's advancement of individuality has created an environment that is so heterodox that the institutions, practices, narratives and symbols that once gave people part of their sense of community identity have lost a lot of their meaning. Jameson explains that this erosion of common culture has, in turn, compromised the development of individual identity, since it takes the presence of a dominant frame of reference to make the conception and expression of difference necessary. In effect, the atmosphere that is being imagined is one where the boundaries of the self-container described by Johnson have expanded to the degree that what is inside ceases to have an identifiable form. This is the state of being that Kennelly observes in his spirit guide, the man made of rain.

When Kennelly first encounters the man made of rain in poem 1 he notices with surprise that his visitor is simultaneously permeable and self-contained, constantly changing and yet recognizable as a distinct entity:

... The rain poured through him,  
Through his eyes, face, neck , shoulders, chest, all his body  
But no rain reached the ground,  
It ended at his skin.

He looked at me with eyes of rain  
And said, 'I'll be coming to see you  
Now and then from this moment on.  
Today, I'm colours, all colours,  
Look at me, I'll be colours again  
But different next time, maybe.  
See my colours today.' (MMOR 15, lines 8-18)

This introductory glimpse at the man made of rain suggests some of the ways that his body subverts traditional conceptions of the body's materiality. Although the skin of the man made of rain *does* serve as a boundary that gives shape to his insides, it is a fluid boundary that exists in a state of constant movement. The man's containment within his body serves to locate him space, but he also has the capacity to be present in more than one geographical or chronological context within the limits of his physical form. As poem 1 progresses, the colors that make up the man made of rain transform into metaphors, just as Kennelly's coldness becomes symbolic of various emotional states in poem 37. Not all of the qualities signified by the colors of the man made of rain are positive; they represent laughter as well as tears, slavery and work and "educated terror." Importantly, none of these qualities exist in isolation; they merge "... into each other / like thoughts that cannot stand alone / but must seek out other thoughts" (MMOR 15-16, lines 38-40). The man made of rain's skin, the physical boundary between his insides and everything that surrounds him, does not hide this assembly of colors from view; the whole spectacle is visible through his skin.

As the description of his colors suggests, the man made of rain's body is subject to confluence with other bodies and other selves. A particularly beautiful passage from poem 29 captures the body of the man made of rain merging with various people of Dublin as he walks down O'Connell Street:

... Beaten children beaten women freezing men  
murdered prostitutes and their crying parents  
seek refuge in the cool lucid nowhere  
visible through his skin.



As he walks, the unacknowledged victims  
walk through him.  
Dignity lives in his welcoming rain.

Shadows gather to salute, pay him homage,  
Solid bodies walk unresolved,  
Trapped in their solidity.

So they live, the bulkythick  
and the flowing inescapable nothings  
walking through each other. (MMOR 66, lines 9-21)

Although the people that the man made of rain moves through exist in a variety of complex states of being, his distinctive presence is not compromised here (or elsewhere in the poem sequence) by his absorption of their more unresolved presences. On the contrary, the man is depicted here and throughout the poem sequence as authoritative and resolved *because* of his openness to people and things that have been cast out, sometimes violently, of society. The contrast that Kennelly lightly draws in this passage between the solid, "bulkythick" bodies of the street-walkers and the "cool lucid" nowhere of the man's body is indicative the man's association with a sense of freedom from conventional structures. Kennelly relates the feeling of being enveloped in the man's freedom with the cleansing, calming, surprising quality of being caught in the rain. When the body of the man made of rain moves through them, the people of O'Connell Street lose some of their imbrication with social and individual identity in a way that seems to have a fleeting, healing effect on them. Penetrated by the bodies of the street-walkers, the main made of rain gains momentary substance. The man made of rain is not incapacitated by his own boundlessness. By moving forward, not necessarily through space or from the past toward the future but from one condition to another, the man made of rain is allowed to encounter a whole range of social, cultural and emotional states of being and, through his reception of these states of being, initiate a response.

The man made of rain's condition of vital receptiveness becomes a model for Kennelly's understanding of his own body and self in the poem sequence. Following Kennelly's encounter with fear personified in poem 32, he meets the man made of rain who also asks the he be let into Kennelly's heart:

... My rain is music, can you hear it?  
I'll put music in my heart, you said.  
It's already there.  
Listen. Open your deep space.  
Let your music out, let my music in.  
The world is a closed shell.

Prise it open with your tears.  
Fear is hell, get out of hell.

His eyes were pouring now, no longer crying,  
he was rain that doesn't cry but pours  
understanding on the frozen  
witness of our fear.

Let my music in, he said again, let  
my music fill the empty space,  
will you let it in?

I'll try, I said, I couldn't explain  
the sudden shiver in my stomach, the quick  
nail in my forehead. Had I told  
the truth? Had I lied?

The wall of my chest opened, bloody unholy door.

I went inside. (MMOR 71, lines 45-65)

Here several shifts in narrative perspective highlight the dissolution of Kennelly's physical and emotional boundaries. In the lines leading up to this passage it is the man made of rain who seems to be speaking. In the second line of this passage the speaker uses the second person pronoun, which makes it unclear for a moment who is speaking. The following six lines are spoken by a voice that could belong either to the man made of rain or to Kennelly. If it is still the man made of rain speaking then his comment that "Fear is hell, get out of hell" re-frames the earlier scene in which Kennelly successfully prevented fear from breaching the boundaries of his body. If Kennelly is the person to whom the comment is being directed then he seems to be located, suddenly, within a state of fear. Both dreamer and otherworldly visitor are composed of the same musical material in this moment of the poem and the ambiguity of the narrative voice can be read as an indication that Kennelly's and the man made of rain's music/bodies are segueing into one other. The following stanzas resume Kennelly's voice and perspective. In the second of these, however, Kennelly relates comments made to him by the man made of rain, effectively absorbing his guide's voice into his own. In the stanza that follows this one (the last before to two single lines that close the poem) Kennelly relates his own comments, absorbing his own voice and revealing himself to be present in two separate time periods at once: the moment of his encounter with the man made of rain and a moment in which he is reflecting on that encounter. In this stanza Kennelly also seems to absorb the physical presence of the man made of rain. In the final two lines Kennelly represents himself as first inside the bounds of his body (he returns to the image of his body as house that he used to capture his



exchange with fear) and outside of it. The images of his chest as an opening door and his self as walking into that door suggest transition: he is neither strictly within the bounds of his house/body nor outside of it but moving between the two spaces.

By the poem sequence's last section Kennelly seems not only to be reflecting the man's raining penetrable presence in his own body but also to have gained some confidence with his emerging sense of openness to the world around him:

Such light, such dancing light, such clear skies.  
His rain is pouring through my eyes,  
Tired years are falling out of my eyes,  
Falling at my feet,  
The rain falls on them,  
God in heaven, swans in the canal,  
These years are turning fresh again,  
I hope someone comes along and finds them,  
In the heart of rain I know I can share  
anything with anyone, in the heart of rain  
love is particular and fluent, why am I  
talking about love, I never knew  
much about it for Christ's sake, it's falling  
All around, through me, it wants to live ...  
I'm walking now, this heart is endless,  
It stretches away as far as I believe  
I see, and farther ... (MMOR 90-91, lines 45-57, 66-68)

This final stanza marks Kennelly's exit from the world of his vision and re-entry into the "real" world. Although his body bears the marks of the trauma that he suffered as a result of his heart surgery Kennelly has also developed an ability to see his body not as flawed imitation of what went before but as vital and transformative, specialized and formed through experience, the point where his present self meets its potential for transforming into another form or forms.

Ultimately, Kennelly's characterization of bodies in *The Man Made of Rain* expresses values of plurality, receptiveness, adaptability and, importantly, imperfection in the same way that the spatial forms of traditional vision narrative flesh out the values of their authors. Kennelly advocates for these values in his earlier poem sequence through his interest in the experiences of socially marginalized people, or through his arrangement of varied narrative voices, or through his construction of his verses in a way that requires the imaginative intervention of the reader. Following the example of the man made of rain and spurred on by the surgical disruption of his consciousness, Kennelly

is able to recognize his body in *The Man Made of Rain* as composed of a multiplicity of flesh, firmaments and fluids. Furthermore, he is able to locate himself intellectually, emotionally, and spirituality outside of the boundaries of his body, at least insofar as the body has been traditionally conceived.

It is important to emphasize the fraught nature of Kennelly's "recoveries" across the poems of *The Man Made of Rain*, because it is easy to read the poem sequence as an expression of uncomplicated transcendence and because such a reading overlooks one of the key features of the work. Pain is an important component Kennelly's representation of the body because it demonstrates the body's ability to respond to the world around and within it. We have seen how, in poem 18 Kennelly's inability to articulate the depth of his physical pain prompts him to manipulate language. In poem 9 Kennelly's scars become representations of the places and events that have formed him. In light of the poem sequence's broad association with healing, they read as evidence of his ability to grow through trauma.

One of the ways that pain features throughout the poem sequence is as a component of birth. *The Man Made of Rain* opens with a meditation on the body. In this opening poem the pain of giving birth is identified as one of the constitutive aspects of the body (" 'What is my blood?' ... / 'Her pain birthing you and me, / the slow transfiguration of pain / into knowing what it means to be' ") (*MMOR*, 11, lines 6-8). In poem 13 Kennelly modifies the act of giving birth so that it becomes something that he can participate in. After watching the word "beginning" vanish into the head of the man made of rain, Kennelly feels the creative impulse so intensely that it moves through his whole body:

There is a now  
That cannot be grasped  
So let me invent  
My past  
My future  
To stop me knowing  
The radiant nothingness of now,  
The drugged pain of now  
The terrifying speed of now  
All through my slow carcass,  
My slow soul.  
This little now  
Is so beyond me  
I'd better make haste  
To invent  
Eternity.  
Stranger at my door,  
Help me. (*MMOR* 41, lines 14-34)



Just as the depth of the pain and coldness that Kennelly experiences in poems 18 and 37 leads him to stretch the boundaries of language, so too does the force of the sensation brought on by the man made of rain's bewildering presence prompt Kennelly to try and "invent eternity" by adapting a mode that will express what he is experiencing. The physical sensations that Kennelly feels in this moment of vision ("drugged pain" "terrifying speed" the feeling of something moving "all through [his] slow carcass") are similar to those that a woman might experience while in the act of giving birth. By associating this moment of beginning with birth, Kennelly relates the pain that he feels with generative energy and underscores its capacity to connect people to one another. Although Kennelly uses birth as a metaphor to express the difficulty of incorporating difference within one's own frame of physical, philosophical, or cultural reference, he also allows it to remain a process of the body.

Kennelly's birth pangs in poem 13 are an example of how he represents gender as fluid throughout *The Man Made of Rain*. In poem 37, we see Kennelly registering the experience of having a makeshift abortion through his own sensory memories so that he can identify with it on a visceral level. In poem 9, he claims the permeability traditionally associated with female representations of the Irish landscape in order to assert himself as the product of a continuous process of development, in conjunction with the natural world. In all of these instances, processes that are often, stereotypically associated with femininity emerge as *human* experiences. A vivid recollection of child sexual abuse in poem 28 bears witness to the fact that invasions of the body happen to men as well as women and underscores the distinctly un-romantic nature of the rape imagery employed in many traditional representations of the Irish landscape.

Kennelly's representation of the body as plural, permeable, and yet self-contained also parallels his use of language. In *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic* Kennelly praises the ways that the authors of *The Book of Lismore* and the *Emmram Brain* incorporated the structure or the content of other vision tales into their own versions in a way that added flair to Christian values being expressed by their authors. In all of the works that have been discussed in this thesis, Kennelly blurs the boundaries between different literary genres so that prose narratives infuse his verse, and his collages of voice achieve the "kind of distilled collaborative music" that he attributes to J.M. Synge's best plays (JJ 79). At its best, Kennelly's blending of forms unlocks the lyrical qualities of language that might not traditionally be considered poetic. Kennelly's description of rain in poem 19 of *The Man Made of Rain* yields, for example, the same sense of surprise that one gets from being caught in an unexpected rain-shower:

Everyone on this island knows everything that may be known  
 about rain.  
 There'd be a noticeable decline in life-giving talk if heaven  
 sent us less rain.  
 Many muttered blessings and curses are the children  
 of rain  
 and I know one sparkling woman who loves  
 to make love in the rain.

(Jesus, says Mary Ann Callaghan, is it any wonder  
 she'll be crippled with arthritis  
 when she's only forty-wan!) (MMOR 48)

In the first eight lines of this poem the consonance of the language (MAN-y MUTT-ered BLESS-ings and CURSE-s are the CHILD-ren of RAIN) replicates the pattering sound of rain on windows, while the variations in line-length invoke the sound of a rain that strengthens and then diminishes in intensity as it is blown through by wind. Mary Ann Callaghan's rough-voiced interjection disrupts the detached rain-language of the preceding lines. Kennelly maintains continuity in the poem, despite this interruption, by picking up some of the sounds (like short 'a' sound of "Many ... blessings and" which resound in Mary Ann Callaghan's name, and the densely positioned short and long 'i' sounds of "is it any wonder" and "crippled with arthritis") that are repeated in the beginning of the poem. The last stanza of poem 19 also keeps the beginning's quick-moving rhythm in spite of the fact that it abandons the abrupt phrase-endings that come out of the 'rain' refrain. Just as the man made of rain moves through the people of O'Connell Street in poem 29, absorbing their presences and dispensing something of his own, Mary Ann Callaghan's voice moves through rain-language of poem 19, heightening its atmospheric quality and stretching it into the realm of idiom. This fusion of linguistic modes and genres is a continuation of the project that we have seen Kennelly developing even in early collections like *Moloney Up and At It*. In *The Man Made of Rain*, however, Kennelly's use of language finds a correlate in bodies that "work vigorously outwards" (Kennelly's description of how poetic forms should work in *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic*) and have the capacity to maintain their distinctiveness even as they incorporate the Other (MIPIE 329).

Kennelly's use of language in *The Man Made of Rain* also constitutes a shift in the way that he uses the sequence form. In *Shelley in Dublin*, *Cromwell*, *The Book of Judas*, and *Poetry My Arse*, Kennelly uses the sequence form as a vehicle to tie together different narrative voices and perspectives. In *The Man Made of Rain* he uses it to claim his own voice as a product of all of the other voices and perspectives that have made, are making, and will continue to make



up his identity. Where Kennelly's earlier poem sequences surrender the authority provided by a consistent narrative perspective in order to demonstrate the complex beauty and possibility of plurality, *The Man Made of Rain* makes difference a feature of his own voice in order to affirm the capacity of the individual to expand and absorb the Other. And yet, Kennelly's voice maintains its distinctiveness throughout *The Man Made of Rain* (and, indeed, in all of this multi-vocal poem sequences — it would be difficult to read even the wildly disparate poems of *The Book of Judas* and not recognize something of Kennelly's mischievous wit and tender generosity behind each voice) just as the bodies of *The Man Made of Rain* maintain their integrity as they coalesce with other physical forms.

In her extensive study of parody Margaret Rose identifies two distinct schools of postmodern thought: one which is devoted to deconstructing the mechanisms of Modern society's obsession with systems and one which seeks to describe the nature of society in the absence of Modern logic. She notes that "some theories of the postmodern have moved from the negative functioning of describing the end or failing of modernism, or of other theories of the postmodern, to describing something more creative and innovative" (197). *The Man Made of Rain* is Kennelly's most successful foray into the latter school of postmodern thought. The state of being that he captures, most especially through his representation of the body in *The Man Made of Rain*, reflects a consciousness and a culture in a state of flux. The beauty of the poem sequence comes not out of any attempt to ossify the dazzling range of experiences that emerge in the course of Kennelly's visions into a careful expression of 'truth,' but out of the careful attention with which he records the spectacle, even when it exceeds his formidable powers of expression.

The contemporary vision narrative that Kennelly presents in *The Man Made of Rain* modifies tradition by admitting the role of the body in shaping consciousness. At the same time that he reorients tradition, Kennelly uses the body to assert the affinity of people with one another and with nature. Kennelly's expansion of the self to include aspects of other people and landscapes does not preclude individuality in the way that Jameson proposes. Instead, empathy (imagined by Kennelly at times as a kind of physical exchange) impels the individual to question, adapt and become more complex, in the same way that Kennelly identifies the blending of poetic forms as a means to improve the expressive capacity of language. This view of contemporary consciousness is a favorable alternative to the shallow simulacra that many postmodern theorists use to demonstrate the character of life in the twenty-first century. In a country that has long located part of itself outside of the borders of its physical landmass, and which is increasingly finding its place in the

boundless cultural territory of the digital age, Kennelly's portrayal of the body is also a valuable symbol of an Irishness that is constantly evolving.



## CONCLUSION

*Who could begin to say what's happening now? Nobody. Never. However, let's begin with the majestic cormorant in the brown river. (Now 104).*

Brendan Kennelly's writing in the years between 1980 and 2000 addresses the social change in Ireland during that period from two directions. Firstly, his treatment of complicated social and cultural issues through the type of character referred to memorably by Terence Brown as Kennelly's "bizarre platoon of mythological, archetypal henchman"—characters like Cromwell, Judas, and Ace de Horner in whom ancient and popular iconography merge with fantastic nonsense—Kennelly provokes the reader to do battle with the substance of a changing moral and intellectual landscape (Brown, "Awakening from the Nightmare", 254). The conversations that ensue between the reader and the text are valuable, in part, because they fail to culminate in any unified point of view on issues sexuality, national identity, religion, gender, art, the body, or any number of other topics. Or, if they do, it is the result of the reader's intervention into Kennelly's polyvocal and aggressively antagonistic constructions. Either way, the poem sequences and plays that Kennelly created in the last years of the twentieth century encourage the kind of continuous questioning characteristic of a postmodernism that is skeptical of unqualified truths. Kennelly's plural forms also affirm the presence and the legitimacy of a variety of different perspectives within Irish culture, without invalidating the perspective of the individual.

It is out of this validation of the individual *in the midst* of the collective that Kennelly's work derives the humane quality highlighted by Åke Persson and others. If, for example, Oliver Cromwell's ruthless profile is striking in the poem sequence that bears his name, this ruthlessness is ultimately dwarfed by the sheer volume of other forms that his persona has taken in the course of history. It is possible, then, if not easy to sympathize with Cromwell when he demands Buffún's respect in the *Cromwell's* prose preface, reminding our little hero that "I am a guest in your imagination, therefore have the grace to hear me out; I am not altogether responsible for the fact that you were reared to hate and fear my name which in modesty I would suggest is not without its own ebullient music. I say further that you too are blind in your way, and now you use me to try and justify that blindness ... kindly remember that you are blind and that I see" (C 15). He has lost control of his legacy, if not of his verve or vision. Kennelly takes this principle even further in *The Book of Judas*, so that the title character becomes a nonentity, overshadowed to the point of erasure by the legions of responses that he has inspired across time and culture. Kennelly celebrates the extraordinary self-possession of characters like Cromwell, ozzie, and Medea, whose threatening existence outside and beyond social norms

owes something to the consciousness-altering nonconformity of the Irish epic hero. Kennelly's attention also extends frequently to the characters referred to by Persson as Kennelly's 'socially marginalized heroes', whose abject circumstances expose both the tyranny of social systems and the reliance of such systems on the creation and exclusion of difference. In both cases the capacity of Kennelly's 'heroes' to move beyond the boundaries of culture (and in the case of characters like Medea and the man made of rain, to move back and forth across these boundaries to suit their particular interests) becomes a source of power and creative energy for them.

John McDonagh writes of Kennelly's poetry that it "is principally characterised by various degrees and notes of resistance. From *Cast a Cold Eye* (1959) to *Martial Art* (2003) Kennelly has sought to establish a poetic independence that aggressively resists generic categorisations" (149). Where Kennelly's writing certainly works against all that is generic, I would modify McDonagh's conclusion by arguing that Kennelly's work seeks to complicate and expand convention rather than to reject it entirely. Works like *Cromwell*, *The Book of Judas*, and *Antigone* in particular explore the status quo in a way that betrays its complexity. Arranged intentionally in the anachronistic, polyvocal spaces that Kennelly creates within in his writing, the generic categorizations of a variety of different ages, cultural conditions, and individual psyches reveal themselves to be a kind of continuum that is more conspicuous for its ability to admit difference than for its sameness. The impulse that characterizes Kennelly's writing, then, is not so much resistance as it is the assertion that dominant frames of reference exist among a whole variety of other perspectives that deserve to be explored and articulated. From a postcolonial standpoint, Kennelly does not so much reject the influence of Great Britain in favor of an authentic Irishness as seek out and celebrate the variety of different Irishnesses that exist within the scope of his culture. In this respect he is in good company with contemporaries including Eavan Boland, Paul Muldoon, and Medbh McGuckian, who have similarly sought to complicate and extend the definition of Irishness for local and global audiences.

The second way that Kennelly addresses social change in the years between 1980 and 2000 is through his use of traditional verse, narrative, and dramatic forms. As he does with his approach to social and cultural issues, Kennelly's treatment of various literary conventions seeks to reflect the speed and expansiveness of contemporary life. In his essay "Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?" Jean-François Lyotard traces the differences between postmodern and Modern art in a way that I think is a helpful point of reference for understanding Kennelly's approach to form. Lyotard argues that postmodernism and modernism both address the varied forms, contradictions, and instability of Modern life through an aesthetic of the sublime, which deals



with emotions so profound that they cannot be fully apprehended by the human mind and that, therefore, bring about feelings of both pleasure and horror. Postmodern art departs from Modern art in that it seeks to marry form to aesthetic by employing structural elements intended to bring about feelings of both pleasure and discomfort where modernism deals with sublime content in a way that is formally pleasing (234-236). Where much Modern art seeks to provide the unity and coherence that is lacking in contemporary life through its form, in other words, postmodern art celebrates fragmentation, unreliability, and a degree of incoherence. Whether it is through his experiments with the sonnet in *Cromwell* and elsewhere, or through his creation of a form that resists itself in *The Book of Judas*, or through his translations of Greek tragedies in a way that gestures towards the many reinterpretations that have lead up to his own, Kennelly demonstrates the capacity of literary forms to absorb difference and still maintain something of the history and particularity that distinguish them. Kennelly's failure to remain faithful to the conventions that usually dictate how we read and understand literature makes for challenging reading, his attraction to provocateurs makes for uncomfortable reading, but these things also create space for the reader to contribute to the meaning that materializes from his work.

Kennelly's validation of the individual consciousness in the midst of the collective is important with respect to his readers as well as the voices that fill his writing, because his works require the reader to move in and out of traditional frames of reference in order to be fully appreciated. Kennelly writes of Gaelic epic literature in *Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic* that its "outstanding characteristic is its sprawling immensity" (MIPIE 1). He continues, saying that "an idea of this immensity may be gained from a consideration, not merely of the huge amount of existing manuscripts, but also of those which have been lost" (MIPIE 1). The poem sequences and plays that I have covered in this thesis similarly signal the immensity of all of the voices and forms that they leave out through their spirited confirmation of plurality and the ongoing evolution of all things on an endless scale. Kennelly's invitation to the insightful reader to engage creatively and continuously with his writing is an answer to the depthless attributed to the postmodern condition by Fredric Jameson and others. With reference to the texts covered in this thesis, the reader must adopt the posture of a hero in the epic sense of that word and order the plural voices in terms of models that we choose deliberately. No matter that it is impossible to say all of what is happening now, or that the raw materials available to us are more fleeting and numerous than ever before. Underlying this approach to writing is the same validation of individual subjectivity that made the vast changes in Irish religious authority, gender dynamics and other aspects of culture at the turn of the twenty-first century possible.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Full-Length Works by Brendan Kennelly (in chronological order)

*Cast a Cold Eye* (with Rudi Holzapfel). Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1961.

*The Rain, the Moon* (with Rudi Holzapfel). Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1961.

*The Dark About Our Loves* (with Rudi Holzapfel). Dublin: John Augustine and Co., 1962.

*The Crooked Cross*: Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1963.

*Green Townlands: Poems* (with Rudi Holzapfel). Leeds: University Bibliography Press, 1963.

*Let Fall No Burning Leaf*. Dublin: New Square Publications, 1963.

*My Dark Fathers*. Dublin: New Square Publications, 1964.

*Up and At It*. Dublin: New Square Publications, 1965.

*Collection One: Getting Up Early*. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1966. (GUE)

*The Florentines*. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1967.

*Good Souls to Survive*. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1967.

*Modern Irish Poets and the Irish Epic*. Thesis: Trinity College Dublin, 1967.  
(MIPIE)

*Dream of a Black Fox*. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1968. (DBF)

*Selected Poems*. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1969.

*A Drinking Cup: Poems from the Irish*. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1970.

*Bread*. Dublin: Tara Telephone Publications, 1971.

*Selected Poems*. Enlarged ed. New York: Dutton, 1971.

*Love Cry*. Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1972. (LC)

*Salvation, the Stranger*. Dublin: Tara Telephone Publications, 1972.

*The Voices*. Dublin: Gallery Books, 1973.

*Shelley in Dublin*. Dublin: Anna Livia Books, 1974 (SID)

*A Kind of Trust*. Dublin: Gallery Books, 1975.

*New and Selected Poems*. Ed. Peter Fallon. Dublin: Gallery Books, 1976.



- Islandman*. Dublin: Profile Press, 1977.
- The Visitor*. Dublin: St. Bueno's Press, 1978.
- A Small Light: Ten Songs of O'Connor of Carrigafoyle*. Dublin: Gallery Press, 1979.
- Evasions* (also entitled *In Spite of the Wise*). Dublin: Trinity Closet Press, 1979.
- In Spite of the Wise* (also entitled *Evasions*). Dublin: Trinity Closet Press, 1979.
- The Boats Are Home*. Dublin: Gallery Books, 1980.
- Ed. *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse*. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1981.
- Shelley in Dublin*. Rev. ed. Dublin: Beaver Row Press, 1982.
- The House That Jack Didn't Build*. Dublin: Beaver Row Press, 1982.
- Cromwell: A Poem*. Dublin: Beaver Row Press, 1983.
- Moloney Up and At It*. Dublin: Mercier Press, 1984.
- Selected Poems*. Ed. Kevin Byrne. Dublin: Kerrymount Publications 1985.
- Cromwell: A Poem*. Corrected ed. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1987. (C)
- Mary: From the Irish*. Dublin: Aisling Press, 1987.
- Love of Ireland: Poems From the Irish*. Dublin: Mercier Press, 1989.
- A Time for Voices: Selected Poems 1960-1990*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1990.
- The Book of Judas*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991. (BO)
- Euripides' Medea: A New Version*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991. (M)
- Breathing Spaces: Early Poems*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992.
- Joycechoice: The Poems in Verse and Prose*. Ed. A. Norman Jeffares and Brendan Kennelly. London: Kyle Cathie, 1992.
- Between Innocence and Peace: Favourite Poems of Ireland*. Dublin: Mercier Press, 1993.

- Euripides' The Trojan Women: A New Version*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993. (TW)
- Donovan, Katie, A. Norman Jeffares, and Brendan Kennelly, Eds. *Ireland's Women: Writings Past and Present*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994.
- Journey Into Joy: Selected Prose*. Ed. Åke Persson. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994. (JJ)
- Donovan, Katie and Brendan Kennelly, Eds. *Dublins*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995.
- James Joyce: The Poems in Verse and Prose* (originally printed as *Joycechoice* in 1992). Ed. A. Norman Jeffares and Brendan Kennelly. London: Kyle Cathie, 1996.
- Moloney Up and At It*. 2nd ed. Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995.
- Poetry My Arse*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995. (PMA)
- Blood Wedding (Bodos de Sangre): A New Version*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1996. (BW)
- Podium*. Tralee : Samhlaíocht Chiarraí, 1996.
- Sophocles' Antigone: A New Version*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1996. (A)
- Words for Women: Poems*. Dublin: Poetry Ireland, 1997.
- The Man Made of Rain*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998. (MMOR)
- The Singing Tree*. Newry: Abbey, 1998. (TST)
- Two: In Memory of David Webb*. Dublin: Trinity Closet Press, 1998.
- Begin*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1999.
- Glimpses*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2001.
- The Little Book of Judas*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2002. (LBOJ)
- Martial Art*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2003.
- Familiar Strangers: New & Selected Poems 1960-2004*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2004. (FS)
- Now*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2006.



*When Then Is Now: Three Greek Tragedies*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2006 (WTIN)

*Reservoir Voices*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2009.

*The Essential Brendan Kennelly: Selected Poems*. Ed. Terence Brown and Michael Longley. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2011. (EBK)

### Journalism by Brendan Kennelly

(in chronological order)

"Defeat Is Never the End for a Man of Heart." *Irish Times*, 20 September 1980: 5.

"Romantic Ireland Not Dead and Gone." *Irish Independent*, 31 December 1986: vi.

"Women and Love." *Irish Independent*, 8 July 1989: 9.

"The Mythology of Deprivation." *Irish Independent*, 14 June 1989: 10.

"The Reasons Why I Want to March in Pearse's Parade." *Irish Independent (Easter Rising Supplement)*, 29-30 March 1991: 3.

"New Life in the Arts." *Irish Independent*, 17 April 1991: 10.

"What Drove Me to Do That Ad." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 6 July 1991: 9.

"We Need This Orgy." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 2 November 1991: 13.

"Bringing Irish Writing to Europe and Beyond." *Irish Independent*, 25, 25, 27 December 1991: 21.

"No One Has Done More for the Arts." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 25 January 1992: 11.

"Long Live Charlie." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 1 February 1992: 12.

"Dublin the Largest Village in Europe and I love It!" *Kerryman (Kerry Person of the Year Supplement)*, 7 February 1992: 4-5.

"Mother Wonder." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 28 March 1992: 12.

"Dublin Dreams." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 21 November 1992: 17.

"Why We're Lucky to Have Sinead." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 12 June 1993: 2.

Books, Theses, and Articles on Brendan Kennelly

Bizot, Richard. "Mastering the Colonizer's Tongue: Yeats, Joyce, and Their Successors in the Irish Schoolroom." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*. No. 30, Fall '97

Brown, Terence. "Kennelly as Novelist". *Dark Fathers Into Light: Brendan Kennelly*. Ed. Richard Pine. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994.

Carty, Ciaran. "The enemies of learning ... and the tyranny of commonsense. Brendan Kennelly: 'It's very hard to be educated coming through an Irish system.'" *Sunday Independent*, 8 February 1981.

Gwynn, Frances. *Theme and Craft in the Poetry of Brendan Kennelly: 1959-1968*. Diss. Trinity College Dublin, 1976.

Jones, Richard. "'Listening Sponge': An Interview With Brendan Kennelly." *Nua: Studies in Contemporary Irish Writing* 1:2 (1998): 63-80.

Kearney, Richard. *Myth, History, and Literary Tradition: Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, Brendan Kennelly*. Dundalk: UDC Arts Committee, 1989.

Longley, Edna. "Poetic Forms and Social Malformations." *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Ed. Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene. London: Macmillan Press, 1989.

McDonagh, John. *Brendan Kennelly: A Host of Ghosts*. Contemporary Irish Writers. Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2004.

Persson, Åke. "A Walk through the Scars: From Pain to Healing in Brendan Kennelly's 'Tetralogy'— *Cromwell* (1983), *The Book of Judas* (1991), *Poetry My Arse* (1995), and *The Man Made of Rain* (1998)." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 8:1 (2002 Spring): 151-71.

- *Betraying the Age: Social and Artistic Protest in Brendan Kennelly's Work*. Gothenburg: Gothenburg Studies in English, 2000.

- Ed. *This Fellow With the Fabulous Smile: A Tribute to Brendan Kennelly*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1996.



Pine, Richard, ed. *Dark Fathers Into Light: Brendan Kennelly*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994.

- "Q.&A. with Brendan Kennelly." *Irish Literary Supplement*. Spring 1990. 21-22.

Quinn, Gerard. "Brendan Kennelly: Victors and Victims." *The Irish Review* 9 (1990): 44-54.

Sedlmayr, Gerold. *Brendan Kennelly's Literary Works: The Developing Art of an Irish Writer, 1959-2000*. Lampeter: The Edward Mellen Press, 2005.

### Works Related to *Cromwell*

Allison, Jonathan. "Cromwell: Hosting the Ghosts." *Dark Fathers Into Light: Brendan Kennelly*. Ed. Richard Pine.

Belshaw, Jennifer. *The Artistic Nightmare: An Analysis of the Sonnet Form in Brendan Kennelly's Cromwell*. Diss. Trinity College Dublin, 1988.

Brown, Terence. "Awakening from the Nightmare: History and Contemporary Literature." *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays*. Mullingar: Lilliput Press, 1988.

- "Telling Tales: Kennelly's *Cromwell*, Muldoon's 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants.'" *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature*. Gerrards Cross : Colin Smythe, 1995.

Healey, John. "From Drogheda to Darkley." *Irish Times*, 5 December 1983: 10.

Hederman, Mark Patrick. "The Monster in the Irish Psyche." *Irish Literary Supplement*, No. 2, Fall 1984.

Hirst, K. E. Désirée. "The Southern Irish Poets of the Late 20th Century." *Anglo-Irish and Irish Literature: Aspects of Language and Culture*. 2 vols. Ed. Birgit Bramsbäck and Martin Croghan. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1988.

Johnstone, Robert. "Brendan Speaks to Oliver's Countrymen." *Krino*, No. 5, Spring 1988.

Kelly, Conor. "Waking From History's Nightmare." *Sunday Tribune (Inside Tribune)*, 22 January 1984.

Kingston, Jeremy. "A Candle Held to Brutality." *Times*, 4 March 1991.

Longley, Edna. "Beyond the Incestuous Irish Anger." *Fortnight*, No. 204, 1984.

Lucy, Seán. "Cromwell's Curse." *Tablet*, 29 September 1984.

O'Connor, Honor. "Sounds and Voices: Aspects of Contemporary Irish Music and Poetry." *Anglo-Irish and Irish Literature: Aspects of Language and Culture*. 2 vols. Ed. Birgit Bramsbäck and Martin Croghan. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1988.

Tóibín, Colm. "Brendan Kennelly Finds a Big Theme." *Sunday Independent*, 1 February 1987.

Works Related to *The Book of Judas*

Bolger, Dermot. "A Poetic Cause for Celebration in Cynical Times." *Sunday Tribune*, 10 November 1991: 3.

Bono [Paul Hewson]. "Nothing Compares to You ..." *Sunday Press (Living)*, 8 December 1991: 2.

Brennan, Rory. "From U2 to Utopia." *Books Ireland*. May 1992.

Cahill, Eileen. "Book Reviews." *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*. No 29.1, Spring 1994.

Devitt, John. "The Treachery of Language." *Sunday Independent (Living and Leisure)*, 27 October 1991: 9.

Goodby, John. "Reviews." *Irish Review*. No 12, Spring/Summer 1992.

Hamil, Brendan. "Irregular Forces." *Fortnight: An Independent Review for Northern Ireland*. January 1992.

Johnston, Fred. "Cultural Differences." *Sunday Times (Books)*, 5 January 1992: 5:4-5.

Martin, Augustine. "No One Is Forgiven." *Irish Independent*, 7 December 1991: 20.

Persson, Åke. "Kennelly Nails the Reader." *Krino*. No. 12, Winter 1991.

Pine, Richard. "No Answers, Only Questions." *Irish Literary Supplement*. No 11.2, Fall 1992.

Roche, Anthony. "The Book of Judas: Parody, Double Cross, and Betrayal." *Dark Fathers Into Light*. Ed. Richard Pine.



- "Joycean Joust with Jesus and Judas." *Sunday Business Post*, 10 November 1991. C13.

Sirr, Peter. "A Laneway Packed With Shadows." *Irish Times (Weekend)*, 21 December 1991: 9.

Thorpe, Adam. "Poem-Bombs Ignite." *Observer (Books)*, 1 March 1992: 63.

Works Related to *Antigone*, *Medea*, and *The Trojan Women*

Battersby, Eileen. "Womanpower." *Fortnight: An Independent Review for Northern Ireland*. July/August 1993.

Brennan, Brian. "Broken Spells." *Sunday Independent*, 9 July 1989: 19.

Colgan, Gerry. "'Medea' at the Gate." *Irish Times*, 7 July 1989: 12.

Dillon, John. "Euripides in Translation." *Irish Literary Supplement*. No. 13, Fall 1994.

Finegan, John. "Medea—Passionate and Strong." *Evening Herald*, 6 October 1988: 10.

Harding, Tim. "Return of Antigone." *Sunday Press*, 4 May 1986: 17.

McCracken, Kathleen. "Rage for a New Order: Brendan Kennelly's Plays for Women." *Dark Fathers Into Light*. Ed. Richard Pine.

McDonald, Marianne. "'A Bomb at the Door': Kennelly's Medea." *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 28:2 (1993):129-37.

- "Rebel Women: Brendan Kennelly's Versions of Irish Tragedy." *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua: A Quarterly Record of Irish Studies* 9:3 (2005): 123-36.

Mead, Kathryn. "An Electra-fying Medea." (Irish) *Independent*, 26 July 1989, 26.

Nowlan, David. "Antigone at the Peacock." *Irish Times*, 29 April 1986: 10.

- "'Medea', at the RDS." *Irish Times*, 6 October 1988: 12.

- "Subverting Ancient Greek Tragedy." *Irish Times*, 3 June 1993: 10.

Roche, Anthony. "Ireland's Antigones: Tragedy North and South." *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Culture*. Ed. Michael Kenneally. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1988.

Spencer, Charles. "True to *Medea*." *Daily Telegraph*, 20 July 1989: 18.

Taplin, Oliver. "Tongue-lashing." *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 July- 3 August 1989: 824.

Tóibín, Colm. "Oh, oh, *Antigone*." *Sunday Independent*. 4 May 1986: 17.

Younger, Kelly. "From 'Dionysus in Dublin: Brendan Kennelly's Greek Trilogy': An Interview with the Author." *Journal of the Irish Theatre Forum Homepage*. 31 May, 1998. University College Dublin. 8 January 2011. <<http://www.ucd.ie/irthfrm/kyounger.htm>>.

- *Irish Adaptations of Greek Tragedies: Dionysus in Ireland*. Studies in Comparative Literature. Vol 40. Lewiston: The Edward Mellen Press, 2001.

- "Irish Antigones: Burying the Colonial Symptom." *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique* 11 (2006): 148-62.

#### Works Related to *Poetry My Arse*

Boran, Pat. "From the Fragile to the Wild." *Sunday Tribune (Magazine)*, 1 October 1995: 20.

Brennan, Rory. "Bottom of the Night." *Irish Independent (Weekender)*, 28 October 1995: 11.

Herron, Tom. "Book Reviews." *Irish Studies Review*. No. 14, Spring 1996.

Lynch, Brian. "Frightening and Frightened Humanity." *Irish Times (Weekend)*, 28 October 1995: 9.

Murphy, Gerry. "Put the Poetic Wheels on That, Toyota!" *Cork Examiner (Weekend)*, 14 October 1995: 31.

Persson, Åke. "Whatever You Say, Say Something." *Irish Literary Supplement*. No. 15, Spring 1996.

Sedlmayr, Gerold. "I am Ace de Horner, Who's That?: Identity in Brendan Kennelly's *Poetry My Arse*." *New Voices in Irish Criticism* 3. Ed. Karen Vandavelde. New Voices Series. Dublin: Four Courts, 2002: 173-180.

#### Works Related to *The Man Made of Rain*

Denman, Peter. "Book Reviews." *Irish University Review*. No. 28, Autumn/Winter 1998.



Duggan, Michael. "Across from Fern Hill." *PN Review* 126. Vol. 25 No. 4, March/April 1999.

Monahan, Noel. "Poetry." *W.P. Journal: Literature and Arts Bimonthly*. November/December 1998.

Roche, Anthony. "An Affair of the Heart." *Irish Literary Supplement*. No. 17, Fall 1998.

#### Other Books, Theses, and Articles

Abbott, Wilbur Cortez, Ed. *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2: The Commonwealth. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Aitken, Stuart C. "Dreams and Nightmares." *The Sage Companion to the City*. Ed. Tim Hall, Phil Hubbard, and John Rennie Short. London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008.

Allen, Kieran. *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Arnold, Bruce. *The Spire: And Other Essays in Modern Irish Culture*. Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003.

Arnold, Matthew. "On the Study of Celtic Literature." *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*. Ed. R.H. Super. Lectures and Essays in Criticism. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1962.

Bakhtin, M. M. (Mikhail Mikhaïlovich). *Rabelais and his world*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968.

Barnes, Monica. "From: Dáil Éireann Parliamentary Debates Official Report (1986)." *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Vol 5. Ed. Angela Bouke et al.

Battersby, Christine. "Her Body/Her Boundaries." *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Ed. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

Beckett, Samuel. *Not I. Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986.

- *Waiting for Godot. Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986.

- *Watt*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.

- Blok, Josine H. "Virtual Voices: Towards a Choreography of Women's Speech in Classical Athens." *Making Silence Speak*. Eds. André Lardinois and Laura McClure.
- Boland, Eavan. *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- Boland, Eavan, and Mark Strand. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.
- Bongie, Elizabeth Bryson. "Heroic Elements in the *Medea* of Euripides." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*. Vol. 107, 1977.
- Brown, Terence. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004.
- Bourke, Angela, Sionhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, et al Eds. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Women's Writing and Traditions*. Vols 4-5. Cork: Cork University Press, 2002.
- Bradley, Anthony, Ed. *Contemporary Irish Poetry: An Anthology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Caws, Mary Ann, Ed. *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*. London: Gordon and Breach, 1991.
- Coleman, Steve and Colin Coulter, Eds. *The End of Irish History? Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Connelly, Alpha, Ed. "The Law and Private Life in the Republic of Ireland." *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Vol 5. Ed. Angela Bouke et al.
- Connor, Steven, Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Corcoran, Neil. *Reading Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Critchley, Simon. *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- Deane, Seamus. *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980*. London: Faber, 1985.



- Ed. "From *Táin Bó Cúailnge*." *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Vol. 1. London: Faber & Faber, 1991
- and Seamus Heaney, "Unhappy and at Home." *The Crane Bag*. Vol. 1, No.1, 1977. 61-67.
- Dentith, Simon. *Parody*. The New Critical Idiom. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Dawe, Gerald. *False Faces: Poetry, Politics & Place*. Belfast: Lagan Press, 1994.
- *How's the Poetry Going? Literary Politics & Ireland Today*. London: Lagan Press, 1993.
- De Valera, Eamon. "The Ireland That We Dreamed Of." *Speeches and Statements by Eamon De Valera*. Ed. Maurice Moynihan. Dublin: St Martin's Press, 1980.
- Drolet, Michael, ed. *The Postmodern Reader: Foundational Texts*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Eagleton, Robert. "Postmodernism and Ethics Against the Metaphysics of Comprehension." *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Steven Connor.
- Euripides. *Medea. Ten Plays by Euripides*. Trans. Moses Hadas and John McLean. London: Bantam Books, 1984.
- *Medea. Euripides Medea and Other Plays*. Trans. James Morwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- *The Trojan Women. Ten Plays by Euripides*. Trans. Moses Hadas and John McLean.
- Fennell, Desmond. *Whatever you say, say nothing: why Seamus Heaney is no. 1*. Dublin: ELO Publications, 1991.
- Flower, Robin. *The Irish Tradition*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1994.
- Foster, Roy. *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change*. London: Allen Lane, 2007.
- "We Are All Revisionists Now." *Irish Review*, No. 1, 1986.
- Fuller, John. *The Sonnet*. The Critical Idiom. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1972.

- Goodby, John. *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*. London: Faber and Faber, 1961.
- Griffith, Mark. "Antigone and Her Sister(s): Embodying Women in Greek Tragedy." *Making Silence Speak*. Eds. André Lardinois and Laura McClure.
- Hall, Edith. "Introduction." *Euripides Medea and Other Plays*. Trans. James Morwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Harmon, Maurice, Ed. *Irish poetry after Yeats : Seven poets: Austin Clarke; Richard Murphy; Patrick Kavanagh; Thomas Kinsella; Denis Devlin; John Montague; Seamus Heaney*. Portmarnock (Co. Dublin): Wolfhound Press, 1979.
- Harris, Susan Canon. *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002.
- Hatto, A. T. "Towards an Anatomy of Heroic and Epic Poetry." *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry*. Vol. 2: Characteristics and Techniques. Ed. J.B. Hainsworth. London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1989. 145-298.
- Heaney, Seamus. "Feeling into Works." *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*. London: Faber & Faber, 1980.
- and Seamus Deane, "Unhappy and at Home." *The Crane Bag*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 1977. 61-67.
- Hill, Myrtle. *Women In Ireland: A Century of Change*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003.
- Hyde, Douglas. *The Story of Early Gaelic Literature*. London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1922.
- Jackson, John Wyse and Hector McDonnell, Eds. *Dublin's Other Poetry: Rhymes and Songs of the City*. Dublin : Lilliput Press, 2009.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*. Vol. 1, No. 146. July/August 1984.
- *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism*. London : Verso, 1990.



- Jencks, Charles. *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*. 6th ed. London: Academy Editions: 1991.
- Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Johnson, Toni O'Brien and David Cairns, Eds. *Gender in Irish Writing*. Milton Keynes : Open University Press, 1991.
- Johnston, Dillon. *Irish Poetry After Joyce*. Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
- Keohane, Kieran and Carmen Kuhling. *Collision Culture: Transformations in Everyday Life in Ireland*. Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2005.
- Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland*. London: Jonathan Cape, Random House, 1995.
- Kinsella, Thomas, Ed. *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Klages, Mary. *Literary theory : a guide for the perplexed*. London: Continuum, 2006.
- Lardinois, André and Laura McClure, Eds. *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Lennard, John. *The Poetry Handbook*. 2nd Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "The Differend: Phrases in Dispute." *The Postmodern Reader: Foundational Texts*. Ed. Michael Drolet.
- "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge." *The Postmodern Reader: Foundational Texts*. Ed. Michael Drolet.
- "Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern." *The Postmodern Reader: Foundational Texts*. Ed. Michael Drolet.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Levinas Reader*. Ed. Sean Hand. Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Lloyd, David. *Ireland After History*. Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1999.

- Lucy, Seán, Ed. *Irish Poets in English: The Thomas Davis Lectures in Irish Poetry*. Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1973.
- Longley, Edna. "From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands." *The Living Stream: Literature & Revisionism in Ireland*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994.
- McAleese, Mary, Betty Purcell, and Mary Robinson. "Dialogue." *The Crane Bag*. Vol. 4. No. 1. 1980.
- Miller, Dean A. *The Epic Hero*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Montague, John, Ed. *The Faber Book of Irish Verse*. London: Faber, 1974.
- Morwood, James. "Explanatory Notes." *Euripides Medea and Other Plays*. Trans. James Morwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Moylan, Tom. "Irish Voyages and Visions: Pre-figuring, Re-configuring Utopia." *Utopian Studies*. Vol. 18. No. 3. 2007.
- Muldoon, Paul, Ed. *Contemporary Irish Poetry*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986.
- Murphy, Gerard. "Notes on Aisling Poetry" *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies*. Vo.1. No. 1. 1939.
- Ní Dhonnchadha, Máirín, and Theo Dorgan, Eds. *Revising the Rising*. Derry: Field Day, 1991.
- O'Brien, Mags. "From: Divorce? Facing the Issues of Marital Breakdown." *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Vol. 5. Ed. Angela Bouke et al.
- O'Casey, Seán. *The Plough and the Stars*. Seán O'Casey: Three Dublin Plays. London: Faber and Faber, 1998.
- Ó Madagáin, Breandán. "Keening." *Caointe agus seancheolta eile: Keening and other old Irish musics*. Indreabhán : Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2005.
- Parrish, Matt. "Trying to Find Now" (an interview with William Gibson). *The Boston Pheonix*, 4 January 2012.
- Pearse, Pádraic. "Peace and the Gael". CELT (Corpus of Electronic Texts) Homepage. 21 April, 1998. University College Cork. 7 June, 2011. <<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E900007-009/>>.



- Pethica, James, Ed. *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.
- Randolph, Mary Claire. "Early Irish Satire and the White-Thorn Tree." *Folklore*. Vol. 54. No. 3. Sept. 1943
- Robinson, Mary. "Inaugural Speech." Given by Her Excellency Mary Robinson, President of Ireland, in Dublin Castle on Monday, December 3, 1990.  
<<http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/robinson/inaugural.html>>.
- Rose, Margaret A. *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1993.
- Rutherford, Richard. "Introduction." *Alcestis and other plays / Euripides*. Trans. John Davie. London : Penguin Books, 1996.
- Said, Edward. *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*. Derry: Field Day, 1988.
- Sophocles. *Antigone*. Trans. Reginald Gibbons and Charles Segal. The Greek Tragedy in New Translations. Eds. Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Spearing, A.C. *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Spenser, Edmund. *A View of the Present State of Ireland. The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*. Ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Frederick Morgan Padelford and Ray Heffner. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949.
- Stewart, A.T.Q. *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1977.
- Stuttard, David. *An Introduction to Trojan Women: Including an Adaptation of the Play*. Brighton: Company Dionysus, 2005.
- Suleri, Sara. *Meatless Days*. London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1990.
- Trevor, William. *A Writer's Ireland: Landscape in Literature*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1984.
- Williams, John Ellis Caerwyn. *The Court Poet in Medieval Ireland*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Williamson, Margaret. "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*. *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality*. Ed. Anton Powell. London: Routledge, 1990.

Yeats, William Butler. "Per Amica Silentia Lunae." *Mythologies: William Butler Yeats*. New York : Simon & Schuster, 1998

- *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose*. Ed. James Pethica.