Abstract
Perhaps it was the emergence of global media geographies of Spätkapitalismus (Late Capitalism) which provoked Deleuze and Guattari in their collaborative text Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1983) to claim that ‘the schizophrenic voyage is the only kind there is.’ However with the proliferation of digital technology, it is now possible to explore the schizoid disassociation between modern and ‘hyper-global’ conceptions of time and space in artistic and inventive manners. This paper will discuss in the context of current critical and geographical thought the performance of a cybernetic assembly A Relay of Joy. Utilizing the faculties of aurality and tactility for playing sounds in response to marks placed on a sheet of paper. The user rendered as a Beckettian figure is hooded, so the sound relays the location of the mark, assisting coordination. The intention is to draw a face through a process of mental mapping that emerges in response to sound rather than sight. The implications of this device are strange, as initially it is difficult to work out what is happening. Using the machine, the user is locked into a cybernetic assembly, or an “abstract machine.” Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘abstract machine’ comprises further abstractions of the body as a fragmented form. The machine deals with the abstractions of sound, stripping out sight in an attempt to locate a face that’s going to emerge from touch. The sense impressions are perverted: it’s a deliberate ill effect that turns the machine, as the crisis of late capitalist modernity turns in the subject.
The plane is concerned only with movement and rests, with dynamic affective charges: the plane will be perceived with whatever it makes us perceive, and then only bit by bit. Our ways of living, thinking or writing change according to the plane upon which we find ourselves.¹

Giles Deleuze. Spinoza: Practical Philosophy

There is an extraordinarily fine topology that relies not on points or objects but rather on haeccties⁴ on sets of relations [...] it is a tactile space, or rather 'haptic', a sonorous much more than a visual space. The variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature…

Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. A Thousand Plateaus

all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath…

Samuel Beckett. Molloy

**Introduction (Charles Travis)**

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s enigmatic and controversial aphorism – ‘the schizophrenic voyage is the only kind there is,’ from Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1983) now seems prescient as quotidian senses of place and everyday life of the early twenty-first century become increasingly disassociated in the spatial and temporal implosions and fragmentations fostered by ‘hyper-global’ mediascapes in this turbulent period of Spätkapitalismus⁶ (Late Capitalism). At recent conference on the Digital Humanities at Cambridge University in September 2008, I as a geographer, was struck by a thematic scope which intimated to a certain extent, the interdisciplinary synergy characterized by the broad practice of geography. However, the main items on the program involved ongoing collaborations between digital media, the humanities and arts. Aside from the largely utilitarian use of Geographical Information Systems in climatic, environmental and planning subfields, geography as a discipline, particularly the humanistic side, has been reluctant to engage in the almost ubiquitous presence of digital media, in fostering and furthering research in its more esoteric, artistic and conceptual dimensions.

Having recently completed a doctorate in Irish literary geography of the early twentieth century, I was particularly drawn to the Nobel laureate Samuel Beckett, and the perceptive shift from a Cartesian verisimilitude marking his early prose and poetry to the more phenomenological, physically embodied (being-in-the-world) settings of his later works, populated by figures on bicycles wearing bowler hats, light bulbs
hanging on wires in lonely rooms, and desolate landscapes; in particular the essential
milieu of his seminal drama Waiting for Godot (1952) a work both contemporaneous
with, and allusive of the mid twentieth century emergence of Spätkapitalismus, and its
fractal, non linear geographies.

Consequently, as I wandered the conference exhibit hall, I was struck by a figure
hooded by a black foam tube that approximated a brimless, exaggerated Edwardian
top hat, almost Dr. Seussian in nature (Picture 1). Amidst the lined tables occupied by
academic book publishers and sellers, with company logos and complimentary biros,
the figure stood in the corner of two grey partitions, like a character from a Beckett play
before an easel with a piece of charcoal in his hand blindly sketching lines on a sheet
of paper. The outline of a face began to emerge, accompanied by a series of electronic
pops and blips, industrial screeches, and orgasmic moans, which caught the startled
and confused attention of the hall’s more staid exhibitors. On close examination, it was
revealed that cables ran from the back of the easel to a MacBook Pro, which was emitting
the sounds in concert with the emerging visage of a face. Sensors were embedded in the
easel, and as the hooded figure traced his charcoal across one of the copper buttons lying
under the artistic foolscap, a sound/noise ejaculated from the silver MacBook’s tiny
perforated speakers.

The figure soon unhooded, and I introduced myself to the scholar and digital artist
Tim Long, whose interests corresponded with Deleuze and Guattari and the ‘grotesque.’
As the inventor of the ‘drawing machine’ exhibited as A Relay of Joy, Long stated in the

Picture 1
A Relay of Joy: the drawing machine.
conference program that his drawing machine comprised ‘further abstractions of the
body as a fragmented form’ dealing with abstractions of sound, stripping out sight in
an attempt to locate a face that’s going to emerge from touch.’ He kindly offered me an
opportunity to try out the machine; soon I was hooded and blindly sketching a face,
partly guided by the machine’s noises- partly guided by my own mental mappings of a
generic human face, and the sooty feel of charcoal between my index finger and thumb.
Phenomenologically, I entered a different space, a plane in which the conventional
habits of visual artistic practice were confined to tactility and aurality- the visual
sense nullified by the hooding. Though I was creating a visual representation, visual
perception was not a component involved in producing a visage; instead the cybernetic
assembly comprising USB cables and the sound card of a MacBook Pro, extended my
non visual acuity. After reflecting upon my observation of, and participation with Long’s
A Relay of Joy, I was struck immediately by the realization that the virtual elements of
the digital media drawing machine conflued with its ‘actual’ embodied performance. In
doing so from the perspective of critical geography, the piece intimated a ‘Deleuzean
event,’7 being a conception in practice that could provide a reconceptualization of space
and time. As Marcus Doel and David Clarke note:

The Deleuzean event is far removed from the commonsensical notion of
something that is simply present at hand…One is reminded of the stuttering’
events in the plays of Samuel Beckett…In Deleuze’s version of empiricism
the event is as much virtual as it is actual…Events are explosive: they unsettle
what appears to be given, and breathe life into what appears to be spent.8

Such an ‘event’ I felt, could aid in illuminating non-representational theory’s, foci on
performance, the body/machine. Secondly I realized I had been suddenly placed in an
interstitial space of fieldwork in which my interests in embodied geographies, critical
theory, mass media and art collided in a very serendipitous manner. In a sense, as my
path crossed the ‘event’ of Tim Long’s abstract machine performance, I experienced what
Deleuze would call a ‘creative encounter’ – that would force thought and estrangement
from the conventions of my daily habits and memories.

The paper is divided in two main sections. The first will discuss the aesthetic
collapse of Euclidian and Cartesian perspective and as Deleuze and Guattari note, the
‘pathological’ rise of Spätkapitalismus in the twentieth century, to contextualize Long’s
digital media work and situate its embodied performance with current Deleuzean and
non-representational discourses in geographical thought. The second section, authored
by Tim Long, will describe the technical and theoretical dimensions of his drawing
machine. A conclusion will follow which will proffer more questions than answers, and
a brief discussion, to situate A Relay of Joy in the ‘hyper-global’ terrae incognitae of the
twenty-first century’s emerging mediascapes.
The Collapse Of Euclidian And Cartesian Perspective; The Rise Of The Media Geographies Of Spätkapitalismus

To ‘map’ the salience of Long’s A Relay of Joy in illustrating elements of Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of the pathologies of Spätkapitalismus in their collaborative text Anti Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1983), and concepts associated with geography’s current engagement with ‘non-representational theory, it is necessary to contextualize his ‘abstract machine’ in the aesthetic and technological developments of the early to late twentieth century which gave birth to the ‘hyper-global’ mediascape in which it operates. In Western civilization, geography has traditionally favored the visual perspective in its depiction and representation of subject matter.

From the global scale to intimate somatographies, Euclidian and Cartesian perspectives have historically dominated the phenomenological from the eighteenth century onwards by providing ontological and epistemological framings which reinforce the conventional structures of power, commodification, class, ethnicity and gender espoused by Western society. For Edmund Husserl, the German Phenomenologist, speaking in 1935 ‘the roots of the crisis lay at the beginning of the Modern Era, in Galileo and Descartes, in the one-sided nature of the European sciences, which reduced the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation and put the concrete world of life, die Lebenswelt, as he called it, beyond their horizon.’

Henri Lefebvre, noted that this crisis manifested in the early decades of the twentieth century following the fin de siècle, when ‘the main reference systems of social practice in Europe disintegrated and even collapsed. What had seemed established for good during the belle époque of the bourgeoisie came to an end: in particular, space and time, their representation and reality indissociably linked. In scientific knowledge, the old Euclidian and Newtonian space gave way to Einsteinian relativity. But at the same time, as is evident from the painting of the period—Cézanne first of all, then analytical Cubism—perceptible
space and perspective disintegrated. The line of horizon, optical meeting-point of parallel lines, disappeared from paintings.  

However, an Enlightenment debate on the nature and composition of space between Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and Isaac Newton (1642-1727), had anticipated the perceptual shift that was recognized by Woolf, Husserl and others and corresponded with the emergence of mass media forms of film and radio during the early twentieth century. In the debate, Leibniz proposed that space was relational and created solely between objects. This stood in opposition to Newton’s view of space (commensurate with Descartes’) as absolute, infinite, stable and consisting of ‘God’s boundless uniform sensorium.’ In Marshall McLuhan’s theory of media, Newton’s perspective embraced a visual bias reflective of the early development of ‘print culture’ created by the technological innovation of the Gutenberg printing press. McLuhan noted that Leibniz’s conception of space incorporated an ‘acoustic’ sensibility which is finite, flexible and characteristic of oral or pre-print cultures, and manifests itself in the current digital age of Spätkapitalismus through the visual aurality of global broadcast cable news and entertainment networks.

The advent of broadcast media in the early twentieth century in the form of radio, film and later television laid the foundation for the mass consumption of (post) modern mediascapes, the McLuhan-like global-electronic extension of the human nervous system and the perceptual compression of time and space, which seems more in tune with Leibniz, than Descartes. The emergence of Spätkapitalismus mediascapes and Jean Baudrillard’s attendant conceptions of simulacra and hyperreality can be contextualized within an unprecedented historical confluence between nuclear science, electronic and digital technology and mass production and consumerism. Spätkapitalismus heralded the decline of the economy established by the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century and witnessed the emergence of ‘Information and Knowledge Economies’ of the early twenty first century.
However, despite the technological advances afforded by *Spätkapitalismus*, the events of 11 September 2001 witnessed occidental and oriental meta-narratives colliding in grotesque and absurd tableaux, and broadcast to the ‘corners’ of the earth with the stylistic conventions utilized to market Hollywood blockbusters.

Collapsing alongside the Twin Towers was the last premise of rationality undergirding Cartesian and Occidental supremacy, revealing a vulnerability to, as Deleuze and Guattari would describe, the ‘pathology’ of late capitalism, leaving many of occidental geographic epistemologies impotent in the face of *Spätkapitalismus* mediascapes which collapsed all previous Western framings of the experience of space and time. The ubiquity of the laptop and the worldwide web has fostered countless extensions of the human nervous system into this ‘pathology’, with interfaces as pedestrian as online commerce, pornographic saturation and the video tabloid of cable news networks. The spaces of flow enable and empower the spidery, black economies of international drug cartels, arms dealers and organized crime, and provide a ‘cyber swamp’ in which ‘terrorist’ organizations, pontificate, prosper and proliferate.

Individual states become vacuum tubes of consciousness chloroformed within their own media bubbles suggesting the artificiality of sovereignty observed in the works of Spinoza and Deleuze. In one sense, as Felix Stalder notes, echoing Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of ‘Deterroritarialization’ this is a result of a hyper-connected global society that structurally disconnects and devalues entire regions and populations, not just economically, but, perhaps more importantly, culturally. Despite the profound structural changes that have witnessed all that is solid melting into air, mainstream Western consciousness, to a large extent operates with the scaffolding erected during the Enlightenment.

As Lefebvre notes over the course of the twentieth century to present day: ‘“One” continued to live in Euclidean and Newtonian space, while knowledge moved in the space of relativity. Comparatively straightforward, Euclidian and Newtonian space still seemed absolute and intelligible because it was homogeneous and had nothing to do with time. As for time, it remained clock-time, and was itself homogeneous. People went on singing tonal melodies, with clear rhythms and harmonic accompaniment. They persisted with habitual perceptions and traditional representations, which were erected into eternal verities when in fact they derived from history, and had already been superseded in scientific knowledge.’ It is this schizo-affective disassociation between the quotidian rhythm of everyday life in an Euclidian frame and the spatial-temporal compression engendered under *Spätkapitalismus*, which Deleuze and Guattari diagnose in *Anti-Oedipus*.

The positivistic premises of the former underlay the efforts of geography’s ‘Quantitative Revolution’ of the 1950s and 1960s, which coincided with the emergence of *Spätkapitalismus*. Spatial science further emphasized the dualism of Descartes’ perspective and projected upon the plane of Euclidian and Newtonian space - ironically,
Einsteinian insights played a little if nonexistent role, resulting in an epistemological cul-de-sac for the discipline. As a consequence of the Quantitative Revolution’s rational emphasis, a re-examination of subjectivity by humanistic geographers, critiqued the illusory objectivity promulgated by the practitioners of spatial science and reinvigorated the saliency of the human component in furthering the theoretical boundaries of geography as it closed the twentieth century.

As Trevor Barnes noted “intellectual production is always materialized through human bodies, and nonhuman objects. Neither is present in the rationalist account. Humans in the rationalist account…are presented as isolated “brains in vats”, disembodied, disconnected, disembedded. In the sociology of scientific knowledge view, however, knowledge never arrives from pure brainpower, from only sparking synapses. It is the outcome of embodied practice.”14 And it is such an emphasis under the umbrella of ‘non’ representational theory’s foci on performance and the ‘body/machine’ that has emerged as the cutting edge of theoretical practice on the cusp of the twenty-first century. Influenced in part by Deleuze’s ‘ex-centric empiricism, non-dialectical conception and immanent materialism,’15 the ‘event’ and ‘embodied performance’ of Long’s ‘drawing machine’ can offer one reconceptualization of the relations of space and time as performed and experienced within the ‘thousand plateaus’ of Spätkapitalismus’s global mediascapes.
I have created a drawing machine for my own artistic experiments called a Relay of Joy that has been exhibited on four occasions, when members of the public were invited to use it. Firstly I will describe what it is, and how it works technically. Secondly, I will discuss its intent and discoveries about its properties that have emerged from its use, and finally I will speculate on the creative and philosophical contexts of the machine.

My concern with philosophy is practical, crash philosophy is the term I propose for my mode of investigation – a collision of being, thinking and making. This inquiry is part of my research into the grotesque image and imagination, which seeks to interrogate problematic embodiments and subjects, whose attributes can be aligned with Antonin Artaud’s ‘subjectile’, which is neither subject nor object.

The drawing machine sets out to challenge the stability of relationships between world and body, subject and object. If an ‘objectivist’ position could be proposed, then my research would be concerned with a difficult relationship between subject and object, body and world, although this would not necessitate an entirely irrational, or purely ‘subjectivist’ position. I will firstly describe the technical elements of the ‘abstract machine’ that I have constructed, before discussing its wider implications. The physical computing device I have constructed plays sounds in response to marks placed on a sheet of paper. The user is hooded, so the sound relays the location of the mark, assisting coordination. The intention is to draw a face, which emerges in response to sound rather than sight. Using the machine, the user is locked into a cybernetic assembly, or an ‘abstract machine.’ The abstract machine intends to align the user’s body with the machine, even though the user is stripped of normal sensory faculties. The machine deals with the abstractions
The sound samples can be modulated for reverb, delay and looping, offering the capacity to extend the sounds triggered from the drawing. I used an Apple Mac Powerbook, although a Windows PC could also be used with the same, or similar software installed. The fixed location of the piezo resistors permit me and other users to 'learn', where the sounds are. A more complex, sensitive pad, capable of sensing right across the entire drawing board would permit different compositions in sound and mark making to emerge. Users can hear the sounds generated from the contact of compressed charcoal, graphite, or oil paint applied with a palette knife. Rapid gestural marks will create a crescendo of sounds. By establishing roughly where the sensors are, users can orientate the development of the drawing, enabling a rough type of face, or face mapping to emerge. The 'Joy' of the title refers to the orgasmic moans and shouts sampled from porn movies downloaded from the Internet relayed by the machine. It is an ironic reference to a philosophical jouissance; and intellectual pleasure blending with a series of ejaculatory screams.
When first presented publicly, the intended violence of the machine, and my desire for it to disturb emerged diluted. The screams were not long enough – adjustments were required in the software to add delay and reverberation to the sounds played by the pencil or stylus on paper. I discovered that after working on the machine and taking off the hood, I was disoriented – taken aback, emerging from an outlandish and private experience. Users and observers were both intrigued and distressed. A greater investment of horror, more noises of sexual passion, played louder, and total blindness may have conveyed the sense of disorder to greater effect, or it may have repulsed all or any engagement, whereas I wished the machine to waver on an edge between modes of pleasure and distress, as a transformative condition, re-minding, or re-arranging the senses.

This may be where a distinction between my readings of horror and the grotesque exist; horror repulses, or turns the body away from involvement, but it seems to me that the grotesque lives in a nether-land between desire and repulsion. User response to what the machine was doing differed from my intention, prompting me to adapt its use. The machine’s purpose baffles me almost as much as anyone else, so I was pleased to be informed by users about its properties. It seemed to disturb people using it. It did not work well if a reasonable and logical approach was taken to making a drawing. The social action of watching someone drawing, when they cannot see who is watching them intrigued the viewer and gave them a privilege and power over the user, who wore a tall light rubber hood. Intended originally to make me look like a prick (dick-head), the significance of the hood was not apparent. A literal understanding of my intentions, disregarding metaphor or allegory, point to the ‘thing’—the event—as the meaning. It is concerned with production, rather than product – so experimentation, and the
engagement of sense stimulation are the outcome. Some observers brought their own allegories and metaphors to the event – the hood made the user look like they were in a Dada costume, or made them look like a torture victim. Meanings from the worlds of other people, other bodies, invested the device with meaning, from the world of art, and the world of other disturbing and violent interactions of bodies. The drawn results from the machine showed a remarkable variety; even though the individual was blind to their action of drawing, a latent imagination seemed to determine difference. Strategies, or ‘cheats’, included feeling for the edges of the paper before drawing, or slowly setting out an oval outline, which, despite efforts to make a ‘correct’ drawing, resulted in the features of the face being added in the wrong place.

By replacing sight with sound as the sensory perception of physical action the agency of sensation is brought into question, diminishing habitual sense, and tending towards non-sense, because the person cannot control the machine, or their drawing, but they can modulate the sounds by making marks they cannot see, but the sound gestures they make are not sensible (in alignment with common sense), offering a vulnerable tendency which could be outlandish or strange. For some users the fear of not controlling the process seemed evident through a careful overture of touching, finding the edges of the paper, tapping the sensors, prior to making any marks. In contrast other users began with broad gestural marks, indicating acceptance of the unreasonable requirements, and the impossibility of commanding the process, or the outcome. Physical and material speeds and affects might be privileged over cognitive decisions—a force and rhythm in the encounter as production might emerge—this is also the ambition to attain ‘joy’, to lose a sense, to be a thing, out of the world, but to re-encounter the connections of material bodies.

Two types of user reaction to the sensory deprivation can be hypothesized, one responding to ‘external cause’, the learnt approach demonstrated by the desire to delineate the face’s boundaries, and to create a ‘correct’ looking face, and secondly, a sensation privileging approach, learning from ‘internal cause’ evidenced by the body responding to feeling and sound feedback, resulting in a disordered drawing. Does a disordered experience emerge? There are no measurable units in the sensational experience that is intended to disorientate, so subjectivity is also, I hope, rendered outlandish and out of control as the body becomes redistributed within the emergent structure of the relay. Can the drawing machine relay this encounter, and heighten it? It will need to be improved, providing the body with headphones and more sensitive sensors. The environment will need to permit the user to engage with the reorientation of sensation with greater intensity, through the use of louder speakers, and possibly other physical stimulus, a vibrating floor, or a shaking device. Several spectators compared the hooded users to people subjected to sensory deprivation; the astonishing willingness shown by many users to put on the hood may evidence curiosity, possibly, but also a desire to experience something strange by disordering the senses. The drawing machine operates
with a type of sensory exchange, which is a method employed in the technology of torture – a normative reality is deliberately reoriented to undermine and disorder the body, and therefore, the mind’s capacity to assimilate sensory experience.

As starting point, the practical experiment is intended to extend speculation – it is an inventive machine. It intends to provoke an alternative to the body's habitual senses, perverting common sense, and shifting relations to physical surroundings and the difficulty of subject/object relations. One important discovery is that it is a social machine that encourages people to participate with it and talk about its significance. The drawing machine's central tenet of aesthetic interest resides in the obligation of the body to employ sensation in a disordered and abnormal frame. The word 'aesthetic' derives etymologically to *aisthētikos*, 'perception'. Diogenes Laertius presents Stoic 'sense-perception,' as 'The activity [of sensing that] is also called aísthēsis.' This 'sense-perception' is a cognitive process, 'but it is by reason that we get cognition of conclusions reached through demonstration'.

The aesthetic as a notion of idealised beauty, assembled from external influence should not have relevance to the operations of the machine. But the observed desire in users to access received, rather than perceived, material informing the process, indicates a desire to conform to what might be a fictional aesthetic, instead of succumbing to the sense-perception of reordered cognitive stimulus. My interest concerns how sense-perception is apprehended prior to habitual application of reason. The machine reorders the senses to reveal what emerges from sense-perception when reason is absent during the production of a drawing. Is a pre-reasoned sense-perception possible? Could this be called an animal sense-perception, a base-level of stimulation? A raw perceptual process that does not permit reason to enter into aesthetic encounter of production? This would present the user with a challenge, where their mental faculties are called to respond to stimulus outside of the normal sensory order. My intention was originally to use the device for my own experiments in sensory disturbance, pursuing my inquiry into the grotesque, and to draw a face to which I was blind; this face would be made from sound feedback and touch.

The capacity of the machine's social function emerged from its first public exhibition at 'Notations' conference at the Slade School of Art, University College London in January 2008. People were surprisingly willing to put on the 'hat' and try to draw a face. When exhibited in Canterbury during the summer of 2008, a number of visiting families from abroad tried out the machine. A Spanish family happily looked on as 'Dad' put on the hat and made a drawing. The spectacle of the machine as circus sideshow emerged. The sideshow, as 'cheap thrill,' providing a short, but thrilling encounter of a world made strange, and then returning to normal, often involves the knowledge that onlookers are watching a performance. The performer/participant is watched, they need to perform, but cannot control what they cannot see while drawing, so a dilemma occurs. Any strategy to maintain control, like feeling for the edges of
the paper, seemed preferable to employing the machine's real potential, to privilege loss of control and to enter into a delirious and unfamiliar touching, listening and shrieking event. There may be a joy involved in shifting away from a normative mode of consciousness and moving to another level of bodily integration conditioning the 'sensorium' - which, when extended from the mental map to a corporeal map, involves the engagement of the body's contained and uncontained attributes.

Speculation upon the possibility of a body becoming disoriented by the substitution of one sense impression with another indicates a grotesque motivation - a deranged, other-worldly subject, neither all flesh and bone, nor soldered micro-circuits and wires, but both, might emerge: this is the prospect of a body, trapped outside its habitual coordinates becoming a machine which wishes to reterritorialise itself as a living, organic being. The distinction between mind and body may be challenged when the body needs to execute an action the mind cannot. My research seeks to examine the physical interconnections of bodies and their objects, and related multiplying experiences of perception, requiring the more fixed relations of a Cartesian thesis promoting logic and a primacy of logical thought to be jettisoned. Proposing that the body becomes deranged through an act of dissolution is discovered in the construction of one reading of Spinoza's conception of body, – a mutant infant to the godless metaphysics of the late twentieth century which clings onto bodies, objects and things. The unified, bounded body of the individual subject appears to be discredited, and other modes and intensities of bodies have come forward. Charles Stivale points to a model of this disturbing, distributed body in his examination of a Spinozist influence evident in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. By plotting "distributions of intensity," of "affects" as "latitude" in relation to longitudinal "relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness," Deleuze and Guattari develop Spinoza's thinking in proposing, …

The word 'outlandish', for Deleuze, is an equivalent to 'the deterritorialised'; and this is the perception I wish the drawing machine to engender. Remember it is made of human and machine parts, neither of which are required to fulfill their normative functions. It is perverse, a bad event, intending to initiate an awful turn in the user and the spectator. In its contemplation, the machine should permit perception of threat, difficulty, and a turning point between control and unreason. In its use, the machine should permit the body to experience disorientation, obliging thought to strain against the reordering of sensational coordinates. It is an ambitious machine, it would like to create an outlandish
thing; a body of unreason. The individual, as an affective body (affect, not of the drives and complexes of Freudianism, but affects of becoming – a temporally modulated affect of intense movement) carries a map of their immediate environment with them. Sound, air, temperature, movement of the body and other bodies, desire, language, apprehension; these are bundles of affects as an extended and extensive body. Relations between external and internal coordinates of a thinking, affective subject question properties of bodies. When or how does the body think? When does thought feel?

Many instances present themselves: Sex—the movement of bodies—the friction of coitus, drug intoxication, even a sweet cup of coffee – shifts the body into a variety of encounters, realms, affects and speeds. The encounter of bodies in imagination as bodies of desire in Freudianism—the bodies of drives, sublimations, complexes and projections—are discovered as sexual bodies of difficulty, which in the cartography of the psychoanalytic system, relates to other drives, acting as metaphors determined by the ‘symbolic order,’ the properties of which the Spinozist model challenges. A risk is taken in rendering these psychoanalytical bodies to Spinozist becomings. The proposal orphans affect from the drives and subsumes it in sense-perception. The concern with speeds and movements of bodies in the machine – touching, drawing and listening, conflating thought and movement into sense-perception discover a Spinozan body as modifications of conatus and affectus. ‘Spinoza’s identification of ‘the actual essence’ of a thing with its conatus – the ‘striving by which each thing strives to preserve in its being’ (Ethics. iii def.3) The complexity which results from this account of bodies has as its correlate under the attributes of thought – a multiplicity that both enriches the possibilities of human knowing and creates an unavoidable confusion at its very core.’

Spinoza notes:

By emotion (affectus) I understand the modifications of the body by which the power of action of the body is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time the idea of these modifications.’ (Ethics. iii def.3)

Minute relations of bodies, imagined in Spinoza’s description of a worm swimming through a body’s blood, navigating minute relations of bodies, discovering the cells and atoms of which the human body is composed, attributes of which link all bodies – connected by a capacity to survive, and a capacity to experience joy, respectively defined by the conatus, and affectus. The modifications of these attributes are actions of bodies, and the idea of those modifications are bodies too. Spinoza presents this framed within a ‘rationalist’ thesis, but Spinozism presents it as something away from the rational, as multiplicities, and a crazy and unavoidable confusion. More movement, greater speeds, less certainty, and greater capacities to become transformed describe bodies aligned to the grotesque, which are paradoxically bound into other bodies: ‘From this it follows that every body, insofar as it exists modified in a certain way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe.’
He questions how the body can relay physical sensation to thought, and how thought may relate affect to the body, challenging the Cartesian division between mind and body. I may ask, 'how can a cause not be assigned to an action? In response, reason will propose an answer, here is the cause, and here is the action from which it arises. But in suppressing habitual, reasoned sense, the drawing machine generates a sense from outside of habit. The drawing itself, as production of a re-ordering, becomes a body-map of a temporary negotiation of sense made from a body of disorder. The broader context of a spatial mapping of the body, the extension and intensities of physical affects and psychic material are relevant to my project, but the scope of this paper precludes detailed discussion of the social implications of the drawing machine.

Speculation on the connections between the individual body and the social body can be discovered in Antonin Artaud’s paranoid and terrifying vision, which is arguably a sustained and merciless assault upon the conatus. Artaud’s ability to locate the shredded bodies and articulate his disturbance lucidly, in writing and drawing, assisted Deleuze and Guattari to delineate their schizoanalytical theory. The Greek skhizein ‘to split’ points to the drawing machine’s interrogative function, and its capacity to encourage a cleaving of the senses: sound, as a sexual glossolalia (bodies mingling), replaces sight, so touch is only felt, not observed. The inscribed index of the marks are made unobserved, cutting the hand/eye coordination, and the body’s action away from sight.

The body, as social body, is split from the body as sensorium. I am hinting at the possibility of a social body also possessing a conatus, prone to disorder, and the drawing machine may investigate in a minute way how this disorder might operate. It
“a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild untamed differences, a properly differential and original space and time”

—Giles Deleuze
Difference and Repetition

“An ‘abstract machine’ which plays a ‘piloting role’ and does not ‘function to represent’ something real, but rather ‘constructs a real which is yet to come.’”

—Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari
A Thousand Plateaus

may be wrong to propose that where bodies go wrong, a society goes wrong, but Deleuze and Guattari do establish this alarming link in their schizoanalytical theory: ‘Corpus:Socius, politics and experimentation.’ If a body is capable of being split and shredded, of losing direction, what related capacities does a social body possess? What imagination discovers a body to be and what a social body discovers itself to be – these are linked components, and linked intensities.

Personally, in this age of media saturated Spätkapitalismus, the social body terrifies me. It presents itself sometimes as sensible creation, but a delirium, which bodies know, runs like a rash across its surface. I feel myself to be more of a spec than a participant in the spectacle.

So I will pull on the hood and make drawings from the screams.

iii: Conclusion
The event and performance of A Relay of Joy calls to mind one of Marshall McLuhan’s media aphorisms: ‘a light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence.’ By the same token Long’s cybernetic assembly creates its own effective
electronic milieu, a fragmented metaphorical space for the human experience of Spätkapitalismus, and an analogy for the ‘schizophrenic journey’ suggested by Deleuze and Guattari through its ‘hyper-global’ mediascapes.

Though often invoked as an ‘information superhighway’ which alludes to an outdated Fordism, the world-wide web is closely analogous and contiguous with the human nervous system. The synapses of digital media, constituted by silicon chips, extend, as Marshall McLuhan has previously argued about the telegraph in the nineteenth century, our human faculties of perception and sense through the neural cyber threads which carries both pathogens and anti-viruses from the inner worlds of our psyches, to the ends of the earth and back again.

The collapse of Euclidian and Cartesian space and time and the movement of information at light speed through the cerebellum of this cyberspace has induced a sense of cultural ‘vertigo,’ which Jock Young notes is ‘the malaise of late modernity: a sense of insecurity of insubstantiality, and of uncertainty, a whiff of chaos and a fear of falling.’ Such movement implies as, Deleuze notes ‘a plurality of centers, a superimposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of movements which essentially distort representation.’

Manuel Castells notes that as a result of the global ‘neural network,’ emerging from the development of Spätkapitalismus ‘the geography of the new history will not be made, after all, of the separation between places and flows, but out of the interface between places and flows,’ the shift constituting a world-wide electro-shock treatment to our habituated faculties of perception. Long’s assembly is about being lost or disoriented in such a new geography, and is an attempt to find bearings with a simple device that highlights how contingent the orientation of body to world is – relating to broader issues of ‘social cohesion’ in a world where the sense of space has been fragmented by 24/7 mediascapes where crisis and urgency seem to dominate.

The artistic performance of an individual in cybernetic assembly intimates a twenty-first century echo
of Marshall McLuhan’s observation regarding the emergence of print media: ‘If a new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world, then new ratios among all our sense will occur in that particular culture. It is comparable to what happens when a new note is added to a melody. And when the sense ratios alter in any culture than what had appeared lucid may suddenly appear opaque and what had been vague or opaque will become translucent.’ By subtly altering the sense ratio in favor of the aural and tactile, and away from the visual, the individual is placed in Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s ontology, upon a new ‘plane’ of perception. This also serves to approximate Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptions of ‘an abstract machine’ which plays a ‘piloting role’ and does not ‘function to represent’ something real, but rather constructs a real which is yet to come. By eliding visual perspective, so fundamental to the practice of Western geography and media, Long’s ‘abstract machine’, by imposing a ‘limitation’ to perception as Deleuze notes ‘presupposes’ and allows a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild untamed differences, a properly differential and original space and time to emerge in the perception and experience of the performer. In this sense Long’s drawing machine, ‘deterritorializes’ an individual from the visual world, enabling a plane of aural and tactile perception to emerge.

Drawing upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari, one dimension of Nigel Thrift’s elaboration of ‘non-representational’ theory is concerned with the performance of the human body as a tool-being operating within a ‘new kind of electronic background’ of the time-spaces making their way and shaping the world. He asserts: “I do not count the body as separate from the thing world. Indeed, I think it could be argued that the human body is what it is because of its unparalleled ability to co-evolve with things,” and contends: “as a result of the intervention of software and new forms of address, the background of time-spaces are changing . . . character, producing novel kinds of behavior that would not have been possible before and new types of object which presage more active environments.”

Bio-techno interfaces, such as Long’s cybernetic assembly form, according to Thrift, not so much a technological unconscious as a technological anteconscious providing a warp and weft of inhuman traffic with its own indifferent geographies. A Relay of Joy provides perhaps an illustration of this technological disposition and hybridity. Its performance effects a fragmented, yet embodied piece of human geography, which by intimating Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘schizophrenic journey’ maps a distinctive space to navigate the vertigo promulgated by Spätkapitalismus’ pervasive ‘hyper-global’ mediascapes.
ENDNOTES

1 Tim Long is Senior Lecturer in Digital Culture, Arts and Media at Canterbury Christ Church University, and a practising artist who has conceived and performed A Relay of Joy. Long’s research into the grotesque image and imagination concentrates on issues of transformation, dissolution, deterritorialisation, and anomaly, drawing upon discussions by Deleuze and Guattarri, Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin. Concepts debating the monstrous and abject are applied to examining grotesque morphologies and the dissolution of the subject, identified in case studies drawn from literature and the history of art: Antonin Artaud, Francis Bacon, and outsider artist, Adolf Wolffi.

2 Dr. Charles Travis is a Research Associate with the Trinity Long Room Hub and a Lecturer in Geography at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Possessing an MA in Mass Communication, Travis is interested in the intersection between art, media and critical geographical thought.


4 Definition from Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: ‘We have done with all globalizing concepts. Even concepts are haecceities (essence of a thing), events.’


6 Ernest Mandel’s framing of ‘Spätkapitalismus’ (Late Capitalism) in 1972, described the unprecedented confluence between nuclear science, electronic and digital technology and mass production and consumerism.

7 ‘Events’ in Deleuze’s though are localised conceptions, which in turn can also be viewed as territories and haecceities

8 Marcus Doel and David Clarke explain: ‘The Deleuzian event is far removed from the commonsensical notion of something that is simply present at hand…One is reminded of the ‘stuttering’ events in the plays of Samuel Beckett…In Deleuze’s version of empiricism the event is as much virtual as it is actual…Events are explosive: they unsettle what appears to be given, and breathe life into what appears to be spent.’ Gilles Deleuze in (eds.) Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage, 2006) p. 104.


12 Stalder, *Manuel Castells*, 98

13 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 47


15 Marcus Doel and David Clarke Gilles Deleuze in (eds.) Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage, 2006) p. 106

16 syn-es-the-sia also syn-aes-the-sia (sin’is-thē’zha) n. 1) A condition in which one type of stimulation evokes the sensation of another, as when the hearing of a sound produces the visualization of a color. 2) A sensation felt in one part of the body as a result of stimulus applied to another, as in referred pain. 3) The description of one kind of sense impression by using words that normally describe another. synes-thet’ic (-thē’tĭk) adj. Dictionary.com. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004 (accessed: February 03, 2009).

17 Umberto Eco, thinks different perhaps of the interchangeability between Mac and PC, ‘The Holy War Mac vs. dos’ *Umberto Eco, Porta Ludovica*, 30 Sept. 1994: ‘The fact is that the world
is divided between users of the Macintosh computer and users of MS-DOS compatible computers. I am firmly of the opinion that the Macintosh is Catholic and that DOS is Protestant. Indeed, the Macintosh is counter-reformist and has been influenced by the ratio studiorum of the Jesuits. It is cheerful, friendly, conciliatory; it tells the faithful how they must proceed step by step to reach—if not the kingdom of Heaven—the moment in which their document is printed. It is catechistic: The essence of revelation is dealt with via simple formulae and sumptuous icons. Everyone has a right to salvation.

DOS is Protestant, or even Calvinistic. It allows free interpretation of scripture, demands difficult personal decisions, imposes a subtle hermeneutics upon the user, and takes for granted the idea that not all can achieve salvation. To make the system work you need to interpret the program yourself: Far away from the baroque community of revelers, the user is closed within the loneliness of his own inner torment. You may object that, with the passage to Windows, the DOS universe has come to resemble more closely the counter-reformist tolerance of the Macintosh. [Accessed 28 Jan. 2009].

19 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 260.
21 Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet, Charles Stivale, 'Labécdaire De Gilles Deleuze', A as in animal.
31 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 89.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 10
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The ‘Historical Poetics’ of Kate O’Brien’s Limerick: a critical literary Geography of Saorstát Éireann and the 1937 Bunreacht na hÉireann Plebiscite

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The polemics of place operating in Catholic bourgeois Saorstát Éireann in 1937, the year of the Bunreacht na hÉireann plebiscite are aptly mapped, illustrated and critiqued in Kate O’Brien’s 1938 novel Pray for the Wanderer. O’Brien’s subtle and audacious literary technique charts the social and political landscapes of the Saorstát which emerged in the two decades after independence. O’Brien creates a spatial metonym for her native Limerick, to represent the increasingly binding relations between family, class, religion, gender and sexuality. The theoretical lenses which bring the critical literary geographies of O’Brien’s writing into focus employ Mikhail Bakhtin’s Historical Poetics to excavate the ‘aesthetic landscape’ of her text and to explore and discuss its relevant social and political themes.

Keywords: critical literary geography; Kate O’Brien; M. M. Bakhtin; Saorstát Éireann; 1937 Bunreacht na hÉireann

Introduction

The town of Mellick and its adjoining ‘Vale of Honey’ comprises an imaginary geography in Kate O’Brien’s 1938 novel Pray for the Wanderer. It acts as a polemical metonym for her native Limerick and the increasingly binding relations between family, class, religion, gender and sexuality which emerged in southern Ireland in the two decades following the Irish War of Independence. O’Brien’s audacious literary perspective dissected and critiqued the social and political milieu of the Catholic petite bourgeoisie which supported Saorstát Éireann’s adoption of the 1937 Bunreacht na hÉireann, a constitution that imposed a quasi-religious and patriarchal political architecture upon the fledgling post-independent nation. The decade or so prior to the adoption of the new constitution had seen competing forces of conservatism and modernism at work. From 1929, writers such as O’Brien faced the ‘symbolic institution of the much reviled Censorship Board’ (Foster 1989, p. 535) and consequently played the role of dissidents in the public sphere of post-independent Ireland. Protectionist economic policies and the Economic War with Britain (1932–1938) over land annuities unpaid during the War of Independence resulted in severe damage to the Irish economy. Despite this turn of events, projects such as the Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme of 1929 fostered rural electrification and the inauguration of Aer Lingus as the national airline in 1936 provided evidence that tendrils of modernity were pushing through the insular and war-torn milieu of...
the Irish Free State. However, Fianna Fáil’s social legislation of the 1930s was increasingly vetted by a Catholic hierarchy and clergy, and the 1937 Constitution bore their imprimatur. In tandem with cultural nationalism the State and Church had ‘anathematized everything from jazz to modern fiction’ (Foster 1989, p. 535) in an attempt to assert the Catholic identity of Ireland, in contrast to the Protestant heritage of its former imperial master.

Born in 1897, Kate O’Brien was the seventh child of Thomas and Catherine ‘Katty’ O’Brien, owners of an equestrian business and members of Limerick’s affluent mercantile class. During her adolescence and early adulthood she was a supporter of the embryonic Free State, but soon became one of its most incisive critics, as De Valera’s myopic vision of Irish social life unfurled itself during the 1930s. Educated at Laurel Hill Convent and University College Dublin, in the war-torn colonial capital of Ireland, O’Brien moved to England in 1919 and subsequently spent time in the USA and Spain. Her marriage to Gustaaf Renier, a Dutch journalist, failed, although her lesbianism has been at times curiously avoided by academics:

Kate O’Brien, her family, her biographers, critics, and friends all colluded to keep her in the closet. Not so much covering up her bonds with women, as by denying that those partnerships were of any relevance to her work (Donoghue 1993, p. 37).

O’Brien emerged with a serious reputation as writer after the debut of her first play Distinguished Villa, in 1926. During the 1930s, O’Brien turned her pen from drama to prose, and published a series of novels rooted in a fictional provincial Irish city named Mellick. Framed by a cityscape of church steeples and castles, O’Brien’s novels Without My Cloak (1931), The Ante-Room (1934) and Mary Lavelle (1936) were informed by her intimate knowledge of Limerick’s culture, history and geography. Though dismissed by critics as a polemical tract, and second-rate piece of literature, O’Brien was motivated to write Pray for the Wanderer in response to the banning of Mary Lavelle under the Censorship Act of 1929 for its vivid portrait of lesbianism and adultery, themes prohibited within the tight moral web spun by Church and State in the decades following Irish independence. The theoretical lenses which bring the critical literary geographies of O’Brien’s work into focus, consist primarily of methods which excavate the textual and ‘aesthetic landscape’ of her novel. This is done by engaging Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895–1975) ‘Historical Poetics’ in which periodicity and the associated figures and events of time are in rhythm with a distinct sense of place and the cultural manifestations to which they give birth.

Considering critical literary geographies

The ‘cultural’ turn in geography and the ‘spatial’ turn in literary and cultural studies during the fin de siècle of the twentieth century form two ends of an epistemological bridge from which the perspective of a ‘critical literary geography’ can be considered. Geographers such as Douglas C. Pocock (1981, p. 15) and Marc Brosseau (1995, p. 90) have argued respectively that literature could establish ‘the basis for a new [and] ‘cleansed’ perception’, and for the importance in a Bakhtinian sense of being diaologically receptive to the different ‘way novels write and generate particular geographies’. Conversely, the discipline has acknowledged the agency of text in
fostering cultural production, social critique and the construction of material place. In an earlier reflection on literary geography, Yi-Fu Tuan (1978, p. 205) identified three possible avenues to engage the subject: firstly, as a ‘thought experiment on possible modes of human experience and relationship’; secondly, as an artefact whereby literature ‘reveals the environmental perceptions and values of a culture: it serves the geographer who is also a historian of ideas’; and thirdly ‘as an ambitious attempt to balance the subjective and the objective it is a model for geographical synthesis’. In the discipline of literary and cultural studies, Franco Moretti’s *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998), an outstanding benchmark of literary cartography, stands in distinction to Andrew Thacker’s *Moving Through Modernity* (2003). Moretti applied geometric and quantitative analysis, leavened with Marxist insight and the sensibility of a polymath to examine the production and content of English and Continental modern literature primarily in the nineteenth century. In contrast, Thacker insightfully examines the thought of Heidegger, Bachelard, Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Foucault, as theoretical lenses to illuminate socio-spatial and affective dimensions of place experience in the modernist genre. Thacker’s erudite readings on Virginia Woolf’s ‘houses of the brain,’ and the ‘joggerfry’ of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, stress that one aim of a critical literary geography is to ‘seek out the historical links between modernism and the production of particular material spaces in modernity’ (2003, p. 5). However, for geographers, literary scale remains relevant: ‘as a literary form the novel is inherently geographical’ (Daniels & Rycroft 1993, p. 460) and is arguably the best scale suited to study imaginative representations of period and place:

> The world of the novel is made up of locations and settings, arenas and boundaries, perspectives and horizons. Various places and spaces are occupied by the novel’s characters, by the narrator and by audiences as they read. Any one novel may present a field of different, sometimes competing, forms of geographical knowledge, from a sensuous awareness of place to an educated idea of region and nation (Daniels & Rycroft 1993, p. 460).

In the case of Ireland and its writers, geographer Patrick Duffy (1985, p. 35) observes: ‘it has been suggested that the strength of feeling for home-place is more deeply embedded in Irish literature than in any other west European culture’. He states that such literature can be ‘read in different ways,’ and whether a poem, short story or novel, the various literary forms employed in Ireland constitute a spectrum encompassing the locality of the parish and townland, a variety of regional and vernacular landscapes, and the broader ‘embodiment of the nation-state’ (1997, p. 80). This illuminates ‘the flexibilities and fluidities of contested constructions of Irish identity’ (1997, 66) represented in the various texts which constitute the canon of ‘national’ literature. Duffy observes:

> Irish place and landscape have been variously constructed and interpreted to fulfil the changing requirements of particular segments of society, both inside and outside the island. In this respect, literary texts can be regarded as signifying practices, which interact with social, economic and political institutions so that they ‘are read, not passively, but, as it were, rewritten as they are read’ (1997, p. 65).

This paper’s exploration of *Pray for the Wanderer* will be informed by a perspective that considers O’Brien’s text as a textual and aesthetic landscape which signifies a distinct perception of provincialism and politics in the early Irish post-independence
experience. When examined under the chronotopic lens provided by Bakhtin’s ‘Historical Poetics’ the landscape of the novel can be hermeneutically excavated to identify the critical literary geographies generated by O’Brien’s writing. In this regard, Cook (1981, p. 66) argues that the human geographer and

the novelist have much in common. Both seek to portray the activities of people within the context of a specific milieu, infusing their descriptions of people and places with a sensitivity born of a rich and varied experience of life and society. Both seek to engender in their audience a deep awareness and empathy concerning others and their *lebenswelt*.

In geography’s most recent ‘cultural’ turn, as Barnes and Duncan (1992) note, landscapes became conceptualised as ‘texts’. Conversely, texts and, by extension novels, can be perceived as discursive forms of landscape themselves, which generate geographies related to period, identity and sense of place. This reading of ‘landscape as text’ draws upon phenomenological and hermeneutic modes of interpretation, which have their applications in both social sciences and the humanities. In regards to the ‘spatial turn’ in the latter, Thacker (2003, p. 4) notes that within literary studies space has long been conceived ‘as the spread of text upon paper and page, or the narrative pattern of a text read through time’. Such confluences of interdisciplinary thought allow the ‘placing’ according to Peet (1998, p. 233) of ‘landscape interpretation at the centre of an interdisciplinary arena where issues like objectification, representation, consciousness, and ideology,’ have opened ‘a dialogue between cultural geographers and literary theorists, cultural anthropologists, and others who, in expanding the concept of text become interested in landscapes’. For example, Stevens (2001, p. 5) adopting a Foucauldian perspective, argues that novels constitute ‘landscapes in the aesthetic sense’ and can be recognized as:

compositions arrived at through human design, and in the historical sense, sites made up of several strata of events. The text becomes a kind of archaeological site that reveals in its excavation the accretion of histories, not a single narrative tradition but the overlapping and infiltration of different lives (2001, p. 5).

This illustrates an evolving perspective on landscapes and texts, and provides a fixed point of entry, and a frame of reference for ideological, humanistic, historical and cultural engagements concerning the relationship between literature and place on a variety of scales: ‘The excavation of the text reveals the level(s) of inheritance within a fiction, a descension which frequently spans imaginative and actual past realities, or which unearths conflicts between different concepts of time and space’ (Stevens 2001, p. 5).

### Historical poetics

Bakhtin’s literary theory is salient to analysing O’Brien’s work on several levels. Firstly, there is a *chronotopic* historical contextuality and parallelism to their biographies. As figures born during the European *fin de siècle* both O’Brien and Bakhtin experienced periods of revolution, civil war, social upheaval and the consolidation of hierarchical and oppressive power structures during the early twentieth century. In Bakhtin’s case this took the form of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, a subsequent civil war (1918–1921) and the emergence of Stalinism in the 1930s. Consequently, the analytical frame Bakhtin developed was not only contiguous to the historical events unfolding in the European theatre during the
period in which O’Brien was writing, it also shares her apparent intent, to interrogate through the aegis of literature the polemical and ideological framings of time and place, and the epistemologies produced as a result. Secondly, the performance space scripted by O’Brien and anchored by the literary archaeological site of her novel generates a multiplicity of geographical and ideological perspectives, which can be examined under the broad theoretical platform of Bakhtin’s thought: ‘His writing touches on linguistics, psychology, theology, sociology, and poetics; he has been variously treated as a formalist, a structuralist, a poststructuralist, a Buberian theologian, a democratic humanist, and a Marxist of any stripe from relative orthodoxy to essential heresy’ (Kershner 1989, p. 15). However in analysing the textual and aesthetic landscape of Pray for the Wanderer, this paper will specifically employ Bakhtin’s chronotopic lens to sharply focus O’Brien’s representations of time and space in her novel. Bakhtin (1981, p. 81) describes the theoretical function of his concept accordingly:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature . . . In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history.

Bakhtin developed his concept of chronotope after studying the evolution of western literature from its classical origin in Greek epics, through the folklore tales of Medieval Europe, to the appearance of the modern novel, constituted by the works of Rabelais, Flaubert, Stendhal, Balzac and Dostoevsky from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Bakhtin (1984, p. 250) identified several classical chronotopes including the ‘idyll,’ the ‘road,’ the ‘public square’. He noted that, with the emergence of the modern novel, chronotopes began to function ‘as the primary point from which ‘scenes’ unfold within narrative space,’ and observed:

All the novel’s abstract elements -philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect -gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work. Such is the representational significance of the chronotope.

Bakhtin’s chronotopes of the ‘petty bourgeois town,’ the ‘road’, the ‘salon and parlour’ and the ‘threshold’ can all be applied to excavating the textual and aesthetic landscape of Pray for the Wanderer in such a manner. Such ‘time-space’ nodes are reflective of the period and place in which the literary work is produced, and can be perceived as providing the settings in which ‘the knots’ tying narrative webs and dialogue of a piece become ‘tied and untied’ (1981, p. 250).

Chronotopic analysis illuminates the relevance of O’Brien’s novel as both a socio-spatial historical record and artefact of the cultural production/critique occurring during the 1930s in southern Ireland. Arguing for a ‘critical literary geography’ Thacker (2006, p. 63) notes: ‘We should reconnect the representational spaces on literary texts not only to material spaces they depict, but also reverse the moment, and understand how social spaces dialogically help fashion the literary forms of texts’. In this regard, Bakhtin notes it is ‘living artistic perception . . . [which]seizes on the chronotope in all its wholeness and fullness’ (2002, p. 16) and states that ‘a definite and absolutely concrete locality serves as the starting point for the creative
imagination [...] this is a piece of human history, historical time condensed into space’ (1968, p. 49). Bakhtin’s chronotopic function within a piece of literature not only is shaped by the milieu in which it arises, it is an element of a humanised landscape, and functions as ‘an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring’ (1981, pp. 425–6). Therefore, from the standpoint of a critical literary geography, this paper by utilizing the Bakhtinian lens of ‘Historical Poetics’, will illustrate how O’Brien’s writing style maps and dissects the relations between class, religion, sexuality and gender, which became increasingly marginalised by the dominant political discourses comprising the Censorship Act of 1929 and the 1937 constitutional plebiscite.


In O’Brien’s literary canon of the 1930s, a polemical Irish version of Bakhtin’s (1981, p. 84) chronotope of the ‘petty-bourgeois provincial town with its stagnant life’ emerges. Her writing fictionalizes and maps Limerick from the colonial period at the end of the eighteenth century to the second decade of southern Irish independence after Saorstát Éireann’s foundation in 1922. Bakhtin (1981, p. 84) identified this chronotope in Flaubert’s Madame Bovary (1857) as ‘simple, crude, material, fused with houses and rooms of the town, with sleepy streets, the dust and flies, the club, the billiards and so on’. Its relevance to our discussion of O’Brien’s work is clearly defined by Bakhtin’s delineation of historical poetics, which although ‘beginning with the so-called ‘Greek romance’ and ending with the Rabelaisian novel’ (2002, p. 16) clearly stresses that:

The relative typological stability of the novelistic chronotopes that were worked out in these periods permit us to glance ahead as well at various novel types in succeeding periods (2002, p. 16).

Despite the fact that Bakhtin’s work focussed on eighteenth and nineteenth century examples, there are clear historical poetic resonances in O’Brien’s work. The consolidation of the nation-state, supported by a solid bourgeoisie and the emergence of the novel as a literary form to represent and interrogate this relationship, links the works examined by Bakhtin, to this paper’s exploration of O’Brien’s work in the early twentieth century. By defining a similar spatial metonym for her native Limerick in the novels Without My Cloak (1931), The Ante-Room (1934), the banned Mary Lavelle (1936) and Prayer for the Wanderer (1938), O’Brien generated an imaginative geography in which ‘Mellick lay at the heart of it, in [a] green, watered valley’ (1938, p. 183). By creating the ‘aesthetic landscape’ of this ‘Vale of Honey’ located on the South Clare-Limerick borderland, O’Brien was able to trace in her prose-fiction the evolution of the Irish provincial town and consequent ascendency of its Catholic bourgeois from just prior to the Act of Union, to the apotheosis of this class during the period marked by DeValera’s constitutional plebiscite of 1937.

Without My Cloak concerns the bourgeoisification of a Catholic family named the Considines, whose acquisition of financial and political power mirrors the growth of provincial Ireland in the nineteenth century. O’Brien panoramically opens her novel in 1789 with Anthony Considine, a horse thief, gazing with the perspective of a peasant outsider upon a ‘grey smudge of a town called Mellick’ (1931, p. 5), from a
vista on the South-Clare hills. This vantage point which provides a natural and social geography of the surrounding landscape, becomes a palimpsest in her successive depictions of Limerick and its hinterland:

The Vale of Honey is a wide plain of fertile pastures and deep woods watered by many streams and ringed about by mountains. Westward the Bearnagh hills [...] In the south two remote green hills had wrapped their heads in cloud; eastward the stonier, bluer peaks wore caps of snow already. To the north the mountains of St. Phelim were bronzed and warmly wooded. Villages lay untidily about the plain; smoke floated from the chimneys of parked mansions and the broken thatch of cowmen’s huts (1931, pp. 3-4).

Considine leads his stolen roan through ‘the crumbling gates of Mellick’ (1931, p. 5) where in a back alley he meets the widow Dooney ‘who kept a potato and crubeen shop in Lady’s Lane’ (1931, p. 13). He eventually marries the widow, but is killed in a bar brawl on the night of his son’s birth. Twenty years later, his enterprising son Anthony places a sign that states ‘John Considine, Hay, Strau and Forage Deeler’ (1931, p. 14) over the door of a small store located on Kilmoney Street. In contrast to his father’s gaze as an outsider, O’Brien (1931, p. 10) depicts Anthony’s insider perspective after he has relocated his place of business to the more affluent and expanding mercantile hub of Mellick, which supplies raw materials to feed the Industrial Revolutions erupting across the landscapes of England, Europe and America:

...standing now between Hennessy’s Mills and the Passionist Church, with its back windows opening on the Dock Road, and the river, and on its face a look as blank and sad as any worn by its more venerable neighbours [...] At the crossings, where short streets cut the New Town symmetrically from east to west, he could glimpse the great stream to the right of him down a hill and observe the regular hurry of its course past the unhurrying docks; carts and ships and cargoes [...] Charles Street consisted mainly of stores and offices; it wore the grave, grey look of commerce, an aspect increased by the dusty pallor laid on the street’s face by two or three great flour mills.

The Considine family therefore establishes a provincial financial and political powerbase over the course of the nineteenth century, with a main interest in trying ‘to wring the supply from [the] small and lazily farmed island. [...] The uncertainty of the Irish yield and the inertia among tenant-farmers always provided a dangerous element of gamble’ (1931, p. 7). In doing so, the family establishes a liminal space, though reflective of an emerging bourgeois Catholic Ireland, is not intrinsically nationalist in its ideological perspective, but supra-nationally conscious in a pragmatic sense:

he was proud to be Catholic in the days when that was not easy; and he showed the courage of his rather staid opinions. He had only one enthusiasm and that was for Dan O’Connell, ‘the Liberator,’ as he unfailingly called him. After O’Connell’s death he lost such interest as he had had in national affairs, and watched them, [...] merely for their material reactions on his business and family. Political agitators, Ribbonmen, Young Irelanders, and such like filled him with rage, and he was not shy about cursing them when he got the chance. The Potato Blight concerned him chiefly in that it was disastrous to his trade; the Crimean War brought back prosperity and was remembered with affection. During the Indian Mutiny he was vaguely and sardonically amused at what he guessed of England’s difficulties, but his native inclination always to think and act as an Irishman was perpetually impeded by a secret sentimental tendency to admire the sturdy little Queen (1931, p. 15).
Having consolidated his fortune, Anthony establishes a manorial residence in the ‘Vale of Honey’ on an abandoned Protestant Ascendancy estate called ‘River Hill, which had been on the market since its house had been blown up in ‘48’ (1931, p. 32).

It is in this space that familial conflict so intrinsic to O’Brien’s fiction begins to take root. Establishing a trope by which her characters attempt to resist the gravitational pull of genealogy, ideology and place, O’Brien introduces Anthony’s son Denis, who rejects his place in the Considine family business, in a vain attempt to pursue a vocation as a landscape artist. His ambition to sculpt environments is ironic in light of O’Brien’s emphasis on the centripetal force of place and time in shaping the attitudes of the various characters in her fiction. It is through Denis’ eyes that O’Brien depicts the ravaged social geographies of ‘Old Town’ Mellick, which have twentieth century echoes in Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes* (1996), a memoir of an impoverished Limerick boyhood in the 1930s and 1940s. Though it is in this quarter that the Considines first settled, it is a place that the family has shunned:

He discovered Mellick’s slums, for instance -the crumbling Old Town that looked so gently beautiful at evening, grey, sad, and tender, huddled on humpy bridges about canals and twisty streams -and found that under its mask of dying peace it lived a swarming, desperate full-blooded life, a life rich in dereliction, the life of beggars, drunkards, idiots, tramps, tinkers, cripples, a merry, cunning, ribuld, unprotesting life of despair and mirth and waste […]. Rheumy and filthy-smelling old men, sharp-eyed wolfish children, lively tongued women who suckled dirty babies at dirty breasts, the old crone with lupus-eaten face who seemed to live in the doorway of St. Anthony’s Church (1931, p. 127).

Denis’ act of rebellion in attempting to wed a peasant girl is ultimately futile, as is the attempt of his sister Caroline to leave a loveless marriage by fleeing to London with a Protestant lover. In the end the centripetal pull of family, religion, and place exert a moral gravity which returns her to provincial Ireland. O’Brien’s prose extirpates the chronotopic and ideological forces, as well as the human geographies at play in shaping Caroline’s fate:

All Mellick she seemed to see, men and houses, quick and dead, in an earthquake rush to overtake her. Faces whose names escaped her, clerks of her father’s, old beggar-women, shopgirls, ladies with whom she drank tea, her confessor, Father McEwen, pretty Louise Hennessy, Mrs. Kelleher the midwife […] the grey mass of Considine’s office with Anthony swinging out the front door (1931, pp. 183–184).

In *Without My Cloak* the chronotopes which tie the novel’s narrative structure together bind the Considine family with the provincial destiny of Mellick, O’Brien (1931, p. 436) writes, like ‘chain dropped softly on chain’. In her 1936 novel *Mary Lavelle*, she more subtly sculpts the chronotope of her heroine’s ‘petty-bourgeois provincial town’ into a gendered space depicting the early decades of the twentieth century. Though the novel is largely set in Spain and concerns an Irish governesses’ adulterous affair and friendship with a lesbian character (two themes for which it was banned), O’Brien grounds the heroine’s perspective in her evolving literary portrait of Limerick/Mellick. As Mary reflects back upon her home and native city, her nostalgia is framed in the perspective of a Catholic bourgeois gaze:

In that it was – surprisingly – like Mellick. The name sent her dreaming back again into what surely was reality […] the breakfast-room at Upper Mourne Street […] had a large window opening on to a grassy back garden, very neat, with a stunted fig tree in the middle. This room and the restricted view from its battered window-seat were for
Mary enduring symbols of childhood. She could see the darning basket on the seat now, *The Irish Rosary*, the *Daily Sketch* (O’Brien 1936, pp. 21–22).

In the end, Mary’s experiences in Spain beyond the ‘restricted view’ of her childhood, cause her to realize ‘the limitations of Mellick, and of her place in it, were she to be married or single – nothing glamorous or amazing’ (O’Brien 1936, p. 27). O’Brien’s depiction of the Irish provincial town and the evolution and ascendancy of its Catholic bourgeois class finds it apotheosis in *Pray for the Wanderer*. O’Brien’s (1938, p. 113) post-independence portrait of Mellick charts the confessional web of prohibitions and ‘atmosphere of active Catholicism, decorum, taboo and self-discipline’ which reflected her perspective on the polemics of place in provincial Ireland during the 1930s. Setting her narrative in 1937 in the months leading up the constitutional plebiscite, O’Brien (1938, p. 42) coins an Irish translation for Bakhtin’s chronotope of the ‘petty bourgeois provincial town’ –

a pretty scene - tranquil and traditional, modestly civilized […] for all the thoughtful world, a thing of ruins and archaisms.

The novel’s main character is named Matt Costello, an ex-Irish Republican Army (IRA) volunteer and internationally acclaimed writer and dramatist who, at the age of 37, returns from England to the provincial Irish town of Mellick. Costello is seeking refuge and emotional exile in his home town, even though his works have been banned under the Free State’s Censorship Act of 1929. He is fleeing a failed love affair with a stage actress in London, an imperial city shadowed by the gathering storm clouds of World War II. In the provincial milieu of Mellick, ‘under the drug of memory and tradition’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 159), Costello hopes to re-assemble his life, and possibly make a new beginning. As he facetiously tells his old friend, solicitor Tom Mahoney, he wants to ‘find out what Dev is really doing for Cathleen Ní Houlihan’s four green fields’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 69). In this regard, the dominant chronotope of ‘the petty-bourgeois town,’ will largely be brought into view in *Pray for the Wanderer* through the multiple chronotopic lenses of the ‘road’ the ‘salon and parlour,’ and the ‘threshold’. As Matt and Tom saunter down one of Mellick’s thoroughfares on a May evening, O’Brien’s (1931, p. 93) depiction of the veneer of modernity slowly creeping into the Irish provincial town of 1937 evokes the fundamental chronotopic space of the ‘road’:

The wide Georgian street looked noble, beautifully lighted by cold arc lamps.

‘Shannon Scheme?’
‘Yes. Good, isn’t it?’
‘Fine. A creditable-looking town. Up, Dev!’

Bakhtin stresses that within a writer’s work ‘one crucial feature of the ‘road’ […] is the socio-historical heterogeneity of one’s own country that is revealed and depicted’ (2002, p. 18). In O’Brien’s case the chronotopic illumination of this passage reveals the palimpsest of the historical nature of Mellick. The eighteenth century antiquity of the Georgian tradition is linked to the twentieth century modernity of the 1929 power station built at Ardnacrusha (*Ard na Croise* ‘Height, or Hill, of the Cross’) a site with both Anglo and Gaelic designations, in an area of South-Clare located a few miles from the Limerick border where O’Brien has set her narrative. This illustrates Bakhtin’s contention that ‘on the road […] representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages - intersect at one spatial and temporal
point’ (2002, p. 17), and perhaps between historical epochs as well. The rural electrification of the Shannon Scheme from which the fictional Mellick benefits, brings ‘illumination’ on the nature and significance of the various landscapes - whether natural, social or ideological, revealed by O’Brien’s prose. In Bakhtin’s theoretical practice ‘the chronotope of the road’ is also ‘both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement, Time as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it’ (1984, p. 244). For Matt Costello, the provincial space of Mellick induces a welcoming temporal vertigo: ‘London was no longer three hundred but three thousand miles away, and the lightning change in perspective was an irrational, intolerable relief’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 188). The chronotopic gateway of the road in O’Brien’s novel frames the personal and political dilemmas that perhaps she experienced; and within the narrative spaces mapped by her writing, Costello will confront in the various landscapes of his homecoming. As has been argued, the chronotopic spaces in O’Brien’s novel are anchored by her native experience of Limerick. Consequently her depiction of Mellick illustrates that ‘chronotopes in literary texts are not cut off from the cultural environments in which they rise’

Figure 1. Kate O’Brien’s Limerick/Mellick suggests M.M. Bakhtin’s ‘chronotope’ of the ‘Petty-Bourgeois Town’ which she translates in Pray for the Wanderer (1938) as ‘a pretty scene-tranquil and traditional, modestly civilized [...] for all the thoughtful world, a thing of ruins and archaisms.’ The biographical, historical, modernist and literary chronotopes emerging from O’Brien’s ‘literary geography’ are visualized above. The image draws upon Great Britain G.S.G.S. 3906, 1:25,000 Map sheet 14/15 SE Limerick, digitized by the Glucksman Memorial Map Library at Trinity College Dublin. The image was then geo-rectified, with a TSM 65 Irish Grid projection. It was then processed in ArcView GIS and rendered in ArcScene.
They also generate additional spaces reflective of a writer’s historical and geographical milieu. Mulgrave Street, location of Boru House, the home into which O’Brien was born, had expanded considerably during the nineteenth century under the Act of Union. Its proliferation of chronotopic spaces reflected, as Logan (1994, p. 115) notes, an emerging provincial urban modernity:

The creation of Mulgrave Street provided the space for important new institutions such as the Artillery Barracks (1807), the County Infirmary (1811), the County Gaol (1821), the District Lunatic Asylum and the Mount Saint Lawrence Cemetery (1849).

The modern institutionalisation of space in O’Brien’s early life milieu seems to have imbued her with an awareness of the centrality of place as a means to anchor essential themes in her writing. As such, the theoretical scope of this paper regards Pray for the Wanderer as a site of dissidence. The social, cultural and political landscapes of 1930s provincial Ireland are excavated in O’Brien’s prose, by applying a conceptual bracketing provided by Bakhtin’s chronotope of ‘the petty-bourgeois town’ brought into view by the chronotope of the ‘road’ and more sharply focused by the ‘salon and parlour’ and the ‘threshold.’

The ‘Historical Poetics’ of Saorstát Mellick

O’Brien’s literary gaze in Pray for the Wanderer opens at Weir House, a manor house built by Matt Costello’s father on the banks of a stream on the outskirts of Mellick. Her novel continues to reveal the chronotopic dimensions of the ‘petty bourgeois town’ within the interiority of Tom Mahoney’s Georgian House on Mellick’s King Street. In both textual settings, the ‘salon & parlour’ is the dominant chronotope. Bakhtin (1981, p. 246) notes in such a narrative space the ‘webs of intrigue are spun, denouements occur and finally [it is] where dialogues happen’. Within the intersection provided by this chronotope:

the graphically visible markers of historical time as well as of biographical and everyday time are concentrated and condensed; at the same time they are intertwined with each other in the tightest possible fashion, fused into unitary markers of the epoch (Bakhtin 1981, p. 246).

At Weir House, Costello’s brother Will, ‘a citizen of the Irish Free State’ (1938, p. 4) resides in a bucolic milieu with his wife Una, and their five young children. Costello finds himself sitting in one of its rooms one May evening, gazing at the bourgeois décor of the house which contains a ‘wood fire, the Victorian sofa, pink flowers on the wall, the old brass cake stand’ and ‘silver trophies too, behind the glass doors of the Chippendale cupboard’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 2, p. 11). Costello’s father had been a ‘breeder of blood stock’ champion thoroughbreds, but his brother Will has replaced the equestrian business with ‘Dairy Shorthorns’ (1938, p. 11). Despite being a supporter of W.T. Cosgrave, leader of the opposition party Fine Gael in 1937, Will is bullish about his economic and political prospects: ‘We dairy farmers are a power in the land now’ (1938, p. 46) he tells Matt. O’Brien (1938, p. 46) writes that Will’s wife Una ‘A wild and blowy rose . . . was still an innocently seductive woman, plump and rather charmingly untidy, with mousy hair and a fragrance of contentment’. She ‘was completely subservient to Will without remembering that so she had vowed to be at the altar’ (1938, p. 95). But as a wife and mother, she is no sacrificial victim, as her needs are met within the demands of her role: ‘She was no one’s martyr and had no
idea that there was need for a martyr in the cause of domestic happiness’ (1938, p. 94), ‘Will and the children used her up, and in doing so vitalized her’ (1938, p. 95).

The Irish General Election was held on 1 July 1934 with Fianna Fáil winning 68 seats to Fine Gael’s 48, enabling the former party to form a majority government. A plebiscite was held the same day to ratify the 1937 Constitution. In both cases De Valera was triumphant. He gained power to control the organs of state and the legal blueprint to imprint his ideology upon the country’s political architecture, effectively in Henri Lefebvre’s term influencing the ‘production of space’ in southern Ireland. The constitutional clauses regarding women and the role of the family in the Irish state, argues Joe Lee, can be perceived as a projection of a troubled psyche: ‘It was if were subconsciously striving to obliterate the memory of his own childhood. He had lost his father when he was a baby, and his mother had sent him back to her family in Ireland while she went out to work in New York […] It was if the constitution tried to blot out the memory by denying it could happen’ (1989, p. 207). The new constitution was adopted on 29 December 1937 and Saorstát Éireann was officially designated Éire.

The chronotopic space of Weir House allows O’Brien to contest this ‘production of space,’ and position herself as a doubly marginalised figure in the social and political landscapes of the Free State and the new dispensation of Éire: that of a woman and a lesbian. During her adolescence and young adulthood, O’Brien was a staunch supporter of the project of Irish liberation. In 1921 she travelled to Washington D.C. to work on De Valera’s Bond Drive, to raise funds to support an independent Irish state, but by the mid 1930s she became alarmed by the type of confessional shape that the infant Irish state was taking under De Valera’s leadership:

O’Brien was appalled by the way in which the new Irish State had developed. She despised the smug, complacent nationalism and the illiberal, puritanical approach to the arts. Besides she mistrusted Eamon De Valera whom she regarded as only a milder variation of the dictators that were coming to power all over Europe (O’Toole 2005).

Article 41.1 of the 1937 Constitution (1937, p. 58) would soon come to dictate: ‘the family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society, as a moral institution [is] superior to all positive law’. In Pray for the Wanderer, Weir House and its occupants symbolise the social construction embedded within this legislation. A second clause, Article 41.2, designates the role Irish women should play to sustain this moral institution, a social function that Una as wife and mother, happily fulfils: ‘by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved’ (1937, p. 160).

Gazing through the three long windows of Weir House’s drawing room Matt Costello reflects on the pastoral setting outside, and O’Brien fleshes out the polemical significance of Weir House, as a chronotope embodying the provincial Catholic bourgeois of the period. Costello’s chosen place of exile is within its naïve bosom, an elegant milieu where, as O’Brien (1938, p. 308, p. 217) writes ‘Roses swooned in beauty on the table; the brood mares and the silver trophies kept their ancient places; beyond the window lay childhood’s unchanged garden’, filled with ‘columbine, lilies and Canterbury bells . . . sunflowers and late lingering, azaleas. A brilliant parade’. And Costello realizes ‘even in his first days of pain that it was good for him to be at Weir House […] to play noughts and crosses with Sean, to argue the
“economic war” with Will, to flirt with Una’ (1938, p. 238). But Costello’s thoughts cannot help but stray beyond the horizons of Weir House, and he broods upon the darker events of the decade, as the long shadows of Hitler and Mussolini’s fascist regimes stalk the political landscapes of Europe: ‘Chains clanking; bombers roaring through the once free sky […] nationalisms foaming at the mouth; grown men taking instructions from this little creature or that as how they shall think’ (O’Brien 1938, pp. 42–43). Anticipating the 1937 general election, in which De Valera’s Fianna Fáil party would successfully attempt to secure a consecutive third term in government, as well as ratify a new constitution for the country, Costello ruminates about the shape that the Ireland he fought to liberate is taking, under the tightening web of social and civic legislation:

A dictator’s country, too. But a more subtle dictator than most – thought he also, given time, he might have the minds of his people in chains […] Well, the Free State would vote on its Constitution, and […] Ireland, newly patrolled by the Church, would be unlikely to vote solid against the Holy Trinity. Certainly this household wouldn’t, whatever it might think of Dev (O’Brien 1938, p. 44).

Indeed, the revolutionary Ireland of 1916–1921 fomented by socialists and poets like Costello, has by the late 1930s evolved into a fortress Ireland ruled by clerics and capitalists. O’Brien’s spatial representation of Mellick and the social and political sensibilities of its Catholic bourgeoisie is further mapped in more detail through the use of dialogical interaction whose chronotopic ‘outcome is the building of roads, towns and cultures’ (Folch-Serra 1990, pp. 255–256). Commenting on Bakhtin’s ideas on language, the novel and their use to study region, place and landscape, Holloway and Kneale (2000, p. 82) note:

Space is constructed by the constant dialogical interaction of a multiplicity of voices; at any point in space and time it is possible to see a chronotope which is more or less fixed depending upon the strength of competing centripetal (monological) and centrifugal (dialogical) forces.

The monological force which O’Brien’s novel contests through its dialogical encounters and chronotopic spaces is the ideology of Irish Catholic nationalism as it was cultivated by De Valera through his government’s increasingly close relationship with the hierarchy of the Church in the 1930s. This translated Catholic teaching into constitutional legislation, and arguably plotted the direction in regards to social and economic policy that the Irish nation would take over the course the twentieth century. However, paradoxically, O’Brien’s novel also provides evidence that, instead of existing as monolithic entity, the Church itself possessed internal contradictions and contestations. Her writing also challenges ‘official’ Free State representations of the ‘authentic’ Irish identity as being rooted in a pre-lapsarian ‘Gaelic Eden’ located in the West of Ireland, in places such as O’Brien’s native South Clare-Limerick borderland.

The politics of sexuality and censorship

O’Brien’s novel illustrates another nuance in the Bakhtian conceptual landscape which as Folch-Serra (1990, p. 258) observes, interprets ‘ongoing historical developments that alternatively ‘anchor’ and destabilize the ‘natural harmony’ of a given region through constant interaction between meanings.’ It is the dialogical interactions within O’Brien’s narratives which ultimately situate the minor chronotopes in
her novel and illuminate the dominant ‘petty-bourgeois town’ Bakhtian motif. This is most apparent in the chronotopic space of the ‘salon and parlor,’ in which Costello’s conversations with a Franciscan Priest, and his friend the solicitor Tom Mahoney take place. O’Brien sets this encounter in a ‘big, Georgian house in King Street’ (1938, p. 58), where Mahoney resides with his mother and cousin Nell. As a playwright, Costello’s dialogical performances in space tend towards the centrifugal, while Mahoney’s and the priest’s as representatives of the legal and religious institutions inhabiting the State, lean toward the centripetal. O’Brien’s (1938, p. 59) chronotopic setting for the meeting of these competing dialogical forces, also illustrates the demarcations, structures and borders of the bourgeois class and gender roles acted out in provincial Ireland during the period:

The dining room in which they sat was on the first floor, behind the drawing room. Tom’s offices occupied the ground floor, and obviously the kitchen and the servants’ quarters must be in the basement. There was no service lift, yet dinner proceeded without a hitch in a prosperous Victorian setting. […] Was it still possible to ask your fellow creatures to race up and down four flights of stairs with your roast lamb and green peas? Keeping with this ‘archaic’ Victorian custom, the genders separate after dinner. The women to the big drawing room; the men the study: ‘It was a tall, pleasant room with one long window. Although overfilled with books, both legal and general, it was orderly and comfortable. There were green leather armchairs on either side of a Georgian mantelpiece’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 61). Costello and Tom, who had been acquainted in childhood and at university in Dublin, settle in for a conversation that is filled with witty repartee, sardonic observation and contemplative frankness, which constitutes the character of discourse in the bourgeois salon. Within the chronotopic space of ‘salons and parlor’ ‘political, business, social, literary reputations [are] made and destroyed, careers […] begun and wrecked’ (Bakhtin 1984, p. 247). As the tête-à-tête between Costello and Tom continues, a more earthy dimension of Irish provincial life hidden under the veneer of De Valera’s Catholic ideal, and an additional chronotopic space generated by O’Brien’s (1938, pp. 71–72) prose, emerges into view:

‘There is a brothel in the town, in the town,’ sang Tom. ‘In Mellick?’
‘Two, I believe. But the outsides are a fine, symbolic warning. Anyway, a poor chap I know was seen going into one of them of a certain Wednesday night, and on Friday when he got his wages he got the sack.’

These hidden aspects of the double-lives depicted in Mellick are alluded to largely through dialogue. Tom, a lapsed Catholic, describes to Matt the powerful influence that the local clergy and hierarchy have come to possesses over the social and political milieus in provincial Ireland:

Religiosity is becoming a job in this country, you might say. A plank. A threat and a menace. A power in the land, in fact, my boy! In the Island of Saints and Scholars! Yah —it’s disgusting! […] with Father O’Hegarty warning you kindly about this, and […] Father O’Hanigan running off to talk to the bishop about you! Town Council Stuff! Pure jobbery (O’Brien 1938, pp. 72–73).

After his rant about the insidious confessional influence in Mellick, Tom places the responsibility on the puritanical strain of Catholic theology promoted within Irish seminaries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and diffused from
pulpits within the Free State: ‘that Jansenism that Maynooth has threatened at us for so long. Now it’s ripe at last – we’re sick, like the rest of the world’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 80). Despite his feelings about the dangerous influence of this heretical and puritanical theology on the nature of Irish Catholicism, one of Tom’s confidants is Father Malachi, a Franciscan priest.

In contrast to the ‘jobbery’ and ‘Jansenism’ which characterizes much of the growing Catholic hegemony of the Free State, Tom tells Matt: ‘The Franciscan is the poor man’s friend […] This fellow has been at the head and tail of every strike that has afflicted Mellick in ten years. His sermons are a perpetual embarrassment to his superiors and he’s come mighty near being unfrocked’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 200). Though Costello admires the priest for his social activism, he takes umbrage when Father Malachi praises his books as ‘eloquent and powerful, but states that they are ‘news to us here in Ireland, even if news of an unfortunate or unwelcome character’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 195). The writer, the solicitor and the priest engage in a long discussion where Costello’s books are described as ‘myth-creating, anti-social and unnecessary’ and artists are described as ‘dangerous fellows,’ who are ‘the instigators and inspirers of egotism, the handers-on of all the romantic and individualist non-sense that has made a shambles of the world’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 196, p. 201, p. 202). Father Malachi then asks ‘You resent our censorship of you, I suppose?’ O’Brien’s (1938, pp. 205–206) response to the banning of her 1936 novel Mary Lavelle, under the Censorship Act of 1929 forms the subtext of Costello’s reply:

‘I reject censorship, lock, stock and barrel.’
‘Why?’
‘Because it is a confession of failure. It is a denial of human judgement and understanding, and a gross intrusion on liberty.
[...] Sheer impertinence- and an example of that fatal tendency in all modern government to level down, not up. In any case, too many negative regulations are a symptom of weakness in any authority.

Legislation enacted under the Censorship Act of 1929 affected all types of literature during the period in which O’Brien was setting her novels in the fictional Mellick: ‘between the years 1930 and 1939 some 1200 books and some 140 periodicals fell foul of the Censor’s displeasure’ (Brown 1985, p. 149). ‘Negative regulations’ had also been extended to other spaces in Ireland’s public sphere after the enactment of censorship legislation: ‘By 1930, all of the nudes had been removed from the Municipal Gallery, Dublin’s principal gallery of modern art’ (Carlson 1990, p. 10).

Accordingly, the symbolism of place contained in O’Brien’s (1938, p. 113, p. 114) chronotopic representations of Mellick and Weir House, stand in contrast to the spatial metaphors representing Costello’s ‘abandoned, senseless, exhibitionist life of London, Berlin and Paris’ which embody the antithesis of De Valera’s theories on Catholic social engineering. The libertine narratives comprising Costello’s novels and dramas, banned by the Saorstát, have been written in such places as ‘cellars and lodging houses and borrowed studios’. His performance as a writer and moral dissident, when intersecting dialogically with the ‘petty bourgeois town’, is illuminated by other chronotopic spaces which Bakhtin (2002, p. 21) designates the ‘Threshold and related chronotopes’:

– those of the staircase, the front hall and corridor, as well as the chronotopes of the street and square that extend those spaces into the open air are the main places of the
action in his works, places where the crisis events occur, the falls the resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of man (2002, p. 21).

Despite Matt’s cynical attitude towards the censorious atmosphere which has replaced the colonial landscape he fought to eradicate, he does attempt to engage socially in the ‘petty bourgeois’ milieu of the Free State. But its insular chronotopic spaces, in contrast to his life in London, leave him ‘depressed: Three hundred miles away Louise [Matt’s former lover] was at this moment playing the last passages of his last act’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 208). During his time in Mellick, Matt courts Nell, a teacher who lectures world history in Irish and is Tom Mahoney’s cousin and ex-fiancée. A few days after the exchange with Father Malachi and Mahoney, Matt drives ‘through twisting lanes to the little stone church on the hill top’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 223) to meet Nell. As he peers inside the space of the chapel he hears the congregation singing the hymn ‘Do thou, Bright Queen, Star of the Sea /Pray for the wanderer/ pray for me’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 235). O’Brien’s contrast between the space of a small stone church in provincial Ireland, in which devotions to a Marian statue are being performed, and Matt’s memory of a lost lover acting his drama upon a stage in cosmopolitan London, is also a chronotopic function of the ‘threshold’. It signifies the clash between Nell’s adherence to religious orthodoxy, and Matt’s belief, however illusory, in the power of the artist’s capacity to capture an ‘imaginative truth’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 208). The chronotope illuminates the fact that the conflict between the centrifugal forces embodied by Matt’s romanticism and libertarianism and the centripetal forces which constitute Nell’s confessional relation to Mellick and, by extension, the Ireland of the period are no longer compatible. Matt earnestly tells Nell:

You believe in a whole tissue of minor taboos and obligations and prohibitions which derive from your central belief, and also from being a citizen of Dev’s Free State and a victim of the universal Zeitgeist [. . . ] I believe in none of these things (O’Brien 1938, pp. 258–259).

At the close of Pray for the Wanderer, Costello decides upon exile and leaves the insularity of his native country for the cosmopolitanism of New York City. Before doing so, he turns his thoughts to the immediate surroundings of Weir House: ‘This uncrowded landscape, flowing peace. This easy sense of God and of right and wrong, God save Ireland. There might conceivably be some general hope in such salvage’ (O’Brien 1938, p. 307). When perceived through the Bakhtian lens, it can be argued that O’Brien has created an ironic spatial metaphor to symbolize the social and political discourses which operated in the Irish Free State in collusion with the Catholic Church and under the government of Eamon DeValera.

Conclusion

The patina of ‘archaism and ruin’ with which O’Brien renders her portrait of provincial Ireland of the 1930s in Pray for the Wander, provides an Irish translation of Bakhtin’s ‘Historical Poetics,’ which sets periodicity and the associated figures and events in rhythm with distinct senses of place and the spaces of culture to which they give birth. A reading of O’Brien’s work through the lens of the novel’s dominant chronotope of the ‘petty bourgeois town’ provides an experience of a place infused with ‘a viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space,’ but as Bakhtin
notes ‘often serves as a contrasting background for temporal sequences that are more charged with energy and event’ (2002, p. 20). Social-historical elements of the novel have been brought into focus by the chronotopes of the ‘road’, ‘the salon and parlor’ and the ‘threshold,’ which further illuminate ‘the petty-bourgeois’ town which anchors the novel’s critical literary geography. O’Brien’s chronotopes of Weir House and the big Georgian House on King Street graphically visualize the conflict between the centrifugal quest of Matt Costello’s search for a liberating ‘imaginative truth’, and the centripetal forces, cloaked in a retrograde cultural nationalism, binding religion, gender roles, sexuality and freedom of speech in a tight moral and political web. Her fictional depiction of Limerick, framed by Georgian boulevards and houses, church steeples and castles, provided an anchor for her polemical representation of provincial Ireland during the 1937 constitutional plebiscite. While it is true that Mellick is the home of two brothels it is also an arena where a religious schism between the sexual Puritanism enforced by the Jansenistic theology of Maynooth, and the social activism of the Franciscan order is played out within the ‘pure jobbery’ of local politics. Brothel patrons are sacked from jobs; labour activists are painted as heretics. Dissecting the binding web of the Catholic bourgeois family, the provincial town and the Irish State are core themes that emerge in Pray for the Wanderer. When viewed through the analytical lens provided by Bakhtin’s ‘Historical Poetics,’ O’Brien’s novel provides a critical geography which maps out ‘a cultural field in which many kinds of expressions, some factual, some fictional are interwoven’ (Daniels 1992, p. 314). The design of De Valera’s 1937 constitutional draft was aimed at establishing boundaries which would delineate essentialised political and personal geographies to fulfil his own idiosyncratic vision for the Irish nation. His framing of the document ‘overrode the concerns of women, and also those of Protestants, intellectuals, artists, northern nationalists and republicans, all of whose rights were either curtailed or excluded’ (Kiberd 1996, p. 404). The effect of this framing on gender roles and the politics of sexuality in Ireland was debilitating: ‘Irish women retreated into a secondary role with the setting up of the northern State in 1920 and the Free State in the south in 1922. Around Irish women, as in a cage, were set the structures of family and women were assigned home-based, full role as housewives, whose talents and energies were devoted to looking after husband and children’ (MacCurtain 1985, p. 49). MacCurtain’s observation and O’Brien’s writing underscore an argument put forth by Foucault (1972, p. 216):

In a society […] prohibitions interrelate, reinforce and complement each other, forming a complex web [and] the areas where this web is most tightly woven […] where the danger spots are most numerous, are those dealing with politics and sexuality.

O’Brien’s writing was shaped by her experiences working as a governess in Spain, as a journalist in England and as the doubly marginalised figure of a woman and lesbian in the social and political landscape of the Free State. The banning of her novel Mary Lavelle under the Censorship Act of 1929 coloured the sensibilities of her protagonist Matt Costello. Though O’Brien maintained warm family ties with her family in Limerick, like Costello she eventually left Ireland in self imposed exile and divided her time between London and Spain, before retiring with her sister to Kent, England until her death in 1974. Such a literary life echoed the paths taken by her contemporaries James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Their exiles characterized a trend in the broader cultural history of the period marked, as Weisberg (2000, p. 43) notes, by
a formative relationship between literary innovation and the cross-cultural status of many modernist and avant-garde artists, those who during the first half of the century came to London, Paris or Berlin from ‘colonized or capitalized regions [within Europe]…linguistic borderlands… or as exiles…from rejecting or rejected political regimes.

It has been observed that ‘unlike most Anglo-Irish writers, O’Brien recognised that landscape was not exclusively the terrain of Ireland, however strongly its society resembles an available microcosm: the O’Brien perspective is international’ (Pine 1994, p. 81). Despite the influence of European cultural trends and O’Brien’s international perspective, it must be recognized that it was her native Limerick that ground, shaped and polished the essential chronotopic lens of place which generated the critical literary geographies contained in her novel. Invoking the philosopher and poet George Santayana, O’Brien (1962, p. 148) once reflected upon the significance of her native place in her writing: ‘The freest spirit must have some birthplace, some locus standi from which to view the world and some innate passion by which to judge it’. Modestly I say the same for my relationship with Limerick. It was there that I began to view the world and to develop the necessary passion to judge it’. O’Brien generated a critical literary geography which distinctly traces the history, culture and landscape of the provincial Catholic bourgeois in Limerick and South Clare from the Act of Union to the second decade of Saorstát Éireann’s existence. ‘If we may talk at all of the ‘world’ of the writer, Kate O’Brien’s Mellick and the adjoining Vale of Honey is as distinctive as the most famous, as Hardy’s Wessex, or George Eliot’s Warwickshire’ (Reynolds 1987, p. 51).

References


“Rotting Townlands”: Peadar O’Donnell, the West of Ireland, and the politics of representation in Saorstát na hÉireann (Irish Free State) 1929-1933

Charles Travis

Introduction

Socialist writer Peadar O’Donnell’s literary representations of the West of Ireland’s natural and cultural landscapes as depicted in his 1929 novel Adri-goole and 1933 drama Wrack provide an insider’s perspective on the breakdown of community life and the struggle for existence which afflicted the townlands and islands of county Donegal during the formative years of Saorstát Éireann (Irish Free State). The West of Ireland has long been perceived as a genius loci of inspiration for Irish cultural and political identity. Prior to the establishment of the Free State, the natural landscapes and Gaelic communities located in this Atlantic hinterland sustained the geographical imaginations and political aspirations of a people dominated by the British colonial system and bounded by its imperial cartography. After the foundation of the Free State in 1922, the rural culture and landscapes of the West, served to anchor a nationalist genealogy and iconography.

O’Donnell’s literary perspective encompassed the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) against Britain; the ensuing civil war (cogadh na gCarad, “war of the friends, relatives”) between “Treatyites” and Republicans during 1922-23, and the early years of Saorstát Éireann. For historical geographers such a perspective provides in the words of Carl Sauer an “ability to see the land with the eyes of its former occupants, from the standpoint of their needs and capacities.” It must also be noted that “O’Donnell’s literary work and his political projects cannot be understood independently of one another: each is essential to an explanation of the other.” Writing in a period during which “a whole class was vanishing off the face of the land, the statistics nearing a mute witness to the process,” O’Donnell’s works allow geographers to extirpate the idiom and vernacular of a dying culture and flesh out the social and environmental factors which precipitated the loss of agricultural labourers in Ireland “from 300,000 in 1911 to 150,000 in 1936.”

O’Donnell’s origins in rural Donegal and his various roles as a teacher, union organiser, Irish Republican Army volunteer, writer and editor for *An Phoblacht* and *The Bell*, constitute the definition of an “organic” intellectual. Elaborating on a post-Soviet theory of proletarian revolution, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) centred his work on the role of such a figure in his *Quaderni del carcere* (*Prison notebooks*). Written after his incarceration by Mussolini in 1926, Gramsci contended that such individuals played a part in contesting the dominant political and civil establishment of the state by providing new ideological basis for hegemony. Organic intellectuals were “linked to the social mass of country people and the town (particularly small-town) petite bourgeoisie, not as yet elaborated and set in motion by the capitalist system. This type of intellectual brings into contact the peasant masses with the local and state administration....Because of this activity they have an important politico-social function.” O’Donnell’s portrayal of rural life in *Adrigoole* and *Wrack*, served a Gramscian purpose by voicing the needs of the impoverished Irish countryside during the formative years of the Free State’s existence. Before discussing the salience of this role, it is important to situate O’Donnell’s writing within the broader political and economic landscape of the period, and to distinguish his works from other contemporaneous representations of the “West” of Ireland.

The Political Landscape of Saorstát Éireann (1920s and 1930s)

The Irish Free State emerged in 1922 and despite being retained by treaty as a member of the Commonwealth, its budget was dis-established from the coffers of the British exchequer. Facing this new economic reality, the first Irish head of State William T. Cosgrave, established a *Cumann na nGaedheal* government which produced a series of conservative budgets slashing social expenditure over the decade. Consequently “Irish poverty, especially in remote rural districts remained exceptional by contemporary Western standards.” The assassination of Free State Justice Minister Kevin O’Higgins in 1927 by Republican dissidents provoked the question of whether a transfer of political power in the fledgling state, as it entered the 1930s, could be accomplished by peaceful and democratic means.

In March 1932, the question of Irish constitutional viability was answered when Fianna Fáil deputies led by Eamon de Valera, arrived at the parliamentary chambers of Dáil Éireann with pistols in their pockets after winning a majority of seats in the February election. The grass-root political base of the party comprised “a complex coalition of traditionalists, modernisers, visionaries, conservatives, radicals, cranks and optimists.” Based on the structures of the IRA, Fianna Fáil membership attracted the vote of the marginalised small farmers and landless labourers depicted in O’Donnell’s works. Having fought on the Republican side during the civil war, the newly elected party distrusted the democratic intentions of Cosgrave’s administration, and doubted the loyalty of
the Free State Army. The fears of De Valera and his deputies proved naught; their pistols remained pocketed as they were installed as the new government. De Valera’s emphasis on Catholicism, the Irish language and frugality reflected a “philosophy of politics based on the preservation of the small farmer and the social unit centred around him....[T]his type of society was essentially a conservative one. It did not understand or accept the maximisation of capital wealth as a principle object of state policy.”10 De Valera’s government instituted a withering economic protectionism, re-framed the 1937 Constitution’s social clauses with a strong Catholic bias, and altered Ireland’s external relations with Britain, removing the Free State from the Commonwealth and setting the foundations for the declaration of an independent republic in 1948. Despite these bold political strokes “emigration remained a central feature of the Irish experience in the 1920s and 1930s, making a mockery of much of the rhetoric of the pre-independence era, which had depicted it as solely a consequence of foreign occupation. Between 1926 and 1936, 72,563 males and 94,188 females [out of a population of 3 million] emigrated.”11 O’Donnell’s portrayals of Irish rural life pointed to the social and economic factors behind this phenomena, placing his work in contrast to more picturesque and romantic representations of the “West” by urbane artists, intellectuals, politicians and academics of the period.

**Representing the “West”**

It has been argued that following the plantation of Munster and Ulster by English and Scottish settlers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the subsequent displacement of the indigenous Gaelic population to the Atlantic hinterland of the island, the “West” of Ireland was “effectively constructed between 1650 and 1840, when the limits of cultivation...rose from c.500 to c.900 feet, when the ‘spade and the spud’ conquered its contours and frontiers.”12 With the rise of cultural nationalism and the political mobilization towards Irish independence after the great potato Famine of 1845-1848, these isolated Gaeltacht (Gaelic speaking) communities, which had suffered a feudal landlordism, poverty and emigration, took on totemic significance in the various nationalist literary, visual and academic and political representations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Partition of the island under the 1920 Government of Ireland Act secured a Unionist majority for the six county British province in the north. The identity of Northern Ireland and particularly the rural landscape of the Lagan Valley of mid Ulster, strongly associated with the Protestant “settler” tradition, was countered by a nationalist appropriation of the West. In 1921 the writer Aodh de Blácaín published a faith-based novel From a Gaelic Outpost, linking Irish identity to the Catholic heritage that existed in the Atlantic fringe of the island. After the foundation of the Free State in 1922 Daniel Corkery, a professor at University College Cork produced two works, The Hidden Ireland (1924)
and Synge and the Anglo-Irish (1931), arguing for an essentialist national literary identity based on religion, language and land. In 1926 a government report led to the establishment of Gaeltachtas districts in the West which received political and economic preference. Their idealised images were nurtured by De Valera and Fianna Fáil for the 1932 poll to boost the party’s rural and republican credentials with an ambivalent electorate.

Most inhabitants of Gaeltachtas were perceived as stoic and enduring folk by the urban artistic and political gazes of the period. Paintings produced by Academic Realists Sean Keating, Maurice MacGonical and Charles Lamb of Irish rural landscapes “served to embody the nationalist ideals of the new Free State,” and provided iconographic caricatures of their inhabitants. Paul Henry, a Belfast native, created panoramas embracing a style in which traces of human existence were often elided from his canvas: “most typically, he chose to portray landscape tableaux that frequently included the representation of a cottage in a landscape embracing the mountains behind and turbulent skies above, as seen in Lakeside Cottages (1929-32).”

Robert Flaherty’s 1934 film Man of Aran employed a similar artistic trope by cloaking a cast of Aran islanders in silence as they enacted daily rituals of island life for his camera lens. Verbal spontaneity was recorded later and edited to the soundtrack to provide ambience in scenes featuring the islanders shark fishing and riding out a storm in a currach. Lacking any formal dialogue, the film’s narrative was driven and sign posted by captions. An Irish Tourist Association guide from 1939 praised the film as an “epic island story...‘shot’ on the island, the actors being natives playing on Nature’s own stage, with the Atlantic Ocean as a background.”

Social scientists also journeyed to the West in an attempt to capture the essence of “unreconstructed” Irish rural life. Studies in ethnography and anthropology such as Conrad M. Arensberg’s The Irish Country Man (1937) and Family and Community in Ireland (1940) conducted with Solon T. Kimball appropriated a West Clare community and its environs as a picturesque social laboratory. Sponsored by Harvard University, the latter study presented a tightly knit community marked by rural self sufficiency and a belief system blending a pagan lore of fairies with traditional Catholicism. Other less “pastoral” features of rural life during the period were studiously ignored. The “existence of class consciousness [was] deemed not to exist in Irish rural communities,” and “little enough of the harshness, the poverty and the degradation of the life of many people in Ireland,” emerged from Arensberg and Kimball’s fieldwork. Indeed “the darker side of life—drudgery, drunkenness, violence, ill health, exploitation,” seemed to fall outside the focus of their study. Collectively these political, artistic and academic framings of the “West” illustrated an urban and nationalist tendency to objectify the region as a cultural icon. By doing so they ignored the existence of rural poverty and its effect upon the small communities inhabiting the island’s Atlantic hinterland. In contrast O’Donnell’s experience
of life in the townlands inhabited by “tough mountain folk who live[d] in the Fenian tradition” served as a primary spatial lens through which the Donegal native focused his literary and political concerns.

Early Life

O’Donnell was born on February 22, 1893 in Meenmore, a townland located in the Rosses of north-western Donegal. His father, James Sheain Mor, leased acreage on the estate of the Marquis of Conyngham, an absentee landlord, who resided in Dublin. The family’s holdings consisted of a five-acre plot surrounded by ocean, bog and mountain. Unable to secure a livelihood on his acreage, O’Donnell’s father took part in the annual summer migration of farm laborers or “tatie hokers” to Scotland. His mother Brigid, a strong supporter of the seminal Irish labour leader James Larkin, was employed as a low paid worker in a local clothing factory. As a result, “he grew up in a strongly matriarchal community, where women bore the burdens while men were absent for half the year. His mother was a strong, progressively thinking woman who obviously influenced him greatly.”

Families in Meenmore participated in the collective activities of planting, harvesting, turf cutting and fishing, and the communal life of his townland became a “dominant motif in O’Donnell’s reminiscences and literature; within it he identified the raw materials of a future socialistic society.” He attended St. Patrick’s Teaching College in Dublin, where he became influenced by the socialist revolutionary James Connolly and exposed to the works of Karl Marx. In 1913 he returned to teach on the Donegal coastal islands. In 1917 O’Donnell was elected teacher’s representative for the Derry Trades and Labour Council. Soon after, he became a full-time union organizer for the Irish Transport and General Worker’s Union (ITGWU) in Ulster. In 1919 O’Donnell organised strikes at the Monaghan Asylum and Caledon Mill which united Catholic and Protestant workers across the sectarian divide in the province. These industrial actions shook the occupying political establishment to its core: “the senior British official in Ireland, Lord French, regarded the emergence of a united labour movement as a greater threat than Sinn Féin and its campaign to repeal the Act of Union.”

The eruption of the Irish War of Independence and British trade unionism in Ulster marginalised O’Donnell’s efforts and in 1920 he was appointed head of the East Donegal IRA. The ratification of the Anglo-Irish Agreement established the Free State in 1922, and he joined the Republican resistance at the Four Courts in Dublin which sparked the Irish Civil War of 1922-23. Consequently O’Donnell was imprisoned and with the constant threat of execution hanging over his head, he began writing in for a prison journal entitled The Book of Cells. In an epiphanal moment laden with Gramscian overtones, O’Donnell recalled realising: “I know that I know the insides of the minds of the mass of the
folk in rural Ireland: my thoughts are distilled out of their lives....If I could say their lives out loud to these remnants of the Irish of history until they would nod their heads and say 'this is us!' Accordingly, O'Donnell's fiction can be read in a Gramscian context as a dimension of his political activism. His novel Adri-gooole contributed to raising public consciousness during the Land Annuities cam-paign of the late 1920s and Wrack served as a dramatic response to the criticism of Church and State aimed at his communist action group Saor Eire during the “Red Scare” of the early 1930s.

Adri-gooole (1929)

O'Donnell based his novel on a newspaper article in the Irish Inde-pendent concerning an isolated family who after paying land annuities, starved to death in the townland of Adri-gooole on the Cork-Kerry border in 1927. On the flyleaf of a 1929 edition O’Donnell inscribed: “I was in Mountjoy Jail when the O’Sullivan family were starved to death at Adri-gooole [sic]. As I don’t know that district I set the story in Tirconaill, believing mountain folk to have a oneness of experience.” Their deaths fulfilled a prophetic warning by Patrick McGilligan a Free State government minister who as a member of the first Irish government from 1924 to 1932 grimly predicted “people may have to die in this country, and die through starvation.” Set in the western fringe of Donegal, the novel traces the life of Hughie Dalach, a migrant labourer who forced as a boy to seek work in the Lagan Valley of Ulster, later emigrates to Scotland. It witnesses his return and marriage to Brigid, a local woman from the Lower Hills. Adri-gooole closes with Hughie’s losing struggle against the bog, and his family’s fatal estrangement from their townland neighbours in the impoverished years following the Irish Civil War.

Historical Background

O’Donnell completed Adri-gooole after spending several years working on the Land Annuities Campaign, protesting Free State payments “amounting to well over £3 000 000 a year,” to the British government. Levied upon small landowners, the annuities during the 1920s deprived households “about 10 percent of their net income.” Originating in the 1891 and 1909 Land Acts which provided tenants with cash advances to purchase small holdings carved out of larger estates, annuity payments were disrupted in 1919 by war. The Land Act of 1923 obligated the Free State to collect annuities in arrear and place them in a Purchase Annuities Fund. In 1926 a subsequent treaty stipulated the arrears would be paid directly to Britain. This provoked a meeting in O’Donnell’s na-tive townland, historically dominated by landlordism. The land annuity issue raised long-held Fenian sentiment and resistance: “Landlordism was a worn out, historical myth. It was binding nowhere, at least of all in Ireland. The land an-
nuity was only the other side of the rent penny. People should disown that too. Henceforth let no man pay rent for land. The people raised their hands and pledged themselves to practice and protect this freedom....[P]eople came to look on it that loyalty to the Republic was, somehow, involved in the repudiation of landlordism; as if it was an aspect of the refusal to recognize the British court.”

O’Donnell’s novel lent force to his “argument that breaking the law by withholding land annuity payments was preferable to starvation.” Eamon De Valera adopted the issue for Fianna Fáil’s 1932 election campaign, and after assuming office halved the payments, but retained the amounts for the Free State and refused to pay the balance to the British government. Consequently the Land Annuities campaign, stoked by socialist activists such as O’Donnell, flared into the Economic War against Britain which took place between 1933 and 1938.

The Lower Hills

Ironically, Adrigoole commences in a bucolic frame, despite the impoverished landscape of bog and stone in which it is set: “In the Lower Hills, clearing up the fields at the end of the harvest was the best loved task of the year. Once the basket of potatoes had disappeared into the barn, and the last stone or sod had been fixed on the fence round the stacks of oats, neighbourliness had new freedom.”

Communal life is sheltered symbiotically within the natural features of a rugged landscape:

Around blazing fires old men and stories; women leaning wise heads towards live words and sipping strong tea; the tinkle of dancing knitting-needles. From the shelter of grey rock, where stars spoiled the shadow, the gurgling laughter of couples. A blue sky roofing a grey night. And behind it all the mountains of Donegal, sombre, muscular, massive, full-breasted with earthliness, leaning against granite headed Errigal, sharp-edged among the stars.

The novel provides a genealogy of Adrigoole’s origins: “The first man to come in to the Lower Hills was a Dalach. He married a woman of the Gallaghers.” The novel’s description of the birth of the townland is consistent with indigenous settlement patterns on the Atlantic coast after the Scottish plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century: “One by one cottages sprang up, crops grew in warm pockets, a road came, a school house was built down at the bridge; school master and books followed.” The hinterland represented by O’Donnell’s “Lower Hills” region constitutes “some of the poorest and most inaccessible parts of western Europe and it is certain that [such regions] only experienced close and permanent settlement by farming people at a very late date and that these late colonisers were probably refugees evicted from adjoining more desirable regions.”
The Hiring Fair

O’Donnell’s narrative gaze also frames the child labour markets of Ulster which operated until the late 1930s. The “Hiring Fair” of Strabane in County Fermanagh, was a place O’Donnell writes, “where Gaelic servants and the planter masters,”35 met to “bargain year after year, since the native power was broken in Ulster.”36 Within this quasi-feudal market, “the folk from the ‘back country,’”37 many of them children, were hired out at a pittance as a manual agrarian labourers and domestic servants to wealthy Protestant farmers from the Lagan Valley of mid Ulster. Hughie’s experience of this sectarian space is fraught and tense:

he felt that even here the grown-ups were afraid. A buzz of hushed talk arose among the young folk, and instinctively it was in Gaelic. Round about the Gaelic whispers hung the heavy, solemn, Scotch accent of the stranger.38

Donal A’Chailleach, “who had a name for a short temper in the Lower Hills;”39 is the Catholic middleman, who acts as a broker between the Gaelic folk and the Protestant landowners. Donal, despite professing a feisty animosity against the Orange farmers: “Damn on them; an’ it’s us should be up here in these lands; bloody lot o’ thieves,” is passive in the face of their aggression: “Donal only grinned when a stocky, middle-aged man in side-whiskers shouldered him roughly out of the way.”40 Hughie and the other children line up, as one such farmer eyes them like cattle, and tells Donal: “I could be doin’ wi’ a likely lump o’ a lassie’ he said. ‘Is the big one yourn?’”41 He in turn responds:

‘She’s that. Come over here, Ellen.’ Ellen a girl of sixteen, came slowly forward, her head down. Mr. Craig put his hand under her chin, and tilted her face backwards ‘She’s a bit well-featured. I’d sooner hae a homelier face. I don’t want men wastin’ their time.’32

Hughie is hired and commences a rite of passage common to many folk who migrate from the Lower Hills. The economic gateway of the Hiring Fair eventually takes him to Scotland, where an emigrant’s ticket to American can be earned. O’Donnell’s narrative finds Hughie as an adult returning instead to his native townland, where he will engage in a futile struggle against the confluent forces of an embittered community and an unforgiving and unsustainable landscape.

The Bog

Western bogs on the Irish archipelago were described by the “doyen” of Irish geography E. Estyn Evans as regions of “refuge,” that provided “hiding places as secure as the mountain massifs.”43 On an environmental level however “the
modern west of Ireland landscape (so often visualised as ‘natural’) ... can be seen as an ecological catastrophe on a large scale, represented graphically by the spread of blanket bog.” Its claustrophobic representation in *Adrigoole* mirrors this observation. O’Donnell’s bog land is an “unkind environment,” which “subjugates” its inhabitants: “But the rocks were sharp-edged, deep-rooted, broad-faced; the patches of soil were twisted around granite boulders; there were no ploughs, only spades; no horses, only donkeys.” O’Donnell writes that Hughie’s grandfather perceives the bog as a quagmire, rather than a place of refuge, and has predicted that this environment will eventually devour the ambitions of his progeny:

The grandfather looked at the empty, greyish bog.... Only low-lived things could live in there; fat, bulbous, lazy frogs that come out of soft, lifeless, spongy spawn, and go out again in slimy, clammy death.

Hughie’s grandfather believes that emigration is the key to the future: “He had no feeling that his grandson should be kept at home; out into the world sometime or deeper into the bog; not the bog; emphatically not the bog.” When Hughie does return to a farmstead above the Lower Hills, he is happy at first to be home: “Without friendly soil under foot Hughie was nothing. Scotland had taught him that; strength and greatness were in Hughie on the land only.”

In time his grandfather’s prescience comes to haunt him: “He did not know it was hereditary in him to have a feeling against bog. He worked to drive it deeper and to deepen the layer of life.” Hughie tells his wife Brigid, whose uncle Neddy Brian owns the remote farm upon which the family lives: “It’s the bog underneath, ... it’s hard to drive bog deep, an it sucks an’ suck at any strong life above it.” Hughie’s attempt to wrestle a small crop from its grasp, becomes futile: “He could scarcely send his spade to the ears without touching bog. He tried to deepen drains, but he was flooded out. He cursed the mountain about him that day with its bellyful of water.” The Rising of Easter 1916 instigates the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-1921 during which IRA men are given shelter at the farm. This puts a further strain on the family’s resources: “[at] night they whispered how quickly their supply of potatoes would be used up with all the traffic.”

The civil war that follows independence causes “a caesura across Irish history, separating parties, interests and even families, and creat[es] the rationale for political divisions,” which remain etched on southern Ireland’s political landscape to this day. Holding Republican sympathies during the civil war, the Dalachs are ostracized by the Free State shop-keepers, clergy and Gardai of Adrigoole: “The lack of trust in Hughie in his farm was growing; it was becoming a nightmare with him that the bog was rising.” O’Donnell’s bog metaphor conveys a counter-idyllic impression of Irish historical geography laden with post-colonial overtones: “a treacherous site of instability, the bog unleashes dark and recidivist forces....Sodden grounds sustain a primeval past, operate as sites of agrarian and political strife, and seem to promise or, in some cases, threaten a future be-
Hughie is forced to emigrate and find work as a navvy in Scotland. Land arrears in the form of a “terrible plague of Civil Bills” issued by the Free State begin to arrive to the small isolated farmers, as Hughie contracts typhoid fever in Glasgow. His wife rushes to nurse him, and upon returning to Adrigoole they discovers the illness has further isolated the family: “Will neighbours never be neighbours again?” Brigid mused. Out of a sense of desperation, Hughie joins a neighbour’s illicit poteen brewing operation, but the still-house is raided and he sentenced to prison. On the journey to Dublin, a prisoner and a garda engage in banter which O’Donnell leaves with social criticism:

The sergeant said the poteen was the curse of any district....Donal defied the sergeant to tell him a case of a well-to-do man that ever made poteen. And the sergeant defied Donal to tell him of a man that made poteen ever coming to anything...barring he left the district. And Donal demanded the name of any poor man, or anybody belonging to a poor man, that ever became anything, barrin’ he left the district.

The subtle shading of the preceding passage teases out the existence of class conflict and the underground economy elided from many representations of rural Ireland during this immediate post-colonial period. After his release from prison, Hughie returns to his destitute farm above the Lower Hills and is greeted by a grim tableaux of death, which causes him to go mad:

The woman, Brigid, she was dead. The child face down on the hearth was dead. Wrapped in the straw at the back of the door there was a body; little Sheila. When the straw was moved stench rose. In the bed somebody stirred and they turned eagerly. Nancy was sitting up. They lifted her out. Donal grumbled; Eoin cried weakly; faces without flesh or colour; only eyes.

Inspired by the actual deaths of the Sullivan family, O’Donnell transposed their story “as a voice out of life I know” upon his familiar Donegal landscape. Their struggle of existence, made precarious by the breakdown of “neighbourliness” afflicted many regions in the Atlantic hinterland of the island in the politically turbulent and economically impoverished years following Irish independence.

Wrack (1933)

In November 1932, O’Donnell’s drama Wrack (published in 1933) premiered at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The play’s six acts were set upon a Donegal coastal island and the surrounding Atlantic Ocean on a cold winter evening. The drama’s dialogical spaces invoke a barren, wind swept topography, and the
power of sea and landscape to affect the dispositions within the social milieu of a dwindling, isolated fishing community.

Historical Background

*Wrack* was written in the atmosphere of the “Red Scare” of the early 1930s during which O’Donnell was labelled by the Free State and the Catholic Church as “a very dangerous individual.” Irish Catholic bishops had issued a pastoral letter in 1931 linking *Saor Éire*, O’Donnell’s political action group to Stalinist Russia, due to its call for a “nationalisation of banks, industries and large landed estates.” O’Donnell’s play countered this xenophobia: “They said Russian Gold was the cause of the unrest. I said such things as the slapping of wet skirts against people’s legs. Therefore *Wrack*,” and noted: “The Irish bishops were playing havoc with the rural minds which would naturally, if left free to themselves, sympathise with those they were being incited to destroy.” As a consequence of the Blasket Island biographies of Tomás O Criotmhthain’s *An tOileánach* (The Islandman) (1929) and Maurice O’Sullivan’s *Fiche Blian ag Fás* (Twenty Years A-Growing) (1933), “island communities emerged into the national and...international spotlight,” during the 1930s. But statistics reveal O’Donnell’s depiction of island life was more prescient: “In 1911 there were 124 inhabited islands off the Irish coast...by 1991 there were only 21 inhabited with a population of just 3,055.” With its strongly matriarchal voice as a counter to the patriarchal tone of the bishop’s letter *Wrack* elicits a last rite for the dying remnants of Ireland’s island communities.

The Island

The curtains of O’Donnell’s drama open upon the interior of a stone cottage inhabited by Hughie and Brigid Boyle, a young fishing couple in their thirties. Lamenting the endemic dampness that pervades the island, Brigid tells her visiting neighbour Mary Jim: “I hate the slapping of wet skirts on my legs. I hate all this pulling and driving and mean living; it’s making me a kind of risen. And there’s more like me. Look at the way we’re wearing out.” Mary Jim has just returned from scavenging on “the carrigeen moss strand” and is brooding as well: “I would as soon look for milk out of the rotten udder of the dead cow the dogs are tearing at in the Point, as go down to the sea these days for anything.” A drought of herring has left the islanders “hiding and juking” their “guts from roaring with hunger” and reduced to combing for “carrigeen, sloak, dilsk; everything that’s dead and clammy” on the rocky shoreline. Mary Jim’s assessment is bleak: “There won’t be herrin’ anymore. The sea around this island is dead.” She mourns: “What life can people have on an island when the life goes out of the sea?” Though the island women are filled with despair, Brigid’s husband Hughie praises his environment: “Isn’t the sea the most natural thing in the world? You never see that right till you
go to a ravelled up place like a city.”

Brigid, however, articulates the social malaise infesting a community on the edge of starvation:

If it’s not the silence it’s a spill of talk, and the silence is the same as talk; a cover to hide one mind from the other. Is there a house on the island with two women on the floor but there's tightness and sharpness and silence? Is there a houseful of childer but they’re nagging and scratching at one another? Isn’t the whole island in fidgets? And what is the root of it all? I’ll tell you, its hunger; aye it is, hunger.

An impending storm bringing a run of herring is soon recognised by an elder named Kitty Cormac: “Cobwebs on the grass is rain. Cormorants is birds I never heard heed put in.”

Excitement and fear mingle as the shroud of enmity and despair is lifted temporarily from the islanders and their milieu.

The Sea

Fishing crews set out by launching their string of boats under “the glow of the lanthorn.”

Peter Dan, the island’s top fisherman calls out “there’s a strong fresh smell of fish in the wind here” and the crews soon reach a place on the fishing grounds where “the water is a broth of souls.” The islanders cast their nets, and as the storm rises, O’Donnell plots the cruel trade of fishing by juxtaposing the old fisherman Johnny Anthon’s calls for “neighbourliness” in the face of disaster, against merciless lines intoned by a faceless “voice,” in a quest to return to the island with a ballast of herring. As Johnny’s boat grapples with a full net on the swelling ocean, the “voice” celebrates: “Heavens we have them. Ho-ho me whistlers! Three cheers for old Ireland.”

However, Johnny hears a shout for help from Peter Dan and Hughie’s boat, and raises the alarm to his crew. The “voice” replies: “What heed would you put in a shout...the dogfish will be tearing our nets and spoiling the fish,” to which Johnny replies: “Always put heed in what might be the shout of a neighbour wanting you.” Their craft begins to founder and Johnny orders the net of herring to be cut loose: “It’s a hard word to say, but it’s a word must be said: come on, now, it’s murder, but we must do it -out with your knives.”

The “voice” protests “we have our fish, and we’ll take them in or sink,” to which Johnny pleads: “But by God, man, you heard Peter Dan.” The response of the “voice”: “To hell with Peter Dan,” is cold and heartless like the roiling sea which surrounds the boats.

An Caoineadh (The Keening)

After a night spent on the coastline waiting for Hughie’s return, Brigid returns to her cottage at dawn and finds Paddy and Kitty Cormac, rosaries in hand. Urged to offer devotions Brigid scathingly replies: “If I open my mouth to pray I’ll SCREECH” She is admonished for her despair by the elderly couple:
“Peter Dan’s crew battering their way through the sea, its on your knees you should be.”91 With the storm still raging the clairvoyant Fanny Brian enters the cottage with blood on her arm, crying out: “Our men is lost, Brigid Hughie!”92 Raising the “caoineadh”93 (keen; crying weeping), Fanny Brian laments: “The thick thighs of the waves crushed the life out of our men, for I saw it.”94 Giving evidence for Kitty Cormac’s judgement that “yon sea is not human”95 Fanny recalls: “I saw a big coffin drifting helpless in the sea, and a sail peeling itself off a mast and winding itself around the bodies of dead men. It was Peter Dan’s boat.”96 Responding to the horror of this vision Brigid cries out “I fixed the holy water bottle in the bow- a coffin’....Hughie knew.”97 As the surviving crews return, Johnny Anthon is helped into the cottage only to be met with Fanny Brian’s fury: “my curse on you for an island. My thousand curses on the hungry belly of the sea.”98 Brigid then “dashes to the door and pulls it open; a gust of wind puts out the lamp. There is a struggle around the door.”99 Kitty Cormac’s “voice alone sounds in the rosary in the darkness”100 as the curtains draw upon an empty and forsaken cottage. Wrack illustrated to urban audiences Saor Éire’s concerns about “the absolute destitution of the coastal fishermen.”101 Lauded critically, the Irish Times praised the drama: “As a picture of life in the most desolate parts of Ireland it has its merit. The outlook and speech of these people, as depicted by the dramatist, have the ring of truth about them.”102

**Conclusion**

The political, economic and social blight afflicting the West of Ireland following the establishment of the Irish Free State caused O’Donnell to observe regarding his own county: “We saw townlands of white cottages rot. New houses might arise on the sites of the old but the old neighbourliness did not arise. A way of life was gone forever.”103 The depictions of Irish rural life in Adrigoole and Wrack address a primary concern of Carl Sauer’s who argued that researchers attempting to extirpate the historical geographies of a region needed “to place one’s self in the position of a member of the cultural group and time being studied.”104 O’Donnell shaped his characters, their dialogues and sense of place from the townlands and topographies of his native landscape: “You have an environment, and if you want to run a theme through it, you call up people out of that environment to live out your theme.”105 The desolation which colors the end of Adrigoole came to O’Donnell in 1924 as he was on the run in the hills of Donegal: “I was more aware now of the weakness of this economy. My eyes were sharper. I noticed how the heather ate its way into land that had fallen into feeble hands. It saddened me that the mountains should renew their grip on fields that had been won from them by desperate, hopeful men. I often walked alone in the shadow of the hills. It was then that the sense of gloom and doom in my novel Adrigoole, entered my mind.”106 At Wrack’s debut in the Abbey Theatre in 1932, O’Donnell stated that he “just wanted to draw aside a window-curtain
in a cottage on an island,” and later reflected: “I intended it to be a glimpse of an island dying; the island I had in mind has since died.” His works reflected the reality that for many rural dwellers in 1930s Ireland “living conditions were basic; families large; emigration and tuberculosis part of life.”

O’Donnell remarked in 1933 that “my pen is just a weapon and I use it now and then to gather words into scenes that surround certain conflicts.” Adri-goole coupled with O’Donnell’s agitation, exacerbated class tensions in rural Ireland setting the stage for De Valera’s Economic War with Britain. Wrack a product of the “Red Scare” of 1930s, which provided the government with “a climate for new, terrorist legislation,” allowed O’Donnell in Gramscian terms, to draw upon pockets of rural resistance to further his political and literary work: “The Church-burning, anti-God Reds, when arrested, turned out to be neighbours’ sons that grew up among them. Their commonsense began to work again.” As a result he was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters after its foundation by W.B. Yeats and AE Russell in 1932. O’Donnell continued to disown the “official culture” of Free State Ireland with its “idealization of the west, [and] valorisation of peasant life.” In regards to Irish rural communities he declared “the best step towards a new cultural life [was] a sharp rise in the standards of living” and dismissed the Irish state’s idyllic pretensions towards its rural heritage: “I hate to see spinning-wheels, thatched cottages, small farms and handicraft kept alive to make a show.”

O’Donnell’s work entwined the literary and the political to contest the hegemony of Church and State, expressed in the Free State as a form of Catholic nationalism. He attempted unsuccessfully to foster a counter-hegemonic revolution in this region of Ireland and lamented: “A powerful, vital folk they are but too blasted patient; muling along carrying manure on their backs, draining bogs, blasting stones, while out beyond was their inheritance.” In conclusion, O’Donnell’s works illustrate that for the West of Ireland, landlordism and colonialism had been replaced after the foundation of the Irish state by economic and political marginalization, nationalist objectification, and most tragically by the breakdown of neighbourliness, a social compact which for hundreds of years had sustained rural communities in the face of institutionalised poverty, famine and emigration.

Notes

5. *An Phoblacht* the official paper of Sinn Féin (the political wing of the Irish Re-
publican Army) was founded in Belfast in 1906 as *The Republic*. O’Donnell edited the publication between 1931 and 1934.


14. Ibid., 31-44, 42.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 188.


21. Ibid., 4-5.

22. Ibid., 13.


27. Ibid.


31. Ibid., 11-12.

32. Ibid., 13.

33. Ibid.


36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 53.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
44. Kevin Whelan, “Settlement Patterns in the West of Ireland in the Pre-famine Period,” in Tim Collins, ed., *Decoding the Landscape* (Galway: Centre for Landscape Studies, 1994): 63.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 26.
50. Ibid., 231.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., 239.
53. Ibid., 279.
54. Ibid., 236.
59. Ibid., 266.
60. Ibid., 287.
61. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
70. Ibid., 11.
71. Ibid., 19.
72. Ibid., 12.
73. Ibid., 14.
74. Ibid., 19.
75. Ibid., 18.
76. Ibid., 18.
77. Ibid., 49.
78. Ibid., 16.
79. Ibid., 24.
80. Ibid., 75.
81. Ibid., 76.
82. Ibid., 77.
83. Ibid., 82.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., 83.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., 91.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid., 92-93.
95. Ibid., 86.
96. Ibid., 92-93.
97. Ibid., 93.
98. Ibid., 95.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
102. Ibid., 198.
111. Peadar O’Donnell, *There will be Another Day*, 126-127.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid., 2.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
Heart of Darkness *Redux.*

Charles Travis

1

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look like that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. (Heart of Darkness.1)

The story of Marlow’s journey in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is one that describes a psychological voyage to the ‘Inner Station’ of the Jungian Shadow archetype lurking in the unconscious meta-narrative of the Western imperial project.

Conrad’s mapping of the relationship between subconscious mindscapes and the perception and appropriation of corporeal landscapes in his novella is the narrative of Marlow’s employment by the ‘Company’ to travel up river to its ‘Inner Station’ located in colonial Africa to relieve a top Company agent, Mr. Kurtz of the ivory, that he has been hoarding. The journey encapsulates a descent into human physical and spiritual depravity that is palpably inherent in the agency and structure of colonialism, as Marlow steaming upriver first encounters the myth of Kurtz and then his writings from his diary before actually meeting the man who has elevated himself to the level of an imperial demi-god above the natives in the African interior.

The commentary provided by the Saharan travel diary of Sven Lindquist, the poetry of Robert Bly and the critical literary approaches of Edward Said, allow a means to map relevant themes emerging from the narrative within *Heart of Darkness.* These textual maps trace the nineteenth century roots of Western imperial thought, discourse and action as they took purchase in the soil of the subconscious landscapes of Europe and America and their subsequent territorial possessions. But first we shall begin with Conrad, the sailor, whose journeys beyond the occident, took us inside the psychic architecture of our own Western imperial assumptions.

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II

He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. (Heart of Darkness.²)

Joseph Conrad, originally named Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, was born on December 3, 1857 to Polish parents in Berdichev, a town in the Ukraine, which was dominated by the Russian Empire at the time. In 1862, his father Apollo, a Polish patriot, was found guilty of conspiracy against the Russian state and took his wife Evalina and young Jozef with him into exile to the northern province of Vologda. By the time Conrad was eleven he was an orphaned and living in Poland with an uncle in Cracow. He left Poland when he was sixteen and went to Marseilles in France to become an apprentice on the ship Mont Blanc and began his training as a merchant sailor. Eventually plying his trade in the West Indies, he allegedly was a gunrunner for supporters of Don Carlos, the Spanish pretender, on the ship Tremolino.

In February of 1877 after acquiring substantial gambling debts on borrowed money, he attempted suicide, but failed when the bullet he intended for his heart, missed its mark. In 1878, after recuperating from his self inflicted wounds, he joined the British Merchant Navy and by crewing on the various ships, including the Narcissus and the Otago among others, travelled widely to the colonial backwaters of the South Pacific, Asia, the East Indies and the Belgian Congo. In 1902, after retiring as a merchant sailor, he published Heart of Darkness, a striking critique of Western imperialism culled from his experiences travelling as a seaman.

III

But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, “must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approached them with the might as of a deity,” and so on, and so on. “By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,”…It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence…This was the unbounded power of eloquence –of words- of burning noble words…It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lighting in a serene sky: “Exterminate all the brutes!”’ (Heart of Darkness.³)

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² Conrad, 8.
³ Conrad, 71-72.
Like Conrad describing the travel dairy of Kurtz, the Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist wrote as well about his own physical and psychological journeys. In a travel diary that he kept during his trek across the Sahara by bus, Lindqvist meditated generally on themes within Heart of Darkness. But specifically, one particular sentence within the text caused him to brood very deeply. In his diary he described his own reflection on the import of that sentence,

> The core of European thought? Yes, there is one sentence, a short simple sentence, only a few words, summing up the history of our continent, our humanity, and our biosphere, from Holocene to Holocaust. It says nothing about Europe as the original home on earth of humanism, democracy, and welfare. It says nothing about everything we are quite rightly proud of. It simply tells the truth we prefer to forget. I have studied that sentence for several years. I have collected quantities of material that I never have time to go through. I would like to disappear into this desert, where no one can reach me, where I have all the time in the world, to disappear and not return until I have understood what I already know.’

The sentence was, ‘Exterminate all the brutes!’ And when Lindqvist published his diary in 1992, nearly ninety years after Conrad published Heart of Darkness, he chose that epithet of Kurtz’s as the title. Over the course of his journey, he pondered the Enlightenment project’s cultural contribution to the development of Western imperialism.

The ‘Age of Reason’ had transformed Europe from a collection of feudal states emerging from the Dark Ages into a crucible of democracy and humanism, but by the late nineteenth century, the emergence of European nationalism combined with developments in the study of the natural sciences created an ethno-centric rationale to validate the European imperial project.

In his diary, Lindqvist explores in a hermeneutic fashion the writings of notable scientific figures of the nineteenth century such as the zoologist Georges Cuvier, the geologist Charles Lyell, the botanist Charles Darwin and the geographer Friedrich Ratzel, to gauge the impact of their work on the course of the natural sciences during the 1800s and their subsequent contribution to the ethos of imperialism. In Michel Foucault’s term, these individuals could be viewed as rare figures, founders of a ‘discursivity’ that contributed to the development of the theory of evolution, its racialist assumptions and

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4 Sven Lindqvist, Exterminate All The Brutes (London: Granta, 1992) 3.
generally, to the philosophy of the natural sciences during the 'halcyon’ days of the European imperial project.

Lindqvist begins his hermeneutic analysis with the writings of Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), the founder of vertebrae palaeontology. In January 1796, Cuvier lectured at the Institut National de France, in Paris, first publicly introducing the idea of extinction, which he based upon the discovery of fossilized remains of the mastodon. His audience, having lived through the ‘reign of terror’ of the French Revolution, during which many old established French patrician families had been killed, found in Cuvier’s lectures an equivalent experience echoing from the distant geological past.

In 1812 Cuvier published Recherché sur les ossemens fossiles des quadrupèdes [Research on the Fossil Bones of Quadrupeds]. In its introduction entitled Discours sur les révolutions du globe [Discourse on the Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth] he wrote,

Why has not anyone seen that fossils alone gave birth to a theory about the formation of the earth, that without them, no one would have ever dreamed that there were successive epochs in the formation of the globe?6

Between 1827-1835, Cuvier published The Animal Kingdom, a 16-volume text that divides humans into three races, and in describing the 'Negroid' races he states, 'The hordes belonging to this variant of human being have always remained in a state of total barbarism.'7 This racialisation of African continental culture already had its precedent in the work of anatomist William Tyson's text, Orang-Outang or The Anatomy of the Pygmy, (1708) which delineated the search for a missing link in the hierarchy of species.

In 1829 the British Geologist Charles Lyell (1797-1875) visits Cuvier, and greatly admires his work. He goes on to write one of the classic works of nineteenth century British geology, Principles of Geology (1832) claiming the ultimate cause of extinction was an organism’s lack of flexibility and ability to adapt when unfavourable environmental changes occur. Like Cuvier’s experience of the French Revolution, Lyell was influenced by socio-cultural historical changes occurring within his own habitus8. He had observed similar

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6 George Cuvier’s study Recherches sur les ossemens fossiles des quadrupèdes [Research on the Fossil Bones of Quadrupeds] was first published in France in 1812. The Discours sur les révolutions du globe [Discourse on the Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth] was the introduction to his larger work. The translation contained in this text is based upon the Third French Edition (Paris and Amsterdam, 1825). The introduction (which is excerpted from in this text) to the earlier work had been translated into English (in 1813) and German (in 1822), and had added considerably to Cuvier’s international reputation as one of France’s most important scientists.


8 A concept generated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which he defined as ‘a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences,
phenomena, albeit on a social scale, in the emerging labour markets of the Industrial Revolution that were spreading across Europe, and subsequently sensed the traces of this phenomenon taking place in nature as well.

The British naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) carried Lyell’s Principles of Geology with him on his famous voyage on the Beagle. It influenced his research in the Galapagos Islands and in the spring of 1834, during his time in Patagonia, he observed, ‘Certainly no fact in the long history of the world is so startling, as the wide and repeated extermination of its inhabitants?.’ Darwin published his famous Origin of Species in 1859, concluding that the study of fossils will throw light not only on the destruction of living creatures but also on their origins. Darwin’s assertion towards evolution created a debate in which his scientific beliefs and those of Cuvier and Lyell, were generally at odds with each other.

Cuvier simply did not believe in organic evolution. Species he contended were essentially inalterable in form. If there were morphological changes occurring within a species, there would be convincing fossil evidence of the existence of such intermediate specie forms. In contrast, Lyell believed that the destruction of a species was actually the result of a small number of environmental and biological processes occurring slowly over time.

Darwin sceptically questioned the assumptions held by Cuvier and Lyell. He speculated that if old species did indeed die slowly, then why couldn’t the converse occur -that new species could arise slowly as well, with their intermediate forms being forced out quickly without necessarily leaving any geological or fossilized traces or remains? Darwin contended that the fiercest evolutionary struggle took place between species that most resemble each other genetically.

In regard to this fiercest of evolutionary struggles he stated, ‘Hence the improved and modified descendants of a species will generally cause the extinction of the parent species.’10 In a letter to Lyell in 1859, Darwin speculated that this evolutionary struggle may also occur between the human races, resulting in, ‘the less intellectual races being exterminated.’11 In 1871, Darwin published The Descent of Man and in it claimed that gorillas and ‘savages’ are intermediate forms between lower primates and ‘civilized’ man. He concluded that these specie forms were indeed dying out. He stated in his text, ‘At some future period not very distant as measured in centuries, the

functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfer of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems.’ In David Swartz, Culture and Power (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 100.


civilised races of man will certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races.’

Lindqvist in his text, observes in regards to the debate between these three discursive figures of nineteenth century natural science,

_Cuvier, Lyell and Darwin – they are all, in their work, fictional characters. The story of how they made their discoveries is nothing but a story, as it says nothing about them themselves. The omission of all that is personal makes the scientific ‘self’ into a fiction lacking any equivalent in reality._

Their inherent assumptions of racial inferiority of the ‘darker’ and ‘savage’ races informed other evolutionary discourses of the nineteenth century. In 1850, the anatomist Robert Knox (1791-1862) published _The Races of Man: A Fragment_. He had studied comparative anatomy with Cuvier, and in his text racial prejudice already infusing the developing theory of evolution is framed in scientific rationality and given moral validity. With little empirical evidence to support his claims, Knox writes,

_I feel disposed to think that there must be a physical and consequently, a psychological inferiority in the dark races generally...To me, race, or hereditary descent, is everything; it stamps the man...race is everything: literature, science, art, in a word, civilization, depend on it._

Lindqvist observed that the racialisation of evolution, emerging from biology and zoology, spread to other disciplines, including geography, the discipline charged with mapping those surfaces of the earth that the imperialist project was intent on appropriating. Between 1882 and 1891, the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, (1844-1904) originally a zoologist/biologist, wrote the classic _Anthropogeographie_. In the tenth chapter of his text he focused on ‘the decline of peoples of inferior cultures at contact with culture.’ In 1897 he continued with this theme in _Politische Geographie_ within which he claimed that

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13 Lindqvist, 104.
15 Friedrich Ratzel’s, _Anthropogeographie_, was actually published in two volumes, in 1882 and 1891. The first volume was ‘an application of geography to history’ and the second volume concerned ‘the geographical distribution of man.’ Both volumes must be placed in the context of the debate over the relationship between the cultural sciences and natural sciences taking place within the German intellectual community of Ratzel’s time, as shown in R.J. Johnston, D. Gregory & D.M. Smith _The Dictionary of Human Geography 3rd Ed._ (Cambridge: Blackwell 1984) 18.
16 Lindqvist, 144.
17 Ratzel’s attempt to conduct a nominally scientific study of the relations between society and nature through the elaboration of a system of social, biological, political, geographical and cultural concepts can be seen to culminate in his text _Politische Geographie_. Writing in a historical milieu that can be described as characterized by an
‘stunted hunting people in the African interior’\textsuperscript{18} along with ‘innumerable similar existences’\textsuperscript{19} are classed as ‘scattered people with no land.’\textsuperscript{20} In 1900 Ratzel began to develop the idea of \textit{Lebensraum}, by linking the biological theory of evolution with geographical theory concerning space, in which he ‘equated a nation with a living organism and argued that a country’s search for territorial expansion was similar to a growing organism’s search for space.’\textsuperscript{21}

In 1904 he published these ideas in \textit{Der Lebensraum}, based upon his earlier travels in North America in the late nineteenth century and his observations of the conflict between European whites and Native Americans in their struggle over land. This struggle became the paradigm upon which much of Ratzel’s conceptualisation of \textit{Lebensraum} was based. He observed of the Western expansion in America, ‘The result was an annihilating struggle, the prize for which was the land, the space.’\textsuperscript{22} He added ‘The history of primitive peoples dying out on the appearance of a people of higher culture provides many instances of this.’\textsuperscript{23}

In concluding his survey of the effects that the discourse of natural science in the nineteenth century had upon the emerging century, Lindqvist notes that the racialist assumptions of evolution first emerging in the fields of biology and zoology had spread with devastating effect into the twentieth century infusing and transforming the direction of nationalism, social theory and politics.

In 1924 Adolph Hitler was given Ratzel’s \textit{Politische Geographie} when he was incarcerated in Landsberg Prison after his failed ‘Beer Hall Putsch.’ The text influenced his writing of \textit{Mein Kampf} (\textit{My Struggle}) during his yearlong prison stay. The German School of \textit{Geopolitik}\textsuperscript{24} appropriated the concept of \textit{Lebensraum} in the 1930s to justify the Nazi programme of territorial expansion. Hitler’s incorporation of the ‘annihilating struggle’ contained in \textit{Lebensraum} emerged in his belief that under the Third Reich, Germany and

\textsuperscript{18} Friedrich Ratzel, \textit{F.Politische Geographie in Exterminate All The Brutes}, Sven Lindquist (London: Granta 1992) 145.
\textsuperscript{19} Ratzel, 145.
\textsuperscript{20} Ratzel, 145.
\textsuperscript{21} Johnston, Gregory & Smith, 329.
\textsuperscript{23} Ratzel, 154.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Geopolitik}, A school of political geography developed in interwar Germany which was associated with the geographer Karl Haushofer and the journal \textit{Zeitschrift fur Geopolitik} (1922-44) was a crude form of environmental determinism (a doctrine that human activities are controlled by the environment, which became leitmotif during the early decades of twentieth century American Geography as well.) The concept provided a spurious basis and rationale to justify German expansion, which provoked WWII. Along with Ratzel’s work it also appropriated the German philosopher Georg Hegel’s concept of the state as a community based upon on a transcendental spiritual union in which and trough which all nationals are bound spiritually into an organic ‘oneness.’ Johnston, Gregory & Smith, 162,228,230.
England were to divide the world between them, possibly due to the royal blood lines shared by the two countries. Hitler’s concept of Lebensraum led eventually to the institution of the Nazi extermination policy towards the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally handicapped and other ‘social undesirables,’ and underlay his justification of the ‘final solution.’

IV

I thought his memory was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man’s life—a vague impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it in their swift and final passage;

(Heart of Darkness,26)

I had to beat that Shadow—this wandering and tormented thing.

(Ibid.27)

The image imbedded in the title Heart of Darkness in psychoanalytical terms is an allusion to the Jungian Shadow archetype, whose domain exists within the subconscious elements of the human psyche. The psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) wrote that the Shadow, along with the Animus and Anima, (gender expressions of female and male, respectively) are archetypes stemming from the collective unconscious28 (shared by a cultural group) that enter the personal unconscious and influence the ego with the most frequency.29

Jung believed that the collective unconscious is rooted in a person’s heredity and culture and consists of archetypes, (from the Greek, arkhetupon: literally, ‘first moulded’) which are inherited.30 Jung wrote that,

25 Lindqvist, 158.
26 Conrad,105.
27 Conrad, 94.
28 Frantz Fanon, the post-colonial theorist and psychiatrist interrogated the subtle strains of racism and anti-semitism in Jung’s work.Positing psycho-analysis as a Euro-centric colonial discourse, Fanon wrote that the construct of the collective unconscious ‘is purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group…[and]…the expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilised savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man.’ Frantz Fanon, Black Skins, White Masks, (London: Pluto 1989) 186-187. This interrogation of Fanon’s could possibly be based upon Jung’s observation concerning the collective unconscious of people of colour that, ‘…It does not matter that his skin is black. It matters to a certain extent, sure enough—he probably has a whole historical layer less than you. The different strata of the mind correspond to the history of the races.’ Carl Jung, The Collected Works, Vol. 18 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1952) 46. Jung was developing his research in the social sciences at the time that the racist Euro-centric scientific discourses were influencing all levels of scientific inquiry, and it seems his work as well was not entirely insulated from this strain.
30 Jung.
This collective unconscious does not develop individually, but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents.31

Jung believed that access to the collective unconscious was found in the realm of dreaming, images and what he termed the active imagination, essentially the domain of Poiesis (from the Greek, poiesis: literally, ‘making poetry.’)

The contemporary American poet Robert Bly informs his work with this Jungian Shadow archetype. For Bly, the Shadow represents the instinctive side of the psyche, that which ‘has lots of hair and a tail.’32 He notes that a Puritanical streak in Western culture in general and in America in particular, tends to repress the Shadow and equate it with evil.33 He observes that in oriental cultures this archetype is symbolized by the ‘Yin’ energy of the Yin-Yang, in which the white part and the black parts of personality are united inside a circle.34

In the Western cultural psyche, there is apartheid dividing this unity and the projected effect of this separation is structured into space in the forms of racism, sexism and other quasi-imperialistic discourses and manifestations. Jung wrote that such projections are psychic resistances against the archetype and the effect of this is to

Isolate the subject from his environment...instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one. Projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face.35

The face of American imperialist projections first emerged in February of 1899, the year Conrad was finishing Heart of Darkness and Rudyard Kipling was publishing his poem The White Man's Burden, a leading expression of British imperialist ideology in McClure's Magazine, in which he proclaims:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Take up the white man's burden} \\
\text{Send forth the best ye breed} \\
\text{Go bind your sons to exile} \\
\text{To serve your captives' need}\end{align*}
\]

The Philippine-American War began on 4 February 1899, and two days later the U.S. Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris that officially

33 Bly, 24.
34 Bly, 24.
35 Jung, 146.
ended the Spanish-American War, ceded Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States, and placed Cuba under U.S. control. American imperialists latched on to Kipling’s poem to justify the US global expansion as a noble cause, but even before the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the institution of slavery fed by the ‘Atlantic triangle’ trade among the United States (and the Caribbean), Western Africa and Britain, had laid a deep foundation for American Shadow suppression.

In 1901, after two years of devastating warfare in the Philippines, Mark Twain remarked: ‘The White Man’s Burden has been sung. Who will sing the Brown Man’s?’ Bly’s analysis of the psychological state of Kurtz, as the personification of fin de siècle Western imperialism in Heart of Darkness, informs us that within this historical milieu ‘for a white man to recover his Shadow at the same time he is exploiting blacks is…beyond the power of a human being.’ Yet Conrad, as an author was able to trace the darker elements of the collective unconscious and travel to the ‘Inner Station’ of the Shadow, through his novella.

In contrast, Bly as a poet begins his journey to the darker elements of the ‘American’ mindscape with images traced from the stone motif of ‘Plymouth Rock’ along the cold Northern Atlantic coast of New England. He argues, ‘If the American drama begins with Puritans killing turkeys, then Kissinger’s and Nixon’s bombing of Cambodia [itself an example of the burgeoning effect of imperialism enshrined in the military-industrial complex] takes place in the third act.’ He traces the narrative of this drama in the following sketches of poetry, weaving a landscape from various threads. He begins with the Puritans, who have landed in New England to escape religious persecution and consequently create a deadly ‘theocracy’ of their own.

It is that darkness among pine boughs
That the Puritans brushed
As they went out to kill turkeys.
We have carried around this cup of darkness.
We hesitate to anoint ourselves.

Bly observes that, ‘most Puritans did not distinguish darkness from Satan…. Hatred of the Yin side of the circle begins as a small thread in the first American cloth.’ He follows this thread of hatred trailing the Conestoga wagon caravans across the prairie carrying the faith of

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38 Zwick.

39 Bly, 64.

40 Bly, 12.


42 Bly, A Little Book on the Human Shadow, 11.
‘Manifest Destiny,’ an ideology that gained prominence in the nineteenth century, in which divine sanction was given to justify the westward expansion of the United States.

Lie after lie starts out into the prairie grass, like mile-long caravans of Conestoga wagons crossing the Platte.
And a long desire for death flows out,
Guiding it all from beneath:
“A death longing if all longing else be in vain…” \(^{41}\)

This thread of hatred, emanating from a fear of the Shadow side of the soul, wove itself into the social cultural fabric of the emerging ‘American’ landscape. The genocidal aim of the Indian Wars (which contributed to Ratzel’s development of the concept of Lebensraum) during the late nineteenth century has imprinted itself within the American military industrial consciousness of the early twenty-first century.

We fear every person on earth with black hair.
We send teams to overthrow Chief Joseph’s government.
…Underneath all the cement of the Pentagon
There is a drop of Indian blood preserved in snow:
Preserved from a trail of blood that once led away
From the stockade, over the snow, the trail now lost. \(^{44}\)

Bly picks up this lost trail in the desolation of the late twentieth century American experience in Vietnam and reflects back on the Indian wars of the past century. He observes, ‘The South Asians, representing a civilization more reconciled to the moist dark than ours, merged with ghostly Cherokees or Crows far down in our psyche.’ \(^{45}\) He recognized that the Vietnam War ‘…emphasized how estranged from nature the entire nation was.’ \(^{46}\) Bly, in his reading of certain trails in the American psyche seeks the Shadow image of inward darkness rising from the poesis of the American landscape, and asks:

The literature of the American earth is many thousands of years old, and its rhythms are still rising from the serpents buried in Ohio, from the shells the Yakuts ate of and threw to the side. The literature of the American nation is only two hundred years old. How much of the darkness from under the earth has risen into poems and stories in that time? \(^{47}\)

In this regard, the earthy darkness in the American psyche of Henry David Thoreau’s pond in Walden (1845) and the sensuous engagement with grief over the Civil War during the 1860s in Walt

\(^{41}\) Bly, Selected Poems, 79.
\(^{44}\) Bly, 75.
\(^{45}\) Bly, A Little Book on the Human Shadow, 12.
\(^{46}\) Bly, Selected Poems, 63
\(^{47}\) Bly, A Little Book on the Human Shadow, 63.
Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1881) had been traded for the illusory bright limitlessness of the Puritanical metaphor of America as a ‘Shining City on a Hill’ (as utilized by President Ronald Reagan’s speechwriters during the 1980s.)

To borrow a phrase from Edward Soja, it is a ‘Synekism’ of thought which first entered the American mindscape in a sermon entitled *A Modell of Christian Charity* written in 1630, by Puritan leader John Winthrop. His proposal of a utopian synoikismos, -which translated from the Greek means, ‘literally the condition arising from dwelling together,’ as was intended for the Puritan faithful travelling together by ship to New England to escape religious persecution in England. Winthrop wrote,

...For wee must consider that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The ies of all people are upon us.

The establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony later that same year concretely grounded the Puritan’s utopian aspirations towards the ‘New Jerusalem’ and laid the foundation for the promulgation of the ethos of ‘Manifest Destiny.’ During the twentieth century ‘America’ as both a notion and a nation took on global significance. In the latter half of the century discourses promulgating this motif and ideology were revived and reconstructed in an attempt to shape and contour the political, social and cultural landscapes within the United States.

This was indicative of the strict Puritanical impulse that runs through the fabric of the country’s history. Bly in his deconstruction of this cultural impulse that masks the Shadow states, ‘As Americans, we have always wanted the life of feeling without the life of suffering. We long for pure light, constant victory. We have always wanted to avoid suffering, and therefore are unable to live in the present.’ In repressing this archetype, Bly states that in regards to males in general, ‘the dark side... is clear. Their mad exploitation of earth resources, devaluation and humiliation of women, and obsession with tribal warfare are undeniable.’

Commenting on President George H. Bush’s decision to attack Iraq, launching the Persian Gulf War in 1990, Bly lamented that it was, ‘The greatest mistake ever made by an American president. Because

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48 This lay sermon was written in passage aboard the *Arbella*, and was part of the ‘Arbella Covenant’, one of the discourses upon which the premise of the Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded in 1630. John Winthrop (1588-1649) one of its founding fathers, set Boston in Massachusetts, as the capital of his “citty upon a hill.” He attended Trinity College, in Cambridge England and studied law at Gray’s Inn in London. He was governor of the colony four times until his death in 1649. Reuben, Paul P. 2002. Chapter 1: Early American Literature to 1700 –John Winthrop. PAL: Perspectives in American Literature-Research and Reference Guide. WWW URL: http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chapt/winthrop.html (7 April 2002)
the soul of the nation is still torn by the Vietnam War…the government decision gives no hint of Shadow motives. We see Iraq’s Shadow, but not our own.”

An example of the national self deception and Shadow suppression inherent in Bush’s decision to attack Iraq could be seen in the creation of a Persian Gulf War mediascape, inaugurated in the USA by Cable News Network (CNN) in 1991 to cover ‘Operation Desert Storm’. Within the penumbra of the nation’s repressed Shadow, a endless stream of broadcast images of the war (described by Lewis Mumford as the ‘Supreme drama of a completely mechanized society,’53) started flowing twenty-four hours a day via global mass media outlets. This type of coverage delivered market-share and was quickly copied and multiplied by other broadcast media corporations.

This audio-visual narrative, composed of hyperreal information, distorted the effects of the mechanised violence (itself a by-product of the military-industrial complex,) of American air and ground forces against Iraq’s meagre forces. This narrative created a seductive simulacra of reality and reinforced the American public’s mythological meta-narratives concerning the idea of freedom to justify the U.S. military operation that ‘liberated’ Kuwait from Iraqi possession.

The violent corporeal projections of the Shadow embedded in this narrative flowed out before uncomprehending eyes and anaesthetized consciousnesses of the nation. Jean Baudrillard [father of the conceptions of mediascape, hyperreality and simulacra] interprets this type of seduction ‘…as a game at the level of appearances, …something fundamentally artificial.’

Thus an artificial sense of American national invulnerability was re-enforced by this hyperreal narrative, only to be shattered by the events of 11 September 2001, which were broadcast globally and fulfilled a premise of the post-modern age, that if mediascapes can promulgate images that construct mythological political narratives, it can be perceived that mobile phones, the internet and passenger airlines can as well, become tools of deconstructive political messages within in this medium. And thus in this post-modern milieu, as Martin Amis notes, ‘terrorism [becomes] political communication by other means.’

V

We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil.

(Heart of Darkness56)

56 Conrad,51.
Conrad, operating in a historical milieu devoid of broadcast mass media, but still inculcated with imperialist propaganda (such as McClure’s Magazine), did not ignore the suffering inflicted by the imperialist project in his narrative consciousness. The literary theorist Edward Said notes, ‘As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them.’ But did contribute a penetrating critique on the imperialist project through a piece of literature. And, Said locates two different critical lines anticipating the apotheosis of the post-modern age event of 11 September 2001, leading out of Conrad’s narrative consciousness in Heart of Darkness.

The first critical line that Said recognize in Conrad’s work is the emergence of a ‘Striking lack of faith in…the great legitimising narratives of emancipation and enlightenment.’ As discussed by Jean-Francois Lyotard, ‘Our age… is post-modernist, concerned only with local issues, not with history… not with a grand reality but with games.’ And Foucault observes, ‘since power is everywhere it is better to concentrate on the micro-physics of power that surround the individual.’

In the writings of both continental philosophers, observes Said, ‘We find precisely the same trope employed to explain the disappointment in the politics of liberation: narrative, which posits an enabling beginning point and a vindicating goal, is no longer adequate for plotting human trajectory in society.’ He continues in a commentary that describes the emerging global landscapes of the 21st century, ‘Enter now terrorism and barbarism… a new phase of history…’

The second critical line Said locates in Conrad’s writing is the explicit reference in the Heart of Darkness to a sense of the narrative’s perspective being outside of the conception of the imperialist project. Marlow and his listeners on the deck of the yawl, Nellie, although enveloped in the ‘God, King and Country’ ethos underlying imperialism, are represented in a manner that suggests that they have a more secular perspective that is perhaps outside the imperialist project in its perceptive focus. As Marlow surveys the setting sun over the Thames estuary he gazes upon London and says suddenly, 

And this also…has been one of the dark places of the earth.

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58 Said, 29.  
61 Said, 29.  
62 Said,30.  
63 Conrad, 7.
Said writes, concerning this narrative twist, ‘It is beholden neither to notions about historical destiny, and the essentialism that destiny always seems to entail, nor to historical indifference and resignation.’

In identifying these critical themes in Conrad’s work, Said reflects upon his own identity as Palestinian in exile, who has experienced the occupation of his homeland by a foreign power. And as a Palestinian Said writes from an outsider perspective when he states, ‘I feel outnumbered and out-organized by...a Western consensus that has come to regard the Third World as an atrocious nuisance, a culturally and politically inferior place.’ In regards to this consensus he observes that it has, ‘...taken up a strident chorus or rightward tending damnation, in which [it] separates what is non-white, non-Western, and non-Judeo-Christian from the acceptable and designated Western ethos, then herd it all together under various demeaning rubrics such as terrorist, marginal, second rate, or unimportant. To attack what is contained in these categories is to defend the Western spirit.’

To attack these categories is perhaps to engage in an element of Shadow projection, and to further the structures of nineteenth century imperialism in which the oppressors and the oppressed, much like Kurtz and his native followers become linked in a violent tautological cycle which sinks deeper and deeper into conflagration, chaos and entropy, firmly re-enforcing narratives and discourses emanating from the architectural failures of the Enlightenment project to disengage itself with its own cultural and ethnocentric bias. In this regard we can inform ourselves with Said’s observation that

The discourse [concerning the imperial attitude] of resurgent empire proves today that the nineteenth-century imperial encounter continues today to draw lines and defend barriers. Strangely, it persists also in the enormously complex and quietly interesting interchange between former colonial partners…But these exchanges tend to be overshadowed by the loud antagonisms of the polarized debate of pro- and anti-imperialists, who speak stridently of national destiny, overseas interests, neo-imperialism, and the like, drawing like minded people – aggressive Westerners and ironically, those non-Westerners… away from... ongoing interchange.

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64 Said, 31.  
65 Said, 31.  
67 Said, 28-29
VI

The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (Heart of Darkness. 68)

The interchange provided by the commentaries on Heart of Darkness, by Lindqvist, Bly and Said, offer an ontological mapping of a psychological journey into the unconscious to the ‘Inner Station’ of the Western imperial Shadow. In this regard Marlow and Kurtz represent to a degree, the polarized ‘Yin’ and ‘Yang’ energies of the human psyche. Marlow alludes to his narrative emerging from a subconscious landscape when he states

It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation. 69

Of his journey on the steamer upriver, he states it

… was like travelling back to the beginnings of the world. 70

And relates,

It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me — and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough, too — and pitiful — not extraordinary in any way — not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light. 71

Marlow floats on the edge of an emerging fin de siecle consciousness, and when he arrives at the Inner Station he encounters Kurtz who has raised himself to the level of an imperialist demi-god over the natives slowly expiring in a hut surrounded by posts adorned with impaled heads. The barbarism, that the Western imperialist project is intent on civilizing is found deeply rooted within its own cultural structures. Conrad, in painting Kurtz’s last living moment, forms a prescient image to warn Western consciousness as it enters into the twenty first century,

Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some

68 Conrad, 111.
69 Conrad.
70 Conrad, 48.
71 Conrad, 11
image, at some vision –he cried out, twice, a cry that was no more than a breath –The horror! The horror!72

Finis.

Bibliography


72 Conrad, 100.


