



*Journal of
Irish
and Scottish
Studies*

Volume 7: Issue 1

*Contested Witnesses
in Irish and Scottish
Literature*

Aberdeen University Press

JOURNAL OF IRISH AND SCOTTISH STUDIES

Volume 7, Issue 1
Autumn 2013

Contested Witnesses
in Irish and Scottish Literature

Published by
Aberdeen University Press

in association with

The Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies

ISSN 1753-2396

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies

General Editor: Cairns Craig

Issue Editors: Michael Brown and Sandra Hynes

Editorial Advisory Board:

Fran Brearton, Queen's University, Belfast
Eleanor Bell, University of Strathclyde
Ewen Cameron, University of Edinburgh
Sean Connolly, Queen's University, Belfast
Patrick Crotty, University of Aberdeen
David Dickson, Trinity College, Dublin
T. M. Devine, University of Edinburgh
David Dumville, University of Aberdeen
Aaron Kelly, University of Edinburgh
Edna Longley, Queen's University, Belfast
Shane Alcobia-Murphy, University of Aberdeen
Ian Campbell Ross, Trinity College, Dublin
Graham Walker, Queen's University, Belfast

International Advisory Board:

Don Akenson, Queen's University, Kingston
Tom Brooking, University of Otago
Keith Dixon, Université Lumière Lyon 2
Marjorie Howes, Boston College
H. Gustav Klaus, University of Rostock
Peter Kuch, University of Otago
Graeme Morton, University of Guelph
Brad Patterson, Victoria University, Wellington
Matthew Wickman, Brigham Young
David Wilson, University of Toronto

The *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies* is a peer reviewed journal published twice yearly in autumn and spring by Aberdeen University Press in association with the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies. An electronic reviews section is available on the RISS website at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/issjournal.shtml>

Editorial correspondence, including manuscripts for submission, should be addressed to The Editors, *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, Humanity Manse, 19 College Bounds, University of Aberdeen, AB24 3UG or emailed to: riiss@abdn.ac.uk

Subscription information can be found on www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/publications

Cover image: Jo Fraser, 'In Charitates', 2012 Charcoal and Pitt Pastell on Paper, copyright Jo Fraser ©

CONTENTS

Editorial	v
The Heretic and the Hibernophobe: Foreign Perceptions of Ireland from Antiquity to c. AD 1200 <i>Aideen M. O'Leary</i>	1
Ghostly Repetitions: The Supernatural, Nostalgia and Classical Tradition in James Macpherson's <i>Ossian</i> <i>Ersev Ersoy</i>	53
'Shameful Literary Traditions': Daniel Corkery and the Literary Reputation of Francis Sylvester Mahony <i>Fergus Dunne</i>	75
Individual Doubt in George MacDonald's English Novels <i>Tim Baker</i>	105
Decolonizing Anarchic Formations and the State's Politics of Isolationism in Patrick McCabe's <i>The Butcher Boy</i> <i>Shabriyar Mansouri</i>	131

Following in Caryl Churchill's Footsteps: Rona Munro's neo-Brechtian Didactic Paratext in <i>Pandas</i> (2011) <i>Virginie Privas-Bréauté</i>	173
Jarring Witnesses in the Poetry of John Hewitt and Derek Mahon <i>Edwin Cruden</i>	191
Notes on Contributors	203

The Heretic and the Hibernophobe: Foreign Perceptions of Ireland from Antiquity to c. AD 1200

Aideen M. O'Leary

Before Thomas Cahill's book-title became a notorious catchphrase, the Irish had long been credited with 'saving civilisation'.¹ In one fervent instance, James J. Walsh said of Irish missionaries that 'their intensity of purpose and lofty enthusiasm that carried them on in spite of difficulties and obstacles that might discourage the hardest, *was well recognized by the neighboring peoples in the Middle Ages*... This is the secret of the achievements they succeeded in making so successfully in those centuries of the early Middle Ages when a great force such as theirs was so sadly [sic] needed by the disturbed world of their time.'² The message here (along with their enormous contribution to learning) is that Irish triumphs over their less Christian adversaries led to widespread, unquestioning recognition of their greatness. However, it must also be acknowledged that anti-Irish sentiment was known among their contemporaries; the best-documented adversaries, or rivals, belonged to the Christian élite.³ It was the Irish students, teachers and missionaries on the European Continent who seemed to provoke the strongest reactions.⁴

To understand the emerging world of colonial Ireland in the later Middle Ages, it is essential to consider the testimonies of those who in earlier times supported the conquest and/or colonisation of the island; however, for the period up to the Norman 'conquest', and especially for Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the question of how Ireland was viewed from abroad remains relatively unexplored. Broad analyses of Ireland's relationship with the outside world have been written from a modern, usually historical,

¹ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York, 1995), 4: 'Without the Mission of the Irish Monks, who single-handedly refounded European civilization throughout the continent in the bogs and valleys of their exile, the world that came after them would have been an entirely different one — a world without books.'

² James J. Walsh, *The World's Debt to the Irish* (Boston, MA, 1926), 37–8 (my italics).

³ Cf. David N. Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat: Scribe, Language and Culture in the Church of Viking-Age Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), especially 37–9; see also Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (London, 1995), 221–2.

⁴ Cf. section 4, below.

perspective;⁵ more specific studies have dealt with English and (more recent) British perceptions of Ireland.⁶ Authors of both these kinds of works often begin with the ideas of Gerald of Wales in the late twelfth century.⁷ A few mediaevalists have gone so far as to note anti-Irish sentiment in their own times also.⁸ The present discussion therefore extends from Antiquity to the point where most previous studies have begun.

It is well known that Gerald was writing in the context of the Norman ‘civilisation’ of Ireland.⁹ A great many scholars have been drawn to this extremely serious (though highly entertaining) individual’s works; his two books on Ireland are seen as the earliest full exposition of a conqueror’s mindset in relation to the island, and as crucial sources – even the ‘founding texts for the English writing about Ireland’¹⁰ – for the next several centuries. His views were incorporated (often unacknowledged) into a great many later works on Ireland, from various periods and political contexts.¹¹ These adaptations ranged from travelogues based on brief visits to literary portrayals by Irish resident Edmund Spenser,¹² and even included nineteenth-century

⁵ Robin Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169–1369*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 2012); James Muldoon, *Identity on the Medieval Irish Frontier: Degenerate Englishmen, Wild Irishmen, Middle Nations* (Gainesville, FL, 2003); David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester, 1988); and Patrick Ward, *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing* (Dublin, 2002).

⁶ Andrew Hadfield and John McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to That Land: British Perceptions of Ireland from the Reformation to the Famine* (Gerrards Cross, 1994); Shirley Adawy Peart, *English Images of the Irish, 1570–1620* (Lewiston, NY, 2002); E. D. Snyder, ‘The Wild Irish: A Study of Some English Satires against the Irish, Scots, and Welsh’, *Modern Philology*, 17 (1920), 148–85; and P. Coughlan, ‘“Cheap and Common Animals”: The English Anatomy of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century’, in Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (eds), *Literature and the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990), 205–23.

⁷ For example, Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*, 1–3; Hadfield and McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to That Land*, 25–9.

⁸ Snyder, ‘The Wild Irish’, 147; J. F. Killeen, ‘Ireland in the Greek and Roman Writers’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 76C (1976), 207–15 at 211; and F. X. Martin, ‘The Image of the Irish – Medieval and Modern – Continuity and Change’, in Richard Wall (ed.), *Medieval and Modern Ireland* (Gerrards Cross, 1988), 1–18 at 17–18.

⁹ Cf. section 5, below.

¹⁰ Hadfield and McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to That Land*, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7 and 25. For discussion of later writers’ reliance on Norman perspectives see also Snyder, ‘The Wild Irish’; Martin, ‘The Image of the Irish’; and especially J. Gillingham, ‘Images of Ireland, 1170–1600: The Origins of English Imperialism’, *History Today*, 37 (1987), 16–22.

¹² The principal detailed analyses of specifically English perceptions of Ireland are P. Coughlan, ‘“Some secret scourge which shall by her come unto England”: Ireland and Incivility in Spenser’, in Coughlan (ed.), *Spenser and Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Cork, 1989), 46–74; Joan Fitzpatrick, *Irish Demons: English Writings on*

accounts.¹³ Significantly, John Gillingham has shown that Gerald's works reflected earlier and contemporary Norman perspectives on Ireland and the Irish.¹⁴ In this investigation I hope to extend Gillingham's work and to show that Norman expansionist (and therefore British imperialist) attitudes had deeper roots and a much longer history in the Middle Ages and earlier.

How Irish people were perceived by those on the outside – and more specifically what scholarly characteristics and attitudes were ascribed to Irishmen – is a different question from how, or whether, they 'saved civilisation', but nonetheless a crucial one. Examination of such authors' motives inevitably helps to deepen our understanding of Irish history: for the period up to the early seventh century we possess no documentary evidence from the Irish in Ireland, so there is no option but to investigate external sources. From then until the Norman intervention, these accounts furnish us with essential historical evidence (in addition to that from within Ireland) and provide new perspectives on Ireland's relations with the outside world.

Discussion of Ireland viewed from abroad in the Middle Ages necessarily invokes several fundamental issues. Mediaeval Ireland is often characterised by outward missionising and hostile invasion. Those principally credited with 'saving civilisation' are the well-documented Columba, Columbanus, Aidan, John Scottus Eriugena, and Marianus Scottus, who together spanned half a millennium. But many figures entered Ireland from other environments, and their interactions with the Irish varied from those who stayed for long periods and made sustained efforts to integrate, for instance St Patrick, Agilbert, Ecgfrith, and Scandinavian colonists, to Gerald of Wales and his royal patrons, who visited much more briefly. Still more outsiders probably never visited but were indirectly informed and/or influenced, like Aldhelm and Bede. Foreigners' evidence was occasionally based on their personal experiences, most importantly the accounts offered seven centuries apart by St Patrick and Gerald of Wales, but more often came through second-hand information or even hearsay, some writers revealing their views by mention of an individual Irishman, real or imagined.

Ireland, the Irish, and Gender by Spenser and His Contemporaries (Lanham, MD, 2000); Elizabeth L. Rambo, *Colonial Ireland in Medieval English Literature* (London, 1994); Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Savage Soyl* (Oxford, 1997); and John P. Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller in Ireland: Accounts of Ireland and the Irish through Five Centuries* (Dublin, 1991). For further discussion of Spenser's views on Ireland see section 5, below.

¹³ Gillingham, 'Images of Ireland', especially 16–18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

The present study is concerned with Ireland as perceived by those from other places, rather than with the influence of Irish learning in mediaeval Europe. The latter issue has occasioned much interest among mediaevalists.¹⁵ By contrast, outsiders' perceptions of Ireland from Antiquity to c. AD 1200 (which were expressed in a multitude of contexts and in several languages) have been discussed peripherally by those considering particular sources,¹⁶ or as brief subsections of larger works,¹⁷ but have never been made the subject of a full investigation.¹⁸ The ultimate objective is to revisit old questions as perceived from Antiquity to the Norman intervention in Ireland: the extent of Ireland's political and cultural distinctiveness; the perceived issue of anti-Irish prejudice;¹⁹ how particular Irishmen's contributions to 'civilisation' were received in the eyes of those writing in other lands; and

¹⁵ See, for example, James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929; rev. imp. by L. Bieler, 1966), 486–604; M. Herbert, 'The Legacy of Colum Cille and his Monastic Community', in James P. Mackey (ed.), *The Cultures of Europe: The Irish Contribution* (Belfast, 1994), 9–20; G. Le Duc, 'The Contribution to the Making of European Culture of Irish Monks and Scholars in Medieval Times', *ibid.*, 21–39; Martin McNamara (ed.), *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution* (Dublin, 1976); B. Bischoff, 'Trische Schreiber im Karolingerreich', in *idem*, *Mittelalterliche Studien: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte* (3 vols, Stuttgart, 1966–71), III, 39–54; and M. T. Flanagan, 'The Contribution of Irish Missionaries and Scholars to Medieval Christianity', in Brendan Bradshaw and D. Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland: Revisiting the Story* (Blackrock, 2002), 30–43.

¹⁶ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 219–32; Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 36–9; A. T. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', in L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (eds), *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian* (Groningen, 1996), 31–59; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Bede, the Irish, and the Britons', *Celtica*, 11 (1983) 42–52; Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Ipswich, 1979), 139–40 and 143–6; and Jane Stevenson (ed. and trans.), *The 'Laterculus Malalianus' and the School of Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge, 1995), 8–20.

¹⁷ Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland: From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (1899; rev. imp. by Brian Ó Cuív, London, 1967), 17–24; Snyder, 'The Wild Irish', 151–4 and 170–1; Gillingham, 'Images of Ireland', 18–20; and Martin, 'The Image of the Irish', 7–13.

¹⁸ This despite fascinating treatments of how the Irish were depicted in later English literature and drama: for example, Rambo, *Colonial Ireland*; Coughlan (ed.), *Spenser and Ireland*; Joep Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expression prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1986), especially 86–8; Stephen O'Neill, *Staging Ireland: Representations in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Dublin, 2007). For nineteenth-century stereotypes see L. P. Curtis, Jr, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, CT, 1968), especially 2–7; and *idem*, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot, 1971).

¹⁹ For later manifestations of this see Liz Curtis, *Nothing But the Same Old Story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism* (London, 1984).

the development of outsiders' knowledge and understanding of Ireland in this period.

This geographically peripheral island is accepted as having, and is known among mediaeval historians for, societal features peculiar in European terms. Ireland's political and social make-up was somewhat distinctive: the society was without overall political governance, as the island had not been Romanised.²⁰ Instead it had a thoroughly uncentralised structure of kingdoms whose leaders (on all strata) came from the extended kin-group.²¹ Also the Irish learned classes (the highly-trained individuals who preserved Ireland's history and culture) developed a tendency to synthesise Ireland's pre-Christian and Christian pseudohistory with universal historical events, creating fascinating webs of legendary narrative;²² in this way we know that they were extremely self-confident in, and passionate about, their own history and culture. Given all these factors, it has been necessary for historians to weave together diverse primary sources, both Irish and foreign in origin, in order fully to reconstruct Irish society. With such an understanding of the questions and issues in the earlier mediaeval Gaelic world as a whole (that is, Ireland and Scotland) we can truly come to terms with how – and how much – politics and culture changed with the Norman intervention. I have attempted to show elsewhere that the Irish ecclesiastical élite (from the seventh century to the twelfth) utilised external texts and ideas, often transforming them to fit the mores and circumstances prevailing in their own society.²³ But regarding the other side of this equation, we need fully to examine the motivations and accuracy of the non-Irish accounts of the Irish and of their history – the basis for compliments, whether negative remarks were intended as racial slurs or personal insults, and if the overall picture was one of stereotype or even outright 'prejudice' against the

²⁰ Cf. section 1, below.

²¹ Donncha[dh] Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 1–29; Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), 3–5; cf. another distinctive culture, that of the Icelanders: Jesse L. Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (New York, 2001).

²² For example, R. A. S. Macalister (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (5 vols, London, 1938–56); John Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory* (Cambridge, 1994); A. M. O'Leary, 'Mog Ruith and Apocalypticism in Eleventh-Century Ireland', in Joseph F. Nagy (ed.), *The Individual in Celtic Literatures* (Dublin, 2001), 51–60.

²³ Aideen M. A. O'Leary, *Trials and Translations: The Latin Origins of the Irish Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (Aberdeen, 2013). The specific themes of that discussion are the reception and adaptation in Ireland of apocryphal legends about the apostles: I have explored which apocryphal *acta* were known in Ireland and in Irish contexts abroad, and attempted to show that reworking of apostolic legend played a vital role in Irish ecclesiastical culture.

Irish – in order to make insightful deductions about Ireland's place in mediaeval Europe.

Foreigners' views of Ireland and the Irish address four major aspects of Irish history: Ireland's geographical setting and political, social and military background and customs; the early raids and migrations of some Irish to Britain and their effects there; the arrival and growth of Christianity in Ireland in the fifth century; and perceptions of Irish Christians abroad. As Norman and English colonists' views have hitherto been characterised as coming from a world of changed relations between Ireland and what had by the late eleventh century become Anglo-Norman England, these will be treated separately in a fifth section.

We also gain insights from outsiders into Irish political and cultural matters at home. The best-documented – and most remarkable – example of those who went there to stay was the Briton, Patrick, subsequently venerated as the Irish national apostle. He left tantalising information about his Christian missionary activity in Ireland in the fifth century.²⁴ Instances of those who travelled to the island but did not settle permanently there are far more frequent in external records, however: Christian Ireland was seen by many as a highly desirable place for foreigners to gain a broad, intellectually stimulating (and perhaps safer) education in the early Middle Ages.²⁵ By contrast, much useful information on Ireland and her people came from the pens of those who almost certainly did not see that country for themselves at all. For instance, Bede probably never even left Northumbria but devoted himself to the preservation of all kinds of knowledge, sifted through friends, correspondents, and more formal written sources.²⁶ Other accounts of matters relevant to the Irish at home were probably based on more superficial knowledge: acquaintance with an individual Irishman in England or on the Continent;²⁷ the availability of earlier remarks on Ireland (for instance Classical references); or perhaps even through rumour.

²⁴ A. B. E. Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu's Life* (Chichester, 1978). Broad discussions include E. A. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?* (Woodbridge, 1985); Ludwig Bieler, *Studies on the Life and Legend of St Patrick* (London, 1986); and David N. Dumville *et al.*, *Saint Patrick, 493–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993). For detailed discussion see section 3, below.

²⁵ For example, the future king Oswiu was educated in Ireland – *Historia ecclesiastica* III.25: Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), 296–7.

²⁶ Charles Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera Historica* (2 vols, Oxford, 1896), I, xlv–xlvi n3.

²⁷ For example, Theodulf's poem on Cadac-Andreas: cf. section 4, below.

The reasons why we might expect to find prejudice, apart from common-or-garden hostility, in foreign accounts of the Irish have to do with the distinctiveness of Irish political life and the shock that that would have caused to the uninitiated who heard or read about it from their own, usually Romanised, environments. We should also consider the early-mediaeval missionary activities of Irish ecclesiastics in other places: Irish churchmen could take intellectual conflict amongst themselves and were unafraid of a good argument,²⁸ but we should not assume that those unfamiliar with Irish culture would very easily accept this.²⁹ Another possibility is that the testimonies of pre-eminent ancient or early-mediaeval authors were perpetuated by later commentators who thought it more amusing to convey negative rather than positive views.

1 Background Information

I turn first to consider the background or introductory information: Ireland's location, landscape, climate; and the political practices and military strategies of her people. Such issues are almost exclusively discussed outside of Ireland: the interest of the Irish in describing their own environment lay not so much in the everyday as in the unusual, which is why we have (proportionately) so many chronicle-entries on plagues, famines and other natural disasters, long hot summers (very unusual), as well as various cosmological phenomena such as comets and eclipses.³⁰

For the earliest evidence of Insular activities we have to rely on non-Irish sources, although much of their pre-Christian heritage may have been preserved by the Irish when they committed their heroic tales to writing.³¹ The Irish have been seen in more modern times as a Celtic people.³² Most of the

²⁸ Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 16–18; Hughes, *The Church*, 108–9: the Irish had a 'natural acceptance of division' (108).

²⁹ This is possibly true of Archbishop Theodore: cf. section 4, below.

³⁰ For example, the 'Annals of Ulster' for AD 675: *Nubes tenuis [ocus] tremula ad speciem celestis arcus ... Luna in sang[u]inem uersa est*, 'A thin and tremulous cloud in the shape of a rainbow ... The moon became (the colour of) blood', Seán Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, I (Dublin, 1983), 142–3 (675.4).

³¹ See, for example, J. P. Mallory (ed.), *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast, 1992); Barry Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (Oxford, 1997), 25–7 and 109–10.

³² Cf. P. Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 36 (1998), 1–35, at 26–7; Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts*, 145–7.

Classical accounts of Celts were concerned with Gauls or other Continental Celtic groups; these were the subject of many accounts by Greek and Roman authors curious to document barbarians and their lifestyles.³³ Their descriptions placed special emphasis on Celtic fearlessness in battle,³⁴ even recklessness in fighting against the sea,³⁵ boastfulness,³⁶ fondness for feasting and (especially) drinking,³⁷ sexual promiscuity,³⁸ wealth in gold,³⁹ and druidic religious teachings and practices.⁴⁰ Most of this type of evidence was based on the first-hand testimony of Posidonius (which survives only through subsequent authors' references), and frequently implied that these fearless Celts were a potential or existing threat. Such Classical themes and descriptions were not, of course, applied exclusively to Celts.⁴¹ Though not specific to Ireland, these accounts are regarded as generally applicable to the island.

The Greek and Roman remarks, however brief, on various specific aspects of Ireland – as well as mediaeval geographical descriptions of the island – serve as very useful evidence for the characteristics of Irish people as perceived by many in the Middle Ages and beyond.⁴² The Irish character was often inextricably linked with the island's natural resources, although that connection varied among the many works under discussion here.

Unsurprisingly, Ireland was known as Britain's smaller neighbour (it was usually called *Hibernia*, or, by Greeks, *Iernè*). Geographical knowledge of the

³³ John P. Koch and J. Carey (trans.), *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 4th edn (Aberystwyth, 2003), 5–40; Philip Freeman, *Ireland and the Classical World* (Austin, TX, 2001); idem, *War, Women and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts* (Austin, TX, 2002). Cf. Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998), especially 48–76.

³⁴ Koch and Carey (trans.), *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 8–9 (§14: Polybius), 12–13 (§18: Diodorus Siculus), and 16–17 (§19: Strabo). (The texts referred to in this section are listed – within each footnote – in chronological order of their composition.)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 (§6: Aristotle).

³⁶ *Ibid.* (§6: Aristotle) and 13 (§18: Diodorus Siculus).

³⁷ *Ibid.* (§5: Plato), 12 (§18: Diodorus Siculus), and 10–11 (§17: Athenaeus).

³⁸ *Ibid.* (§6: Aristotle) and 14–15 (§18: Diodorus Siculus).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12–13 (§18: Diodorus Siculus) and 18 (§19: Strabo).

⁴⁰ For instance, *ibid.*, 13–14 (§18: Diodorus Siculus), 18 (§19: Strabo), and 21–3 (§§13–18: Julius Caesar).

⁴¹ Cf. *Germania* by Tacitus: Herbert W. Benario (ed. and trans.), *Germania: Tacitus* (Warminster, 1999).

⁴² Cf. J. F. Killeen, 'Ireland in the Greek and Roman Writers', especially 211. The following discussion refers to the most significant Graeco-Roman accounts of Ireland and the Irish. Excerpts have usefully been collected by Philip Freeman, with some commentary: Freeman, *Ireland*; the citations provided here are, where possible, from specialist editions and translations.

island gradually increased from the time of Julius Caesar, who wrote that Ireland was around half the size of Britain.⁴³ Caesar's estimates of geography and distances were fairly accurate except for his implication that Ireland was located near *Hispania*.⁴⁴ The Greek author Strabo, in his 'Geography' of the first century AD, extended the island's remoteness to its inhabitants: Ireland, at the very edge of the habitable world and north of Britain's centre,⁴⁵ was home to ἀγρίων τελέως ἄνθρώπων καὶ κακῶς οἰκούντων διὰ ψυχῆς, 'completely wild people [who] live a wretched existence on account of the cold'.⁴⁶ He added promiscuity, gluttony and cannibalism to the mix – which the Irish practised in common with other barbarians such as the Scythians, Celts (interestingly seen here as a separate people), Iberians and others.⁴⁷

Pomponius Mela (in his *De chorographia*, written in the 40s AD) was the first known author to extol the wonders of Ireland's natural landscape: *caeli ad maturanda semina iniqui, verum adeo luxuriosa herbis non laetis modo sed etiam dulcibus, ut se exigua parte diei pecora impleant, et nisi pabulo prohibeantur, diutius pasta dissiliant*, 'the climate is unfavourable for the ripening of grain, but yet it is so fertile for grass, not only abundant but sweet, that livestock eat their fill in a small part of the day. Unless they were restrained from this pasturage, they would burst from feeding too long'.⁴⁸ Moving immediately on to the human inhabitants, he again made harsh comments: *cultores eius inconditi sunt, et omnium virtutum ignari magis quam aliae gentes, pietatis admodum expertes*, 'The inhabitants of this island are unrefined, ignorant of all the virtues more than any other people, and totally lacking all sense of duty'.⁴⁹ Here their character was not a direct consequence of the climate in which they lived.⁵⁰

⁴³ *De bello Gallico* V.13. Text: H. J. Edwards (ed. and trans.), *Caesar: The Gallic War* (London, 1967), 250–3; translation: Freeman, *Ireland*, 37; Freeman has observed that this was the first undisputed Classical reference to Ireland. For earlier quotations which possibly refer to the island, see Hyde, *A Literary History*, 20–2.

⁴⁴ *De bello Gallico* V.13. Text: Edwards (ed. and trans.), *Caesar*, 250–1; translation: Freeman, *Ireland*, 37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁶ 'Geography' 2.5.8: *ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45–6.

⁴⁸ *De chorographia* 3.53: *ibid.*, 48–9; modern farmers, like ancient herdsmen, should be worried (49).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 48–9. This link between environment and people was echoed, in a more positive manner, by Bede in the early eighth century: see section 1 below. In the late twelfth century, Gerald of Wales twisted the connection for his own purpose, slating the Irish for their extreme laziness despite their wonderfully fertile landscape: see section 5, below.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48–9.

Significantly, this general 'knowledge' of Ireland's physical climate and human character was developed – by the first-century Roman historian Tacitus – into political insights, when he recorded the deeds of his father-in-law Agricola, the Roman proconsul in Britain.⁵¹

eamque partem Britanniae quae Hiberniam aspicit copiis instruxit, in spem magis quam ob formidinem, si quidem Hibernia medio inter Britanniam atque Hispaniam sita et Gallico quoque mari opportuna valentissimam imperii partem magnis in vicem usibus miscuerit... [in melius] aditus portusque per commercia et negotiatores cogniti. Agricola expulsum seditione domestica unum ex regulis gentis exceperat ac specie amicitiae in occasionem retinebat. Saepe ex eo audivi legione una et modicis auxiliis debellari obtinerique Hiberniam posse; idque etiam adversus Britanniam profuturum, si Romana ubique arma et velut e conspectu libertas tolleretur.

'That part of Britain which faces *Hibernia* he garrisoned with troops, more out of hope than out of fear. For *Hibernia*, lying between Britain and Hispania, and placed strategically in the Gallic Sea, would unite the most robust parts of the empire to the great advantage of both.... The approaches and harbours are [better] known due to trade and merchants. Agricola had taken in one of their [underkings] driven out by an internal discord and was keeping him under the pretence of friendship for the right opportunity. I often heard him say that *Hibernia* could be conquered and occupied by one legion and a moderate number of auxiliaries. Moreover, it would be useful against Britain as well if Roman arms were everywhere raised high and liberty, so to speak, vanished from sight.'

This is revealing about Agricola's military strategy to use Ireland to control Britain, as well as on Irish political structure and internal disputes. Clearly there were already grades of kingship accompanied by political infighting, protection was sought, and in this early period Ireland was seen as a potential area of conquest.⁵²

⁵¹ *Agricola* §24. Text: R. M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond (eds), *Cornelii Taciti De vita Agricolae* (Oxford, 1967), 108; translation: Freeman, *Ireland*, 56–7.

⁵² Cf. Muldoon, *Identity*, 35. Oddly, Douglas Hyde made no mention of the *regulus* or Agricola's thoughts of conquering Ireland: *A Literary History*, 21. On political

The words of the sardonic Roman satirist Juvenal are especially interesting as a disillusioned insight into the political predicament and moral hypocrisy of the Roman empire in the second century AD. His ‘Satire 2’,⁵³ often singled out as vulgar and omitted from school and university curricula, includes a passing mention of Ireland, in the context of discussing an Armenian soldier:⁵⁴

Arma quidem ultra
litora Iuvernae promovimus et modo captas
Orcadas ac minima contentos nocte Britannos,
sed quae nunc populi fiunt victoris in Urbe
non faciunt illi quos vicimus.

‘So we have come to this. Our arms have invaded the Orkneys,
Ireland, the northern lands where the light dwells long in the summer,
But the acts that are done in this proud city of victors
Never were done by the men we have beaten down.’

Juvenal listed Ireland among the most faraway locations of the known world, along with Orkney and Britain; his anger at the behaviour displayed on Rome’s behalf was obvious. What passed for sophisticated conduct in this great city of triumphs was more debauched than the lifestyles of even the remotest conquered barbarians.⁵⁵ Such moral bankruptcy would be rendered yet more offensive, in Juvenal’s view, by its influence on hostages like this Armenian boy.⁵⁶

Solinus’s influential *Collectanea rerum mirabilium* (written around AD 200) added brief but significant information about Ireland’s fauna.⁵⁷ In his brief

structure cf. Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans*, 28–35. (This was echoed much later in the ‘Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ for 1087, where William the Conqueror said that he could conquer Ireland with no troops but by sheer cunning: Susan Irvine (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition, vol. 7, MS E* (Cambridge, 2004), 97; Dorothy Whitelock et al. (trans.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1961), 164.

⁵³ Susanna Morton Braund (ed. and trans.), *Juvenal and Persius* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 148–63.

⁵⁴ Satire 2, lines 159–63. Text: Braund (ed. and trans.), *Juvenal and Persius*, 162; translation: Rolfe Humphries (trans.), *The Satires of Juvenal* (Bloomington, IN, 1958), 31; Freeman, *Ireland*, 62–3. There is no evidence that *Iuverna*, Ireland, had been conquered, as Britain and Orkney had been; cf. *ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁵ Cf. Susanna Morton Braund (ed.), *Juvenal, Satires Book I* (Cambridge, 1996), 164–5; and John Ferguson (ed.), *The Satires: Juvenal* (London, 1999), 154–5.

⁵⁶ Cf. Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist: A Study* (Oxford, 1954), 63–4.

⁵⁷ Cf. Freeman, *Ireland*, 86.

mention of the island, he wrote that *illic nullus anguis, avis rara, gens inhospita et bellicosa*, ‘[there] there are no snakes, few birds, and an unfriendly and warlike people’.⁵⁸ Around a millenium later, these ‘facts’ – particularly the absence of snakes – were reworked by Gerald of Wales with (in my view) somewhat similar purposes in mind.⁵⁹

Early Christian writers were predictably scathing in regard to what they knew of Irish social and religious affairs. The protagonist here was Jerome, who (at the end of the fourth century) claimed to have witnessed Irish cannibalism: *Quid loquor de caeteris nationibus, cum ipse adolescentulus in Gallia Atticotos [al. Scotos], gentem Britannicam, humanis vesci carnibus*, ‘Why should I speak of other nations when I myself as a young man in Gaul saw the saw the *Atticoti* [or *Scoti*], a British people, feeding on human flesh?’⁶⁰ He also mentioned that the Irish were sexually licentious in the extreme: *Scotorum natio uxores proprias non habet: et quasi Platonis politiam legerit, et Catonis sectetur exemplum, nulla apud eos conjux propria est, sed ut cuique libitum fuerit, pecudum more lasciviunt*, ‘The nation of the *Scoti* do not have individual wives, but, as if they had read Plato’s “Republic” or followed the example of Cato, no wife belongs to a particular man, but as each desires, they indulge themselves like beasts’.⁶¹ So the Irish, at home or abroad, did not escape Jerome’s attacks. Likewise, his contemporary Prudentius used the beastly *Scottus* as an example to persuade his readers to accept that a supreme being existed: *semifer et Scottus*, ‘[even] the half-wild Scottus’ was not immune to the divine presence of Christ.⁶²

The Irish people were sometimes thought to be similar to the Britons and Gauls; there was less detailed knowledge, of course, but it is remarkable that this much information was gathered (even incidentally) and conveyed to Greek and Roman elite audiences, who were doubtless entertained as well as educated. Ireland was clearly part of ancient geographical and ethnographic works, and was just one area in an extended world of potential conquests

⁵⁸ *Collectanea rerum mirabilium* XXII.2–6: *ibid.*, 86–7. Freeman, *War*, has described Solinus’s *Collectanea* as ‘a gossipy and altogether fanciful collection of stories from various parts of the world’ (78). See also Bede’s geographical portrait of Ireland (clearly Solinus was one of his sources), later in this section.

⁵⁹ Cf. section 5, below.

⁶⁰ *Adversus Iovinianum* II.7. Text: J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiæ [Latinae] . . . cursus completus* (221 vols, Paris, 1844–64) (henceforth *PL*) XXIII, col. 296A; translation: Freeman, *Ireland*, 99.

⁶¹ *Adversus Iovinianum* II.7. Text: *PL* XXIII, col. 296A; translation: Freeman, *Ireland*, 99. For Jerome’s remarks on a particularly Christian theme (Pelagius and his heresies), see section 4, below.

⁶² *Apotheosis*, lines 212–16: *ibid.*, 102.

which would benefit from being actively ‘civilised’. As we have seen, in particular from Tacitus and Juvenal, this knowledge served as a useful point of comparison (and sometimes sour comment) for Classical writers’ own societies and their advances.⁶³

Even at a very early period, Ireland was already developing a reputation for being environmentally pleasant; having been introduced as a ‘reliable’ piece of knowledge, this grew and became a topic given special attention by outsiders. The idea apparently never waned for over a thousand years to Gerald’s time and beyond. Regarding the people of Ireland, whose character was often said to be shaped by the natural elements around them, their principal characteristics in Graeco-Roman accounts were physical remoteness and psychological inaccessibility to Roman control or influence. There was not much to say, to begin with, and certainly not much information with which to differentiate the Irish from their fellow-barbarians in the far West. This contrasts starkly with, for instance, the Britons, whose political developments were appearing within the realm of received Roman knowledge, during Agricola’s governorship and especially thanks to Tacitus. Ireland and the Irish held further intrigue for Classical writers and their audiences, as they were only slightly and occasionally on Greek and Roman radar. The sarcastic ‘compliment’ from Juvenal on (supposedly conquered) barbarians’ moral superiority, the *semifer Scottus* of Prudentius, the perceived ‘wild’ and ‘warlike’ nature of the Irish, all strongly hint at a people (yet) to be tamed. Like beasts they had the potential to be subdued, given the opportunity, and (as Agricola reportedly said) their proximity to Britain would make this all the easier, and the more advantageous to Rome. The fact that this ‘taming’ never happened had far-reaching consequences for Ireland’s history and for how the island was perceived by those within the ‘Romanised’ world.

In the earliest known first-person account of the island, Ireland’s landscape was experienced in a very real way by the young Patrick: before returning on his mission he had spent six years as a slave on the bleak hills of Ireland, coping only (so he tells us) because it was there that he first found God.⁶⁴ Several generations later, Bede provided a topographical description of Ireland in the preface to his ‘Ecclesiastical History of the English People’: he offered almost wistful details of her climate (milder than that of Britain)⁶⁵ and her flora and

⁶³ Cf. Muldoon, *Identity*, 2–3.

⁶⁴ *Confessio* §16: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 25 and 44. For fuller discussion of St Patrick’s views on Ireland and the Irish, see later in this section.

⁶⁵ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.i: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*,

fauna.⁶⁶ Milk and honey were abundant, and reptiles were unknown.⁶⁷ This information he derived partly from the remarks of Isidore in his *Etymologiae*.⁶⁸ Bede almost certainly never travelled to Ireland,⁶⁹ but may have been informed by people who did know the island,⁷⁰ so as not to rely exclusively on earlier geographical writings, for instance those of Solinus. Although his description is not strictly accurate,⁷¹ it is clear that Bede viewed the neighbouring island favourably in physical terms, even by comparison with his own homeland.⁷²

Regarding Ireland's natural environment and early political and social customs, foreign accounts varied in their accuracy but were predominantly both brief and curious. The commentators' own surroundings and political circumstances, however, were never far from their thoughts.

2 Early Migrations to Britain and their Effects

Next I turn to the first Irish exodus in this period: migrations occurred in the fifth century resulting in colonies in western Britain.⁷³ This was a development of the fierce raids to which Patrick provides first-hand testimony,⁷⁴ although those incursions may also have had a longer history.⁷⁵ These *Scotti* continu-

18–21; cf. Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 10–11.

⁶⁶ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.i: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 18–21; cf. Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 10–11.

⁶⁷ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.i: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 18–21; cf. Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 10–11. On this 'evocation of Paradise' see also J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), 9.

⁶⁸ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIV.vi.6: PL LII, col. 513B.

⁶⁹ Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, xxi; Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, I, xvi–xvii.

⁷⁰ Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (University Park, PA, 1991), 40–1.

⁷¹ Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 10–12.

⁷² He also admired the healing properties of Irish manuscripts. For instance, *Historia ecclesiastica* I.i: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 20–1; see section 4, below.

⁷³ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.12: *ibid.*, 40–5; Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 23–4; Richard Sharpe (trans.), *Adomán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth, 1991), 148–9.

⁷⁴ *Confessio* §1: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 23 and 41; cf. Gildas, *De excidio Brit[an]onum* §19: Michael Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents* (Chichester, 1978), 23 and 94–5.

⁷⁵ T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: Mission and Papal Authority', in Dumville *et al.*, *Saint Patrick*, 1–12 at 5.

ally threatened the neighbouring Britons;⁷⁶ their settlements in Britain were seemingly first recorded by the sixth-century British ecclesiastic Gildas, who described the twofold enemy of Irish/Gaels and Picts as exceedingly savage, and likened them to rabid wolves and *in alto Titane incalescenteque caumate de artissimis foraminum caverniculis fuscis vermiculorum cunei*, ‘dark throngs of worms who wriggle out of narrow fissures in the rock when the sun is high and the weather grows warm’.⁷⁷ Bede showed his indignation at the Irish incursions by referring to *impudentes grassatores Hiberni*, ‘the shameless Irish robbers’.⁷⁸ This was probably based on Gildas’s account, but for Bede it was still very strong language indeed. His unflattering tone re-emerged later as he concluded his account of an early seventh-century Northumbrian defeat of the Irish in North Britain: he stated that from then on no Irish king in Britain dared to attack the English.⁷⁹ It should be said that Bede was not fond of the Picts either⁸⁰ but unleashed more of his anger on the Irish.

3 The Arrival and Dissemination of Christianity

Regarding the first known contact with organised Christianity, we rely entirely on non-Irish evidence. In AD 431 Pope Celestine I sent Bishop Palladius to look after (otherwise unspecified) Christians in Ireland.⁸¹ Palladius unaccountably vanished from history,⁸² and the most-documented missionary, Patrick, appeared in Ireland.⁸³ This was his own personal mission and not, at least

⁷⁶ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.12: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 40–5.

⁷⁷ *De excidio Brit[an]onum* §19: Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Gildas*, 23 and 94. Cf. Hughes, *The Church*, 43.

⁷⁸ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.14: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 48–9.

⁷⁹ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.34: *ibid.*, 116–17.

⁸⁰ For example, *Historia ecclesiastica* I.14: *ibid.*, 48–9.

⁸¹ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Chronicon*: PL XXVII, col. 717; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 20–3; Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 79–81. This was later recorded by Bede, in *Historia ecclesiastica* I.13: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 44–7; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), 202–15.

⁸² Dumville *et al.*, *Saint Patrick*, 17–18 and 42–3; Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 79–102; for a persuasive attempt to resurrect Palladius’s career see Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 21–3.

⁸³ Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 23–34 and 41–54; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 214–20.

initially, an official role;⁸⁴ his previous Irish experience must have served him well. His two principal compositions, in the form of open letters, are a self-defensive memoir (*Confessio*)⁸⁵ and a diatribe against the persecutor King Coroticus and his soldiers (*Epistola*).⁸⁶ Patrick reveals much about the trials of introducing the new religion into Ireland; and we glean numerous exclusive insights into fifth-century ecclesiastical organisation as well as liturgical practices.

Implied in all this is of course the difficulty in spreading the new faith in such an uncentralised society; it had to take place by persuasion alone. And Patrick's preaching seems to have been relentless, reaching even the remotest areas of Ireland: *etiam usque ad exterar partes, ubi nemo ultra erat*, 'even to the remote districts beyond which there was no-one'.⁸⁷ His persistence leaps out from his every utterance on the subject. Also evident are his astuteness and diplomatic skill in dealing with political leaders: he took great care never to provoke them and even admitted to giving presents and payments to kings and judges,⁸⁸ but when gifts of jewellery and other treasures were offered to him by some of his wealthier converts, he rejected them.⁸⁹ Only in this way could his mission have proceeded at all.

But the introduction of this new religious message was anything but an easy task, and it would be foolish to assume that Irish pagans took it calmly.⁹⁰ The most pervasive theme in Patrick's writings is the extreme danger he faced at every turn.⁹¹ On a daily basis, he tells us, not only did he endure criticism and insult from unbelievers,⁹² but his very life was at risk, and he was imprisoned by the heathen of this foreign country.⁹³ Patrick seems to have been com-

⁸⁴ Thomas O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick* (London, 2005), 65–8.

⁸⁵ Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 23–34 and 41–54.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 35–8 and 55–9.

⁸⁷ *Confessio* §51: *ibid.*, 33 and 52. Cf. I. Wood, 'Missionaries and the Christian Frontier', in Walter Pohl *et al.* (eds), *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians* (Leiden, 2001), 209–18, especially 210.

⁸⁸ *Confessio* §§52–3: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 33 and 52. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 95–100.

⁸⁹ *Confessio* §§49–50: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 32–3 and 51–2. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 98.

⁹⁰ On the processes of Christian conversion and 'civilisation' in the Middle Ages, see Muldoon, *Identity*, 11–14.

⁹¹ See, for instance, E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, WI, 1982), 247–8.

⁹² For example, *Confessio* §37: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 30 and 48. Cf. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 81–4.

⁹³ *Confessio* §52: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 33 and 52; cf. O'Loughlin, *Discovering*

pletely fearless and was openly willing to die in Ireland for his beliefs.⁹⁴ But it was only when his followers were attacked by a band led by the slave-trader Coroticus that he became visibly angry.⁹⁵

Several times in his *Confessio*, he discussed allegations against him made by his elders at home, which arose from an unspecified sin he had committed as a boy;⁹⁶ he mentioned a defence-hearing (probably a synod) in his absence in which he was betrayed by the close friend to whom he had confessed his wrong.⁹⁷ Self-defence in the face of his various tribulations was one impetus behind his writings, the *Confessio* at least being penned towards the end of his life.⁹⁸ It seems that his fellow-Christians in Britain were Patrick's main intended audience for both works;⁹⁹ as we might expect, then, he revealed much about Christian organisation and practices in both Ireland and Britain.¹⁰⁰ In the open letter to Coroticus he referred to the white robes and baptismal chrism of his followers who were put to death.¹⁰¹ In this way Patrick left invaluable historical evidence for Christianity and its practitioners in early Ireland, as well as for Irish raiding and enslavement of foreigners.¹⁰²

Did all the hardships endured by Patrick, both as slave and as missionary, induce him to turn against the Irish? He was certainly critical of the surrounding pagan activity,¹⁰³ and in one passage he even bands together Irish/Gaels (*Scotti*) and Picts as persecutors (*Lupi rapaces deglutierunt gregem Domini*, 'Ravens wolves have devoured the Lord's flock'¹⁰⁴), so that to recall Bede's words of 150 years later, north Britain was home to shameless heathen rob-

Saint Patrick, 67.

⁹⁴ *Confessio* §59: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 34 and 53. Cf. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 121.

⁹⁵ Patrick's *Epistola* §§12–15, for example: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 37 and 57–8. Cf. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 125–6.

⁹⁶ *Confessio* §§26–33: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 28 and 46.

⁹⁷ *Confessio* §§27–32: *ibid.*, 28–9 and 46–7.

⁹⁸ *Confessio* §62: *ibid.*, 34 and 54.

⁹⁹ Apart from the content, it was too early to expect a widespread Christian readership in Ireland: cf. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 113–24.

¹⁰⁰ He mentions incidentally the baptisms he has performed in their thousands — on the precise figures we can be somewhat sceptical — and that these included offspring of royal families. See *Confessio* §50: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 32 and 52; and *Confessio* §§41–2: *ibid.*, 31 and 50 respectively. See also Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 96–102 and 85–7, for discussion of Patrick's finances and Irish social classes respectively

¹⁰¹ *Epistola* §3: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 35 and 55.

¹⁰² Cf. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 88–92.

¹⁰³ *Confessio* §37: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 30 and 48.

¹⁰⁴ *Epistola* §12: *ibid.*, 37 and 57.

bers.¹⁰⁵ But Patrick seems never to have blamed or condemned the Irish at home for any of his suffering; rather he regarded them as the people among whom he had been called to spread the Gospel and, in the process, to redeem himself for past sins.¹⁰⁶ Though extremely close to his family,¹⁰⁷ he chose to follow through with his calling. At one point he prayed never to be separated from this remote and foreign people;¹⁰⁸ and even saw himself as one of them.¹⁰⁹ Any bitterness was aimed instead at those of his fellow-Britons who, in his view, had hindered his mission.¹¹⁰

The beginnings of Irish Christianity were not considered in any detail by Gildas or Bede, nor are any independent near-contemporary accounts available from Gaul, where Palladius, the first and papally-sanctioned bishop in Ireland, may have lived prior to his appointment.¹¹¹ Another source appears to confirm that Patrick did not convert or expel every pagan in Ireland: if we accept a contemptuous reference in AD 655 by the 'Irish Augustine' (in his work *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, 'On the miracles of holy Scripture') to druids of his own day teaching about some form of transmigration of souls,¹¹² we must acknowledge that pre-Christian belief was still alive and reasonably well even two centuries after Patrick.

I turn now to highlight some examples of how outsiders' accounts can complement the Irish sources and so deepen our understanding of the latter. These occur mostly in the form of incidental comments: for instance, Patrick's allusions to underkings and female slaves in fifth-century Ireland,¹¹³ whom he seems to have treated with equal respect,¹¹⁴ as well as an earlier episode in which Irish sailors asked Patrick to suck their nipples before they would allow him

¹⁰⁵ *Historia ecclesiastica* I.14: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 48–9.

¹⁰⁶ *Confessio* §28: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 28 and 47.

¹⁰⁷ *Confessio* §43: *ibid.*, 31 and 50.

¹⁰⁸ *Confessio* §58: *ibid.*, 34 and 53.

¹⁰⁹ *Epistola* §16: *ibid.*, 37 and 58.

¹¹⁰ *Confessio* §§26–32: *ibid.*, 28–9 and 46–7; cf. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 117–20, and Hughes, *The Church*, 33–5.

¹¹¹ For connections with Gaul see Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius', 5.

¹¹² Marina Smyth, *Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland* (Woodbridge, 1996), 73–4; eadem, 'The Earliest Written Evidence for an Irish View of the World', in Doris Edel (ed.), *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1995), 23–44 at 37–9. See also John Carey, *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* (Dublin, 1998), 58n7.

¹¹³ *Confessio* §42: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 31 and 50; *Epistola* §12: *ibid.*, 37 and 57.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

onto their boat in his escape from slavery.¹¹⁵ Patrick stated that he had refused this offer because they were *gentes*, ‘pagans’,¹¹⁶ implying that this was a standard gesture of supplication or submission for slaves, or perhaps some kind of religious ritual.¹¹⁷ Sacrifices and of course resistance to Christian teaching are highlighted by Patrick,¹¹⁸ such happenings are only sporadically mentioned in Irish sources (and those sources are of much later date).¹¹⁹ Bede is informative on Irish monastic generosity in hosting and educating Anglo-Saxon and other foreigners, for instance, Oswald,¹²⁰ Agilberht,¹²¹ and Ecgberht.¹²²

But Ireland was, at the same time, in Bede’s eyes, a hotbed of potential heresy.¹²³ Unconventional behaviour on that island carried over into Irish intellectual activity in his own land.¹²⁴ Bede demonstrated knowledge of natural disasters like plagues in Ireland,¹²⁵ as well as providing some place-name evidence important for his relatively early date.¹²⁶ An Anglo-Saxon raid into Ireland in 684 was documented in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* as well as by Irish chroniclers:¹²⁷ this attack, expansively criticised by Bede,¹²⁸ may reveal

¹¹⁵ *Confessio* §18: *ibid.*, 26 and 44.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 19–20.

¹¹⁸ *Confessio* §§35–7: Hood (ed. and trans.), *Saint Patrick*, 29–30 and 48.

¹¹⁹ Cf. section 2, above.

¹²⁰ Oswald was subsequently king of Northumbria and became a martyred saint; see *Historia ecclesiastica* III.9: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 240–5.

¹²¹ Agilberht was a Gaul who arrived in southern England via Ireland, but who was later effectively dismissed from his episcopal see because his *barbara loquella*, ‘barbarous speech’, was almost incomprehensible to the English; see *Historia ecclesiastica* III.7: *ibid.*, 234–5.

¹²² Egberht was highly praised by Bede for his piety and learning; see *Historia ecclesiastica* III.4 and III.27: *ibid.*, 224–5 and 312–15 respectively.

¹²³ For contrasting views see D. Ó Cróinín, ‘“New Heresy for Old?” Pelagian Heresy in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640’, *Speculum* 60 (1985), 505–16 at 515–16; and Thacker, ‘Bede and the Irish’, 38–43. For further discussion see section 4, below.

¹²⁴ See section 4, below.

¹²⁵ *Historia ecclesiastica* III.27: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 312–13.

¹²⁶ For example, Rathmelsigi; *Historia ecclesiastica* III.27: *ibid.*, 312–13; Inisboufinde and Mag éo; *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.4: *ibid.*, 346–7. Cf. Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 196 and 210.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 260; *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.26: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 426–9; Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster*, 148–9 (684.2).

¹²⁸ *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.26: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 426–9 (where he made brief mention of the rightful imprecations of this friendly and harmless race).

new information about Hiberno-Northumbrian relations at that time, pending final determination of the identities of the Irish involved.¹²⁹

Regarding further incursions from abroad, one foreign tidbit offers further insight into the nature of Viking activity in ninth-century Ireland: an entry for 847 in the Carolingian 'Annals of Saint-Bertin' records that Viking raiders had turned the Irish into *tributarii*, 'regular tribute-payers'.¹³⁰ This is not admitted in surviving contemporary Irish records,¹³¹ and appears to add considerably to Irish chroniclers' (often terse but terror-laden) descriptions of Scandinavian plunder. Another entry in the 'Annals of Saint-Bertin', for the following year, notes a request by an Irish king for an alliance with Charles the Bald:¹³² this needs further investigation but appears to confirm that at least one Irish leader solicited Continental involvement in Irish political life (and thereby to illuminate Irish depictions of the event).¹³³

Still on the theme of longer-term effects of Christian conversion, outsiders' comments on the nature or sophistication of known Irishmen's education and learning as received at home make for a more rounded picture of Ireland. The most detailed (though questionable) example of this is St Columbanus's broad education as described by his Italian hagiographer, Ionas;¹³⁴ his 'Life of Columbanus' was written a generation after the holy man's death at his monastery at Bobbio. In his youth at Bangor, Columbanus studied the Gospels, grammar, rhetoric, and geometry among other pursuits.¹³⁵ We are told that he had resisted worldly temptations earlier in life in order to concentrate on

¹²⁹ H. Moisl, 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 103–26 at 120–4.

¹³⁰ Félix Grat *et al.* (eds), *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, 54; Janet L. Nelson (trans.), *The Annals of Saint-Bertin* (Manchester, 1991), 65; Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 56.

¹³¹ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster*, 306–7 (847).

¹³² Grat *et al.* (eds), *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, 55–6; Nelson (trans.), *The Annals of Saint-Bertin*, 66; Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 56–7.

¹³³ Irish chroniclers rather emphasised concern at the the conflict with Scandinavians in this period; see also, for example, an entry in the 'Annals of Ulster' for 849, in which groups of foreigners in Ireland attacked each other: Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster*, 308–9 (849.6).

¹³⁴ *Vita sancti Columbani* §3. Text: Bruno Krusch (ed.), *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iobannis, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum* (Hannover, 1905), 154–8; translation: Adalbert de Vogüé (trans.), *Jonas de Bobbio: Vie de saint Colomban et ses disciples* (Bégrolles-en-Mauges, 1988), 105–8. This may be hearsay, or invention on Ionas's part, given his obvious motive.

¹³⁵ *Vita sancti Columbani* §3. Text: Krusch (ed.), *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum*, 155–6; translation: de Vogüé (trans.), *Jonas de Bobbio*, 105–6. Cf. L. Bieler, 'The Classics in Celtic Ireland', in R. R. Bolgar (ed.), *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 500–1500* (Cambridge, 1971), 45–9 at 46.

these more important matters.¹³⁶ Given Ionas's emotional closeness to his subject – despite his lack of personal acquaintance with Columbanus – his work has been afforded more credence than those of most mediaeval hagiographers. But his agenda and his distance from Ireland render his anecdotes on Columbanus's early life rather suspect.

A century after this saint's floruit, the Anglo-Saxon bishop and scholar Aldhelm (d. 709) concerned himself with Irish education in two of his letters.¹³⁷ Aldhelm may have been taught by an Irishman;¹³⁸ although I regard the argument for Maeldub as his teacher as somewhat flimsy,¹³⁹ his work had close affinities with Irish stylistic features. But it is not always clear whether he meant this as sincere tribute to, or mocking parody of, Irish style.¹⁴⁰ To his student Wihtfrith,¹⁴¹ who was planning to study in Ireland, Aldhelm wrote a lengthy warning against the considerable dangers of going there to learn, especially the pre-eminence of 'pagan' mythology, which (along with the widespread practice of prostitution in everyday life) indicated a moral turpitude most distasteful and undesirable for a young and eager student:¹⁴²

Absurdum enim arbitror, spreta rudis ac veteris instrumenti inextricabili norma per lubrica dumosi ruris diverticula, immo per discolos philosophorum anfractus iter carpere seu certe aporriatis vitreorum fontium limpidis laticibus palustres pontias lutulentasque limphas siticulose potare, in quis atra bufonum turma catervatim scatet atque garrulitas ranarum crepitans coaxat,

‘I think it absurd to spurn the inextricable rule of the New and the Ancient Document and undertake a journey through the slippery paths of a country full of brambles, that is to say, through the troublesome

¹³⁶ *Vita sancti Columbani* §3. Text: Krusch (ed.), *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum*, 155; translation: de Vogüé (trans.), *Jonas de Bobbio*, 105.

¹³⁷ For discussion of Aldhelm's views on Irishmen studying in his own homeland, see section 4, below.

¹³⁸ Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (Cambridge, 1994), 2–4; Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 6–7.

¹³⁹ O'Leary, *Trials and Translations*, 125–9.

¹⁴⁰ Orchard, *The Poetic Art*, 51–60; idem, 'Artful Alliteration in Anglo-Saxon Song and Story', *Anglia*, 113 (1995), 429–63 at 456.

¹⁴¹ Rudolf Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi Opera, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi XV* (Berlin, 1919), 479–80; Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 154–5.

¹⁴² Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi Opera*, 479, lines 7–11; Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 154.

meanderings of the (worldly) philosophers; or surely (it is absurd) to drink thirstily from briny and muddy waters, in which a dark throng of toads swarms in abundance and where croaks the strident chatter of frogs, when there are clear waters flowing from glassy pools.'

These problems he attributed to the influence of Classical mythology, which has never been shown to be prominent in seventh-century Irish schools or literature,¹⁴³ so his claims must be regarded with scepticism.

Aldhelm's other addressee regarding Ireland, Heahfrith, was told of the problems with Irish education and its troublesome products at Canterbury.¹⁴⁴ Heahfrith had (by contrast with Wihthfrith) already studied for almost six years in Ireland, probably at Mayo.¹⁴⁵ Aldhelm addressed the young man as a prospective advanced student of considerable ability, strongly advising him to pursue his studies in England, where the educational system was far superior. Aldhelm appeared not only resentful but baffled at the popularity of Ireland as a destination for English students, in the light of the (more than star-studded) education available in England:¹⁴⁶

Britannia ... verbi gratia ceu solis flammigeri et luculente lunae specimine

¹⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, 139–40. For discussion of mediaeval Irish engagement with Classical literature, see W. B. Stanford, 'Towards a History of Classical Influences in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 70C (1970), 13–91; *idem*, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (Dublin, 1976); Fergal McGrath, *Education in Ancient and Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1979), 76–7; B. Ó Cuív, 'Medieval Irish Scholars and Classical Literature', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 81C (1981), 239–48; Bieler, 'The Classics'; Barbara L. Hillers, *The Medieval Irish Odyssey Merugud Uilixis meic Leirtis* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1997); and Michael W. Herren, 'Classical and Secular Learning among the Irish before the Carolingian Renaissance', *Florilegium*, 3 (1981), 118–57; reprinted as article I in *idem*, *Latin Letters in Early Christian Ireland* (Aldershot, 1996); for further discussion on Aldhelm see section 4, below.

¹⁴⁴ Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi Opera*, 486–94; Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 160–4. See also G. T. Dempsey, 'Aldhelm of Malmesbury and the Irish', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 99C (1999), 1–22; L. Bieler, 'Ireland's Contribution to the Culture of Northumbria', in Gerald Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), 210–28 at 217; D. R. Howlett, 'Aldhelm and Irish Learning', *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi*, 52 (1994), 37–75; and A. S. Cook, 'Who was the Ehfrid of Aldhelm's Letter?', *Speculum*, 2 (1927), 363–73.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 145.

¹⁴⁶ Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi Opera*, 492, lines 15–17, and 493, lines 1–2; Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 163. Cf. Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 197: 'The letter would be very interesting if it were not almost unintelligible through the writer's puerile pomposity.'

potiatur, id est Theodoro infula pontificatus fungenti ab ipso tirocinio rudimentorum in flore philosophicae artis adulto necnon et eiusdem sodalitatis cliente Hadriano dumtaxat urbanitate enucleata ineffabiliter praedito!

‘Britain ... possesses, for example, the luculent likeness, as it were, of the flaming sun and the moon, that is, Theodore, who discharges the duties of the pontificate and who was from the very beginnings of his apprenticeship mature in the flower of the arts of learning, and his colleague of the same sodality, Hadrian, equally endowed with ineffably pure urbanity.’

Aldhelm could not fathom why a serious student should consider anywhere but England for the very best instruction. In conclusion, he claimed unconvincingly that his remarks on ‘Irish savants’ were made in jest and with the intention to praise scholars in England rather than abuse the Irish.¹⁴⁷ Some Irishmen were admired for their ability to surmount their barbarian origins and the perceived inadequacy of an Irish education. John Scottus Eriugena, for instance, had done very well considering that he must have received an inadequate training in Ireland, according to the papal librarian Anastasius.¹⁴⁸

The opinions of St Bernard of Clairvaux on Irish education are found in his ‘Life of St Malachy’ (d. 1148), his friend and a man who holds a significant place in the development of Irish Christianity as it attempted to make the transition to a streamlined, Continental model of ecclesiastical governance.¹⁴⁹ Bernard left no doubt as to his view, from the very opening of his work:¹⁵⁰

Malachias noster, ortus Hibernia de populo barbaro, ibi educatus, ibi litteras edoctus est. Caeterum de natali barbarie traxit nihil, non magis quam de sale materno pisces maris. Quam vero suave, quod inculta

¹⁴⁷ Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi Opera*, 494; Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 163–4.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. section 4, below.

¹⁴⁹ David N. Dumville, *Councils and Synods of the Gaelic Early and Central Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1997), 37–46; Cf. Diarmuid Scully, ‘Ireland and the Irish in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Life of Malachy: Representation and Context’, in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal* (Dublin, 2006), 239–56 at 253–4.

¹⁵⁰ *Vita Sancti Malachiae* §1. Text: PL CLXXXII, col. 1075; translation: Robert T. Meyer (trans.), *Bernard of Clairvaux: The Life and Death of Saint Malachy the Irishman* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1978), 15.

nobis barbaries tam urbanum protulit civem sanctorum, et domesticum Dei!

‘Our Malachy was born in Ireland of a barbarous tribe; there he was brought up and educated. Yet he betrayed not a mite of his rude origin, any more than a fish of the sea preserves a salty savour. How delightful it is that crude barbarism should have given us so worthy a man, a fellow-citizen with the saints and a true member of the House of God.’

It is clear that Malachy had to overcome a significant disadvantage. For instance, an Irish teacher of high renown displayed *lenitas*, ‘a certain light-mindedness’ by playing with a shoemaker’s awl; Malachy was a serious student and took offence.¹⁵¹ Later, himself a teacher and peacemaker, he helped to remedy the problems of secular and ecclesiastical governance, despite suffering persecution and abuse.¹⁵²

4 Perceptions of Irish Christians Abroad

My next historical theme is perceptions of Irish Christians in other lands (especially in the so-called ‘Golden Age’).¹⁵³ This is the most attractive issue among scholars who have considered outsiders’ views of the Irish.¹⁵⁴ Not

¹⁵¹ *Vita sancti Malachiae* §2. Text: PL CLXXXII, col. 1076B; translation: Meyer (trans.), *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 17. Brian P. McGuire, *The Difficult Saint: Bernard of Clairvaux and his Tradition* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1991), 82: ‘Bernard seems to have arranged his material to make Malachy’s experience conform to his own’. For discussion of Bernard’s own education, see G. R. Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford, 1983), 37–44.

¹⁵² *Vita sancti Malachiae* §§38–43. Text: PL CLXXXII, cols 1095–7; translation: Meyer (trans.), *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 34–5. For the views on Ireland of twelfth-century church reformers, see section 5, below.

¹⁵³ Cf. Hughes, *The Church*, 91–5; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 196–232; and Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford, 1947), 47–8.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Muldoon, *Identity*, 7–8. For treatment of particular sources see especially Thacker, ‘Bede and the Irish’; B. Bischoff, ‘Theodulf und der Ire, Cadac-Andreas’, *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 74 (1955), 92–8. For general discussion of Irish scholarly influence abroad see Louis Gougaud, *Gaelic Pioneers of Christianity: The Work and Influence of Irish Monks and Saints in Continental Europe* (Dublin, 1923); Flanagan, ‘The Contribution’; P. P. O’Neill, ‘Irish Cultural Influence on Northumbria: The First Thirty Years, A.D. 635–64’, in Benjamin T. Hudson and V. Ziegler (eds), *Crossed Paths: Methodological Approaches to the Celtic Aspect of the European Middle Ages* (Lanham, MD, 1991), 11–23; Bieler, ‘Ireland’s Contribution’; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 219–32; and Vivien

all Irish Christians left their homeland intending to “save civilisation”: the circumstances in which Irish people undertook foreign travel varied as widely as did their reception in foreign parts. The Latin term *peregrinatio*, usually translated as ‘pilgrimage’,¹⁵⁵ is interpreted by some as the exclusive concept behind Christian missionising. But that can be misleading for two reasons. First, conversion of pagans was by no means the only (or even usual) intention of Irish Christians when they sailed for foreign lands. More often they were going in pursuit of spiritual exile but nonetheless ended up as missionaries, as did St Columbanus.¹⁵⁶ Secondly, as Thomas Charles-Edwards has demonstrated, for the Irish, *peregrinatio* took various forms, some of which did not include overseas travel, and it is found (among other genres) in early mediaeval Irish laws and penitentials as a punishment for crimes or sins (frequently taking the form of banishment or exile to another region within Ireland).¹⁵⁷ Although not all emigrants, therefore, were necessarily dedicated Christians or even well-behaved men and women, it is the deeds of Christian travellers which provide us with most of the concrete evidence for mediaeval Irishmen abroad. The exile of St Columba to Scotland could have resulted from accusations that he had triggered a divisive battle;¹⁵⁸ but we do not have the full story since we rely on Columba’s principal hagiographer, who glossed over the details.¹⁵⁹

Irishmen’s contribution to script styles in Anglo-Saxon and Continental manuscripts is well known;¹⁶⁰ but it is the extant opinions of witnesses,

Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians* (Woodbridge, 1982), 4–10.

¹⁵⁵ T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘The Social Background to Irish *peregrinatio*’, *Celtica*, 11 (1976), 43–59; K. Hughes, ‘The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), 143–51.

¹⁵⁶ *Vita sancti Columbani*, §4. Text: Krusch (ed.), *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum*, 159–60; translation: de Vogüé (trans.), *Jonas de Bobbio*, 108–9; Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 60 and n192; and D. Bullough, ‘The Career of Columbanus’, in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Life and Writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), 1–28 at 8–9. Cf. K. Hughes, ‘The Celtic Church and the Papacy’, in C. H. Lawrence (ed.), *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Stroud, 1999), 1–28 at 14–21; and C. Stancliffe, ‘Kings Who Opted Out’, in Patrick Wormald *et al.* (eds), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), 154–76 at 168–9.

¹⁵⁷ Charles-Edwards, ‘The Social Background’, 46–8.

¹⁵⁸ Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (eds and trans.), *Adomán’s Life of Columba* (London, 1961), 71–4; Sharpe (trans.), *Adomán: Life of St Columba*, 12–15; Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Dublin, 1988), 26–9.

¹⁵⁹ Anderson and Anderson (eds and trans.), *Adomán’s Life of Columba*, 186–7.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 34–8; Hughes, *The Church*, 98–102.

observers and recorders in the various adopted homes of those Irishmen which reveal a question even more complex.¹⁶¹ Naturally, their opinions varied widely, so at this point let us examine the 'foreign' accounts, comments and anecdotes – the good, the bad, and the complicated.

Let us begin with the complicated, since Bede's position defined and set the scene for the others. How Bede perceived the Irish in general – especially the Christian immigrants – has been a difficult and even controversial issue.¹⁶² Of course, he was not primarily concerned with Irish matters; and his portrayals can, on the surface, seem contradictory. Many of the views presented in the 'Ecclesiastical History', in particular, are expressed through the mouths of others, some of whom lived long before Bede's own time. In dealing with the question of his views of the Irish, let us consider two separate themes: how he regarded Irish Christianity generally as it manifested itself in Britain; and his descriptions of individual Irishmen living and teaching there. His first specific attribute to that island's learning was that scrapings from Irish manuscripts placed in water which was then drunk could cure snake-bites.¹⁶³ But pervasive among his more general reports, quotations and observations lurk the dark issues of schism and heresy, tendencies which arose in Ireland itself but had had profound bearing on Ireland's contribution to Anglo-Saxon Christianity. In the 'Ecclesiastical History' he quoted a mid-seventh-century papal letter to Irish Church-leaders accusing the Irish of recently reviving the 300-year-old Pelagian heresy.¹⁶⁴ Since Bede did not offer criticism, clarification or contradictory evidence for this part of the papal letter, we may deduce that he saw some validity in this accusation. Bede condemned the heresy of the late fourth-century British monk, Pelagius,¹⁶⁵ and his 'poisonous' teachings on, for

¹⁶¹ For some useful consideration of this evidence, see Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 37–41 and 51–62; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 196–200 and 219–29; and Louis Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands* (London, 1932; rev. imp. by J.-M. Picard, 1992), 129–84.

¹⁶² Cf. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', 31–2; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 196 and 207; M. W. Pepperdene, 'Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*: A New Perspective', *Celtica*, 4 (1958), 253–62; and Bieler, 'Ireland's Contribution', 214–15.

¹⁶³ This is usually interpreted as veneration of Irishmen's writings, which nonetheless seems to contradict many of Bede's other allusions to their earlier activities in Britain; *Historia ecclesiastica* I.i: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 20–1; Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 10–11. Cf. n72, above.

¹⁶⁴ *Historia ecclesiastica* II.19: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 198–203; Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 114.

¹⁶⁵ *Historia ecclesiastica* II.19: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 200–1.

instance, the issues of free will and predestination.¹⁶⁶

Jerome, a contemporary of Pelagius, had referred to him as *Scotorum pul-tibus praegravatus*,¹⁶⁷ ‘weighed down with Gaelic porage’, a description which was positively contemptuous as well as anti-heretical. There is no evidence to demonstrate a revival of Pelagianism in Ireland in the seventh century,¹⁶⁸ although the Pope’s appointment of Palladius could have resulted from its spread in Britain (and perhaps to Ireland) two centuries earlier.¹⁶⁹

An even greater departure from mainstream Christian practice was the well-documented refusal of a great many churches in Ireland and North Britain to accept the Roman method for dating Easter, as well as other customs, for instance monastic tonsure and rules.¹⁷⁰ The Easter-issue was viewed by both camps as fundamental to Christian worship, and Irish correspondence and synodal decrees demonstrate the high profile and divisive nature of that controversy, especially in the seventh century.¹⁷¹ By Bede’s own time the question had largely been resolved, but he spared no effort in highlighting just how traumatic it had been in Anglo-Saxon England. The papal letter I have mentioned,¹⁷² as quoted by Bede, also alleges that the Irish who celebrated Easter on the wrong day were guilty of Quartodecimanism, a heresy which involved Easter Sunday coinciding with the Jewish Passover.¹⁷³ Bede took care to reinforce, following that quotation, that only certain of the Irish were thus accused.¹⁷⁴ More importantly, he quoted an early eighth-century letter from a

¹⁶⁶ *Historia ecclesiastica* II.19: *ibid.*, 200–1; for discussion of the Pelagian heresy, see, for example, B. R. Rees (trans.), *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* (Woodbridge, 1991), 1–25, and Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 52–5.

¹⁶⁷ *Commentarii in Jeremiam Prophetam, Prologus*. Text: PL XXIV, col. 682; translation: Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 20–1. Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 53: ‘Unfortunately the saint forgot to tell us whether there was some connexion between the Briton’s taste for Irish porridge and his interest in free will’.

¹⁶⁸ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 206–7; Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 201n4.

¹⁶⁹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 21; Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands*, 27–9; Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?*, 56–7. Cf. section 3, above.

¹⁷⁰ Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, I, xxxix–xli.

¹⁷¹ Hughes, *The Church*, 103–20; Maura Walsh and D. Ó Cróinín (eds and trans.), *Cummian’s Letter De controuersia paschali and the De ratione computandi* (Toronto, 1988), 18–25. See also Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, II, 25 (on the controversy over Easter-dating), and 133 (on Irish church-organisation).

¹⁷² Cf. *Historia ecclesiastica* II.19: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 198–203.

¹⁷³ Cf. Ó Cróinín, ‘New Heresy for Old?’, especially 506–8 and 515.

¹⁷⁴ *Historia ecclesiastica* II.19: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 200–1.

since deceased abbot of his own monastery to the king of Picts, condemning outright (as Pelagian heretics) those among his people who followed the Irish Easter-dating.¹⁷⁵ Also discussed here is tonsure or monastic hairstyle, another controversial difference between Gaelic practice and the Roman norm;¹⁷⁶ this too is couched in heretical terms, alleging that the style was in imitation of the evil biblical druid Simon Magus and was therefore a Gaelic form of the sin of simony.¹⁷⁷ As regards Easter-dating, Bede was passionately in favour of the Roman method, and he made this more than obvious in his 'Ecclesiastical History'.¹⁷⁸ The differences would, of course, have had particularly telling effects in his own kingdom of Northumbria, where both the Gaelic and Roman forms had been well established.¹⁷⁹

But when he came to discuss particular Irish Christian missionaries in his country, whose contribution he certainly acknowledged,¹⁸⁰ how did Bede reconcile with this his poor view of some of their customs? He did not hesitate to offer high praise to the most prominent Irish churchmen in Britain, no less so than to their English counterparts. The three highlighted are Columba (founder of Iona),¹⁸¹ Aidan (also of Iona), Irish bishop of the Northumbrian community with his see at Lindisfarne,¹⁸² and the renowned visionary saint, Fursa.¹⁸³ With regard to Columba and Aidan, the Easter-question is tackled directly in the midst of this high praise; and Bede did his best to rationalise,

¹⁷⁵ *Historia ecclesiastica* V.21: *ibid.*, 532–53, especially 544–5.

¹⁷⁶ *Historia ecclesiastica* V.21: *ibid.*, 546–51. Cf. E. James, 'Bede and the Tonsure Question', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 85–98.

¹⁷⁷ *Historia ecclesiastica* V.21: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 548–9.

¹⁷⁸ For example, *Historia ecclesiastica* III.17: *ibid.*, 264–6, regarding St Aidan.

¹⁷⁹ Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', 34–5. For discussion of Bede's account of the early Roman mission to Northumbria see Ann Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500–1066* (Basingstoke, 1999), 17–18; and Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 105–13.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', 39–51; O'Neill, 'Irish Cultural Influence'; and Pepperdene, 'Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*'; to all these contrast D. Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 229–47 at 246–7.

¹⁸¹ *Historia ecclesiastica* III.4: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 220–5. He may not have been aware of his (probably older) contemporary Adomnán's 'Life of Columba': *ibid.*, 225n2; cf. D. N. Dumville, 'Derry, Iona, England, and the Governance of the Columban Church', in Gerard O'Brien (ed.), *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society* (Dublin, 1999), 91–114 at 93: 'one senses that Bede might have wished to be ignorant of Columba's merits'.

¹⁸² For instance, *Historia ecclesiastica* III.15–17: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 260–7.

¹⁸³ *Historia ecclesiastica* III.19: *ibid.*, 268–77.

indeed to excuse, the holy men's mistake over this central element of their faith. Having praised Aidan's many virtues, he continued:¹⁸⁴

Haec in praefato antistite multum conplector et amo, quia nimirum haec Deo placuisse non ambigo. Quod autem pascha non suo tempore observabat, uel canonicum eius tempus ignorans uel suae gentis auctoritate ne agnitum sequeretur deuictus, non adprobo nec laudo. In quo tamen hoc adprobo, quia in celebratione sui paschae non aliud corde tenebat, uenerabatur et praedicabat quam quod nos, id est, redemptionem [sic] generis humani per passionem, resurrectionem, ascensionem in caelos mediatoris Dei et hominum hominis Iesu Christi.

'All these things I greatly admire and love in this bishop and I have no doubt that all this was pleasing to God. But I neither praise nor approve of him in so far as he did not observe Easter at the proper time, either because he was ignorant of the canonical time or because, if he knew it, he was compelled by the force of public opinion not to follow it. But, nevertheless, I do approve of this, that in his celebration of Easter he had no other thought in his heart, he revered and preached no other doctrine than we do, namely the redemption of the human race by the passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven of the one mediator between God and men, even the man Christ Jesus.'

He played up the issue in his dramatic account of the Council of Whitby of 664,¹⁸⁵ but when he wished to discuss it in relation to the otherwise flawless devotion of an individual, he understated it to considerable, and even moving, effect;¹⁸⁶ this despite his earlier hint of possible heresy on Aidan's part when he echoed the Pauline dictum about those who had zeal for God but not according to knowledge.¹⁸⁷ Bede's account of Irish Christianity and its role in Britain

¹⁸⁴ *Historia ecclesiastica* III.18: *ibid.*, 266–7. Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, I, xl: "It is sad that he should think it necessary to pause in the middle of his beautiful sketch of the sweet and saintly character of Aidan to say that he 'much detests' his mode of keeping Easter". Cf. Bieler, 'Ireland's Contribution', 212, and Charles-Edwards, 'Bede, the Irish, and the Britons', 51–2.

¹⁸⁵ For discussion of the dating and significance of this council see R. Abels, 'The Council of Whitby: A Study in Early Anglo-Saxon Politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 23 (1983), 1–25.

¹⁸⁶ *Historia ecclesiastica* III.17: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 262–7. Cf. Peter Fairless, *Northumbria's Golden Age* (York, 1994), 35–7.

¹⁸⁷ *Historia ecclesiastica* III.3: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical*

has been the focus of more discussion (in Irish and British historiography) than that of any other mediaeval outsider;¹⁸⁸ indeed one could focus entirely on that question. Reading his 'Ecclesiastical History', at least, leaves no doubt that the development of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England, and in north Britain, owed a considerable debt to the Irish both at home and abroad.¹⁸⁹ I think that Bede did not express any demonstrable ill-feeling towards the Irish except in their early manifestation as heathen butchers,¹⁹⁰ and indeed that he was favourable towards them, downplaying their flaws even on his pet issue of Easter dating.¹⁹¹

I turn next to another prolific, but more difficult, English cleric. Aldhelm held offices in the south of England,¹⁹² by contrast with Bede, who worked in the north at a slightly later period. As we have seen,¹⁹³ he was a complex character with obvious concerns about Irish education. In his letter to Heahfrith, Aldhelm added to his remarks on the superiority (over Irish schools) of the education available in Anglo-Saxon England,¹⁹⁴ by describing the contribution of Irish students to Archbishop Theodore's classroom at Canterbury:¹⁹⁵

Theodorus summi sacerdotii gubernacula regens Hibernensium globo
discipulorum, ceu aper truculentus molosorum catasta ringente val-
latus, stipetur, limato perniciter grammatico dente iactura dispendii
carens rebelles falanges discutit et utpote belliger in meditullio campi
arcister legionum falangibus saeptus aemulorum spissis: mox nervo-
sis tenso lacertorum volis arcu spiculisque ex faretra exemptis, hoc
est chronographiae opacis acutisque syllogismis, turma supercillii tyfo
turgens amissa ancilium testudine terga dantes latebras antrorum atras
triumphante victore praepropere petunt,

History, 218–19; Romans 10:2. The Old English Bede omits this: Plummer (ed.), *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, I, 124.

¹⁸⁸ See section 4, above.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', 49–51.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. section 3, above.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 112: 'Bede was a lover of Ireland and took great interest in its intellectual activity'; and Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 255.

¹⁹² Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 8–10.

¹⁹³ See section 3, above.

¹⁹⁴ See section 3, above.

¹⁹⁵ Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi Opera*, 493; Lapidge and Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm*, 163.

‘although Theodore[,] who pilots the helm of the high priesthood, be hemmed in by a mass of Irish students, like a savage wild boar checked by a snarling pack of hounds, with the filed tooth of the grammarian – nimbly and with no loss of time – he disbands the rebel phalanxes; and just as the warlike bowman in the midst of battle is hemmed in by a dense formation of enemy legions, then, when his bow is tensed by his powerful hands and arms and arrows are drawn from the quiver, that is, from the obscure and acute syllogisms of chronography, the throng, swollen with the arrogance of pride, their shield-wall having been shattered, turn their backs and flee headlong to the dark recess of their caves, while the victor exults.’

This obviously reflects the two-way intellectual migration between England and Ireland in his own time,¹⁹⁶ and the competition among schools to attract able students. Theodore’s Irish pupils were clearly eager to learn, but were misguided on the Easter-dating issue, as well as arrogant, argumentative and therefore irksome. Aldhelm, it seems, held a very grudging tolerance of these young men and their background. This is curious if not contradictory in the light of his own probable Irish influence and his literary affinity with Hiberno-Latin models.¹⁹⁷

In the mid-ninth century we find a similar reaction to the most remarkable Irish scholar abroad – John Scottus Eriugena. We know Eriugena for his learning in Greek as well as Latin and for his outstanding contribution to Western philosophy.¹⁹⁸ In a letter by the papal librarian, Anastasius, to King Charles the Bald in March 860, there is almost nothing but emphatic praise for Eriugena’s work: *Mirandum est quoque quomodo vir ille barbarus (qui in finibus mundi positus, quanto ab hominibus conversatione, tanto credi potuit alterius linguae dictione, longinquus) talia intellectu capere in aliamque linguam transferre valuerit. Joannem innuo Scotigenam virum, quem auditu comperi per omnia sanctum*, ‘It is a wonderful thing how that barbarian, living at the ends of the earth, who might be supposed to be as far removed from the knowledge of this other language as he is from the familiar use of it, has been able to comprehend such ideas and translate them into another tongue [Greek]: I refer to John

¹⁹⁶ See section 4, above, with regard to Bede’s angle on the same topic.

¹⁹⁷ See section 3, above.

¹⁹⁸ See, for instance, Maïeul Cappuyens, *Jean Scot Erigène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Bruxelles, 1969); Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (eds), *Eriugena: East and West* (Notre Dame, IN, 1994); and the references in Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 53n166.

Scotigena, whom I have learned by report to be in all things a holy man'.¹⁹⁹ In this way Eriugena's achievement was all the more praiseworthy, given the librarian's opinion of Ireland's educational offerings and even her people.²⁰⁰

Now we come to more endearing portraits of the Irish,²⁰¹ starting with that painted by Charlemagne's later biographer, Notker 'the Stammerer'.²⁰² In this passage the exuberance of the Irish 'peddling their wisdom' at court is infectious: *Si quis sapientiae cupidus est, veniat ad nos et accipiat eam; nam venalis est apud nos*, 'If anyone is eager for wisdom, let him come to us and receive it; for it is wisdom that we have for sale'.²⁰³ I take the piece as indicative of how the Irish character was viewed by some, even though the episode itself is presumably unhistorical. Foreign descriptions of Irish pilgrimage refer to Irishmen's fearlessness in crossing the sea.²⁰⁴ For instance, the ninth-century Heiric of Auxerre, in his 'Life of St Germanus', held Irish scholars' wisdom and persistence in very high regard: *Quid Hiberniam memorem contempto pelagi discrimine paene totam cum grege philosophorum ad littora nostra migrantem. Quorum quisquis peritior est, ultro sibi indicit exilium, ut Salomoni sapientissimo famuletur ad votum*, 'Why should I speak of Ireland when almost all its people, contemptuous of the dangers of the ocean, have migrated to our shores with their crowd of philosophers? The more learned of them are more apt to exile themselves in order to serve the wishes of the most wise Solomon'.²⁰⁵

An entry for 891 in the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' described three Irishmen in a boat who neither knew nor cared where their pilgrimage was going.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹ Text: PL CXXIX, col. 739C; translation: Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 228. Cf. section 3, above.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Kenney, *The Sources*, 582: Anastasius gave 'high praise to the work of Eriugena'.

²⁰¹ Cf. Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 37–9.

²⁰² Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 219–20.

²⁰³ *Liber Primus Gestorum Caroli* §1. Text: Hans F. Haefele (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum nova series XII* (Berlin, 1959), 1, lines 12–14; translation: Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 220.

²⁰⁴ Cf. the early Celts: section 1, above.

²⁰⁵ *Heirici carmina*. Ernst Dümmler (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetarum Latinorum Medii Aevi*, III (Berlin, 1896), 429, lines 24–6; translation: John J. Contreni, *The Cathedral School of Laon from 850 to 930: Its Manuscripts and Masters* (München, 1978), 81; also quoted in Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 38; see also *ibid.* 55–6. Heiric even thought that the Irish were the envy of Charles the Bald: *ibid.*, 38–9; cf. Contreni, *The Cathedral School of Laon*, 81–5, 135–6 and 148–51.

²⁰⁶ Janet M. Bately (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, vol. 3, MS A* (Cambridge, 1986), 54; Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 61–2; Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', 48–9. Cf. B. Bradshaw, 'The Wild and Woolly West: Early Irish Christianity and Latin Orthodoxy', in W. J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds), *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish* (Oxford, 1989), 1–23 at 7–8.

þrie Scottas comon to Elfrede cyninge on anum bate butan elcum gereþrum of Hibernia, þonon hi hi bestelon, forþon þe hi woldon for Godes lufan on elþiodignesse beon, hi ne rohton hwær. Se bat wæs geworht of þridan healfre hyde þe hi on foron, 7 hi namon mid him þæt hi hæfdun to seofon nihtum mete, 7 þa comon hie ymb .vii. niht to londe on Cornwalum 7 foron þa sona to Elfrede cyninge. Þus hie wæron genemnde, Dubslane 7 Maccbethu 7 Maelinmun,

‘In a boat without any oars three Gaels came to King Alfred from Ireland, which they had left secretly because they wished for the love of God to be in foreign lands, they cared not where. The boat in which they travelled was made of two and a half hides, and they took with them enough food for seven days. And after seven days they came to land in Cornwall and went immediately to King Alfred. Their names were Dubsláine, Mac Bethad, and Mael Inmain.’

Finally I shall deal with the negative views. It is in the context of controversy that we should consider St Columbanus,²⁰⁷ who flourished about a century before Bede. As a highly learned, articulate man founding churches in Frankia, he was both vigorous and stubborn in defending his native customs, including the traditional method of Easter-dating.²⁰⁸ Therefore he was bound to get into trouble with all forms of authority. On a local level he was banished from his diocese by more than one bishop, and he was frequently threatened with trials and possible imprisonment.²⁰⁹ In his letters he even vehemently confronted Pope Gregory the Great: for example,²¹⁰

Quare ergo tu, tam sapiens, nimirum cuius clarissimis per urbem, ut antiquitus, sacri ingenii diffusa sunt flumina, Pascha tenebrosum colis? Miror, fateor, a te hunc Galliae errorem acsi scynthenium iam diu non fuisse rasum; nisi forte putem, quod vix credere possum, dum eum constat a te non fuisse emendatum, apud te esse probatum,

‘Why then, with all your learning, when indeed the streams of your holy

²⁰⁷ Cf. section 3, above.

²⁰⁸ Bullough, ‘The Career of Columbanus’, 13–14.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 13–17; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 356–78.

²¹⁰ *Epistula* I.iv: G. S. M. Walker (ed. and trans.), *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Dublin, 1957), 4–5.

wisdom are, as of old, shed abroad over the earth with great brightness, do you favour a dark Easter? I am surprised, I must confess, that this error of Gaul has not long since been scraped away by you, as if it were a warty growth; unless perhaps I am to think, what I can scarce believe, that while it is patent that this has not been righted by you, it has met with approval in your eyes.'

Even from Columbanus's own works, therefore, we gain a strong sense of how he was regarded in various quarters of western Europe. In more recent times he has, however, been hailed as a paragon of European unity.²¹¹

I turn next to the work known as *Laterculus Malalianus*, likely to date from late seventh-century England according to Jane Stevenson, who has persuasively argued for an attribution to Archbishop Theodore himself.²¹² It offers two jibes at learned Irishmen. The first is a throwaway comment regarding their chronography: *In sex milia autem annorum concordant omnes apparuisse Dominum; quamvis Scotti concordare nolunt, qui sapientia[m] se existimant habere, et scientiam perd[i]derunt*, 'However, all agree that the Lord appeared in 6,000 years – though the Irish do not wish to concur, who judge themselves to have wisdom, and [so] lose knowledge.'²¹³ This seemed to be applied to all Irish scholars, for reasons broader than the author was willing to admit; in this way it can be regarded as prejudicial. It is ironic that some should have denied Irishmen the very qualities for which others praised them so highly.²¹⁴

The other mention of the Irish is a more general criticism: *Iam ne nos fallant multiloquio suo Scottorum scolaces, ipsa se nobis ueritas liquidissimus labiorum promat nectareis, ut omnem a nobis amaritudinem tollat aliene doctrine...*, 'Lest the twisty reasoners/whelps of the Irish deceive us with their verbiage, let truth disclose herself to us with the most liquid nectar of the lips, so that she may take away from us all the bitterness of strange teaching...'²¹⁵ Theodore's 'Hibernophobia' (if he was the author) may imply that his Irish students were

²¹¹ For instance, Tomás Ó Fiaich, *St Columbanus in His Own Words* (Dublin, 1974), 170: 'St Columban is the patron saint of those who seek to construct a united Europe' – Robert Schuman (1886–1963), French statesman and Foreign Minister, 1948–52.

²¹² Stevenson (ed. and trans.), *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'*, 8–15; contrast Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 219.

²¹³ Stevenson (ed. and trans.), *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'*, 124–5.

²¹⁴ For a summary of this author's attributes see *ibid.*, 10–11. One of Jane Stevenson's (perhaps less watertight) reasons for arguing an Anglo-Saxon origin for this text is that, in the late seventh century, only the Anglo-Saxons were sufficiently concerned about the Irish to display 'Hibernophobic sentiments': *ibid.*, 99.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120–1.

annoying in the sense of loud and talkative (although at least he did not accuse them of laziness).²¹⁶ The in-joke was directly echoed by Aldhelm, when he focused on their babbling ignorance and possibly their foreign accents or pronunciation.²¹⁷ Clearly, however, Theodore and Aldhelm were willing to teach and associate with them: rather than turning away their business, they may have enjoyed exchanging good-natured banter, only later using these (probably young and intense) Irishmen as rhetorical fodder.²¹⁸ The Carolingian anecdote about Eriugena at table,²¹⁹ and his ‘biting epitaph’²²⁰ for Hincmar – though almost certainly later inventions – show that this particular Irishman was perceived as self-confident to the point of insolence; like Theodore’s students, perhaps, he was a barbarian too big for his boots.

The Life of St Wilfrid, bishop of York,²²¹ who died in the same year as Aldhelm and was inextricably involved in Anglo-Saxon politics, includes an interesting reference to the Irish. Wilfrid, like Bede, was not favourable to ‘Irish’ Easter-dating or other customs, but was far more direct than Bede in showing it; this despite the benefits of an Irish education at Lindisfarne.²²² The author, Stephen of Ripon (709 x 731), reported the bishop’s self-defensive speech at a council in 703 in which he defiantly listed his achievements for Northumbria:²²³

Necnon et ego primus post obitum primorum procerum, a sancto Gregorio directorum, Scotticae virulenta plantationis germina eradicarem; ad verumque pascha et ad tonsuram in modum coronae, quae ante ea posteriore capitis parte e summo abrasa vertice, secundum apostolicae sedis rationem totam Ultrahumbrensiū gentem permutando converterem?

²¹⁶ On possible word-play behind *scolaces* see *ibid.*, 163n2.

²¹⁷ Cf. section 4, above.

²¹⁸ Theodore seems to have been favourable to Irishmen who conformed with Romanist views: Bieler, ‘Ireland’s Contribution’, 214.

²¹⁹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 227.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228. This was outwardly more negative than the papal librarian Anastasius’s remark on Eriugena’s own learning prowess: cf. section 4, above.

²²¹ Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, 1927).

²²² Irish monastic education seems to have had a more positive influence on other well-known Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics, for instance SS Oswald and Cuthbert. Cf. *Historia ecclesiastica* V.19: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 518–19, and Bieler, ‘Ireland’s Contribution’, 213.

²²³ *Vita sancti Wilfridi* §xlvi: Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 98–9. Cf. Hughes, ‘The Celtic Church’, 17–18; and Dumville, *Councils and Synods*, 24.

‘Was I not the first, after the death of the first elders who were sent by St Gregory, to root out the poisonous weeds planted by the Scots? Did I not change and convert the whole Northumbrian race to the true Easter and to the tonsure in the form of a crown, in accordance with the practice of the Apostolic See, though their tonsure had been previously at the back of the head, from the top of the head downwards?’

The Irish contribution is dismissed as a strange, peripheral element leading the faithful astray, and which would have continued to do so but for Wilfrid. It is striking to note the contrast between his temperament here and his logical eloquence at the Council of Whitby as portrayed by both Stephen and Bede.²²⁴ (Curiously, the council where Wilfrid defended himself is not mentioned at all in Bede’s ‘Ecclesiastical History’.) How much of the nastiness and anti-Irish sentiment is due to Wilfrid himself, and how much to his hagiographer, we cannot be sure.²²⁵

Another seemingly negative view appears in the correspondence of the Anglo-Saxon missionary, Boniface (d. 754). He had emigrated to spend his best years reorganising the church in Frankia; and his work gives us an almost Patrician sense of how difficult it was to preach in an alien environment.²²⁶ One of his difficulties originated with Virgil of Salzburg, who may have been Irish;²²⁷ Boniface became so frustrated that he accused Virgil of heresy before the Pope.²²⁸ This action, I think, indicates not anti-Irish sentiment, but rather Boniface’s dogmatically anti-heretical views, which are clearly visible elsewhere in his work.²²⁹ Having said that, there seems to have been a general decline of

²²⁴ Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 20–3; *Historia ecclesiastica* III.25: Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 295–309. For broader discussion of Wilfrid’s background and achievements, see D. Kirby, ‘Bede, Eddius Stephanus and the ‘Life of Wilfrid’, *English Historical Review*, 98 (1983), 101–14; and C. Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish* (Jarrow, 2003).

²²⁵ W. F. Bolton described Wilfrid as ‘one of the most colorful, and at the same time one of the most unattractive, figures of the Anglo-Saxon Church’: *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature 597–1066, volume I: 597–740* (Princeton, NJ, 1967), 66.

²²⁶ Michael Tangl (ed.), *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Selectae I* (Berlin, 1916), 214–15; Ephraim Emerton (trans.), *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York, 2000), 99–100.

²²⁷ M. L. W. Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900* (London, 1931), 145–6.

²²⁸ George W. Greenaway, *Saint Boniface: Three Biographical Sketches for the Twelfth Centenary Festival* (London, 1955), 57.

²²⁹ Thomas F. X. Noble, Preface, in Emerton (trans.), *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, xix–xx.

Irish influence by the mid-eighth century:²³⁰ as George Greenaway put it, ‘the time was long since past when free-lance preachers of the Irish type could hope to achieve lasting results.’²³¹ In his attempt to chart a chronological process of Irish scholarly influence (as distinct from others’ perceptions of the Irish), Dáibhí Ó Cróinín has suggested that Irish influence had declined by the ninth century.²³²

Despite the appreciation for Irish scholarship and teaching in the Carolingian world,²³³ some views of Irish court scholars were very critical. Most famously, an attack on one Irishman was made by the bishop of Orléans, Theodulf: in a celebratory poem including description of Charlemagne’s royal circle, this Spaniard unleashed his sarcasm on the seemingly blameless Cadac-Andreas (of whom little else is known).²³⁴ He accused him of ignorance and stupidity rather than a specific offence,²³⁵ and the episode resulted in no known charges. The tone of the attack could suggest wholesale anti-Irish sentiment on Theodulf’s part, as well as relentless showing-off in word-play and other rhetorical skills.²³⁶ On the other hand, we should remember that Theodulf’s bitter sarcasm was aimed not exclusively at this Irishman but at scholars of other foreign origins also. (Theodulf was himself, of course, a foreigner in Frankia.) It is clear that verbal sparring was an intrinsic element of Carolingian intellectual culture.²³⁷ As Anthony Harvey has persuasively argued, the Irishman may have tried to

²³⁰ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 219–22.

²³¹ Greenaway, *Saint Boniface*, 15.

²³² Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 169.

²³³ Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 39, and section 4, above.

²³⁴ Text: Bischoff, ‘Theodulf’, 94; cf. *Theodulfi carmina*: Ernst Dümmler (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae latini aevi Carolini I* (Berlin, 1881), 490–3; translation: Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry, 750–1150* (Philadelphia, PA, 1993), 269–71; see also *ibid.*, 58–61; and Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 221–2.

²³⁵ For a partisan and strangely literal interpretation see M. Garrison, ‘The Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature and the Court of Charlemagne (780–814)’, in Rosamond McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994), 111–40 at 125: ‘the tantrum of Theodulf’s arch-enemy, a short[ly] irascible and competitive Irishman’. See also V. Law, ‘The Study of Grammar’, *ibid.*, 88–110.

²³⁶ See, for instance, K. Sidwell, ‘Theodulf of Orleans, Cadac-Andreas and Old Irish Phonology: A Conundrum’, *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 2 (1992), 55–62.

²³⁷ Peter Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, 67–74; P. Riché, ‘Les Irlandais et les princes carolingiens aux VIII^e et IX^e siècles’, in Heinz Lowe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter* (2 vols, Stuttgart, 1982), II, 735–45; D. Schaller, ‘Poetic Rivalries at the Court of Charlemagne’, in R. R. Bolgar (ed.), *Classical Influences on European Culture A.D. 500–1500* (Cambridge, 1971), 151–7, especially 154; for continuation of this trend see B. Bischoff, ‘Living with the Satirists’, *ibid.*, 83–94 at 83–4.

impress his hosts by attempting, and failing, to speak as they did.²³⁸ At around the same time (the end of the eighth century), the Anglo-Saxon Alcuin, cleric and intellectual at the Carolingian court, expressed dissatisfaction with Irish educational practices in Frankia, making a clearly disparaging reference to the Irish and their 'Egyptian boys' engaging in erroneous methods of computus.²³⁹ Whether Alcuin was criticising all Irish scholars, however, is doubtful.

There is no more entertaining encapsulation of all mediaeval outsiders' criticisms of Ireland than the Norman-Latin poem *Moriubt* by Warner of Rouen, who satirised a probably fictional character whom he presented as an Irishman.²⁴⁰ This erudite but often obscene work, set in the Viking Age, depicts the ugly, stupid and pompous 'hero' Moriuh. The author was sufficiently knowledgeable to invert the positive attributes for which Irishmen had been familiar on the Continent, as well as the most traumatic events of Irish history prior to the Norman conquest; in this way he exposed and savagely mocked the man's helplessness in the face of adversity. Expertise on Irish history and social custom was unusual for an outsider, but the focus on an individual Irishman was not, especially from a Continental perspective. Although many of its sources are obscure,²⁴¹ its antecedents in subject and tone are easily found. In his condescending depiction of the laziness, religious ignorance and promiscuity of the Irish, Warner foreshadowed many of the Norman colonist viewpoints.²⁴²

²³⁸ A. Harvey, "Battling Andrew" and the West-Brit Syndrome Twelve Hundred Years Ago', *Classics Ireland*, 9 (2002), 19–27. For discussion of Theodulf's own dismissal and exile see Ann Freeman, "Theodulf of Orléans: A Visigoth at Charlemagne's Court", in *L'Europe héritière de l'Espagne wisigothique: Colloque internationale du C.N.R.S. tenu à la Fondation Singer-Polignac* (Paris, 1990), 185–94 at 192–3; reprinted as article VIII in eadem, *Theodulf of Orléans: Charlemagne's Spokesman against the Second Council of Nicaea* (Aldershot, 2003).

²³⁹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 221–2: following brief consideration of Alcuin and Theodore, he has remarked that 'such anti-Irish sentiment was the exception, not the rule' (222).

²⁴⁰ Christopher J. McDonough (ed. and trans.), *Warner of Rouen, Moriubt: A Norman Latin Poem from the Early Eleventh Century* (Toronto, 1995), 72–107; cf. Ronald E. Pepin, *Literature of Satire in the Twelfth Century: A Neglected Mediaeval Genre* (Lampeter, 1988), especially 1–23 and 117–59.

²⁴¹ In a separate article I hope to demonstrate the extent to which Warner utilised the work of Persius, the satirist of the Stoics, especially in his condemnatory 'mock-penitential' towards the end of *Moriubt*: McDonough (ed. and trans.), *Warner*, 104–5, lines 465–72.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 74–5, lines 29–32; cf. section 5, below.

Solis in occasum iacet insula Scottia dicta,
Fertilis, a populo non bene culta suo;
Vt dicunt plures, hanc gens si gnara teneret,
Vinceret Italiam fertilitate sua,

‘Where the sun sets lies an isle, called Ireland, a fertile (land) though not well tended by its inhabitants. Many people say that if this (island) was occupied by a nation of any skill, it would surpass Italy in its riches.’

He also echoed those of St Jerome:²⁴³

Hi sibi concessis, pressa quoque mente sub artu
Carnis, et ignari luminis [et] Ailithroni.
Quantum per habitum sectantur corpore scortum!
Est mihi perlatum: more cubant pecudum;
Non braccas portant, ueneri quia semper adherent,

‘Though these things have been granted to them, in addition, under the frame of their body, their mind is crushed. They are also unaware of the light of God enthroned on high. How much they run after prostitutes with their bodies, aided by their mode of dress! Word has been brought to me: they couple like animals; they do not wear trousers, because they are constantly locked in sexual activity.’

The plot is structured around this monstrous character’s search for his abducted wife, which brings him from Ireland to the Northumbrian trading centre of Corbridge, and eventually to Rouen.

Moriuht sees himself as a scholar, a grammarian and a poet, but his ‘talent’ is sarcastically attacked by Warner, who shows him to be more drawn to sexual promiscuity than to scholarship.²⁴⁴

Hic Moriuht stultus, de mortis origine dictus,
Tali gente satus, stat sibi grammaticus.
Grammaticus, rethor, geometra, pictor, aliptes,
Omnia sit uobis; est caper ipse mihi,

²⁴³ Ibid., 74–5, lines 37–42; cf. section 1, above.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 74–5, lines 49–54.

'This slow-witted Moriuh, named from the origin of death, is sprung from such a race and in his own eyes lives as a grammarian. Scholar, rhetorician, geometer, painter, scribe – let him be all things to you; for me he is Caper himself!

Later in the poem a supposed quotation of his shamefully poor verse adds to Warner's merciless mockery.²⁴⁵ Throughout the work Moriuh and his wife are likened to goats.²⁴⁶ He in particular is subjected to constant humiliation; for example, Vikings whip him and urinate on his bald head.²⁴⁷ He is sold into slavery for the apt sum of one counterfeit denarius;²⁴⁸ and his sexual conduct is deviant even within marriage.²⁴⁹

All this illustrates Warner's inverted history of Ireland, his knowledge of trading customs including slave-trading;²⁵⁰ the poem is in effect an expanded version of Theodulf's attack on Cadac-Andreas,²⁵¹ in its elements of mocking a self-styled poet²⁵² and wholesale humiliation.²⁵³ Among the extant views of Irish Christians abroad, there was a good deal of negative opinion; however, these attacks were usually aimed at individuals (historical or otherwise) or triggered by a particular event or doctrinal issue, rather than stemming from generalised anti-Irish sentiment.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 96–7, lines 341–60 (quotation line 341); and repeated, 102–3, lines 438–54 (quotation line 451). Cf. Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985), 195–6 (no. 726).

²⁴⁶ For example, McDonough (ed. and trans.), *Warner*, 92–3, lines 299–300.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 76–7, lines 65–70; cf. D. N. Dumville, 'Images of the Viking in Eleventh-Century Latin Literature', in Michael W. Herren *et al.* (eds), *Latin Culture in the Eleventh Century* (2 vols, Turnhout, 2002), I, 250–63 at 259–61.

²⁴⁸ McDonough (ed. and trans.), *Warner*, 82–3, lines 165–70.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 102–5, lines 455–72.

²⁵⁰ Cf. section 1, above.

²⁵¹ See section 4, above.

²⁵² Cf. Lapidge and Sharpe, *A Bibliography*, 195–6 (no. 726).

²⁵³ For seventeenth-century works comparable to *Moriuh* (by John Taylor the Water-Poet), see Snyder, 'The Wild Irish', 176.

²⁵⁴ Following brief consideration of the issue, Ludwig Bieler correctly acknowledged that Irish scholars abroad had gained a reputation for learning and that 'tribute, if sometimes grudgingly, was paid to them by their continental colleagues': 'Christian Ireland's Graeco-Latin Heritage', *Studia Patristica*, 13 (1975), 3–8 at 7.

5 Norman and English Colonists' Perceptions of Ireland and the Irish

The prospect, and later the reality, of the colonisation of Ireland brought about a new literary relationship between the two islands, from which the works of Gerald of Wales and others emerged. Yet in many respects Cambro- and Anglo-Norman perceptions of Ireland were based on those of the ancient world.²⁵⁵ It is interesting also to compare the Irish with the Welsh and other potential 'conquests' as portrayed by Norman writers. Warner's attack on Moriut had obviously illustrated (Continental) Norman attitudes also, at an earlier time and without the element of conquest.

From Anglo-Norman England in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Lanfranc and subsequently Anselm, archbishops of Canterbury, called for church reform, addressing the Irish political leadership directly.²⁵⁶ Lanfranc, imbued by Pope Gregory VII with 'apostolic authority', addressed Irish marriage-customs and erroneous practices in the consecration of bishops.²⁵⁷ We can see in this way a clear interest and agenda relating to Irish churches (though without specific information):²⁵⁸ the Irish were seen as inferior Christians and therefore targets for reform. I have discussed elsewhere the probable role of the legend of Mog Ruith, the Irish druid and supposed executioner of St John the Baptist, as an instrument of reform-measures in 1096.²⁵⁹

By the first third of the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury (in a combination of new ideas and revived Classical views) was condescending towards 'barbarous' nations, including the Irish; as John Gillingham has argued, they were seen as not simply unChristian but more significantly undeveloped in terms of (Romanised) industry, cultivation and commerce.²⁶⁰ This tendency to

²⁵⁵ Cf. A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (eds and trans.), *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland, by Giraldus Cambrensis* (Dublin, 1978), xxxi (suggested rather tentatively).

²⁵⁶ Dumville, *Councils and Synods*, 35 and 40–1; Sheehy, *When the Normans Came to Ireland* (Cork, 1975), 10–11; and Hughes, *The Church*, 257–62. Pope Gregory VII himself also wrote to Ireland urging reform: Maurice P. Sheehy (ed.), *Pontificia Hibernica: Medieval Papal Chancery Documents Concerning Ireland, 640–1261* (2 vols, Dublin, 1962–5), I, 7–8.

²⁵⁷ Hughes, 'The Celtic Church', 23–8.

²⁵⁸ John Watt, *The Church in Medieval Ireland*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1998), 4–10. For discussion of Anglo-Norman views on Ireland in the twelfth century, see J. Gillingham, 'The Context and Purposes of the *History of the Kings of Britain*', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 13 (1991), 99–118; idem, 'Conquering the Barbarians: War and Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Britain', *The Haskins Society Journal*, 4 (1992), 67–84.

²⁵⁹ O'Leary, 'Mog Ruith', 51–60.

²⁶⁰ Gillingham, 'The Context', 107–10; Muldoon, *Identity*, 65. For an unconvincing study of William's knowledge on Ireland, see C. H. Slover, 'William of Malmesbury and the Irish', *Speculum*, 2 (1927), 268–83.

describe the Irish as 'barbarous' had been used much earlier also, for instance by the ninth-century papal librarian Anastasius as a weapon against Irish education at home.²⁶¹ Many educational, social and other 'deviations' remained on the minds of outsiders writing about Ireland in the twelfth century, for instance Bernard of Clairvaux and Gerald of Wales.

In praising his friend Malachy's achievements,²⁶² Bernard took several jibes at Irish ecclesiastical irregularities, especially regarding consecration to and succession of bishoprics.²⁶³ The overall effect was as follows: *dissolutio ecclesiasticae disciplinae, censurae enervatio, religionis evacuatio: inde illa ubique, pro mansuetudine christiana, saeva subintroducta barbaries, imo paganismus quidam inductus sub nomine christiano*, 'a total breakdown of ecclesiastical discipline, a relaxation of censure, a weakening of the whole religious structure. Hence cruel barbarity was substituted for Christian meekness; as a matter of fact paganism was brought in under the label of Christianity'.²⁶⁴ Clearly Bernard was highlighting the concerns and reforming ideals which he himself held in common with Malachy.

All these events preceded the Norman 'conquest' of Ireland in the 1160s, which was immediately prompted by the document known by its opening word, *Laudabiliter*.²⁶⁵ This papal bull, in which the English pope Hadrian IV requested of King Henry II that Irish churches be reformed, was in effect a pretext for Norman intervention.²⁶⁶ This move was also presaged earlier in the century by William of Malmesbury and by John of Salisbury, as is evident from their remarks on the Irish and other peoples.²⁶⁷

The evidence is closer to Ireland, and even clearer, with regard to Norman colonists themselves. Gerald of Wales presented his views on Ireland in two works, including a great deal of material on the people's character and social

²⁶¹ Cf. section 4, above.

²⁶² Cf. section 3, above, for Bernard's views on Irish education.

²⁶³ *Vita sancti Malachiae* §19. Text: PL CLXXXII, col. 1086; translation: Meyer (trans.), *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 37–8.

²⁶⁴ *Vita sancti Malachiae* §19. Text: PL CLXXXII, col. 1086C; translation: Meyer (trans.), *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 38; cf. Muldoon, *Identity*, 65. On the well-founded nature of the specific accusations, see Hughes, *The Church*, 245–6; and Watt, *The Church*, 10–11.

²⁶⁵ For background to *Laudabiliter* (including an English translation), see Sheehy, *When the Normans Came to Ireland*, 9–16.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15–16; see also Hadfield and McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to That Land*, 7–9 and 25–9; and Muldoon, *Identity*, 72–4.

²⁶⁷ Gillingham, 'The Context', 107–10; cf. Sheehy, *When the Normans Came to Ireland*, 11–12.

customs.²⁶⁸ Travelling extensively in Ireland but writing from his ‘civilised’ Norman perspective, he appeared to deplore the Irish character, drawing special attention to alleged outrageous sexual practices.

Like many of the Classical and early-mediaeval works, his opening description in *Topographia Hibernica* focused on the natural environment. Similarly to Bede, he noted in particular the absence of snakes:²⁶⁹

Nec mihi mirandum videtur, quod vermium istorum, sicut et piscium, avium, et ferarum quarundam, naturalem defectum terra patitur. Sed hoc stupore dignum occurrit, quod nihil venenosum aliunde advectum unquam continere vel potuit vel potest,

‘I do not think it remarkable that the country should not have these reptiles, just as it has not got certain fish, birds, and wild beasts. It is a natural deficiency. But this fact is truly astonishing, namely, that if a poisonous thing is brought here from elsewhere, the island cannot, and never could, endure to keep it.’

This illustrates the beauty, and perhaps the quaintness, which he saw in Ireland’s landscape, but also serves to highlight his exasperation at the Irish people’s behaviour. On their general character, he was unimpressed to say the least: *gens silvestris, gens inhospita; gens ex bestiis solum et bestialiter vivens*, ‘They are a wild and inhospitable people. They live on beasts only, and live like beasts’.²⁷⁰ Significantly, they seemed unable to exploit natural resources due to their barbarity and laziness: for instance: *Vacat arborum virtus invita, dum et optimis agris desunt agricolae*, ‘The wealth of the soil is lost, not through the fault of the soil, but because there are no farmers to cultivate even the best land’.²⁷¹ The natural brilliance of the resources, and the fact that they were being wasted, made the Irish natural indolence far worse.

²⁶⁸ James Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica* (London, 1867); John J. O’Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales: The History and Topography of Ireland* (London, 1982); Scott and Martin (eds and trans.), *Expugnatio Hibernica*.

²⁶⁹ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 62 (I.xxix); translation: O’Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 50–1 (§22).

²⁷⁰ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 151 (III.x); translation: O’Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 101 (§93). Cf. the Classical references and Bede’s remarks, section 1, above – Gerald provided a new spin on old ideas.

²⁷¹ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 152 (III.x); translation: O’Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 102 (§93).

Their other main characteristics were promiscuity²⁷² and even bestiality.²⁷³ On their treachery, Gerald wrote that *Fidei et sacramenti religionem, quam sibi observari summopere volunt, aliis praestitam quotidie violare nec verecundantur nec verentur*, 'They do not blush or fear to violate every day the bond of their pledge and oath given to others – although they are very keen that it should be observed with regard to themselves'.²⁷⁴ This is similar to, and an expansion of, Warner's portrait of the Irish character.²⁷⁵ In the north-west they engaged in barbarous rituals to inaugurate kings,²⁷⁶ in Gerald's exaggerated version of a possible earlier custom. With regard to Irish Christianity, the people were ignorant and the clergy seriously flawed;²⁷⁷ to illustrate the problems as he saw them, Gerald reported an exchange between himself and the archbishop of Cashel.²⁷⁸ In essence the Irish were inferior Christians, who had no martyrs; the latter was a well-founded charge but Gerald displayed little understanding of its background. The Irish also learned foreign deceit and took it out on others;²⁷⁹ they always carried axes, a custom borrowed from the 'Ostmen' or settled Vikings;²⁸⁰ they lived in another, outdated world with regard to fashion, battle customs, commerce, and cultivation of crops.²⁸¹

In a rare departure, he complimented the Irish on their musical ability, indeed their only useful quality. But even here we find a sting in the tail: by

²⁷² *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 164–5 (III. xix) and 181–2 (III. xxxv); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 106 (§98) and 117–18 (§109).

²⁷³ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 169 (III. xxv); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 109–10 (§102).

²⁷⁴ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 165 (III. xx); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 106 (§99).

²⁷⁵ Cf. section 4, above.

²⁷⁶ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 169 (III. xxv); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 109–10 (§102).

²⁷⁷ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 162–3 (III. xviii) and 170–82 (III. xxvi–xxxvi); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 105–6 (§§97–8) and 110–18 (§§103–9).

²⁷⁸ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 178–9 (III. xxxii); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 115–16 (§107). For the background to this see Watt, *The Church*, 8–11.

²⁷⁹ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 186–7 (III. xliii); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 122 (§117).

²⁸⁰ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 165–6 (III. xxi) and 186–7 (III. xliii); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 107–8 (§100) and 122 (§117).

²⁸¹ *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 149–53 (III. x); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 100–3 (§93). Cf. Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982), 158–60.

Gerald's own time the Scots had outstripped the Irish by their industriousness: *Multorum autem opinione, hodie Scotia non tantum magistram aequiparavit Hiberniam, verum etiam in musica peritia longe praeualet et precellit. Unde et ibi quasi fontem artis jam requirunt*, 'In the opinion, however, of many, Scotland has by now not only caught up on Ireland, her instructor, but already far outdistances and excels her in musical skill. Therefore people now look to that country as to the fountain of the art'.²⁸² Most of these charges are also evident in the 'very spirited'²⁸³ illustrations in one manuscript: Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS. 700 (formerly Phillipps 6914).²⁸⁴

In the conclusion to his more overtly political work on Ireland, *Expugnatio Hibernica* ('The Conquest of Ireland'), Gerald explained how Ireland should be conquered and then governed,²⁸⁵ having already set out in his *Topographia* why Ireland needed to be conquered. He did not neglect to attack some Normans here also; as he had made clear earlier in the text,²⁸⁶ he thought that the 'conquest' had been far from immediate or successful thus far.

Like Aldhelm five hundred years earlier, Gerald seemed to be strongly influenced by practices he professed to despise early in the *Topographia*: in his case Classical perceptions of Ireland. Although the question remains as to whether the more extensive ethnographical accounts were available or known in this period,²⁸⁷ the influence of the geographical descriptions is obvious: Gerald cited Solinus and similar works, which were a significant part of the background to his own writing.²⁸⁸ Graeco-Roman writers however, had had far less knowledge (and no known first-hand experience) on which to build their accounts or to form judgments; for Gerald there was no such excuse. If we take his accounts at face value, evidently his experiences in Ireland only served to repel him from almost every aspect of the island. It may be more sensible to regard his *Topographia* as tongue-in-cheek provocation than the naive recycling of 'tall tales' by an outsider. At any rate, his sentiments were

²⁸² *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 154–5 (III. xi); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 104 (§94).

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁸⁴ For instance, the harp: *ibid.*, 103; axes: *ibid.*, 107; deformities: *ibid.*, 73 and 118; and sexual practices: *ibid.*, 75 and 76. Cf. *ibid.*, 16–17 at 17; and M. Brown, 'Shaping and Mis-shaping: Visual Impressions of Ireland in Three Manuscripts', in Vera Kreilkamp (ed.), *Éire/Land* (Boston, MA, 2003), 41–5.

²⁸⁵ *Expugnatio* §§38–9: Scott and Martin (eds and trans.), *Expugnatio Hibernica*, 244–53.

²⁸⁶ For example, *Expugnatio* §34: *ibid.*, 230–3.

²⁸⁷ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 178–81.

²⁸⁸ For instance, *Topographia Hibernica*. Text: Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Topographia*, 28–9 (I.vi); translation: O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales*, 35 (§2).

neither new nor unusual in the late twelfth century; as John Gillingham has shown, Gerald was merely committing to writing the prevailing views of his time.²⁸⁹ Gerald wrote in similar vein (but less vehemently) about the Welsh; like Geoffrey of Monmouth, he was neither anti- nor pro-Welsh.²⁹⁰ As James Muldoon has argued, these 'conquerors' were in the process of creating new identities on the Irish frontier and elsewhere.²⁹¹ Gerald's agenda of 'civilisation' became standard currency for at least five centuries, some highlights being the fourteenth-century *Polichronicon* by Ranulph Higden²⁹² and the later works of Edmund Spenser²⁹³ and Barnaby Rich.²⁹⁴

The moniker 'the wild Irish' indeed became a staple description of the island's people in English works; it spanned hundreds of years and clearly encapsulated the superior perspective of the coloniser. The fact that many of these authors were born or resident in Ireland in no way differentiated them from those without such an Irish connection. This 'wildness', attributed with scorn and prejudice to all Irish people,²⁹⁵ became a self-propagating fashion and was eventually expanded into 'pan-Celtic' prejudice, to include all Scots and Welsh as well as the Irish.²⁹⁶

Edmund Spenser's work prompts an especially interesting connection to early-mediaeval outsiders' perceptions of Ireland, despite the chronological gulf and the vast political changes which had taken place within England, and in its relationship with Ireland, by the late sixteenth century. There are striking parallels between his own Irish experience and that of St Patrick; yet the written results could scarcely be more different in respect of the Irish people. Spenser provided in his 'A View of the Present State of Ireland' a thoroughly detailed account, focused mainly on Irish laws, social customs and religious belief; but it was as though he were describing a remote and alien people, rather than fellow-residents in Munster. He expressed disgust (more so than Gerald had

²⁸⁹ Gillingham, 'Images of Ireland' (an extremely useful analysis even without footnotes).

²⁹⁰ Cf. Gillingham, 'The Context', 109–10.

²⁹¹ Muldoon, *Identity*, especially 77–87.

²⁹² Rambo, *Colonial Ireland*, 36–40.

²⁹³ Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser: A View of the State of Ireland* (Oxford, 1997); Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 59–69, which contains useful excerpts (in modern English) from 'A View' and from several other texts; and A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Faerie Queene* (London, 1977).

²⁹⁴ Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 81–90.

²⁹⁵ Snyder, 'The Wild Irish', 147–8.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 151–2: this began with Gerald (although his attacks on the Irish and the Welsh were separate) and was continued by William of Malmesbury, who included Scandinavians in his insults (152), so that such ridicule crossed the North Sea also.

done) that so many of the ‘Old English’ had grown to love the language and customs of Ireland more than their own.²⁹⁷ Of course he must have witnessed traumatic events,²⁹⁸ but his attitude towards all native Irish people (insofar as they were relevant to his work) was one of utter contempt: these were people from whom he could not wait to escape.²⁹⁹ In Spenser’s view, native Irish laws covered up criminality,³⁰⁰ as did the mantle and the glib or forelock,³⁰¹ and Irish Christianity had from the very beginning lacked understanding and even real priests.³⁰² On Patrick’s mission, Spenser wrote that, following the failure of Palladius’s papally-sanctioned mission, ‘he [Pope Celestine] afterwarde sent over, St Patricke beinge by nacion a [B]ryton, who converted the people beinge then infydells from paganisme and christyned them: [i]n which Poopes tyme and longe before, yt is certene that religion was generallie corrupted, with their popishe trumperie: Therefore what other could they learne, then such trashe as was taught them, and drinke of that Cupp of fornication, with which the purple harlot had then made all nations drunken’.³⁰³ His duties of mapping the territory, as a representative of ‘conquest’, presumably created little engagement with people; his only commitment was to officialdom. Having no connection with, or objective in relation to the Irish, and without an inner drive to propel or even sustain him among these foreigners as St Patrick had had in his mission to spread the new message of Christianity in fifth-century Ireland, Spenser was unable to conceive of any positive outcome to his exile. The literary product of his time on the neighbouring island was seen as so

²⁹⁷ Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366–1922: A Sourcebook* (London, 2000), 45–9, especially 48; Muldoon, *Identity*, 15–19.

²⁹⁸ Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 59–60.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; Snyder, ‘The Wild Irish’, 158.

³⁰⁰ Hadfield and Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser*, 14–15; Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 62.

³⁰¹ Hadfield and Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser*, 56–9; Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 63–6.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 66–8; for a variant text see Hadfield and Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser*, 153–4.

³⁰³ W. L. Renwick (ed.), *A View of the Present State of Ireland by Edmund Spenser* (London, 1934), 110; Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 66; cf. Muldoon, *Identity*, 90. Hadfield and Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser*, has a more moderate version of this passage which mentions SS Patrick and Columba: *ibid.*, 153–4. The passage on Patrick is also not included in the list of Ware’s omissions: Appendix II, *ibid.*, 170–6. Could this variant reading have arisen from the nature of Spenser’s remarks, or his factual error in stating that Patrick was sent to Ireland by the Pope? I hope elsewhere to analyse in detail several provocative reinterpretations of early Irish Christian history; for John Wesley’s remarks on St Patrick’s mission and achievement, see Hadfield and McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to That Land*, 20.

inflammatory that it was not published until 1633, almost forty years after its composition, by which time the political issues had escalated still further.³⁰⁴

Like Gerald (a major influence), Spenser was unafraid to criticise his colonising predecessors and contemporaries. He reckoned that Ireland and its people needed subjection since the Norman attempt at conquest had ultimately failed: the Irish were 'a people very stubborne, and untamed, or if it were ever tamed, yet now lately having shooke off their yoake, and broken the bonds of their obedience'.³⁰⁵ Patrick's dealings with the authorities of his own country had been – like Spenser's – very strained as the prelates had (according to himself) failed to promote him or even to recognise his achievement. His task in such an alien land was extremely difficult; yet he eventually came to regard himself as Irish.³⁰⁶ Possibly as a consequence of failed ambition, Spenser's relationship with Ireland (if it can be so called) was expressed in tirades of bitterness and disappointment.

6 'Ill-wishers of Ireland?'

Before Ireland became an entity known to people in other lands, and several centuries prior to Irishmen's arrival on the Continental European stage showcasing their intellectual talents, many of those at the centre of Graeco-Roman civilisation demonstrated their curiosity (laced with hearsay) about Celts, with an occasional reference to the cold faraway island which eventually might have helped to bolster the Roman hold on Britain. It did not seem important or urgent enough, however, to form any more than a possible uncomplicated encounter in Agricola's mind.

Although many, especially Norman, views seem prejudicial in that the views are applied across the board to all Irish people, this is not the dominant picture among foreigners who wrote about Ireland in the period up to around 1200. Attention was drawn to differences rather than similarities, as we would expect. We certainly see the recurrence of negative attributes such as promiscuity, belligerence, laziness, ignorance, and even heresy. But Irishmen were also noted

³⁰⁴ W. Maley, 'How Milton and Some Contemporaries Read Spenser's *View*', in Brendan Bradshaw *et al.* (eds), *Representing Ireland: Literature and the Origins of Conflict, 1534–1660* (Cambridge, 1993), 191–208 at 191–2; Hadfield and McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to That Land*, 12–13.

³⁰⁵ Hadfield and Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser*, 14; Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 61; cf. Coughlan, 'Ireland and Incivility', 56.

³⁰⁶ See section 3, above.

for their wisdom, generosity, and devotion to God. Irish ecclesiastics abroad were exporting their traditional ideas and customs, and forceful personalities like Columbanus did not easily assimilate into new cultures. Sometimes they were viewed as a threat even though it was not necessarily their intention to be so: for instance, regarding the issue of Easter. The virtue of lively intellectual debate could turn into vicious personal attack, as we have seen from Theodulf and Warner. Certainly the papal librarian Anastasius, and perhaps even Archbishop Theodore himself, used Irishmen's erudition as a weapon against them, and Bernard of Clairvaux used Malachy's learning to attack Irish churches generally. This was presaged at the Carolingian court, where the prestige granted by Irishmen's patrons may have influenced others to envy them.³⁰⁷ Such an international milieu forced people to compete for recognition, but some may have struggled to adapt and succeed; this could have given rise to tension and/or conflict. In works such as Aldhelm's correspondence, it can be hard to distinguish between plain nastiness and good-natured banter: the Irish too had a robust sense of humour and, had *Moriuh*t existed, I think that he would have given as good as he got.

To turn Ireland into a useful colony was an aspiration from the first century AD, ultimately fulfilled by the English. In this discussion we have seen a great many 'outsiders' looking in from different perspectives and eras, each with his own concerns and interests. There were several different types of experience, varying levels of understanding and, to paraphrase John P. Harrington, many degrees of bewilderment.³⁰⁸

Later colonists' accounts of Ireland were in effect perpetuating many of the Classical perceptions, especially of the character of Ireland's people. It is difficult to pinpoint the precise origins of each author's remarks (positive or negative) but on the whole Classical views appear to have prevailed. Acquaintance with Ireland grew but engagement or understanding did not greatly increase. Apart from any problematic scholarly or commercial contacts, the earlier unpleasant views were perhaps transmitted through Jerome,³⁰⁹ and accepted uncritically by the uninformed. In the eleventh century, Warner probably encountered Irishmen on the Continent and was generally well-versed on Ireland; yet *Moriuh*t showed very little engagement with the Irish or consideration of them as fellow-scholars. Like Gerald of Wales, Spenser

³⁰⁷ For remarks on some Irishmen's successful adaptation in the Carolingian world see Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*, 39.

³⁰⁸ Cf. Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 9.

³⁰⁹ See section 1, above.

liked to display his general familiarity with Classical literature³¹⁰ but took an approach towards the Irish which was more akin to Graeco-Roman speculations than perhaps he realised.

For most of these 'foreigners' it was naturally the Irish who were on the outside – as far as it was possible to go before falling off the world's edge. As St Patrick put it, 'areas beyond which there was no-one': this speaks to his loneliness and alienation; yet he meant well and was in effect speaking from within. Bede too endeavoured to investigate and demonstrate the Irish traditional approach to Easter-dating, resulting in a thorough and balanced treatment of Ireland's religious contributions and problems (mostly as these applied to Northumbria and to the broader Anglo-Saxon world). Bede described Aidan, Colman and others as though they were his fellow-teachers and even friends, even though they had been active a century earlier. In his understanding that the Irish in no way subscribed to any convention of their own peripherality,³¹¹ Bede was virtually alone among foreigners writing about Ireland.

Geoffrey Keating responded vehemently to English attacks, in his *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, known as 'A History of Ireland' and completed around 1634;³¹² but in the Middle Ages Irishmen appeared unmoved by what others wrote about the island, be they admirers or 'ill-wishers'.³¹³ This Irish example of indifference was clearly not followed by those from other lands: Ireland was, unquestionably and increasingly, noticed and remarked upon from Antiquity onwards, and the impact of the Irish (particularly those who had left the island) was deemed more worthy of attention than that of their Anglo-Saxon and other contemporaries.³¹⁴ Such reactions (or lack thereof) to foreign intellectuals' attacks may have contributed to the increased denigration of Ireland by colonisers who had little understanding of the island's earlier history or

³¹⁰ For example, on the ancient use of mantles: Hadfield and Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser*, 56–7; Harrington (ed.), *The English Traveller*, 63–4.

³¹¹ Cf. Herbert, 'The Legacy of Colum Cille', 12.

³¹² B. Bradshaw, 'Geoffrey Keating: Apologist of Irish Ireland', in idem *et al.* (eds), *Representing Ireland*, 166–90; Hadfield and McVeagh (eds), *Strangers to That Land*, 7–8; and Ward, *Exile*, 40–1. For broader discussion of Irish literary ripostes, see Snyder, 'The Wild Irish', 150–1.

³¹³ The earliest known reviewer of Spenser's 'A View of the Present State of Ireland' described him as an 'ill-wisher of Ireland': Maley, 'How Milton and Some Contemporaries Read Spenser's *View*', 192–3.

³¹⁴ We are at least fortunate in the extent of our surviving evidence for mediaeval Ireland; for discussion of more truly 'marginal' groups see Michael Goodich (ed.), *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society* (Philadelphia, PA, 1998), especially 2–7.

contemporary culture;³¹⁵ the implications that Ireland had failed to accomplish the proper standards of ‘civilisation’ showed that foreigners’ engagement with the Irish had significantly and gradually regressed since the early Middle Ages, despite many writers’ considerable experience of Ireland. As Robin Flower put it, however, Irish Christians abroad (and presumably those at home) carried on undeterred: ‘[t]he Irish religious made the whole world of Europe in their day into their monastery . . . [b]ut . . . change altogether they could not, for in their life’s beginning the destiny of their minds was determined’.³¹⁶

University of Aberdeen

³¹⁵ Issues in need of further exploration include the development of successive ‘discourses of colonisation’ from earlier mediaeval Ireland (for example, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian residents) to colonial Ireland from the eleventh century onwards: cf. Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford, 1989), 47–50; to what degree English colonists writing about Ireland were familiar with the Classical views they helped to perpetuate; and the ways in which they misinterpreted mediaeval Irish history and culture.

³¹⁶ *The Irish Tradition*, 66.

Ghostly Repetitions: The Supernatural, Nostalgia and Classical Tradition in James Macpherson's *Ossian*

Ersev Ersoy

Introduction

The Poems of Ossian, a collection of prose poetry published in 1760–3, proves to be a crucial text marking the beginnings of the eighteenth-century Romantic Movement to which James Macpherson contributes significantly by his construction of a Romanticised image of a heroic past from the Gaelic ballad tradition. The key inspiration behind *Ossian* seems to be the idea of looking at the past with hopes to ‘rediscover’ what was being neglected in contemporary modernist thought — that is, tradition, which centres on the supernatural and the divine — in order to help construct a common social reality or awareness. This was also a rediscovery or a recreation of a mythic world which could not be detached from its society’s knowledge and creation of history, as ‘myths express and deal with a people’s reality postulates about the world; and mythic truths pertain more to a moral universe than to a “natural” one (in the sense of the physical unitary world of scientists)’.¹ One can observe that the mythic world of *Ossian* is aimed at the creation of a common symbolic universe which is a cohesive collective of the past, present and the future, in order to establish a memory that is shared by all the individuals in the collectivity.

Macpherson makes use of the supernatural or the divine to create the machinery of the epic, which is considered to be of great importance by many critics, including Hugh Blair, who had the chance to discuss the issue with Macpherson before and during the publication of *Ossian* and almost certainly led him to give his translations epic pretensions. It is the repeated occurrence of the supernatural in the poems that provides the focus of this article. I will address these ghostly repetitions in hopes of showing how the poet’s ‘recreation’ of the mythic universe was fuelled by strong nostalgia and how he edited his original Gaelic material using Homer, Milton and Virgil as classical models.

¹ Joanna Overing, “The Role of Myth: An Anthropological Perspective, or: “The Reality of the Really Made-up”” in *Myths and Nationhood* (London, 1997), 12.

Ghostly Apparitions

A ghost can be defined as a bodiless soul or spirit of a deceased person. It is a common belief held by people from various countries and cultures that ghosts can be seen if and when they haunt certain locations or be seen by people with whom they used to associate before or at the time of death. In *The Poems of Ossian*, ghosts are generally described as thin airy forms — and sometimes with an imperfect form. J.S. Smart, beautifully defines Ossianic ghosts as ‘disembodied, though personified, fragments of melancholic memory which float across the imaginative present of the poems’.³ They appear to people they knew, loved, cared about, had a special connection with or feared in life, ‘but their communication with this world can only ever be shadowy’.⁴ The departed spirits, in the poems, do have common features such as having a feeble voice, a weak arm and a knowledge that is more than the humans may possess. These visits are precise, lasting only for a few moments; conversations, if present, are short and the language of ghosts is difficult to understand, adding to the solemn gloom of these scenes, which suits Blair’s secret of achieving sublimity, in which his own words, is ‘to say great things in a few, or in plain words: for every superfluous decoration degrades a sublime idea. The mind rises and swells, when a lofty description or sentiment is presented to it, in its native form’.⁵

Apart from the general mentioning of ghosts and spirits as the souls of dead heroes or enemies, the poet makes use of their appearances more specifically by giving details of such encounters with several heroes. In *The Poems of Ossian*, which includes twenty-three poems (some with several chapters or books), there are fifteen significant instances where a character is visited by a ghost, which gives him/her advice, foretells the coming of a battle, warns about enemy activity or mourns the deaths of heroes. Sometimes, they do not speak at all but their looks pass on information to that person.

Ossianic ghosts are gentle and noble; yet, the news they present to the

² Arrows indicate the ghostly appearance (NB: Caithbath₁ was originally from Skye, but was sent to Erin by Trathal).

³ J.S. Smart, *James Macpherson: An Episode in Literature*, (New York, 1973), 24.

⁴ Susan Manning, ‘Henry Mackenzie and *Ossian* or, the Emotional Value of Asteriks’ in Fiona Stafford and Howard Gaskill (eds), *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations* (Amsterdam, 1998), 143.

⁵ Hugh Blair, ‘A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal’ in James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, Howard Gaskill (ed.) (1763; Edinburgh, 1996), 394.

characters might not always be as gentle as their appearance. They carry out the same pursuits they used to do before they passed away: ghosts of the bards keep on singing, whereas those of the departed heroes ride on the wind and carry their bows. Connal explains the actions of spirits to Cuchullin in the second book of *Fingal*: ‘Ghosts fly on clouds and ride on winds, said Connal’s voice of wisdom. They rest together in their caves, and talk of mortal men’⁶. Just as they have varying duties and responsibilities even in the afterlife, the reasons they appear to the mortals differ too: to warn heroes of coming danger, to foretell battle, to mourn the death of a loved one, or to express sorrow for a past event.

Genealogical table below (see fig. 1) summarises and shows the relationships between Ossianic characters, also displaying the occurring ghostly visits.

Ossianic Ghosts and the Past

The other-worldly atmosphere in the poems feeds greatly on these ghostly appearances, while they also contribute to the balance of sentimentality and heroism. The poems combine heroism with elegy, joy with grief, past with present, death with life; emphasising, and constantly reminding the audience of the significance of complementary opposites. Most of the poems are inspired by the existence of darkness and light, which stands for evil and good or happiness and sadness. Ghosts are described as being made of mist, or they are likened to mist, which covers the face of the sun, preventing its light from reaching the earth. In many instances, stars or the moon are said to look dimmer through the mist of a ghost:

His spear was a column of mist: the stars looked dim through his form.
His voice was like hollow wind in a cave: and he told the tale of grief.
The soul of Nathos was sad, like the sun in the day of mist, when his
face is watry and dim.⁷

The ghosts of Ardven pass through the beam, and shew their dim and distant forms. Comala is half unseen on her meteor; and Hidallan is sullen and dim, like the darkened moon behind the mist of night.⁸

⁶ James Macpherson, *Fingal: Book II* in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 66.

⁷ James Macpherson, *Dar-thula: A Poem*, in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 141.

⁸ James Macpherson, *The War of Caros* in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 110.

Doubtlessly, recurrence of mist and misty figures highlights the liminality of the poetry as mist stands for the condition between the light and dark. Moreover, underlying the motif of dark against light is sadness and joy. The theme of 'joy of grief' seen throughout the poems also acts as an important constituent of Macpherson-Ossian's transcendent poetry. Ghostly appearances underline this theme as they are the reminders — and the remainders — of the past. They represent memories, which bring joy but grief takes over with their disappearance. The characters either 'covered grief with joy'⁹ or joy rises in their faces only to be covered with sadness again, continuously stressing the futility of life: 'She thinks it is Aldo's tread, and joy rises in her face: but sorrow returns again, like a thin cloud on the moon'.¹⁰ Perhaps, one of the best explanations of what joy of grief stands for can be seen in *The Death of Cuchullin*, where Carril says 'the music was like the memory of joys that are past, pleasant and mournful to the soul'.¹¹ However, above all, 'The joy of grief belongs to Ossian, amidst his dark-brown years'.¹²

The importance of the past remains dominant, as we see heroes seeking inspiration and guidance from their ancestors or past experiences: ghosts are thus understood as part of one's past. 'Come, ye dim ghosts of my fathers, and behold my deeds in war! I may fall; but I will be renowned like the race of the echoing Morven'.¹³

Considering this, it becomes possible to see Ossianic ghosts as representatives of the past—they may stand for previous mistakes and victories, also emphasising the value of wisdom gained by experience. The superiority of past over present shows itself in an obvious way.¹⁴ This is particularly evident in *The War of Caros*, where the aged father takes his own father's sword to execute his nameless son, who fails to achieve fame in war:

My son! go to Lamor's hall: there the arms of our fathers hang. Bring the sword of Garmáillon; he took it from a foe. He led him to Garmáillon's tomb. Lamor pierced the side of his son.¹⁵

⁹ James Macpherson, *The Battle of Lora* in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 120.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹¹ James Macpherson, *The Death of Cuchullin* in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 136.

¹² James Macpherson, *Temora: Book Seventh* in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 283.

¹³ Macpherson, *The War of Caros*, 113.

¹⁴ Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1988), 146.

¹⁵ Macpherson, *The War of Caros*, 112.

The fascination of past over present becomes so strong that it turns into a destructive force in this example and continues to exist throughout the poems: we see parents outliving their children in many of the poems, such as Oscar dying before Ossian or Fillan before Fingal.

Looking from another perspective, ghosts can be seen as decayed bodily forms, whereas old age stands for authority, control and knowledge. Although the outcome of old age is desired and respected in all the poems, the physical decay is not denied and in many of the poems it is associated with approaching death:

Often have I fought, and often won in battles of the spear. But blind, and tearful, and forlorn I now walk with little men. O Fingal, with thy race of battle I now behold thee not. The wild roes feed upon the green tomb of the mighty king of Morven. Blest be thy soul, thou king of swords, thou most renowned on the hills of Cona!¹⁶

In this case, not only the death of one person is in question but also the death of a race; one which according to Ossian is glorious and has no match. Also as pointed out by Nick Groom:

Ossian is the last of his race and keeps company only with the dead, with memories that remind him of the futility of his persistence: a living bard with dead characters and a dead audience, whose song seeks to summon the dead, whose song seeks to emulate nature, to become indistinguishable from the murmur of the breeze or the clatter of water, and whose dead are likewise indistinguishable from nature and song.¹⁷

The constant referrals to ghosts may also suggest the poet's loneliness and liminality — his liminality as well as that of his surroundings seems to be an important part of *Ossian's* success.¹⁸ Macpherson's Ossian lives in the midst of wild nature; he is aged and a survivor of his race, close to death. All these aspects point to his ultimate loneliness and isolation, where he is continuously in contact with ghosts of the past, sending messages from their world to ours.

¹⁶ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book II*, 79.

¹⁷ Nick Groom *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London, 2002), 117.

¹⁸ Joep Leerssen 'Ossianic Liminality: Between Native Tradition and Preromantic Taste' in Stafford and Gaskill (eds), *From Gaelic to Romantic*, 7.

This is what brings him 'back to life' while he wants to bring back the years that have passed so quickly. Mists, clouds, waves that constitute a very large part of descriptions of nature, contribute to the melancholy present in the poems in no small way. Ghostly appearances, alongside dismal portrayals of nature, complete the images of evanescence and create nostalgia. Ossian is trapped in his memories and blurry thoughts, struggling to bring back his youth:

Light of the shadowy thoughts, that fly across my soul, daughter of
Toscar of helmets, wilt thou not hear the song! We call back, maid of
Lutha, the years that have rolled away.¹⁹

However long he thinks of and remembers his past and the heroic age of Fingal, hoping to revive the glorious days, he is only confronted by the irreversibility of his 'loss'. Ossian is haunted by ghosts who are immediate family members and this has an important influence on his hopelessness too. Each time, his grief grows, leaving him incapable of taking any action. While Stafford says that "each poem is a variation on the "ubi sunt" motif, and the very evocation of the past makes the present less and less easy to endure"²⁰, according to Keymer, there is a big dilemma in Ossian's poems as they express the absence of what is being described — 'the irrecoverability of a heroic past glimpsed only in the solitary incantations of an aged bard and entrusted thereafter to the vagaries of memorial transmission in a declining culture and language'.²¹ Stafford, however, provides an explanation for this fragmentary form of a distant age, arguing that 'this lack of definition is essential to Macpherson's Celtic world, in which the reader is invited to become lost'.²²

In some cases, heroes are likened to ghosts, rather than being visited by them. For example, in the third book of *Fingal*, Fillan and Oscar are referred to as 'two dark clouds that are the chariots of ghosts'.²³ In *The War of Caros*, Oscar is likened to a ghost again, while Gaul is said to rise in wrath like a ghost in the third book of *Temora*:

¹⁹ James Macpherson, *Oina-morul: A Poem*, in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 323.

²⁰ Fiona Stafford, 'Dangerous Success: Ossian, Wordsworth, and English Romantic Literature' in Howard Gaskill (ed.), *Ossian Revisited* (Edinburgh, 1991), 63.

²¹ Thomas Keymer 'Narratives of Loss: The *Poems of Ossian* and *Tristram Shandy*' in Stafford and Gaskill (eds), *From Gaelic to Romantic*, 90.

²² Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, 103.

²³ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book III*, 78.

Oscar is like a beam of the sky; he turns around and the people fall. His hand is like the arm of a ghost, when he stretches it from a cloud: the rest of his thin form is unseen: but the people die in the vale.²⁴

As the sudden rising of winds; or distant rolling of troubled seas, when some dark ghost, in wrath, heaves the billows over an isle, the seat of mist, on the deep, for many dark-brown years: so terrible is the sound of the host, wide-moving over the field. Gaul is tall before them: the streams glitter within his strides.²⁵

Creating the Sublime

Sublimity in the poems is sustained by the emergence of ghosts, increasing the obscurity of the landscape with their features of darkness, murkiness and ability to cause fear. Edmund Burke finds fortitude, justice and wisdom in the sublime²⁶ and he regards magnificence, which is created by a ‘great profusion of things which are splendid and valuable, in themselves’ as a source of sublimity.²⁷ Blair uses the term extensively, mostly referring to an ‘air of solemnity and seriousness’ where the poet ‘moves perpetually in the high region of the grand and the pathetick’.²⁸ He emphasises that the poet does not speak of anything cheerful, reporting only the events that are serious and grave where the scenery is always wild and romantic.²⁹ While doing this, he points out that beauty is an outcome of using an ornamented language, which may reduce the level of sublimity:

But no sooner does the poet attempt to spread out this sentiment or description, and to deck it round and round with glittering ornaments, than the mind begins to fall from its high elevation; the transport is over; the beautiful may remain, but the sublime is gone.³⁰

²⁴ Macpherson, *The War of Caros*, 113.

²⁵ Macpherson, *Temora: Book Third*, 245–6.

²⁶ Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; Harmondsworth, 1998), 145.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁸ Blair, ‘A Critical Dissertation’, 356.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 356.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 394.

Dafydd Moore observes a connection between the sentimental and the sublime.³¹ Even if it is possible to see this relation in *Ossian*, it does not provide the poet with complete reconciliation, as the awareness of the sublime, 'which in its ideological and cultural formulation might offer something of means of reconciliation, a masculine discourse of feeling'³² reminds him of his past days, causing the gap between the past and present to become impossible to close. He becomes the melancholy old man, looking back at the scenes of happier times. Living in a world populated by ghosts, the characters, simply, cannot escape the tragic past. Whenever the opportunity arises, days of old are celebrated and the bravery of today is thought to be of no match to that of the past. This can be seen when Oscar addresses his ancestors in *The War of Caros*, hoping they will provide him with guidance:

Come, said the hero, O ye ghosts of my fathers! ye that fought against the kings of the world! Tell me the deeds of future times; and your discourse in your caves; when you talk together and behold your sons in the fields of the valiant.³³

On the other hand, it is possible to say that the sublime provides the necessary wisdom and positive heroism for the occurrence of sentimentality. It is accompanied by humanism, which can be seen in many of Fingal's actions, such as when he shows Swaran mercy at the end of the sixth book of Fingal, sending him and his army back to Lochlin:

King of Lochlin, said Fingal, thy blood flows in the veins of thy foe. Our families met in battle, because they loved the strife of spears. But often did they feast in the hall; and send round the joy of the shell. Raise, to-morrow, thy white sails to the wind, thou brother of Agandecca.³⁴

Blair is the greatest admirer of the sublimity of Ossian's poetry, even saying that no literature can match his sublime descriptions. He believes that the most impressive evidence of his mastery over this can be observed where we see godlike opponents, misty ghosts and a harsh nature. He goes on to say that

³¹ Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in James Macpherson's The Poems of Ossian*, (Aldershot, 2003), 136.

³² *Ibid.*, 137.

³³ Macpherson, *The War of Caros*, 112.

³⁴ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book VI*, 101.

‘His poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deserves to be stiled, *The Poetry of the Heart*. It is a heart penetrated with noble sentiments, and with sublime and tender passions; a heart that glows, and kindles the fancy’.³⁵

The existence of such sentimentality and desire for the past has its downsides for the characters, since ‘present’ successes can never be fully celebrated and younger heroes cannot reach the fame of their fathers. This is because even if their actions are very promising for building a new heroic age, they (their actions and victories) only release the memories of an ‘old’ one. The burden of the past is too much for the new generation, despite the inspiration it may provide. Stafford raises a very good argument about Ossian, saying he, himself, may also have been sucked into this burden of older times, as his character tends to be double-sided: a Romantic hero attempting to solve an impossible situation by his poetry, isolating himself from the rest of the world. He remains a blind bard living under the shadow of his father, passively repeating past deeds rather than achieving anything new.³⁶

The implied superiority of the old generation over the young one is portrayed in the third book of *Temora* and can clearly be seen in the episode where even though Fingal is proud of his son, Fillan, for his actions in battle, he begins telling a heroic story from his own youth.³⁷ This seems to mirror the eighteenth-century literary world, in which, writers or poets felt the pressure of having to equal the literature of the past. According to Stafford, this could be seen especially in Scotland, as ‘the self-consciousness about the Scottish language meant that many writers sheltered behind imitations of English masters, just as Macpherson had in his earlier attempts at poetry. Past masters could provide inspiration, but they could just as easily lead to depressing feelings of inadequacy’.³⁸

One memorable point Moore makes is the idea of ‘reverse typology’ seen in *Ossian*, suggesting that the world of the poems is haunted not only by ghosts of the past, but also ghosts of future. That is to say, current victories are not regarded as the bringer of a glorious future as much as they are seen as a threat that might cause obscurity and weakness in the future. Moore points out that ‘the present is located within the context of a wide-turning circle of events which means that the downtrodden of today will be tomorrow’s conquerors; while on the other hand, the events of the present form part of

³⁵ Blair, ‘A Critical Dissertation’, 356.

³⁶ Fiona Stafford, ‘Dangerous Success’, 63–4.

³⁷ See Macpherson, *Temora: Book Third*, 250.

³⁸ Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, 149.

a continuum, the way things were 'meant' to be and over which we have little or no control'.³⁹

The return of the dead helps make the gap between their and our world smaller. In other words, it reduces the fear of the unknown, also making death seem like a fulfilling solution to achieve peace. In a way, death is the means to gain immortality. Therefore, it is possible to say that Macpherson's *Ossian* makes death look appealing, which can be seen in Ossian's own words: 'Happy are they who fell in their youth, in the midst of their renown!'⁴⁰ It is too painful for him to remember old times in his isolation, so death may serve as a way out of this misery. What brings him close to his loved ones, who are long dead, and their memories, are ghosts. The joy of dying in battle is also expressed by Fingal's words where he calls for the ghosts of his fathers to come and take his brave men who have fallen. It is expected that they will be accepted to the Otherworld joyfully, just like the way they have died:

O ye ghosts of heroes dead! ye riders of the storm of Cromla! receive my falling people with joy, and bring them to your hills. And may the blast of Lena carry them over my seas, that they may come to my silent dreams, and delight my soul in rest.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Ossian's ghosts are not portrayed as happy. They are also looking back to older times with longing, while trying to warn their friends and family about coming disasters using their wisdom. They are trapped in a world where they cannot fight their enemies, no matter how strong or vigorous they are; but only know about the future and guide the next generation, brothers or their fellow warriors — which also increases their despair. In a way, they are preoccupied with their 'past' too, carrying the burden of the need to save the loved ones.

The Ghosts of Ossian Compared with those in Homer, Virgil and Milton

The first edition of *Fingal* (1761–2) contains footnotes that refer directly to particular extracts from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Milton's

³⁹ Dafydd Moore, 'James Macpherson and William Faulkner: A Sensibility of Defeat' in Stafford and Gaskill (eds), *From Gaelic to Romantic*, 196.

⁴⁰ Macpherson, *The War of Caros*, 113.

⁴¹ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book IV*, 85.

Paradise Lost. One of the reasons Macpherson did not try to conceal the similarities between his and the classic epics is because his aim was for *Ossian* to be seen as a rival to them. However, in *Temora* (1763) and in the later editions of *Fingal* (1765 and after) most of these notes were omitted, most likely due to the controversies regarding the authenticity of the translations. Despite this, Macpherson, and especially Blair, never retracted their claims about Ossian's poetry being as impressive as these Classic works of literature. In fact, Milton's *Paradise Lost* might have inspired and raised the need for an ancient 'Scottish bard' and an epic that could be compared to the greatest poets of the West, as 'never could the idea of a Scottish epic have been more welcome than in 1760'⁴² at a time when 'a Scottish nostalgia for a remote or aggrandising past' was dominant.⁴³

From Classics to Ossianic: Homer and Virgil

Blair chose to compare *Ossian* with Homer, as to him, 'Homer is greatest of all the great poets, the one whose manner, and whose times come the nearest to Ossian's'.⁴⁴ Macpherson, on the other hand, resurrects Ossian in the eighteenth century in a way that he thinks will bring out what is best in Homer, leaving out what he thinks would not suit the Ossianic story-line.⁴⁵ According to Blair's observations, Macpherson-Ossian follows quite a similar path when creating his machinery — Homer blended his country's legends about the gods to create his epics just like Macpherson, who found the tales of his country inspiring and amusing 'the fancy'.⁴⁶ His comparisons of the representation of spirits and ghosts in the works of the two poets constitute an important part of Blair's *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (DATE). He makes them only to establish that, although the two poets' idea of ghosts seems to be quite alike, Macpherson's descriptions are 'drawn with much stronger and livelier colours than those of Homer. Macpherson-Ossian describes ghosts with all the particularity of one who had seen and conversed with them, and

⁴² Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, 113–14.

⁴³ Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen, 1988), 86.

⁴⁴ Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation', 357.

⁴⁵ It is safe to assume that Macpherson's relationship to Homer was not only mediated by Blair but also by Thomas Blackwell, a leading authority on Homer, who was his teacher in Aberdeen.

⁴⁶ Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation', 365.

whose imagination was full of the impression they had left upon it'.⁴⁷ Homer's descriptions are more extended, adding a greater variety of incidents, whereas Ossian's are precise, only sufficient to make the reader visualise the scene. Still, Macpherson emphasises in a note to *The War of Inis-thona* that 'the notion of Ossian concerning the state of the deceased, was the same with that of the ancient Greeks and Romans. They imagined that the souls pursued, in their separate state, the employments and pleasures of their former life'.[□]

Ossian	Virgil	Homer
King of Inis-thona, said Oscar, how fell the children of youth? The wild boar often rushes over their tombs, but he does not disturb the hunters. ¹³ They pursue deer ¹⁴ formed of clouds, and bend their airy bow.—They still love the sport of their youth; and mount the wind with joy. ⁴⁸	The chief beheld their chariots from afar; Their shining arms and coursers train'd to war: Their lances fix'd in earth, their steeds around, Free from the harness, graze the flow'ry ground. The love of horses which they had, alive, And care of chariots, after death survive. ⁴⁹	Now I the strength of Hercules behold, A tow'ring spectre of gigantic mold; Where woodland monsters grin in fretted gold, There sullen lions sternly seem to roar, The bear to growl, to foam the tusky boar, There war and havock and destruction stood, And vengeful murder red with human blood. ⁵⁰

The similarity of Macpherson's expressions, especially with Virgil's, strikes the eye.⁵¹ Much like Ossianic ghosts, Homer's are not totally incorporeal, looking like thin airy forms; they can appear and disappear whenever they want, their arm is weak, yet they ride on winds and clouds. While the ghosts of the bards

⁴⁷ Ibid., 366.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁹ Dryden, *The Aeneid: Book VI*, 181: 651–5.

⁵⁰ Alexander Pope, *The Odyssey of Homer, Volume Two* (Philadelphia, 1828), Book XI, 210–11.

⁵¹ It should be kept in mind that what we have here are three translations from three different people, all of which are from separate texts. Dryden, Pope and Macpherson, all had their own ideas as to what literary translation should be.

continue singing, those of departed warriors wander the battlefields. The image of spirits displayed when Ulysses visits the land of the dead in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* is a good illustration of this similarity⁵²:

When lo! appear'd along the dusky coasts,
Thin, airy shoals of visionary ghosts;
Fair, pensive youths, and soft enamour'd maids;
And wither'd elders, pale and wrinkled shades;
Ghastly with wounds the forms of warriors slain
Stalk'd with majestic port, a martial train
These and a thousand more swarm'd o'er the ground,
And all the dire assembly shriek'd around.⁵³

It is also interesting to see that Ossianic ghosts can be damaged by a man, like those of Homer. When Ulysses travels through Hades in the eleventh book, he meets the shade of Elpenor, who is mournful and crying. They have a short conversation, in which the ghost tells him how he ended up in the land of the dead and asks for a tomb. Even after his request is fulfilled he keeps groaning and Ulysses sends him away with his sword:

Due to thy ghost, shall to thy ghost be paid.
Still as I spoke the phantom seem'd to moan,
Tear follow'd tear, and groan succeeded groan.
But as my waving sword the blood surrounds,
The shade withdrew, and mutter'd empty sounds.⁵⁴

Although we do not come across an occasion where a spectre is hurt by a hero, Cuchullin implies that he would be able to hurt Crugal's ghost if he had drawn his sword through its form: 'My sword might find that voice, and force his knowledge from him. And small is his knowledge, Connal, for he was here today'.⁵⁵ Ulysses tells the ghost of Achilles and Patroclus that he is lost to his country and friends in their conversation and the fact that Ulysses goes to the Otherworld in search of information about the future and advice from the Gods he worships might be related to Ossian's Oscar, who also seeks guidance

⁵² Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation', 366.

⁵³ Pope, *Odyssey: Book XI*, 191.

⁵⁴ Pope, *Odyssey: Book XI*, 192.

⁵⁵ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book II*, 66.

from his fathers who are in the Otherworld.⁵⁶ The passage from Homer is given below:

To whom with sighs: I pass these dreadful gates
To seek the Theban, and consult the fates:
For still distress'd I rove from coast to coast,
Lost to my friends, and to my country lost.
But sure the eye of Time beholds no name
So bless'd as thine in all the rolls of fame;
Alive we hail'd thee with our guardian gods,
And dead, thou rul'st a king in these abodes.⁵⁷

Besides their ghostly features, the ways they disappear show certain resemblances — for instance, in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*, the ghost of Patroclus, after visiting Achilles, vanishes almost exactly like one of Ossian's ghosts (Crugal); with a feeble cry, dissolving like smoke into nature:⁵⁸

Like a thin smoke he sees the spirit fly,
And hears a feeble, lamentable cry.⁵⁹

Like the darkened moon he retired, in the midst of the whistling blast.⁶⁰

One of Ossian's most remarkable expressions, 'joy of grief', is also seen by Blair as being paralleled by this specific appearance of Patroclus in the *Iliad*; similarly, when Ulysses meets his mother in the shades in the *Odyssey*, signifying the delight of seeing a loved one and the sorrow brought by the realisation of their eternal absence: 'Or has hell's queen an empty image sent, / That wretched I might e'en my joys lament.'⁶¹ It is again Blair who points out that in both these occasions the heroes melt with tenderness, lament their not having

⁵⁶ 'Come, said the hero, O ye ghosts of my fathers! ye that fought against the kings of the world!—Tell me the deeds of future times; and your discourse in your caves'. Macpherson, *The War of Caros*, 112.

⁵⁷ Pope, *Odyssey: Book XI*, 206.

⁵⁸ Macpherson draws attention to this similarity in his notes to the *Poems* quoting from Homer. See Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 425, note 8.

⁵⁹ Alexander Pope, *The Iliad of Homer: Volume One* (London, 1809), Book XXIII, 241: 117–18.

⁶⁰ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book II*, 65.

⁶¹ Pope, *The Odyssey, Book XI*, 197.

it in their power to throw their arms round the ghost and ‘in a mutual embrace, enjoy the delight of grief’.⁶²

Ossian combines conjugal love with heroism, without letting sentimentality take control of the scene or the characters; and ‘since conjugal love is a common theme in Homer, particularly in the *Odyssey*, Macpherson again ties his own epic to the classical tradition’.⁶³ An example of this can be seen when Ossian follows the instructions from Everallin’s ghost, pointing out that the enemy is threatened by even his song. Here, we also see that Macpherson acknowledges the resemblance of the passage to one of Homer:

My spear supported my steps, and my rattling armour rung. I hummed,
as I was wont in danger, the songs of heroes of old. Like distant thunder
Lochlin heard; they fled; my son pursued.⁶⁴
Forth march’d the chief, and distant from the crowd,
High on the rampart raised his voice aloud;
With her own shout Minerva swells the sound;
Troy starts astonish’d, and the shores rebound,
As the loud trumpet’s brazen mouth from far
With shrilling clangour sounds the alarm of war,
Struck from the walls, the echoes float on high,
And the round bulwarks and thick towers reply;
So high his brazen voice the hero rear’d:
Hosts dropp’d their arms and trembled as they heard.⁶⁵

Spirits and deities are observed to inspire the warriors in both *Ossian* and the *Iliad*. However, Ossianic spirits are never presented as being able to interfere with battles; whereas, the gods of Homer frequently do so. Macpherson notes that ‘it was the opinion then, as indeed it is to this day, of some of the highlanders, that the souls of the deceased hovered round their living friends; and sometimes appeared to them when they were about to enter on any great undertaking’.⁶⁶ It is reasonable to think that this belief might be Macpherson’s starting point when he brings down the spirits of the departed to encourage Ossian’s heroes. Cuchullin says:

⁶² Blair, ‘A Critical Dissertation’, 381.

⁶³ Josef Bysveen, *Epic Tradition and Innovation in James Macpherson’s Fingal* (Uppsala, 1982), 122.

⁶⁴ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book IV*, 84.

⁶⁵ Pope, *The Iliad: Book XVIII*, 150: 255–64.

⁶⁶ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book I*, 422.

Peace to the souls of the heroes; their deeds were great in danger. Let them ride around me on clouds; and shew their features of war: that my soul may be strong in danger; my arm like the thunder of heaven. But be thou on a moon-beam, O Morna, near the window of my rest; when my thoughts are of peace; and the din of arms is over. Gather the strength of the tribes, and move to the wars of Erin.⁶⁷

Even though the ghosts of Ossian do not affect the events directly, they do have indirect influence, which gives them similar functions as the gods of the *Iliad*. Since Ossian does not paint a picture of a world full of gods like Homer or Virgil, he has the spirits of fallen heroes fulfil their function — their actions are magnified, respected and taken for granted. Macpherson provides an explanation: ‘Had Ossian brought down gods, as often as Homer hath done, to assist his heroes, this poem had not consisted of eulogiums on his friends, but of hymns to these superior beings’.⁶⁸

Crugal’s ghost appearing to Connal is paralleled with that of Virgil’s Hector, while Swaran is associated with Achilles. Macpherson draws attention to these resemblances, in an attempt to show how Virgil handled the subject in a similar manner.

When Hector’s ghost before my sight appears:
A bloody shroud he seem’d, and bath’d in tears.
Such as he was, when, by Pelides slain,
Thessalian coursers drag’d him o’er the plain.
Swoln were his feet, as when the thongs were thrust
Through the bor’d holes, his body black with dust.
Unlike that Hector, who return’d from toils
Of war triumphant, in Æacian spoils:
Or him, who made the fainting Greeks retire,
And launch’d against their navy Phrygian fire.
His hair and beard stood stiffen’d with his gore;
And all the wounds he for his country bore.⁶⁹

The way the two ghosts are described and introduced show certain similarities,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁶⁸ James Macpherson, *The Antiquity &c. of the Poems of Ossian* in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 46.

⁶⁹ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book II*, PO 425. See also Dryden, *The Aeneid: Book II*, 43, 273–84.

nevertheless, Crugal has a less horrifying image. The gruesome look of Hector's ghost is due to his humiliating defeat and although Crugal's ghost is also wounded, his 'feeble voice' and 'decaying' bodily features give him an otherworldly appearance:

My hero saw in his rest a dark-red stream of fire coming down from the hill. Crugal sat upon the beam, a chief that lately fell. He fell by the hand of Swaran, striving in the battle of heroes. His face is like the beam of the setting moon; his robes are of the clouds of the hill: his eyes are like two decaying flames. Dark is the wound of his breast.⁷⁰

However, like the Ossianic Crugal, Hector serves the role of a messenger by warning the hero about the coming disaster.

References to Virgil's Troy can be related to the Jacobite Rebellion since 'Macpherson consistently deploys Jacobite iconography in such a way as to stress its play on slippage and diaspora, to the point of creating what amounts to an admission of defeat'.⁷¹ Although Fingal gains an epic victory, the hidden remnants of despair remain. The table below summarises the similarities between Crugal's ghost and those of Homer's Patroclus and Virgil's Hector:

Crugal	Patroclus	Hector
He appears to Connal as he rests alone.	He appears to Aeneas at night when everyone is asleep.	He appears to Achilles while he is away from his men at the shore.
He tells Connal that his body is not buried yet: "but my corse is on the sands of Ullin" (<i>Fingal: Book II, PO</i> 65).	Patroclus visits Achilles because he still has not buried his body: "Let my pale corse the rights of burial know, / And give me the entrance in the realms below" (<i>The Iliad: Book XXIII</i> 240).	He appears in tears as his body was dragged in the ground and slain.

⁷⁰ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book II*, 65.

⁷¹ Moore, 'James Macpherson and William Faulkner', 188.

Conversation continues until the ghost vanishes having delivered his message.	Only after their dialogue comes to a conclusion, the ghost disappears.	Leaves when he delivers his message. Their conversation comes to an end upon hearing noises from afar.
---	--	--

Moina's ghost, on the other hand, who is seen by Clessámmor, in *Carthon*, can be associated with Virgil's Phoenician Dido (in terms of description, appearance and way of introduction). The way Macpherson and Virgil play with the words 'light and night', as well as the correspondences made with moon, mist and the ghosts' appearances show great similarities.⁷²

Nor Clutha ever since have I seen: nor Moina of the dark brown hair.
 She fell in Balclutha: for I have seen her ghost. I knew her as she came
 through the dusky night, along the murmur of Lora: she was like the
 new moon seen through the gathered mist: when the sky pours down
 its flaky snow, and the world is silent and dark.⁷³
 Not far from her wound, her bosom bathed in blood;
 Whom when the Trojan hero hardly knew,
 Obscure in shades, and with a doubtful view
 (Doubtful as he who sees, through dusky night,
 Or thinks he sees, the moon's uncertain light).⁷⁴

Ossian's Miltonic Paradise

Alongside such classical allusions, Ossian's Cuchullin can be linked with Milton's Satan. Although the connection is not immediately obvious, it is made clear in Macpherson's notes to the 1762 edition of *Fingal*. Milton's description of the falling angels applauding Mammon: 'such murmur filled/ The assembly, as when hollow racks retain / The sound of blustering winds,'⁷⁵ is imitated by Ossian's 'What murmur rolls along the hill like the gathered flies of evening? The sons of Innis-fail descend, or rustling winds'.⁷⁶ Instead of comparing the

⁷² Macpherson has also pointed to this connection in his notes. James Macpherson, *Carthon* in Macpherson, *Poems of Ossian*, 446.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁴ Dryden, *The Aeneid: Book VI*, 174: 454–59.

⁷⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost: A Poem in Twelve Books*, (New York, 1868), II, 284–6.

⁷⁶ Macpherson, *Fingal: Book I*, 58.

Conclusions

Ghosts are everywhere: on the weeping wind, on the airs that Ossian draws from his lyre, on the waves and storms and tempests. The ghosts outnumber the living.⁸²

Without doubt, returning souls play a very significant role in Ossian's poetry. The repeated ghostly visits are inspired by Macpherson-Ossian's never-ending nostalgia and longing for the past. Thus, they contribute to the nostalgia evinced in the poems. It may even be argued that they are the essence of the sublime, the sentimental, the melancholy and of primitivism. Macpherson masks some aspects of native Gaelic superstitions and beliefs with his Ossianic ghosts, which he considers as suiting the contemporary trend better. As also clearly stated by him, he achieves this by imitating and drawing from the Classical tradition which is especially evident in the episodes of ghostly appearances. He replaces the primitive elements of his epic models with the polished manners of the eighteenth century; so that, in his *Ossian*, ancient heroism meets modern politeness. The ancient bard was primitive but eloquent, stricken but honourable: he was even blind like Homer and Milton; all in all, he was everything the enlightened population wanted.⁸³

It seems that the Ossianic poems should not only be seen as a representation of loss or defeat — against time, bringing old age and solitude — but also as an expression of its results and the circumstances for such consequences. In Stafford's words 'on the surface of the text, Ossian seems a helpless observer, whose own vulnerability in the face of relentless passing in time is projected onto the sun itself'.⁸⁴ However, the world evoked has a destructive side which cannot be overcome, neither by him nor his characters. Associations between *Ossian* and Milton's Satan may lead us to the conclusion that the nature of Ossianic heroes causes their collapse, which has led them to chase the memories of their ancestors, without any true desire for revival.⁸⁵ Therefore, we see that to Macpherson-Ossian, memory becomes a form of afterlife. The blind bard is left in constant admiration of the legend created by him, doomed by what he values the most, which is the

⁸² Groom, *The Forger's Shadow*, 117.

⁸³ Stuart Kelly, *Scott-land: The Man Who Invented a Nation* (Edinburgh, 2010), 25.

⁸⁴ Stafford, 'Fingal and the Fallen Angels', 181.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

'ancient' past. Yet, this fascination provides him with enough wisdom and sentiment to create his poetry that portrays him as the 'decaying' bard, whose poems can 'raise the dead'.

University of Edinburgh

‘Shameful Literary Traditions’: Daniel Corkery and the Literary Reputation of Francis Sylvester Mahony

Fergus Dunne

In 1866, during the final weeks of his life, Francis Sylvester Mahony (1804–66), the Cork-born wit, essayist, and journalist, destroyed all that remained of his personal papers and correspondence—an action which, in the words of one literary historian, ‘all interested in his memory must ever deeply regret’.¹ As a close friend of William Makepeace Thackeray and Robert Browning, and a former colleague of Charles Dickens and Thomas Carlyle, he might well have secured a permanent place in Victorian literary history on the basis of his correspondence alone. An apparent desire for posthumous obscurity, however, was not inconsistent with the shifting authorial identities of a writer who signed his work variously as ‘Frank Mahony’, ‘Francis O’Mahony’ (or ‘O’Mahonai’), ‘F.M.’, ‘Father Prout’, ‘Frank Cresswell’, ‘Oliver Yorke’, ‘Teddy O’Driscoll’ (or ‘O’Dryscull’), ‘Rory O’Dryscull’, ‘Don Savonarola’, ‘The Bookseller’s Hack in Ordinary’, ‘An Eminent Hand’, and ‘The Paris Correspondent’. Mahony is mainly remembered today as the poet of the popular ballad, ‘The Bells of Shandon’, and as the author of the satiric ‘Prout Papers’, a series of scholarly essays contributed to the conservative London periodical *Fraser’s Magazine* in the mid-1830s. Later collected in book form as *The Reliques of Father Prout* (1836), Mahony’s essays presented an idiosyncratic mix of cosmopolitan and peripheral Irish perspectives, providing a complexly ironic commentary on the historical divisions and political discord of contemporary Ireland. Assuming the semi-autobiographical persona of ‘Father Prout’, the learned (if eccentric) parish priest of Watergrasshill, County Cork, Mahony combined polemical attacks on the Irish nationalist leader, Daniel O’Connell (1775–1847) with classical exegesis, mock-antiquarian debate, parodic reworkings of popular Anglo-Irish balladry, and accomplished translations from modern and ancient languages. His pretended discovery of foreign-language originals for Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies* (in fact, his own historically recontextualised translations) presented an unorthodox exploration of the difficulties of textual reinterpretation in a fraught political context. The alternating

¹ George O’Neill, ‘Father Prout’, *Journal of the Ivernian Society*, 3 (1910), 24.

emphasis in the ‘Prout Papers’ on classical order and colonial variety, formal conservatism and subversive metafictional comment, literary originality and an anti-Romantic ‘imitative’ or translational ‘inauthenticity’, registered Mahony’s self-conscious refusal of a putative literary synthesis between the metropolitan and peripheral aspects of his work. Yet, seen as a whole, the ‘Prout Papers’ succeeded in imaginatively combining opposing literary perspectives, holding the contrasting poles of his aesthetic in ironic tension with one another.

While this sometimes imbued his writings with a characteristic tonal instability, it also reproduced the ambiguity and confusion of a context not easily reducible to literary coherence. As both a ‘progressive Tory’ and Catholic unionist author, Mahony created in ‘Father Prout’ a polyglot character whose ‘multilateral’ soul and ‘multifarious’ talk were not readily amenable to conventional literary categories.² If literary reception partly concerns itself with rediscovering the particular question to which a text is the answer, Mahony’s ironic writings—described by the fictional Fraserian editor, Oliver Yorke (also Mahony), as ‘complete, as far as it goes’—generate many questions about colonial Irish authorship but provide few concrete answers.³ Interpretation, then, assumes a central role in these anti-Romantic essays, with the modern Irish author ironically reconceived by Mahony as a humble translator of literary precedent. Faced with the interpretative challenge that Mahony sets down for readers of his self-reflexive writings, literary historians are asked to somehow adequately account for an author whose scholarly yet topical, intertextual essays defy easy categorisation, and who explicitly sets out to subvert the notion of canonical authorship. The present article will attempt to re-examine the simplification and distortion of Mahony’s work, with particular reference to the politicised reshaping of his reputation by Daniel Corkery and others in the post-independence period. The steady downgrading in his literary status, from nineteenth-century popular renown and critical respectability to the relative obscurity of more recent times, will be reassessed in relation to the predominance of certain essentialist nationalist paradigms in standard studies of nineteenth-century Irish literature. Reception theory will be used to offer a more sensitive reading of Mahony’s multilayered prose, and to help re-evaluate the close dialogue his texts maintained with the context from which they emerged.

One might begin by looking at the high reputation that the ‘Prout Papers’ enjoyed in the mid to late nineteenth century. Mahony’s ‘peculiar *mixture*

² Francis Mahony, *The Reliques of Father Prout* (London, 1860), iv.

³ *Ibid.*, ix.

of ... toryism, classicism, sarcasm, and punch' helped to establish and secure his initial reputation amongst the metropolitan reading public of 1830s London.⁴ However, in a private letter of 1856 to the publisher Richard Bentley, Mahony complained that the first edition of *The Reliques of Father Prout* (1836) had 'slept' in commercial neglect for two decades.⁵ This was at least partly attributable to the restricted availability of his prose writings due to his own snobbish refusal to reissue his 'essentially scholarly' tome in a 'cheap series' format.⁶ Yet, notwithstanding his apparent distaste for the spread of popular literacy, he later chose to reissue an expanded collection of his Prout essays with Henry G. Bohn, a publisher known for providing accessible classical translations to a non-classically educated audience.⁷ Republished during the golden age of nineteenth-century classical scholarship, the revised and enlarged edition of *The Reliques of Father Prout* (1860) found a new audience for Mahony's prose, and was reprinted at least sixteen times in London and New York up to 1909. The republication of his periodical essays was accompanied by a concomitant rise in his critical fortunes. Writing in 1866, James Hannay asserted (with perhaps a touch of exaggeration) that the name of 'Father Prout' was still a 'household word' in the 'literary world of the metropolis' at the time of Mahony's death.⁸ A large 818-page anthology of Irish verse, *The Poets and Poetry of Ireland*, published in New York in 1868, devoted seventy-five pages to the poems and translations of Mahony.⁹ Less than a decade later, William Bates could confidently declare that Mahony's Prout writings 'have now taken a high and permanent place among the general literature of our time'.¹⁰ The posthumous appearance of *The Final Reliques of Father Prout* (1876) and *The Works of Father Prout* (1881), both of which were published in London, attest to the ongoing metropolitan interest in Mahony's work. By the

⁴ James Hannay, 'Father Prout', *The Universal Review* (February 1860), 252.

⁵ Francis Mahony, 'Original and "Photostat" Copies of Letters by Rev. Francis Mahony', National Library of Ireland, Ms. 5059, fol. 19.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See André Lefevere, 'Translation Practice(s) and the Circulation of Cultural Capital: Some Aeneids in English' in Susan Basnett and André Lefevere (eds), *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* (n.p., 1998), 54.

⁸ James Hannay, 'Recent Humorists: Aytoun, Peacock, Prout', *North British Review*, 45 (September 1866), 76.

⁹ See *The Poets and Poetry of Ireland: With Numerous Notes by J. Hardiman, M.R. I. A., Samuel Lover, and D. F. McCarthy, Professor of Poetry, University of Ireland* (New York, 1868).

¹⁰ William Bates (ed.), *A Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters (1830–38), Drawn by the Late Daniel Maclise, R.A. and Accompanied by Notices Chiefly by the Late William Maginn, LL.D.* (London, 1873), 96.

early 1880s, there had been a minor revival of interest in his writings, with three recently published or reprinted editions of his prose and journalism in circulation. (William Bates, in his capacity as editor of *A Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters* [1873], a collection of caricatures and potted biographies taken from *Fraser's Magazine*, added a lengthy biographical portrait of Mahony to the expanded 1883 edition of the text.) Charles A. Read, editor of the influential multi-volume anthology, *The Cabinet of Irish Literature* (originally published between 1879 and 1884, but reprinted four times at the turn of the last century), lauded him as an 'inimitable Irish genius' entitled 'to a place among the great masters of comedy'.¹¹ As late as 1892, the Irish-American critic, D.O. Crowley, could argue (again with some exaggeration): 'There are, indeed, few pseudonyms in the broad extent of English literature that have attained greater celebrity than that of "Father Prout", the classic sage of Watergrasshill, near Blarney.'¹²

How, then, to account for the rapid decline in Mahony's reputation in the early twentieth century? Aside from the superior quality of Mahony's satiric, hyperliterate prose, the 'Prout Papers' were valued in a nineteenth-century British context for their skilful interleaving of the national and cosmopolitan components of his aesthetic, and for their surefooted negotiation of the traditional gap between the classical and the contemporary. One might briefly cite the pro-Union assessment of Mahony's writings which the Tory editor, critic and magazinist, James Hannay (1827–73) contributed to the liberal Scottish periodical, the *North British Review*, shortly after the author's death in 1866. Hannay characterises his friend's literary oeuvre as the work of a brilliant 'minor' author, who enjoyed his 'chief reputation among the cultivated classes'.¹³ Respected in London literary circles and 'loved and honoured by his own countrymen', Mahony manages to combine the distinctive national traits of an Irish writer with the classical cosmopolitanism of a sixteenth-century man of letters.¹⁴ For Hannay (a Scottish-born critic), he thus represents an ideal of the 'British' author who aesthetically reconciles the competing needs of 'national individualism' and national 'intercommunion'. It is important to recall here that Mahony's classicism was, in some respects, a patrician response to the

¹¹ Charles A. Read (ed.), *The Cabinet of Irish Literature: Selections from the Works of the Chief Poets, Orators, and Prose Writers of Ireland* (4 vols, 1879; new edition, New York, 1903), III, 48, 49.

¹² Rev. D.O. Crowley, *Irish Poets and Novelists* (1892; third edition, San Francisco, 1893), 397.

¹³ James Hannay, 'Recent Humorists', 75.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

rise of Romantic nationalism, a transnational and transhistorical alternative to the counter-Enlightenment emphasis on cultural specificity. Yet while broadly 'faithful' to the spirit of ancient literature, his Hibernicised (if anti-Romantic) reworkings of classical learning were also a serio-comic recognition of the fact that interpretation always takes place in history. If, in Mahony's case, this necessarily involved a semi-ironic reconciliation of ancient Rome and 1830s Cork, it also signalled the vulnerability of Mahony's work to changing historical circumstances. The critical fate of the 'Prout Papers'—out of print since 1909, and the subject of only one major critical study in the twentieth century—is linked to the declining influence of classical education, and the subsequent marginalisation of classical communities of interpretation. It reflects, too, the rise of the Home Rule and nationalist movements in Ireland, and an increasingly exclusivist focus on national themes in Irish literary criticism. Not easily categorised in terms of genre, content or even political tenor, Mahony's post-Romantic, pre-Victorian periodical writings were most often positioned in relation to their classicism and perceived 'Irishness'—two central and recurrent tropes of the 'Prout Papers' that would alter in meaning and significance in the twentieth century. Though representative of nineteenth-century metropolitan attitudes to the 'Prout Papers', Hannay's review, focused as it was on Mahony's aesthetic evasion of the dual threats of 'provincialism' and 'excessive centralization', ran the risk of overemphasising his cosmopolitan classical sensibility while also underestimating the political pressures attendant upon figuratively representing the disparities between Irish and British conditions.¹⁵ The term 'North Britain' was a phrase given new currency by contributors to the *Edinburgh Review*, a periodical lauded by the *North British Review* for having "laid the foundation of an empire", and which played an important role in developing a general theory of British nationalism.¹⁶ In contrast to nineteenth-century Ireland, civil society and religiosity—the two cornerstones of nineteenth-century Scottish identity, according to Graeme Morton—were not compromised by participation in the British nation-state.¹⁷ The defining nineteenth-century Scottish policy of 'unionist nationalism' was premised on the widely-held belief that Scottish interests were best served

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Quoted in Linda E. Connors and Mary Lu MacDonald, *National Identity in Great Britain and British North America, 1815–1851: The Role of Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* (Surrey, 2011), 142. See also Mark Schoenfeld, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity: The 'Literary Lower Empire'* (New York, 2009), 202.

¹⁷ See Graeme Morton, 'Identity Out of Place' in Trevor Griffiths and Graeme Morton (eds), *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1800 to 1900* (Edinburgh, 2010), 259.

by the preservation of the union and the promotion of empire.¹⁸ One might argue, therefore, that as a conservative Scottish journalist writing for a liberal Scottish (or ‘North British’) periodical, Hannay was not well positioned to offer an incisive examination of the Irish separatist considerations that would ultimately prove crucial in defining Mahony’s literary reception.

For present purposes, then, the question can be narrowed to the ideological aspects of Mahony’s reception, and to whether, first, Mahony’s Catholic unionist prose—with its forceful and defining anti-O’Connellite rejection of the proposed repeal of the Act of Union—was politically problematic for contemporary and posthumous nineteenth-century commentators? Significantly, Mahony was invited in the 1840s to contribute to the newly-launched *Nation* newspaper, the main organ of the liberal nationalist Young Ireland movement. When the *Nation* was attacked by O’Connell in 1843 for ‘praising writers not entitled to be praised’, Thomas Davis (1814–45), leading journalist and guiding spirit of the *Nation*, reiterated the newspaper’s policy of non-sectarian inclusiveness, praising Mahony’s candid evaluation of the Irish Catholic clergy, his defence of his old Jesuit instructors in the Prout essay, ‘Literature and the Jesuits’, and his groundbreaking introduction of obscure Catholic authors to a Tory Protestant audience.¹⁹ Davis concludes unequivocally that his fellow ‘countrymen may fairly be proud of him without evincing any want of taste or patriotism’.²⁰ Certainly, Mahony’s Tory patrician rejection of O’Connellite popular politics was readily amenable to the ecumenical but elitist and Protestant-dominated cultural nationalism of Young Ireland—a pointed reminder of the deep-seated divisions within Irish nationalist thought even at this early stage in its development.

But even leaving aside the complexities of contemporary Irish nationalism, his nineteenth-century critics and biographers, most of whom wrote in a similar vein to James Hannay, were focussed, in the main, on describing the aesthetic merits of his literary achievement rather than exploring the precise nature of his political allegiances. The Catholic barrister, Charles Kent, one of Mahony’s earliest biographers, unreservedly condemned his ‘revolting’ anti-O’Connellite lyric, ‘The Lay of Lazarus’:²¹

¹⁸ See Graeme Morton, *Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830–1860* (East Lothian, 1999).

¹⁹ Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: A Fragment of Irish History, 1840–50* (London, 1880), 169.

²⁰ Thomas Davis, ‘Irish Writers’, *Nation*, 25 February 1843, 313.

²¹ Francis Mahony, *The Works of Father Prout*, Charles Kent (ed.) (London, 1881), xxv.

Hark, hark, to the begging-box shaking!
For whom is this alms-money making?
For DAN; who is cramming his wallet, while famine,
Sets the heart of the peasant a-quaking ...
The land is all blighted with famine,
Yet still doth *he* crave—and, like ghoul at a grave,
Racks rottenness, rooting for Mammon!²²

Yet, despite Kent's evident unease at this highly provocative depiction of O'Connell as a thief rifling a Famine corpse for the Catholic rent, he did not infer a general lack of patriotic feeling in Mahony's work from this particular stance. Writing in the same decade as Kent, the Irish ballad collector, Charles MacCarthy Collins remarked in his *Celtic Irish Songs and Song-Writers* (1885) that 'notwithstanding his unreverend life, notwithstanding his contempt for O'Connell, he was regarded with affection by his countrymen'.²³ Archbishop John MacHale, famed ecclesiastical supporter and facilitator of O'Connellite Catholic nationalism, summarised nineteenth-century attitudes to Mahony in his pithy observation that 'the Irishman who wrote Father Prout's papers was an honour to his country'.²⁴

Even following the post-Parnellite resurgence of Irish cultural nationalism, and the emergence of the Gaelic League (1893) and the Irish Literary Theatre (1899) as important pre-independence national institutions, Mahony could still find a sympathetic audience for his work. This can be seen most strikingly in the largely appreciative portrait of the 'Prout Papers' that appeared in the newly-founded *United Irishman* newspaper (1899–1906), edited by the writer and activist, Arthur Griffith (1872–1922), later founder of the radical nationalist party, *Sinn Féin*.²⁵ For a time 'the most important organ of the Irish nationalist movement', the *United Irishman* played a significant early role in the Irish literary revival, providing a practical, analytical component to the aesthetic project of cultural nationalism.²⁶ Eminent early contributors included W.B. Yeats, John Eglinton, 'AE', and George Moore. The newspaper's anti-British emphasis

²² Francis Mahony, *Facts and Figures from Italy* (London, 1847), 17–18.

²³ Charles MacCarthy Collins, *Celtic Irish Songs and Song-Writers: A Selection* (London, 1885), 91.

²⁴ Mahony, *Works*, xxxii.

²⁵ See Virginia E. Glandon, *Arthur Griffith and the Advanced-Nationalist Press: Ireland, 1900–1922* (New York, 1985).

²⁶ Robert Hogan (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Literature: Revised and Expanded* (2 vols, Westport, Connecticut, 1996), I, 503.

on the need for ‘economic self-help’, industrialisation and rural development was complemented by its efforts both to promote and offer insightful political commentary on the new Irish literature.²⁷ In a series featuring patriotic Irish writers entitled ‘The Man of the Week’, the anonymous *United Irishman* reviewer notes the anti-nationalist nature of Mahony’s ‘political leanings’, and his antipathy to O’Connell.²⁸ Yet although regretting that Mahony’s ‘pen was sometimes unjust’, he ‘can forgive this weakness in recalling his great intellectuality and the proud position he held in an era of intellectual giants’.²⁹ He remarks favourably, too, on Mahony’s ‘warm’ admiration for Thomas Davis, praises his humorous critique of the patriotic poet and balladeer, Thomas Moore (‘our national bard’), and reprints his translation of ‘The Three-Coloured Flag (A Prosecuted Song)’ by the French republican poet, Jean-Pierre de Béranger.³⁰ This latter point is particularly noteworthy given that the paper’s articulation of a ‘revivified separatist faith’ drew upon and commemorated the ecumenical Irish republican ideals of the 1798 Rebellion.³¹ Indeed, Mahony’s emphasis on religious ecumenism, economic patriotism, and anti-O’Connellite polemic overlapped with Griffithite pleas for religious tolerance and economic self-determination, as well as his suspicion of parliamentary politics, British Liberalism, and nineteenth-century Irish bourgeois nationalism (as exemplified in the figures of O’Connell and Moore). As was the case with Young Ireland, Mahony’s progressive Tory writings were reviewed impartially by the *United Irishman*, in a manner sensitive to the historical subtleties and contradictions of his decentred metropolitan aesthetic. Read carefully and selectively, Mahony’s Catholic unionist writings could be accommodated to Griffith’s distinctive brand of committed, though inclusive and non-violent, nationalism, and thus mined profitably for the future-oriented project of Irish separatism.

Amid the ideological confusion and political polarisation of early twentieth-century Ireland, however, the rapprochement between cultural revivalism and Griffithite civic republicanism would prove short-lived. Tensions became apparent when Griffith vigorously criticised J.M. Synge’s sexualised depiction of Irish womanhood in *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), and were later

²⁷ Matthew Kelly, ‘Essentialist Agendas: The Irish Literary Revival’, *Irish Review*, 33 (2005), 125.

²⁸ ‘The Man of the Week’, *United Irishman: A National Weekly Review*, 13 May 1899.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Matthew Kelly, ‘The End of Parnellism and the Ideological Dilemmas of Sinn Fein’ in D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day (eds), *Ireland in Transition, 1867–1921* (London, 2004), 145.

compounded when he attacked Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) for its allegedly inauthentic, retrograde, and morally dubious delineation of national character.³² Behind this was a culturo-political dispute about what constituted a properly national literature. Sophisticated revivalist reworkings of a reenergised national spirit provoked intense debate on the need to balance literary cosmopolitanism with a home-grown nationalist aesthetic. (Despite—or, perhaps, because of—the political values extolled in his work, Mahony was rarely seen as a cosmopolitan European writer in this context, even though, ironically enough, literary cosmopolitanism enjoyed a vogue in the early twentieth century as a kind of counter-discourse to the revival.³³) Griffith's increasingly intolerant stance towards what he saw as negative and unrepresentative revivalist portrayals of the Catholic peasantry embodied an emerging conviction that literary endeavour had to subserve the nationalist cause.

Equally significant was a further split within nationalist thought between Griffith's Davisite ecumenical separatism and the ethnic essentialism of the Irish-Ireland movement. Griffith's comparatively moderate Irish exclusivism found fuller expression in the vitriolic journalism of D.P. Moran (1869–1936), pugnacious editor of *The Leader* newspaper (est. 1900), and author of polemical works such as *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (1905). Inspired by the linguistic nationalism—though not the ethnic inclusiveness—of the Gaelic League, Moran forcefully rejected the forward-looking cultural nationalism of Griffith and the revivalists. Instead, making telling use of his command of sectarian abuse and political invective, he aggressively promoted the need for an exclusively Gaelic Catholic Ireland. As Patrick Maume observes, Moran 'spoke for [urban] Catholic professionals and small businessmen forcing their way into economic sectors dominated by Protestant and Unionist patronage networks'.³⁴ Rejecting the Protestant Irish population as 'resident aliens', Moran urged that the authentic 'Gaels' of a '*de facto*... Catholic nation' reconnect with their native inheritance.³⁵ What Moran termed the 'battle for two civilisations'—which reached its cultural zenith with the *Playboy* controversy—was predicated on Irish-Ireland's Romanticisation of the Irish peasantry—a process that deflected attention away from the role that

³² See Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), 207–21.

³³ See John Eglinton, 'The De-Davisisation of Irish Literature', *Bards and Saints* (Dublin, 1906), 36–43.

³⁴ Patrick Maume, *D.P. Moran* (Dundalk, 1995), 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22; quoted in R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1989), 454.

an urban-based, Catholic middle class played in the campaign for political independence. (Though both *The Leader* and *United Irishmen* promulgated a purist vision of peasant Ireland, they were both predominantly white-collar Dublin newspapers with a limited national readership, their focus on nationalist interests at odds with the Home Rule emphasis of the mainstream press.) In the pungent rhetoric of Irish-Ireland, the Gaelic-speaking peasant of the rural west came to symbolise a persecuted yet defiant and unbowed native culture—one now being appropriated by revivalist members of the very same Ascendancy ruling class which, it was argued, had once orchestrated its oppression. Notwithstanding his own anti-Semitism, Griffith condemned Moran's *Leader* for its clericalist appeal to the 'lowest, basest and meanest passion in man—religious bigotry';³⁶ nonetheless, it was the Irish-Ireland contribution to this intranationalist debate—the potent rejection of the 'sham' 'all-creeds-and-classes' school of Davisite nationalism—that would ultimately produce a negative reassessment of Mahony's Tory writings.³⁷

With the increased emphasis on ethnic essentialism, and the pan-nationalist focus on the need to create and define a distinctively Irish literary canon which addressed national issues in a national literature, a new note of censure and disapprobation—centred on notions of cultural disparagement and 'stage-Irishness'—now entered the critical historiography. In his *Nova Hibernia* (1914), for example, the Cork-born journalist, magazinist, and literary historian Michael Monahan (1865–1933) celebrates the 'Celtic Renaissance', a 'rebirth of genius and spirituality' that forced 'critics, so long hostile or merely contemptuous ... [into] considering us more seriously'.³⁸ But he is careful to qualify his mainly positive appraisal of Mahony's career by criticising the 'Lay of Lazarus' for 'adding to his country's shame'.³⁹ Indeed, Mahony's attempt to traduce the reputation of O'Connell demonstrates that 'his sympathies were not with a majority of his own countrymen'; nor, in a remark that reveals the immediate relevance of Mahony's controversial views, were they in accord with a mid-nineteenth-century Ireland 'struggling along in the old way (which has not yet been entirely changed for a better)'.⁴⁰ The Irish Jesuit critic, George O'Neill (1863–1947), first professor of English language and philosophy at the National University of Ireland, also declares Mahony to have been

³⁶ Quoted in Brian Maye, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin, 1997), 159.

³⁷ Maume, *D.P. Moran*, 8.

³⁸ Michael Monahan, *Nova Hibernia: Irish Poets and Dramatists of Today and Yesterday* (New York, 1914), 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

but ‘imperfectly’ Irish in his ‘sympathies’.⁴¹ For O’Neill, Mahony’s ‘violent Toryism’ manifested itself in his vilification of those who were, in O’Neill’s analysis, ‘the only possible Irish leaders’:

With such political views we are not surprised to find associated some lack of that sense of national dignity and self-respect the growth of which has been a cheering phenomenon of our recent history. He is ready to make fun of all things Irish (including himself) for the delectation of an outside world—of a world already too prompt to take us at the jester’s valuation.⁴²

There is a direct connection, in other words, between Mahony’s conservative repudiation of O’Connellite nationalism and his purported desire to present an anachronistic, unpatriotic version of Irish identity to an English audience. He was, quite simply, a ‘professional jester’, whom O’Neill groups alongside his one-time editor, William Maginn, regretting that two such gifted writers came to prominence in a stage-Irish milieu.⁴³ (Writing in the same period, the moderate nationalist author, Stephen Gwynn [1864–1950], also blithely dismissed what he termed the pedantic ‘polyglot jesting of Father Prout’ in a throwaway reference to Mahony’s complex, translation-based satire, ‘The Rogueries of Thomas Moore’.⁴⁴) In remarks that presage the imminent decline in Mahony’s reputation, the ‘Prout Papers’ are deemed by O’Neill to be representative of ‘something we have just got away from, and consequently, are least likely to study with sympathy’.⁴⁵

Yet one could argue that as the arbiters of a ‘canonical’ Irish literature attempted to discredit what was, for them, an outmoded and inauthentic understanding of national character, Mahony’s work took on a new significance, and, in some respects, began to grow in importance. One might invoke here the concept of a literary *nachleben* (or afterlife) which foregrounds the process by which a given author’s works are ‘forever being re-created, *appropriated* in the name of conflicting political and aesthetic ideologies’.⁴⁶ Hans Robert Jauss links the lifespan of a literary text to its ongoing ability to elicit a response in

⁴¹ George O’Neill, ‘Father Prout’, 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 20, 20–1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴ Stephen Gwynn, *Thomas Moore* (London, 1905), 25.

⁴⁵ O’Neill, ‘Father Prout’, 3.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830* (Oxford, 1989), 2.

“readers who again appropriate the past work or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it”.⁴⁷ The question, as phrased by Edward Said, is ‘why a text enjoy[s] currency at one time, recurrency at others, oblivion at others?’⁴⁸ In Mahony’s case, the answer can be directly linked to the literary criticism of Daniel Corkery (1878–1964). The publication in 1931 of his highly influential study, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*—described by Seamus Deane as ‘a founding act of literary and political criticism for the newly emergent Free State’—helped secure a minor (and predominantly negative) *nachleben* for Mahony’s writings.⁴⁹ Corkery had been an important contributor to Moran’s *Leader*, and he would become the most articulate proponent of the Irish-Ireland project of cultural decolonisation. As one of a generation of young Irish intellectuals inspired by both the Irish-language activism of the Gaelic League and the religious isolationism of the Catholic Church, he was closely affiliated with the Catholic nationalist élite that defined the narrow ethos of post-independence Ireland. In *The Hidden Ireland* (1925), Corkery’s landmark survey of the Irish-language poetry of eighteenth-century Munster, he had written with a novelist’s flair of a re-emergent Gaelic Catholic culture, giving critical currency to the titular concept of an historically occluded peasant tradition which, he claimed, had remained intact and untainted through centuries of British oppression. *The Hidden Ireland* was later criticised by revisionist historians for its perceived lack of historical rigour and its obfuscation of class difference; but the enduring appeal of Corkery’s thesis lay, nonetheless, in its indisputable ‘rhetorical power’, and its imaginative engagement with Irish-language poetic sources.⁵⁰ It succeeded in the difficult task of establishing a two-way dialogue with the native literary canon, demanding, first, that the modern Irish reader experience the strangeness of a lost Gaelic inheritance by establishing a “living” link with the past’, so placing ‘the relationship between reader and read in the foreground of its project’.⁵¹ But, equally importantly, it allowed the Gaelic past of the Penal Law era to re-inhabit the present of post-independence Ireland. Published in the period immediately after the establishment of the Free State, *The Hidden Ireland* helped establish a tendentious Irish-Ireland view of national

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London, 1984), 150.

⁴⁹ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford, 1997), 151.

⁵⁰ See L. M. Cullen, *The Hidden Ireland: Reassessment of a Concept* (Dublin, 1988), 25; and Patrick Walsh, ‘Daniel Corkery’s *The Hidden Ireland* and Revisionism’, *New Hibernia Review*, 5 (2001), 42.

⁵¹ Walsh, ‘Daniel Corkery’s *The Hidden Ireland* and Revisionism’, 39.

history as an ‘educational orthodoxy’, resurrecting the past in what might be described as the new cultural dispensation established by an official nationalist monoculture.⁵² In one sense, *The Hidden Ireland* represented a positive harnessing of the national energies unleashed by the Irish Literary Renaissance; however, its attempt to create a shared community of interpretation involved an exclusionary challenge to the ‘Ascendancy’ model of national history. From a literary standpoint, this largely negative project was taken up in earnest in *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, where a desire to re-create a distinctively Irish voice in an English-language setting saw Corkery comprehensively reject the metropolitan literary ‘moulds’ of nineteenth-century Ireland.

In what, essentially, was an ambitious attempt to impose a new set of standards on the study of Irish literature in the Free State, Corkery set about re-examining the work of the most prominent Irish authors of the preceding two centuries, and asking whether their writings were still relevant to a modern Catholic nationalist Ireland. In the controversial opening chapter, Mahony (or ‘Prout’, as Corkery, significantly enough, chooses to refer to him) is cited as one of the leading exponents of a colonial Irish literature produced by expatriate authors for an English readership. (Corkery had himself authored a number of well-received plays and novels—several of which were published in both Dublin and London—and was well acquainted with the difficulties of finding a home-grown audience for a native Irish literature.) For Corkery, the ‘colonial’ school of writing exhibits a quaint, exotic form of Irishness before ‘alien eyes’, instead of endeavouring to address an Irish readership.⁵³ Fashioned by the writers of an alien Ascendancy class, the ‘moulds’ of Anglo-Irish literature did ‘not willingly receive the facts of Irish life’.⁵⁴ The efforts of colonial authors, moreover, to accommodate the prejudices and preconceptions of a non-native audience meant that they failed ‘to canalize some share of Irish consciousness so that that consciousness would the better know itself’.⁵⁵ Unlike the canonical literature of other nations, Anglo-Irish literature was not, therefore, ‘written primarily for its own people’.⁵⁶ The related phenomenon of the emigration (or ‘expatriation’) of Irish authors who sought a foreign market for their literary wares is represented as ‘a chronic disease from Goldsmith’s time, Steele’s time, Sheridan’s time, Burke’s time, Moore’s time, Prout’s time, Wilde’s time, to

⁵² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵³ Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork, 1931), 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

our own time of Shaw, Joyce, and Moore'.⁵⁷ Corkery is careful to distinguish between a genuine Anglo-Irish literature—one which, as in the case of Synge and the dramatists of the Abbey theatre, tried 'to express Ireland to itself'—and a colonial literature that exists only by 'English suffrage'.⁵⁸ This latter form of Irish writing represented for Corkery an ignoble, unpatriotic surrender to the demands of the metropolitan British marketplace. Indeed, Mahony is portrayed as part of 'the shameful literary tradition of ... Prout, Maginn, Lever, [and] Lover', writers who are here categorised as members of an Ascendancy class which had only a distant knowledge of the Irish peasantry.⁵⁹ The intellectual brilliance of the 'colonial' author marked their alienation from the 'emotional background' of their compatriots, their cosmopolitan indifference allowing them to trade in 'insolence, cynicism, recklessness, and hardness'.⁶⁰ It was this remote, elevated perspective on his fellow countrymen that allowed Mahony to laugh "'with foreign jaws" at the 100 per cent. type of Irishman', even if, Corkery argues, his alleged eagerness to meet the demands of a foreign literary market concealed the 'secret sorrow' of the 'jester'—namely, his 'desertion of the land that most required ... [his] services'.⁶¹

Corkery's analysis, then, picks up on and develops the three main tropes that attached to Mahony's name in the early twentieth century. The depiction of his writings as frivolous yet shameful, emotionally uninvolved and lacking in national sympathy saw him become the linking figure in Corkery's study between two distinct groups of expatriate and stage-Irish authors—a writer who exemplified Corkery's central hypothesis that literary expatriation necessarily involved pandering to outside interests. Significantly, Mahony had never before (nor has he since) formed part of such a select group of Irish authors, his brief ascension into the category of major authorship representing a final flowering of his critical reputation before his definitive relegation to the second rank. Any refutation of Corkery's thesis would need, first, to address the notion that Mahony 'deserted' or was even insufficiently attentive to the plight of his native land. Mahony and Maginn, we are told, are amongst 'those who most summarily dismissed the claims of their own people'.⁶² But even the most cursory knowledge of Mahony's biography might lead one to query his alleged emotional detachment from a people he had voluntarily

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11, 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 17, 19.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18.

ministered to in the Cork Foundling and Fever Hospitals, and for whom he had risked his life during a cholera epidemic. More pertinently, perhaps, his Prout writings provided him with a forum for his acidulous criticisms of a corrupt system of landlordism (only noticed, he argues, because of ‘Rockite’ agrarian terrorism), as well as his anti-Connellite rage at the refusal of the *Liberator* to endorse poor law relief for the starving Irish populace, and his consistent support for municipal political reform. The ironic humour of his Prout essays was less a question of an auto-exotic ‘laughing with foreign jaws’ at the Irish peasant than of satirising the particular version of national identity endorsed by O’Connell and his peasant followers (a subtlety more likely to be lost on someone who does not carefully distinguish between Mahony and the fictional ‘Father Prout’). In both the prose and illustrated content of the ‘Prout Papers’, the reality of Irish poverty was a constant and pressing theme, belying the notion that Mahony casually renounced his homeland to become one of the literary ‘servant[s] of the English people’.⁶³ Writing as Father Prout, Mahony also endorsed the need to develop native Irish industry; indeed, the Irish protectionist stance he adopted in the ‘Prout Papers’ represented a provocative updating of Swiftian economic patriotism against the backdrop of 1830s O’Connellite nationalism (a position, one might note, which was at odds with his overall defence of the British imperialist project).⁶⁴ His rejection of the O’Connellite Repeal movement, and his later newspaper tirades against Fenianism, were founded on the genuine (if later unpopular) conviction that Catholic Ireland would fare better within the parameters of the Union. (Recent research by Jennifer Ridden on the active participation of Irish Catholics in the British imperial project illustrates the complex of loyalties at stake here.⁶⁵) Far from exhibiting contempt for his native land, Mahony was attempting to convey the opinions of an alternative Catholic unionist Ireland—opinions that would prove anathema to twentieth-century advocates of the Irish-Ireland movement. What is at issue, then, is not an absence of national feeling but rather the biased assumption that his Catholic unionism was incompatible with the promotion of Irish interests.

One might also query Corkery’s rejection of the formal conservatism he ascribes to the ‘Prout Papers’. Corkery’s cultural protectionism is in contrast

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁴ See Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork, 1998), 196.

⁶⁵ Jennifer Ridden, ‘Britishness as an Imperial and Diasporic Identity: Irish Elite Perspectives, c. 1820–70s’ in Peter Gray (ed.), *Victoria’s Ireland?: Irishness and Britishness, 1837–1901* (Dublin, 2004), 88–105.

to the French- and Italian-educated Mahony's support for intellectual 'free trade', which he endorses as vigorously as he opposed its economic equivalent. According to Corkery, 'Ascendancy' writers like Mahony were forced to work within 'an unnatural because unnative mould'.⁶⁶ But for Mahony, the Union between Ireland and Great Britain was a two-way process—one that could mean the Hibernicisation of British culture as well as the Anglicisation of Gaelic traditions. In 'The Songs of France', for example, Mahony accords French literary precursors to a series of major British authors whose writings, Prout claims, 'betray the... working of this [Gallic] foreign essence, mixed up with the crude material of Saxon growth'.⁶⁷ He thus comically reverses and sets in relief conventional cultural hierarchies by establishing a derivative relationship between a native 'Saxon' literature and the traditions of a more powerful neighbour. Yet this is also intended to convey an ironised, peripheral perspective on British-Irish cultural relations. By also placing a substantial number of Irish authors at the heart of the metropolitan canon, he seeks to demonstrate the unacknowledged influence of Irish writing on the formation of the British tradition—a tradition already relativised in the same essay by its depiction as posterior to the French literary canon. Corkery, by contrast, assumes that there can only be an uneven, unilateral relationship between the colonial author and the all-powerful imperial centre. This is to see writers such as Mahony and his editor Maginn—who were the driving force behind the controversial, London-based *Fraser's Magazine* for much of the 1830s—as largely impotent figures who obsequiously courted popularity and unquestioningly fulfilled the demands of the literary marketplace. It altogether ignores the deliberate challenge that their idiosyncratic, disputatious writings presented to a contemporary British readership. Politically unorthodox (or even 'rebellious') and frequently scandalous, *Fraser's* was a publication noted for its comic exploitation of the troubling gap between received generic convention and a recalcitrant peripheral reality.⁶⁸ Dominated by the Cork Fraserian's questioning, 'decentred' attitude to metropolitan cliché, it gained an enviable reputation for its commitment to the publication of innovative British and European prose. In certain respects, Mahony's satiric, peripheral reappraisal of the

⁶⁶ Corkery, *Synge*, 15.

⁶⁷ Mahony, *The Reliques of Father Prout*, 237.

⁶⁸ See Rebecca Edwards Newman, "'Prosecuting the Onus Criminus": Early Criticism of the Novel in *Fraser's Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 35 (2002), 403; and Patrick Leary, '*Fraser's Magazine* and the Literary Life, 1830–47', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 27 (1994), 107, 110–12.

dominant ‘moulds’ and established conventions of the literary centre could appear a good deal more patriotic than Corkery’s almost deferential attitude to the established canonical literature of Britain. It was, one could argue, Mahony’s cosmopolitan willingness to comically re-read Anglo-Irish literary relations, capitalising on the misapplication of British literary convention to Irish circumstances—rather than Corkery’s cultural essentialism—that provided the more sensitive response to the ‘flux and uncertainty’ of Irish national consciousness.⁶⁹

But if Corkery’s caricatured portrait of ‘Father Prout’ was a crudely reductive attempt to redefine a mercurial, ‘multilateral’ figure, then so too was his monocultural vision of Free State literature an attempt to impose a politically-interested interpretation of the literary past on a hybrid, multilayered and transnational tradition. Faced with the dual task of not only formulating new canonical standards, but also distinguishing them from the long-established literary traditions of the dominant neighbouring island, Corkery had difficulty in positively delineating his own contrasting concept of an authentically Irish literature. Importantly, individual literary talent (along with the Joycean celebration of self over society) would now take second place to an author’s ability to express the collective national ‘reality’ of Irish life:⁷⁰

The three great forces which, working for long in the Irish national being, have made it so different from the English national being, are: (1) The Religious Consciousness of the People; (2) Irish Nationalism; and (3) the Land.⁷¹

If Irish writing were to emulate the ‘normal’, canonical status of British literature, it would have to enshrine these three core elements at the centre of a mainstream literary tradition.⁷² The key canonical factors adduced by Corkery, however, served to underline the historical dimensions of his essentialist rhetoric, begging the question of the extent to which his historically contingent formulation of ‘normal’ standards shaped his view of Irish race consciousness. Furthermore, the fact that Corkery’s own model of a national literature was focussed on the need to imbue Irish writing with the same normative status

⁶⁹ Corkery, *Synge*, 14.

⁷⁰ See John Wilson Foster, ‘The Irish Renaissance, 1890–1940: Prose in English’ in Margaret Kelleher and Philip O’Leary (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature* (2 vols, Cambridge, 2006), II, 149–50.

⁷¹ Corkery, *Synge*, 19.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 3.

he attributed to British literature—the word ‘normal’ recurs throughout the introductory chapter—went some way towards explaining the dualistic nature of his arguments, and his (at times) contradictory efforts to create an authentically Irish literature by close reference to previous British paradigms. For Declan Kiberd, this ‘represented a final surrender to colonialist modes of thought’—that is, an unconscious post-independence replication of colonial paradigms.⁷³ Corkery’s criticism, in short, was in danger of becoming part of the very tradition he himself had vigorously condemned in his prospectus for a new Irish writing.

Nonetheless, Kiberd’s suggestive description of Corkery as Ireland’s earliest approximation to a ‘post-colonial critic’ is apt and justified, notwithstanding the pervasive suspicion of cultural hybridity that characterises much of his cultural (if not his literary) writings.⁷⁴ Though often dismissed as a ‘cultural commissar’, who was ‘insular, racist and parochial’, Corkery focussed critical attention on such key issues as bilingualism, cultural decenteredness and the psychologically ‘fractured’ nature of colonial identity.⁷⁵ His oft-quoted description of ‘national consciousness’ as ‘a quaking sod. It gives no footing. It is not English, nor Irish, nor Anglo-Irish’ provided a pithy diagnosis of the post-colonial Irish condition.⁷⁶ If, surprisingly, Mahony and Corkery are in broad agreement about the ‘in-between’ status of Irish culture, its aforementioned ‘flux and uncertainty’, they differ radically in their critical response to this context—a result, in part, of differing interpretative strategies. Corkery’s vision of Gaelic Ireland drew on ‘the Romantic tradition of cultural criticism, which posited an organic society based on timelessly valid human values in the past in order to criticise the shortcomings of contemporary society’.⁷⁷ But, as Conor Carville notes, the synchronic notion of an organic Irish society is replaced in Corkery’s discussion of the ‘three forces’ by ‘a diachronic notion of the impact of climate, tradition, ideology and economics’.⁷⁸ Carville further observes that Corkery is fearful of the fact that ‘an essentialised Irish consciousness [must be sent] to a site situated somewhere in the English language’, thus exposing Irish culture to

⁷³ Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge, 2005), 184.

⁷⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London, 1995), 272; Daniel Corkery, *The Stones and Other Stories*, Paul Delaney (ed.) (Cork, 2003), 9.

⁷⁵ Heather Laird, *Daniel Corkery’s Cultural Criticism: Selected Writings* (Cork, 2012), ix.

⁷⁶ Corkery, *Synge*, 14.

⁷⁷ Patrick Maume, *‘Life that is Exile’: Daniel Corkery and the Search for Irish Ireland* (Belfast, 1993), viii.

⁷⁸ Conor Carville, ‘Becoming Minor: Daniel Corkery and the Expatriated Nation’, *Irish Studies Review*, 6 (1998), 144.

an ‘expatriate’ loss of original meaning and authorial intention.⁷⁹ Importantly, for the ‘Hidden Ireland’ to re-emerge, Gaelic Ireland must be re-read through the intermediary medium of English. Again, the question of interpretation is key here: for Corkery, reading is an act of imaginative identification with a stable, enduring and authentic Ireland, which is in contrast to the emotional sterility he detects in expatriated authors such as Mahony. Ireland, in effect, becomes a text that must be read faithfully in accordance with the values of an essential Gaelic order, a process that sees Corkery encouraging an ‘unreal revivalism’ of a context which, in real historical terms, ceased to exist at the end of the eighteenth century.⁸⁰

One might briefly invoke here the work of Wolfgang Iser, who like Corkery prioritises the concrete experience of reading as ‘an interaction between text and reader, [which makes it] “an effect to be experienced”’, or a reader-centred process that is in contrast to the traditional emphasis on the text as an “object to be defined”’.⁸¹ Iser characterises the text as providing a skeleton of objective, pre-formulated meaning which is then actualised or concretised in the ‘indeterminate’, subjective interpretations of individual readers. The aesthetic object is neither the pre-given text nor its various historical interpretations but a product of the interaction between the two. In Corkery’s work, too, we are presented with the notion of ‘nationality’ as a pre-given text or state of being, but one which must, nevertheless, be supplemented by an act of historical interpretation that calls upon a performative (English-language) ‘nationalist’ identity. (The slippage between the terms ‘nationality’ and ‘nationalism’ in *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* is an index of the internal tensions of Corkery’s argument.)⁸² As Stanley Fish has famously argued, however, the Iserian model proves unsustainable in practice due to the impossibility of fixing the role of interpretation in its idealised reconciliation of objective text and subjective reader. The ‘determinate’, pre-given text, according to Fish, is always subject to some form of framing interpretation by the reader, thus undermining its supposedly independent status. If, as Fish argues, the act of reading is invariably governed by a prior set of indeterminate assumptions on the part

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ See Tom Garvin, ‘Revolution? Revolutions are what Happens to Wheels—The Phenomenon of Revolution, Irish Style’ in Joost Augusteijn (ed.), *The Irish Revolution, 1913–1923* (London, 2002), 229.

⁸¹ See Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1984), 83; see also Patrick Walsh, ‘Daniel Corkery’s *The Hidden Ireland* and Revisionism’, 40–3.

⁸² See Paul Delaney, “A Lack of Invention”: Corkery, Criticism and Minor Fatigue’, *Irish Review*, 33 (2005), 105.

of individual interpreters, then Iser's insistence on the guiding objectivity of the text is fatally compromised, as is the determinate/indeterminate distinction upon which his theory depends.⁸³ This Fishian emphasis on interpretative subjectivism accords with the ironic 'translational' aesthetic of Mahony's writings, particularly his politicised, anti-Romantic reworkings of Moore's nationalist poetry, which might also be applied to the Romantic underpinnings of Corkery's cultural criticism. As evidenced in his satires on Irish antiquarianism, Mahony is deeply suspicious of the whole project of cultural revival, and consistently rejects the notion that an essential Irishness can be transmitted intact and unchanged across time and between languages. His mocking critique of Moore's nationalism deliberately multiplies and antedates the linguistic and historical contexts of Moore's English-language *Melodies*:

[H]e who can execute a clever forgery, and make it pass current, is almost as well off as the capitalist who can draw a substantial check on the bank of sterling genius: so, to give the devil his due, I must acknowledge that in terseness, point, pathos, and elegance, Moore's translations of these French and Latin trifles are very near as good as the primary compositions themselves.⁸⁴

In other words, Mahony comically distorts what is presented as uniquely Irish by introducing a radical indeterminateness into the project of forging a national literature. Mahony, in effect, denies the possibility of an ahistorical (or 'phenomenological') model of reading in his satiric translations by undermining the objective stability of Ireland as a site of interpretation. His focus on the indeterminate, subjective pole of the reader-text interaction presents Gaelic Ireland as an interpretative construct, subject to infinite historical revision. But this is precisely the fear that lies at the heart of Corkery's canon-making project—namely, that all Anglo-Irish literature is translational and indeterminate, divorced from the guiding spirit of an organic Gaelic Ireland. (After the publication of *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, Corkery, in a move that perhaps represented the logical conclusion of Gaelic League revivalism, went so far as to propose the excision of all writing in English from the Irish literary canon.) Corkery conceives of a canonical Free State literature as a

⁸³ See Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford, 1989), 68–86.

⁸⁴ Mahony, *The Reliques of Father Prout*, 151.

kind of culturo-linguistic border that might guard against the re-colonisation of Irish literature by English-language interpretation; Mahony, on the other hand, ironises any direct act of identification with the past, exploiting the hyphenated status of 'Anglo-Irish' literature by underscoring the inability of the porous linguistic borders of literary nationalism to offer an exclusive temporal, historical or even national 'footing'.

According to Patrick Maume, Corkery, having fully embraced the revolutionary fervour of the early twentieth century, 'never entirely recovered from the shock of the Civil War and the Republican defeat';⁸⁵ arguably, his critical writings on Synge are symbolic of a more general movement away from the initial idealism of a pre-independence Romantic nationalism to a lingering post-independence bitterness about unchanged material circumstances and unfulfilled cultural expectations. Yet, while Corkery's 1931 study may be viewed as the product of a particular juncture in Irish history, it has, nonetheless, exerted a lasting influence on Mahony's literary legacy, as can be seen, for example, in Ethel Mannin's *Two Studies in Integrity* (1954), the only substantive biography of Mahony to appear in the twentieth century. A noted author, feminist and socialist, Mannin (1900–84) provided a valuable synthesis of the available critical and biographical literature, endeavouring conscientiously to resolve 'various conflicting statements... [and to sort] opinions and undocumented assertions from established—or establishable—facts'.⁸⁶ Her even-handed, comprehensive study of Mahony's life and work is enriched by a novelist's sensitivity to the idiosyncrasies of character, and succeeds in presenting a much more nuanced, ambivalent account of Mahony's literary career than Corkery's hostile re-evaluation. As a lifelong left-wing sympathiser, she picks up on Mahony's criticisms of O'Connell's supposed exploitation of the peasantry, and his insistence in the 'Prout Papers' on the need to 'plead in the poor man's defence' for the introduction of an Irish poor law.⁸⁷ But even so, she still considers Mahony to have been a 'bad Irishman ... nationalistically speaking'.⁸⁸ An English-born author commenting on Anglo-Irish cultural relations, she defers to the judgement of O'Neill and Corkery on the question of his alleged lack of patriotism. Directly citing the 'very penetrating treatise' of 'Professor Corkery', she condemns Mahony for belonging to a stage-Irish

⁸⁵ Patrick Maume, *Life that is Exile*, viii.

⁸⁶ Ethel Mannin, *Two Studies in Integrity: Gerald Griffin and the Rev. Francis Mahony (Father Prout)* (London, 1954), 14.

⁸⁷ Mahony, *The Reliques of Father Prout*, 286.

⁸⁸ Mannin, *Two Studies*, 174.

school of writing that ‘invariably caricatures national character’ and completely misses “‘the secret things in the nation’s soul’”—a likely allusion to Corkery’s concept of a ‘Hidden Ireland’.⁸⁹ In what is a generally sympathetic portrait, Mannin is willing to allow (*contra* Corkery) that ‘he had Ireland in his heart’; but by endorsing Corkery’s partisan thesis she conspicuously fails to challenge received critical opinion.⁹⁰ Her analysis represents, in effect, a restatement of the established Irish-Ireland position, which, in emphasising his supposed membership of a stage-Irish literary generation, limits any attempt to directly engage with his texts and contexts.

With the dearth of critical attention to Mahony’s work in the late twentieth century, the next significant milestone in his critical reception was the publication of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991), which also betrays the abiding influence of Corkery’s analysis. This major collection, which self-consciously set out to interrogate issues of Irish literary canonicity, and to argue “‘against an essentialist version of Irish nationalism’”, included a number of Mahony’s poems and songs.⁹¹ Its general editor, Seamus Deane, had in an earlier synoptic work, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1986), listed the publication date of *The Reliques* as 1859 instead of 1836 (or even 1860, the year in which the second edition appeared), referred to its author as ‘Sylvester Mahony’, and mistakenly credited him as the person who ‘invented the fame of the Blarney Stone’.⁹² This lack of attention to detail is also evident in the framing commentaries of *The Field Day Anthology*. In his general remarks in the section entitled ‘Poetry 1800–1900’, Deane once more positions Mahony in relation to ‘an audience to which ... [the] press deferred in matters of taste and opinion’.⁹³ Deane distinguishes between the different expectations imposed on early nineteenth-century contributors to the British and Irish periodical presses, numbering Mahony amongst those compelled to present what ‘was widely considered to be properly poetical or politically acceptable’ to a metropolitan audience.⁹⁴ He, and his fellow Irish magazinists, created stock characters, who were ‘witty, sentimental, enthusiastic, impervious to practical

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹¹ Quoted in Helen Thompson, ‘Field Day, Politics and Irish Writing’ in Helen Thompson (ed.), *The Current Debate about the Irish Literary Canon: Essays Reassessing The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Lewiston, 2006), 11.

⁹² Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London, 1986), 114.

⁹³ Seamus Deane, ‘Poetry and Song, 1800–1890’ in Seamus Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (3 vols, Derry, 1991), II, 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

considerations and much inclined to drinking and wastefulness'.⁹⁵ This he terms 'instant antiquarianism', or 'the discovery of the age-old patterns of Irish folk-life miraculously preserved in the amber of poverty and illiteracy'.⁹⁶ These essentialised characteristics—exemplified in source works such as *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825) by Mahony's friend, the Protestant unionist antiquarian, Thomas Crofton Croker (1798–1854)—were, he asserts, actively adopted and developed by writers who wished to capitalise on the 'historicized version of the Irish national character' popularized in post-Union Irish fiction.⁹⁷

Significantly, Mahony is portrayed as one of a multitude of Irish authors remembered for only a single lyric, translation or ballad (in his case, 'The Bells of Shandon'). But this fails to account for the healthy publication history that *The Reliques* enjoyed until the early twentieth century, and (as outlined above) the influence and creative latitude Mahony had as a contributor to and later editor of *Fraser's Magazine*. It is also questionable if 'The Bells of Shandon', an intricate song perfectly poised between nationalist eulogy and nationalist parody, necessarily fits the conventional notion of what was 'politically acceptable' or indeed 'properly poetical' ('I've heard bells tolling / Old 'Adrian's Mole' in, / Their thunder rolling / From the Vatican ... / But thy sounds were sweeter / Than the dome of Peter / Flings o'er the Tiber, / Pealing solemnly').⁹⁸ One might note, first, that the Prout character is portrayed as neither drunken, wasteful nor impractical. While Croker was anxious to record the 'timeless' verities of Irish peasant existence—a traditional way of life that began to alter irrevocably in the early nineteenth century—Mahony, far from drawing on 'archetypal' national traits, was commenting directly on a period in the mid-1830s when the Catholic masses had emerged as a formidable political force. The peasantry, of which there is, one should remember, comparatively little mention in the 'Prout Papers', are seen either as the ignorant, deluded supporters of O'Connell or as the victims of a corrupt system of social organisation. In other words, they are almost always situated in relation to the concrete socio-political reality of 1830s Ireland (rather than spoken of in terms of certain 'innate', stage-Irish qualities they supposedly possess). Furthermore, the 'wit' and 'enthusiasm' of Mahony's essays often centres on the celebration of the literature and learning of the ancient world

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Mahony, *The Reliques of Father Prout*, 159.

or, alternatively, as a parody of the more fanciful speculations of antiquarian enthusiasts. Indeed, Mahony's mocking attitude to antiquarian formulations of Irish identity—brilliantly satirised in 'The Watergrasshill Carousel' and 'The Rogueries of Thomas Moore'—made it highly unlikely that he would subscribe to the so-called 'instant antiquarianism' of Croker's researches. Even if one extends the definition of stage-Irishness to include what Deane has elsewhere termed Prout's 'humourous pedantry and designedly overblown eloquence', few other alleged examples of such writing could be described as 'serious and considerable as works of scholarship and literary criticism', as certain Prout essays have been characterised by the classical historian, W.B. Stanford.⁹⁹

With its focus on the politics of representation, the *Field Day Anthology* 'is intended to be a self-conscious construct which interrogates its own practices and avoids privileging one point of view'.¹⁰⁰ While denying, however, that the anthology constitutes an Irish literary canon, and thus bracketing out his own views on the link between language, politics, and identity formation, Deane demonstrates in his analysis of Mahony's work an indebtedness to a nationalist politics which has its 'historical roots in the Irish Revival'.¹⁰¹ Deane criticises both the homogenising character of nineteenth-century bourgeois nationalist discourse and its attempt to create a homologous relationship with the metropolitan centre from which it apparently wished to distinguish itself. Yet he himself offers a homogenous view of nineteenth-century periodical culture that not only recalls Corkery's exclusivist nationalism but also rehearses his 'normative', metropolitan-focussed assessment of the 'Prout Papers'. Here, once again, is the allegation that Mahony set out to present a quaint, condescending version of Irish identity, a variation on Corkery's tendentious portrait of an essentially powerless literary grouping, which obsequiously fulfilled metropolitan expectations. (Significantly, Mahony is referred to as an 'expatriate' Irish author in *A Short History of Irish Literature*.¹⁰²) Here, too, is the familiar emphasis on British-Irish literary relations, and the guiding assumption that literature is necessarily focussed on the portrayal of the national. Ironically, when applied to the 'Prout Papers', Deane's anti-essentialist reinterpretation of the canon becomes indistinguishable from the essentialist Irish-Ireland rejection of Mahony. Though apparently committed

⁹⁹ Deane, *A Short History*, 114; W.B. Stanford, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (Dublin, 1976), 175.

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, 'Field Day, Politics and Irish Writing', 12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰² Deane, *A Short History*, 114.

to a more inclusive and self-questioning nationalism, it says nothing of the ‘internal’ critique that Mahony, the Irish Catholic insider, provided of the key figures attached to an incipient popular Catholic nationalism (O’Connell) or its cultural nationalist equivalent (Thomas Moore). Nor does it attempt to re-imagine Mahony’s place within the accepted canon of Irish literature, thus failing to fulfil a key promise of the entire *Field Day* project: that of providing “a means of accessing the creative possibility of a future promised in the past”.¹⁰³

Pursuing this “radical backward look” will enable a different kind of reception for Mahony’s work to emerge—one already hinted at in valuable 1990s studies by Joep Leerssen and Terry Eagleton, which manage to skilfully combine close textual reading with a greater awareness of and sensitivity to historical context.¹⁰⁴ Thinking beyond the reception history of the ‘Prout Papers’ described above, the future critical fate of his work might be best determined by close reference to the literary reception envisaged in his original writings. Importantly, one of the very first critics to assess the merits of *The Reliques of Father Prout*, and to point out the difficulties of pinning down the author’s precise intentions was, appropriately enough, Mahony himself. His eleven-page anonymous review appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine* for March 1836. In this ‘serio-comic self-examination’, Mahony speaks of ‘a certain supplementary process which ... [Prout’s] compositions are probably doomed to undergo on issuing from our hands’—that is, the conflicting interpretations and analyses of ‘such people as reviewers’.¹⁰⁵ He goes on to describe a related fear—‘technically called *criticophobia*’—experienced by ‘great author[s]’ who felt apprehensive about the ‘strange liberties which folks were likely to take with their writings’.¹⁰⁶ Picking up on this theme in the brief preface to the first edition of *The Reliques of Father Prout*, Mahony (in the guise of fictional general editor ‘Oliver Yorke’) opens with the ironic statement: ‘It is much to be regretted that our Author should be no longer in the land of the living, to furnish a general Preamble, explanatory of the scope and tendency of his multifarious writings.’¹⁰⁷ In other words, Mahony purports to regret the absence of any

¹⁰³ Shaun Richards quoted in Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies: Theory, Discourse, Utopia*. (Hampshire, 2009), 22.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. See Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, 123–5; and Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop*, 190–9.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Kent’s description. See Mahony, *Works*, 363, 369. (This piece was first collected in Kent’s 1881 edition.)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 370.

¹⁰⁷ Mahony, *Reliques of Father Prout*, ix.

overarching explanation of Prout's writings, 'having learned from Epictetus that every sublunary thing has two handles, and from experience that mankind are prone to take hold of the wrong one'.¹⁰⁸ But this is largely due to Mahony's own deliberate evasiveness—the frequent absence of a definitive interpretative 'handle'—and the evident pleasure he takes in misdirecting his less attentive or well-informed readers. Despite his professed 'criticophobia', it is clear that 'Prout's translative and hermeneutic labours' require a corollary effort on the part of his readers and interpreters.¹⁰⁹

The 'Reliques', as the name suggests, are presented here as a semi-ironic sacred text—a parody of the British Romantic privileging of literary originality, which ironises the interpretative process for those who, like Mahony, must face "the ungentle" practitioners' of literary criticism.¹¹⁰ For Mahony, as for other Fraserians, 'literature' is a product of 'the collective activity of authorship, publishing, reading, and reviewing'—the established process through which an 'Author' comes to be affirmed as a recognised member of the literary economy.¹¹¹ Accordingly, if instead of 'true', unquestioning 'votaries', Prout's venerable work must be 'handled by the uninitiated and the profane', then it requires some form of protection from the 'rude manipulation' of critics and reviewers.¹¹² Just as Mahony, the anonymous Fraserian reviewer, purports to regret the absence of Father Prout, who, he claims, might help clarify what, in reality, he himself had written, so too is irony and ambiguity seen as a means of distancing the writer from the critical "mangling" of those who wash his 'soiled linen'.¹¹³ Neither the author 'Mahony' nor his putative original intentions are readily available to the reader of the 'Prout Papers'. Instead, he/she is confronted with the digressive allusiveness of his essays, their abrupt shifts in tone and frequent subversion of literary precedent, along with their playful use of language, which consistently foregrounds translation and critical reinterpretation. The pervading sense in the 'Prout Papers' of the transience of linguistic meaning can have the effect of making it difficult for the reader to establish where they stand in relation to the author. (Mahony's calculated ambiguity provides an alternative gloss on Corkery's 'quaking sod' metaphor.)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Mahony, *Works*, 368.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 371.

¹¹¹ See Carol A. Bock, 'Authorship, the Brontës, and *Fraser's Magazine*: "Coming Forward" as an Author in Early Victorian England', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 29 (2001), 247.

¹¹² Mahony, *Works*, 370.

¹¹³ Ibid., 369.

Seen in this way, the comments contained in his ironic self-critique present a direct challenge to those charged with the difficult task of offering a coherent explanation of the 'Prout Papers'. In short, if the precise nature of Mahony's work remains unclear, or at least undecidable, then the absolute rejection (as well as the outright appropriation) of his writings becomes problematic, as does the efforts of critics to situate Mahony's position in Irish literary history.

Mahony's work, then, needs not only to be freed from a progressivist nationalist metanarrative, but also from the presumption of canonical certainty that underwrites such interpretations. This is less a question of denying the validity of the nationalist reading than of rejecting its exclusion of other possible interpretations. The rephrased quotation cited above from Epictetus's *Enchiridion* ('Not things, but opinions about things, trouble men') underscored, for Mahony's prospective readers, the troubling gap between textual objectivity and subjective interpretation. It was, as well, an unsourced allusion to the title quotation of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67), indicating Mahony's own affiliation to an Irish metafictional tradition that also included Prout's supposed father, Jonathan Swift. Traditional intentionalist interpretations, focussed to varying degrees on whether Mahony was a good or bad Irishman 'nationalistically speaking', fail to account fully for an author who, though seemingly hidden and removed from his readership through various textual identities ('Father Prout', 'Oliver Yorke', the anonymous Fraserian reviewer), is, in fact, also a constant presence in essays where his subtle use of irony requires the reader to repeatedly consider the similarities and differences between author and fictional character. His characterisation of the 'Prout Papers' as literary 'reliques' is a comic recognition of the possibility that the text can outlive its author's intentions; but it serves, too, as a reiteration of the Swiftian suspicion of language as a vehicle for communicating restrictive meaning. While the term 'author' may suggest a certain fixity of identity, Mahony's self-review, which centres on an explicitly 'multilateral' persona who may or may not reflect the writer's own opinions, clearly implies a element of authorial self-division. By satirically re-examining his own writings, and implicitly drawing his 'real' historical self into the fictionality of the text, Mahony ironically bridges the divide between objective text and subjective interpretation. His paratextual self-review manoeuvres the afterlife of the text towards a form of 'criticism of criticism'—a move representative of Mahony's overall translational aesthetic, in which reading and interpretation come to assume a key role in resituating the literary past in relation to a modern receiving culture.

Mahony's complication of the interpretative process also has political implications. Robert Jauss stresses the defamiliarising function of literature, which serves to objectify the existing 'horizon of expectations' prevalent within a given culture in regard to generic norms, relationships to familiar literary works, and the opposition between fiction and reality—all key aspects of Mahony's achievement in the 'Prout Papers'.¹¹⁴ For both Jauss and Mahony, negation of audience expectation is an important measure of the aesthetic value of the work. One might cite, for example, the aforementioned Prout essay, 'Literature and the Jesuits', in which Mahony asks his Tory Protestant audience to temporarily suspend sectarian judgement of the Jesuit order while presented with a sympathetic reading of an alien and potentially hostile Catholic literature—the product, Father Prout grandly claims, of 'the most learned, and by far the most distinguished literary corporation that ever arose in the world'.¹¹⁵ Wolfgang Iser pushes this emphasis on negativity further by stressing the non-mimetic role of literature.¹¹⁶ For him, the objectification of reality in a literary text reorganises social, cultural and literary norms, removing them from their usual context, so allowing the reader to reassess their merits.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, this is merely a prelude to the 'negative', non-formulated interpretation of that reality which is supplied by its readers. "Negativity" enables the reader to recognise and disengage from their previously held prejudices, moving beyond existing literary norms to seek out the as yet unconcretised meaning that inheres in the text. Without this capacity to accommodate innovative interpretation, the text, in Iser's view, has negligible literary value.

Arguably, the 'Prout Papers' also present an alien Irish environment to their British Protestant readership, but one which Mahony's audience, as co-partners in the political union between Britain and Ireland, are asked to interpret and understand. Iser conceives of literary negativity as "the nonformulation of the not-yet-comprehended", or as 'the structure that enables the reader to transcend the world in order "to formulate the cause underlying the question of the world."' ¹¹⁸ As such, it demands openness to difference and an ability to assimilate alien viewpoints. If the question to which the 'Prout Papers' is the comic answer is the unrepresentable flux of Irish circumstances, then the burden of interpreting the notably unreliable

¹¹⁴ See Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Brighton, 1982), 24.

¹¹⁵ Mahony, *The Reliques of Father Prout*, 173.

¹¹⁶ See Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 73.

¹¹⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, 1978), 74.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Holub, *Reception Theory*, 96.

narrator, 'Father Prout', and the fractious political context upon which he comments, falls on the contemporary British reader. Viewed within the terms of Iser's system, the metropolitan reader is asked to fill in the 'gaps' and 'blanks' in the text, and to confront and partly assimilate the 'otherness' of Ireland.¹¹⁹ However, it is precisely the instability of the 'Proutean' narrative voice, and the 'indeterminate', non-representational character of much of the 'Prout Papers', which simultaneously demands and problematises any putative act of imaginative identification with Irish circumstances. Prout's first-person narrative offers both the modern and contemporary reader a window onto the politico-historical complexity of the context; but this also requires them to view through Prout's eyes 'the rancour of polemics and the horrors of religious controversy, embittering all the relations of society around me', thus compelling them to recognise the difficulty of explaining Ireland or subjecting it to a single interpretative perspective.¹²⁰ Like Ireland, or the 'Irish question', the text confronts its audience with interpretative difficulty, deliberately and self-consciously refusing to provide a secure narrative footing for its readership. At its most extreme, this dramatically refocuses the audience's attention on the issue of textual indeterminacy, pointing up the limits of representation and interpretation, and the failure of Irish literature aesthetically to resolve or 'transcend' the historical contingency of political division.

For Walter Benjamin, works of art incorporate their pre-history and their after-history – 'an after-history in virtue of which their pre-history, too, can be seen to undergo constant change'.¹²¹ Those attempting to apply a 'radical backward look' to the 'Prout Papers', a work abounding in tags, allusions, quotations, and learned references, need to fuse a modern 'horizon of expectations' with that of the interstitial post-Romantic, pre-Victorian period in which these essays were composed. Themselves works of interpretation, Mahony's Prout essays call out for an active posterity. The Jaussian concept of a 'chain of receptions' underlines the collective, ongoing, and 'intersubjective' unfolding of meaning through successive interpretations (as opposed to an historical positivist focus on the 'thing-in-itself'). Viewed in this way, the secondary criticism can be re-examined in light of the original texts and contexts, their cultural antecedents, and a modern horizon of expectations, allowing multiple perspectives to be considered. While this may, in historical

¹¹⁹ See Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (London 1987), 146–7.

¹²⁰ Mahony, *Works*, 280.

¹²¹ Quoted in Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions*, 4.

terms, shackle the text to its secondary criticism, a significant issue when one considers the longevity of the Irish-Ireland reading of his work, it still reduces the possibility of individual subjective misinterpretation and (true to the spirit of the 'Prout Papers') leaves room for new readings to develop and emerge—in this instance, one more sensitive to the metafictional tradition suggested by Mahony himself. New readings must also take account of the perspectivist epistemology of the 'Prout Papers'—its characteristic mix of ancient and modern, regional and metropolitan, provincial and cosmopolitan—and with it Mahony's notion of the 'fallible reader', who in expressly identifying with or explicitly rejecting aspects of the Prout character risks becoming one more object of the author's satire.

Individual Doubt in George MacDonald's English Novels

Tim Baker

George MacDonald is primarily remembered for *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), the adult fantasy novels which bookend his writing career, and to a lesser extent for children's fantasies such as *The Princess and the Goblin* (1871). Socially realistic and avowedly theological novels make up the vast majority of his output, however. Although extremely popular at the time of writing, MacDonald's fourteen Scottish novels, and especially his thirteen English ones, are now almost universally dismissed as minor works, significant only as precursors of the sentimental, 'kailyard' fictions of J.M. Barrie and Samuel Crockett, or as examples of moralizing sentimentality in Victorian fiction.¹ Robert Lee Wolff, in his controversial but still influential 1961 survey of MacDonald's fiction, *The Golden Key*, frames his brief discussion of these works in terms of 'incessant drudgery' and a descent 'to banality', even while admitting that they hold some interest, while Francis Russell Hart argues that the realistic novels should be read in light of the more famous fantasies: 'MacDonald's "novels" are actually theological romances, where the fantastic and the normal, the ideal and the real, are separated only by semivisible and

¹ Stephen Prickett makes a compelling case for reading MacDonald's fantasies as his most significant work, while the rest of his novels are merely 'a mixture of acutely observed local colour and stylised plot dominated by heavy moralising'. Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge, 1976), 247. In this he follows G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and W.H. Auden, all of whom praised MacDonald extravagantly either as a 'mythopoeic' or religious writer and ignored his realistic work. A great many of MacDonald's critics begin their articles with citations from one of these authors, and, in Catherine Durie's words, 'the popularity of Lewis's writings his revitalized interest especially in America'. Catherine Durie, 'George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis' in William Raeper (ed.), *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh, 1990), 162. Indeed, America is the only country in which MacDonald's non-fantastical works are currently in print, albeit only in abridged editions. However, Prickett, Wolff and Raeper all count the number of MacDonald's realist works inaccurately and may regard these works as minor due to a lack of close engagement with the texts themselves. While this article will not make a claim for their literary merit, many of these works show an imagination and philosophical perspective equal to that of the fantasies.

shifting boundaries'.² While critics such as David S. Robb, William Raeper and Stephen Prickett have all contributed to a broader understanding of MacDonald's realistic works, especially in their concern with a rehabilitation of the Scottish novels, the true import of these novels has yet to be adequately recognised.³ In their focus on the relationship between the individual and the community, and between the individual and God, these works can be read not only as moral fables, but as significant works of theological philosophy in their own right.⁴ More particularly, MacDonald's consistent references to post-Enlightenment and Idealist thinkers reveals new dimensions of the legacy of German thought in nineteenth-century Scottish letters.

The influence of eighteenth-century German thought on MacDonald's novels has long been established. The adult fantasies are filled with explicit references to Novalis, most particularly, and owe much of their structure and imagery to E.T.A. Hoffman and Goethe. Many critics who have recognised these influences use them to support the notion that MacDonald's work is ultimately based not in social realism, but in fantastical imagination; Roderick McGillis writes, for instance, that: 'When MacDonald paraphrases Novalis ... he expresses not only utopian hope and desire, but also a belief in the efficacy of the fairy tale', while Robb argues that in both the novels and the fantasies, 'MacDonald's basic aim is the same: to follow the example of Novalis in romanticizing the commonplace'.⁵ Prickett, along the same

² Robert Lee Wolff, *The Golden Key: A Study in the Fiction of George MacDonald* (New Haven, 1961), 267; Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London, 1978), 101.

³ David S. Robb, for instance, argues that while 'implied theology' is certainly important in MacDonald, 'Surely the Scots utterance, and also what can only be called the intimacy of address to the deity, helped unlock MacDonald's imagination'. David S. Robb, 'George MacDonald's Scottish Novels' in Raeper (ed.), *The Gold Thread*, 15.

⁴ A dominant contemporary strand of criticism views MacDonald primarily as a Christian apologist, as can be found in Kerry Dearborn's recent monograph, where she argues that: 'Because MacDonald yearned above all to attend to God's Spirit, the truth he communicated expresses enduring wisdom ... [O]ne may experience in reading MacDonald an awakening from the commonplace to experience more fully the reality of God's ways'. Kerry Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald* (Aldershot, 2006), 66. Similarly, Miho Yamaguchi, in the only full-length critique of the Thomas Wingfold novels, claims that MacDonald's 'unique theology challenges us to seek God's love and truth with our own eyes'. Miho Yamaguchi, *George MacDonald's Challenging Theology of the Atonement, Suffering, and Death* (Tucson, AZ, 2007), 127. Such readings, while common in American religious publications, will not be addressed in this article, which will instead focus on the more rigorously philosophical aspects of MacDonald's theology.

⁵ Roderick McGillis, "'A Fairytale is Just a Fairytale": George MacDonald and the

lines, writes that 'German writers of the late eighteenth-century literary renaissance were ... little-known, and even exotic, figures to the more insular British readership of the 1850s', and in them MacDonald found a long-awaited 'romance' and 'mysticism'.⁶ This perspective has been challenged in recent articles by William N. Gray and Ruth Y. Jenkins, who use the work of Julia Kristeva to argue that 'MacDonald fails to follow through the dialectic of Novalis'.⁷ Yet the extent of the German influence in MacDonald's work is far greater than these critics have allowed, and while his relationship with Novalis is especially clear, it is by no means the only example of a German influence. Throughout his English novels MacDonald repeatedly cites German thinkers to support his own philosophical arguments. While his fantasies quote Novalis primarily to highlight the importance of dreams and the imagination, and of transcending the commonplace, in his other novels he cites German thinkers to more explicitly theological ends. This is especially apparent in the English novels. While his fantasies are largely concerned with the importance of dreams, and his Scottish novels can be productively read as defences of passing customs and language, MacDonald focuses in his English novels on the entwined concepts of individual scepticism and free will.

At its most fundamental level, MacDonald's thought locates individual freedom in the surrender of human will to God's will. As he writes in the early novel *Guild Court* (1868):

A man must do his duty, if he would be a free man, whether he likes it or not. But if he can regard it as the will of God ... surely even the irksomeness of his work will no longer be insuperable ... [I]n yielding

Queering of Fairy', *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, 17 (2003), 94; David S. Robb, 'Realism and Fantasy in the Fiction of George MacDonald' in Douglas Gifford (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature: Volume 3, Nineteenth Century* (Aberdeen, 1988), 279.

⁶ Stephen Prickett, 'Fictions and Metafictions: *Phantastes*, *Wilhelm Meister* and the Idea of the *Bildungsroman*' in Raeper (ed.), *The Gold Thread*, 122. Rosemary Ashton, on the contrary, writes that: 'by 1840 German literature was on the whole both acceptable to British taste and accessible to those who knew no German'. Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800–1860* (1980; London, 1994), 22. The difference may be explained in terms of genre: while German poetry and drama were certainly far more familiar in this period, philosophy and theology were still treated with suspicion, especially in small communities, as evidenced by MacDonald's dismissal from his post at Arundel.

⁷ William N. Gray, 'George MacDonald, Julia Kristeva, and the Black Sun', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 36 (1996), 891.

his own way and taking God's, lay the only *freedom* of which the human being, made in the image of God, is capable.⁸

Phrased in this way, MacDonald's philosophy appears neither wholly original nor especially Germanic, and any attempt to study his thinking in light of German thought must bear in mind Rosemary Ashton's criticism of Thomas Carlyle, in which she argues that while Carlyle believed he owed his notion of self denial to readings of Goethe, Fichte and Novalis, they were equally 'a product of his Calvinism'.⁹ In many instances, MacDonald cites German thinkers not in order to disseminate their thought, but to lend credence to his own philosophical system, itself often far removed from his nominal influences.

The development of MacDonald's interest in German philosophy, however, is especially noteworthy in contrast to the often hostile reception such philosophy was accorded at the time. His first extensive encounter with German texts can be dated to 1842, long after the initial enthusiasm expressed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Carlyle, but well in advance of James Hutchison Stirling's publication of *The Secret of Hegel* in 1865. In 1836, the Church of Scotland drew up a petition to prevent the teaching of German philosophy.¹⁰ So too Thomas Chalmers, who would embrace the Kantian tradition late in life, cautioned several years later:

For those who are not inclined to study German philosophy, I do not recommend that they should suspend it for their ordinary readings. Their very ignorance of the German idealism, the very confinement of their mental philosophy to the doctrines and metaphysics of the Scottish school, are guarantees in themselves against the deleterious influence of these outlandish speculations.¹¹

⁸ George MacDonald, *Guild Court* (1868; London, 1908), 54, 168. Italics in original.

⁹ Ashton, *The German Idea*, 89. George Davie's defence of James Ferrier similarly seeks to locate what has traditionally been read as a German influence as authentically Scottish: 'While the rational tendency in his critique of intuitionism was doubtless inspired by German philosophy, his general position was very much in the Scottish tradition'. George Elder Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1961), 280. Unlike Carlyle and Ferrier, however, MacDonald seems almost unaware of the Scottish tradition, and explicitly emphasises the importance of German thought repeatedly throughout his work.

¹⁰ Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, 35.

¹¹ Quoted in Alexander Campbell Fraser, *Biographia Philosophica: A Retrospect* (Edinburgh and London, 1904), 74.

While scholars such as Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison would later defend Fichte, particularly, late in the nineteenth century, there was a sharp division between Scottish Common Sense philosophy and German influences until 1880.¹² In many respects, the link between consciousness of the self and consciousness of God established in MacDonald only reaches its culmination in the work of Edward Caird in the early 1890s.¹³ MacDonald's unique combination of German philosophy with both dissenting and Anglican religious traditions in the 1860s and 1870s represents a staunchly individualistic theological perspective. MacDonald's use of German philosophy can thus be seen both as a bridge between Carlyle and later scholars and as an often contrary reading of post-Kantian thought and early Romantic thought.

Although MacDonald never mentions contemporary developments in the reception of German philosophy, it is possible to separate his career into two distinct stages that in many ways mirror a more general engagement with eighteenth-century German thought. Although MacDonald's first English trilogy, which is made up of *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (1867), *The Seaboard Parish* (1868) and *The Vicar's Daughter* (1871), is often read as autobiographical, concerning MacDonald's time at Arundel—the church from which he was removed on grounds of Germanism in 1852—he presents a moral vision in these novels that is relatively close to contemporary dissenting theologies.¹⁴ As the title of the first volume suggests, the novels follow in the tradition of John Galt's *Annals of the Parish* (1821) in their relatively un-dramatic presentation of a small-town vicar and his family, albeit with a shift from history to religion as a central theme. Throughout this trilogy, MacDonald employs a naïve Romanticism and straightforward religious teachings, and primarily presents the individual in relation to nature and art. In his second English trilogy—*Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (1876), *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1878) and *There and Back* (1891)—however, MacDonald develops a far more complicated and challenging view of human freedom and will, one that may cite German

¹² David Fergusson, *Scottish Philosophical Theology 1700–2000* (Exeter, 2007), 18, 156; Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, 303.

¹³ Caird himself links Fichte and Carlyle, arguing that for both 'Religion ceases to be the worship of God who is revealed in outward nature . . . and becomes a reverence for a divine power that speaks only, or mainly, in the soul of the individual'. Edward Caird, *The Evolution of Religion*, Vol. 1 (Glasgow, 1893), 352. This argument can be seen as one of the cornerstones of MacDonald's late theology, as discussed at length below.

¹⁴ Greville MacDonald ascribes his father's removal from the ministry to a charge 'originated in his *Songs of Novalis*: he was tainted with German Theology' but does not clarify further. Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London, 1924), 179.

thought less often, but that can be seen to be far more profoundly influenced by post-Enlightenment thinking. In these novels, MacDonald departs from mainstream Protestant theology to present individual reason as the only possible path to God.¹⁵ MacDonald's English novels can thus be used to illustrate the range of Scottish—and more generally, British—responses to eighteenth-century German thought.

I: Novalis and Theology

The majority of critics who have considered MacDonald's English novels have done so primarily in relation to their theological, rather than narrative or stylistic, merit. Raeper's definitive biography, for instance, claims that in *The Seaboard Parish*, as in many other novels, what MacDonald has done 'is to press a series of sermons into a three-volume novel and use them, as he used all his novels, to address the theological and social questions of the day'.¹⁶ MacDonald himself writes at the start of *The Seaboard Parish* that 'I have been so accustomed to preach all my life, that whatever I say or write will more or less take the shape of a sermon'.¹⁷ For MacDonald, external experience is only of interest insofar as it sheds light on inner experience, in particular the path of the individual to God. He writes at the close of *Annals*, for instance, that: 'no man's life is fit for representation as a work of art save in proportion as there has been a significant relation between his outer and inner life, a visible outcome of some sort of harmony between them'.¹⁸ Almost all of his early novels end with a summary in which the moral lessons imparted are clarified and repeated: these are not works written for the escapist pleasure of their audience, but for their moral improvement. Yet it is worth noting that, especially in the early novels, MacDonald's theological constructs are as likely to appear in discussions of literature as in formal sermons. MacDonald's novels are filled with literary references: George Herbert and John Donne

¹⁵ Charles Taylor portrays such viewpoints as 'the great Victorian drama of unbelief', with twin ideals of 'self-responsible rational freedom' and 'a kind of heroism of unbelief'. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge MA, 1989), 404. MacDonald's originality in these late works lies in his integration of these ideas with his earlier Romantic concerns, and in the explicit grounding of his writing in German thought.

¹⁶ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Iring, 1987), 196.

¹⁷ George MacDonald, *The Seaboard Parish* (1868; London, [1884]), 1.

¹⁸ George MacDonald, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (1867; 6th ed. London, 1887), 569.

are constant reference points, while Wordsworth and Coleridge figure heavily in the early novels, as does Tennyson in the late ones. Most importantly, however, MacDonald uses his fiction to advertise the merits of German poets and philosophers, including Heine, Goethe, Schiller, Jean Paul and especially Novalis.

MacDonald was well-known to his contemporaries as a German scholar, and while the particulars of his reading are unknown (Raeper cites Swedenborg, Boehme, Schelling, Fichte, Kant, Schleiermacher and the Schlegels among MacDonald's influences), it is widely agreed that he was as well-read in German literature and philosophy as any of his more-renowned peers.¹⁹ In the early novels the reading of German poets and the singing of German songs—*Adela Cathcart* (1863) devotes an entire chapter to the singing of a song by Heine—are presented as paths to individual religious consciousness through an appreciation of literary form. A lengthy passage in *Seaboard* focuses on the fifth of Novalis' *Spiritual Songs* (1802), which the narrator's daughter finds has 'a lovely feeling [that belongs] only to the New Testament and [has] nothing to do with this world round about us'.²⁰ The New Testament and Novalis are held as twin paragons of a philosophy that, as Frederick C. Beiser writes, allows the individual to 'see things anew, as they are in themselves and for their own sakes, apart from their utility and common meaning'.²¹ The reading of poetry—especially German but also, in a key passage in *Annals*, that of Wordsworth—allows the individual to develop his powers of contemplation, which in turn leads to salvation. As Prickett notes, MacDonald's idea that poetry is a '*theological* instrument' was 'not uncommon among nineteenth-century churchmen', yet the weight MacDonald gives it, as well as the particulars of his examples, is somewhat unusual.²²

Although Novalis is cited in diverse contemporary novels such as Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), it is likely that MacDonald's familiarity with his works comes not from the 1860 article by J.M. Ludlow in *Macmillan's Magazine* which re-introduced his work to the British public, but from both first-hand reading of the German texts and more especially from his friendship with, and the reading of, Carlyle and F.D. Maurice.²³ Maurice contributed an article to the

¹⁹ Raeper, *George MacDonald* 49, 239.

²⁰ MacDonald, *The Seaboard Parish*, 461.

²¹ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge, 1999), 101.

²² Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion*, 86–7.

²³ W.E. Yuill, "'Character is Fate": A Note on Thomas Hardy, George Eliot and Novalis',

Athenaeum in 1829 that cited Goethe, Fichte, Novalis and Schlegel.²⁴ Yet the most influential early British criticism of Novalis can be found in Carlyle's 1829 article for the *Foreign Review*, with which MacDonald was undoubtedly familiar.²⁵ Carlyle devotes the bulk of his appraisal to lengthy translations, on the grounds that the reader will find in them: 'the strangest inquiries, new truths, or new possibilities of truth, a whole unexpected world of thought, where, whether for belief or denial, the deepest questions await us'.²⁶ Carlyle introduces Novalis as both a philosopher deeply indebted to Herder and Fichte—a preacher of 'the Majesty of Reason'—and as a 'Mystic'; he is both poet and thinker, and for Carlyle, the value of his thought is that it cannot be easily understood or systematised, but only appreciated for his beauty.²⁷ Yet although Carlyle is often at pains to connect Novalis with other post-Kantian thinkers, MacDonald's early use of Novalis's work is almost purely in the realm of aesthetic and religious thought.

Novalis is particularly used in MacDonald's work to illustrate the use of poetry to transcend the commonplace. In a contemporary essay on 'Forms of Literature', MacDonald juxtaposes the notion that 'what man is to this planet, what the eye is to man himself, Poetry is to Literature' with the image of meeting Novalis among the saints in heaven: 'Shall I not one day, "somewhere, somehow", clasp the large hand of Novalis, and, gazing on his face, compare his features with those of Saint John?'²⁸ Novalis is thus used both as an exemplar of Romanticism as a predominantly literary trope and, more unusually, as a religious figure in whose writings can be seen a path to the divine. As MacDonald makes clear, 'poetry', as symbolised by Novalis, is the meeting of the commonplace and the romantic.²⁹ He writes in *Annals*

Modern Language Review, 57 (1962), 402.

²⁴ Ashton, *The German Idea*, 107.

²⁵ Although MacDonald almost always cites Novalis in German, especially in the epigraphs in *Phantastes*, *Lilith* and *David Elginbrod*, almost every citation can also be found in the Carlyle article, including the line of which MacDonald was most fond—'Our life is no dream, but it may and will perhaps become one'—which MacDonald was later to quote back to Carlyle in a letter of 1877.

²⁶ Thomas Carlyle, 'Novalis' in idem, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Collected and Republished*, Vol. 1 (1869; London, 1887), 424.

²⁷ Ibid., 443. Indeed, for Carlyle the work of Novalis, Fichte and Kant forms a continuum: the former's work is 'in its essential lineaments synonymous with what little we understand of Fichte's, and might indeed, safely enough for our present purposes, be classed under the head of Kantism, or German metaphysics generally'. Ibid., 439.

²⁸ George MacDonald, *Orts* (London, 1882), 230.

²⁹ Dearborn acknowledges a Romantic influence in MacDonald's 'correlation of theology with poetry', but, despite a lengthy reading of Novalis, ultimately sees this relation

that 'The poetic region is the true one, and just, *therefore*, the incredible one to the lower order of mind; for although every mind is capable of the truth, or rather capable of becoming capable of the truth, there may lie ages between its capacity and the truth'.³⁰ This claim suggests Novalis' own definition of the Romantic, which is an operation of 'endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite'.³¹ As Terry Pinkard has argued, Novalis 'embodied the twin commitments of early Romantic theory'—that we must be responsive to the world, and that our responses must be creative—in a way recognised and adopted by MacDonald.³²

In MacDonald's explicitly Christian reading of Novalis, a response to the world also becomes a response to God: explaining the link between the natural and spiritual worlds, he writes in *Annals*: 'I always found the open air the most genial influence upon me for the production of religious feeling and thought'.³³ Nature is used both as an exemplar of things as they are—the world that God has made—and things as they should be—the world as God wills it. In *Seaboard*, for instance, he writes of nature's power both to restore human faith in the goodness of the world, and to open the human mind to greater glories: 'Often when life looked dreary about me, from some real or fancied injustice or indignity, has a thought of truth been flashed into my mind from a flower, a shape of frost, or even a lingering shadow—not to mention such glories as angel-winged clouds, rainbows, stars and sunrises'.³⁴ Like poetry, the study of nature awakens an individual consciousness. MacDonald here again is following Novalis, who writes in *The Novices of Sais* that: 'The ways of contemplating nature are innumerable; at one extreme the sentiment of nature becomes a jocose fancy, a banquet, while at the other it develops into the most devout religion, giving to a whole life direction, principle, meaning'.³⁵ This dual account of nature appears throughout MacDonald's first trilogy: passages of heightened pathetic fallacy and extreme sentimental-

as stemming from MacDonald's unclearly defined 'Celtic background'. Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination*, 27.

³⁰ MacDonald, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, 92. Italics in original

³¹ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, Margaret Mahony Stolkar (trans. and ed.) (Albany, 1997), 60.

³² Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge, 2002), 148.

³³ MacDonald, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, 246.

³⁴ MacDonald, *The Seaboard Parish*, 437.

³⁵ Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, Ralph Manheim (trans.) (Brooklyn, 2005), 31.

ism are juxtaposed with scenes in which the individual experience of nature is posited as leading to the individual experience of God. As in Novalis, God 'is the goal of nature'.³⁶

In his accounts of both nature and art, MacDonald thus follows a traditional and uncomplicated reading of Novalis; at this stage in his career, he does not take into account the issues of subjectivity and mediation which modern critics such as Andrew Bowie view as central to Novalis' philosophical project.³⁷ MacDonald's predominantly Romantic notion of individuality is located in the two-fold response to nature and the world and the development of individual creativity. It is only in this latter context—primarily with regard to literature, although on occasion he shifts his focus to painting—that he begins to introduce the theme of individuality that becomes central to his later work. MacDonald's early stance on individuality can be seen both in relation to Ruskin, whose influence is felt throughout *The Seaboard Parish*, and Novalis, particularly in *Adela Cathcart*. In the former, MacDonald writes that the individual 'is a centre of crystallization' who, as an artist, portrays the world not as it is, but 'what nature has shown to him, determined by his nature and choice. With it is mingled therefore so much of his own individuality... that you have not only a representation of an aspect of nature, as far as that may be with limited powers and materials, but a revelation of the man's own mind and nature.'³⁸ This revelation of individual perception is not without risks, for individual representative art can be misleading, but it is important because only once the individual consciousness has been established can God be approached. This is the heart of MacDonald's early theology: art and nature, in disparate ways, awaken the individual power of contemplation. Once awake, that power can begin to contemplate the divine, through the intermediation of Jesus. As he writes in *Cathcart*, introducing a lengthy passage from Novalis: 'Before it [freedom in the knowledge of God] comes true for the race, it must be done in the individual. If it be true for the race, it can only be through its being attainable by the individual. There must be something in the story belonging to the individual. I will look at the individual Christ, and see how he arose.'³⁹

MacDonald here closely follows one of Novalis' notes on Fichte, where he writes: 'If a thing is determined in the whole, then it is also determined in the

³⁶ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 123.

³⁷ Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (2nd ed. Manchester, 2003).

³⁸ MacDonald, *The Seaboard Parish*, 197.

³⁹ George MacDonald, *Adela Cathcart* (1863; London, [1882?]), 132.

individual'.⁴⁰ His shift from a focus on the individual artist to the individual Christ has no explicit antecedent in Novalis, but fits generally with the work of other key figures in early Romanticism, most particularly Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder. Isaiah Berlin, for instance, summarises both thinkers in relation to the role of the individual artist: 'For them a work of art is the expression of somebody, it is always a voice speaking. A work of art is the voice of one man addressing other men.'⁴¹ Hamann and Herder both celebrate the multiplicity of the individual in relation to a whole, that is, God. For Herder, the more 'life and reality' a being has in relation to the whole, the more it is an individual or a self.⁴² For Hamann, not dissimilarly, the response of the individual to a given essence, be it God or nature, comes in wholeness and multiplicity.⁴³ The individual is thus located in terms of responsiveness to the world, and more particularly for MacDonald in the necessity of a response to God, known through Christ, and in the appearance of a creative output. It would be an overstatement to argue that MacDonald consciously based his theological and aesthetic doctrines around a detailed understanding of writers such as Hamann and Herder, although he may have been familiar with some of their writings. His account of the individual human's relation to Christ, which he attributes to Novalis, closely resembles his friend Maurice's account of Herder, in which 'a belief in a Person, attachment to a Person, more than to a notion, either theological or ethical, would seem to have been in accordance with the tone of his mind and of his teaching'.⁴⁴ Yet in these works from the first decade of his career, MacDonald is beginning to develop a theory of the individual's relation to God and to art that takes many of the precepts of German Romanticism into account.

⁴⁰ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, Jane Kneller (ed.) (Cambridge, 2003), 161. Novalis elsewhere terms Jesus 'pure personality' but never approaches the central Christian impulse found in Hamann and Herder. *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴¹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, Henry Hardy (ed.) (London, 2000), 59.

⁴² Johann Gottfried Herder, *God: Some Conversations* Frederick H. Burkhardt (ed. and trans) (New York, 1949), 213.

⁴³ James C. O'Flaherty, *Hamann's Socratic Memorabilia: A Translation and Commentary* (Baltimore, 1967), 47; Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 6.

⁴⁴ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Modern Philosophy; or, a Treatise of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy from the Fourteenth Century to the French Revolution, with a Glimpse into the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1862), 643. The relationship between Maurice and MacDonald is well documented. Of greatest interest to this paper, however, is Greville MacDonald's assertion that while there was not 'any sort of difference between' the two, 'Where Professor Maurice was concerned primarily with the Church's relation to God, my father's interest was with individuals'. MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 400–1. The significance of this interest will be developed below.

The most comprehensive account of MacDonald's early views comes in *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1872), labelled as autobiographical but largely believed to be inspired by Ruskin's life. *Cumbermede* is arguably the most linear and eventful of MacDonald's English novels, and while it includes fewer explicit discussions of literary value than the preceding trilogy, it is at times strongly reminiscent of varied sources including Augustine's *Confessions*, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1836) and Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861). The novel can be read as the story of Cumbermede's gradual development into a Romantic sensibility and as a primer to many of MacDonald's prevailing themes. Early in the novel Cumbermede speaks of the immediate experience of nature that he will later find in the English Romantics:

The prophets of the new blessing, Wordsworth and Coleridge, I knew nothing of. Keats was only beginning to write ... Yet I was under the same spell as they all. Nature was a power upon me. I was filled with the vague recognition of a present soul in Nature—with a sense of the humanity everywhere diffused through her and operating on ours.⁴⁵

Art here is thus a secondary experience that reflects an originary experience of nature. Cumbermede's adolescent thoughts on nature are almost immediately followed by a passage in which, alone on a German hillside, he undergoes an experience of isolation and doubt which leads to religious awakening: 'It was as if something divine within me awoke to outface the desolation. I felt that it was time to act, and that I could act.'⁴⁶ From this point forth, Cumbermede directly relates many of MacDonald's preoccupations: not only does he reference Jean Paul and Heine at length, but he discusses the importance of dreams, as in Novalis, the belief in the salvation of animals (the doctrine which may have resulted in MacDonald's removal from the church and that appears at ever-increasing length in his novels), and even the myth of Lilith, which is not provided in the novel of that name. Midway through the novel Cumbermede's friend Charley provides one of MacDonald's clearest explications of the relation between religion, nature and art:

'you lead yourself inevitably to a God manifest in nature—not as a powerful being—that is a theme absolutely without interest to me—but

⁴⁵ George MacDonald, *Wilfrid Cumbermede: An Autobiographical Story* (1872; 4th ed. London, 1886), 131–2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

as possessed in himself of the original pre-existent beauty, the counterpart of which in us we call art, and who has fashioned us so that we must fall down and worship the image of himself which he has set up.⁴⁷

MacDonald's theology here owes much to both Novalis and Schleiermacher, who, as Theodore Beiser argues, provided the stimulus for the 'romantic religious revival'.⁴⁸ For Schleiermacher, as will be discussed at greater length below, religious consciousness arises from the consciousness of the universe, not from the following of religious traditions.⁴⁹ Here, in focusing on the originary experience of nature and, unusually, completely eliding any mention of churches or sermons, MacDonald both follows certain early Romantics and begins to develop the antipathy towards all orthodoxies and dogmas which will become a dominant theme in his later work. As MacDonald will argue at much greater length in the Thomas Wingfold novels, 'religious theories'—that is, the conventional practice of religion—work in opposition to individual religious experience, which is obtained in nature and in art.⁵⁰

Cumbermede thus suggests many of the theological precepts which MacDonald will develop four years later, but places them in the context of Romantic perspectives on art and nature. It is also MacDonald's subtlest novel, at least in respect of his appropriation of German Romanticism, as can be seen in the final chapter. Even as he repeatedly writes of the importance of Novalis in his conception of literature, MacDonald rarely adopts any of the formal elements that make the work of the early Romantics so distinctive. Here, however, in the final chapter, he displays a tendency to fragmentation similar to that found in the works of many Jena school authors, a fragmentation that, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue, 'finally dislocates and 'unworks' texts ... that should have been sheltered from such an accident by their genre'.⁵¹ While for its first 500 pages *Cumbermede* is the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 298.

⁴⁸ Beiser, *Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, xix. MacDonald quotes Schleiermacher as early as 1863, in *David Elginbrod* (1863; London, [1871]).

⁴⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, Richard Crouter (trans and ed.) (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1996), 106.

⁵⁰ MacDonald, *Wilfrid Cumbermede*, 480.

⁵¹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (trans) (Albany, 1988), 59. The importance of the fragment in Novalis is also seen by Carlyle, who notes his 'detached expositions and combinations, deep, brief glimpses'. Carlyle, 'Novalis', 443.

most traditionally plot-driven of MacDonald's novels, containing none of the authorial interventions or sermonizing of his other work, it reaches its conclusion just short of the expected climactic resolution. Instead, the final chapter consists of inconclusive fragments, expressing both Cumbermede's doubts and the impossibility of the novel form to represent adequately a life still in progress. The final fragment points to the expected conclusion—one of marriage and forgiveness—but at the last moment turns, if not to God as such, to an expression of will:

She has sent for me. I go to her. I will not think beforehand what I shall say.

Something within tells me that a word from her would explain all that sometimes even now seems so inexplicable as hers. Will she speak that word? Shall I pray her for that word? I know nothing. The pure Will be done!⁵²

This turn from individual doubt to 'pure Will' will itself become the focal point of MacDonald's later work. Presented here, however, without authorial interpretation, it can be seen only as a fragment, and perhaps the truest example of the influence of Novalis on MacDonald's work.

II: Thomas Wingfold and Fichte

Thomas Wingfold, Curate initially appears to repeat the concerns of the earlier English novels. The opening chapters invoke Heine and Wordsworth in order to present a Romantic view of nature as the unrecognised truth of daily life. Yet as the plot develops, these Romantic notions are discarded in favour of a more complex theology of individuality. The central narrative concerns the struggle of a young curate to leave behind the preaching of written sermons and to speak the truth from the pulpit, even when the truth is that he has lost his faith and can only approach God through doubt. Wingfold's story of gradual redemption is less dramatic, and has received less critical attention, than that of Leopold Lingard, whose murder of a young woman while under the influence of opium is perhaps the most shocking and amoral moment in MacDonald's fiction. Concentrating on this latter story, Wolff argues that in

⁵² MacDonald, *Wilfrid Cumbermede*, 520.

Thomas Wingfold MacDonald was 'preaching evil... Against the background of violence and illegality, which MacDonald almost excuses, the sentimental vaporings of the curate and his deformed advisers about the study of Christ's life as an incentive to faith seem particularly offensive'.⁵³ MacDonald himself suggests the ease with which this interpretation can be reached, as Mrs Ramshorn summarises Wingfold's sermons as 'teaching people, in fact, that the best thing they could do was to commit some terrible crime, in order thereby to attain a better innocence than without it could ever be theirs'.⁵⁴ MacDonald here deviates sharply from what J. Hillis Miller calls the moralistic realism of Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope, wherein realistic depictions of life will show the consequences of good and bad acts, and inspire the reader to choose the good.⁵⁵ To concentrate on the amorality of Leopold's actions and the relative ease with which he is forgiven by his family and friends is to ignore MacDonald's central argument, however, in which murder and unthinking support of church doctrines are both presented as sinful, not in relation to conventional proscribed morality, but because they turn the individual away from God. It is only in an affirmation of self as self, whether achieved through repentance or through the establishment of sceptical doubt, that any salvation can be achieved. As MacDonald wrote in a letter of 1866: 'doubt is the hammer that breaks the windows clouded with human fancies, and lets in the pure light'.⁵⁶

This centrality of the relationship between the individual and God is initially presented by Polwarth, a deformed dwarf—indeed, he is explicitly presented as a goblin in *Paul Faber*.⁵⁷ This is done in terms almost identical to those in the *Princess* books—and later adopted by Wingfold. For Polwarth, like Cumbermede, isolation gives rise to individualisation: 'The isolation that belonged to my condition wrought indeed to the intensifying of my individuality... I learned to pray the sooner for the loneliness, and the heartier from the solitude which was as a chamber with closed door.'⁵⁸ This isolated state gives rise to a form of idealism, in which:

Either the whole frame of existence... is a wretched, miserable
unfitness, a chaos with dreams of a world, a chaos in which the higher is

⁵³ Wolff, *The Golden Key*, 298–9.

⁵⁴ George MacDonald, *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (1876; 4th ed., London, 1887), 346.

⁵⁵ J. Hillis Miller, *Victorian Subjects* (Durham, 1991), 32.

⁵⁶ MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 374.

⁵⁷ George MacDonald, *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1878; 6th ed., London, [1890?]), 387–8.

⁵⁸ MacDonald, *Thomas Wingfold* 83.

for ever subject to the lower, or it is an embodied idea growing towards perfection in him who is the one perfect creative Idea, the Father of lights who suffers himself that he may bring his many sons into the glory which is his own glory.⁵⁹

This vision of the world as a potentially static chaos is almost completely opposed to the way in which Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel present chaos as a creative force. Indeed, if one follows the critical consensus that MacDonald uses Novalis as a buttress for his own fairy-tale ideology, this passage suggests a repudiation of his earlier thought. For Novalis, the relationship between chaos and accomplished creation is the same as that between the fairy tale and ‘the world of truth (history)’—both opposed and similar.⁶⁰ In presenting that relationship not as creative, but as ultimately destructive, MacDonald appears to be turning away from Novalis. In *Thomas Wingfold* Novalis is mentioned only once, in the context of a rather indeterminate discussion of the possibility of heaven. The institution of individual doubt as a predominant theme not only moves MacDonald away from conventional religious perspectives, but also from his earlier focus on Romantic notions of art and the imagination.

MacDonald nevertheless continues to present his theological argument in the context of a nominal idealism, as Wingfold reflects that ‘the vision of the ideal woke the ideal in yourself’.⁶¹ The primary concern in his theology, however, is less with the ideal than with the self that is open to it. Wingfold finds faith enough to preach, although he repeatedly insists that he has no special claim to knowledge, while Helen (his love and Leopold’s sister) resigns herself not to any certain faith, but to ‘give her life’ in the search for a God who may or may not exist.⁶² Wingfold’s final position is surprisingly similar to Hume’s Philo in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), who argues that: ‘To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian’.⁶³ Scepticism and doubt are important for MacDonald precisely because they are facets of the individual experience. The triumph of individual reason over received religion returns MacDonald to a modified Enlightenment perspective, in which individual consciousness is perceived as the supreme good. Polwarth,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁰ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 126.

⁶¹ MacDonald, *Thomas Wingfold*, 197.

⁶² Ibid., 504.

⁶³ David Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, J.C.A. Gaskin (ed.) (Oxford, 1998), 130.

who is perhaps the closest the novel comes to presenting a conventionally devout Christian, believes it is an 'awful thing' that 'this feeble individuality of ours, the offspring of God's individuality, should have some power, and even more will than power, to close its door against him, and keep house without him!'⁶⁴ And yet, in *Paul Faber*—the novel which in many ways resolves the crises of *Wingfold*—individual will is itself presented as the path to God: 'the will of the individual sides divinely with his divine impulse, and his heart is unified in good. When the will of the man sides perfectly with the holy impulses in him, then all is well; for then his mind is one with the mind of his maker; God and man are one.'⁶⁵ Individual will is thus presented neither as a perfect and necessary path to God, nor as an obstruction, but as instead the necessary precondition to religious thought, or indeed any thought at all. It is only through doubt, whether it is originated in purely philosophical terms, as with *Wingfold*, or from physical experience, as for Leopold and to a certain extent Polwarth, that any notion of the individual can be reached, and it is only through consciousness of the self as an individual will that the self can come to God.

MacDonald presents a theology and moral philosophy in *Thomas Wingfold* that, in its focus on individual conscience, appears little-related to either prevailing religious customs or his own early Romanticism. However, his ideas can be better appreciated in the context not only of early Romanticism, but also of late-Enlightenment thought. In recent years, Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, along with Judith Butler, have argued that the Kantian paradox is the basis of post-Kantian idealism.⁶⁶ This paradox, briefly outlined, stipulates that if we are to impose a principle on ourselves, we must have a reason to do so. For that principle to be binding, it must be self-imposed, yet if that principle arises from outside ourselves, it cannot be said to be self-imposed. This paradox, as will be shown below, lies at the heart of MacDonald's late writings, but its influence on Idealist thought can be most clearly seen in the work of Fichte. For Fichte, the solution to the Kantian paradox is to recognise that Kant's dichotomy between subject and object is itself subjectively established. Our thoughts about reality and the structure of reality are, through intellectual intuition, the same. Consciousness, as Fichte introduces his *System of Ethics* (1798), 'rests on the various aspects of this separation of what is subjective

⁶⁴ MacDonald, *Thomas Wingfold*, 206.

⁶⁵ MacDonald, *Paul Faber*, 422.

⁶⁶ Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860*, 58–60.

from what is objective, and, in turn, on the unification of the two'.⁶⁷ All knowledge, then, is knowledge of the self. The world cannot then be 'an alien being', but is something that, because it is formed from the individual's own thought, can finally be known.⁶⁸ Fichte thus, as Bowie argues, radicalises the Kantian subjective turn, both by making the world into a product of the 'I' and by exploring the structures of self-consciousness itself.⁶⁹ The 'I' is not an object, but a normative status that can only be achieved through a process of self-recognition; it is only once the 'I' can be seen, through an act of will, as the foundation of reason, that the world can be known. Consciousness of self-activity is the only ground of freedom and will.

From this insight, Fichte develops not only a system of science and knowledge, but also of faith and morality. The realisation of being, through the will, is for Fichte a matter of faith. 'Our philosophy', he writes, 'begins with an item of faith', where faith is: 'a decision of the will to recognize the validity of knowledge'.⁷⁰ Only through faith can anything be known as real. This, in turn, leads to the absolute, for only through the combination of the two parts of the self, consciousness and 'free obedience', can the self be 'connected with the One *which is there*, and take part in its being'.⁷¹ For Fichte, the will is ultimately the will to be one with God, although he touches upon this only briefly, and in difficult terms 'The complete annihilation of the individual and the fusion of the latter into the absolutely pure form of reason or into God is indeed the ultimate goal of finite reason; but this is not possible in any time'.⁷² For both Novalis and Fichte, God is the ultimate goal of freedom and will, but as this goal is impossible within the context of linear time and human life, they frequently only allude to the more explicitly theological elements in their ethical systems.

Instead, Fichte locates the immediate focus on individual will not in unification with the absolute, but in relation to moral duty. This link is made explicit in Novalis' *Fichte Studies*, where he writes: 'Morality must be the core of our existence, if it is to be for us what it wants to be. Its end, its origin, must be the *ideal of being*. An unending *realization of being*

⁶⁷ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The System of Ethics*, Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöllner (trans and eds) (Cambridge, 2005), 7.

⁶⁸ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, Peter Preuss (trans) (Indianapolis, 1987), 75.

⁶⁹ Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 70.

⁷⁰ Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 31; Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 71.

⁷¹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 107. Italics in original.

⁷² Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 143.

would be the vocation of the I.⁷³ Morality consists in the consciousness of determinate duty, a consciousness that is not immediate, but 'is found through an act of thinking'.⁷⁴ Once this duty has been found, however, it becomes an immediate consciousness, through the recognition that this determinate something is a duty.⁷⁵ In order to be human, an individual needs to achieve consciousness of himself, a consciousness that lies in the recognition of freedom. Morality, and the path to God, lies in recognizing the consciousness and freedom of all other individuals. 'Everyone becomes God', Fichte writes:

so long as one preserves the freedom of all individuals. It is precisely by means of this disappearance and annihilation of one's entire individuality that everyone becomes a pure presentation of the moral law in the world of sense and thus becomes a 'pure I,' in the proper sense of the term; and this occurs by means of free choice and self-determination.⁷⁶

Or, as Novalis states more abruptly: 'God is I'.⁷⁷ The individual must then first recognise himself as an individual, a fundamentally rational stance, and then recognise others as individuals, a fundamentally moral one. Fichte's morality is, in many ways, closely related to Kant's categorical imperative, and the community of reason. Yet it is his depiction of reason and morality as finally leading to God that MacDonald draws upon.

In a fragmentary passage at the end of *Paul Faber*, in the dream-vision of a dying man, MacDonald presents a Fichtean view of the final relationship between the self and God:

I had but one feeling—and that feeling was love—the outgoing of a longing heart towards—I could not tell what;—towards—I cannot describe the feeling—towards the only existence there was, and that was everything;—towards pure being, not as an abstraction, but as the

⁷³ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, 165. Italics in original.

⁷⁴ Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 164.

⁷⁵ Fichte here elaborates Kant's correlation between conscience and faith, where 'Conscience is a consciousness which is of itself a duty'. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (eds) (Cambridge, 1998), 178.

⁷⁶ Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 245.

⁷⁷ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, 38.

one actual fact, whence the world, men, and me—a something I knew only by being myself an existence. It was more me than myself; my very existence was the consciousness of this absolute existence in and through and around me: it made my heart burn, and the burning of my heart was my life—and the burning was the presence of the Absolute.⁷⁸

As in Fichte's *System of Ethics*, this subsumption into the Absolute is only made possible by an earlier realisation of individual consciousness. Paul Faber himself is an unusual figure in MacDonald's fiction, not least because his atheism is not only presented sympathetically but often defended. Wingfold respects Faber both for his 'horror of all kinds of intellectual deception or mistake'—which precludes a belief in God—and for Faber's own respect of the individuality of others.⁷⁹ The fulfilment of individual duty is not, for MacDonald, equal to faith in God, but it is both necessary and commendable: 'The doing of things from duty is but a stage on the road to the kingdom of truth and love. Not the less must the stage be journeyed.'⁸⁰ Duty is 'the only path to freedom'.⁸¹ Faber's consciousness of duty is arrived at by an act of will; as in Fichte's system, he comes first to consciousness of himself as a reasoning individual, and then proceeds to live out of duty. This is the path taken, albeit in a very different form, by Leopold in *Thomas Wingfold*, who, seized with guilt after his crimes, is brought to the realization of his own freedom. Yet what makes *Faber* remarkable among MacDonald's works is that Faber does not, at the end, achieve any particular religious awakening. He remains an admirable atheist.

Throughout the volume, Wingfold and Faber, who represent what might be called the poles of religion and science, are united in their defence of individual morality against false religion. It is from the curate, not the surgeon, that the strongest argument against religion comes: "I suspect that worse dishonesty, and greater injustice, are to be found among the champions, lay and cleric, of religious opinion, than in any other class."⁸² Lest the reader think MacDonald is arguing in favour of one particular religious view, almost all forms of Christian belief come under attack: if John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards receive the sharpest scorn, the Church of England and dissenters

⁷⁸ MacDonald, *Paul Faber*, 456–7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 146.

are also singled out.⁸³ Instead, scientific rationality is indicated as one of the few ways to Christ left available, for 'Science teaches that a man must not say he knows what he does not know'.⁸⁴ The establishment of scepticism and reason as the foundations of belief underlies the entire novel. Belief in Christ is, while still central to MacDonald's theology, here placed as secondary in respect to the self-identification and development of individual consciousness. In an eloquent first-person interjection at the close of the novel, MacDonald suggests without this *a priori* development of rationality, none of his theological ideas can be understood at all:

But hear me this once more: the God, the Jesus, in whom I believe, are not the God, the Jesus, in whom you fancy I believe: you know them not; your idea of them is not mine ... [My words] would bring you life, but the death in him that knoweth and doeth not is strong, in your air they drop and die, winged things no more.⁸⁵

Those readers who read MacDonald's novels expecting a theology which accords with their own notion of Christianity, he warns, will be disappointed: even if the terms are the same, the route to reach them is entirely different, and it is the route that matters. Without consciousness of individual duty, without recognition of individual freedom and will, all knowledge of God is wasted. *Paul Faber* is, in theological terms, MacDonald's angriest and most violent book, a novel in which only Wingfold, the religious sceptic, and Faber, the scientific sceptic, are portrayed with any sympathy. This violence has been picked up on by many critics, and used as an example of MacDonald's sadomasochism. Wolff, who notes that MacDonald regarded *Paul Faber* 'as his best book, a judgment which nobody else is likely to share', focuses only on the novel's sexual politics, both approving of MacDonald's championing of women's rights and condemning what he sees as an obsession with sexual violence.⁸⁶ Robert Crawford finds that 'emblems of incest, bestiality and

⁸³ MacDonald's scorn for the Church of England may seem surprising, given his conversion around 1865 as part of joining Maurice's church. As he makes clear in an undated letter to his father, however: 'I have no love for *any* sect of Christians as such'. MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 197.

⁸⁴ MacDonald, *Paul Faber*, 240.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 514.

⁸⁶ Wolff, *The Golden Key*, 302. Wolff is here paraphrasing Greville MacDonald, who writes: 'my father once told me he thought [*Paul Faber*] the best of all his novels, although emphatically it is not so'. MacDonald, *George MacDonald and his Wife*, 353.

voyeurism contribute to an often claustrophobically dark eroticism that sits very uneasily with the didactic tone'.⁸⁷ Yet to focus on these aspects of the novel is to entirely obscure MacDonald's central argument, which is a rejection of both contemporary and Romantic notions of both selfhood and religion in favour of a return to post-Kantian idealism.

Although mention of specific German thinkers is rare in *Paul Faber*, and completely absent in the third book in the trilogy, *There and Back*, the former volume nevertheless carries a summary of 'Germanism' which in part adequately represents much of MacDonald's late theology:

The love of the past, the desire of the future, and the enjoyment of the present, make an eternity, in which time is absorbed, its lapse lapses, and man partakes of the immortality of his Maker. In each present personal being, we have the whole past of our generation enclosed, to be re-developed with endless difference in each individuality ... Friends, I should be a terror to myself, did I not believe that wherever my dim consciousness may come to itself, God is there.⁸⁸

Although this does not appear particularly relevant to the study of any single German thinker, in its focus on the difference within and between each individual it again presents the notion that all religious belief is based on an act of free choice. Even as the passage ends with the reaffirmation of God's presence, what remains is the terror of knowing that it is only through the individual will that God's presence can be recognised, and thus that it always has the potential not to be the case. *Paul Faber* is the story of that terror, a novel in which belief in God is continually presented as necessary but always also potentially illusory. It is a novel in which only reason matters. Although the novels that follow try to assuage this terror, and in conventional moralistic tones point to the importance of the will of God above all other things, there is nothing of either the fury of *Wingfold* and *Faber* nor the Romantic wonder of the early novels. These late works do maintain a focus on individuality, occasionally even reintegrating the early Romantics, but are never again—with the possible exception of *Lilith*, which is an anomaly in the general decline of

⁸⁷ Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London, 2007), 480. The accusation of bestiality is particularly suspicious. The novel is indeed especially strong in its arguments for animal rights, and an excerpt was reprinted as an anti-vivisection tract, but there is no basis whatsoever to Crawford's claim. Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 175.

⁸⁸ MacDonald, *Paul Faber*, 293.

MacDonald's work after 1880—as philosophically coherent as the pre-1880 novels. In *Weighed and Wanting* (1882), the reader is told that: 'in duty, and in duty only, does the individual begin to come into real contact with life; therein only can he see what life is, and grow fit for it'.⁸⁹ Five years later, in *Home Again* (1887), however, individual consciousness, and the ability of individual to determine duty, is almost without value: 'God's things come out of his thoughts; our realities are God's thoughts made manifest in things; and out of them our thoughts must come, then the things that come out of our thoughts will be real. Neither our own fancies, nor the judgments of the world, must be the ground of our theories or behaviour.'⁹⁰ It is almost as if, having brought doubt and scepticism to the forefront of his work, MacDonald convinced himself more than he desired, and so abandoned any notion of a systematic theology in favour of something far more vague and unconvincing.

In *There and Back* (1891), his late return to Wingfold, however, MacDonald develops one final idea drawn from German thought, that of mediation. Wingfold's appearance in this novel is brief and perhaps unsatisfactory, but in his role as both exemplar and mediator, he presents a final solution to the anxieties raised by *Paul Faber*. The role assigned to Wingfold in this novel can be found in Fichte, where: 'The first rule for spreading morality will therefore be the following: show your fellow human beings things worthy of respect. And we can hardly show them anything better suited to this purpose than our own moral way of thinking and our own moral conduct.'⁹¹ It is particularly in relation to Schleiermacher, and again to Novalis, that the importance of the moral figure as a mediator between the individual and the divine can be seen. For Schleiermacher, religion is the acceptance of 'everything individual as part of the whole', rather than the practice of a particular set of creeds, and is furthermore based in the human, for in order to have religion, 'man must first have found humanity, and he finds it only in love and through love'.⁹² Like Fichte, for Schleiermacher religion is found in individual intuition, both at the level of the single human and the community of individuals, but as with Fichte's call for the individual to be a moral exemplar to his peers, simply by demonstrating his own free morality, Schleiermacher notes that the first stage of individual determination is reached through a mediator, a 'leader who awakens his sense for religion from its first slumber and gives him an

⁸⁹ George MacDonald, *Weighed and Wanting* (1882; London, [1884?]), 13.

⁹⁰ George MacDonald, *Home Again* (London, 1887), 285.

⁹¹ Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 301.

⁹² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 25, 37–8.

initial direction'.⁹³ Novalis touches on this point as well, both in his call for 'an intermediary—which connects us to the Godhead', and, to a certain extent, in his political writings, where the monarch serves such a function.⁹⁴ Wingfold, who is presented purely as a doubter in the first novel in the trilogy and as an interesting interlocutor in the second, fulfils the role of this intermediary in the final novel. Although the novel is primarily a *bildungsroman*, like *Wilfrid Cumbermede*, concerning the education, inheritance and marriage of Richard Lestrangle, Wingfold makes brief appearances in order to impart such enigmatic statements as: "I must be self-conscious as well as thing-conscious".⁹⁵ It is only through conversations with Wingfold that Richard becomes capable of recognising his own will. Although the theological perspective in *There and Back* is less coherent than in the earlier novels, as the story of Wingfold's growth first into individualism, and then to the role of mediator, it continues to fit the Fichtean paradigm established there. Traces of the mediator can be found throughout MacDonald's fantasy work—the best example being Mr Raven in *Lilith*—but it is only in this trilogy where the reader is told how the exemplar of individual consciousness comes to be such.

There is, in *There and Back*, a second moral exemplar, however. The most important episode in the novel is a reading of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797), which Richard uses to explore all of his ideas of Nature, God and the self. If not named as often as Novalis, Coleridge is a key influence on MacDonald's work, especially in the later novels, where the reading of Coleridge—as well as the reading of Carlyle—is portrayed as the path to both self-determination and goodness.⁹⁶ Coleridge quickly bypasses Fichte in favour of Schelling in *Biographia Literaria*, yet the *a priori* positioning of self-identity as a route to God in Thesis IX still contains echoes of Fichte's *Ethics*: 'philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive of philosophy. We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the self, in order to lose and find all self in GOD.'⁹⁷ Like MacDonald, too, Coleridge's concept of the self in his later

⁹³ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁴ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 35.

⁹⁵ George MacDonald, *There and Back* (1891; London, [1893?]), 145.

⁹⁶ This use of Coleridge, especially focusing on a reading of *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, appears in *David Elginbrod* as well, which novel's discussions of that poem are repeated almost verbatim in *There and Back*, and where Coleridge is held as a 'means of spiritual growth'. MacDonald, *David Elginbrod*, 12.

⁹⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, George Watson (ed.) (London, 1975), 154.

work is based in reason: 'I would raise up my understanding to my reason, and find my Religion in the focus resulting from their convergence'.⁹⁸ For both Coleridge and MacDonald, the notion of the individual self is at once central, for it permits the establishment of religious thought, and secondary, for that self is ultimately subsumed in God. Yet the similarity between them is striking: writing sixty years later, MacDonald repeats Coleridge's combination of Romantic and post-Kantian thought: for both writers, an early interest in nature and art gives way to a study of the relation between the self and God. It may be argued that both writers use German terms only to promote their own, far more avowedly Christian, ends. Yet even if that is the case—and the argument above has hopefully indicated that MacDonald, at least, stays closer to Fichte than has previously been acknowledged—it remains notable that their late views in many ways adhere to those of Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, for whom, as Charles Taylor argues, 'The Law of Nature is normative . . . *because* it is God's command'.⁹⁹

MacDonald's thought, as expressed in his English novels, cannot be seen either as representative of Victorian moral sentiment, nor as a naïve appropriation of a particularly Romantic focus on the imagination and fairy tales, as almost all of his critics have argued. Instead, in his work he takes a circuitous route to a complex philosophy of the individual that, while always anchored in German thought, is often surprising in its return to scepticism as the basis of understanding (completing, perhaps, the cycle beginning with Hume's reception in Germany). For MacDonald, 'Of all valueless things, a merely speculative theology is of the most valueless'.¹⁰⁰ Rather than speculate, then, he returns to the self-recognition of the individual and the centrality of free will. For MacDonald, to be an individual means having the power to choose that in which you believe, and as much as his work can be read as an explicitly Christian apologia, what makes his thought distinctive among nineteenth-century Scottish novelists is not the extent of theology in his writings, but his willingness to undercut it at every turn. In this way, MacDonald's theological novels can be seen as creating the space for the rigorous engagement with German philosophy that flourished in Scotland at the end of the nineteenth century.

University of Aberdeen

⁹⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State According to the Idea of Each*, John Barrell (ed.) (London, 1972), 150.

⁹⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 235.

¹⁰⁰ MacDonald, *Paul Faber*, 134.

**Following in Caryl Churchill's Footsteps:
Rona Munro's neo-Brechtian Didactic Paratext
in *Pandas* (2011)**

Virginie Privas-Bréauté

Rona Munro is a contemporary Scottish woman writer (born in 1959 in Aberdeen) interested in the issue of women's place in Scotland in a context of social mayhems in which the notions of feminism and nationalism need to be articulated. Through her work she aims at conveying a national identity for Scotland in which women have a role to play and have stories to tell. Therefore, she finds devices to inscribe her plays among that of playwrights whose objective is to give Scotland a national identity artistically and who stage working-class women (re-) telling their stories and voicing their versions of history. Munro's aim then reminds one of Caryl Churchill's since they both advocate the use of new dramatic techniques, including Brechtian devices, to denounce the political treatment and conditions of women oppressed by patriarchal and capitalist societies.

Caryl Churchill has been an icon for feminist socialism since 1976, the year when she met Monstrous Regiment on an abortion march.¹ Throughout her career she has addressed questions of ethical and a political natures concerning life in a world considered alienating, and with a view to show how the women who long for more than the ordinary have had to take on challenges and overcome confrontations. In her article 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics', Janelle Reinelt praises the innovative quality of her dramatic strength and deduces:

[her] experiments with creating characters that confront the reality of historical constraints while also revealing themselves as the product of artistic manipulation of the means of representation enabled her theatre pieces to capture the questions about difference that were critically engaging feminists in the 1980s and 1990s.²

¹ 'One of the earliest British feminist theatre groups and one of the few original groups still operating in Britain, the Regiment was set up as a permanent collective committed to both feminist and socialist ideals.' Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London, 1993), 69.

² Janelle Reinelt, 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics' in Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond

That is one of the reasons why her style still ‘enlivens political landscapes that speak to the contemporary moment.’³ Churchill has audaciously combined ‘classical mimesis’ and ‘deconstructive anti-realist strategies such as Brechtian gestus, myth, dreams, and fragmented narrative structures’ on stage so as to investigate contemporary issues engaging women and show that their experiences were neither general nor static.⁴ In this respect, we may think about *Mad Forest* (1990) which features all the characteristics of a neo-Brechtian play according to a study by Jean-Marc Lantéri in ‘Forêt folle, déraison des hommes ou brechtisme et postmodernité dans *Mad Forest* de Caryl Churchill’. Indeed, like Brecht before her, Churchill ‘has repeatedly examined revolutionary conditions, and engaged ambitiously with the artistic dilemma of how to represent political turmoil on stage.’⁵ That is why she peoples her plays with British and non-British characters involved in political and economic issues.

Similarities between Munro and Churchill, notably in terms of feminist worries both on political and aesthetic aspects, emerge then. In fact, both women playwrights share the same aesthetic objective; they also deliver a subtle political message through their pieces. That is how the stage directions and the paratext as defined by French literary critic Gérard Genette are studied as didactic tools to teach the readers of *Pandas* about the social conditions of women in Scotland and about the (re-) definition of its national identity. There will only be little examination of the representation of the stage directions and the paratext on the stage yet because the main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the Brechtian apparatus which might well be used to explore the performance of *Pandas* can be adopted to study its script. This script first and foremost addresses stage directors and actors and then general readers who can thus get the same impression as if they were attending the play.

Genette distinguishes the ‘peritext’ from the ‘epitext’, two textual elements that make up the paratext and complement the voice of the author in the stage directions. Under the word ‘peritext’, Genette refers to the name of the author, the title, the dedication, the epigraph, the preface and the notes. To all these, Marie Bernanoce, a Senior Lecturer in performing arts at the university of Grenoble (France), adds the sub-titles, the table of contents,

(eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill* (Cambridge, 2009), 26.

³ Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond, ‘Introduction: On Caryl Churchill’ in Aston and Diamond (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, 13.

⁴ Reinelt, ‘On Feminist and Sexual Politics’, 26.

⁵ Mary Luckhurst ‘On the Challenge of Revolution’ in Aston and Diamond (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, 52.

the list of characters, the summary, the first and last covers and any picture, including the bill, that illustrates the play. Both Genette and Bernanoce omit the stage directions but it seems that they can be considered as notes from the author and be included in the list. Under the word 'epitext' Genette lists the mediations, the interviews, the colloquia, the correspondence and the diaries to which Marie Bernanoce adds the texts of any work done with the actors before they act in the play and the programme of the performance. If we do not have all these pieces of information in *Pandas* as published by Nick Hern Books in 2011 especially as far as the 'epitext' is concerned we do have a lot of elements to work on and with.

The study of the stage directions and the 'peritext' under a neo-Brechtian light will show that the play is didactic in that Munro wants to deliver a particular message which has an impact on audiences and readers.⁶ Indeed, the latter may be taught about the conditions of women in Scotland through the dialogues of the actors but also through the stage directions and any adjacent textual and visual information (that is Munro's first aim, delivering a political message). In parallel, this analysis will shed light on the way Munro (re) defines the contours of Scottish drama and gives Scotland a national identity thanks to the Brechtian theory of didactic drama (this will be her second aim, an aesthetic one); a national identity that is paradoxically enhanced by the inclusion of Chinese elements, including *pandas*—the thread with which all those texts were sewn together.

1. Giving Voice to Working-Class Women: Munro's Political Aim

The editorial peritext is what we first see in the Nick Hern Books edition of Munro's play. This generic heading was created by Genette so as to define all the elements under the direct and main—yet not exclusive—responsibility of the editor, publisher, or edition.⁷ It includes the cover of the book, its format, the pictures it shows, its colours. It is important to start with the editorial peritext in so far as it gives information on the play and is somehow didactic. On the purple and black front cover, we can read the title of the

⁶ The devices are used in a neo-Brechtian way since, despite the similarities with Brecht's theory used at the time when his plays were performed, the environment is not the same if we think about the time, the place and the evolution of people's mentalities.

⁷ 'Toute cette zone du texte qui se trouve sous la responsabilité directe et principale (mais non exclusive) de l'éditeur, ou même de l'édition.' Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, 1987), 21.

play, the name of the author, the logo of the publisher (there is no editor), the logo of the theatre company where the play was first performed and a photograph, not extracted from the performance, showing two young Chinese people standing under a cherry tree in blossom. This juxtaposition of elements sheds light on a first misleading paradox: the play seems to be about China but was written by a Scottish writer. This piece of peritext may first exemplify the neo-Brechtian use of dialectics so as to address the mind of spectators and / or readers and not their hearts, a recurring device throughout Munro's play. Then, as we look at the back cover, there is continuity in terms of colours (yet the purple prevails over the black this time) and picture (it shows the same people but from a closer look and in a different position: they do not face the reader anymore, they look at each other). We also have more information on the play and the writer so as to clarify the contents of the edition and the origin of the author, materials certainly transmitted by the theatre company staging the premiere of the play as a complement or substitute to the show programme—which might lead us to consider this edition as an 'epitext' per se along Bernanoce's analysis.

Recontextualising resources, a preoccupation of both the theatre company and Munro, is shared by the publisher who mentions other authors he/she has published on page 92 and among whom Caryl Churchill appears. This device on the publisher's part has two goals: first it demonstrates that Nick Hern Books has some legitimacy in the publishing of plays industry and secondly, it inscribes Munro's work among those of major authors.

1.1 A Post-Modern Revisionism? The Importance of 'Historicisation' of Post-Devolution Playwrights

Before the play starts, we can find ten pages of what Genette and Bernanoce call 'peritext'. These pages are usually not read, and in this edition, they are even not numbered. For this analysis, they will be numbered from i to x. Yet they are of crucial interest given the fact that they convey information that helps recontextualise the play in terms of place, time and themes in a neo-Brechtian like style, devices that some Scottish women writers have used according to Susan C. Triesman:

Brechtian historicisation of the text, fragmentation of the whole, disconnections, overlappings and variations, metonymy, privileging

of the domestic arena which is seen as women's place, use of the mundane to reach deeper structures, and the foregrounding of non-verbal determinants of meaning from music to kinesics: all are in the playwright's arsenal.⁸

Like Sharman McDonald, Rona Munro is part of a school of Scottish traditional female playwriting characterised by its plurality of styles and contents, expressing the whole range of different experiences and worries. Ksenija Horvat notes that 'firmly rooted in socialist tradition, [Scottish women's] plays dealt with pertinent social issues, they created revisionist histories by questioning the well trodden Burnsian, Scottesque, tartan-clad image of Scotland's past, and they set out on a search for Scotland's identity, its position and function in the modern world.'⁹ These women writers have followed in Caryl Churchill's footsteps. Like the British playwright who delivers messages 'through historicised and dramatized events' in her plays, Munro historicises her piece thanks to the stage directions and the paratext which take on a pragmatic status characterised by their situational or communicational value, the nature of the addresser, that of the addressee, and the illocutionary force of the message they deliver, in Genette's words.¹⁰ On the introductory page of the edition, the reader is immediately given the date and the place of the first performance of the play as if it were absolutely necessary to recontextualise it. It says that *Pandas* was first performed on 15 April 2011 at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, in other words the play was shown to a Scottish audience in the post-devolution period. Later, on page four, the reader is also informed of the fact that the time of print preceded the time of performance which may cause him to realise that the text 'may differ slightly from the play as performed', another piece of evidence that leads us to become aware of the importance of time in such a political context.

Reinelt reminds us that feminist scholars in the United Kingdom and the

⁸ Susan C. Triesman, 'Sharman McDonald: The Generation of Identity' in Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (eds) *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh, 2000), 55.

⁹ Ksenija Horvat, 'Scottish Women Playwrights against Zero Visibility/New Voices Breaking Through', *Études Écossaises*, 10 (2005), 145.

¹⁰ Ars Gör Banu Akcesme, 'Epic Theatre as a Means of Feminist Theatre in Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest*', *Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sayı*, 26 (2009), 95; 'Le statut pragmatique d'un élément du paratexte est défini par les caractéristiques de son instance, ou situation, de communication: nature du destinataire, du destinataire, degré d'autorité et de responsabilité du premier, force illocutoire de son message, et sans doute quelques autres qui m'auront échappé.' Genette, *Seuils*, 14.

United States became interested in historiography as the theory of historical methods and objects and how to do history. She explains that

Women formed a group and challenged male hegemony with regard to the production of history. One of the buzz-words of the time, 'her-story', emphasised the exclusions from history of the agency of women and the importance of their roles, the neglect of research on ordinary women and the dearth of material about their everyday life, and the significance of sex and gender differences to the conceptualization of socio-political life in any era.¹¹

For Reinelt, Churchill's work engaged with every aspect of this feminist scholarship. Similarly Munro cares about feminist historiography in *Pandas* and her concern about time reflects that in as much as this post-devolution period allows Scottish women to voice their feelings freely.

If time is crucial, place is similarly important throughout the play. On page ii, the Traverse Theatre is said to be 'Scotland's New Writing Theatre' which 'has embraced a spirit of innovation and risk-taking' since it was built in 1963. Here the publisher's information, transmitted by the Traverse itself, is pragmatic, semantic and didactic since he/she lays the stress on the inventive, energetic proprieties that characterise the place. It is further explained that the Traverse's policy is to help all artists—we may then think about women more specifically—express themselves in Scotland at this particular time, telling the stories they want to tell, because they have been silenced for too long or simply ignored. This idea is shared by Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell who assert that many Scottish female playwrights have developed 'concepts of dislocation and space in their work' to try and gain their rightful place.¹²

These issues of place and time have become themes in feminist post-devolution playwriting and Rona Munro is no exception to the rule. If she now lives in London and had this play published by a publishing house in London, it only adds to the urge to let Scottish women tell their stories as Tom Maguire explains:

¹¹ Reinelt, 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics', 21.

¹² Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell, 'Sue Glover, Rona Munro, Lara Jane Bunting: Echoes and Open Spaces' in Christianson and Lumsden (eds), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, 65.

Mobility ... is a crucial way of interrogating place's social significance. It is also a means to expose the ways in which space is gendered ... where female characters transgress boundaries of place; they face isolation, exclusion or confinement as prisoners or mad women. Yet in moving into new spaces, female characters are also able to reinvent themselves and the sense of the world they inhabit.¹³

Munro, a Scottish expatriate in London, writes about matters affecting both the Scots and the Chinese since the play, entitled *Pandas*, precisely deals with this transgression of national frontiers for both love and business sake.

Maguire adds to this that worries about time—because it is ‘unstable’—also pervade new Scottish play writing. He mentions three other plays by Munro, *Bold Girls* (1991), *Fugue* (1983) and *Your Turn to clean the Stair* (1992) and writes that ‘Munro counterpoints the progression of events in contemporary time with the unveiling of the past they provoke ... Slippages or movements between temporal states also give way to moments of non-time in specific plays.’¹⁴ This device, far from giving a naturalistic representation of the world, can further prove that Munro resorts to the Brechtian dramatic theory; it is part of the anti-realist strategy which she also puts to the fore through both her own notes on the text and the stage directions. In her note, Munro explains the genesis of her play, when and where the action takes place—all this meant to be understood as information strengthening its importance in the whole economy of the play—as much information to help the reader understand he / she is in a theatre and not in real life. If we refer to Genette's definition of the notes on the text from the author, we realise to what extent they are a guide for any reader to understand the text but also to orientate his / her reading.¹⁵ This illocutionary force is also what characterises the paratext: it has an impact on the reader like Brechtian drama on the audience.

¹³ Tom Maguire, ‘Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s’ in Ian Brown (ed.) *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh, 2011), 161.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁵ ‘La préface auctoriale assumptive originale, que nous abrégerons donc en préface originale, a pour fonction cardinale d’assurer au texte une bonne lecture. Cette formule simplette est plus complexe qu’il n’y peut sembler, car elle se laisse analyser en deux actions, dont la première conditionne, sans nullement la garantir, la seconde, comme une condition nécessaire et non suffisante : 1. obtenir une lecture, et 2. obtenir que cette lecture soit bonne.’ Genette, *Seuils*, 200.

‘Guider le lecteur, c’est aussi et d’abord le situer, et donc le déterminer.’ *Ibid.*, 215.

As we read the play, we may notice that there is regular symmetry given by the publisher: in the top left-hand corner, we always find the number of the page and the title of the play whereas in the top right-hand corner, we find the number of the act, and the page number. This device is both pragmatic and didactic because it enables the reader not to be lost, all the more so as it is at the top and not at the bottom, so it is the first element we come across as we read the play. Yet it is not the most important in the play and this paradoxical characteristic is precisely one of the elements on which the piece is based. Likewise, in the biographies of the people involved in the staging up of the play included in the edition by NHB, the information about Crystal Yu, the actress playing Lin Han, stands out. Her biography reads as follows: ‘Crystal has also appeared in a variety of international commercials for brands including HSBC, Danone Aqua, MTV, Nokia, Orange, and most notably appearing alongside Madonna in a campaign for her H&M fashion line.’¹⁶ If feminist playwrights have strived to deconstruct the image of woman as an object, we may wonder why the stage director took in Crystal Yu—a symbol of capitalism—to precisely deconstruct it. Knowing that Munro’s play is precisely about the failure of a trading partnership between a Chinese family company and a Scottish wholesaler involved in suspicious negotiations, we can consider that having Crystal Yu as the actress is a way to historicise the female body in so far as now women have the power to choose for themselves. It might also well be added to the dialectical strategy to enhance the neo-Brechtian use of dramatic techniques.

1.2 Social Feminism: Criticising Capitalism?

If *Pandas* is a play about the business transaction of rugs from China to Scotland and the denunciation of a capitalist system in which love yields to economic worries, the reader can measure how economic matters pervade the paratext. The very first page (page i) of the edition reminds us that Munro’s play does not simply need actors. There is a staff of people ‘working’ behind the stage and referred to as ‘directors’, ‘designers’, and ‘managers’, providing all the material support needed such as light, sound, and costumes for example. The idea that this staff belongs to an organism is further strengthened by the presentation of the Traverse Theatre as a ‘company’ with a board of

¹⁶ Rona Munro, *Pandas* (London, 2011), vii.

directors.¹⁷ Furthermore, the Traverse requires money to operate as the publisher mentions on page viii: he thanks many 'corporate sponsors for their recent support' among which we find well-established firms like Habitat or Heineken to mention a few. Steve Cramer explains that the Traverse Theatre has indeed always needed external financial support to produce plays.¹⁸ Likewise, these economic pressures are undergone by feminist theatres: as Lizbeth Goodman writes: 'while all theatre is influenced to some extent by audience reaction, feminist theatre depends for its survival upon audience support—personal and political as well as financial'.¹⁹ This financial aspect at the back of a play is also exemplified by the edition we are analysing. If we are told that Nick Hern Books is a global company—the publisher laying emphasis on its legal department in charge of coordinating any performance of the play worldwide—we also understand that it sells books, including plays.²⁰ That is the reason why we can see the price tag on the back cover along with the bar code since books are marketable products, which reminds us of the possible economic value of a work of art in today's society.

Today's society is precisely the preoccupation of feminist writers, as Lizbeth Goodman further argues. She explains that 'feminist theatre has shifted its boundaries in accordance with social and economic movements'.²¹ It is no surprise then that Munro should be interested in social feminism and more particularly in social gendered differences as defined by the historical construction of women's roles in society and also in political considerations of women in society. Like Churchill before them, numerous women playwrights, including Munro, have explored social issues in which women's roles have been redefined. In addition to the dialectical recruitment of Crystal Yu, the numerous stage directions pinpoint Munro's worries. We can notice that there are objective and subjective remarks, notably on the movements of the characters and their feelings. Yet readers can also notice that the expression of feelings tends to portray women whereas movements tend to characterise men, thus strengthening the traditional difference opposing men and women. If Munro's women are sometimes 'offended' or 'clearly upset', her men

¹⁷ Ibid., ix.

¹⁸ 'There does seem some connection between aesthetic experiment's advancement and financial emergency's exigencies in the mid 1980s Traverse Theatre's case.' Steve Cramer, 'The Traverse, 1985–87: Arnott, Clifford, Hannan, Harrower, Grieg and Greenhorn' in Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, 165.

¹⁹ Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 42.

²⁰ Ibid., 94.

²¹ Ibid., 57.

move.²² Andy, one of the characters involved in the business with China for instance ‘takes a coin out of his pocket and starts to toss it’ and ‘tosses’ it for a while.²³ Yet, playing with money, in the literal and figurative senses, will be of no avail, since, in the end, the business fails but love prevails. The power of emotions is not developed pointlessly in *Pandas*, it is part of the playwright’s politics inscribed in her socialist literary experience.

It should be pointed out that in her note on the text Munro adds her name in the end as if to sign it.²⁴ We may consider this signature as a social *gestus* as Brecht defined it. It seems to be an act of vindication of who she is and what she writes about. Munro lives in a post-devolution period in Scotland, twelve years after the agreement was signed, at a time when women can express their ideas more freely, when they are no longer considered as mere wives and mothers. Her female characters in *Pandas* have a social role to play: they are academics or business partners with working-class and middle-class family backgrounds. In keeping what characterises women, she subverts the articulation between emotions and politics, rendering emotions, and thus women, more powerful. Yet, Goodman would say that feminist theatre must be ‘directly and uncompromisingly political in order to effect social change’.²⁵ Feminist socialism in the 2010s has had new worries and orientations somehow initiated by Caryl Churchill according to Sheila Rabillard.²⁶ The political revolution under way in *Pandas* has to do with the protection of the environment and more particularly the preservation of pandas in China, as conveyed through both the text and the paratext. Munro’s aim is shared by her publisher since, on the last page, at the bottom of the information about

²² Munro, *Pandas*, 17, 39.

²³ *Ibid.*, 23, 24, 26.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own*, 17.

²⁶ ‘Caryl Churchill’s drama shows a sustained and deepening engagement with ecological issues from her 1971 radio drama *Not Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, through *Fen* (1983) (developed for the stage with the members of the Joint Stock theatre company), to the collaborative combination of dance, song and drama *Lives of the Great Poisoners* (1991), the more recent play *The Skriker* (1994) and *Far Away* (2000), and her 2006 choral work *We turned on the Light*. Her focus moves from localized environmental concerns (as in *Fen*) to the ecological effects of globalization and the alienated consumerism of late capitalism (for example in *Far Away* and *The Skriker*), but there is not so much a simple progression in her work as a recursive, intense dialogue in which elements of her earlier plays are repurposed and complex issues are revisited.’ Sheila Rabillard, ‘On Caryl Churchill’s Ecological Drama: Right to Poison the Wasps’ in Aston and Diamond (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, 88.

the NHB company, we can find the logo of FSC—the forest stewardship council—an organisation ‘promoting environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests’.²⁷ It means that the paper on which the play was printed was recycled. Moreover, on the back cover price tag, there is also an ecology-friendly indication: it says its paper has been recycled.

Such is Munro’s new dramatic strategy to let women’s voices be heard in post-devolution Scotland. The paratext, which is in fact a combination of what the Traverse Theatre had the publisher publish and Munro’s texts, is a powerful medium to help female voices reshape the contours of social feminism or feminist socialism. It is part of an aesthetic of her politics of emotions.²⁸ Yet, Brechtian theory is based on the idea that plays are didactic as long as they address the mind of the audience, not their heart. So, as demonstrated on several occasions, Munro’s play is based on paradoxes giving way to dialectical approaches leading to debates. It seems that these dialectic didactic elements create enough distancing to allow for re-imagining Scotland and Scottishness.²⁹

2. The Stage Directions and the Paratext as Forging a National Identity for the Scottish Theatre

Ksenija Horvat notes that the changes in themes and preoccupations of female Scottish playwrights started in the 1990s, ‘reflecting the current changes in Scottish society’, notably when it comes to finding new definitions of ‘nationhood’ within the UK and the world.³⁰ In *Pandas*, the alienating power of capitalism striking Scotland is particularly denounced. Like Churchill, who put the stress on ‘consumerist attitudes causing environmental degradation’

²⁷ <http://www.fsc.org/vision-mission.12.htm> [Accessed 6 July 2012].

²⁸ As Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond say about Churchill’s work: Aston and Diamond, ‘Introduction: On Caryl Churchill’, 10.

²⁹ ‘Questions of inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and borders, whether real or imagined, have for a generation of Scottish playwrights working in a post-devolutionary context, affected their terms of engagement with issues of identity and difference ... The establishment of the new Scottish parliament in 1999 created cultural momentum and provoked a “general sense of an incoming tide” (Tom Nairn) which enabled and indeed required reimaginings of Scotland and Scottishness.’ Trish Reid, ‘Post-Devolutionary Drama’ in Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, 188.

³⁰ Horvat, ‘Scottish Women Playwrights against Zero Visibility’, 151.

in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* (1971), Munro uses the theme of environmental protection in China to urge the readers to become aware of the social changes needed in Scotland.³¹ Some distance is effectively beneficial and she deliberately creates defamiliarising effects through the stage directions and the paratext so as to reach her aim.

2.1 Distanciation: The Creation of a National Drama

In 'Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism', Elin Diamond reminds us that 'the cornerstone of Brecht's theory is the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the technique of defamiliarising a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to see or hear it afresh.'³² In the NHB edition of *Pandas*, distanciation is first conveyed through the first three blank pages which separate the paratext from the text of the play. These virgin pages might act like the French tradition's strikes struck before the curtains rise and meant to arouse the audience's interest. They might also echo another technique used by Munro and other Scottish women playwrights who 'develop images of open, empty space to depict woman's inner world of imagination and desire.'³³ They can thus be seen as a threshold before we enter the play and more particularly women's qualms since that is one of the leading themes in *Pandas*.

Diamond further explains that the V-Effect has an impact on the audience in so far as it is meant to trigger off a sense of alienation: 'the A-effect consists of turning an object from something ordinary and immediately accessible into something peculiarly striking, and unexpected.'³⁴ Such has been the objective of many women playwrights according to Susan C. Triesman:

Scottish women's playwriting is characterised by the transformative and the transgressive, presenting the classic experience of the Other, where otherness becomes crucial to character's structure and where the poetic and the comedic engage with the underlying structures of the dominant culture in order to deconstruct them. It is especially

³¹ Sheila Rabillard, 'On Caryl Churchill's Ecological Drama: Right to Poison the Wasps', 90.

³² Elin Diamond, 'Brechtian Theory /Feminist Theory toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 32 (1988), 82–94.

³³ Horvat and Bell, 'Sue Glover, Rona Munro, Lara Jane Bunting', 77.

³⁴ Diamond, 'Brechtian Theory', 84.

important that, since they inhabit the structures they are destabilising, women dramatists render the familiar unfamiliar.³⁵

In this respect, the study of the font of the script is particularly interesting since it gives precious information on this alienation process. If we take the example of the very first page, we find eight different fonts that shed light on the name of the theatre, that of the theatre company, the title of the play, the name of its author, the cast, the names of the characters and those of the actors, the time and place of the first performance. If we take a closer look at the cast, we read the names of the characters in italics, while the names of the actors embodying them are not. The aim—be it that of Munro and/or that of the publisher for publishing norm reasons—seems to add further distanciation between reality and fiction. Diamond indeed recognises that ‘in performance the actor “alienates” rather than impersonates [the] character’.³⁶ There should be no identification between the actor and her/his character, and even between the characters and the audience / readers, the point being to enable the audience / readers to ‘remain free to analyse and form opinions about the play’s “fable”’.³⁷ That is why the cast of characters is repeated on page 4, and the reader is only given the names of the protagonists, there is no other information precisely to prevent any identification with them.

Another defamiliarising device is to be found in the note from the author on page 3. Indeed, the note—it is striking that this term should be singular—is written in prose, a style that stands out from the rest of the play. Then the study of the personal pronouns sheds light to a possible confusion in the reader’s mind since Munro uses ‘I’ and then ‘you’ as if she was addressing the reader when in fact she is still talking about herself. She says: ‘once in a while you write a play and you can’t pinpoint where it comes from’, distancing herself from this general remark; yet that could be misleading for the reader who might feel addressed to directly.³⁸ Genette explains that one of the main *raison d’être* of the paratext is to have an influence on the reader, even to manipulate him.³⁹

In this respect, dedications are ambiguous for Genette. He explains that they always have at least two addressees: that whom the dedication is written

³⁵ Triesman ‘Sharman McDonald: The Generation of Identity’, 55.

³⁶ Diamond, ‘Brechtian Theory’, 84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁸ Munro, *Pandas*, 3.

³⁹ ‘L’action du paratexte est bien souvent de l’ordre de l’influence, voire de la manipulation, subie de manière inconsciente.’ Genette, *Seuils*, 412.

for and the reader. As soon as the dedication is made publicly, the reader becomes the witness of the dedication⁴⁰. In *Pandas*, there are two dedications. The first is addressed to 'Dave' whose identity is not specified.⁴¹ It is humbly written in small font and in italics. The second dedication is more subtle since it is written in the author's note. Munro mentions Fiona Knowles, the long-time colleague with whom she co-founded the MsFit so as to produce her work, and says: 'Bless you, darling, this one's for you too.'⁴² Therefore, readers should take some distance from the paratext as well and stop believing that everything said is unjustified and taken for granted.

Studying the paratext comes down to having a distanced critical analysis on who wrote what and for whom. If Munro attributes herself as the author of the note on page three as shown previously, we may wonder who wrote the second note on the text on page four. This note is about the problem of translating Mandarin into English for audience's comprehension; it is thus overtly didactic. It seems to address the readers but can also aim to give directions to the stage director and actors. The same situation arises on the back cover: we are clueless about the writer's identity, yet the information given is didactic since it orientates our reading of the play.

Brecht advocated the use of such devices because he considered didactic drama as a social apparatus which had the power to change the mentalities of audiences. Similarly, the role of the audience in feminist theatre is particularly important according to Gillian Elinor, 'because of the diversity of perspectives of its members, and because of the theatre's potential to 'convert' some spectators to a feminist way of seeing'.⁴³ The same idea can apply to the readers of the script, if they have attended the play or not. The effect wanted by the theatre company, the playwright and the publishers in the script equates

⁴⁰ 'Quel qu'en soit le dédicataire officiel, il y a toujours une ambiguïté dans la destination d'une dédicace d'œuvre, qui vise toujours au moins deux destinataires: le destinataire, bien sûr, mais aussi le lecteur, puisqu'il s'agit d'un acte public dont le lecteur est en quelque sorte pris à témoin... Typiquement performative, je l'ai dit, puisqu'elle constitue à elle seule l'acte qu'elle est censée décrire, la formule n'en est donc pas seulement: 'je dédie ce livre à Untel' (c'est à dire, je dis à Untel que je lui dédie ce livre), mais aussi, et parfois bien davantage: 'je dis au lecteur que je dédie ce livre à Untel?'. Ibid., 137.

⁴¹ Munro, *Pandas*, 1.

⁴² Ibid., 3. 'One response for [women] writers to exclusion from Scotland's theatre institutions was to produce their own work. Munro co-founded the MsFits with Fiona Knowles, producing satirical sketches and cabaret performances.' Maguire, 'Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s', 156.

⁴³ Quoted in Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 223.

that expected in the performance. From this observation, Goodman argues that 'feminist theatre is not only received and interpreted, but also influenced by its audience'.⁴⁴ In the paratext of *Pandas*, we can consider the appearance of the word 'beat' in the stage directions throughout the whole play, as wake-up calls for both the spectator and for the reader with at least two objectives. First it aims at constantly arousing their attention, and secondly it is meant to remind them that it is not real life on the stage but fiction. This repetition is part of the anti-illusionist devices used by Munro in a neo-Brechtian way. Munro previously warned readers, potential stage directors and actors that, when staging the play, 'it's crucial to pin down who knows what and when they know it ... and to mark the moment each character really falls in love'.⁴⁵ That is why precisions like 'a moment, they're noticing' appear in the stage directions as if to suspend the status of the real.⁴⁶ Reinelt asserts that Churchill also 'create[s] precisely calibrated suspended realities where temporal and spatial coordinates are impossible to secure and the action skirts the surreal' especially in *Far Away* (2000), *A Number* (2002) and *Drunk enough to say I love you?* (2006).⁴⁷

The analysis of the stage directions both in terms of content and form finally gives us precious information on didacticism in so far as they convey a visual sense of fragmentation within the play. As a matter of fact, they sometimes appear in parenthesis, sometimes in brackets (especially when language is concerned) and are sometimes written in italics depending on what information they disclose.

2.2 Non-Linear Structures and Fragmentation

As argued previously, Susan C. Triesman demonstrates that female Scottish playwrights have recently resorted to many techniques, including the fragmentation of the whole, to reshape the contours of Scottish national drama. Ksenija Horvat adds to this that non-linear structures have been traditionally used by female playwrights in Scotland to tell stories.⁴⁸ Likewise Aston and Diamond write that one of the characteristics of Churchill's plays is

⁴⁴ Ibid., 233.

⁴⁵ Munro, *Pandas*, 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁷ Reinelt, 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics', 27.

⁴⁸ Horvat, 'Scottish Women Playwrights against Zero Visibility', 146.

the ‘non-linear’.⁴⁹ If the repetition of the word ‘beat’ throughout *Pandas* as well as the many pauses, moments of deep breath and silences, can be tools to give some rhythm to the play, in a neo-Brechtian fashion since they echo Brecht’s use of ‘songs’ and music to fragment his pieces, other elements also convey an identical impression of fragmentation and absence of linearity. From the very first page, the use of different fonts can be seen as the announcement of anti-linearity. This effect is then kept in the following page on which we find information on the Traverse Theatre: the text of the publisher is interrupted by extracts from national journals, periodicals and newspaper reviews lauding the theatre and supporting his/her words. The ‘epitext’ is here at the service of the ‘peritext’ to strengthen this notion of a didactic paratext.

For Brecht, drama had to be built up by various bits and pieces. In *Le Réalisme épique de Brecht*, Bernard Dort asserts that Brecht was not interested in the unavoidable unveiling of events in a chronological order from one scene to the next as developed in classical theatre. On the contrary, he advocated montage and juxtaposition.⁵⁰ This is precisely the impression that we get when we read the back cover where numerous pieces of information have been juxtaposed without any obvious coherence. They are all introduced in the same way, be they about the content of the play, its premiere, its author. They give a sense of visual uniformity but they do not deal with information of the same nature.

Brechtian drama is indeed made up of fragments of reality extracted from the world particularly to enhance the tensions they bring to the world.⁵¹ *Pandas* exemplifies this in so far as the three couples of characters—Jie Hui and Lin Han; Andy and Julie; James and Madeleine—all have personal stories to tell; in turn, they give an overview of their own reality, each very different from the other. Fragmentation is also found in the structure of the play. There are only two acts with no scene to divide the play and to give an impression

⁴⁹ Aston and Diamond, ‘Introduction: On Caryl Churchill’, 14.

⁵⁰ ‘Brecht rompt avec l’enchaînement inéluctable du théâtre classique où une scène en amène une autre, avec l’irrésistible progression de ce théâtre fondée sur la psychologie ou sur l’exigence d’un moment culminant où puisse se réaliser la catharsis. Selon ses propres termes, Brecht substitue à la croissance du théâtre traditionnel, le montage.’ Bernard Dort, ‘Le Réalisme épique de Brecht’ in idem, *Réalisme et Poésie au Théâtre* (Paris, 1958), 201.

⁵¹ ‘Une pièce de théâtre est faite de fragments de la réalité, de situations brutes révélées à partir de gestes, d’objets simples. Seulement Brecht ne se laisse jamais aller à donner une signification symbolique à ces fragments. Il les situe dans le monde. Il dévoile leur rapport avec l’ensemble de la vie. Il introduit entre ces fragments et le monde, une tension, une contradiction.’ Ibid., 20.

of linearity. Yet, if we look more closely at the internal organisation of each act, we find divisions which help slide from one pair of characters to the next. This slippage is facilitated by the use of light, a device Brecht recommended. Whenever Munro writes in the stage directions 'fade lights into' spectators and readers know the characters, the setting and the subject change.⁵² However, from page seventy nine to the end of the play (page ninety one) there is no more clear indication of these changes. On the contrary, the six characters are all on the stage at the same time; if they share the dramatic space and time, they stand in different places, though. James and Madeleine are in China, Jie Hui and Lin Han are in a hotel in Edinburgh and Andy and Julie in a hospital room in Scotland. In Brechtian terms, the fragmentation of the scenes and the absence of linearity are meant to convey a general meaning and the audience's responsibility is to bring it out.⁵³ The word 'panda' recurring from the beginning to the end comes as one clue for spectators and readers who have to bring all the characters and their stories together so as to find the message conveyed through the play; hence its title.

The paratext is thus at the heart of a pedagogical triangle involving the playwright, the reader and the publisher like the performance is at the heart of a pedagogical triangle involving the playwright, the audience and the theatre company. Adopting Brecht's theory on drama as well as a feminist point of view to analyse the paratext of the play sheds light on its didactic dimension and the strategies used by Munro to reshape the contours of Scottish drama not only on stage but also in this edition. In *Pandas*, China becomes the prism through which it is possible to observe Scotland and the role of women in Scottish society at social, economic and political levels. It is also the medium through which the playwright reaches her aesthetic aim. Its script complements its performance so that the readers realise how powerful neo-Brechtian feminist drama can be.

If Goodman asserts that feminist drama has taken new directions of which the unperformed is becoming an element, then the paratext, since it is not shown on the stage, can be characteristic of feminist drama.⁵⁴ Yet, the problem of qualifying Rona Munro as a feminist playwright arises. Like Churchill, Munro's work is 'feminist in impact', but the adjective 'feminist' has

⁵² Munro, *Pandas*, 12, 19, 30, 54, 65 and 78.

⁵³ 'La succession de ces scènes constitue un sens global, mais c'est au spectateur à le déterminer, à le tirer de la pièce: à aucun moment, Brecht ne l'exprime totalement, à aucun moment ce sens global ne s'exprime dans une scène-clef. 'Dort: 'Le Réalisme épique de Brecht', 202.

⁵⁴ Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 192.

been used in such a derogatory way by the media, that it seems better to define it as 'women's theatre' if a label needs to be found for her work.⁵⁵ As a matter of fact, Munro explains she is 'a Scottish playwright, a woman playwright and an Aberdonian playwright, not necessarily in that order'.⁵⁶

Of more importance, Rona Munro's *Pandas* is seen as experimental since it borrows many Brechtian devices and adapts them to the present context. Yet, she considers empathy and emotions as part of the human social experience, an idea that Brecht absolutely objected to. Thus, not only does Munro reshape the contours of Scottish drama, she also re-defines a neo-Brechtian apparatus in giving back their importance to emotions.

Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3

⁵⁵ Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay, *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre* (1996: London, 2004), 5.

⁵⁶ Maguire, 'Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s', 154.

Jarring Witnesses in the Poetry of John Hewitt and Derek Mahon

Edwin Cruden

We ask for history, and that means that we ask for the simple record of unadulterated facts; we look, and nowhere do we find the object of our search, but in its stead we see the divergent accounts of a host of jarring witnesses, a chaos of disjointed and discrepant narrations, and yet, while all of these can by no possibility be received as true, at the same time not one of them can be rejected as false¹.

The above quotation from F.H. Bradley concerns the problem of multiple points of view in the field of narrative historiography and is the centrepiece to Robert Holton's study of the dynamics of point of view in modern fiction. Holton deftly charts critical attitudes to historiography, from Aristotle through Foucault. The problem of point of view throughout historiography is highlighted, particularly with recourse to the opinions of Bradley, through Louis Mink and Hayden White. With these attitudes in mind, and through the theoretical lens of Mikhail Bakhtin and Pierre Bourdieu, Horton highlights the strategies used to deal with multiple points of view in examples of modern and postmodern historical novels. Holton highlights 'a specifically modern pressure on the certainty of narrative perspective in historiography' and concludes that 'the struggle with jarring witnesses ... is one of the definitive characteristics of modernist fiction'². Holton does not however explore the extent to which that struggle is characteristic of modern poetry. After a brief illustration of exactly what is meant by 'jarring witnesses', this essay will examine the extent to which the struggle with them Holton identifies is characteristic of the poetry of John Hewitt and Derek Mahon.

Bradley mentions jarring witnesses only briefly in his *Presuppositions of Critical History*. In this context, they are a metaphor for the disparate, multiple points of view which are problematic for the writing of episodic narrative history. Thus, writing a history of multiethnic, multilinguistic Malaysia would

¹ F.H. Bradley, *Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1935), 9.

² Robert Holton, *Jarring Witnesses: Modern Fiction and the Representation of History* (Hemel Hempstead, 1994), 251.

presumably be bedevilled by the multiple points of view, the jarring witnesses, of the various ethnic groups and their various religious and cultural beliefs, not to mention those of Malaysia's imperial colonisers. For Bradley, the historian's task is to arbitrate between jarring witnesses to 'bring order to chaos'³ of multiple points of view. Holton points out the corrective and exclusionary bent to Bradley's viewpoint and indeed Bradley's essay is at pains to point out the validity and invalidity of certain narratives. For Bradley, there is an implicit hierarchy of narratives for historiographical consideration: some witnesses can be relied upon, some jar and so cannot. So, while jarring witnesses begin life for Bradley as a multitude of equally salient narratives, they end up as narratives earmarked for exclusion from history. Robert Holton prefers to keep with Bradley's original metaphor for jarring witnesses, equally salient multiple points of view, but recognises that valid points of view have been and continue to be suppressed. Thus, when Holton refers to jarring witnesses, he refers to the narratives of the excluded and suppressed, rather than to those *to be* excluded and suppressed for the good and cohesion of the meta-narrative, for example

Jarring voices were emanating from diverse sectors of society as the tide of imperialist expansion had begun to turn; the dissatisfaction of women was propelling an increasingly militant women's movement; and the working classes were demanding more power ...⁴

Where Bradley sees jarring witnesses as something to be corrected by exclusion from a narrative hierarchy, Holton, it can be argued, sees them as something potentially *corrective* to narrative by their very inclusion in that narrative. It is with Holton's, rather than Bradley's, view of jarring witnesses that this essay examines the poetry of John Hewitt and Derek Mahon.

John Hewitt's 'The Colony' is an extended meditation on the development of a Roman colony, from the perspective of one of the Roman colonisers. 'First came the legions, then the colonists,' the persona begins. Eleven subsequent stanzas chart the 'smoking out the nests / of the barbarian tribesmen' and the subjugation of the colonised by the coloniser⁵. The poem ends at an uneasy present with the decline of the Roman Empire. The persona recognises that 'from other lands the legions ebb' and ruminates on the coming future

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁵ John Hewitt 'The Colony' in Michael Longley and Frank Ormsby (eds), *John Hewitt: Selected Poems* (Belfast, 2007), 36.

‘when the tribes assert / their ancient right and take what once was theirs’⁶. The poem works as a metaphor for the historical Protestant experience in the lands which became Northern Ireland. In a sense the very fact of the poem represents proof that Holton’s assertion that ‘the struggle with jarring witnesses ... is one of the definitive characteristics of modernist fiction’ is also true of modernist poetry; this poem sets out ostensibly to highlight a narrative of historical subjugation and disempowerment. Further, though the single persona structure of the poem does not allow for the self-expression of the natives (the jarring witnesses in question), the persona is at pains to empathise with their historical plight. When ruminating on a massacre of colonists, he recognises that his people’s contemporary ‘fear [is] quickened by the memory of guilt / for we began the plunder’ and the tonality of his acknowledgement that ‘We took their temples from them’ and their ‘kindlier soils’ is far from triumphalist⁷ ⁸. However, while seemingly edging towards the remorseful, it becomes apparent in the ninth stanza that the persona is no altruist. Here the persona is concerned with a temporal present, where before he has been concerned, albeit with contrition, with an imagined historical past. While he may view the past between the coloniser and colonised objectively and intellectually, his views of the present crackle with bigotry:

They worship Heaven strangely, having rites
we snigger at, are known as superstitious,
cunning by nature, never to be trusted,
given to dancing and a kind of song
seductive to the ear, a whining sorrow.
Also they breed like flies. The danger’s there;
when Caesar’s old and lays his sceptre down,
we’ll be a little people, well outnumbered⁹.

The persona is conflicted by an intellectual desire that historical injustice be righted and a gut emotional reaction to the perceived threat posed to his people by the very righting of that injustice. However, while this represents the limit to the persona’s ability to countenance the jarring witnesses of the

⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷ Although running the risk of gendering the poems in this essay, for the sake of tidiness, personae will be referred to in the masculine where not obviously defined, rather than “he/she, his/her” etc. The reader will also be referred to in the masculine.

⁸ JHewitt, ‘The Colony’, 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

natives, it is not the only struggle with jarring witnesses depicted in the poem. An emotional connection to the land comes to predominate at the poem's close and, accordingly, the language used to describe the landscape alters in the fifth stanza. Where previously such descriptions had been peripheral glances at 'heaving country' and 'shining corn', in the fifth stanza the land is

this patient, temperate, slow, indifferent,
crop-yielding, crop-denying, in-neglect-
quickly-returning-to-the-nettle-and-bracken,
sodden and friendly land¹⁰.

With this semantic field of emotional and physical intimacy, this is the first time in the poem where the persona betrays emotional attachment to the land. Later, in the tenth stanza, as the Empire recedes, the persona points out the people who 'ignore the question [of what will happen to them] / sure that Caesar's word / is Caesar's bond for legions in our need'¹¹. The very mention of the people being 'sure' seems almost to emphasise their lack of certitude. There is the strong implication, with the descendants of the colonisers becoming emotionally attached to the land, the colonisers have in a sense become naturalised and are no longer colonisers but natives in their own right, albeit different to the 'native' natives. John Wilson Foster states that 'Hewitt's Roman is today's Protestant—arrogant, patronizing, frightened, forced by his restricted definition of accepted behaviour to find the Catholic Irish savage, yet perversely sure that he too is Irish.'¹² The oft-cited end of the poem sees the persona admitting as much. He is intellectually able to admit that his people's colonial history has 'altered us' but, in a dichotomous fashion similar to his inability to countenance the jarring witnesses of the natives beyond rectifying an imaginative past, there is a defensive, emotional and intransigent streak to his final three statements:

we would be strangers in the Capitol;
this is our country also, nowhere else;
and we shall not be outcast on the world¹³.

¹⁰ Ibid., 36–7.

¹¹ Ibid., 39.

¹² John Wilson Foster, 'The Landscape of the Planter and the Gael in the Poetry of John Hewitt and John Montague', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 1 (1975), 17–33.

¹³ Hewitt, 'The Colony', 40.

The colonisers' transformation to coloniser-natives is complete: they are 'strangers' to their Roman heritage and, in being 'outcast', they are now jarring witnesses to Roman interests.

Richard Kirkland levels the accusation that 'Hewitt's writings appear as nothing less than wagers with heterogeneity: if his analytic method cannot prevail, sensory impression and prejudicial emotion will inevitably break through. Moreover, there is evidence that Hewitt was aware of this dilemma.'¹⁴ This seems a rather odd thing to level, negatively, as if Hewitt was seeking to avoid the issue, when the issue seems to be exactly what Hewitt is addressing in one of his most famous poems. Hewitt's coloniser is at pains to objectively analyse the history of his own people and he arguably manages to atone, if only in accepting a narrative of collective guilt, for past injustices. However, he is unable even to think of the colonised, who cohabit his temporal present, outwith the dehumanising language of subjugation. It is arguable that, rather than the Roman/Northern Irish metaphor, it is this struggle between cultural atonement and cultural survival which is central to 'The Colony'. This struggle is a perfect example of how the 'struggle with jarring witnesses'¹⁵, that Holton perceives in modernist fiction, can be said to be true of modern poetry from Northern Ireland. Further, 'The Colony' highlights, through the Romans' transformation from colonisers to coloniser-natives, the historical creation and recreation of jarring witnesses which struggle amongst themselves.

Also alluding to antiquity is Derek Mahon's poem 'Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy'. The poem takes its refrain 'It is night and the barbarians have not come'¹⁶ from the Egyptian-Greek poet C. P. Cavafy. The original poem, translated by Keeley and Sherrard as 'Waiting for the Barbarians'¹⁷, concerns an ancient town under perceived threat from external barbarians. The leaders of the town wait to surrender to the barbarians, dress up in elaborate state regalia for the transfer of power and cease to legislate for the town's inhabitants. The barbarians do not come and word is spread that in fact there are no barbarians. Rather than being a case for celebration, the townspeople desert the streets in

¹⁴ Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965: Moments of Danger* (New York, 1996), 31.

¹⁵ Robert Holton, *Jarring Witnesses: Modern Fiction and the Representation of History* (Hemel Hempstead, 1994), 251.

¹⁶ Derek Mahon, 'Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy' in Paul Muldoon (ed.), *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (London, 1986), 289.

¹⁷ C.P. Cavafy 'Waiting for the Barbarians' in George Savidis (ed.), Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (trans.), *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems* (Princeton, 1992), 18.

consternation. It is at this point that Mahon sets his poem. In the light of the barbarians not having come, the narrator harks back to a time when

It was not always so hard;
When the great court flared
With gallowglasses and language difficulty ...¹⁸

The paradox of finding ‘gallowglasses and language difficulty’ easier than not being invaded by barbarians is a strange thing to comprehend and it is tempting to accept Norman Vance’s succinct summation of what Mahon is getting at:

Once there had been the straightforward polarity of Planter and Gael, colonizer and colonized, and a clear sense of language difference and of who the “barbarians” were. But the simple sixteenth-century world of conquest and difference ... has gone¹⁹

However, Vance’s reading fails to take fully into account the complexity of imagery Mahon uses here and, it can be argued, crucially misses Mahon’s point. Gallowglasses were Norse-Scottish-Irish mercenaries. The image is intriguing as, apart from being an interesting historical hybrid of the Irish and two of their main medieval invaders, the gallowglasses themselves were of dubious loyalty and could be found on all sides of any tussle in the medieval British Isles. There is no ‘straightforward polarity’ in the section. In fact, the narrator fondly remembers a time when there was much difficulty in communication and difficulty in discerning who was loyal to whom. In the fourth and fifth stanzas, the poem jumps into a decidedly modern present:

Now it is night and the barbarians have not come.
Or if they have we only recognise,
Harsh as a bombed bathroom,
The frantic anthropologisms
And lazarus ironies behind their talk

¹⁸ Derek Mahon, ‘Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy’ in Muldoon (ed.), *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 289.

¹⁹ Norman Vance ‘From Decadence to Byzantium’, *New Literary History*, 35.4 Forms of Decadence (2004), 563–72.

Of fitted carpets, central heating
And automatic gear-change—
Like the bleached bones of a hare
Or a handful of spent
Cartridges on a deserted rifle range²⁰.

Again, the imagery is complex but Mahon's point is worth digging out. Mahon's persona harks back fondly to a time of medieval confusion and hybridity which, he imagines, was not as hard to live with as the modern world's static hegemony of mutually intelligible languages of materialism (the carpets, central heating and cars) and violence (the bombed bathrooms and bullet cartridges). This turns traditional republican narrative, of a peaceful, cohesive Ireland made confused and problematic by British invaders, fundamentally on its head.

'Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy' struggles with jarring witnesses in a rather different way than Hewitt's 'The Colony'. Where that poem's persona actively tells the story of the subjugated, the persona here undermines elements of the narrative of the subjugated. It could be argued, from the point of view of the jarring witness (that is to say, a republican narrative of Irish history) that in so undermining republican narrative, Mahon is complicit in maintaining the illegitimacy of the ascendancy. However, Mahon's persona specifically points out his disdain for what he sees as a mutually intelligible (i.e. to republicans and everyone else) present of vacuous materialism and violence, and his preference for what *he* understands the past to have been like. In a sense then, the jarring witness that Mahon's poem struggles to give voice to is Mahon's perception of Irish medieval history which has been submerged or distorted by other jarring witnesses.

Where Mahon portrays materialism and violence side by side in 'Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy', he arguably could be said to equate one with the other. This would almost certainly seem an unfair equation; a life of docile materialism is surely preferable to a life of violence and anguish. But the reader is unmistakably left with the sense that materialism and violence are related, if not necessarily antithetical to each other. This fundamental intertwining of materialism and violence crops up time and again in modern Northern Irish poetry and it is to a powerful example of such a poem that this essay now turns. John Hewitt's 'The Coasters' is entirely in the second person.

²⁰ Mahon, 'Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy', 289–90.

The reader therefore reads in the guise of a ‘coaster’, namely an inhabitant of North Down’s ‘gold coast’ middle-class Belfast suburbs²¹. ‘You coasted along’ reads the first line and ends the seventeenth line, neatly bracketing three stanzas of detached middle class materialist living; ‘larger houses, gadgets, more machines / ... golf and weekend bungalows’, holidays to caravan parks and the Mediterranean, infrequent church attendance and ‘subscriptions to worthwhile causes’²² ‘The other sort, / coasting too’ appear in the third stanza²³. Because ‘relations were improving’, ‘You visited each other... / moved by your broadmindedness’ and ‘The annual processions / began to look rather like folk festivals’²⁴. The final four stanzas chart the simmering of intercommunal tensions in the language of epidemic infection, ‘the old lies festered; / the ignorant became more thoroughly infected’, while statements that the addressee simply ‘coasted along’ now intersperse rather than bracket the stanzas²⁵. The implication is that *by* coasting along, imagining themselves uninvolved in civil strife while always voting in ‘the regular plebiscites of loyalty’ and reaping the material benefits of them, that the coasters themselves fuel the epidemic: ‘You coasted along / and the sores suppurred and spread’²⁶. By the last stanza, similarly to his ‘The Colony’, Hewitt moves from past tense to present tense and the sense of urgency and of complicity is palpable:

Now the fever is high and raging;
 who would have guessed it, coasting along?
 The ignorant-sick thresh about in delirium
 and tear at the scabs with dirty fingernails.
 The cloud of infection hangs over the city²⁷

‘The Coasters’, less obviously than in ‘The Colony’ perhaps but no less fundamentally, has a struggle with jarring witnesses at its core; interestingly, they are not ‘the *other* sort’, but ‘the ignorant’ whose wellbeing is poetically structured to be predicated on the behaviour of the coasters, who, in leaving the ignorant to their illness while simultaneously reaping the benefits of their

²¹ Susan McKay, *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People* (Belfast, 2000), 13.

²² John Hewitt, ‘The Coasters’ in Longley and Ormsby (eds), *John Hewitt: Selected Poems*, 71.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 71–2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 71–2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

higher social position, fuel and exacerbate that illness²⁸. Edna Longley's view that the poem 'indict[s] the] socio-political conduct' of 'the Planter'²⁹ can certainly be said to be borne out. The last line 'You coasted too long', apart from being an admirably poetic and acerbic judgement, emphasises the reality that no separation of the previously hermetic coasters and jarring 'ignorant' witnesses will henceforth be possible and a new narrative certainty is now being struggled for³⁰.

The final poem this essay turns to is Derek Mahon's 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford'. The premise of the poem is deceptively simple: in the titular shed, abandoned 'since civil war days', 'A thousand mushrooms crowd to a keyhole', the only source of occasional sunlight³¹. After 'a half century, without visitors, in the dark', the narrator unwittingly discovers them by opening the door of the shed and ponders on their appearance³². While it is tempting to read this rediscovery, of malignant growth after 'half a century', as a metaphor for the re-emergence of violence in the island of Ireland in the 1960s, Kathleen Shields warns that 'the mushrooms cannot be reduced to the Protestants of Northern Ireland'³³. Her warning is astute as such a simple reading of the poem risks missing much of Mahon's artistry. The complexity of the poem is notable even from the themes and images implied in the poem's two epigraphs. The second of these is a dedication to the author J.G. Farrell, whose book set in a decaying Anglo-Irish hotel in County Wexford during the Irish War of Independence inspires this poem's setting. The first epigraph though is a quote from Turkish Greek poet George Seferis' 'Mythistorema': 'Let them not forget us, the weak souls among the asphodels'³⁴. The Asphodel Meadows are an area of the Greek Underworld where the souls of those who lived with neither heroism nor evil reside. In a sense, the asphodels are for the forgotten people of history, the people with no narrative. This is a strikingly fitting image for the content of the poem that follows. The lead up to the discovery of the mushrooms is an exquisitely paced, gradually-building crescendo of imagery.

²⁸ Ibid., 71 [my emphasis].

²⁹ Edna Longley, 'Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland', *The Crane Bag*, 9.1 Contemporary Culture Debate (1985), 26–40.

³⁰ Hewitt 'The Coasters', 71–3.

³¹ Derek Mahon 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford' in Muldoon (ed.), *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 296–7

³² Ibid., 297.

³³ Kathleen Shields 'Derek Mahon's Poetry of Belonging', *Irish University Review*, 24(1994), 67–79.

³⁴ Quoted in Muldoon (ed.), *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 296.

The fourth stanza explores the mushrooms' fifty year concealment, the

deaths, the pale flesh flaking
 into the earth that nourished it;
 And nightmares, born of these and the grim
 Dominion of stale air and rank moisture³⁵.

The fifth stanza shifts to the appearance of the mushrooms to the narrator as he discovers them:

... Magi, moonmen,
 Powdery prisoners of the old regime,
 Web-throated, stalked like triffids, racked by drought
 ... food for worms³⁶

The imagery reaches its crescendo of horror in the sixth and final stanza where the narrator anthropomorphises the mushrooms:

They are begging us, you see, in their wordless way,
 To do something, to speak on their behalf
 Or at least not to close the door again.
 Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii!
 'Save us, save us' they seem to say,
 ... [']You with your light meter and relaxed itinerary,
 Let not our naive labours have been in vain!³⁷

While the mushrooms are imagined pleading like Seferis's plaintive epigraph, Peter McDonald points out that this last line 'makes explicit a parallel which has already been felt beneath the surface. The discovery of fungi in a disused shed carries the symbolic weight of all the "lost lives" that make up history'³⁸. That Mahon adopts the imagery of death camps in relation to neglected mushrooms, successfully and with great humanity, is, it can be argued, a remarkable poetic achievement.

³⁵ Mahon 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', 297.

³⁶ Ibid., 297.

³⁷ Ibid., 298.

³⁸ Quoted in Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965: Moments of Danger* (1996), 201.

That Derek Mahon's 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford' struggles with jarring witnesses is not in doubt. Where from the poem's outset it is tempting to view such a witness as the disenfranchised Anglo-Irish Protestant, it soon becomes apparent the poem is not concerned with this-or-that jarring witness to a metanarrative but all the jarring witnesses throughout history who languish 'among the asphodels'³⁹, deprived of any historical narrative. Writing about this poem, Scott Brewster states that "The one who arrives late, taking the place of the "expropriated mycologist", is a witness, signatory or keyholder to the obscure but enduring memories and secrets lodged behind the door of the shed.⁴⁰ If Brewster is right then 'the one who arrives late' is the poet, confronted with how to address the needs of jarring witnesses to history. That the poem ends with the above lines at least gives those jarring witnesses some narrative voice but the truth of that voice is justifiably weakened by the word 'seem' as Mahon's persona recognises the fundamental inability to give full, true voice to the voiceless, to fully incorporate the jarring witness to history⁴¹.

A problem with Holton's methodology of exploring, and thus justifying, the extent to which the struggle with jarring witnesses is characteristic of modern fiction is his sole use of novels which could fall under the genre historical fiction. He points out that 'the novel, especially the historical novel, ... is concerned with representing the temporal existence and legitimacy of particular communities and their points of view'⁴². It could be argued that his argument would be made all the stronger if the characteristic he emphasises were highlighted in other examples of fiction in literature. This is also a problem with judging the extent to which the struggle with jarring witnesses is characteristic of modern poetry from Northern Ireland. The historical circumstances of this poetry means that issues of 'legitimacy of particular communities' are, arguably, almost bound to be addressed by poets in those times and places. At the same time however, it is hardly the fault of John Hewitt and Derek Mahon that they were born into the circumstances they were and were blessed, or cursed, with the wish to analyse their lot through poetry. Perhaps, if given several hundred more pages, Holton would have examined jarring witnesses in Science Fiction and Magical Realism and there certainly seems to be scope for examining how jarring witnesses are dealt with

³⁹ Quoted in Muldoon (ed.), *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 296.

⁴⁰ Scott Brewster 'A Residual Poetry: Heaney, Mahon and Hedgehog History', *Irish University Review*, 28 (1998), 56–67.

⁴¹ Mahon 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', 298.

⁴² Holton, *Jarring Witnesses*, 52.

in modern poetry in general. Nevertheless, this essay shows beyond doubt that the ‘struggle with jarring witnesses’ Robert Holton attributed as ‘one of the definitive characteristics of modernist fiction’ is fundamentally true of the modern Northern Irish poetry of John Hewitt and Derek Mahon⁴³. Hewitt’s ‘The Colony’ and ‘The Coasters’, while adopting respectively atoning and accusatory personae, both have a struggle with jarring witnesses at their core; ‘The Colony’, rather than straightforwardly comparing Roman colonisation to British colonisation of Northern Ireland, is fundamentally about the struggle between inter-communal atonement and threats, perceived or otherwise, to cultural survival. ‘The Coasters’ takes a different tack and, rather than having a ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ group jar against each other, sets inter-communal strife up as a class conflict, with the values of materialism espoused by the middle-classes fundamentally intertwined with the violence that pervades their society. Derek Mahon’s poetry, while more oblique, struggles similarly with jarring witnesses. ‘Poem Beginning with a Line by Cavafy’, harking back to a version of history overlooked by specifically Irish republican jarring witnesses can be said to, on the one hand implicitly legitimise the Protestant Ascendancy but, on the other hand, give voice to a lost narrative of Irish hybridity. ‘A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford’ similarly deals with lost rather than subjugated narratives but its scope is so vast as to illustrate, albeit metaphorically, the pressure on poets or artists to give voice to the jarring witnesses of history.

University of Edinburgh

⁴³ Ibid., 251.

Notes on Contributors

Timothy C. Baker is Lecturer in Scottish Literature at the University of Aberdeen. He is the author of *George Mackay Brown and the Philosophy of Community* (2009), and is completing a monograph on contemporary Scottish Gothic. His research is focused on the relation between community and religion in Scottish fiction; he has recently published articles on Catherine Sinclair, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, John Burnside, Compton Mackenzie, and Robin Jenkins.

Edwin Cruden is an alumnus of National University of Ireland, Galway, Università degli Studi di Udine and University of Edinburgh. His research interests include the cultural mobilisation of masculinities, formalist approaches to non-linear narrative structures, war poetics throughout history and dominant minority narratives.

Fergus Dunne has completed a doctoral thesis on the texts and contexts of Francis Sylvester Mahony. He has published articles on various aspects of Mahony's writing career, including his role in the Cork Fraserians contribution to 1830s British periodical culture, his Rome correspondence for the *Daily News*, his later journalism for the *Globe*, and his translation-based critique of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*.

Ersev Ersoy completed her BA (honours) in Linguistics at Hacettepe University in Turkey in 2005. She received her MSc and PhD in Comparative literature from the University of Edinburgh, respectively in 2007 and 2012. Her doctoral thesis, 'Social Reality and Mythic Worlds' explores the reflections of folk belief and national heritage in Macpherson's Ossian and Lönnrot's *Kalevala*. Her main research interests include cultural memory, historical writing and the representations of Scottish identity in the eighteenth century.

Shahriyar Mansouri received his PhD from the University of Glasgow. He specializes in twentieth-century Irish novel, with additional interests in

theory of the novel, historical fiction, biopolitics, and a Deleuzian reading of (post-) nationalist identity. He has presented and published papers on Irish identity and culture in post-independence Ireland, and on authors such as Samuel Beckett, Francis Stuart, Jim Phelan, Roddy Doyle, and Edna O'Brien. Shahriyar is Assistant Professor of English at Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, and IASIL regional Bibliography Representative for Iran.

Aideen M. O'Leary (Ph.D. Cambridge) is Lecturer and Programme Coordinator in Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies at the University of Aberdeen, having held prior appointments at University College Cork and the University of Notre Dame. Her main research interests lie in the interactions between the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon worlds and Latin literature, and in New Testament apocrypha. Recent publications include *Trials and Translations: the Latin Origins of the Irish Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (Aberdeen 2013).

Virginie Privas-Bréauté teaches English and business English through drama and dramatic techniques at the Lyon 3 University - France. After a PhD on the work of Anne Devlin and Stewart Parker, she studied the dramatic representation of national identities in contemporary Northern Irish drama. She has recently examined the didactic value of drama through the borrowings from Bertolt Brecht's and Augusto Boal's theories. This has led her to consider how contemporary playwrights from minorities aim to reshape the contours of their drama. She also analyses how drama may reshape the contours of language teaching.