UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO
FACULDADE DE FILOSOFIA, LETRAS E CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS MODERNAS
PROGRAMA DE PÓS GRADUAÇÃO EM ESTUDOS LINGÜÍSTICOS E LITERÁRIOS EM
INGLÊS

VIVIANE CARVALHO DA ANNUNCIAÇÃO

**EXILE, HOME AND CITY: THE POETIC
ARCHITECTURE OF BELFAST**

(VERSÃO CORRIGIDA)

SÃO PAULO
2012

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TESE DE DOUTORADO APRESENTADA À FACULDADE DE
FILOSOFIA, LETRAS E CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS DA
UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO COMO PARTE DOS
REQUISITOS PARA OBTENÇÃO DO TÍTULO DE DOUTOR EM
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2012

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“Think where man's glory most begins and ends, And say my glory was I had such friends.”

(W. Butler Yeats)

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis is concerned with how the poetry written in Northern Ireland throughout the twentieth century reifies the city of Belfast through language, metaphor and imagery, compiling a concrete constellation of aesthetic experiments. It also examines how its poets have represented not only Belfast's concrete and architectural landmarks, but also its historical and spatial displacements. Due to the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922, through which Ulster remained a constitutive part of the British Isles, while the South started to build the foundations of what was going to become the Republic of Ireland, Northern Irish poets have built a poetic landscape that has been instead incessantly fragmented through the motifs of alienation and displacement of subjectivity. Through the analysis of the Belfast poems by the poets Louis MacNeice, John Hewitt, Padraic Fiacc, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian, Seamus Heaney, Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Allen Gillis and Miriam Gamble, the thesis shows the poetic architecture of Belfast points to wider sociological spaces. It is never alone, or even single, but always plural and globally referential. Through a *space of confluence* which brings together dissimilar discourses, the selected poems present a desire to possess Belfast artistically, a city where art, history and memories intermingle and interact in a dynamic manner. Images, styles and ideas are carried from generation to generation and create a constellation of fearful and hopeful dreams. It engages past and present in a fruitful reflection on identitarian and artistic belonging.

Key-words: Modernism, Northern Irish Literature, Belfast, poetry;

RESUMO

A presente tese tem como objetivo compreender como a poesia escrita na Irlanda do Norte representa a cidade de Belfast durante o século vinte. A hipótese defendida pela tese é a de que o trabalho poético com a métrica, figuras de linguagem e imagens cria uma constelação de experimentos estéticos. O trabalho também compreende como os poetas recriaram não somente os pontos de referência arquitetônicos de Belfast, mas também os seus próprios deslocamentos históricos e geográficos. Devido à assinatura do tratado anglo-irlandês em 1922 através do qual o Ulster se manteve parte das Ilhas Britânicas e o sul começava a

construir as fundações do que seria chamada futuramente de República da Irlanda, os poetas pertencentes à Irlanda do Norte criaram uma paisagem poética que é incessantemente fragmentada por meio da alienação e do deslocamento subjetivo. A análise dos poemas de Belfast escritos por Louis MacNeice, John Hewitt, Padraic Fiac, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian, Seamus Heaney, Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Allen Gillis e Miriam Gamble, demonstra que a arquitetura poética de Belfast aponta para espaços sociológicos mais abrangentes. A cidade não é retratada singularmente, mas em sua conexão com outras localidades globais. Por meio de um *espaço de confluência*, que agrupa discursos diversos, os poemas selecionados apresentam um desejo simbólico de possuir Belfast, uma cidade em que arte, história e memórias interagem de forma dinâmica. Imagens e estilos são passados de geração para geração, criando uma constelação de sonhos aterrorizantes e esperançosos, que engajam passado e presente em uma reflexão sobre pertencimento identitário e artístico.

Palavras-chave: Modernismo, Literatura norte-irlandesa, Belfast, poesia;

RESUMO EXPANDIDO

A presente tese tem como objetivo compreender como a poesia escrita na Irlanda do Norte representa a cidade de Belfast durante o século vinte. Minha hipótese é a de que o trabalho poético com a métrica, figuras de linguagem e imagens cria uma constelação de experimentos estéticos. A tese também tem como objetivo compreender como os poetas recriaram não somente os pontos de referência arquitetônicos de Belfast, mas também os seus próprios deslocamentos históricos e geográficos. Desde o começo do século vinte os poetas pertencentes à Irlanda do Norte criaram uma paisagem poética que, ao contrário de sólida como suas ruas e monumentos, é incessantemente fragmentada por meio da alienação social e do deslocamento subjetivo. Como paradigma, estaria a poesia de Louis MacNiece (1907 – 1963) por espelhar a angústia do exílio e da falta de pertencimento. Em “Carrickfergus” ele afirma que, por pertencer à comunidade protestante, não tem conexões com a comunidade católica, mesmo sendo solidário a uma sociedade mais igualitária. Um dos motivos pelas quais essa relação dúbia se desenvolve está no fato do poeta ser herdeiro de uma língua cuja raiz já é incerta devido à colonização. Após uma geração de poetas continuamos a presenciar um senso de não pertencimento, e inconformismo provindos dos lábios de poetas como Derek Mahon (1941) e Ciaran Carson (1948). Enquanto o primeiro emprega uma métrica disjuntiva para conceber uma poética assombrada por espectros da história, o segundo demonstra sua total dissolução subjetiva em meio à guerra civil. Nos dias de hoje, poetas como Sinéad Morrissey ainda se questionam sobre o significado de pertencimento em Belfast.

Uma das teses defendidas pelo trabalho é que tal configuração artística se deve a um momento histórico específico, catalisador do que se pode chamar de uma dissociação de sensibilidade irlandesa: a assinatura do tratado anglo-irlandês em 1922 através do qual o Ulster se manteve parte das Ilhas Britânicas e o sul começava a construir as fundações do que seria chamada futuramente de República da Irlanda. Atuando no centro dessa ruptura histórica, há uma fratura simbólica e cultural: se por um lado uma futura república estabelecia uma identidade para a Irlanda, o Norte ainda tentava constituir uma utopia para imaginação artística. Ao mesmo tempo em que poetas como William Butler Yeats e autores associados ao Celtic Revival estavam criando um cânone nacional e uma tradição literária com a qual gerações futuras iriam dialogar, questionar e expandir (Nolan 157), os autores do norte ainda encontravam dificuldades de fazer parte dessa paisagem cultural que, devido a uma “divisão étnica e religiosa crônica” (Garvin 2) impedia a unificação nacional moderna. Ao longo dos capítulos, defendo que a obsessão literária na criação de utopias ou distopias é uma

característica psicológica e artística que se dá devido à configuração histórica típica da Irlanda do Norte, que foi originada pelo que o crítico Tom Gavin chamou de “tradição dupla” (2): uma industrial e a outra campestre, que embora heterogêneas, apresentam resquícios coloniais em sua formação.

Baseada no fato que há uma tradição dupla na Irlanda como um todo devido não somente às ondas migratórias de escoceses para a Irlanda do Norte no período medieval (Maxwell Web 4, Aug 2011), mas também devido à partilha promovida pelo tratado anglo-irlandês no começo do século vinte, os poetas da Irlanda do Norte e da República da Irlanda apresentam diferentes preocupações e preferências artísticas. Depois de William Butler Yeats, os poetas da República da Irlanda possuíam uma tradição literária para seguir ou se opor. Os poetas do norte, por sua vez, não tinham certeza se aquela tradição era fiel a sua identidade histórica e social – ou se até mesmo eles pertenciam àquela tradição. Enquanto a primeira geração de poetas sulistas desenvolveu a noção de celta de modo a conciliar o intelectualismo protestante e a sensibilidade campestre, as experimentações do Norte tentavam acomodar paisagens rurais e urbanas, o que os possibilitou a serem “esteticamente e culturalmente conscientes de si mesmos” (Longley, *Poetry* 220). Se por um lado o sistema colonial irlandês foi um dos fatores que contribuiu para diferentes experimentações poéticas, por outro o legado industrial da Irlanda do Norte teve sua importância. A lírica ríspida e direta da Irlanda do Norte, que retrata *shipwrecked women* (McNeice 25) e *tall chimneys at roof tops* (Hewitt 42), tem origem na classe operária da cidade de Belfast, enquanto a República buscava no campo uma unificação orgânica de cultura.

De modo a compreender como Belfast é representada por meio de uma linguagem poética que propõe uma nova arquitetura para a poesia da Irlanda do Norte, a tese investiga a natureza dos materiais artísticos da arquitetura da cidade, contextualizando formalmente a poesia da Irlanda do Norte. De acordo com a noção *forma e função*, é possível observar como os contornos estilísticos do primeiro grupo são desenvolvidos e expandidos pelos grupos posteriores. Portanto, as perguntas que guiam essa escolha metodológica são: como a cidade é constituída pelos poetas que dramatizam um exílio e alienação de seus lares? Quais os materiais poéticos que compõem essa arquitetura? Qual é o processo de construção? Quais são as diferenças significativas de cada autor? Há uma visão utópica ou distópica dessa cidade? Há uma cidade material sendo arquitetada? Ou seria apenas um lar imaginário? Como os atentados terroristas corroboram nessa visão? Quais as diferenças entre uma geração e a outra?

A presente tese está dividida em três capítulos que ilustram, de forma metafórica e analítica, como essa mesma cidade foi arquitetada por meio do material disponível pela linguagem poética: métrica e imagem. Demonstrando como cada experimento poético não é originário de uma preferência artística individual, mas parte de projetos interconectados que dialogam uns com os outros, a tese apresenta uma abordagem cronológica. O primeiro capítulo examina a poesia escrita antes da guerra civil irlandesa, os chamados *Troubles* de 1969, o segundo capítulo analisa a poesia produzida durante a guerra civil e o terceiro capítulo, a poesia produzida após os *Troubles* e Acordo de Belfast (ou Acordo da Sexta Feira Santa de 1999). Desta maneira, o primeiro capítulo examina como os poetas Louis McNeice, John Hewitt e Padraic Fiacca constroem um referencial de imagens da cidade de Belfast com o qual futuros poetas irão dialogar. Se por um lado McNeice apresenta Belfast como uma mulher esquelética que implora por esmolas na porta de uma igreja, John Hewitt e Padraic Fiacca optam pelo retrato de uma Belfast proletária, em que fábricas e chaminés convivem com atentados terroristas e o início da guerra civil. É importante ressaltar que os três poetas, ao escolherem diferentes retratos da cidade, demonstram, subjetivamente, sua falta de pertencimento nessa cidade. Enquanto McNeice demonstra que não se sente confortável com a ambiguidade religiosa em poemas como “Carrifergus” e “Belfast”, John Hewitt procura defender uma utopia socialista por meio da crítica aos rumos tomados pela cidade; tais ideais são reproduzidos em poemas como “Because I paced my thought” e “Ireland”. Padraic Fiacca adotando uma linguagem fragmentada e próxima dos experimentos poéticos pós-modernos, apresenta um deslocamento subjetivo no início da Guerra Civil Irlandesa. Poemas como “Gloss” apontam que para Fiacca a cidade de Belfast é sinônimo de desespero e crise psicológica. Nesse primeiro momento, compreendemos como Belfast apresenta o desconforto do exílio e da alienação subjetiva – o que será simbolicamente retomado pela geração seguinte.

O segundo foca na Renascença Norte Irlandesa, que ocorreu no período dos *Troubles* (1969). Embora haja um grande número de poetas escrevendo durante esse período, o trabalho analisa alguns deles em diálogo: Michael Longley e Derek Mahon, Ciaran Carson e Paul Muldoon, e Medbh McGuckian e Seamus Heaney. Com uma multiplicidade de temas e experimentações artísticas, esses poetas revolucionam o cenário poético norte irlandês, sugerindo uma nova versão de história literária e política. No primeiro momento do capítulo, a análise poética de Michael Longley e Derek Mahon sugeriu uma retomada de temas clássicos como metáfora do tempo presente. Poemas como “Graffiti” e “Hebrides”, de Longley, e “Spring in Belfast” e “Ovid in Tomis”, de Mahon sugerem, concomitantemente,

exílio e retorno à cidade. O conceito de lar é desenvolvido de maneira distanciada e desafiadora. Na análise de poemas escritos por Paul Muldoon e Ciaran Carson, a cidade é observada como um espaço de confusão social e psicológica: enquanto para Muldoon as relações pessoais não conseguem ser desenvolvidas plenamente, Carson critica a estruturação política da cidade ao abordar temas como justiça, leis e aprisionamentos. Na última seção do capítulo, dedicada aos poetas Medbh McGuckian e Seamus Heaney, comprovamos como o distanciamento psicológico e geográfico de Belfast resulta em um retrato metonímico da cidade. Enquanto McGuckian retoma Belfast por meio das imagens de sua infância e de seu pai, Heaney, durante seu período de afastamento, compara a guerra civil em Belfast a outros monumentos de cultura produzidos durante guerras, como os poemas de Garcia Lorca e as obras de James Joyce.

O terceiro foca mais especificamente em uma produção recente e inovadora representada pelos poetas Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Allen Gillis e Miriam Gamble. Essa geração de poetas, que na maioria das vezes teve sua carreira iniciada nos anos noventa, retrata o início de uma era tecnológica e global. Após a assinatura do Tratado da Sexta Feira Santa (1999) os poetas começam a refletir sobre como a história norte-irlandesa torna-se material para exploração turística e cultural da cidade. Enquanto Leontia Flynn e Allen Gillis reproduzem uma Belfast rodeada por referenciais da cultura popular, como filmes, canções e produtos norte-americanos, Sinéad Morrissey e Miriam Gamble retratam o impacto dessa nova configuração social de Belfast em suas escolhas artísticas e subjetivas. Interessantemente, o processo de paz e uma nova configuração social fez com que as poetizas se sentissem mais motivadas para desenvolverem seus experimentos poéticos. A escolha pelos poetas do terceiro capítulo também se deu pela sua interação artística com estilos, temas e estruturas adotadas por gerações anteriores.

A conclusão apresentada pelo estudo é que a cidade de Belfast é representada poeticamente por meio da desconstrução de estereótipos nacionais e pelo trabalho incessante com formas poéticas pré-estabelecidas. Ao contrário de defender ideais políticos, o que é confortável em uma situação de guerra civil, cada poeta opta por representar a cidade de Belfast de acordo com percepções subjetivas, desprovidas de manifestos políticos. De forma geral, a partir do dado da consciência contrapontística do exílio e da alienação do lar, tais poetas retratam a cidade como um lócus onde o confronto entre o real e o subjetivo produz uma gama de questionamentos que retornam à própria realidade do período histórico. A cidade de Belfast não é retratada singularmente, mas em sua conexão com outras localidades globais. Por meio de um *espaço de confluência*, que agrupa discursos diversos, os poemas

selecionados apresentam um desejo simbólico de possuir Belfast, uma cidade em que arte, história e memórias interagem de forma dinâmica. Imagens e estilos são passados de geração para geração, criando uma constelação de sonhos aterrorizantes e esperançosos, que engajam passado e presente em uma reflexão sobre pertencimento identitário e artístico.

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I – PRE-TROUBLES MEMORIES

Exposé – Sir Charles Lanyon, or the Social Dys-topist

Shipyard, or “banned forever from the candles of the Irish poor”

The Botanic Gardens, or “The dream of a Western Heaven”

The Linen Industry, or “The smoking chimneys over the slate roof tops”

CHAPTER II – TROUBLES MEMORIES

Exposé – Queen's University Belfast, or the Imaginary community

Sir Alfred Brumwell Thomas, or “The tall kingdom at your shoulder”

The Crumling Road Gaol, or “An asterisk on the map”

The Walls, or the Real communities

CHAPTER III – POST-TROUBLES MEMORIES

Exposé – The Albert Clock, or “history’s dent and fracture splitting the atmosphere”

The Ulster museum, or local curiosity

The North Arcade, or the walking tours

The Odyssey Arena, or “I have Nothing to Declare”

EXILE, HOME AND CITY:

THE POETIC ARCHITECTURE OF BELFAST

*The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvellous subjects.
We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvellous;
but we do not notice it
(Baudelaire 129)*

INTRODUCTION

The present thesis is concerned with how the poetry written in Northern Ireland throughout the twentieth century reifies the city of Belfast through language, metaphor and imagery, compiling a concrete constellation of aesthetic experiments. I wish to examine how its poets have represented not only Belfast's concrete and architectural landmarks, but also its historical and spatial displacements. Since the beginning of the century, Northern Irish poets have built a poetic landscape that, rather than being as solid as its streets and buildings, has been instead incessantly fragmented through the motifs of alienation and displacement of subjectivity. This condition can in fact be dated to a very specific historic event: the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922, through which Ulster remained a constitutive part of the British Isles while the South started to build the foundations of what was going to become the Republic of Ireland.

At the very core of this historical rupture, there is a symbolic and artistic split. While there was an anticipated Republic already imagining and establishing an identity for the symbolic image of the nation of Ireland, the North was still dwelling in a literal utopia for artistic imagination. At the same time William Butler Yeats and the authors associated to the Revival group (Padraic Colum, F. R. Higgins and Austin Clarke) were creating a national canon and a literary tradition with which future generations would dialogue, question, and expand. For the critic Emer Nolan the Revival was the most significant moment in Irish literature. In her words, in no other historical period,

Ireland produced so many writers of such extraordinary quality. Moreover the reputations and achievements of W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge are inextricably bound up with the revivalist features of their Irish subject matter, and those of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett are at least moulded by their rejection of aesthetics and politics of the revival. The contemporary 'branding' of the Irish cultural heritage continues to exploit the frame of these literary stars. (157)

In the meantime, the authors from the North were struggling to become part of that cultural landscape on the account of "a chronic ethno-religious divide" (Garvin 2) which hampered a Modernistic ethos of unification. The literary obsession for the creation of utopias or dystopias is a psychological and an artistic feature that often comes to pass due to an historical configuration. This is not specific to Northern Ireland, but, in Tom Garvin's words, the unique "double tradition" (2) of this province intensifies this literary move to the other-worldly.

Grounded on the view that there is a double tradition in Ireland not only on the account of the migratory waves of Ulster Scots to Northern Ireland in the early medieval times (Maxwell, Web 4 Aug 2011), but also due to the partition promoted by the Anglo-Irish treaty in the beginning of the twentieth century, the poets from the North and the Republic of Ireland display different preoccupations and artistic preferences. After William Butler Yeats, the poets in the Republic of Ireland had what could be considered a created literary tradition which they would follow or react against. The poets in the North were not entirely confident whether that native Irish tradition was faithful to their historical and social identity. The first generation of Republican poets took on board and developed a notion of the Celt that would come to terms with both Protestant intellectualism and peasant *weltenschaung*. The Northern experimentations, however, were concerned with an accommodation of rural and urban landscapes, which enabled them to be "aesthetically and culturally self-conscious" in order to keep their literary options open (Longley, *Poetry in the Wars* 220). While Irish colonial system was one of the factors that contributed to different poetic experimentations, Northern Ireland's industrial heritage must be also accounted for when, in dissimilar ways, these Northern poets fall back on their cultural roots. Northern Irish harsh and blunt lyric, which depicts "shipwrecked women" (McNeice 25) and "tall chimneys at roof tops" (Hewitt 42), is deeply indebted to the working class backdrop of the city of Belfast, whereas the Republic was in pursuit of a national unification of culture.

With a view to understanding how Belfast proposes a new architecture to the poetry of the North of Ireland, this thesis is divided into three chapters. They will analytically illustrate how this very same city has been metaphorically constructed through the material available to poetry: metre and imagery. In addition to giving a wide overview on how these poetic experiments are not isolated poetics, but interconnected projects that mirror and dialogue with each other, I am going to rely on a chronological division. The first chapter is going to examine the poetry before the Troubles, or after the Anglo-Irish treaty (1922); the second, the poetry of the Troubles (1970s-1990s), and the third, the poetry that continues to reinvent Belfast after Good Friday Agreement (1998), in which a series of measures were taken in order to guarantee Northern Ireland would have a more equalitarian and democratic government, free of terrorist attacks and civil strife.

Thus, the first chapter is going to examine how the poets Louis MacNeice, John Hewitt and Padraic Fiacc artistically represent the city, the second is going to focus more specifically on the poetry of the “Troubles”, or so called Ulster Renaissance. Although there were many poets who were – and still are – part of the group I am going to focus more precisely on the pairs Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, Ciaran Carson and Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian and Seamus Heaney. The third is going to focus more specifically on a more recent, and innovative tradition, developed by poets, such as Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Allen Gillis and Miriam Gamble. Interestingly enough, with the peace process and a new configuration, Northern Irish female poets feel more encouraged to develop their distinctive poetic voice. Also, my preference for these poets stem from their development of styles, themes and structures started by previous generations.

Owing to the fact that the political separation of Northern Ireland deepened a social and ethnic segregation that was already present in Irish society as a whole, the artistic sensibility was extremely affected. The lack of – and the longing for – stability and home that poetry about Belfast displays is a symbolic response to this complex separation. The anxieties, idiosyncrasies and contradictions of the poets to be studied are prone to be identified as artistic devices which necessarily have to be understood in their historical context. In this sense, the main focus of this thesis is to understand how this historical and social space of the city of Belfast symbolically reproduces imagined homes and hidden histories. The question to be addressed in studying these poets and this period can be reduced rather simply to the following: how are the poets going to represent the city in which they once dwelled, or still dwell in their imagination, or which never existed but represent wishes fulfilled for their city? A second question presents itself: with which materials are they going

to build up the cities that were once disturbed and partially shattered by violence and war? Which places within this city are most readily conjured up? As a natural ramification of the first three questions, we must ask: What is the outcome of such representations? And finally, is there a clearly distinctive aesthetic in terms of generations, be it modern or postmodern, in the invention of the city, since it is primarily a modern motif?

I. 'BELFAST IN LITERATURE' COMMITMENT TO THE HISTORY OF THE LAND

In order to solve these questions related to the poetic architecture of Belfast, it is important to start by exploring, along general lines, the aesthetic commitment of its main poets. Belfast in literature is primarily represented through an artistic commitment to the city not simply as a platonic instance, but as a literary motif. The repetitions and variations of this motif throughout Ireland's literary history create an artistic representation of the geographical and cognitive displacement of Ireland. In the sixteenth century King Henry VIII made himself supreme ruler of Ireland and set into motion a long political process of Anglicization of the land:

Henry's intention was to bring about a revolution. He wanted to substitute for the 'sundry sorts' of people who made up the Irish population – that is the Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Irish – one class only, the king's subjects, all of whom would be anglicised. (Hayes-McCoy, *The Course of Irish History* 179)

Henry's successors continued his civil policy until the introduction of the plantations in the early seventeenth century Ireland. Settlers arrived from England and Scotland bringing their traditions, institutions, families and ways of life. However, David Lloyd's recent studies have shown that such measures led to an arbitrary division of the land, giving rise to a different mode of production and world view – since the native Irish ways (and language) were gradually substituted by the standard English. Small plantations replaced the traditional *clachans* (Lloyd, *Irish Times* 39-72)¹, isolating the individual from the community. The

¹ A *clachan*, is a medieval settlement common in rural Ireland. It is constituted of a village without any formal building. Their origin is unknown, but it is likely that they belong to an ancient root. For David Lloyd in the book "Irish Times", the *clachans* were agricultural settlements that defined Irish society. Through a communal

communal aspect of the land was substituted by a lease system that became the paragon of the historical partitions of Ireland. Based on a symbolic attempt to build a site in which that historical moment would be recaptured, the poets from the North have dwelled on aesthetic experiments that try to recover the materially foreclosed.

With the political developments of the twentieth century partition, the social fragmentation of Northern Ireland and, as a consequence, its economical capital deteriorated substantially. With a view to equalising the acquisitive power and employment opportunities of the Catholic community, in 1968, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association demanded changes through marches and public pleas. Nonetheless, the authorities envisioned them as anarchic attempts, and violently repressed any kind of social manifestation. On the other extreme, the Irish Republican Army prepared itself to counter-attack and started a new campaign that would resort to terrorist attacks and armed guerrilla warfare (Moody and Martin 344). In general terms, these are the main events that characterise the onset of the Troubles which lasted for long and unsettling years (1969 – 1998). This is the tense background which guides the ethos of the poetry of the North. It directs its forces towards a cultural digging of the historical circumstances which originated the social distresses of the sixties, seventies and eighties.

This poetic archaeology is already seen in the early poetry of the modern writer Louis MacNeice. In the second poem of his first book *Poems* (1935), “Valediction”, the poet expresses his longing to understand Ireland: “Being ordinary too I must in course discuss/ What we mean to Ireland or Ireland to us” (7). These extended and rhythmically pleasant verses express a moral and ethical commitment to a place that incites urgent answers. This happens because “in Ireland the land is of course an economic and political category and an ethical one” (Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 13). Being committed to the critical understanding of Ireland means this sensibility is preoccupied with the cultural identity of the land and the context that shaped it. This ethical stance was also taken on board and further developed by Derek Mahon, the poet whose lyric is deeply involved with the questions that MacNeice raised in the beginning of the century. For Mahon, the interpretation of the city is associated with the exercise of memory and responsibility, just as he expresses in his poem “Spring in Belfast”:

Walking among my own this windy morning

sharing of the land, peasants would have access to different forms of land –and culture, for they would also embrace dances and symbolic rituals as part of their communal life.

In a tide of sunlight between shower and shower
 I resume my old conspiracy with the wet
 Stone and unwieldy images of the squinting heart
 Once more, as before, I remember not to forget.

 And echoing back streets of this desperate city
 Should engage more than my casual interest,
 Exact more interest than my casual pity. (13)

If Mahon's view of his hometown is built on his perception of its inhabitants, on the other hand, the images suggested in the opening stanza point to binary oppositions, such as sunlight and shower, stone and heart, and memory and forgetfulness. These dichotomies, developed throughout the four stanzas of the poem, challenge poet and reader to engage in something more meaningful than occasional pity. Their engagement should be related to a rational commitment to history and culture. This vision is highlighted by the critic Eve Patten in her exploration of Northern Ireland through literature. For her, the poet in Ireland is a speaker of his community and a paragon for distinctive social groups:

In Ireland, traditional perceptions of the writer as responsible for registration of public sensibility have long been a source of poetic capital. The literary community continues to prioritize its poets as the primary agents of articulation and critique, a tendency which has been linked... to the legacy of a bardic past. (130)

In this sense, the figure of the poet is invested with ethical potential, which is a residue of a mythic or idealised era of the Celtic bard. Thus, following MacNeice's legacy, Northern poets are compelled to give a response to the political questions of their time. In order to do it, they feel obliged to forge an alliance between their individual affiliations and their ancestral community, or their personal artistic credos and the body of work which has been created before them. While trying to make something new, this coalition is useful given the fact that historical pressures present a powerful subject for poetry and are best addressed communally and diachronically. Usually, this dialogue with their heritage forces the artists to

reflect about their themes and motives, imaginatively expanding the scope of their aesthetic experimentations and literary references.

Since they are committed to the land and to history, the poets from Northern Ireland present a drive towards community. This drive was previously displayed by Louis MacNeice and then developed by Derek Mahon. In addition to ethical concerns, there is a linguistic commitment that is land related. In the hybrid essay and prose poem “Brick,” Ciaran Carson characterizes the city of Belfast according to a geological principle in which the most primitive natural source becomes representative of the architectural structure of the place:

Belfast is built on *sleech* – alluvial or tidal muck – and is built *of* *sleech*, metamorphosed into brick the city consuming its source as the brickfields themselves were built upon; *sleech*, this indeterminate slobbery semi-fluid – all the public buildings, notes Dr. Pococke, visiting the town in 1752, are founded on a *morass* – this gunge, allied to *slick* and *sludge*, slag, *sleek* and *slush*, to the Belfast or Scots *sleekit* that means sneaky, underhand, not-to-be-relied-on, in the earnest becoming, brick, something definite, a proverbial solidity. (179)

Linking the slipperiness of language with the very building blocks of Belfast, Carson associates the natural aspect of the city to the cultural landscape of Belfast. The transmutation of the geological material to the architectural building itself leads the reader to envisage a naturalisation, not of culture, but of technology. It is as if the manufacturing of the brick possessed the symbolic significance of reconnecting man and nature in its most primitive essence. Such a programme recollects the dialectic of the Enlightenment and the emancipation of humanity through the mastering of nature. (Adorno, *Dialectics* 04) According to Adorno, the ability then to transform the environment according to necessity emancipates humankind by making individuals sovereign over the world around them. One of the most striking examples was the Industrial Revolution which changed the landscape of British cities with factories and industrial apparatuses. In Terry Eagleton’s view, in the British context, “society itself... becomes a marvellous aesthetic organism, self-generating and self contained... ‘a new rural aesthetic which deliberately joined beauty with productivity and profit.’” (*Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 4). Society, in this definition, is an aesthetic project in itself.

By exploring language – and not nature – as the artifice that builds this city, Ciaran Carson proposes a different commitment to the land. Not cultural or intellectual, Belfast acquires a new tone with the mispronunciation of the words the doctor employs to describe the city. In this sense, the ideology of rationality, or the dialectic of Enlightenment, is revealed through the irrationality of something that cannot be thoroughly grasped: language, the raw material of poetry. In a special kind of linguistic mixture, the poet creates an ambiguous exchange between the cultural landscape and the diverse languages that characterise it. Thus, the poet's perception of the land leads to a different reasoning that ironically imitates the scientific mode. Structurally, it builds the place of inspiration in contrast with the poetic language as a metaphorical decoy that lures the readers into unsteady associations and references.

The complexity of language envisioned by Ciaran Carson is what Edna Longley defines as the relationship between Belfast and poetry. For her “as with politics, so with literature: if you pull out one thread of the Belfast tangle, others tug in opposition” (Longley, *The Living Stream* 86), thus, the various opposing threads are not precisely clear since language, from a poetic point of view, is estranged and alien. The poetic form reveals the material and historical complexity of the political situation of the land. Rather than a simplistic interpretation, poetry aims at revealing the strength of the signifier vis-a-vis a signified that tries to enclose it, so that a reconciliation or unification of truths is no longer possible. Another similar view is reproduced by one of the most distinctive voices of Northern Irish poetry: Paul Muldoon implicitly states the poetry of the city of Belfast is capable of revealing something other than this very same ideology.

Belfast for London's dog eat dog
back stab
and leap-frog.
More than once he collapsed
at his desk. But Margaret
would steady him through the Secretariat

towards his favourite restaurant
where, given my natural funk

I think of as restraint,

I might have avoided the Irish drunk. (167)

The proposition made by the poet in “The Soap Pig” is related to the violence that is both typical of Belfast and inherited from the big city dog-eat-dog frame of mind. The abrupt property of sounds reproduced by the plosives functions as a symbolic emblem of the social violence of the period the poem was written (1987). Poetry, hence, commits itself to land and violence – war and scarcity. Perhaps the metric economy of the verse mirrors the lack of words to describe the social distress provoked by the terrorist attacks performed by the IRA during the seventies. Moreover, the aspect of formal instability, with dissimilar associations and ironic images, is present in Carson’s and Muldoon’s poems. This will be analysed in detail in Chapter II.

The connection between poetry and violence is also examined by the critic Fran Brearton. She emphasises that the outbreak of the Northern Irish conflicts in the sixties compelled critics to read contemporary poetry in Northern Ireland in “the context of the Troubles, thus positing a symbiotic relationship between poetry and violence” (Brearton, “Poetry of the Sixties” 94). It follows that the border between reasoning, linguistic deceit and social hostility is dissolved, as well as that between history and communitarian division. Taking into consideration the experiments previously mentioned the reader can identify a wide variation of social and political concerns in the poetry from Northern Ireland.

War has proven to be powerful subject for poetry since Homer, but in specific contexts, war may also distort the way in which poems are read, interpreted and divulged. Along these lines, it is possible to affirm that the greatest disadvantage in understanding art solely as a symptom of social uneasiness, is that it ceases to be the symbolic manifestation of a reflexive thought about the history of art, and starts to be a vehicle of propagandist ideals. This is especially true of Northern Irish poetry. Even though the examples quoted above do not represent the whole of the production of poetry in Northern Ireland, if there is such a thing as an organised whole of such production, these aesthetic projects depict the eagerness to change the conventional representations of the land and the mechanisms of history. They push artistic experiments to an unsteady ground between morality, language, violence and memory.

The critic and philosopher Theodor Adorno said a great deal about the relationship between political and aesthetic commitments. For him, inasmuch as the poetic imagination is not a creation *ex nihilo*, the artistic motivation ought not to depend on a political ideology,

nor on a mere exercise of craft. It must, through the use of innovative techniques, offer another viewpoint on society. In his article “Commitment”, on which I am basing the subtitles of this introduction, he mentions the example of Pablo Picasso, who replied to a Nazi officer that the *Guernica* was not created by him as an individual, but produced by the distresses of the Second World War. As expressed in the article:

When a work is merely itself and no other thing, as in a pure pseudo scientific construction, it becomes bad art—literally pre-artistic. The moment of true volition, however, is mediated through nothing other than the form of the work itself, whose crystallization becomes an analogy of that other condition which should be. (12)

From the preceding text and the initial exposition of the poets from Northern Ireland, I am directing my readings to a homologous relationship between artistic form and society. In other words, artistic form is a special type of social content – perhaps still not commercialized by the utilitarian logic of Enlightenment or maybe utterly occupied by this logic. In poetry, language assumes primordial importance. It does not only belong to the social milieu, as the medium through which people exchange experiences, but also represents a subjective manifestation of a collective configuration. Those few samples suggest that Belfast is a space that incites authors to reflect symbolically upon land, history, violence and ethical responsibilities. This is also highlighted by Adorno in his lecture “Lyric poetry and society”:

Through its configurations [language] assimilates itself completely into subjective impulses; one would almost think it had produced them. But at the same time language remains the medium of concepts, remains that which establishes an inescapable relationship to the universal and to society. (43)

However, there are other aspects which deserve further attention when one deals with specific contexts, such as Northern Ireland. To put in context this conceptualisation of Belfast as the place of writing imagined by Northern Irish authors, it is relevant to stress that throughout history, Irish landscape has been envisioned not only as a place governed by natural rules and primitive instincts but also tradition and spirituality. In the nineteenth century, Ireland’s aristocracy profited from the simultaneous visions of Britain as the land of

civility and culture and Ireland as its natural contrary: “Irish nationalism, one might venture, begins with nature (the rights of man) and ends up as culture” (Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 9). The dichotomy Nature and Culture is relevant to understand the poetry of Northern Ireland for

Irish place and landscape have been variously constructed and interpreted to fulfil the changing requirements of particular segments of society, both inside and outside the island. In this respect, literary texts can be regarded as signifying practices, which interact with social, economic and political... places and landscapes are narrative constructions produced by writers and often more real than reality itself, so powerful and influential is the role of the artist. (B. Graham, 65, 66)

In this light, it would not be a contradiction to summon up Edna Longley’s plea that “‘In an age of repressive collectivism, the power of resistance to compact majorities resides in the lonely, exposed producer of art’... poetry possesses the semantic means, the metaphorical audacity, to press beyond existing categories, to prepare the ground where, in Derek Mahon’s words, ‘a thought might grow.’” (Longley, *The Living* 9) Although poetry precedes any philosophical thought, its materialism – poetic forms and technical experimentations – carries political implications for society. If, poetry in general replies both to the subjective impetus of the artist and to the collective whole of society, how could poetry more specifically in The North of Ireland offer more than a bird’s eye view of the historical situation of the land? The answer given to this dilemma by the literary and cultural historian Terence Brown is that through the prism of history:

Northern Irish poems written since the 1968... have carried full cargoes of grief and mourning. They have weighted too by earnest, imaginatively serious, attempts to comprehend the crisis there in the light of larger experience, deeper truths, more universal realities than the merely local. It was as if their ‘literary nowhere’ had become a place of political and explanatory contexts urgently needed. (Brown, “Out of Ulster” 64)

Even though this assertion carries an irrevocable truth, it does not do complete justice to the aesthetic force of the poetry of the period, for aesthetics has an ethics that goes beyond a simplistic political principle. Due to the fact that any individual poem is self-referential, it expands its scope beyond individualistic concerns. Thus, the questions it gives rise to are of reason and justice, but always within an artistic framework. Given the historical past of Ireland, the ethics of the aesthetic that Northern Irish poetry pursues involves a redemptive force, which is found not solely in the poetic self, but in the artefact which connects the self to the collective: the land. This is actually the case not only of Ireland, but of most colonial societies.

The category of post-colonial for Northern Ireland incites vehement debates, since colonisation largely happened before the British Empire – i.e, in the 16th and particularly the 17th centuries, from England, and then later from both England and Scotland. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning Ireland was an important trade point for England. This particular colonial heritage is not likely to be extinguished from the cultural memory of society and its artistic representations. Seamus Deane clarifies the connection between modernity and national liberation:

even before the Famine, the various formulations of the Irish national character had emphasized the existence of a natural relationship between the people and the land that had been deformed or distorted by violent expropriations of the seventeenth century and the penal legislation of the eighteenth. (22).

From Deane's study it can be inferred the presence of the land is not only present in political discourses after the English colonization, but also before. That being the case, what is the legacy of the art produced in a place that is criss-crossed by British and Irish affiliations? According to George Boyce, these affiliations produce "political fragmentations" and "clashes of identities" which are the "epitome of British and Irish history and their cultural and social patterns" (24). Acting at the core of this "political fragmentations" (24), there is the influence of the Ulster-Scots and British immigrants whose outlook and traditions were gradually modified when they arrived in the land. Also, there is the influence of a native culture, especially from Gaelic origins, whose forms of life were challenged and altered by the new settlers (24). Since different identity patterns coexist in society, the poetry produced is going to reflect this plurality of cultures and artistic variety, which involves great names of

the British canon, and to an Irish sensibility, which enforces itself on the writing of the period.

How could an aesthetic experiment be truthful to those traditions – given that they also interact with each other – through the use of landscape and without losing its commitment to artistic experimentation? The answer lies in a theme that is related to the cultural memory of the place and to the modern national project. More than that, this theme is still connected to the *avant-gardist* impulse of revolution and radical transformation: the poetic depiction of the city.

II. ‘BELFAST IN LITERATURE’: COMMITMENT TO AN ARCHITECTURAL CONSTELLATION

In this second part of my introduction I wish to expose the theoretical and methodological point of view that is going to be developed throughout the thesis. Having established that poets are committed to the land ethically, linguistically and historically, there is also the question of how this land is transformed according to historical needs. In this process, there is a dialectical relation between land as a natural instance and land as a technological system. As previously mentioned, inherited from the English rationality, there is a naturalization of culture which transforms landscape into a technological space. It is as if the social structure was already prescribed before being constructed. The allotment of parcels, the building of streets, factories and ports contribute to the mythic view of a society organically organised according to the site it has been constructed on. If architecture stems from the impulse to improve nature, then I wish to argue that poetry is a type of mythical architecture, projecting a rational form onto social and geographical organisation. Contrasting with the ideal of the city, Irish landscape embodies idealised characteristics of society as a kind of anti-architecture: landscape, rather than human constructions, shaped the connection between the Irish people and a superior spiritual realm. The artistic projection of the land is usually bucolic and idealised through feminine and ethereal creatures – such as seen in the poetry and drama of William Butler Yeats and reconsidered by poets from the North. Considering that the representation of this land is an Irish obsession of a return to an original stage (before invasions or social divisions), the poetry that represents utopic ideals construct a romantic social organisation.

Through a dialectical relationship between technology and nature I intend to see the poetry of the city as a constellation, a term which was applied by Walter Benjamin to systematise the multiplicity of city rebus in Paris (*Arcades Project* 1999). For the purpose of exploring Belfast, I use this term to convey that Belfast in poetry is constituted of not only a single aesthetic project, but many. These projects, therefore, culminate in the poetic architecture of Belfast, which contain within itself a multiplicity of experimentations, social distresses and psychological displacements that depict society as a whole. In Irish writing place has a special centrality, as Eamonn Hughes recognizes analysing the poetry of Tom Paulin:

The centrality of place in Irish writing has long been recognized. But [...] analysts are currently undertaking its reconsideration as: ‘the presumed centralities of cultural identity, firmly located in particular place which house [...] stable cohesive communities of shared tradition and perspective, though never a reality for some [are] increasingly disrupted and displaced for all’.

(162)

The representation of the structure of the city, which represents communal values and cultures, depends on the heterogeneity of its representations, which are made of the poetic materials itself. Through the concept of “constellation” the poetry of the city of Belfast and general theme of the poetry of the city is connected. Walter Benjamin’s constellation enabled him to expose the Paris of the Second Empire as a poetic stance composed by the poet Charles Baudelaire (*Arcades* 1999). Even though my main point is to construct a city through the material available to poetry, I believe that adding the idea of the constellation would be relevant to addressing the myths of progress modern society creates. In Benjamin’s viewpoint:

for the first time, with Baudelaire, Paris becomes the subject of lyric poetry. This poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the *flâneur*, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller (10).

This assertion stems from Baudelaire's theoretical essays which pronounce the city as the greatest modern theme. In *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), Charles Baudelaire envisions an artistic force in the depiction of the city. In this text, which was an artistic paradigm for generations of artists, he claims that modernity "admires the eternal beauty and the astonishing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained in the tumult of human liberty" (395). The poet assumes that there is harmony in the liberty people gain from wandering vacantly in the streets, on the other hand he also challenges this attitude by observing the chaos and noise of the objectified world around him. In an enthusiastic defence of the Modernist movement, Marshall Berman observes the poetic beauty conceived by Baudelaire was in its similarity to the ordinary life of the common men. Thus, the paradox and the authenticity of modern poetry is the loss of the idealized halo in the depiction of the urban experience.

It is also its most striking difference in relation to the poetry of the landscape. The poetry of the city possesses the striking feature of betraying the common passer-by with illusions and mistakes, due to the new technologies (Benjamin 20). The idea that inspired Benjamin's term *phantasmagoria* was the eighteenth century projectors which caused bewilderment and apprehension in the spectators. In the dark, they would watch the shadow of a ghost that enlarged in size while going towards them. Thanks to a *camera obscura*, the audience was not able to see the projector, having thus the impression that the visual illusion was something real. According to the cinema critic Laurent Mannoni, these shows became exceedingly popular in France not just because of the technological spectacle, but due to the fact that they subverted the positivistic logic of rationality: "phantasmagorias were in the air of the period: a new variation on superstition, a strange perversion of the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment which so signally contributed to the improvement of the lantern." (Mannoni 390 – 415) Benjamin profited from this image to reflect upon the theme of modern sensibility and how this illusion-reality could create the new ethos of modernity. Similarly to Adorno's interpretation of history as a naturalization of social relations, when projecting a non-linear history (*Urgeschichte*) of modernity in the *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin conceives a constellation of phantasmagorical images which represent the contemporary experience. Thus, urban characters, such as the collector, the prostitute, the *flâneur*, and the gambler interact with the newly conceived architecture of iron and glass and compose a discontinuous sense of time and space.

If on the one hand, the modern subject is able to wander vacantly in the streets, passers-by and objects from commerce transform his subjective experience into a series of

violent shocks. Instead of a prolonged sensation of memory and history, the modern cities transfer the feeling of estrangement and reification to the modern man. As a consequence, marketable commodities mediate the external reality to the turmoil of the individual conscience. At the same time that art forged in the chaos of the city reifies, id est, objectify and commercialise the subjective experience, it creates dialectic phantasmagorias that obscure and reveal myths of modernity. The element of obscurity lies not in the novelty of the modern, but in its return to a mythic structure, proving that modernity has also recaptured the mythic vision to create industrial society. In other words, the myth of the new is already a past. The constellation present in the city – as I briefly mentioned previously – is also an emblem of ancient social structures which are still present. As Seamus Deane puts it:

A constellation is, then, a previously unrecognised structure or network of relations that was always there like the unconscious, and appears to us, like it, in articulated images, laden with the weight of the past and haloed in the light of discovery and recognition. So, it is very far from exhibiting any narrow line, or advancing pattern of stadial evolutionary progress, like the Marxist philosophy of history, Benjamin wants to replace with the messianic version of the breakthrough, the arrival, which is always in preparation as the event which has already happened but is belatedly recognized. (10)

Deane explains the poetry of the city opens itself to the possibility of a new sensory experimentation. The very same sentiment of terror and bemusement the public have in observing the phantasmagorias, the *flâneur* has in strolling in the arcades and passageways. At this moment, reality is objectified through the enchantment with the new architectural structures and the city becomes the place where subjectivity remains true not only to itself, but also to the collective experience of society and history:

What supposedly distinguishes art from discursive thought – its high degree of specificity – is pushed to an extreme... the constellation safeguards particularities but fissures identity, exploding the object into an array of conflictive elements and so unleashing its materiality at the cost of its sameness of the detail is allowed. (Eagleton, *The Ideology of the aesthetic* 331)

In the borderline between the subjective and the collective, Eagleton explains that the concept of constellation offers another view on the materialist understanding of totality. It is a theoretical model conceived by Benjamin that is capable of apprehending the totality of human experience without losing the specificity of the detail: “by revolutionizing the relations between part and whole, the constellation strikes at the heart of the traditional aesthetic paradigm, in which the specificity of the detail is allowed no genuine resistance to the organizing power of totality” (Eagleton, *The Ideology of the aesthetic* 331). The idea of constellation remains relevant for the study of art nowadays, as regards to poetry in a more specific context, the critic Marjorie Perloff enquires if the lyrical forms conceived by poets were ever a symbolic manifestation of society as a rationally imagined whole. She also goes so far as to ask if such forms were an imaginative response to the fragmentation of the whole this very same social order would entail. If the city is a “constellation”, the materiality of this very same city is imprinted on art through the formal structure of poetry, which is its art’s medium. However, in poetry the work with the language is considerably heightened, because poetic forms are emblems of fixed structures established throughout the history of art, therefore it is not completely autonomous. Focusing on the materiality of the poetic language Roman Jakobson points out that in poetry there is a dissociation of signifier and signified:

Poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion: when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and internal form acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality (174).

In contrast to Adorno, whose focus is on the subjective mediation of the poetic language, the founder of the *Society for the Study of Poetic Language*, V. Sklovskij, also defends that poetry should be solely about linguistic possibilities. For him, art should capture the ordinary facts of life and ‘make them strange’ (ostranenie) and ‘make them difficult’ (zatrudnenie): “The aim of art is to give the feeling of things as seeing and not as knowing; the device of art is the device of the ‘making strange’ of things and the device of form made difficult, magnifying the complexity and the duration of perception, since the perceptual process in art is an autonomous value. (Sklovskij qtd. Eagleton 49). Even though the views expressed by Russian Formalism may appear at first glance unrelated to those of the Frankfurtian school of thought, when the poetry of the city is concerned, both theories ought

to be brought together. To fall back on a convenient metaphor for the present context, poetic forms are like an architectural site in which the poet is simultaneously trapped and liberated. The poetry of the city takes on board general structures, imbued with paradigms and repetitions: something estranged and alienated comes into being. The “technique of *ostranenie* ... is contemporary with the dawn of historical consciousness”. (Jameson *Prison House* 57) However, the game of recognition and estrangement is never going to be entirely clear. Rather, it is like the phantasmagorias which create an illusion which is both true and artificial.

The following perception gives another perspective to the function of the city in engaged or committed poetry in Northern Ireland, mainly because it adds to the artistic perception of alienation, the materialist concern with the alienation of the masses, the notion of *ostranenie*, a linguistic term which refers to the poetic function of defamiliarising the world. The modern poet, forged at the outset of mercantile modernity, centres his efforts in configuring a rational and objective space where language flows, since he or she searches for excellence in terms of technique and craft. His or her gaze simultaneously seeks order and organization which cannot, by any means, be found in society. Thus, the search for a pure form of poetry is also figuratively a yearning for a rationality that throughout the twentieth century proved to be a vehicle for authoritarianism and atrocities. In this sense, the poetry that foresees in the city its simultaneous estrangement and redemption is fated not only to reproduce its subversive nature but also perpetuate its pre-conceived notions.

It is in the reproduction of this chaotic disturbance where the strength of this poetry lies. I would like to add that the ideas developed by the Frankfurt School and Russian Formalism enable a more productive understanding of the poetry of place in Northern Ireland. The way that Northern Irish poetry contributes to this understanding of place is by reflecting about “points of origin, sources of value, territories of lived experience [which are] constructed according to determinate needs”. (Hughes 162) In light of Walter Benjamin’s concept of “constellation”, which examines the importance of the city to the modern sensibility, it is possible to observe that the poetry of the city of Belfast, although burdened by the fate of history and violence, offers more sources of exploitation than its commitment to a localised conflict. The Northern Irish experience with art, symbols and identitarian struggle is also part of a cultural sensibility that was present in the twentieth century as a whole and was developed by diverse authors from different countries. I believe the depiction of Belfast in poetry is revealing because it also challenges the fallacy of authenticity by proposing that the experience of modernity is also envisioned not only in the huge capital

cities, but also in peripheries. The construction of Belfast through poetry reflects the experience with the socio-cultural condition of migration and geopolitical displacement. Thus, the innovative experimentations within the realm of Northern Irish poetry are not going to be unionist or nationalistic discourses, but the ones which connect the constellation of the representations of land to the pluralistic portrait of the city. Within this tryst between the local and the universal, the poets inscribed their sense of alienation and geographical displacement in a deformed poetic architecture.

Returning once more to Edna Longley's image that there are a myriad of threads in the tangle of Belfast and poetry, I would argue it is crucial to pull a specific one: *Belfast in Literature*, and not *Literature in Belfast* as she herself does. While Longley has made an important scrutiny of *Literature in Belfast*, in "'A Barbarous Nook': The Writer and Belfast" (*The Living Stream* 86 – 108), I wish to follow her ideas to comprehend the historical and artistic motivations that have made the city such an important theme for three generations of poets. Due to its capacity to bring the global in the local, while reproducing and resisting the *status quo*, this discussion is currently present in theoretical debates and still worthwhile pursuing.

III. 'BELFAST IN LITERATURE IN BELFAST': COMMITMENT TO AN IMPURE SOIL

In this last section I wish to suggest that Belfast in poetry means heterogeneity and impurity. Based on James Joyce's idea, which sees the Irish people as an impure race and the Irish culture as a multiple fabric, a product of an "impure soil" (Cheng 25), I seek to establish that after digging and harvesting the soil of the land, the Belfast we see in poetry is indeed diverse and multiple, but still full of historical contradictions. That revelation of temporal idiosyncrasies is imprinted on poetic form in order to maintain a critical view of art and society while creating images of a sublime beauty. Not simply of a beauty that is "a joy forever" (Web 19 March, 2012), as John Keats wished, but a sublime beauty that reveals inhumanity in the supposedly enlightenment project of modernity. As much as in empire capitals or in "barbarous nooks", the poetry of the city of Belfast reveals that civilization is barbarity in different guises.

As a visionary and a challenger of the ideas present in the intellectual debates of his time, specifically the ones associated with the Nationalist Romantic Celtic Revival line of thought, James Joyce expressed a viewpoint that was totally deprived of an idealized notion

of the Irish countryside. In his article “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” he espoused a thoroughly problematic notion of Romantic history in Ireland:

Our civilization is a vast fabric [...] in which the most diverse elements are mingled, in which Nordic aggressiveness and Roman law, the new bourgeois conventions and the remnant of a Syriac religion, are reconciled. In such a fabric, it is useless to look for a thread that may have remained pure and virgin without having undergone the influence of a neighbouring thread. What race, or what language [...] can boast of being pure today? And no race has less right to utter such a boast than the race now living in Ireland. Nationality [...] must find its reason for being rooted in something that surpasses and transcends and informs changing things like blood and the human word. (165)

The impure “language” Joyce refers to above can be identified as the “language of montage, the structuring of identity as the juxtaposition and commingling of opposites” as the critic Luke Gibbons pointed out in “Montage, Modernism and the City” (Gibbons 5), it is also the language of the constellation that I have been calling attention to. From this viewpoint, Walter Benjamin and James Joyce can be brought together for they are referring to modernity and its effects in the artistic perception of their time. This is also the stance the Northern Irish poets choose when approaching the theme.

In his attempt to define Irish culture as an excavated soil where stories have been written, erased and re-written, Joyce prefigures what the Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson manifests: “At times it seems that every inch of Belfast has been written-on, erased, and written-on again: messages, curses, political imperatives, but mostly names, or nicknames – Robbo, Mackers, Scoot, Fra” (*Collected Works* 160). Complementing this assertion, which points clearly to the inscription of the city in its dwellers’ experience, Sinéad Morrissey states that sleeping in Belfast, after being ten years away from it, unravels its inhabitants’ “wishes/ that leaves the future unspoken and the past/ unencountered and unaccounted for” (13), while her contemporary Leontia Flynn affirms “Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction./ What was mixed grills and whiskeys (cultureless, graceless,/ leisureless/ is now concerts and walking tours (Friendly! Dynamic!/ Various!)” (2) Those views, which in spite of their distinctive aesthetic cut, surprisingly recapture James Joyce’s plea that cultures, in their plurality of meanings and affiliations, are a repository of diverse stories and symbolic

materializations. Accordingly, their direct, indirect and ironical stances reveal the sceptical feelings about the present city of Belfast, that, in spite of its fashionable garments, it is still an ever-changing and wishful thought, lost between present and past nostalgias and future utopian projection.

In an essay that focuses on the ideological breakdown of Nationalism and Unionism, Edna Longley states that the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are failed conceptual identities, for “the ideas which created them and the ideologies which sustained them have withered at the root. If ‘Northern Ireland’ has visibly broken down, the ‘Republic’ as once conceived has invisibly broken down. And since 1969 each has helped to expose the inner contradictions of the other” (*The Living Stream* 173). Although Longley’s study reveals much of the ideology behind the propagandist ideals perpetrated by both parties, the collapse of both “Irelands” is partially the failure of the modernist project. The critic Colin Graham explains more thoroughly this letdown of unification by affirming that the outbreak of the modernist project is related to an unsuccessful utopian venture. According to him, the specific utopian space carved out by Irish artists, instead falling back on the “production [of an]... Utopian space” (23), where the visions of a national territory would be unified, it centres its effort on conceiving a *concept* of such space. Thus, Ireland becomes a metaspace emptied of “Ireland and Irish signs have a multiple ‘valency’”² which effects an unsettling form of liberation from the object or *res*” (27). Such is the urgency to convey a meaning to the Irish landscape; the concept of Irish history is bound up in ruptures, discontinuities and fragmentations, as then expressed both Joyce, Carson, and Morrissey. Graham is correct in stressing the fictional characteristic of the Irish utopia – or dystopia – but it is essential to point out that ‘valency’ is not simply typical of Ireland as a whole, but also of the modernist project altogether. And according to the post-structuralists, typical of all poetry and language. It is fundamental to understand that the promises perpetuated by the modern state failed to fulfil its basic premises. In other words, David Lloyd stresses that:

The failure of the modern state to fulfill even its quite limited emancipatory promises: the promise to counter the accumulative greed of capital with some semblance of just distribution of its goods; the promise of that security it offers

² In this passage, Colin Graham probably uses the term ‘valency’, which in traditional linguistics refers to the capacity of a verb to take a specific number and type of noun phrase arguments, in order to convey the idea that Ireland is made up of a variety of signifying possibilities. Thus, their national utopia is always thought and conceptualized, but never fully realized.

to private property might in some degree be balanced by the welfare offered to its citizens in the various forms... the promise that it would sustain and respond to a critical and participatory citizenry. (*Irish Times* 8)

Shedding a different light upon the debate of nationalism and emancipation, Lloyd stresses there are moments of multiple temporalities in Irish history, through which it is possible to envision the several flaws provoked by the Enlightenment in colonial societies. According to him, these are moments that show how the history of the country was governed not only by the British rule, but by agrarian and industrial mercantilism. Combined with the history of capitalist society, which imprinted its legacy in the early stages of Ireland's colonization process, there is a philosophical line of thought which also left its mark in the land: the bourgeois problem of autonomy or self-determination. With modernity, the idealism which stemmed from the German Idealist school of thought has lost its predominance due to the technological and scientific innovations of the first half of the twentieth century. As the philosopher Robert B. Pippin sees, modernity posed a problem and

many become dissatisfied because [it] seemed to promise what it finally could not deliver – an individuality and collectively self-determining life – or because they lost faith that they knew what that would mean, or because some came to believe that it was not such a wise thing to have promised in the first place. (3)

More specifically, the idea of Northern Ireland as a singular place whose cultural connections bear little resemblance to the rest of Europe is indeed debatable. However, interpreting its specificities without losing the view of a broader context could be highly significant since it exposes “Ulster's peculiar fate – [of being] neither Irish nor British while also being both” (Longley, 42-50) Irish and British. Given that “it is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, nor its inner life, nor its relation to the world, not even its right to exist” (Adorno, *Aesthetic* 1), what is the meaning of a literary representation which is so closely linked to the loss of modern idealism, and at the same time so closely connected to the impossibility of envisioning an idealised Irish utopia?

It is indeed difficult to tackle this problem in a place “in which identity does not confront difference; rather identity is difference... identity must always be formed on terms of intimacy with whatever one chooses to regard as the other” (Hughes, 4). The answer that I

wish to give is that Belfast in poetry is constructed through memories of the city. These memories indeed are committed, first, to a collective history of colonialism and exploitation, second, to a literary genre that work within the framework of the Enlightenment – such as modern architecture – and third, to the failure of this project as a multiple dystopic experience. The precise manner is going to be discussed in three chapters that work according to the buildings of the city of Belfast. Just as Walter Benjamin selected a few historical characters and events to configure his exposé of Paris, I will similarly choose characters and historical events that metaphorically mirror the aesthetic endeavour of the poems from those periods. The selection of the buildings and the titles, although apparently random, are precise allegories of the experiments of the poets in question. In this sense, the mimicry of Benjamin's style when referring to the three historical periods of Belfast, is not simply an arbitrary enumeration, but a reflection upon poetry, aesthetic history and Northern Irish landscape.

PRE TROUBLES MEMORIES

I. EXPOSÉ – IMAGERY: THE BLUEPRINT

*The cooling star,/ Coal and diamond/ Or sudden birth/ Of burnt meteor//
Are too simple,/ Without the lure/ That relic stored – / A piece of stone/
On the shelf at school,/ Oatmeal coloured.
("Relic of Memory" by Seamus Heaney)*

In the essay "Excavation and Memory" Walter Benjamin states that "language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is a medium of that which is experienced, just as earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried" (576). In the philosopher's point of view, language is associated to the memory, in the same way that earth is related to city, suggesting language structures the past as earth supports the city. Based on this metaphor, my objective in this chapter is to comprehend how Belfast was constructed through poetry in the period between Partition and before the Troubles (1922 – 1969). In order to do that, I would like to argue that there is also a poetic memory that constructs the historic memory like a city. Poetic discourse is characterised by rhyme and metre through the interplay of contrast and similarity, repetition and addition. Nonetheless, those features come to life due to a powerful imagery that cements metric properties together. Pictorial references in poetry are responsible for the interaction of the system of the verse, in the same way that language in prose reconstructs memory and history. Imagery is the medium the poets are going to rely on in order to recapture the most poetic details of the city. These details could be related to the mispronunciation of a word, a colloquial archaism, a nursery rhyme, or the evocation of a writer or character typical of that place. From this point of view, poetic language constructs the city based on a multi-layered imagery principle. First there is a metrical level, then, a picturesque approach that systematises the musicality of the verse. Thirdly, the visual input constellates the poetic architecture of Belfast.

I am using the *concept* of imagery instead of image mainly because of its historical implication. While the former refers to an aesthetic category typical of poetry, the latter is

applied to arts and literature in general. Terry Eagleton's explains in *How to Read a Poem* that for many centuries imagery was relegated to the medieval rhetoric to mere transcendence and transubstantiation, i.e. allegory. However, the Modernism of Pound and H. D. gave it back to the realm of what is concrete and reliable. (138 – 142) Based on the transformation of the concept I would like to investigate what the poetical imagery the city of Belfast reveals about its poets and itself. My main hypothesis is that the shifting oppositions which constitute the concept of imagery are homologous to Belfast's ambiguous perception of rationality and irrationality; reality and myth; ancient and modern. I would argue, aligned with Richard Kirkland that, within the city of Belfast, there is a variety of crystallised pre-conceptions which hints at a frustrated aspiration:

the agony of the missed historical opportunity... signals the onset of a growing inarticulacy... the 'history' of Belfast can be read as a series of betrayals within a permanent state of crisis which leaves the city forever poised on the precipice of narrative determinism. How this narrative is established becomes a point of instability central to an understanding of the city as a mythologised landscape embodying the signs of its own distortion. (Kirkland, *Literature and Culture* 37)

Grounded on the critic's view, within the imagery of the city there are a series of narrative determinations that correspond to its historical distresses. Thus, people, buildings and places that belong to Belfast are not simply its concrete soil. Rather, they are simultaneously ideological symbols of different communities and symptoms of a disjoint modernity. Thus, they constitute an imagery that relates to the experience of defeat and division the utopian longing for integration and completeness, which was not achieved in the national struggle for independence. This imagery, on its most basic level, is concrete; on a more philosophical level, discursive and ideological, hiding and revealing buried stories and sectarian prejudices. To see the poetry of Belfast as a picturesque and ideological blueprint of a periphery in the heart of the European rationality and sensibility, this chapter is divided according to landmarks that deserve to be scrutinised more carefully. The imagery that I use to characterize the city of Belfast is not random or capricious but important sites that have been summoned up by its poets in the years directly after partition, and developed by succeeding generations. I do not wish to revisit the extensively quoted article "Tradition and

Individual Talent” by T. S. Eliot, but I do intend to defend that the tradition of the poetry of the place is changed by the creative ability of the poets in question.

For the critic Anthony Easthope, Romanticism in poetry “is a polarising structure: people react against urbanisation, industrialism and the increased division of labour, impersonality in the social world, by pursuing a subjective intensity and wholeness” (122). Against this backdrop, poetry assumes the role of home, and becomes the place where the subjective voice craves experience. Nonetheless, contrary to the “wholeness” Romanticism, the poetry of the city of Belfast, written by poets who artistically discuss their political and artistic caesuras, is a pluralistic structure of shifting perceptions. Its imagery works in the play between revelation and obscurantism: while it reveals images of a concrete beauty, it hides the ideologies behind it: when ideologies are revealed the concrete beauty then hides behind a yearning for completeness and unification, which the legacy of failure and depression impedes. Once more, as Romantic longing, poetry becomes experience, but this experience is of defeat and fragmentation. When seen through the architecture of the city, Belfast in poetry offers another viewpoint on history, society and communal connection between place and subjectivity.

How do poets represent “contradictory needs which consciousness experiences at times of extreme crisis”?³ (464) The first aim of the present chapter is to look at the way in which poetry recaptures the images of a city in the period between partition and the Troubles. In order to do that, the division that is going to follow is of building-poetry: how the concrete recalls significant features of this city? What is this imagery revealing about the artistic rationality and social sensibility of the place? Whose political ethos is it recalling? What are the central themes that unify or disunify the subjective experience? Which memories are recollected? Secondly, the significance of these memories is going to be examined. What is their significance to different authors? And what is the reason they have been summoned? Ultimately, how do these images represent the building blocks for future poets?

³ I am applying somewhat freely the phrase used by Seamus Heaney at his Nobel Prize lecture. He addresses the contradictory nature of memory and consciousness in Northern Ireland. Heaney, Seamus.

II. SIR CHARLES LANYON (1813 – 1889), OR THE SOCIAL DYS-UTOPIST

According to the critic Paul Larmour ⁴, Sir Charles Lanyon displayed a strict business approach to professional affairs (200-206). The genius of the English architect who became Belfast's most prominent designer, its Lord Mayor and a Conservative Member of Parliament, reflected the social longing for professionalism and order. Lanyon's projects and ideals were in accordance with the original projects of modernisation of the island before the turmoil of the Great Famine. The importance given to architecture was heightened by nascent industrial development:

The town of Belfast was now a city – a development helped by the readiness of its spectacularly indebted landlord, the marquess of Donegall, to alienate land by means of perpetual leases from the 1820s. With the advent of power-looms a factory culture finally displayed the outworker textile industry; the urbanization of eastern Ulster and its booming industrial activities combined with its peculiar religious mix to make the separate nature of the north-east clearer than ever. (Foster 134 – 174).

Creating a distinguished landscape to the city, including roads, towers and bridges, Lanyon's sketches are an artistic representation of the technological progress of the newly born city. A product of English Positivism ⁵ that relied on observation and experience as natural precedents of critical scrutiny, his buildings were more than aesthetic experiments. They were the product of a careful examination of the city that would rival and then surpass Dublin in terms of industrialisation. What has given Lanyon's fame and distinction was his ability to rewrite different styles of different epochs (Neo-classical, Italianate, Gothic, Tudor, Elizabethan and Scots Baronial) while configuring a new landscape to the streets (Larmour 202). In this sense, this artistic longing to give new meanings to more traditional styles and configure a distinctive and varied landscape to the city is associated to a political impetus to accommodate new historical configurations. As the critic stresses once more:

⁴ In a concise article, Dr. Paul Larmor describes the most remarkable features of Sir Charles Lanyon's architecture, while giving a brief account on his life and personality.

⁵ One of the most influential philosophers of Positivism, John Stuart Mill's, followed the scientific method developed by Francis Bacon. This consisted of relations of cause and effect among phenomena. It also proceeds from a study of the actual facts of experience (particulars) and is inductive. (Web, 25 Nov 2011)

Lanyon's energies were not confined to the immediate affairs of the office. From early on he played a part in the wider community and that involvement increased as time went on. There were worthy causes as well as cultural and artistic interests. He was a Vice-President of the Belfast Fine Arts Society in the 1840s and of the Belfast Classical Harmonists Society in the 1850s and he was also a prime mover to have a Government School of Design established in Belfast. (Larmour 206)

The architect's aesthetic project was associated to a historical revisionism of forms that would not be reduced to simplistic religious associations. According to William Maguire, eighteenth century Belfast was predominantly constituted by Protestants: a majority Presbyterian community, which felt segregated by a smaller but more powerful Anglican order. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, Catholics immigrated in order to work in the cotton mills. This new inflow of workers to Belfast caused competition and conflicts, which culminated in the first reported riot in the city in 1813. Such was the severity of the situation that by 1860

behind the vicious sectarianism there lurked a political question involving a test of strength and difference of identity: the Roman Catholics, seeing themselves as a part of Ireland's overwhelmingly religious majority, challenged Belfast's identity as a Protestant town where they were regarded as alien intruders; the Protestants, fearful of Ultramontaniam and of an Irish identity which the Roman Catholics seemed to regard as exclusive to themselves, determined to assert that Belfast remained a Protestant town in a Protestant United Kingdom. (Maguire 97)

On the account of Northern Ireland's uncertainty regarding religious affiliations and political power, Lanyon's social intervention could be interpreted according to those very same religious principles since the construction buildings represented a great change in the cultural landscape. In order to avoid those interpretations, his architectural intentions reflected a will to challenge the social landscape perhaps in hope of a bigger social change. Thus, he introduced an aesthetic eclecticism according to a reasoning which did not work

perfectly. It did not function because his main stylistic choices, Neo-classical, Italianate, Gothic, Tudor, Elizabethan and Scots Baronial, still reproduced the eighteenth century optimism of a protestant bourgeoisie which, did not wish to remain subject to the British laws, still relied on its religious supremacy to maintain its powers. As Roy Foster argues:

the language of the Ulster Protestant, while on many levels egalitarian and democratic, continued to see righteousness as their monopoly, both in political and in religious terms. The religious geography of the north-east settled into a three-way division between Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Catholic: a population fractured along indivisible frontiers (156).

Against the backdrop of religion and cultural identifications, Lanyon elaborated on eclecticism in order to avoid recalling historical events or landmarks which would cause cultural divergence. But his solution is highly problematic: while the architect wished to convey no political meaning to architecture, Lanyon paradoxically created a plurality of meanings for the symbolic memories of the city. In other words, while he did not wish Belfast to be a copy of Dublin or London, or even Glasgow, he wanted it to be at least *similar* to those cities for maintaining the same architectural roots. Thus, what the viewer of the city of Belfast sees is a blank parody, a mixture of styles and cultural references that are not simply part of the contemporary ethos, but a prescribed effect provoked by an architect whose impulse was political, and which resulted in an ambiguous style.

One can easily view Lanyon as a kind of proto-Postmodernist, proposing pastiche as a way to rewrite old styles without being faithful to any. This is partially what poetry in pre troubles Belfast also did: it relied on eclecticism and variation to portray a poetic rather than architectural utopia.

III. THE SHIPYARD, OR “BANNED FOREVER FROM THE CANDLES OF THE IRISH POOR”

In the beginning of a book dedicated to poetry in Ireland after James Joyce, the literary critic Dillon Johnston mentions the importance of 1940 to the understanding of the contemporary artistic scene both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. According to him,

many of the talented Irish literary figures, including Joyce, Beckett, O'Casey and MacNeice had abandoned the relative security of their neutral nation for more vulnerable homes in Britain and in Europe. Yet, in contrast to this apparent rejection of Ireland, their literary creations, letters and conversation reveal, if not a preoccupation with their homeland, frequent patches of nostalgia for native light or landscape or for old friends or Irish faces. These writers remained exiles rather than emigrants. (3)

The point Johnston wishes to make at the outset of his book is that Irish writers of the period inspired, to a certain extent, by the paradigm established by James Joyce, created in their poetry a kind of linguistic storeroom or attic littered with elements from their homeland. Rather than configuring an identity outside their country, as an expatriate, wherever they went, their country was present in their consciousness. But their exile was not simply geographical.

In the poetic landscape of the period, the aspect of psychological exile and subjective alienation is highly present. Terence Brown identifies a philosophic tension at the centre of Louis MacNeice's poetry; for him,

the poet's exile is deeply philosophic as well as geographic. His exile is from all simple philosophic or religious formulations by which man makes sense of his world. In this philosophic scepticism at the centre of his sensibility, MacNeice seems to be both distinct from most of the poets from the Anglo-Irish tradition and yet related to the most remarkable poet, W. B. Yeats. (107, 108)

In addition to envisioning MacNeice's sense of alienation from his native land, Brown states that MacNeice refuses to fuse subject and object. This rejection creates a modern sensibility: "passage after passage emerges from a consciousness controlled by and sensitive to a modern urban environment ... MacNeice was a ... city poet. Between change and permanence, MacNeice's work is the result of a subjective fissure that is symptomatic of Irish history in general" (108). But MacNeice's approach to mending this "subjective fissure" was different from that of Yeats. According to David Dwan,

Yeats was only briefly attracted to socialism, but the general communitarian values of youth were Spencer's uncompromising individualism. He lauded Young Ireland's attempt to combat the social atomism of the modern world by promoting a life of civic virtue and public friendship. But the group's patriotism could also seem anachronistic in a modern setting. (91)

Instead of relying on ideals that were out of joint with the modern ethos, as Yeats did, MacNeice makes an ambiguous use of city life dynamics. With a view to criticising its materialistic paradigm, the poet, in his famous "Bagpipe music", depicts the urban environment as an objectified space of exploitation and interest. However, the uplifting verbal rhythms of this representation become exciting and stimulate the reader to continue reading pleasurably. If Yeats does not use urban life as a theme in his poetry, disregarding its potentialities for criticism, MacNeice uses that to reveal its innermost contradictions. As Richard Danson Brown states, even being substantially critical of communism, the poet could not resolve its dilemmas in a simple right-wing critique or reassertion of liberalism:

MacNeice's politics were characteristically independent... 'He was never a Communist ... but he did come, however unwillingly, to a strongly felt antifascist and socialist commitment which – unlike Auden and Spender – he never seems to have felt much need to modify,' (345)... he was troubled by the same concerns as those writers who were Communist Party members. In this sense... MacNeice's poems explore analogous problems: the tensions between individualism and commitment alongside pervasive feelings of cultural and emotional estrangement. (Web 11 June, 2010)

On account of his deep commitment to a collective ideal of equality, MacNeice uses city imagery, together with its vocabulary and syntax, in order to enact the stage of the modern city. His "poems about Birmingham, Belfast and London were influential in making the full range of urban images as vivid and valid as natural images" (Longley, "Irish Poetry Since" 53). Rehearsing a perceptive mimicry of the positivistic ideology that naturalizes politics, the poet transforms the snapshots of the city life into a locus of attraction and repulsion. In the first poem of his third book dedicated to Carrickfergus, "Carrickfergus" (*The*

Earth Compels, 1939), the poet depicts first the picture of the place where he was born (Belfast) and then a subjective voice that is not able to belong anywhere.

Through MacNeice's poetic interpretation of Belfast in "Carrickfergus" the reader is able to perceive a psychological movement: as long as the speaker of the poem cannot find a place either within the Irish poor, or within the Anglican order, he is compelled to leave Northern Ireland. However, with the onset of war his psychological trauma of leaving is substantially heightened. It is relevant to note that the indication of exile is done through the mention of the train – a modern and urban reference which is typical of not only Northern Ireland, but also England, the place where he is about to dwell:

The war came and a huge camp of soldiers
Grew from the ground in sight of our house with long
Dummies hanging from gibbets for bayonet practice
And the sentry's challenge echoing all day long;

A Yorkshire terrier ran in and out by the gate-lodge
Barred to civilians, yapping as if taking affront:
Marching at ease and singing 'Who Killed Cock Robin?'
The troops went out by the lodge and off to the Front.

The steamer was camouflaged that took me to England--
Sweat and khaki in the Carlisle train;
I thought that the war would last for ever and sugar
Be always rationed... (55)

Moreover, the introduction of the theme of war and its consequences, such as the supplies rationings (eighth stanza, line 4) and trench pictures in the newspaper (ninth stanza, line one), the poet feels obliged to experience Belfast from a distance. Since he is in England during the time of war, this recollection comes through the creation of a utopia: a place where the author would possibly live, but this place exists nowhere else but in his poetic landscape. Thus, the alternative is to mourn his loss: this poetic wish for Belfast is seen in the last stanza

of “Carrickfergus”, when the subjective voice realizes the school where he studied in Dorset (and the place in itself) is so culturally and socially different from where he is from.

The subsequent poems of the collection *The Earth Compels* (1939) similarly display the poet’s desire to be in his homeland. There are two reasons for such a huge attachment to poetic landscape: 1) a heightened literary perception that artistically intertwines the symbolic signification of the Irish question and 2) the political environment of Europe between wars. I would argue that this literary perception comes from his artistic experiments in his first three books: *Poems* (1935), *Out of the Picture* (1937) and *Letters from Iceland* (1937), which do not deny his involvement with Northern Ireland. In these volumes, particularly, MacNeice’s poetry ranges from an open observation of his native place to a lyric that teeters on the verge of obscurity and irony. In the poems “An Eclogue for Christmas” and “Valediction”, for example, the poet revisits Greco-Latin and Metaphysical forms in order to create himself and Belfast. While the former depicts more clearly the urban environment, the latter openly describes the social rhythm of the city:

See Belfast, devout and profane and hard,
Built on reclaimed mud, hammers playing in the shipyard,
Time punched with holes like steel sheet, time
Hardening the faces, veneering with a grey and speckled rime
The faces under the shawls and caps:
This was my mother city, these my paps.
Country of callous lava cooled to stone,
Of minute sodden haycocks, of ship-siren’s moan,
Of falling intonations – I would call you to book
I would say to you, Look;
I would say, This is what you have given me
Indifference and sentimentality
A metallic giggle, a fumbling hand,
A heart that leaps to a fife band:
Set this against your water-shafted air ...

I cannot be

Anyone else than what this land engendered me:

In the back of my mind are snips of white, the sails

Of the Lough's fishing boats, the bellropes lash their tails

When I would peel my thoughts, the bells pull free –

Memory is apostasy ("Valediction", *Poems* 8)

In the same volume the reader is confronted with varied snapshots of the city: the tragic shipwrecked woman from his Belfast ("Belfast"), or the dreadful wolves of the water ("Wolves"), the gawky beetle that is fed by the ancient glories of modern museums ("Museums") or a "frivolous nostalgia" ("Ode"). When the poems are read against each other, one has little doubt that MacNeice is not only an urbane poet, but also a Belfast poet, since his poetic creations are deeply associated to this place – such as he states so clearly in the verses I quoted above. And more than simply voicing his belonging to Belfast, the poet uses these ironic and outlandish images to form strange conjectures, which, according to Terry Eagleton are symptomatic of a divided Ireland: "Belfast, the country's most economically advanced centre, was ideologically one of its most atavistic, awash with ferocious sectarian strife" (Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 275). I would also like to add that, in the context of the Second World War, MacNeice drifts his attention from Belfast and focuses more on the urban environment to display an ethical dilemma of not identifying with the nationalist project that spearheaded the downfall of the First World War. Creating a profound dialogue between local tensions and universal conflicts, MacNeice makes a subjective battle whose fragmented residues still haunt contemporary poets. Thus, the place of his lyric is not in the conurbation of Belfast, or in idealized and distant Carrickfergus, but rather in a place of frontiers: the shipyards where an impressive number of ships, aircraft carriers, cruisers and oil tankers were manufactured.

Most certainly, the historical shipyard of Harland & Wolff, established in 1861 by the English entrepreneur Edward James Harland and the German engineer Gustav-Wilhelm Wolff, could be applied as a metaphor "against the grain". In his "Theses on the concept of history", Walter Benjamin highlights that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (245-255). In this sense, the historical materialist should distance himself from the actual fact and understand how the mechanisms operate "brushing history against the grain". Actually, my attempt with this concept is to demonstrate

that both projects, the shipbuilding of Harland & Wolff and the poetry of MacNeice had the same aim, which was to leave Belfast out in the open for foreign audiences. However, while the former was interested in coping with the capitalist project of success and happiness, the latter embraced those myths to show how ironic and impossible to be thoroughly fulfilled not only in Belfast, but in the world. Applying Benjamin's theoretical framework, MacNeice's poetry represents the entrepreneurs' dialectical image as its opposite. The most inventive and successful shipbuilding company in the world, with its state of the art technology did not prevent two of their most sumptuous creations sinking: the RMS (*Royal Mail steamer*) *Titanic* (1912) and the (HMS) (*His/Her Majesty's Hospital Ship*) *Britannic* (1914). All the same, MacNeice's despondent and ironic voice undermines the Western dream of wealth and progress and, tragically, demonstrates how it is bound to sink in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. MacNeice's strength lies in understanding, contrary to Yeats, the emancipatory potentiality of technology. Nonetheless, the author also questioned the scope of such a project. In this sense, he was also aware that collective desires for equality and justice, if grounded on the logic of exclusion, could be wrecked like the Soviet dream. Thus, MacNeice's poetry, instead of being a constant self-referential form of art, continues to allude to essential questions of modern society.

The sensation of a missed opportunity is rather clear in the poem "Belfast". It exposes the city "at the end of the melancholy lough/ Against the lurid sky of stained water/ Where hammers clang murderously on the girders". These verses from the second stanza of the piece interrogate the very basis on which his place was constructed through a carefully depiction of the image of the city. Perhaps the most important word of the first line is *melancholy*. It adds to the typical Irish word for lake, *loch*, a discreet personal and philosophical weight which expands the scope of the image. By doing that the author creates a counterpoint with his own line in the poem "Snow": the "incurable plurality" of the poem is not so plural and varied in Belfast. This poetic self revision of themes exposes his land, together with his subjectivity, as shipwrecked in the locality of Northern Ireland. The obscure, and somewhat Gothic, framing of the city unfolds in front of his eyes in order to reveal something hidden – just like the phantasmagorias which preceded the cinema and were found in France in the first half of the twentieth century

The poem "Belfast" exhibits a three-folded aesthetic. In the first two stanzas the reader is transported into a world of constant deferral. The syntax that prolongs the characterization of place and that does not stress the action serves as an individualization process in which the specific comes to life.

The hard cold fire of the northerner
Frozen into his blood from the fire in the basalt
Glares from behind the mica of his eyes
And the salt carrion water brings him wealth.

Down there at the end of the melancholy lough
Against the lurid sky over the stained water
Where hammers clang murderously on the girders
Like crucifixes and gantries stand (25)

As shown in the stanzas quoted above, the language used by MacNeice plays with the concept of identification, for the thing – city of Belfast – is transmuted, through a fragmentation of syntax, into a mythic identity that intertwines past and present. MacNeice's identification takes longer to happen, and is suspended by a series of references that point to the contradiction of wealth and poverty: while the first two stanzas focus on the industrialized part of the town, the third (reproduced below) shifts to its manufactured products:

And in the marble stores rubber gloves like polyps
Cluster; celluloid, painted ware, glaring
Metal patents, parchment lampshades, harsh
Attempts at buyable beauty. (25)

The reversal of an artificial landscape of factories, like hard cold fire, salt carrion water, lurid sky, hammers and gantries, to the objects that are produced by those industries is precise since it shows how the mercantilist logic works: the glamorous objects are enveloped by a mythic aura of progress and development, but which hides exploitation and deprivation. It is as if the image of the city was intertwined with the capitalist train of thought and shown thorough the mythic aura of poetry, but dealing with a mundane subject. For this reason, the first parts present itself as what Benjamin would have called a “dialectical image”:

the always-the-same of prehistory manifests itself in the modern, insofar as the modern manifests itself as the always-the-same... The purpose of this intention was... to unmask the idea of the modern itself ... [and to] show how it

coalesces with the idea of mythical repetition, which dominates life in prehistory (129).

The reversal of meaning is observed by the reader in the fourth stanza:

In the porch of the chapel before the garish Virgin

A shawled factory-woman is shipwrecked there

Lies a bunch of limbs glimpsed in the cave of gloom

By us who walk in the street so buoyantly and glib (25)

At the sight of a squalid factory woman by the door of a garish Virgin Mary chapel, the poet contrasts consumption with scarcity. In addition to that, he signals to the naturalness with which the common passer-by witnesses this scene and does not seek to comprehend its reason. Both women, the mythic Virgin Mary and the marooned woman, point not only to history and its perverse enlightenment, but also to a nationalistic desire for progress and wealth. While the first two stanzas stand out as a visual scrutiny of the present, the third exploits the mythical repetition of pre-history. The figure that summons up this optical archaeology is the old lady praying at the dark corner of the church. Moreover, she is essential to the inner cycle of the poem because the view of Ireland as an old lady who would gather her citizens to fight for her independence was part of the national imagery. Besides being the ideological embodiment of hope, this woman was also the archetype of an invigorated nation. As soon as she convinces young soldiers to fight, she would regain strength and spread ideals of communal equality. Seamus Heaney touches briefly on the origin and continuation of this myth:

There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelary of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan van Vocht, whatever; and her sovereignty has been temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange, Edward Carson, and whose godhead is incarnate in a Rex Caesar resident in a palace in London. What we have is the tail end of a struggle in province between territorial piety and imperial power. (*Preoccupations* 57)

Based on the excerpt, it is possible to perceive that MacNeice's imagery influences the Nobel Prize remarks on the tussle between "Mother Ireland and "territorial piety". This continuation is strengthened by the conclusion of the poem: Belfast's sunset is orchestrated by the aura of religion, crime and guilt. If on the one hand the male kind symbolically murders the nationalistic ideals, it also feels guilty. However, in contrast with the Catholic piety, the protestant churches do not accept the intercession of the Virgin Mary. In this fashion, the memory of Mother Ireland is reduced to a frightened creature who seeks shelter in the opulence of a chapel. Implicitly the poet suggests a continuation of the unionist parties and their predominance in the social ethos of the time. Accordingly, MacNeice has taken advantage of this mythology, which was already present in the Irish cultural landscape in order to reveal its unsuitability in Northern Ireland. There is a possibility that MacNeice's re-reading of the myth functions as a literary device that enables the author to expose the unemployment and industrial rivalry that were happening at that time. Not only myth is present in MacNeice's portrayal of Belfast, but also historical facts concerning the dynamics of religion and working class policy after the partition. According to David Fitzpatrick, in the period prior to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the residual hopes of a reunification were shattered, the "political cultures of Ireland have proved more resilient than the economic and social structures from which they emerged" (212). As a result of unemployment and economic depression, Catholic workers were expelled from the shipyards in one of the most grievous episodes since the 1916 Rising. The description the historian uses to characterise the segregated position of catholic community in Belfast in the late 1920's seem to explain clearly what kind of memories MacNeice intended to evoke with the "shipwrecked woman" (as mentioned in the fourth stanza, line two):

The Catholic posture was that of a frightened and alienated minority, sheltering behind priests, fraternities, and Catholic socio-economic networks from the twin menaces of Protestant hostility and unemployment. Protestant ascendancy in Northern Ireland was reinforced though not caused by Catholic repudiation of the New state (212).

Even though MacNeice belonged to a Protestant majority, he overcame his religious limitations in order to display the lack of agreement between the modern poet and his community. As he himself points in one of his essays:

The modern poet ... is often both a 'rebel' against and a parasite upon his community. He makes it his pride to have different values and beliefs from those of the community, while at the same time he demands that the community shall support him and his poetry for their own sake... The poet seems no longer organic to the community (2).

The lack of agreement between poet and community, although idealised, for it suggests a special position of the artist, is challenged by the intellectual and cultural project of the writers of the period. According to John Wilson Foster, the generation to which Louis MacNeice, John Hewitt, W. R. Rodgers, Michael McLaverty and Sam Hanna Bell belonged, wished to fashion a literary tradition in Ulster that would resemble the Irish literary revival. Complementing this view, Foster affirms:

By the 1940s, Belfast like down-at-heel Dublin of the turn of the twentieth century (as Joyce saw it), 'wore the mask of a capital'. Devolution may have created Northern Ireland and given it a parliament, but it was, and it is, an anomalous, indeed paradoxically unique 'province' of the United Kingdom and is often referred to by the pro-Union Northern Irish and English as 'the province'.(208)

With the status of 'province' and with the pretension of being a capital, MacNeice's contradictory Belfast seems unquestionably to embrace the promises of industrial capitalism. However, these ideals are not suitable in a land that seeks to address religious and tribal issues. This mechanism creates "misplaced ideas" (Schwarz 19-32), as the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz develops regarding Brazilian literature in the nineteenth century. This experience comes into being when dependent cultures seek to address their issues according to intellectual mythologies developed somewhere else and whose bases are utterly distinct from the place that they are transplanted to. Thus, this process is one of the features that enable a particular social structure to be reflected in cultural formation as an artistic paradigm. For MacNeice this becomes the interplay between myth and progress which culminates in dialectical images. This interplay is literally concretised in the third stanza, in which the poet describes the attempt of the city to incorporate the marble stones and rubber gloves from the Empire, implying that everything that tends to a beauty would be easily

commercialised. Both sophistication and education – as commodities that come from the outside – and the perpetuation of ancient shibboleths and national myths are also part a circle that annihilates the possibility of an emancipated view of Ireland.

The opposition between the ancient landmark of the unification of Ireland and the “bunch of limbs glimpsed in the cave of gloom” create uneasiness in the reader and incites him or her to reflect on the fictional character of the land vis-à-vis the actual state of affairs. By doing that, the northern Irish poet tries to hold in an uneasy tension two conflicting traditions or schools of Irish nationalist myth: one of a “cosmopolitan modernist”, and the other “mythological motherland” (Kearney 221). While the vision of a cosmopolitan modernist could partially appeal to some parties in the Republic of Ireland, in the North, sectarian violence led to social and political contradictions, invigorating the myth of a violent mother that summons its sons to war. The reason for that is that while partition appealed to every party but the Catholic community, this violent process “generated an enduring and formidable state apparatus for entrenching Protestant supremacy” (Fitzpatrick 211). In addition to isolating the Catholic community,

the new government slipped easily into reliance upon political and physical mobilization of Protestant ‘loyalists’ through sectarian fraternities such as the Orange Order and the Grand Black Chapter. Protestant supremacy was facilitated by the refusal of many Catholics to exploit their admittedly restricted access to nascent state institutions. (212)

Capturing the political tension of his time, MacNeice does not surrender to the easy solution offered by the myth of motherland. Instead, he aesthetically proposes a version of reality that produces historical understanding. His appropriation of the collective imagery that refers back to the tension between communities and industrial developments, such as the Catholic Virgin Mary contrasted with the shipyards, serves to demonstrate Ireland’s fractures, rather than its unity. By associating that with the commercial trade of the city, “prehistory returns to dominate the modern era under the mythical guise of commodity exchange, in which the self-identical perpetually presents itself as new ” (Wolin 129). The conclusion of the poem is somewhat enigmatic, but revealing in terms of gender and politics.

Over which country of cowed and haunted faces

The sun goes down with the banging of Orange drums

While the male kind murders each its woman

To whose prayer for oblivion answers no Madonna (25)

MacNeice summarises “Belfast” by stating that neither Protestant nor Catholic communities are going to be heard, since their violent measures are not in accordance with the Christian ethics of forgiveness and redemption. Without assuming a pious moralising tone, the poet is sceptical even of the existence of a Christian God, mainly because the myths of an idealised Irish identity represents, as Kearney suggests “a symbolic compensation for the colonial calamities of history” (113). However, for MacNeice, a Modernist poet who explores the theme of the city and its economic differences, this cultural compensation is not enough to revert the generalised state of poverty of the land. This leftist point of view leads MacNeice to an artistic and critical dialogue between individual and collective interests, which is observed in his later collections.

This artistic enterprise to present the individual as political continues in the poem “Carrickfergus”. Even though I mentioned it before, I would like to pay a closer attention to the mechanism in which the poet constructs his subjectivity in relation to the people and the geographical space of Belfast and England. I would like to note that what enabled MacNeice to have a broader view on the individual and collective aspect of poetry was his experience as a producer and writer for BBC radio in London. This is perhaps the way in which European war politics influenced his individual integrity in relation to Northern Ireland and modern intelligentsia. As Donald B. Moore highlights:

MacNeice in his attitude... mirrors the attitude of a large section of the contemporary intelligentsia. Despairing of achieving action, or influential political thought, the critical analysis is drained of hope... There is an overriding sense of failure... there will be always those who find its lack of positive idealism a factor which limits their appreciation. (91)

Conveying a pessimistic attitude is not particularly the case in MacNeice’s poetry. Although he possessed a sharp critical voice as regards his society and the intellectual group he belonged to, he did not see himself as superior, but part of a complex historical process. And this is observed throughout the eleven stanzas of “Carrickfergus”, his subjective voice is entrapped by cultural and architectural obstacles that prevent him from achieving a satisfying

completeness. These obstructions are particularly clear in the first four stanzas (quoted below) when the poetic voice attributes artificial traits to the geographical feature of the land:

I was born in Belfast between the mountain and the gantries

To the hooting of lost sirens and the clang of trams:

Thence to Smoky Carrick in County Antrim

Where the bottle-neck harbour collects the mud which jams

The little boats beneath the Norman castle,

The pier shining with lumps of crystal salt;

The Scotch Quarter was a line of residential houses

But the Irish Quarter was a slum for the blind and halt.

The brook ran yellow from the factory stinking of chlorine,

The yarn-mill called its funeral cry at noon;

Our lights looked over the lough to the lights of Bangor

Under the peacock aura of a drowning moon.

The Norman walled this town against the country

To stop his ears to the yelping of his slave

And built a church in the form of a cross but denoting

The list of Christ on the cross, in the angle of the nave.

I was the rector's son, born to the anglican order,

Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor;

The Chichesters knelt in marble at the end of a transept

With ruffs about their necks, their portion sure (55)

The first stanza connects the coast to the noise of the traffic, the second associates historical conquests with architectural division, the third links the smell of chlorine from the

factories to Bangor port and the fourth – perhaps the most critical – evokes religion, race and slavery. In this way, the exaltation of the speed, glass and iron typical of modernism reaches a dead-end in a deserted scenario dominated by divergent politics. In the fifth stanza he introduces the detail of his religious and social identity, split between his father's career as Rector in Carrickfergus (later as Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore) and his sympathy towards the Catholic, especially the ones who belonged to socially deprived classes.

The poem continues with a trenchant description of the British troops marching for war. If in the sixth stanza war is portrayed as direful, in the seventh it is innocuous:

The war came and a huge camp of soldiers
Grew from the ground in sight of our house with long
Dummies hanging from gibbets for bayonet practice
And the sentry's challenge echoing all day long;

A Yorkshire terrier ran in and out by the gate-lodge
Barred to civilians, yapping as if taking affront:
Marching at ease and singing 'Who Killed Cock Robin?'
The troops went out by the lodge and off to the Front. (55)

As seen in the previous stanzas, the traumatic war images – dummies for bayonet practice and sentry's shifts – are opposed to a flustered dog who supposedly conducts the march of the soldiers. The introduction of the animal in the poem, in addition to the inversion of verb clause in the penultimate line creates a sarcastic tone which contemptuously derides civilization by comparing it to a pet that is easily trained to mechanical commands. From this moment, there is a grammatical and subjective caesura that removes the poet from this environment. In the eighth stanza he is transported to England, where the First Great War's distress is painted by through a combination of literary devices such as enjambment and polysyndeton.

The steamer was camouflaged that took me to England –
Sweat and khaki in the Carlisle train;

I thought that the war would last for ever and sugar

Be always rationed and that never again

Would the weekly papers not have photos of sandbags

And my governess not make bandages from moss

And people not have maps above the fireplace

With flags on pins moving across and across— (56)

Moreover, the English social backdrop against which he is brought up tends towards scarcity and frustration: the rationing of sugar, the maps above the fireplace, the ships from Germany and the school in Dorset become a chaotic enumeration that epitomises the plight of an artist who wished that “one could either live in Ireland or feel oneself in England” (Kiberd 474). The summary of this quotation is found in the last part of the poem: at the realisation he is entrapped in a “puppet world of sons” he also perceives he is far from the place that constituted himself as an individual. Nonetheless, the junction of Belfast from the first stanza with Dorset in the last implies that, in spite of local differences, modern conventions serve as individual and social emancipation. From the violence of the last line, “And the soldiers with their guns”, it is suggested that the utopian aura involved in the making of a city is also a mistake.

The gloomy ending of the poem indicates that, even though art and politics should not mix, poetry necessarily originates with social sensibility. As MacNeice himself puts it, when writing “a journal or a personal letter a man writes what he feels at the moment” (*The Collected* 101), and because of this, any “attempt to scientific truthfulness would be – paradoxically – dishonest... Poetry in my opinion must be honest before anything else and I refuse to be ‘objective’ or clear-cut at the cost of honesty.” (*The Collected Poems* 101) Due to his geographical, political and aesthetic beliefs, MacNeice felt displaced even to pinpointing the most grievous problems in society. More than related to the individual, this was part of a social distress of that time not only in The British Isles and Europe, but also in Ireland. As Declan Kiberd points out in *Inventing Ireland* (474) economic stagnation combined with lack of faith in institutional government resulted in massive emigration and created a sense of alienation in population in general.

Throughout the poem Belfast is portrayed as a begrimed and secluded city that simultaneously inspires identification and awe on the part of the author. Nevertheless, its

tormented dwellers, like the woman from “Belfast”, although on the verge of fraught loneliness, do not account for his artistic enterprise. The poet’s socialist and revolutionary claims enable him to go beyond regional and political affiliation and comprehend that: “Belfast showed and still shows, what could happen when workers identify primarily as Catholics and Protestants, and not as workers, or even Irishmen... Difference of language, nationality and religion did not by themselves make the formation of a unified class consciousness.” (Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* 120). Providing a broad understanding of the labour movement in the beginning of the twentieth century, Eric Hobsbawm advances its lack of union.

MacNeice – aware of this feature of the international movement reinserts it in the dynamics of the poem. Belfast is characterised through the artificiality of its geography and the popular appeal: the mass of workers through their labour feed international production, which, in spite of producing technological advances, is also bound to wars and scarcity. Thus, the city acquires the physiognomy of paralysis and scarcity, as if the workers could not go beyond their actual state. Also, the poet’s exile in England heightened his perception of the mechanisms of history and its representations. In the broad artistic context of Modernism, MacNeice could put his finger on one of the central contradictions of the avant-garde: “the habit of rejecting society but simultaneously demanding its support” (Berete 194). More than that, he could advance the cul-de-sac the avant-garde movements reached after the Second World War. The optimism with which Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism (and artistic manifestos of the same kind) looked at the modernist technologies, produced much more disenchantment than fulfilment. Since MacNeice was already part of a community whose inequalities were more evident due to the colonial exploitation, his awareness as regards ideology and illusion was previously raised. Thus, “Carrickfergus” introduces various elements that intensify a sense of estrangement and harshness in relation not only to Northern Ireland, but also to Modernist artistic and technological inventions.

The poet’s scepticism with Modernity leads him to the depiction of industrialism ideology and capitalist illusion in the poem “Bagpipe Music” (*The Earth Compels*, 1938). The piece offers an interesting picture of the urban environment displaying acute hints of sarcasm that disdain both the intellectuality of the period and the bourgeoisie whose expectations were centred on an imperialistic stance. Divided into ten stanzas of extensive lines of twelve and even sometimes fifteen syllables, the poem appears to equate economic with poetic expenditure, and this is done in a logic that is similar to that of the modern city. Its frenetic movement gives rhythm to the verses and imitates the melody produced by the

bagpipes. The musicality of the poem is emphasised by the fact that there are two melodic lines, similar to mechanic reproduction of the Scottish instrument. At the same time that the listener perceives the main musical phrase, he or she recognizes an incessant echo resonating at the back that gives balance to the musical harmony.

The melodic line is constituted of the singular individuals mentioned in the course of the poem, and the continuous bass is represented by the background of the city where the events take place. From the outset, the poetic voice assures the reader he is not going to write about merry-go-rounds or rickshaws, but limousines and peepshows. Mocking the attitudes of the higher classes and with a refined touch of irony, he turns his back on the matters that would concern lower classes, such as playing amongst children's diversions or going up and down in Indian rickshaws, and reinserts the artificiality of the high classes.

It's no go the merrygoround, it's no go the rickshaw,

All we want is a limousine and a ticket for the peepshow.

Their knickers are made of crepe-de-chine, their shoes are made of python,

Their halls are lined with tiger rugs and their walls with head of bison. (95)

In the stanza reproduced above, the combination of merry-go-round and rickshaw represents his concern with the imperialistic enterprises carried out by England and the institution of the city, as conceived in its models, in the other parts of its conquered lands. The critic Raymond William notes:

an internal story of country and city occurs, often very dramatically, within the colonial and neo-colonial societies. This is particularly ironic, since the city, in Western thought, is now so regularly associated with its own most modern kinds of development, while in fact, on a world scale, the most remarkable growth of cities in the twentieth century has been in the 'underdeveloped' and 'developing continents' (286).

And in fact McNeice is indirectly comparing the growth of Belfast – a capital in political terms but still “developing” under any economic criteria, against the other “developed” capitals: London and Dublin. This comparison between cities is a source of creativity for the poetry from the North for two reasons. First, it identifies the city as an instance that simultaneously denies and reproduces the economy of the Empire. Second,

because it figures an artistic paradigm outside the outline of sectarianism. Even though the poet does not mention Belfast in the poem, and his references are to the social environment of Scotland, the reason why I would insert this poem in the realm of Belfast poetry is because both Scotland and Northern Ireland are culturally and socially involved, they represent areas dominated by the British Empire, and ultimately because the themes here presented are further developed by poets of the Ulster Renaissance. Amongst those, there is Michael Longley, who furthers the theme of economic exploitation in the city and Ciaran Carson, who even writes another “Bagpipe Music”. Both poems are going to be analysed in chapter II of this thesis. Such is the importance of MacNeice’s poem, that its echoes are still heard in Northern Ireland.

The reason why McNeice’s poem is further developed by succeeding generations is his ironic appeal to the market and its seductions. And this seduction is the fetishist pornography in the second, third, fourth and fifth stanzas.

John MacDonald found a corpse, put it under the sofa,
Waited till it came to life and hit it with a poker,
Sold its eyes for souvenirs, sold its blood for whiskey,
Kept its bones for dumbbells to use when he was fifty.

It's no go the Yogi-man, it's no go Blavatsky,
All we want is a bank balance and a bit of skirt in a taxi.

Annie MacDougall went to milk, caught her foot in the heather,
Woke to hear a dance record playing of Old Vienna.
It's no go your maidenheads, it's no go your culture,
All we want is a Dunlop tire and the devil mend the puncture.

The Laird o' Phelps spent Hogmanay declaring he was sober,
Counted his feet to prove the fact and found he had one foot over.

Mrs. Carmichael had her fifth, looked at the job with repulsion,

Said to the midwife "Take it away; I'm through with overproduction". (95)

For McNeice the drive for power and status is a metaphor to the merry-go-round of the artists whose commodities – either cultural or material – seduce them as a sexual fetish. For this reason, the poet approximates objects and people in a quasi symbiosis synthesis. The reference to the knickers of crepe, leather shoes and walls covered with tiger rugs ridicules the sophistication of clothes and private spaces. In the same way, the poetic voice spurns the method followed by crime fiction in order to call people's attention. The second stanza mentions John MacDonald, a very popular writer of detective and crime stories set in Florida, in the United States. Although there is a reference to a real artist, the deictic serves as a mere ornament since the poem displays no value judgment, instead it actually equalizes the fetishistic relationship the bourgeoisie have with objects and literature.

The landscape of the body, in the second stanza, is shattered and used for commercialization. At the same time as the poet constructs the fetish, this very same fetish destroys its pleasure. The body is used for commercial purposes and not for bodily connection. Thus, part of the universe created by the author, is a clear reference to the labour exploitation of the working classes: at the moment they are absolutely worn out by over production, they feed a social class that will survive and maintain its privileges until old age. No sooner is the reader able to perceive this witty remark, than the chorus that permeates the whole composition restarts to resonate. This time it refers to bank accounts and uncensored sexual intercourse in public spaces. Again, the interconnection of market transaction and pornography is explicit: the desire of the middle and higher classes is reassurance and pleasure at a pornographic expense. In order to create estrangement on the reader's part, in the following stanza the poet presents the image of a farmer girl, Anne McDuggal, who falls in the grass on her way to the fields, and wakes at the moment she hears the chorus of Vienna waltzes. Nevertheless, the poet breaks the circle and reasserts that neither sex nor culture is what really matters, but production, of which Laird O' Phelps is tired. The fifth stanza (reproduced below) demystifies once more the chain of production relating the physical cut with the symbolic ones made by Willie Murray and his brother: while the former had to deal with his damage, the latter lost port taxes.

It's no go the gossip column, it's no go the Ceilidh,

All we want is a mother's help and a sugar-stick for the baby.

Willie Murray cut his thumb, couldn't count the damage,
Took the hide of an Ayrshire cow and used it for a bandage.
His brother caught three hundred cran when the seas were lavish,
Threw the bleeders back in the sea and went upon the parish. (95)

For the first time in the poem MacNeice mentions the actual failure of the capitalist system. This is probably the reason why in the next stanza he turns to the theme of religion as a therapeutic comfort after a commercial defeat. However, as most of the features that are shown in the poem, neither the Bible, nor the mysticism of Madam Blavatsky offer any concrete answer or solid reliability, so he refuses the idea:

It's no go the Herring Board, it's no go the Bible,
All we want is a packet of fags when our hands are idle.

It's no go the picture palace, it's no go the stadium,
It's no go the country cot with a pot of pink geraniums,
It's no go the Government grants, it's no go the elections,
Sit on your arse for fifty years and hang your hat on a pension (95 – 96)

Since religion offers no comfort, it is a packet of fags that console the tired hands of work. Subtly, MacNeice also reaffirms Karl Marx's famously quoted phrase that religion is the opium of the masses – there is a link between drug addiction and church going, and between drug, sex and religious addiction as ways to alienate people from their exploitation. The images summoned in the ninth stanza (see above), such as country cottages, theatres, government grants and pension evokes a recondite side of the capitalist system. This would be the hidden privileges and the illegal money distributed to the ones who are part of the government. In the case of Ireland and other colonies, this was the privilege of Anglo-Irish or even Scots who were the first settlers. The last couplet regards the topic of break and failure of the system: the author suggests the temperature of the markets is falling, but maybe this is where the possibility of a turnover lies.

The poet leaves in between the lines the fact the ironic cycle of the capital might be reverted. However, even the last lines are ironical, because it seems that the imperial voice is

reinforcing that if the temperature glass is broken, it will not hold up the weather, meaning it will not sustain itself.

It's no go Work your hands my honey love, it's no go my poppet;

from day to day, the winds will blow the profit.

The glass is falling hour by hour, the glass will fall for ever,

But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather. (96)

Thus, the possibility of revolution, which seems atrocious for one class of people would be last resource for another class. All the same, there is the interrogation mark questioning whether that is possible or not. In the context of the Republic of Ireland, it was James Connolly, even before the partition and the independence of Ireland who pursued a nationalistic Marxism for Ireland, and that was his great strength in associating revolution and national state. However, in a place such as Northern Ireland, whose imperialist legacy had left a profound fracture in the land and in the symbolic utopias, such as communism, that was not possible anymore. Therefore, the alternative for art, and specially, in the case of MacNeice is not to be irrevocably plural, but to see in this plurality the artificiality of the Modern myth imported from Western thought. Edna Longley identified in the poetry of Louis MacNeice, multiple stratum:

The 'persistent' Carrickfergus 'stratum' (another geological metaphor) might be discussed from four main angles. To revert to the thread metaphor: one can trace a sensory thread, a socio-political thread, a psychological thread and a mythic thread and these threads might be also correlated with different phases of MacNeice's poetic development (*A New Ireland in Brazil*, 365, 366)

In my reading of the poetry the city of Belfast in MacNeice, this multiplicity of threads and metaphors represent his criticism to modern society and its economic expenditure. In view of the poems analysed, the themes of colonization, nationalist myths and fetishist society are set against the backdrop of Belfast, since it is more than the place where he is from, but his guiding point for analysing London and other cities from Europe. Through his ironic scepticism towards the modern mythology of progress and technological advances – and even of communist utopias – the poet discloses his psychological and geographical displacement. According to Justin Quinn:

History, as a grand Hegelian mechanism encompassing the lives of individuals and political structures, haunted the poetry of 1930's; MacNeice... dwells on a very different type of time, one that streams out unstructured and dream-like. Thoughts are not shaped into orotund conclusions, but remain hanging unfinished in the air. (92)

Following this train of thought, it is possible to perceive that the task of reimagining an artistic model for a country that had been arbitrarily divided into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland – still connected economically and politically to the United Kingdom – not only involved subjective fragmentation, but also a poetic enterprise that would symbolically represent this social trauma. The criticism of modern myths is thus configured through an acute and intense irony that ought to be perceived in the light of his poems “Belfast” (*Poems*, 1935), “Carrickfergus” and “Bagpipe Music” (*The Earth Compels*, 1938). In addition to composing his oeuvre grounded on irony and sarcasm, the concept of myth is thoroughly essential since its imperialistic ideology is laid bare at the very moment the poet introduces them as elements which corroborate to the contemporary catastrophe.

Questioningly his poetry encapsulates many layers, as raised by Edna Longley, nevertheless much of this plurality, when seen through the eyes of the city and its ferocious beauty, is condensed into the destruction of the myth it stands for: the progress and the never reaching utopia of equality. Louis MacNeice's images are of a sublime beauty: the past they evoke are indeed similar to the old ancient myths of The Roman Empire for it absorbs the myths that sustain such a paralysed view of the world. His “Bagpipe Music” and the phantasmagorical Belfast reveals a divided subjectivity, banned forever from the Irish poor and doomed to turn his eyes to them endlessly. The myths criticised and left out in the open by an intelligent resource of irony refuse to mourn and to forget what was still present in Irish history. Thus, his poetry is a living proof of the way myths can be turned into ruins that still force their way into the present and makes people revise the inflexibility of their own positions. Perhaps the rhythm of the bagpipe is still pleasant, and the light of the candles still soothing, conversely, they still question their and people's values.

IV. THE BOTANIC GARDENS, OR “THE DREAM OF A WESTERN HEAVEN”

Complementing the view of an alienated poet in an unfamiliar homeland, Terence Brown characterises another important Northern-Irish writer, John Hewitt, according to a dilemma that was similar to Louis MacNeice’s:

Hewitt (born in 1907) early became aware, as all Ulster children must do, of the strange divisions of the society in which he found himself ... So one of the central preoccupations of Hewitt’s verse is the attempt to define the relationship of the poet and his stock to the rest of Ireland. His claim ... is that he belongs, though once alien. (87, 88)

From the historian’s comments I wish to infer that, artistically, the poetic alienation is represented by a problematic subjective voice. When trying to configure a personal relationship with the land, John Hewitt exteriorises a representational crisis caused by the caesura between people and land. This estranged longing for the soil is observed in one of his most appraised poems, “The Ram’s Horn”: “I have turned to the landscape because men disappoint me” (29). However, since cultural and political connotations have loaded this very same Irish landscape, Hewitt’s solution is also a source of problems, which are manifested in aesthetic choices made by poet. His extended meditative pieces explore how the personal dislocation affects his perception of the cultural and geographical landscape. In the poem “Return” of his *Collected Poems* of the thirties, the poem draws a parallel between his affective memories and rational thoughts. At the centre of the poetic experimentation there is a disturbing antithesis between moral responsibilities and poetic truthfulness. In contrast with MacNeice, Hewitt’s social ideals were buttressed by a strong commitment to a socialist utopia:

I saw how the two engines of my thought
and being, despite the clogging grease of self,
beat in the right direction.
First, positive action gearing the destroyer,
crushing the rocks for basis, digging clear
the level path for justice, the paved way for mercy

.....
appraising each swift arabesque of hunger,

I grew aware of the conflict of my being,

The interplay of memory and thought

And having the dialectics in my sinews

Was eager for the resolving synthesis

I wrote these words out, even recognising

the shifting lights I missed in definition. (19)

Based on the ending of the poem, the reader is able to comprehend that the poet aims at a bonding between collective memory and rational thought. Through the clarity of thought which makes art out of historical suffering, symbolised by the verse “appraising arabesque of hunger”, the poet imagines a utopian world, which humanity transcends into a trans-aesthetic, trans-historical realm, a “path for justice, the paved way for mercy”. These lines reveal more than a personal commitment to socialism, but a review of the Romantic utopia that looks back on organic views of art and society. Contrary to the ominous shipyard adopted by McNeice’s Belfast, I would like to compare his projections and associations to the Palm House in the Botanic Gardens in Belfast. Contrary to the gloomy image I employed to describe McNeice’s Belfast, I wish to argue Hewitt’s rejection of the city projects him to an idealisation that, on the account of the Irish land history, is somewhat not natural. In this sense, the grim and murky atmosphere of the port is transmuted into a realm of a projected utopia, a bucolic location forged in the conurbation of the city.

Conceived also by Charles Lanyon, the Palm House in Botanic Gardens is aesthetically somehow both harmonious with and alien to its surroundings. its curvilinear cast iron glasshouse gives light and peacefulness in the hectic buzz of the city of Belfast. Having its construction initiated by the Belfast Botanical and Horticultural Society in the 1830s, the Palm House has acquired a reputation for fine plant collections. The cool wing houses all year round displays of color and scent using plants such as geranium, fuchsia, begonia and built displays. As well as the conservatory, Belfast Botanic Gardens contains the Tropical Ravine or The Glen:

This rectangular house is uniquely constructed in that the whole interior, with the exception of a pond at one end, is taken up by a sunken ravine so that the visitor walks round what is effect a balcony and looks down into a moist valley filled with tropical plants... one shareholder described it as 'one of the finest houses of the kind in the kingdom'. (McCracken, 44).

On account of their artistically arranged interior, the "The Palm House" and "The Tropical Ravine" stand distinctively as faultless paragons of horticultural Victoriana. The connection with John Hewitt stems from a similar impulse of producing beauty with the rearrangement of samples taken from the natural world. With a more careful analysis of his poems, I wish to demonstrate that, through the scrutiny of the landscape and its natural connotations, the poet seeks to re-create symbolically the organic community that was once displaced by the partition of the land. On top of that, he also aligns with the Romantic idealism of a social revolution. The designers of the Palm House also had a similar impulse, through the selection of a few samples, they wished to recreate an untamed version of nature. Nonetheless, their goal was simply the creation of beauty, deprived of symbolic connotations. Although problematic, this assertion is not far from reality, for both poetry and garden simulate a placid Heaven, which, effectively, does not exist in reality for this conception is precedent of historical and cultural connotations. The amalgamation of idealised notions deprived of external stimulus creates a kind of poetry that through a romantic outlook does not take into account historical configurations.

However, there is a big difference between Hewitt and the architects that conceived the Botanic Gardens is that he tries to soften the social boundaries between communities by creating a lyric utopia grounded on socialist ideals. But the architects, following a potentially antagonist point of view, reproduced the mercantile impulse of embellishing the chaotic nature of modern cities. Thus, the lyric voice undertakes an analytical position in order to recollect what has been fractured in nature once the commercial outlook takes over people's lives. As Edna Longley calls attention for, "Hewitt's oft-quoted line 'I have turned to the landscape because men disappoint me' records no hermit-like resolve but the irony of a profoundly humane imagination... its strength... is that it holds such flavour of the man talking to his fellow-men not only of its native land, but also of itself." (John Hewitt 22). Indeed, similarly to a gardener, Hewitt examines firstly the cultural landscape in order to scrutinize its potential to produce a social revolution. As a good poet, this experiment starts

with his devotion to language as a vehicle for a “continuous emotional traffic with his native land” (Foster, *Colonial Consequences* 156). The poem that expresses that interchange is “Once Alien Here”,

yet lacking skill in either scale of song,
the graver English, lyric Irish tongue,
must let this rich earth so enhance the blood
with steady pulse where now is plunging mood
till thought and image may, identified,
find easy voice to utter each aright (8)

In this sense, the rhymed couplets combined with the perfect iambic pentameter are there to suggest the poet does not wish to dismiss the English language and its forms, but to enrich it with the “Irish tongue”. The insertion of the land in the people’s blood, pulse, thought and image suggests an almost hereditary inheritance of Ireland: at the same time “blood” means familiar bonding, lineage, it also means suffering. Thus, because of its forced tryst in a fusion of opposite forces – English and Irish, in a period post-independence – the sense of alienation cannot be avoided. In the poem “A Belfastman abroad Argues with Himself”, he goes a bit further with the sense of displacement:

You should have spoken when that evil man
first raised his raucous shout, to all who lied
given the lie direct, that little clan
who later marched for justice, joined with pride. (142)

The abstraction of the city of Belfast, whose name is not uttered anywhere in the poem, but for the title, is a negative recognition of the alienation the poet finds himself inserted in. Moreover, these verses are a response to a subjective rupture that cannot be anchored in the real world, but which is at the same time closely connected to a certain knowledge of this world. As he continues in the second stanza:

Now, from safe distance, you assert your right
to public rage. This town is, after all,
where I was born and lived for fifty years.

I knew its crooked masters well by sight,
endured its venom and survived sneers.

I scratch these verses on its flame-scorched wall. (142)

The writing of the verses in a scorched wall is the material verification of an immaterial split, which means that even being far from the city of Belfast, its presence has to be materialised in a dark wall. Through an objectified manifestation and an intimate dialogue between object and subject, “in the form of an image the object is absorbed into subject instead of following the bidding of the alienated world and persisting obdurately in a state of reification” (Adorno 160). The city of Belfast, at least in this poem, resists commercialization precisely because it is an absence: it is present in the form of the writing on a dark wall. However, this absorption poses, simultaneously, a problem and a critical solution to the poem: “the contradiction between the object reconciled in the subject, i.e. spontaneously absorbed into the subject, and the actual unreconciled object in the outside world, confers on the work of art a vantage point from which it can criticise actuality. Art is the negative knowledge of the actual world... [an] aesthetic distance from existence” (Adorno, *Aesthetic* 161). In the case of Hewitt, the aesthetic distance is not seen merely through geographical terms, but also in subjective and formal experimentations. “A Belfastman Abroad Argues with himself” is primarily a sonnet, but its rhyming scheme, altogether with the poetic feet are substantially altered in order to objectively display the poet’s internal exile. In this sense, it is indeed likely its form abba/ cdc/ // efg/ egf, which intermingles Petrarchan and English tradition, is a response to his sense of alienation and the impossibility of the realization of a form of art which represents unification of thought and ideals – such were the Renaissance sonnets conceived by Dante Alighieri, Luis de Vaz de Camões and William Shakespeare.

The ideal of transparency and unification is intrinsically part of the sonnet as a literary construct. As Anthony Easthope highlights, the sonnet “proceeds from the outset as *discours*, ‘I’ and ‘thou’,... Addresser and addressee are specified throughout with ‘me’... the sonnet tries to *contain* the fact of enunciation by holding it in close relation with meaning, attempting... to make a signifier part of the signified.” (Easthope 103) The sonnet, thus, poses a symbiotic relation between subjectivity and unity which is thoroughly in accordance with the Enlightenment train of thought. Nonetheless, when the poet subverts tradition and builds a distorted metric with a subjectivity that argues with itself through the written word, he asserts the impossibility of completion and unification. From this perspective, Hewitt is not only alien to his land, but from all lands, an utterly exiled poet in “search for equilibrium and

an abiding place – not only in a divided province, but in a world at war” (Ormsby iii). Nevertheless, the artistic sensibility offered by the city renders other possibilities for experimentation. Although “the city is not a source of inspiration” (Ormsby iii), the poet decides to compensate for this huge breach in his subjectivity by conducting an obsessive dialogue with his own self. This lack of measure of feelings, suggests a loss of space and time in the homeland’s recognition.

This representation of landscapes recalls George Steiner’s statement about post-war émigrés and refugees: “it seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism, which has made so many homeless, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language”⁶. Thus, the linguistic and social aspect of their dislocation is transplanted to the realm of subjectivity. Since language is the primary resource at the poet’s disposal, when the artist is disrupted by geographical and subjective displacement, his or her intake on poetry carries this subjective quandary. This view is also enforced by J. Foster who believes,

landscape is a cultural code that perpetuates instead of belying the instabilities and ruptures ... land is a sustained metaphor for the cloven Ulster psyche... what is most significant is the cultural shaping of these poet’s perception of the land by the sectarian membership and experience (141).

In order to comprehend Hewitt’s attempt to construct an affective and cultural utopia based on the vocabulary and incongruities typical of the Ulster psyche, I am going to analyze the poems “Once Alien Here” from the collection *No Rebel World* (1948), “Ireland” and “Because I paced my thought” from his *Collected Poems 1932 – 1967* (1969). The ideas, concepts and metaphors developed in these verses, represent a socialist longing for community and placidity in a world forged by Orange drums and adverse ethnographic references.

The piece “Once Alien Here” belongs to his first collection of poems, *No Rebel Word* (1948). Such a book, due to its critical tone and a great deal of experimentation was received poorly by the public. The poet’s lack of enthusiasm was commented by Roberta Hewitt, his wife and a source of inspiration for many of his poems,

⁶ Edward Said develops his ideas on exile based on George Steiner’s notion that Western literature is “extraterritorial”, a literature by and about exiles. For the Palestine critic, “exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical”. (Steiner qtd. in Said 174).

J threw me a letter and said ‘read that’. It was from Muller about *No Rebel Word*. It was said bluntly – this book had not been asked for a long time and they still had 507 copies if J. had no idea of how they could be disposed of they would be destroyed. It was shattering... J. told me this letter came when I was at the cottage a fortnight ago... but he couldn’t tell me... [but] kept it to himself and did not let me share his misery... my heart bled for him. (qtd. in Ferris 45 Journal 14.08.1950)

Through Roberta’s words the reader is able to comprehend that the theme of the book was indeed delicate to a public that was still affected by the distresses of war. It was nevertheless an initial attempt to configure a poetic voice. Austin Clarke highlights:

This is his first collection of poems and has an unusual maturity... his reputation should be assured. He has learned his craft the sturdy way... and knows when to suggest rather than to state... There is a danger in this quiet form of poetry which begins as a country walk, the danger of pedestrianism and Mr. Hewitt does not always escape it: but mostly he induces in us a mood of confidence and expectancy. (Clarke qtd. in Ferris 45)

In other words, this intertwining of rebellion and longing of recognition is typical of what MacNeice has identified as one of the predicaments of the Modern poet: the artist that seeks to be different from, but at the same time accepted by his community. The first stanza of the two of “Once Alien Here” is composed of iambic verses of twelve, eleven and ten syllables, which recollects the poet’s family history – their migration to Ireland and identification with “the ripe England” (line 6) and “the sullen Irish” (line 7). In the second, when the poet asserts he is going to find a new mode of expression, based on both heritages, he uses couplets of iambic pentameter. Even though the first stanza is also composed of rhyming couplets in the second, the regularity in rhythmical scheme represents this new found voice of the poet. The artistic archaeology of the history of the soil, is then a pre-text for him to distance himself from a primitive tribalism, but identify the characteristics that gives a sense of identity and belonging to his community

So I, because of all the buried men

In Ulster clay, because of rock and glen
And mist and cloud and quality of the air
as native in my thought as any here,
who now would seek a native mode to tell
our stubborn wisdom individual,
yet lacking skill in either scale of song,
the graver English, lyric Irish tongue,
must let this rich earth so enhance the blood
with steady pulse where now is plunging mood
till thought and image may, identified,
find easy voice to utter each aright. (8)

From the previous lines the reader is able to perceive that, even though Hewitt's oeuvre thematically reflects his personal anxieties as regards public recognition formally there is a sense of confidence that was thoroughly absent from McNeice's poetry. The most relevant aspect of this image of trust is translated into a poetic foot that intertwines the English iambic pentameter with a wobbling variation of rhythms. It is as if the political crisis of the forties had been transplanted to the formal structure of the poem and echoed in the dream of a Western Heaven, a socialist utopia that would bring together Catholics and Protestants in a single unit. Indeed, instead of being attracted to the cities' bright lights, fashion, luxury and dazzling surfaces – which so enthralled MacNeice – Hewitt's consciousness does not allow him to identify with the luminous structures of Belfast, or any other European city. By refusing to look at the future through the capitalist lens of technology, the poet gazes on the past and the mythic structure of the Ulster with a view to offering an alternative version to the present. As Matthew Campbell highlights, this poem is a paragon of his political and social affiliations, for in addition to making explicit his Protestant Scottish ascendancy, he expressed the wish to speak with an accessible language. Ultimately, the point of view adopted by the author is of a "socialist in a state run by a Unionist party dominated by the landed interest" (*The Cambridge Companion*, 6) and whose city of Belfast, instead of being the fuel of a heroic modernity is a cruel master who taught him how social strangeness could be also employed as a metaphor for his own sense of difference.

Seeing that the form of the “Once Alien Here” reflects its thematic and political questions, the most striking difference posed by the poem is the shock between temporal and rhythmic divisions. If on the one hand the poem tends to a natural and linear historic progression, the artificiality of the heroic couplets suggests an alien identification with Ulster-Scot and Irish communities, as seen in the stanza that I quoted earlier. While the first stanza describes his ancestral voices in Scotland, the second turns to the Irish natives. From the outset, there is an implicit sense of submission to both communities. If on the one hand the poet’s fathers, alien to the Irish soil, ploughed them in order to make a living the Irish, resented this new settlement and cursed the newly arrived people with charms and spells:

Once alien here my fathers built their house,
claimed, drained and gave the land the shape of use,
and for their urgent labour grudged no more
then shuffled pennies from the hoarded store
of well-rubbed words that left their overtones
in the ripe England of the mounded downs.
The sullen Irish limping to the hills
Bore with them the enchantments and the spells
That in the clans’ free days hung gay and rich
On every twig of every thorny hedge,
and gave the rain-packed stone a meaning past
and blurred the engraving of the fibrous frost. (8)

After this initial contrast between the two communities in terms of labour, Hewitt goes on to make a similar contrast linguistically. It is as if Hewitt wanted to prove that the work with the land is intrinsic with the obsession with language that both groups seem to cultivate. Nonetheless this linguistic energy is invested with a negative pathos: while the Scots no longer hold a grudge against their fate, the sullen Irish utter enchantments and spells against this new form of settlement. This dual mode of representation that is born out of the Northern Irish land gives rise to the last stanza: a resented voice that has forsaken the land and is trying to achieve completion in a lyric that intertwines the work with the land with the work with the poetic forms – the poet is a symbolic farmer of words. The use of the word

alright at the end of the poem is ironical, since this peaceful difficult reconciliation is not as peaceful as the lyric envisions. Actually, this lyric is a mode of expression which has to be faithful to this past of deprivation, but whose future could also bring appeasement. In this sense, the attempt to fuse opposites, combined with the metaphor of the house in the beginning, allude to a temporal habitation since the title of the poem “Once Alien Here” evokes different connotations. The adverb “once”, even referring to the past, expresses a narrative truth, such as the fairy tales of the Medieval Ages. The presence of this temporal inflection serves a double purpose: at a first glance, the subjective voice presents a genuine interest in providing a common ground for the different affiliations in Northern Ireland much as fairy tales serve as a common cross-cultural mythic well. Nevertheless, this dream of utopia is questioned by fragmentation and ruins. The ruins from the past transform themselves into the landmarks of the present, which fetter the promise of peace. The evocation of the past, in this sense, is ironic and demands more than a literal apprehension of the poem; the historical content is filtered through stereotyped myths, which ought to be transgressed.

Through an idealised form of lyric that is still in ruins and incomplete, it is highly significant that the utopia Hewitt is pursuing is the social contract as conceived by Edmund Burke. I am taking into consideration Burke’s remark mainly because Hewitt quotes ironically its influence in Northern Ireland in the poem “Conacre”. For Hewitt, as stated in the poem, this is one of the lessons he learned in his exile in Bristol:

suddenly there descended over me
sense of the instant mergence into time ,
my plight no more or less in rims of space
than the busy gestures of Cabot, father and son,
leading the little vessel for adventure,
ruling their course and ticking off the crew
Burke’s rhetoric of the dreams of a Western Heaven
Blueprinted by Robert Southey and his friends (3)

It is relevant that instead of mentioning William Wordsworth or Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet approximates Burke to Robert Southey, with whom Samuel Taylor Coleridge conceived the idea of a utopian community in North America. This apparent trivial

comparison is absolutely central in Northern Irish poetry, since the idea of immigration, colonialism and art is always set against the backdrop of a utopian desire. Interestingly enough another Northern Irish poet, Paul Muldoon, picks up on the idea of utopia. In his early poems, he constantly reflected upon the social organisation of Primitive communities and, more than that, he has re-written Robert Southey's "Madoc" (1990). In both cases, Southey's and Coleridge's poetical attempts are quoted ironically and in opposition to an idealised view of society. Having said that, the poem "Once alien here" embodies ideologically Burke's views: for him, society is a contract that involves tradition and humanity in a trans-historical connection. Older and younger generations negotiate values in an ever-lasting chain. Nonetheless, instead of peaceful soil of equality and justice, the constant task of citizens is to assemble the ruins, or minimise the effects of conflicts left from previous generations. As Burke states:

one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated, is least the temporary possessors and life-renters in it, unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity, should act as if they were the entire masters; that they should not think it amongst their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole fabric of their society; hazarding to leave to those who come after them a ruin instead of an habitation. (Web 31 March, 2011)

In the light of Burke's ideas, "Because I paced my thought" presents a desire to forge a utopia based on the temporal dimensions of traditional socialist ideas. In this sense, the recuperation of the concept of ruin serves the purpose of building bridges between individual and communal history. Fundamentally, its plea is that a profound apprehension of the present rests on the deciphering of the land of Ireland, and not simply on its new technological apparatuses. In this sense, the presence of the Ulster landscape and psyche is precisely what defines Hewitt's initial motivations as a poet. However, what distinguishes his poetry in relation to MacNeice and other Ulster poets is the formal and artistic apprehension of liberal ideals in philosophical and historical dimensions. Poetry, for Hewitt, is like society for Burke, a social contract that requires negotiation of values and a constant revision of obsolete principles.

This very same train of thought is further developed in the second poem I seek to address, “Ireland” (*Collected Poems* 1932 – 1967). It is a long poem, with one stanza of thirty two verses with variable rhymes and free pentameter. Its theme is the landscape and the people from Ireland: in an intensive play with opinions and facts, the poem presents itself as an essay which strives to prove that the Irish race is bitter and dying out for being proud of a land that is actually under lease. Hewitt, in this case, forecloses the argument the Irish are patriots and valiant through a series of incisive statements that go against the instrumental reasoning of modern societies. The subjective voice attempts to prove the Irish people, despite their boasts of a heroic mythic past, are still subject to international division of labour and its political status is still that of a subsidiary economy. In spite of the libertarian plea of the ending, the overall tone of the poem is of disillusionment and failure.

This line of argument, in addition to being aware of Burke’s idea of ruination, challenges the aristocratic vision of nationality, in which peasants are defined by their specific role in society. The double nature of the piece denounces not only Irish material expropriation, but how it is performed through the reproduction of stereotypes. Right in the opening lines of “Ireland”, passionately the poet disregards the heroic glory of the Irish people. Since the royal lineage of invincible warriors is part of an ancient history which is confined to the remote past, the present is the locus of “defeat” and “transatlantic sidewalks” – probable reference to the Irish diaspora around the world.

We Irish pride ourselves as patriots
and tell the beadroll of the valiant ones
since Clontarf’s sunset saw the Norsemen broken...
Aye, and before that too we had our heroes:
but they were mighty fighters and victorious.
The later men got nothing save defeat,
hard transatlantic sidewalks (Web, 20 May 2011)

In the continuation of the poem, Hewitt severely criticises the Irish people’s passivity and veneration for a sterile land – “are yet content with half a dozen turf,/ and cry our adoration for a bog”. In order to revert this perspective, he gives hints that the solution for this insular perspective is the recognition that the Irish “are not native here or

anywhere” (line 18). In other words, the understanding of Ireland continuous flux of immigration is also a form of identifying with ideals that are beyond its borders.

We Irish, vainer than tense Lucifer,
are yet content with half a dozen turf,
and cry our adoration for a bog,
rejoicing in the rain that never ceases,
and happy to stride over the sterile acres,
or stony hills that scarcely feed a sheep.
But we are fools, I say, are ignorant fools
to waste the spirit’s warmth in this cold air,
to spend our wit and love and poetry
on half a dozen peat and a black bog. (Web, 20 May 2011)

The conclusion of the poem serves as a break in the form of a psychological pairing of land and people through half alternate rhymes. The last words of the stanza evoke nature and sojourn – out, place, rock, ledge, sea, partake, earth – however the simplicity of these frequent final iambics reproduces the scarcity and poverty of the eighteenth century Ireland when the crops failed, and great part of the population died out, as Hewitt puts:

So, we are bitter, and are dying out
In terrible harshness in this lonely place,
and what we think is love for usual rock,
or old affection for our customary ledge,
is but forgotten longing for the sea
that cries far out and calls us to partake
in his great tidal movements around the earth (Web, 20 May 2011)

The excerpt demonstrates that the Irish people are perishing not simply due to its people’s “bitterness” or its land’s “harshness”, but due to their inability to recognise the “tidal movements around the world”. Seeing that the poem was written in the sixties, these “movements” the poet alludes to are probably related to the cultural and social revolutions

that were taking place in the period. Among them, there was the decolonization of African countries, the Civil Rights campaign in the United States, the rise of feminism, the socialist protests in France and the construction of the Berlin Wall. Culturally and socially speaking, the sixties were a period of a powerful revision of values, which entailed an engaged form of social change. In this broad context, the mentioning of foreign lands indicates the poet wishes to transcend his geographical and ideological boundaries. His longing is evidenced in the lines, “and what we think is love for usual rock... is but forgotten longing for the sea/ that cries far out and calls us to partake in his great tidal movements around the earth”. In these last verses, in addition to denouncing the people’s adoration for the past and its idealised mythology, Hewitt rationalises the Irish failure in grasping what happens beyond the island’s shore. In this sense, the heavy criticism that was adopted in the beginning is transmuted into a plea for an ancestral understanding of Ulster roots and Celtic pathos.

Although the poet reassures his affiliation to global social revolutions, which gives him a distanced point of view to deal with local conflicts, the speaker of the poem does not lose his Ulster-Scot identity mainly because he states that the adoration of the land is actually the Irish naive way of expressing their wish for equality. This is also his way of transposing the sectarian divisions that segregate different communities. Perhaps, what still makes Hewitt one of the greatest Belfast poets is the fact he did not write openly about the city of Belfast. His pleas for equality and justice, in ethical and social terms, were part of his strategy of diminishing the stereotypical view of different identitarian affiliations. Perhaps more importantly, the investigation of the locality was his way of pursuing socialist ideals. Poetry for Hewitt meant action – a way to intervene in the world around him. But his deeds were not reduced to an engaged form of writing, but were extended to an effective work with trade unions and a serious involvement with the British Labour Party, the Fabian Society and Belfast peace League. Michael Longley and Frank Ormsby highlight that his first poems were published in left wing newspapers and periodicals (xvii).

Although his appraisal of the land is somewhat in opposition to an artistic depiction of the city, the ideals behind his poetic creation were grounded in the Romantic fascination for practical reason. His refusal of the city-escape in his poems is also related to his dream of a “Pantisocracy of bucolic connotations (...) [the combination of] the “innocence of the patriarchal epoch” with the “refinements of modern Europe” (Paes 40). Although pantisocracy was the goal Coleridge and Southey pursued in North America, Hewitt seems to follow the same principle in Ireland: fascinated by the European reasoning, which also conceived the city machinery, the poet wished to create a socialist ethos in an agricultural

Ulster. And this is the theme that connects “Ireland” and the next poem I am going to focus, “Because I paced my thought”. The piece is an example of his refusal of the urban setting, along with its problems and struggles. For the poet, it is clear the fact that the city is the perfect place for the development of the individualistic and capitalist frame of mind. Nonetheless, seen that this ideology is predominant in modern times, he finds himself alone and bereft. Right in the opening lines of the poem, Hewitt affirms:

Because I paced my thought by the natural world,
the earth organic, renewed with the palpable seasons,
rather than the city falling ruinous, slowly
by weather and use, swiftly by bomb and argument,
I found myself alone who had hoped for attention. (23)

His dismissal of the town as a locus of barbarism (“city falling ruinous”) combined with his communal activism (“between... bomb and argument”) leaves him alone, such as the image of some English Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, who find themselves alone in their pleas. His subjective division is again similar to both English Romantics, and William Butler Yeats. In his analysis of Yeats’ views on politics, the critic David Dwan highlights that for the poet, the problem with industrial society was that it valued liberty and private interests above anything else. However, for Yeats, ancient Ireland was ““above all things democratic and communistic”” (Yeats qtd. in Dwan 91). In confluence with the argument that primitive society would approximate individuals through communal values, Yeats also applied organic metaphors to compare social organisations to the natural world ⁷, such as the poem “The Coat” ⁸, when the poet dismissed the Irish mythology and its implications due to the fact it was used for political interests. In this sense, the artificiality of the cityscape leads both Yeats and Hewitt to envision in their natural projection of the organic world a coherent metaphor for utopian aspirations. While the former resorts to a hierarchical stance that sees fascism as the solution to the highly individualistic frame of mind of modern society, Hewitt reaffirms – in “Because I paced my thought” – his belief in a socialist utopia grounded on a working class ethos:

⁷ As Dwan puts it in “Reflections on Revolution”, Yeats “had begun to deploy in his work motifs that he would later explicitly attribute to him. Liberal disillusionment with democracy in the wake of franchise reform appears to have fostered a veritable cult of Burke among Victorian political thinkers”. (115).

⁸ A Coat: I made my song a coat/ Covered with embroideries/ Out of old mythologies/ From heel to throat;/ But the fools caught it,/ Wore it in the world's eyes/ As though they'd wrought it./ Song, let them take it,/ For there's more enterprise/ In walking naked. (Web 11 April 2011)

I should have made it plain that I stake my future
on birds flying in and out of the schoolroom window,
on the council of sunburnt comrades in the sun,
and the picture carried with singing in the temple. (23)

The last two verses of the stanza points to a socialist utopia of a communal society in which the banners carried by Catholics in the masses, and the posters of William of Orange in protestant parades would not be a source of division, but unification and stability. It is as if the fragmentation of the “city falling ruinous” could be reconstructed through an organic and whole community, without the aberrant expenditure of the cities. Perhaps, more important than the allusion to the locality of Northern Ireland (the picture), it is the use of the specific vocabulary used by communists – “comrades”. The use of the word “temple” at the end of the poem is also a hint that this utopia is not affiliated to any church, but rather to a universal principle of ethics and solidarity. It is through this syntactical reference the poet connects the individual to the collective aspect of society. Transposing the local to the universal, Hewitt conceives his own vision not only of a utopian community, but also of humankind, as Brown explains:

For humankind in Hewitt’s understanding is a symbol- and myth- making species, as well as a builder, farmer, worker, and social being. And as a generator of the symbolic, the unconscious mind with its roots in some collective human activity that lies beneath conscious awareness, has, in Hewitt’s sense of things a powerful influence on the artist. (310)

According to Brown, the element that connects the poet to the collective mind is precisely the experience of the land or the cultivation of the syntactic field of language: the detail of a specific topography. In this sense, the evocative names of nature create a chain that both appeals to senses and the rational interpretations of place and emotion. “Because I paced my thought”, then, reveals itself as an open field where the poet ploughs, through collective appeals to communal values, a terrain for social justice and artistic responsibility. Hewitt’s sense of poetry and landscape, as opposed to MacNeice’s is not cynical or dubious, but hopeful and organic, based on an artistic commitment to philosophical and literary conventions of Romanticism – Edmund Burke and Robert Southey. As he writes in a letter to John Montague: “Although I have read a good deal of Marxism and still find the dialectic a

handy if not all-purpose tool I have never been a Communist. Indeed I should best be described as a Utopian Socialist...” (353). In the light of his assertion, it is possible to perceive Hewitt’s poetry is able to appeal to a collective consciousness that echoes justice and social values. In this sense, his refusal of the realistic depiction of the urbane is actually his individual attempt create to a city-escape, with a logic that was founded in the European reasoning. In other words, his refusal of the treatment of the city is a strategic retreat that envisions the possibility of change and amelioration of the conditions of life in the modern metropolis.

The image of the Palm House, and the Botanic gardens, in this sense, helps the reader to envision Hewitt’s project of trying to conceive a socialist utopia. Nonetheless, this is still grounded on a specific geographical place. As he states in another letter to Patrick Maybin: “My hierarchy is this: Ulster, Ireland, British Isles, Europe. And any man who omits one step, is guilty of treason to his people and humanity? Or have I said all this before” (25). Through this hierarchy of localities, Hewitt practices his art and his belief in a form of socialism free of the communist ideology disseminated by the Soviet Union. His outward looking, in this sense, instead of leading to a propagandist ideology, brings him back to his utopist ideals. In order to represent his longing for a community which shared democratic and equality of power and conditions, the poet decides to place his thought in natural and unifying standards, prior to the division of the land and the partition of Ireland.

V. THE DECAPITATED BELFAST, OR “THE SMOKING CHIMNEYS OVER THE SLATE ROOF TOPS”

In an inquiry made by Poetry Ireland Review, writers, publishers, critics and the public in general were invited to answer the simple question of who was the most neglected Irish Poet (living or dead)? Without hesitation, the Dublin-born writer James Liddy replied they were Joseph Campbell and Padraic Fiac. Even though he mentions a few words upon their difference, he bluntly asserts “They must be neglected because they come from one of the most forgotten, weepy, cities in the world... Both more than adequate, more than minor” (qtd. in Montague 50). Inasmuch as the adjectives used by the writer to characterize the city of Belfast are intentionally provocative, they reveal quite a lot about the poet in question. Fiac (1924) is more than minor, since the landscape of his deserted town is transmuted into the troubled New York of the thirties. The poet is an exceptional case in his context: having

migrated to the United States shortly after the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929, Fiacca experienced at first hand the effects of an economically-depressed society.

More than experiencing the economical despair and alienation that was typical of The United States at the period Fiacca had the opportunity to perceive the effects of the economic crises in Northern Ireland as well. In the forties, the poet was in charge of administrating the groceries shop that belonged to his parents. However, due to their complete bankruptcy, the poet decided to join St. Joseph's Seminary, where he published his first verse play, called *Fire* (1946) in homage to St. Patrick. In the same decade, Fiacca discovered he had no vocation for priesthood, which motivated him to go back to Belfast. In his artistic representation of the two lands, the transposition of the Promised Land of America to the oblique and sectarian Belfast provided him with a distanced form of comprehending the heterogeneous aspects of Irish history and identity. For the poet, the understanding of the conflicts in Northern Ireland could not be reduced to a stereotyped representation of the Protestant or the Catholic community, but were part of a pluralistic history. For Kirkland Fiacca's poems about the city of Belfast "displayed a generosity of vision which sought to render the writing of poems about violence in a truly heterogeneous social context and it is the fact that such a vision could not be reconciled to the other private meditative voices" (*La Fatigue* 123). This form of seeing Northern Irish social context probably stems from his understanding of the cultural and racial prejudices that were blatant not only in The United States, but also in Ireland. As the poet pointed out about his parents' shops, "the Irish got everything on tick but the blacks always paid" (Fiacca qtd in Hamill 45). From this transnational viewpoint, his understanding of the Irish was not based on straightforward religious dichotomies, but on a profound complexity of interrelations, which involved questions of national mythology, stereotypes and authenticity.

In addition to a heterogeneous approach of the Northern Irish historical conflicts, Padraic Fiacca's poetry displayed skeptical and critical comments towards the Irish and British tradition of poetry. As well as going against their idealistic approach, Fiacca absorbs the typical archetypes of the land, such as Ireland as an Old woman and the poet as her loquacious defender, and sets them against the backdrop of Northern Ireland's history. This characteristic of the poet's work is also highlighted by Gerald Dawe, who mentions that Fiacca exhibits "prejudice against the mythology of Art and The Poet... [this] prejudice is obsessive, fed by what he sees as the disabling claims of Irish history and the dominating idioms of conventional Irish poetry." (*Brief Confrontations* 143) A perfect example would be "Gloss", a poem which was not ignored by Frank Ormsby (1979) in his anthology of the poets from

the North of Ireland. Right from the first stanza the poet questions the theoretical basis of Emmanuel Kant's theory of Art.

Nor truth nor good did they know

But beauty burning away

They were the dark earth people

Of old

Restive in clay (90)

With the simple verses of seven, two and four poetic syllables and a somewhat regular scheme of rhymes – ab c ab – the poet introduces a formal and discursive rupture: the mode of thought which he is taking on board is of a dissimilar cognition. The characteristic Fiacc introduces in the poetry of the North of Ireland is his opposition to the existing forms of poetry. While MacNeice and Hewitt accepted the reasoning of both European lyric and the Celtic Revival, Fiacc was suspicious of its power to portray the heterogeneity of the reality he witnessed in both the United States of America and Northern Ireland. The first two lines deny the paragon of a philosophical train of thought which Kant developed and was further absorbed by Western philosophy. In both of his most important works, *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant explores the categories of aesthetic appreciation and teleological cognition. A propos of the former, he proposes art should be recognized through the dichotomy beautiful and sublime. While the beautiful is portrayed in a plastic form without a necessary cognition, the latter produces reflective judgment which depends on intellectual activity. Thus, the sublime is reached when the artistic fruition involves the proper discernment of what is good, true and beautiful (Kant *The Critique of Practical*). However, in "Gloss", Fiacc suggests the people he is referring to belong to a different breed. Those beings witnessed the burning of the beautiful "restive in clay". The metaphor of "clay" for the land of Ireland, altogether with the adjective "restive" to characterize its people, proposes a complex web of relations whose common ground would be instability and apprehension. The denial of Western philosophy and its sublime qualities add tensions to the verse and places it in a vacant space between reason and myth. The colloquialism of the language also distances the poet from the beautiful scheme of art that was envisioned by Kant: the simple rhymes, combined with short verses highlight the simplicity of Northern Irish speech.

In the following stanza, Fiacca turns to the pre-Christian legends of Ireland: first he falls back on the pre-historical legends of the Ulster cycle with “Deirdre of the Sorrows”, and second, the Fenian Cycle with “The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne”. Cryptically and obscurely approaching the theme of Ireland, he uses the legends that were largely applied by the members of the Irish Revival to promptly criticise its pompous linguistic devices. The simplistic overtone the poet employs, contrary to invigorating the sense of an Irish identity, rather cleanses the popular legend from its anterior cultural baggage and gives it back to the conversational mode. The rhythmically straight-forward ballad cadence conveys a melodious tonality to the lyric. However, simultaneously, there is a narrative division that controls the second part of the poem – after the full stop. The repetition of the last verse in the first verse as a chorus conveys a paraphrase: it is as if the first part was sung again in a different tonality.

Deirdre watched Naisi die
And great king Connor himself
said
Did you ever see a bottomless
bucket
In the muck discarded?
And comradely Dermot was destroyed by Fionn
Because of the beauty of a girl.
Because the beauty of a girl
The sky went raging on fire (90)

This pleasant fluency is broken, though, on the last verse when the poet, mimicking his own voice, commands the reader to turn the page, even knowing there is no continuation that would impel them to do that. The abrupt ending is a reversal of the incantatory mode: while the poet seduced the reader through his apparent uncomplicated style, he is, on the

contrary, calling attention to its artificiality: it is simply a text manipulated by somebody designated as author.

The rupture with the “Candles of the Irish Poor” of MacNeice and the dream of the “Western Heaven” of John Hewitt also demarcates the actual transition from the Modernist skeptical and utopian approach to a form of poetry that departs from text and not actual reality. It is as if Fiacca was introducing to the “restive” Irish the contradiction of modern identities and the plurality of social contexts. Nonetheless, this new experimentations are not the norm in his poetic oeuvre, but well-placed attempts to sidestep protestant and catholic binomials without tripping into the Marxism of the thirties. Although “Gloss” possesses some of post-modern features, the poem “First movement” remains realistic. It approaches Belfast through the working class sensibility that both MacNeice and Hewitt deployed. Nonetheless, the most important stylistic feature in Fiacca’s poetry remains: an economy of words and, repetition of texts and simple concepts. “First Movement” has five stanzas of a wide variety of poetic meters that are used to describe the city where he was born. The first stanza describes the sky of Belfast: the yellowish clouds and far-off ards. The important detail of the respiratory disease “ards”, creating an ambiguity, is what links the mechanic and artificial to the natural biological part of the human being. In this simple stanza of three lines, the author is able to create a landscape that penetrates its inhabitants and harms their health. The question remains as to whether these physical effects are purely physical or psychological as well.

In this piece, there is also a subjective trace which was totally eliminated in the previous poem. This is the moment when Fiacca introduces his lyric voice: the subjective is not as important as the hazel polluted sky, but a constituent part nonetheless of this picture of grey beauty. The description of the chimneys over “the slate roof tops” and the “wayward storm birds” juxtaposes the natural and the artificial. However, this opposition is not as clear as it seems for the birds possess the human characteristic “wayward”, in the same way the people “restive in clay”. In this sense, even though Fiacca opposes high and low elements (sky and earth), he is, in reality, juxtaposing this distance and blurring the frontiers between poetic language and colloquialism, high art and low art, factory work and artistic craft. The last two stanzas describe, plainly, his exilic attempt to leave the city. Both east and west harbor the sea and threatens people with a sudden darkness. It is quite relevant that throughout six months, starting from October and lasting until April, the days in Belfast tend to have a short span of light and warmth, but this darkness the poet mentions is also related to the psychological state of Belfast’s inhabitants. The gloom penetrates the soul in the same way

that “ards” does the lungs. The theme of darkness could also imply a kind of Dark Age of thought, the same rejection of rational philosophical reasoning the poet suggested in “Gloss”. Hence, the reader observes the poet’s complete refusal of the structures of thought that dominate not only the laws of society and politics, but also art and knowledge.

Perhaps, most importantly, what is central in the poem, and perhaps in his work as a whole, is Fiacc’s attempt to come to terms with conjoined realities. Even though Fiacc cannot be considered an exile in the literal use of the word, Edward Said’s “Reflections on Exile” proposes an argument that is relevant in the poet’s attempt to come to terms with distinct realities. For Said, the twentieth century was the time of massive immigration movements and social displacements. The effects of those in the individual are a sense of constant anxiety (“restive in clay”) and a sense that home is perpetually vanishing. For him, an abrupt and violent dislocation of space produces the pangs of exile. Nonetheless, at the same time that this experience tends to enlarge loss and suffering, it also expands self awareness and social knowledge:

seeing the entire world as a foreign land makes possible originality of vision
Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles
are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness
of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from
music – is *contrapuntal*. (148)

In Fiacc’s case, the originality of vision that Said talks about came with his refusal of the traditional lyric and the approval of a simple mode of expression. The last stanza shows an almost conscious repetition of words, simple poetic feet and identical rhymes, which produce spaces between lines:

And to the east where morning is the sea

the sea

And to the west where evening is

the sea

Threatening with danger

and it

Would always darken suddenly (91)

Those spaces left in his verses culminate in a modernism deprived of a single unit or utopia. His realism stems from a profound work with the ordinariness of language and straight forwardness of themes and ideas. In the case of “First Movement”, the poet wishes to show that the dangerous simplicity of Belfast can be associated to the plain nature of his lyric. Perhaps what is precisely contrapuntal would not be simply his displaced subjectivity, torn between a decadent New York and a miserable Belfast, but a form of poetry that acknowledges the existence of a long tradition, but prefers to take it on board through a negative slant. In other words, in order to appreciate and creatively manipulate the canon, the poet removes the aura of the poet and inserts him or her in the guts of the street. Fiacca is not merely interested in how the city should become a theme on his poetry, but how its most remarkable features imprint themselves on the words in the page.

The poem “Intimate Letter 1972” from the collection *Ruined Pages*, depicts Belfast through its objects and violent threats. Although this poem represents the “Troubled” phase of Belfast in Poetry, could be efficiently applied here due to the fact that it proposes a transition: an explosion which is going to produce Ciaran Carson’s asterisk on the map, or Seamus Heaney’s escape from the fire or even Paul Muldoon’s indeterminism. Right from the beginning, without any euphemism or second thoughts, the poet depicts a decapitated Belfast: a place that cannot cope with the grandeur of heroic modernity:

Our Paris part of Belfast has
Decapitated lamp-posts now. Our meeting
Place, the Book Shop, is a gaping
Black hole of charred timber (95)

The comparison of Belfast to Paris is ironic, although south Belfast, especially the area that surrounds Queen’s University, the so-called Queen’s Quarter, has often been viewed as the city’s cultural district. Nonetheless, this vision in the poem, with the decapitation of such a possibility of refinement and art implies the impossibility of poetry in such a context. The rhymes also show fissures and imperfections, for while the poet tries to follow the scheme a/ b/ b/ a, the destruction of the city ruins his attempt. It also means the incompleteness of the lyric and its inability to be whole when reality is involved in a process of war. In the second stanza, another explosion is going to destroy another lyric paragon: the subjective voice:

Remember that night with you, in-

Calided in the top room when
 They were throwing petrol bombs through
 The windows of Catholics, how
 My migraine grew to such
 A pitch, Brigit said 'Mommy
 I think Daddy is going to burst (95)

This shifting perspective is something that is going to be used by other poets of succeeding generations. Taking advantage of a personal and ordinary motif to approach the beginning of the civil war in Ireland, the poet describes his daughter's observation that her dad is going to burst – like the lamp-posts and book shops of Belfast. Due to the psychological and social distress he experiences, it is as though the city entered his subjectivity and, along with its buildings, is shattered. On this account, in the other stanza he describes how he and his partner got separated due to the bomb that went off on the bottom of the street. Not merely a literal separation, it is a psychological and artistic separation that entails his dissociation with utopias and hopes. The last verse, "It was I who left you" represents not only his farewell to auratic art and the traditional idea that the poet represents a specific social and political class or ethnic group. The first one to leave his family and home is actually the institution of poetry. Even though the motivation is precisely modern, its production demonstrates the lack of hope and faith in industrial society. For Fiac, neither industrial society, nor its promises of an egalitarian future could bear fruits. Nonetheless, his response is a retreat from the well made verse and beautiful poem: simply a "burst".

Even with a clear reference to Paris in the first verse of the piece, the baudelarian *flânerie* is not yet awoken by Fiac, but certainly his work with urban images stems from a similar search embraced by the man who wanders in the recondite corners of the city and captures its singular and evanescent moments. In this sense, due to his attempt to be a dissident voice, his poetry embodies an essence that is going to be further developed by the great names of the so called "Ulster Reinassance". The images that photographers capture, journalists describe and people record in their minds, are commercialized and negotiated in aesthetic perceptions. In the very same way newspapers do. According to David Frisby,

Benjamin insists that 'the social foundation of *flânerie* is journalism'. The flâneur wishes to sell his images of the metropolis, to sell his socially

necessary labor time spent on the boulevards, traversing the signifiers of modernity. (95)

Precisely, this is what is going to guide the next generations of poets and cause a gigantic transformation in the cultural life of Belfast. The fragments of a city distressed by terrorist attacks are going to be patched up according to different authors and worldviews. A connection between this assortment of images, though, is going to be the transitory figure of the *flâneur*. Due to its transience and brevity, he is the natural embodiment of the poet who seeks to represent the ordinariness of life. In Frisby's viewpoint:

We can read of the *flâneur* in all these drafts as if this is a transitory figure, whose literary productions were conditional upon the market for the feuilleton sections of the new press, whose identification of the street with an *intérieur* is one 'in which the phantasmagoria of the *flâneur* is concentrated is hard to separate from the gaslight, and whose habitat is challenged by the decline of the arcades, the advent of Haussmann's grand boulevards and, associated with them, the department stores. (88)

Caught between the crossfire and skeptical about his power to transcend the reality he actually does not inhabit, Fiacc, from an exiled stance which transposes two views of reality, captures images like glimpses of Belfast. In this sense, the conclusion of this chapter resonates somewhat the actual start of the Troubles in Belfast. For the vision of the gloomy tormented city that afflicted MacNeice, expelled Hewitt and shook Fiacc's secure vision is going to be expanded by the next, perhaps more important, generation of poets: the so called Ulster Renaissance – although the term sounds polemical and highly problematic for poets and critics. This new approach to poetry intertwines the conditions of production of poetry in the North, the historical moment in the world and Northern Ireland and experimentations – which, by and large, drew on the example given by this first generation of poets.

* * *

In this first attempt to define Belfast in poetry before the Troubles, I would like to return to Seamus Heaney's assertion quoted in the beginning of the chapter. Based on his

personal experience as a Northern Irish poet, he questioned whether poetry was able to satisfy the contradictory needs of one's consciousness in times of crisis. With the analysis of the Belfast poems by Louis MacNeice, John Hewitt and Padraic Fiacca, it is possible to affirm that they answered Heaney's inquiry positively, since they expressed their subjective quandaries through the creative exercise of memory. Consciously accessing a personal and collective storage of images, the poets produced a quarry, or storehouse of images for future generation of poets to draw upon. In drawing a parallel between poetry and architecture, I demonstrated how, in the same way that the rationality produced by the architect Charles Lanyon demarcated the city of Belfast with buildings and monuments, the poetry by MacNeice, Hewitt and Fiacca "constructed" a tradition that inspired and encouraged other poets. The allegorical comparison between the cityscape and the poets provided a sort of dialectical device to explore the motifs and themes that were developed by each poet in question. Through the poets' subjective concerns, these themes receive a new tone and style, which bring their literary project back to their place of origin and their historical partition, thus justifying, their need to represent Belfast and Northern Ireland.

Answering the questions that were posed initially, the imagery exposed in this chapter revealed snapshots of displaced rationalities, which were part of the social sensibility of the place. With Louis MacNeice, this displaced rationality is seen through his banishment from the Protestant and Catholic order. In his poems which describe the city of Belfast, the poet exhibits failed attempts at a thorough homecoming. A native of Belfast, having moved to Carrickfergus as a teenager and to London later in his adult life, the artistic depiction of the city resorts to a constant feeling of exile. On the other side of the spectrum, John Hewitt, a militant socialist, sees in the urban environment a decoy. Instead of the prosperity and hope foreseen by many of the artists of modern poets, he sees in the city the downfall of civilization. This is the reason why he turns to landscape and tries to conjure up a Burkean Western Heaven. Nonetheless, instead of relying on the Soviet Regime as a secure example, he examines the language of the place to create an emotional bond with the people. This linguistic tie between comrades of different communities is the grounds on which his poetry is forged. Contrasting with Louis MacNeice and John Hewitt, who reflected about politics a collective sense of national belonging, Padraic Fiacca starts to exhibit the first postmodernist traits of the poetry of the north of Ireland. Concerned with the interplay of words and meanings and with a pictorial description of the streets of Belfast, his poetry comes to terms with an alienated sense of self. Having also experienced the life in New York during the thirties, a period in which the economy suffered the grievous effects of recession, the poet

does not seem concerned in reflecting about idealistic utopias, but simply describing his hopeless appreciation for this society.

The architecture of the city of Belfast pre-Troubles displays poets that seek to transcend their exile and find a symbolic home. Nonetheless this home is always displaced and alien, estranged from the dweller and complex in its description. Indeed, this is the most significant legacy the following generation inherits: a certainty that, while “belonging” to Belfast is geographically impossible, a home in the plurality of verse and the description of its streets is subjectively and artistically possible and welcoming.

TROUBLES MEMORIES

I. EXPOSÉ – QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST, OR THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY

*The dews drop slowly and dreams gather; unknown spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
(“The Valley of the Black Pig” by William Butler Yeats)*

Through the first person narrator of the novel *The Pen Friend*, the poet Ciaran Carson makes a compelling association as regards the city of Belfast: “Moses represented God’s ability to unite opposing factions, which had some relevance to my own divided city of Belfast” (92). Although Carson’s novel does not have theoretical pretensions, it subtly conveys the idea that even though the city of Belfast is divided between different loyalties, a divine force is able to bring together divergent social forces. Throughout Carson’s book, the reader is confronted with attempts at reconciliation of several sources. For instance, his narrative tendency towards a free indirect speech – which brings together a plurality of voices – his insistence on highlighting sublime characteristics of works of art and his smooth intertwining of private and public life. Such a symbolic correlation is not simply Carson’s creativity operating alone, but a representative allegory of the efforts made by a whole generation of artists. The generation of poets who attended the weekly meetings at Queen’s University Belfast under the coordination of Philip Hobsbaum invigorated the creative landscape of a Belfast, which, in the 1940s and 1950s, was still coming to terms with modernity. As John Wilson Foster, quoting Joyce about Dublin, puts it, the city “wore the mask of a capital” (209).

Not only critics perceived this disjoint modernity, but also poets and some of them made interesting comments. In Michael Longley’s words, Northern Ireland in the late 1950s was a “godforsaken place”(qtd. Brearton, *Irish Poetry* 98). For Derek Mahon, it was so provincial that “if a coathanger knocked in the wardrobe/ That was a great event” (qtd. Brearton, *Irish Poetry*, 98). For Seamus Heaney, though, Belfast was a place characterised by political conspiracy: “there had been an IRA campaign in the 1950s, and indeed many of the

songs sung in the intervals of... céilís were crypto-IRA songs.” (*Stepping Stones* 47). Combined, these views disclose a cryptographic parchment of a city that is going to be thoroughly re-written in following generations. Even though the new cultural surge of energy brought by the Belfast Group in the sixties and seventies changed substantially the conditions of production of the poetry written in the North, their opposing remarks and lines of thought are not, by any means, disregarded. On the contrary, they usually expand in different directions, creating different aesthetics which are absorbed and further developed by younger writers. According to Fran Brearton:

By the late 1960s, the state of affairs had become unrecognisable. The decade, with its modernisation programmes, scientific developments, civil right movements, social and religious destabilisation, and new educational opportunities (facilitated by the Butler Education Act of 1947), may be seen as a period of change sufficiently extraordinary to render the illusion of (sepia-tinted) pre-Troubles Irish tranquillity as inaccurate as the characterisation of an innocent and stable pre-First World War Edwardian England. The new energies in social and political life also reverberated culturally, and vice versa.

(98)

The point Brearton makes and which I am trying to acknowledge is that the artistic revolution that was happening in Northern Ireland did not belong to Belfast alone. This assertion is extremely important since the critic highlights that those changes belonged to a larger context that involved North and South America and Europe. Thus, the Northern Irish creative surge was part of a global trend in terms of poetry. Movements such as *The Beats* and *Confessionalism* in the United States and *The Movement* in Britain, not to mention the new surge of energy from libertarian movements in ex-colonies, made the sixties and seventies a particular revolutionary period for the genre. In addition to bringing the discussion to a larger scale, Brearton also points out that poets such as John Hewitt and John Montague, who used to work alone, start to make affiliations in order to keep up with the new publishing opportunities. In addition to that conjunction of ideals, Louis MacNeice launches his last collection *The Burning Perch* (1963), whose dark humour and urbane tone would influence succeeding poets. Revitalised with the new publishing market, which saw in these movements a new literary niche, this artistic upheaval was primarily possible due to the

didactic approach poetry received. Contrary to the auratic and idealised notion that poetry was an innate gift, the comprehension that artistic craft could be learned and improved led to a changed shift of perception. In this context, the physical and symbolic building that attracts glances and sparks flights of imagination in anyone who strolls around the corners of Botanic Gardens achieved renewed importance: Queen's University Belfast was more than an institutional paragon, but a unifying symbol of culture.

William Maguire in his *History of Belfast* mentions that the 1861 "census revealed 30 per cent of Belfast Catholics were illiterate, as compared with 10 per cent of Protestants. Religion and public education were of course closely connected" (98). Sectarianism and inequality in educational terms was not simply characteristic of Belfast alone, it was part of an institutional politics that was based on an Imperial political system. However, with the population growth and the consequent rise in Catholic population, the need for a more inclusive education arose. In these terms, even though Queen's University Belfast admitted Catholics – contrary to its counterpart at that time, Trinity College – it reflected the prominence of Presbyterians in its models and policies. From its architecture, "a Tudor-style edifice reminiscent of an Oxford College", to its curriculum

the establishment of the Queen's College both confirmed and strengthened the intellectual and cultural interests already evident in the existence of the Academical Institution and other bodies such as the Linen Hall Library, the Literary Society (1801), the Natural History (later Natural History and Philosophical) Society (1821) – which in 1831 established the first museum in Ireland paid for by public subscription – and the Mechanic's Institute (1825) (Maguire 100)

From this perspective, it is quite clear that the advent of Queen's University is associated with the rise of the practical reason⁹ in Northern Ireland. By 1960, Belfast had already been transformed into an urban and industrial centre. Nonetheless, the debates over class and poverty – which were dominant in most working class areas – were being surpassed

⁹ I am taking into consideration Theodor Adorno's concept of practical and/ or instrumental reason. According to the philosopher, the concept of Enlightenment was designed to disenchant the world and liberate humanity from animism. Thus, through a sensible form of reasoning men would reject a mythic form of thought and embrace the scientific mode, which necessarily means a distancing from the object. Nonetheless, within the capitalist mode of production, the rational thought is replaced by the instrumental reason which prevents workers from thinking outside their mode of production. More than not having access to the profit of their work, the supposed train of thought that would free them from animism, entraps them into their particular function.

by those of religion and nationality ¹⁰. The sectarian debates would become strident and culminate in the Troubles of 1972. Nonetheless, the artistic principle that guided the Belfast Group was simultaneously closely bound to the advent of the industrial progress of the city and against it. It envisioned a poetic construction of a collective utopian space. If on the one hand the birth of the Writers' Group was in a place that was devoted to the specialization of thought, its objectives were related to art and to a non-instrumentalisation of the artistic thought. While the modern *zeitgeist* privileged individual mechanisation of work and subjective autonomy, the configuration of a place that would materially and collectively discuss poetry was projected against it, providing an idyllic aura to that space. As Adorno defends in the *Aesthetic Theory*:

But the function of art in the totally functional world is functionless; it is pure superstition to believe that art could intervene directly or lead to intervention. The instrumentalisation of art sabotages its opposition to instrumentalisation; only where art respects its own immanence does it convict practical reason of its lack of reason. Art opposes the hopelessly antiquated principle of *l'art pour l'art* not by ceding to external purposes by renouncing the illusion of a pure realm of pure beauty that quickly reveals itself as kitsch. By determinate negation artworks absorb the *membra disjecta* of the empirical world and through their transformation organize them into a reality that is a countereality, a monstrosity. (321)

The project the Writer's Group develop is similar to the kind of art that opposes instrumental reason. In a neutral space, the lyric voice undertakes an analytical position in order to portray the contemporary fragmentation of the place. However, this lyric voice does this in order to constitute a singular voice, which would represent an aesthetic projection of a specialised intellectual group. In this sense, there is a dialectic of individuality and colectivity, which ought to be contextualised.

¹⁰ The book *War and an Irish Town* by Eamonn McCann exposes the view that the cultural-identity politics of the Republic and North of Ireland was not sufficient to explain the divisions in Irish society. By being a spokesman of a leftist movement, McCann believed it was necessary to expose the working conditions of Catholics and Protestant in national communities.

Fran Brearton does not consider the writers who gathered – and still gather – at Queen’s University as representatives of a group, since to be a group they needed to embody a singular aesthetic project – such as “Language Poetry” in the United States of America or “The Movement”¹¹ in Great Britain. Even so there was something other than politics that unified their creative impulse. What I wish to infer in this section is that, under the intellectual guidance of Hobsbaum, these poets “helped to create a recognisable and recognised focus for poetry in the North” (Longley, *The Living* 18-19) in which poetic debate would prevail. Through this shift of perception, it is clear that from an aesthetic point of view, despite dissimilar preoccupations and outlooks, what unified their impulse was their desire to constitute a cultural and poetic community. If on the one hand the artistic principle that guided the poets were somewhat different, their quest to forge a poetical space to represent the city of Belfast was indeed what unified their artistic preoccupations. This is something which the Revival Group of the 1920s did not prefigure; the Celtic Twilight led by William Butler Yeats, even being indebted to the Anglo Saxon tradition, was seeking to represent a nationalist and idealised community. The Ulster Renaissance, on the other hand, was unique because right from the outset, it accepted the heterogeneity of the English poetic forms and its plurality of literary projects and departed from this fundamental difference to create its own.

If the task of the Irish poet, as Elmer Kennedy-Andrews sees, is “to resolve the tension between the collective historical experience, and the work’s modernist character as an act of individual authenticity” (192), the acceptance of the plurality of voices that English language brings with itself is essential to distinguish this group of writers as a whole. The formal approach that the group symbolises effectively enables an artistic interweaving of communities, dialogues that “articulate differences within, as well as between Protestant and Catholic Ulster” (Longley, *The Living* 59). Empowering fluid relations between dissimilar aesthetic experiments:

vary in their readings and philosophies of history, their angles on gender, their concepts of Irish society, their senses of place or Nature, their knowable or imagined communities, their critiques of religion and politics, their routes to

¹¹ Language poetry was a movement that started in the United States in 1970 that questioned traditional forms of poetry. They were usually associated to leftist politics and claimed that the sign proceeds meaning. (Web 03 March, 2012) The Movement was a term to designate the poetry that was produced in the fifties in Great Britain (Web 02 March, 2012).

secular transcendence, their trust in metanarratives, their bearing towards
Word and Image. (Longley, *The Living* 59)

Perhaps the Group's original intention was to carve a space for writing in the industrial city of Belfast. Nevertheless, its discussions and experiments bore fruits and created a tradition for poetry writing that still inform and inspire present and future generations of poets. From this angle, Longley's point is absolutely flawless for it sees how the formal work with the English language produced not only a Nobel Prize winner, but also prominent voices in the aesthetic debate. Just as the streets of Belfast portray different styles of buildings and discrete architectures, the poetry written in this very same city is varied and somewhat fragmented, nonetheless it still bears the mark of a utopian project that does not wish to hold a grudge towards the past, but shed new light on this past.

II. SIR ALFRED BRUMWELL THOMAS, OR "THE TALL KINGDOM AT YOUR SHOULDER"

By 1790, when the onset of a war between England and Spain was looming large, a young revolutionary called Theobald Wolfe Tone wrote *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, arguing that the problem with Ireland was that it did not have a Parliament. For him, in such a case, in order to achieve a democratic society, centred in libertarian and egalitarian values, a Parliamentary reform was absolutely essential. Belfast Protestant liberals were greatly impressed since Tone was in favour of what would become the intellectual basis of democratic societies. Nonetheless, since some of his ideals were frowned upon due to their favouring of French revolutionary basis and Catholic emancipation, the opposing parties formed what would come to be identified as the Orange Order (1795). The organisation came into being as a consequence of this ideological split and sought to accomplish the changes that were needed in Northern Ireland without a radical Catholic emancipation. Obviously, the Orange Order started to gain political importance in order to secure the rights of a Protestant majority and diminish the connection with further southern libertarian movements. After a century of agrarian disturbances and land movements on the account of a controlled political policy, Northern Ireland continued to be centred in a relatively autonomous government and a refusal of the liberal Home Rule and Irish Bill of Rights.

As a natural result, the enhancements of political power combined with a strong industrial development, led Belfast to the status of city in 1888. Its cutting edge linen factories and shipyard buildings made it surpass Dublin in population numbers and economic importance. Against this historical backdrop, Sir Alfred Brumwell was invited to conceive the project of the soon-to-be Belfast City Hall. A landmark of important political treaties and signings, the building added to the red brick visual image of the city a comprehensible and refined New Baroque style. The architectural nineteenth century revival of European Baroque was widely adopted in Great Britain and in the British Empire from 1885 until World War I. It was particularly used in government, municipal and commercial buildings. In France, Baroque Revival is known as Second Empire since it highlighted France's facades. Given that Brumwell's project was to create an aura of civilization and sophistication for the city of Belfast, his intensive work with forms and details renewed and transformed the cultural autonomy of the place. I would like to use this particular architectural emblem as a visual allegory for the poetry of two important authors of the Belfast Group: Michael Longley and Derek Mahon.

Even though both authors are usually associated with the Protestant community – and sometimes their poetry is co-opted for political interests – they both express, formally and imaginatively the disturbances of all communities in their place and time. Deprived of political agendas, their artistic attempts are symbols of an identity struggle to reconcile opposites while echoing concrete experiences. As Derek Mahon himself adds, “a good poem is a paradigm of good politics” (qtd. Longley, *Poetry in Wars* 185). For this reason, I would like to maintain Edna Longley's assertion that “Poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated”, but it does not necessarily mean readers are not going to interpret poetry according to their specific background, worldviews or needs, especially in a context of national struggle. However, she is absolutely correct when she stresses this process “distort[s] the rational processes which ideally prevail in social relations; while ideologies confiscate the poet's special passport to *terra incognita*” (Longley 185). As Mahon claims, good poetry can convey good politics by first following rules, such as any artistic structure – architecture, music, painting, etc. – and second, by being self-reflective. By that, I mean a constant revisitation of national history, myths and stereotypes vis-à-vis a well established tradition.

The poem by Derek Mahon called “Spring in Belfast” from his first collection is the perfect example how tradition and individual talent ¹² works together. Departing from the skepticism adopted by Louis MacNeice, Derek Mahon expands the previous portrayal of the city through poetry. It is as if the mythic dream of unification could become real through the artistic representation of the streets’ silences and enclosed gaps. In addition to the representation, Mahon carries an ethical sense, which connects him to land and to a lyric sense of self. As the critic Scot Brewster points out,

He is regarded as the sophisticated cosmopolitan, his ‘local’ attachment to Ireland mediated through eternal questions of aesthetic value. Despite the fascination with “a place of pure being which exists outside history”, however, in Mahon's work writing and identity persist, somehow, somewhere, on the threshold of irrecoverable silence and loss. (56)

“Spring in Belfast” is a poignant recollection of a subjectivity that does not only wish to come to terms with a communal history of violence and scarcity, but also with a personal and familiar sense of belonging. As Mahon describes in one of his interviews, Belfast gave his parents a sense of identity:

Usually my mother was doing this or that, practical things around the house; while my father was usually out at work, away a forty- or forty-eight-hour week perhaps. He worked in the shipyard. A quiet man. He did the same job (with some little promotions) for forty years. Belfast was his life. The shipyard was his life. My mother the same. She was from Belfast. Before she married, she worked in what used to be called the York Street Flax Spinning Company, Ltd., which was the other big Belfast industry: shipbuilding and linen. So they had what you might call blue-to-white-collar jobs in these two industries. (The Art of poetry)

¹² I am taking advantage of the concept developed by T. S. Eliot in his essay “Tradition and Individual Talent”. For him, “no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism.” (4)

From the poet's words, the reader can infer that Belfast is essential to his individual perception, be that in relation to the world around him, or in relation to his subjective discovery. It is quite revealing when he intermingles his parent's history with the land's most remarkable industry. Just as the building that I have selected serves as a comparison to his poetry, his familiar roots echoes a spring characterized by rain, which entices his creation to engage in more than a casual pity, as his verses suggest: "And echoing back streets of this desperate city/ Should engage more than my casual interest,/ Exact more interest than my casual pity" (13). As his parents were fed and molded by Belfast, "Spring in Belfast" builds an artificial subjectivity that longs for more than a detached lament disguised as morality, but a real connection. The distinction between morality and communal connection lies in the fact that moral is the ideological product of bourgeois society¹³. Its rise is connected to the public debates of gentlemen in the eighteenth century, who sought to rationally explain the functioning of a world in which wealth and possessions was available for everyone, but restricted to a few. Morality, then, is imposed in the individual, whereas ethic comes from the individual consciousness about him or herself in relation to society. In Mahon's case, this morality would be the adoption of a discourse that criticizes war and sees it as humanely perverse, as opposed to someone who criticizes and use his or her individual agency to change it. "Casual pity" represents this disinterested morality, while a real connection would embody a broader historical connection and the actual participation in society. Even though his intention is not to embark on a didactic debate, he wishes to produce a poetry that would be socially and historically engaged through the work of language and tradition.

The beginning of "Spring in Belfast" deals with the theme of belonging and mixed affiliations in a scenario of doubts and uncertainties. Although Mahon identifies with the Belfast of the working class communities, the uncertainties of his verses are related to the fragmentation of a social order which merges politics and religion. As Maguire describes, in the forties, fifties and sixties religion was a potent force in the lives of Ulstermen and a continuous source of division. At the same period, in political terms, Unionism was divided between Liberal and Traditional values, while the minoritarian Nationalist party was also subdivided into Traditional and Independent. Having different takes on the question of national sovereignty, religion rather than class was what guided the voters' preference in the general elections. For this reason, even though Labour tried to challenge Unionism, the general ethos tended towards stability. For example, the more liberal approach of Terence

¹³ For more on the raise of morality see "Kant and the Moral Law. In. Eagleton, Terry. *Trouble with Strangers: A study on ethics*. United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell, 2009, pp. 101 – 129.

O'Neill in the sixties, who tried to establish political diplomacy by inviting Sean Lemass, the Irish prime minister, to his office occasioned an organized movement against his political agenda, led by Reverend Ian Paisley. The general instability, combined with the example given by the American Civil Rights movement, brought about a general state of insecurity and anxiety at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies. Even though there was hope for Protestants and Catholics to find a common ground for negotiation, impatience and fear lead to a series of incidents that brought about riots and conflicts (Maguire 234, 235).

In the light of the fact the Catholic and Protestant communities identified with different historical moments, the verse "Once more, as before, I remember not to forget" (Mahon 13), is symbolic of the different ways people emphasize and remember historical events. Perhaps the poet is weighing the different meanings of the celebrations of the Easter Rising, the great battle for the Independence in 1916, and the battle of Somme (1916), in which British and French aligned their forces against the advancement of German troops. However, with the recollection of the "Spring in Belfast" – a period in which the rains are constant – what does the poet wish to unravel? In the next stanza, Mahon either lays the foundations of his poetry, or the side which he takes in such an unsteady period:

There is a perverse pride in being on the side

Of the fallen angels and refusing to get up.

We could *all* be saved by keeping an eye on the hill

At the top of every street, for there it is

Eternally, if irrelevantly, visible (13)

The metaphor of the "fallen angels", in a place where religion is exaggeratedly accentuated, leads perhaps to the agnostic nature of his poetry and maybe to the biblical fallen nature of human beings. Even though remembering not to forget, he must, first and foremost, be loyal to an unbiased ethical principle – independent of religion, but participative and reflective on society. After stressing the perverse pride, he states that everyone could be saved, if they went over the walls and divisions of the city – in Belfast, anywhere you turn, the view of the Cave Hill mountains is quite clear. Nonetheless, in the next stanza Mahon affirms that social pressures led people to the preferable attitude of keeping up old affiliations and perpetuating rivalries. The last stanza is the landmark of his engagement with his community, but also of his guilt in taking the side of the fallen angels and not actively participating in the public debates:

One part of my mind must know its place
The things that happen in the kitchen houses
And echoing back streets of this desperate city
Should engage more than my casual interest,
Exact more interest than my casual pity. (13)

The tense climate in the government and the public riots compel the poet to engage more actively. In this sense, this is what he does most of the time through his lyric, for the sense of guilt and responsibility is a potent force in Mahon's work. The references to "kitchen houses" and "echoing back streets of this desperate city" create a paradox: while there is a private side to the logic of sectarianism, which invades people's routines, there is also a public side of the strife which make not only the city "desperate" but each of its inhabitants. Private habits, in a situation of civil distress, are directly affected by political decision. The personification of the city – it is "desperate" – leads to a utopian impulse, since the word desperate, etymologically speaking, in the late fifteenth century meant having not "in despair" but a great desire for, and this older meaning was still in use in the 1950s. Since poetry's major concern is language, the poet uses old and new meanings in order to represent the "casual pity" that he wishes to transform into a deeper engagement. Furthermore, given the difficulty of the task, the despair of the city and his individual despair becomes the collective longing to see a significant change in that social structure. Perhaps the "wet" feature of the poem is not simply due to the geographical location of Ireland, but a reference to this very same desire. Maybe the rain and the spring could give birth to more fluid relations that do not perpetrate ideologies.

Differently, but dwelling on the same mode, Michael Longley's sense of self is also intertwined with his private and personal story. But the communal aspect, relating him to a bigger whole, so present in Mahon, is broken by the formality of Longley's verse. What would be interpreted by some as sentimental is actually an attempt to transport poetry to a primitive state: the dialogue of the self with its feelings and emotions. As Theodor Adorno defends in "Lyric poetry and Society" poetry is an intimate expression firstly of the self (65), I would like to understand Longley's apparent escapism from a Troubled Belfast pregnant with social distresses as a failed flight of imagination. The poet cannot grasp completeness since his self is always dependent on transitory sensations, something as shifting as social bonding in a place like Belfast. The poems "Graffiti" and "No Continuing City" pay homage

to his hometown through a synecdoche and not metaphor because they multiply the references to the city through fragments. This fragmentary representation of male attraction towards female body entangles power struggles within the intensity of the verse. The synecdoches are pushed to such an extreme that subjective sensations are totally annulled. Even though the reader has the sensation that it is whole and unified subjectivity that pours down his subjective emotions, he is actually breaking familiar associations and revealing a gloomier picture of history – like the negative of a picture.

The poem “Graffiti” is the fourth in his first collection *No Continuing City* (1969). Through seven stanzas of a Beauty that is mixed with its opposite – the Beast, the poet discloses the subjective apprehension of the portrait of a model (in the poem referred to as “princess”) that was vandalized by pornographic scribbles. The metric approach also exemplifies that ambiguous structure: the alternating rhymes alternate with closed – abba/cddc/ effe/ ghgh/ ijji/ kllk/ – and conclude in a final parallel – mm. This shifting mode, structured through perfect pentameters, conveys the idea of uncertainty within a certain and precise skeleton. It is as if the altered image of the princess and the fairy tale she supposedly belongs to would enable the subjective voice to leap from the unreal to the real world. As the infantile mode of perception absorbs the structure of the fairy tale, the poet works in order to absorb and subvert this logic. According to the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (Web 16 October, 2011), fairy tales have a fixed structure that structurally lead children to behave appropriately within specific cultural codes. Analyzing a wide variety of fairy tales, the critic highlights certain elements that always repeat themselves in a fantastic narrative: the hero is usually tested and then has to go through a number of tasks to prove he is mature enough to assume responsibilities of an adult life.

In addition to teaching a moral lesson, fairy tales introduce a narrative mode which structures the thought adopted by children right from an early age. Throughout “Graffiti” Longley simultaneously reproduces and rids the reader of this logic, proving that within this frame there is a special trait to revert its perverse mode. Thus, the poet’s analysis of the spoiled image of the female heroine of “The Beauty and the Beast” suggests a liberating educational and cognitive mode, which is constructed according to the very same traditional approach fairy tales adopt. Towards the end, however, the poet reverses it like a metaphysical wit. Representing the mode of thought right from the first and second line, he states: “It would be painful, tedious and late/ To alter awkward monsters such as those”. The adjectives “painful”, “tedious” and “late” point towards a negative outlook and imply that altering such a well established structure would simultaneously hurt and bore. Nonetheless, the second half

of the stanza starts to enchant the reader by the assertion that it would be charming to metamorphose a good fairy tale. In this sense, the poet plays with ambiguities to both discourage and charm the reader.

It would be painful, tedious and late
To alter awkward monsters such as these
To charming princess – metamorphoses
That all good fairy tales accelerate (7)

The second stanza (reproduced below), functions as a rite of passage from reality to the realm of fantasy: the invocation of Caliban, intertwined with the svelte posture of the blond beauty, produces a series of dualities: light and shadow, revelation and obscurantism, opposites (Caliban and Beauty) that define each other. The third line is the one that effectively describes the challenge faced by the heroine: to defeat the “billboard of forests” in the “mists of lingerie”, in order to track a prince she must find, but cannot due to her static nature. In this stanza the reader also sees the fantastic of the fairy tale transmuting into the billboard of advertisement. The lyric voice is probably observing a city billboard that portrays, like the imaginary Beauty, a model of womanhood. Extremely ironic and abusing of the synecdoche through the enumeration of the parts of this woman, in the following line the poet describes her second test: to endure the mustaches that were inflicted on her face – “As love’s own emblem, their own signature”. The singular parts of her body are much more important than the woman itself: the poet observes her lips and her perfect body. In other words, she is reified on a synecdoche. In the next stanza, her neon aura is revealed and she gains a single hair. The parallel between the advertisement aura and the artificial one given by the scribble reduces her artificial image to a lonely winter. The whole apparatus of the image combined with the sarcasm of the graffiti enables the reader to infer the model is nothing but a failed dream.

One kiss and, in the twinkling of an eye,
The Calibans accepted, wars and all,
At long last resurrected from the sky,
So blond, so beautiful and six feet tall

Through billboard forests, mists of lingerie,

These track a princess unequipped to change
Herself or them: her hair no winds derange,
Her thighs are looked, her cleavage legendary.

Lips where large allure but response is,
Her all too perfect body they endure
By penciling those bouquets of moustaches
As love's own emblem, their own signature. (7)

Nonetheless, the imagery soon becomes gloomy and dark: the pubic shrubbery and the notches drawn around her intimate parts suggest a new burst of energy and a renewed creative artistry. The poet finally dismisses the fairy-tale tone to affirm the quality of the material he draws his poetry from: the Beauty and the Beast, in other words, the enchantment and horror one sees in reality. The image of the woman in the poster may be compared to an actualization of the *passant* by Charles Baudelaire¹⁴. Nonetheless, such is the reification of the figure of the woman and its feminine traits, that she does not have human characteristics; she is simply another object in the mass of the city. The theme of Belfast is highly veiled – as mentioned before – because for Longley his hometown is always a mystery to be discovered. Having spent part of his youth in Dublin and having approached poetry through the models learned from the Classics, Longley here tries to, in the synecdoche of urban spaces, configure a sense of artistic identity. The disembodied spaces are a metaphor of his personal and subjective displacement and concomitantly, of the segregation of his own native land. As Longley states:

The result of being brought up by English parents in Ireland is that I feel
slightly ill at ease on both islands. I am neither English nor Irish completely,
and I like to think there is a healthy condition. It's out of such splits, out of
such tensions, that I write perhaps. (qdt. Johnston 20)

¹⁴ In the sonnet "A Une Passant" by Charles Baudelaire, describes the fleeting encounter between the narrator and an anonymous woman in the streets of Paris. But, due to the fast pace of contemporary life, instead of stopping and rendering his homage to her, the poet ponders on the fugacity of the "here and now", which prevents them from fulfilling a love story. The poem is an emblem of the reification of emotions and experiences to the commercial pace of the city. Longley pushes this metaphor to a larger extent and transforms the woman in a billboard.

The poem “Graffiti” is actually about a personal fragmentation that functions like the incomplete nature of his country. Effectively and reflectively about his own artistic materials, the poet exploits the fairy tale form in order to reveal that within the rigid and fixed structures of reality it is possible to liberate thought. In this poem, the urban graffiti and humor is an utopic impetus towards creative liberty. Thus, the poet is able to observe the positive aspect of such social turmoil for the sake of poetry. The connection with Charles Baudelaire, in this sense, is not obvious, but valid, for both saw an original surge of energy in the lights of the new urban environment. Perhaps Longley’s criticism works like the “Beauty and the Beast”, the beauty is not the woman portrayed as a model for a fetishistic environment, but rather, the audacity of the artist who dared to challenge that view with amusing contours. The Beast represents the fragmentary society that dismisses a deeper understanding of social relations and clings to small niceties, in this case, the fragmentary parts – the hair, the breasts, the cleavage, amongst others.

Drawing a parallel with MacNeice’s woman that was portrayed in his poem “Belfast”, Longley’s woman is not as gloomy or sacrificial, but she is also an emblem and synecdoche of Belfast and its distresses. Nonetheless, the most extraordinary attempt depicted by “Graffiti” is that this very same fragmentary nature penetrates the poetic voice and creates a sophisticated form of art. As Liam Heaney observes, nature becomes the very essence of Longley’s intellectual perception: “the creative process involves the mind contesting imaginatively that which it perceives... the engagement with the natural and the physical phenomena of the world, must be confronted, if a greater sense of the self is to be achieved” (174). I would add that the nature is both the wild spaces of the Irish landscape and in the fragmentary nature of the cityscape. What could be seen as a sentimental poem is actually working towards a subversion of its logic. The hard and fixed structure of the metric, as Brearton points out in her book *Reading Michael Longley*, demarcates the poet’s transition: “the poem’s complex syntactic structure is tightly linked to the overall movement of the poem” (14). Based on this assertion, the final parallel rhyme works with a view to resolving the contradiction Beauty and Beast, by affirming the poetry works within both, not quite resolving, not yet concluding, but opening the verse’s possibilities.

Derek Mahon does not feel completely comfortable with such a subjective fragmentation. While Longley feels at home with his scattered sense of self, Mahon is utterly distressed with subjective incompleteness, mainly because he did not remain in Northern Ireland. Michael Longley, differently, chose to settle in Belfast after having studied in Trinity. A few years later he married the important literary critic Edna Longley and

established a career within the walls of Queen's University, Belfast. On the other hand, Mahon spontaneously decided to leave Ireland: first he studied in Sorbonne, then Canada and United States. As a consequence, his hometown is transformed into a mnemonic stanzas in his poem. The poem "An Unborn Child", which is dedicated to Michael Longley and Edna Longley, depicts his fascination with and fear of the city of Belfast. Echoing Louis MacNeice's "Prayer Before Birth", the poem describes exactly how, in order to be born, the poet must face the difficulties of a great metropolis – and consequently of modernity.

"An Unborn Child" is divided into six stanzas of eight blank verses through which a fetus describes his will to live and experience life. His centre – right on the eighth stanza of the poem – is not actually the mother itself, but rather "the nerve centre of this metropolis". In other words, the poet uses the metaphor of the child to represent his embryonic connection to the land. Like MacNeice's "Prayer before birth" its tone is ambiguous. MacNeice's poem represents the infantile, before his or her birth, afraid of adult life and corruptions typical of modernity. In a similar way, Mahon's poem describes a baby that is yet to be born; although he or she has not actually seen the world, the baby perceives its contours through his mother's senses. In the second and third stanzas, the poet describes domestic activities: his mother swinging her shrouds, the cats playing in the living room and the goldfish swimming. The subjective voice states he feels them in his bones although he is certain that along with the placid atmosphere of love "the intricacies of the maze and the rat-race", will absorb his mind and his senses. However, even though the pressures of capitalist society – represented by the expression "rat-race" – are going to overcome him, he is going to offer resistance, as stated by the next line "they cannot dwarf the dimensions of my hand", meaning that his will to live is greater than its power.

The reason of his resistance is stated in the next stanza, the most important of the piece, since it describes a connection with the metropolis:

I must compose myself at the nerve centre
Of this metropolis, and not fidget –
Although sometimes at night, when the city
Has gone to sleep, I keep in touch with it,
Listening to the warm red water
Racing the sewers of my mother's body;
Or the moths, soft as eyelids, or the rain

Wiping its wet wings on the window-pane (26)

Employing verses that remain in the border between humanity and artificiality, the poet composes the city as a mother, or the mother as a city which nourishes her son. The innovation Mahon introduces is a physiological approach to the city – it becomes a source of life for his subjective self which is not yet born. The evocation of the moths is probably due to their nocturnal habits in search for light. In one of the many studies made about moths, it is believed they fly in a straight line in search for the moon during the night (Scott 185). However, here, the unborn child listens to the moths, but instead of light, the writer associates them with rain – typical Belfast weather. Employing a verse that relies on alliteration, “Wiping its wings on the window pane” the poet reproduces phonetically, with the closure of the consonants, the closure of the maternal womb. In addition to that, the conflation of moths and rain – rain here having wings represents the breakdown of language in the womb. Nonetheless, with the crack of dawn in the next stanza, the voiced consonants become unvoiced sibilants and, within the placid musicality they provide, the poet struggles within the rigorous structure to pronounce the sentence “I want to live”.

Produce in my mouth the words, ‘I want to live!’

This is my first protest, and shall be my last.

As I am innocent, everything I do

Or say is couched in the affirmative.

I want to see, hear, touch and taste

These things with which I am encumbered.

Perhaps I needn’t worry; give

Or take a day or two, my days are numbered. (26)

With the last three verses, Mahon creates an alternating rhyme that does not quite conclude the piece. The reader is suspended by the protest of the fetus who, after voicing his desire to live, is patient enough to wait for the last few days within his metaphorical metropolis. The metaphor of the child in connection with the city as a mother, even before birth, is loaded with meaning and implies more than a natural relationship between self and land, it is a genetic code that impregnates his poetry with meanings that were imminent but still malleable even before the artistic birth. Mahon, differently from Longley, envisions a utopia in art, based on resistance, whereas Longley envisions creativity within the clash of

identities in Northern Ireland. As highlighted by Matthew Campbell both poets in question have paid tribute to MacNeice's "self conscious deracinated skeptical intelligence" (6), but I want to stress MacNeice's commitment to the urbane life and its social distresses are much more latent in Mahon. This happens because MacNeice's poetic utopia is not simply creative, but socially engaging. Just as Neil Corcoran highlights, MacNeice "brings an anti-pastoral instruction – rather dourly, it may seem – in the way poetry should be 'responsible, relevant and social'" (Corcoran *Louis MacNeice in the poetry* 59). In the same way, Mahon breaks with McNeicean urbanity by pushing it to subjective transformation nourished by the historical facts of the city. Those sensations and apprehensions transforms the poem into a self engaging statement that combines resistance with an apocalyptic sense of existence – the baby is yet to be born. The significance of the apocalypse, or revelation in the literal sense of the world, is the universalization of the sensory experience of Belfast to the rest of the world. As Edna Longley states about the poem:

In 'An Unborn Child' the womb becomes the awaiting city of the world: 'I must compose myself in the nerve centre/ Of this metropolis, and not fidget'. Mahon's triple pun on 'compose' fuses organic creation, equilibrium and creativity in relation to the world as city. As with the microcosm, so with the macrocosm... Clearly Mahon's experience of Belfast has coalesced with his experience of other more cosmopolitan cities (*The Irish Writer and the City* 84)

For the poet, within these three levels of meaning, the human submission to cities is absolutely irrevocable, thus "the conscience of the city is... beyond either moral or political analysis" (Longley, *The Irish Writer and the City* 85). In my view, because the child is not effectively born in the poem and the world is simply a wish, the conscience of the city that Mahon wishes to achieve is the never ending desire for resistance for another reality that would improve the actual. Longley does not note this important detail because she is more interested in a general characterization of the poet's work. The pain the poet goes through in order to utter the words, "I want to live", is similar to MacNeice's refrain in "Prayer Before Birth: "I am not Born; O hear/ console/ provide/ forgive/ rehearse/ hear/ fill me". In each stanza MacNeice repeats his plea for attention, a plea which is also a never ending call for renewal. The last two verses of MacNeice's poem, "Let them not make me a stone and let

them not spill me./ Otherwise kill me” is a blatant claim for humanity and transcendence of the material and corrupt world. Mahon’s perception of the cityscape produces a dual conscience: in order to conceive itself, it has to be conceived in the modern experience of the city.

In view of the fact that modernity creates its own myths, the myths modernity conceives are not so well comprehended, but infinitely more powerful than the ones from ancient times. In David Harvey’s words, this happens because their reliability is taken from the “daily experience rather than as wondrous tales of origins and legendary conflicts of human passions and desires” (23). Similarly, Susan Buck Morss in her study of Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* notes modern innovations emerge in society in the form of historical restitutions, or historical repetition: “The new forms ‘cited’ the old ones out of context. ‘Thus, there is an attempt to master the new experience of the city in the frame of the old ones of traditional nature’ (110). She complements this by asserting that Benjamin demonstrates how the nineteenth century displayed a thirst for Greek and Roman proportions. Based on these ideas, the myth of the city of Belfast, as a micro cosmos within the constellation of European modernity, is related to the way in which the poets Longley and Mahon present the concept of myth. Both of them graduated in Classics: Michael Longley, particularly, looks upon Greek and Roman literature as a way to distance himself from the social distresses of the Troubles. In addition to taking on board universally known characters such as Odysseus, Eros, Achilles and Priam, in poems such as “Odyssey”, “Circe”, “Narcissus” “The Centaurus”, “Persephone” (*No Continuing City*, 1969) “Ars Poetica” (*Man Lying on a Wall*, 1972), and “Ceasefire” (*The Ghost Orchid*, 1995) – just to mention a few – Longley also absorbs the poetic forms and proportions that are peculiar to ancient texts. In particular, the poem “The Hebrides” embodies the essence of the epic hero, in which the poet, disguised as a universal protagonist, uncovers his long and hybrid heritage in a legendary journey back home – like that of Odysseus. The piece, more than a search for an artistic identity and a sense of belonging, can be envisioned as a rite of passage from a youth as a graduate student in Dublin to an adult life back in Belfast. The different challenges the poet faces, alongside with his observations, are typical of the transition from one place to the other.

According to Brearton, *No Continuing City* is a collection whose title, taken from Saint Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, functions as a metaphor for the whole volume: the deferral of the city as a suspension of “the accomplishment of desire”, transforms the pursuit into “a permanent condition” (Brearton 35). At the same time the longing is an ongoing feature of

the volume, this journey has a specific departure point: “In *No Continuing City* the poet is both the voyager who transforms his past life of loves into a Homeric journey to a single resting place... a permanent home in Belfast” (Brearton 35). Considering that the poem enacts a journey to a real (the poet is actually returning to Belfast), and transcendental home (the place is depicted through a literary and cultural revision), the “Hebrides” constantly switches between the real and the mythical. Realistically speaking, the “Hebrides” is a clear reference to the islands in Scotland whose history remained in obscurity until 6 C. E., with the arrival of Saint Columba, who Christianized the land. In 8 C. E. fell into the hands of Norwegians, who remained in the archipelago until 1266, until the final ascension of the MacDonald’s kingdom in 1346. Metaphorically speaking, probably due to its mysterious nature, since it was once the hometown of the mystical Celts the islands’ multiracial tradition inspired a number of literary works, such as the tales by Sir Walter Scott, poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe and the novel *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. It also influenced Felix Mendelssohn in his overture *Fingal’s Cave*, a piece inspired by one of his travels to the land

Absorbing this cultural baggage, “The Hebrides” is more than “an accommodation of difference” in a “journey through time, memory [and] trip” (35), as Brearton notes. It actually enacts the apparently simple dialectic of the old and the new and the poet states towards the end, “The sea grows old”. Longley, inspired by the Greek and Roman “measures and proportions” – to go back to Benjamin’s assertion on the nineteenth century artistic projections (p. 17) – describes a journey of artistic and social re-discovery. This poem is decisive in the collection *No Continuing City* as a whole because it establishes his subjective choices as an artist that is “loosing foothold”, but glad of having adopted the “privilege of vertigo”. The point of view of uncertainty and faintness is the actual stage of return. Committed to his self and to the literary and historical tradition that precedes him, the poet needs to architect a form that would voice such a subjective dissociation. The return to Belfast is then a return to poetry, to family traditions, and to a hybrid and plural story that demands from him more than the “privilege of the Virgo”, but an actual response to his community and sense of ethic. Even though the journey is important, as Brearton suggests, I would not go as far as to say that the destination is not as important as the journey. It is essential since it provides him with a special point of view – of seeing in the mythological old and atemporal myths of the place the contradictions of the new.

The poem is divided into five parts, a structure which itself enacts the movement of return. The first section is constituted of three stanzas of six verses each of alternate and

parallel rhymes, in which the poet recollects the “Presbyterian Granite and the lack of trees,/ This orphaned stone”. The memory of the city the poet recollects is deprived of actual natural elements, but for an “orphaned stone”, expression that questions the myths of authenticity conveyed by a supposed original Irish ethnicity. In addition to the ground distinguished by the “Presbyterian Granite”, symbolizing the British presence in the island, the poet also uses the metaphor of the “orphaned stone” to refer to the Irish community – the stones used to be the source of artistic and religious expression of the ancient Celts. Orphaned, perhaps, could be related to the origin of stones; some believe they are related with other ethnicities other than European, like Egyptian ¹⁵. The poet exposes his uncertainty in relation to the return. He wishes to keep in his mind “the effect of the air of the ocean” and the “harbours wrecked”. Trying to reprehend himself in the second stanza of this part, the poet keeps a syntactical deferral of seven lines until the final assertion of that part: “am of two minds”. Although he tries to kill “his nostalgic scheme”, this grammatical suspension of meaning forms the longest part of the poem.

In the third section the mechanism of memory penetrates the structure of the verse and the past becomes a present, wishing for a cure in the future. From ocean to land, the poet is presented as an amputee, aground in his neighbours’ cities. Using the *enjambment* to recollect of people’s attitudes, the poet recalls simultaneously his dwelling amongst his kind. As stated in the poem:

III

Old neighbors, though shipwreck’s my decision,

People my brain –

Like breakwaters against the sun,

Command in silhouette

My island circumstance – my cells retain,

Perpetuate

¹⁵ According to Barry Dunford, “The *Crux Ansata*, the emblem of life in Egyptian hieroglyphics, is found on a stone at Nigg in Ross-shire, and on another at Ardboe, in Ireland. There are many symbols on the Celtic stones of Scotland which are still unexplained....The Crescent, the Serpent, and the Elephant must all be Eastern in origin, and these are commonly met with on the Celtic symbol-bearing stones.” Web 22 January, 2011.

Their crumpled deportment through bad weather.

And I feel them

Put on their raincoats forever

And walk out in the sea

I am, though each one waves a phantom limb,

The amputee,

For those are my sailors, these my drowned –

In their hearts of hearts,

In their city I ran aground

Along my arteries

Sluice those homewaters petroleum hurts.

Dry docks, gantries (23)

His memory of the days when he lived on the land leads to a biological symbiosis between community and poet. Right in the first stanza (as quoted above) the poet affirms that the people he grew up with disapproved of his decision to leave. However, such was their importance in the writer's life that they still populate his mind albeit as contradictions: even though they do not want him to leave, they face their days just like the poet, "wearing raincoats" and "being amputees", with "phantom limbs" that in the city they lay stranded. From this affirmation, the reader perceives a synecdoche: the amputation of the city, such as the subjective voice, creates an unsteady ground both for the construction of the poet and its poetry. Thus, in the next verses the poet enumerates how the homewaters, docks, dykes and buoys educate him toward return. The whole stanza goes:

Dykes of apparatus educate my bones

To track the buoys

Up sea lanes love emblazons

To streets where shall conclude

My journey back from flux to poise from poise

To attitude.

Here, at the edge of my experience,

Another tide

Along the broken shore extends

A lifetime's wrack and ruin –

No flotsam I may beachcomb now can hide

That water line (24)

These two last stanzas of the third part symbolizes the general tone of the poem: from the flux of words, he must poise and then act. In other words, before taking any decision in this city that is as unsteady as the Ocean itself, it is necessary for him to ponder on the meaning of the words.

The fourth section of the poem is a return to the journey. The poet recalls again his present state – after the long recollection of the city – through allusions to the sea. After the undertow, he discerns his “sea level” and, a little bit bemused by the proportions of his memory, with a distorted sense of time, as he affirms by confusing his calendar, he carries on until the end of the journey. The last section, is concerned with the future, but with a clear sense that it is of utmost importance to: “Read like a palimpsest/ My past – those landmarks and the scenery/ I dare resist”. It is clear that although he is utterly disgruntled by the very thought of return, the poet does not intend to disregard the past, but read it like a palimpsest, which means accepting history is written according to specific interests, like a city's architecture with many layers in plain view. However, since there is a temporal as well as geographical dislocation, it is highly likely the poet is also referring to his personal history that is also going to be altered when he arrives. In the next stanza, the poet certifies his fixation in the future by stating the sea grows old, as he accepts the “privilege of the vertigo” arriving in the land. The poem ends in suspension, as if the moment had gone and now he must face the real challenge: re-adaptation and re-insertion into the society he has left behind. Nonetheless, “Hebrides” establishes the paradigm with which Longley works: a sense of history that is plural and not pure. Constantly, he challenges himself and his own community through the questioning of symbols and meanings.

In his mythic and real return, Michael Longley, to use a quote from “The Tollund Man” by Seamus Heaney, feels “lost, unhappy and at home” in Belfast, since it is a constant machine that feeds his imaginary senses with new associations and artistic experimentations. Longley’s Hebrides, hence, is a mythical synecdoche in which scattered details of a dispersed whole compose the material for his imaginary city. The privilege of the vertigo – of being in a higher point or in a ship – is indeed the privilege of being able to live of art in a society dominated not only by the instrumental reason, but also by community division and war. Mahon, on the other hand, does not feel quite at home in such an environment. Due to the fact that his urbanity is a form of engagement with poetry through a sharp criticism of history and society¹⁶, Mahon is “haunted by the landscape”, the cityscape is filled with ghosts, which do not let poet and citizen forget the sectarian war and nationalist disillusionment. As Elmer Andrews identifies, the metaphor of the ghost is the poet’s strategy to develop a second language, giving prominence and importance to what has been forgotten in the narrative of history: the “cadenced language of ghostly hush and lurking demon, [is] the language of the unconscious, of the Other” (Andrews 247). In this way, the manner through which Mahon sees the repetition of the same ideological perceptions is through the ghosts of a mythic era, particularly ghosts which are in exile.

One of the ghosts that seem to capture Mahon’s attention and imagination is the Roman poet Ovid. The piece “Ovid in Tomis” is perfect on the matter for he uses the metaphor of the exile of the Roman poet in order to explain his ethical quandary. Publius Ovidius Naso (20 March 43 BC – AD 17/18), known as Ovid, was sent to exile in the colony of Tomis in 27B.C. by the Emperor Augustus. The reason for his punishment was the adultery the poet himself admitted to having committed in the collection *Ars Amatoria*. In addition to being a punishment, the exile was a form of social degradation for those who had gone against the moral reformation led by the emperor. According to the Latin scholar Gordon Williams, “Augustus launched himself as early as 28 B.C. on a programme of moral reform”. The purpose of such a reformation was a

strong desire for ordered conformity in conduct to an often mythical ancestral ideal. In this form it was a product of the third century B.C., a period fertile in historical inventions and paternalistic attitudes. Private moral conduct was subjected to the scrutiny of... *patres familias* of the state (28).

¹⁶ Seamus Deane defends Mahon’s urbanity “helps him to fend off the forces of atavism, ignorance and oppression which are part of his Northern Protestant heritage” (*Celtic Revivals* 156).

Having gone against the conduct proposed by the state, the poet in his *Tristia* admits his guilt in a poem, making a natural connection between attitude and artistic ability. Hingeing on the idea link between unacceptable behaviour and art, Derek Mahon imaginatively puts himself in the subjective shoes of the Roman poet and exploits, through fifty two three-line verses, the meaning of exile and how it would be possible for a distanced mind to grasp the missing spaces between individuality, community and geographical sites.

The evocation of the city, which is obviously Belfast for the eyes of the poet, is transmuted into Rome. The poet uses Ovid's universally acclaimed *Tristia* in order to "provide the dynamic for a work that is grounded in emotional unease and political stasis but which is fundamentally nurtured on this discord" (Tinley 106). As a binocular glass, Mahon distances the reader from the Northern Irish situation in order to convey an unbiased approach on the matter. Right in the first five stanzas the reader observes that the poet is actually writing from the point of view of the statue of the Roman poet:

What coarse god

Was the gearbox in the rain

Beside the road?

What nereid the unsinkable

Coca-Cola

Knocking the icy rocks?

They stare me out

With the chaste gravity

And feral pride

Of noble savages

Set down

On the alien shore.

It is so long
Since my transformation
Into a stone (157)

Thus, it is as if that inanimate object – a literary voice that was turned into a stone – could revive and without restraint, recapture the days of his exile. In the first twenty stanzas of the poem, somewhat freely, the poet talks about Ovid's longing for his family and friends, however, in the middle of the piece, he affirms that his exile, once a punishment, now "gives a sense of purpose/ however factitious". From the following verse, disguised as the Roman poet, Mahon also tries to find a meaning for his verse – scattered in the ruins of ancient cities and universally acknowledged literature, he seeks to find an artistic voice. As Bill Tinnly suggests, rediscovering Ovid through international eyes is "a method for self-examination and self-understanding... the universal aspect of his work affords an opportunity to look at the question of artistic commitment and the validity of poetry in a new light." (32). Precisely this is the final kernel of the poem.

Or if here, then I am
Not poet enough
To make the connection.

Are we truly alone
With our physics and myths,
The stars no more

Than glittering dust,
With one there
To hear our choral odes?

If so, we can start
To ignore the silence

Of the infinite spaces

And concentrate instead

On the infinity

Under our very noses –

The cry at the heart

Of the artichoke,

The gaiety of atoms. (161)

In the last stanza (reproduced below), lamenting the loss of his hometown, the poet reaches a generalized state of *nostalgia*. Seen in its etymological origin, the word was coined in 1668 by Johannes Hofer as a rendering of German *Heimweh*, from Greek. *nostos* “homecoming” plus *algos* “pain, grief, distress”. The modern sense of nostalgia meaning a more general longing for the past appeared in the 1920’s. However, what the poet seems to be addressing here is the absence of a homecoming – or to use the famous *Odyssey* word, the *nostos*. The conclusion of the piece:

Better to contemplate

The blank page

And leave it blank

Then modify

Its substance by

so much as a pen-stroke

Woven of wood-nymphs,

It speaks volumes

No one will ever write

I incline my head

To its candour

And weep for our exile. (162)

Although the tone the poem acquires towards the end emulates a general acceptance that writing is useless in a situation of exile, the poem accepts that writing is a constant state of exile. As Theodor Adorno affirms apropos of his own exile in California, after the Second World War, “for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live”. (qtd. Said 48). This assertion, which is paradoxically similar to the nostalgia in “Ovid in Tomis”, was also further developed by Edward Said in his *Representations of the Intellectual*. In the chapter entitled “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals”, he makes the distinction between the geographical and metaphysical exile. While the former refers to a stage one goes through of being “totally cut off, isolated, hopelessly separated from [his or her] place of origin” the latter points to a condition, which is the “restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others” (Said *Representations of the Intellectual* 48). The theme of the war and exile leads the poet to the conclusion that him being at odds with his society, either near or far is not simply an individual condition, but the general creative pathos of the nation. In this sense, the common ground of his home in exile is specifically the condition of displacement or the ongoing cycle of reconstruction and desire, recollection and frustration. The poem works within a minimalistic structure: while the poem is lengthy, the verses are short, maybe two or three poetic syllables. This formal contradiction is the artistic manner through which the poet translates the idea that in spite of having so much to be said and so many stories to be uncovered, it is easier to weep for the missed opportunities.

The metaphor of the nymph Syrix whose kind is “Being bulk-destined// for pulping machines/ and the cording of motor car tyres” is an allusion to the industrial city of Belfast. This image of the city mythologizes technology and the concept of progress even in the midst of a highly problematic scenario of war and social division. From this poem it is clear that Mahon refers to the Classics in order to express his personal opinion and social distress obliquely. Thus, instead of being openly critical of his Protestant community, he addresses them through the eyes of the myth and of the metaphysical exile – to use the terminology applied by Edward Said. In this sense, if on the one hand Longley accepts the privilege of the point of view of the vertigo, finding in it a creative fruitfulness, Mahon weeps for his loss and

writes reluctantly. Like the Benjaminian Angel who looks to the past catastrophe and wishes to go back in time, but is dragged to the future, Mahon tries to patch up the fragments of the past, but feels disempowered to do it. If Longley produces a powerful reading of Greek mythology repeating its main motifs and placing them in the Northern Irish context, Mahon uses them as a pre-text to express the void of the present.

It is important to highlight that the possibilities of Belfast in the poetry of these two artists do not cease here, this is just one way of reading their poems in the light of the beginning of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the beginning of their careers – late sixties, early seventies. Michael Longley and Derek Mahon continue writing about Belfast and their hometown keeps changing and their artistic work acquire different tonalities. But their beginning, their initial “lump in the throat”, as Robert Frost explained about the origin of a poem, is “a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness” (127), which is related to the city of Belfast. Although dissimilar, the way their thought finds the words is a creative impulse that stems from a subjective displacement that mirrors and has its origins in communitarian divisions in the North of Ireland. Nonetheless, this history is not simply relegated to facts that were portrayed in the media, but to a humanistic and artistic response to the troubles from its first origins, with the revolutionary Wolfe Tone to the present state of affairs.

Seeing that Michael Longley and Derek Mahon absorb the divisions of their community and represent their inability, as poets and artists who creatively work with symbolic and mythic representations their poetry is an act of reflection. In this sense, as the new baroque style of Belfast city hall illuminates the city with an aura of sophistication, their poetry is also highly developed, representing an aesthetic advance in the Writer’s Group. But, contrary to its dialectical image, their poetry brings essential discussions in terms of personal and communal belonging. In this sense, both oeuvre should not be analyzed according to its erudite nature, but its ability to incorporate Irish and universal traditions of poetry in order to re-signify the present.

III. THE CRUMLIN ROAD GAOL, OR "AN ASTERISK ON THE MAP"

An article in the August 1973 issue of the monthly newspaper *Fortnight* revealed the alarming fact that prison, in Northern Ireland, was the biggest growing industry; supporting this point of view, some disturbing figures were shown. In less than ten years (from 1966 to

1972) the prison population has practically tripled: from a number of 444 it reached 1125, including men and women. The major factor that contributed to this vertiginous increase in inmates was the introduction of internment without trial in August 1971. With a view to halting the advancement of the Irish Republican Army's bombing campaign the introduction of this political measure represented an utter failure. It actually increased the death toll and aggravated the state of segregation: "85 per cent of the 172 people who died violently in 1971 did so after the start of the internment... the arrests caused a number of deaths" (Maguire 223). Since arrests were legally permitted on account of suspicion, only the number of prisoners obviously increased dramatically. In this context of suspicion and terror, the "asterisk on the map", or *The Crumlin Road Gaol* gained importance. Its nickname the "asterisk" comes from the fact the gaol has a rather peculiar shape if viewed aurally. This led the true Belfast *flâneur* Ciaran Carson, in the labyrinth-poem "Belfast Confetti", to make a pun between punctuation (ie. *) and social elements. With brilliance and precision, the poet mimics the interrogations people had to go through before being arrested. Although the poet does not state clearly that the asterisk is a reference to the building, it is quite clear that he wishes to convey this meaning, since the shape of the prison is similar to an asterisk.

In "Belfast Confetti", every line is punctuated with linguistic signals that express the subjective lack of freedom in the streets and in the individual expression of language. In this state of lack of freedom, the poet is like a wanderer who tries to find its way amongst the rhubarb of the surprise bombs left in the streets of Belfast. Nonetheless, such is his astonishment at the situation, that even the poet's memory is affected by the lack of choices. The sequence of questions at the end of the piece – "What/ is my name? Where I am coming from? Where am I going?" – have a double function. At the same time they may represent the questions suspects have to answer when interrogated by police, they also mean the total dissolution of the subjective voice in the labyrinth of the city. Nonetheless, such is his astonishment at the situation, that even the poet's memory is affected by the lack of choices.

As for the architecture of the building, the Gaol was designed meticulously by Sir Charles Lanyon in 1843-1845, "stylistically, the gaol on Crumlin Road represents an important moment in Lanyon's development. It ushered in that really vigorous Italian Renaissance Revivalism that was to be the most interesting of all his many modes of working" (Larmour 202). Moreover, the building was the product of a very careful research that the architect performed in 1841, in the Pentonville prison in London. Erected and concluded within a short period of time in 1843-5, the building was the largest in Lanyon's

career and “laid out on the separate system so strongly recommended in reports of Inspectors General of Prisons in England” (Larmour 202). Such an impressive project was the landmark of a myriad of executions during the Troubles and a continuing source of fear and secrecy. The project that Lanyon undertook after the completion of the gaol was a courthouse situated opposite it, between 1845 and 1850. The building ostentatiously showed the figure of justice, sculpted by Boyton Kirk and containing a 1,5 meter deep tunnel linking the courthouse to the jail under the Crumlin Road.

Keeping in mind the image of a jail that served as home for guilty/not-so-guilty criminals and a focus for suspicious citizens, I wish to infer that the poetry of two poets – Ciaran Carson and Paul Muldoon – in spite of being extremely diverse in their take on the city, have the same labyrinthine structure. For Ciaran Carson, language is a prison house of structured forms that express his apprehension of the city. He even compares language and city, “It’s possible to see a language as a metropolis, its boulevards as paragraphs... and at times in my writing I’ve tried to see my native city, Belfast, with the eyes of an outsider, as someone who is lost in it.” (Carson, *‘From Both Sides of the Track’ An Interview with Ciaran Carson* 166). In order to make his attachment to the city even stronger, the poet goes through a thorough state of annulment in order to project the poetic blueprint of the city. With a similar devotion to linguistic structures, the poet Paul Muldoon uses the playful nature of language and sarcasm to depict the scenario of civil war and destruction. In contrast to Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, the reader knows very little about the voices of either Carson or Muldoon, since they are constantly foregoing their subjectivity in order to submit themselves to the experimentation of poetry. In order to explore how the Crumlin Road Goal is transposed to poetry, I would like to first examine the prison-house structure of the book *The Irish for No* (1987) by Ciaran Carson. Published after the serious advancement of the Troubles in the early 1980s, the book in itself is a self-reflexive image of the city. In order to achieve such an effect, the poet exterminates his personal voice – that of a working class citizen, Catholic born in the Falls Road with Republican sympathies, and instead depicts metaphorically the idiosyncrasies of the land.

First, it is important to disclose the background of this historical period. With the resignation of Terence O’Neill at the end of the sixties, the right wing Unionist movement intellectually guided by Reverend Ian Paisley gained a new surge of energy. The ministers of commerce and home affairs, respectively, favoured internment, a preference which, as discussed above, had the opposite effect of providing more volunteers to the Republican cause. In the same context, perhaps the most grievous event was the Londonderry/ Derry

Bloody Sunday (1972) in which British troops openly opened fire on a crowd of protesters killing fourteen men and women who were believed to be armed, provoking public turmoil and public political manifestations. Such was the controversy of the episode that the current Prime Minister David Cameron apologized in June 2010 (almost forty years later), after the final conclusion of the trial which proved that those civilians carried no weapons¹⁷. In this context of social distress in 1972, the most immediate consequence to Northern Ireland, in addition to the public mayhem in Belfast and the burning down of the British Embassy in Dublin, was the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a return to direct British rule.

The Irish for No is a symbolic response to this distressing situation that took heroic proportions in the 1980s with, first the death of ten Hunger Strikers who demanded political prisoner treatment, second, with the emergence of Sin Féin and third, with the attempted destruction of the British Cabinet in London. In a collective and communal tug-of-war, artists and writers were requested to express publically their concerns and thoughts. Nonetheless, Carson answers those pleas with a book mysteriously divided into three parts: the first with four long poems, the second with sixteen shorter poems and the rather symmetrically closing with another other long four. Four is a central number for the understanding of the book: it is also the number of leaves in a four-leaf clover, which has an interestingly similar shape to an asterisk, ie Crumlin Road jail and it is the number of the poems in each of the three parts – in itself, four a significant number in Irish history, since four is the number of the Irish provinces: Connacht, Ulster, Leinster, Munster. Along with the geographical and social division of the land which had existed even prior to the Norman invasion, the manner with which the writer works with his Irish heritage is symbolic and empowering. This poetic power can be associated to “the meters and assonances of Early Irish verse” and the traditional rituals around Irish folk music jigs in pubs: “a mix of tunes, songs, stories, drinking, eating, whatever happens, including smoking... The tunes themselves are ostensibly simply, but capable of infinitive variation. The music is always renewable in the light of the now” (Carson qtd. Kennedy-Andrews 15). The associations to what has been established throughout history and the new possibilities of the poetic genre is precisely what makes Carson’s poetry so particularly exceptional. The poet started timidly with *The New Estate and Other Poems* (1976), with poems that did not “immediately suggest anything more than traces of a viable poetry of the city... adaptations from early Irish verse and explorations

¹⁷ The full article can be read in the British Broadcasting Website. (Web 27 January, 2011).

of traditional Irish crafts and landscape, which placed him in the familiar and predominant ‘rural’ strain of Irish poetry” (Hinds 148). However, while *The Irish For No* (1987) still references these traditional forms, it is also

energized by urban demotic speech, often the speech of the father whose words and presence are riddled through so many of the other poems in early volumes. The early speech and presence is, however, balanced by the father’s job as a postman, a vital cog in the machinery of print capitalism, which points to the material textuality with which the poems are equally obsessed. (Hughes, *Ciaran Carson Collected Essays* 88)

From Eamonn Hughes’ assertion, I would like to draw a specific attention to the theme of work, since the critic identifies Carson’s father as a central figure not only in the machinery of capitalism, but also in the poet’s involvement with artistic activity. While Michael Longley plays with the nature of the advertisement and Mahon laments the ghosts of a sectarian past, Carson is constantly aware that his subjective voice is the representation of an alienated subject in working-class Belfast. Representing this alienated subjectivity and reflecting on the working class theme is what makes Carson go beyond the sectarian division of Belfast and identify with both Catholics and Protestants. The crossing of communities through to commerce and industrialism is clear in his interview with Elmer Kennedy-Andrews:

Two memories of ‘the other side’ stand out. One is going with my mother to Berlin pawnshop on Shankill Road, and being kitted out with what I suppose were protestant shoes.... Falls Road people shopped on the Shankill and vice versa, thinking that there were better bargains to be on the ‘other side’. As for the fulcrum between two buckets, for me, were not so much religious as linguistic, as I teetered between Irish and English... my father and mother was English, both alien and familiar. (13)

Nonetheless, instead of embracing a kind of Marxism that is associated with the Soviet Union or other authoritarian communist regimes, his artistic project goes hand in hand

with the analysis made by the Easter Rising revolutionary James Connolly. According to David Lloyd, Connolly's:

purpose [was] not to imply the permanence of Celtic communism in the present, but to preface his pioneering study of the working-class radicalism in Ireland with the refutation of the claims made by both unionists and conservative nationalists as to the aristocratic nature of early Gaelic society and the consequent 'ancient Irish veneration for aristocracy. Connolly [was] insistent that what are regarded as the national characteristics of the Irish are in fact products of the material destruction of Irish culture in the course of colonization' (108).

Lloyd goes on to assert that the view of the malnourished and brutalized Irishmen is the ideological product of landlordism and capitalist rule which had existed for centuries, and did not have as its source the much more recent Troubles. From Lloyd's point of view on Connolly, I would like to infer that Carson's approach to the theme of work is an alternative approach to resisting domination by refusing to adopt a subjective identity which would identify with either community: Carson is refusing to engage in an ideological trope which similarly enslaves. Instead, Carson devotes his work almost entirely to the exploration of form and to how poetic form is able to open new alternatives to the present state of division. *The Irish For No*, structurally reminds the reader of the map of Ireland: one island, four provinces in a geographical space divided as Ireland – The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Form and theme are absorbed into a unified whole. At the same time he opens up the structure of the verse with long poems in the first part, in the second part, he shrinks them in small snapshots and with the last, reopens them. While the first deals with realistic details such as fashion, tobacco, railways, work, the second depicts small portraits of the city such as curious events and objects that define Belfast, such as wine, army, numbers, markets, etc. In the last part the poet writes four poems about place, character, his uncle and himself. From objects to city and from city to people, Carson uses a wide range of forms from free verse, to sonnets and variations of lyric structures. This loose nature of his poems may represent the tension and uncertainty that was typical of Belfast at that point. Conceivably, the most interesting feature of the collection is the play with the forms: if the first and third part are

constituted of long poems with verses of ten, seven, eleven and eight syllables, the second is constituted of what in essence are variations of sonnets and concise poems.

In the light of the fact that confined structures are the focus of the present section, I wish to pay more careful attention to the poem “Judgement” from the first part of the book, mainly because it deals with the theme of justice and freedom, central tropes in view of the civil strife in Northern Ireland. The novelty of the poem is the passage from the rural to the urban landscape – a path that usually takes no less than ten miles in Belfast. As Hughes puts it, while the two opening poems of *The Irish For No*, “Dresden” and “Judgement” portray rural settings, they also stress “the shift from largely domestic interiors to the very public world of the succeeding volumes: the world of the streets” (Hughes, *Ciaran Carson Collected Essays* 102). The same point of view is observed by John Goodby, who stresses that the syntax employed by the poet is of a “socially committed promenade” (*Ciaran Carson Collected Essays* 67). Therefore, I would like to add, inasmuch as walking is phenomenologically and physically engaging, this activity bridges the distance between “us” and “them” in a self-differentiating space. In other words, when the individual is obliged to access his body and mind in a spatial perception, it creates a thread between the private locus of the self and the public stage of society. Thus, while the poet prefigures an individual subjective presence, he has to contend with a clash of communitarian identity. The shock of the poet and his refusal to emotionally engage in the events he takes part in is due to his commitment to the poetic and linguistic work.

In Goodby words, Judgement:

Is an example of a class of words whose ambiguity conveys either activity (we can also talk about prose being ‘pedestrian’, of course, or ‘of being transported’ by music, Carson’s other great love), a metaphoric link which Carson elaborates by having Quinley, a character in Johnson story, ‘[walk] the country – Ballinliss and Aughaduff/ Slievencapall, Carnavaddy’ (Ifn, 18). This is the syntax as a stroll, the period as perambulation; syntactical reproductions, doublings-back, and general circumlocutoriness replicating the movements of the haphazard, but ultimately purposeful, Carsonian persona. (69)

The fluid nature of the mechanism displayed by Carson, in “Judgement” stems from the overlapping of two genres: poetry and prose. If on the one hand the poem appeals to the

metrics and images of poetry, it divides its seven sections according to a narrative and legal principle. From the beginning, the poet makes it clear it is the result of a blather that takes place between himself and Johnny Mickey when they were waiting for the train that would take them to the city. Explicit demarcating commentary in italics, and poem in regular font, the poem follows the logic of memory and involuntary associations: one particular detail evokes a hidden thread in the recollections of the characters. Following the transient and brief nature of mental connections, the piece becomes a ballad-like chant in which the poet uses a very simple theme to discuss the nature of law and punishment. The theme in question is Judgement. As we read, we are forced to ask what is the offence? Who is being judged? Who is judging? Which are the circumstances?, etc. All these questions appeal to the realm of a structured society that is ruled by righteous codes. Nonetheless, Carson subverts this idea by inserting the case of a corrupt judge who sentences Quigley for having no bell on his bicycle. The circumstances in which he is fined fifteen shillings are indeed satirical: the boy, Quigley, was the servant of Father Clarke, who had ordered him to drown his black and white terrier because he had tried to abuse it sexually. The demotic theme and the journey-like narration recollect *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. The main reason for the comparison is the ludicrous nature of the rhubarb, which stems from the lack of control of the priest. Also relevant is the transposition of the medieval division of society to a modern setting the only difference being the train and the modern apparatuses of the city.

In the first part the poet tells the reason for Quigley's sentencing, in the second, the circumstances in which he tricks the judge in an auction making him lose the money he fined him. In the third part there is a faint reference to time, since the narrator notes the fact that the judge's kin, the Flynns and McErleans from Derry ought not to be trusted, since they hanged a man in 98. Which 98? Not only does the prose-like structure enhance the dynamics of the verse, it also poses a mystery that is going to be solved at the end of the poem. In the fourth part the poet tells how Quigley could not find a lake to drown the dog, since it was a dry and hot summer. In the fifth, he describes how the priest decided to hang it – since he was good with knots. The sixth part tells the ending and gives the moral of the poem. However, there is a seventh part, in which the name of the “T” poet is revealed: he himself is a McEarlen (from Derry), which is the reason why he hands Johnny Mickey to the authorities. In this sense, the connection between sex, corruption, gambling, evil family feuds, murder and Judgement is finally concluded. The end of the poem is surprising and highly unpredictable, for the narrator wishes to give a lesson, but when the setting changes and they finally arrive in the

city, the nature of betrayal changes from lightly picaresque to deadly serious and an atmosphere of suspicion takes over

The poem “Judgement”, although humorous, implies that the countryside is very similar to the city in the behaviour of its people. Themes of power, vice, corruption, betrayal and misunderstanding are also part of the social environment of the countryside. In this sense, the poet goes against the stereotypical concepts that:

the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue... the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldiness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance and limitation. (Williams 1)

Carson takes on board MacNeice’s comic structure and metrical appeal and tries to show poetically that, within the country, the same debauched manners were present. Thus, the corrupt nature is not part of simply the city, but the historical presence of institutions that promote division and inequality: religion, auctions, class and ethnic divisions. In contrast to Mahon, Carson absorbs MacNeice’s legacy through the eyes of a leftist criticism that questions the permanence of such divisions. Also different from Mahon, who feels guilty and mourns having left Northern Ireland, Carson challenges the romantic idyll of a pure Irish countryside in order to prove that the authenticity claim is actually a desire for dominance. As Colin Graham outlines, the only real challenge to the “mythologised and fetishised sign” (*Ireland and Cultural Theory* 19) of the nostalgic and bucolic landscape is the language of irony. Its strength lies in the exchange between old and new meanings, while exposing the present reality. In the poem “Judgement” this irony stems not only from the intertextuality with MacNiece, but through the appropriation of his meter and technique in order to expose how little has changed since his “Bagpipe music” – which Carson also re-writes. Graham also points out that “the persistence of authenticity in Irish culture is best seen, then, as a series of claims... a desire for validation... this persistence arises from the cultural crisis of colonialism and its de-authenticating of the colonized” (25). Of course, Graham wrote the article ten years after Carson wrote his poem, at a time when colonialism discourse was already being questioned. Carson’s poetry is ahead of its time in questioning this already in 1987. What the poet does not do is retreat to black and white positions since they usually arise from manicheist visions of history and society. The questioning of the Western Heaven which

Hewitt, and even MacNeice himself portrayed, is an antidote to an easy form of conveying and interpretation of historical events.

Hinging on the theme of irony and demystification of stereotypical views, I would like to contrast “Judgement” with a poem by another poet who applies a very particular kind of irony: Paul Muldoon. Having published his first book, *New Weather*, in the mid-seventies, the poet is also part of a later generation of the Belfast Group. One of the most striking features of Muldoon’s poetry is his mastery of puns and irony. Stylistically similar to Carson, Muldoon is constantly trying new linguistic variations, testing poetic rhythms, and creating singular metric structures and images in order to create tension in the usually careful and embellished nature of the poem. Contrary to Mahon and Longley, who are still idealistic in their approach, and also similar to Carson, Muldoon’s language is demotic, unsophisticated and simple. His apparent straightforward approach, however translates into highly sophisticated poems. Through the use of ironical wit and uncanny tropes, the poet provides a deeper understanding not only of the poetic scene in Belfast, but to the lyric potentialities of the poem. According to the poet himself in his essay “Le Fanu”, there is a special kind of:

esoteric or ‘pied’... ‘the urge towards the cryptic, the encoded, the runic, the virtually unintelligible’. The word ‘runic’ itself derives from the old English word run, akin to the Old Norse run and, believe it or not, the Old Irish run – all combining ideas of a ‘secret’ or a ‘secret conversation’ and, as defined by the OED, ‘a letter or character or mark... having mysterious or magical powers attributed to it’, ‘an incantation or charm’, or ‘any song, poem or verse’. (*To Ireland, I 75*).

In the text as a whole, the poet analyses the mythic-like story of the *aisling*: the dream in which Ireland appears to the poet as a beautiful woman and persuades him to fight for her. Muldoon stresses the notion of a supernatural textual power since words and metrical structures would submerge hidden truths or foretell the future. Carson also assumes the language of the mystical in his poetry readings by telling the story of the *aisling* every time he is invited to a reading event. Nonetheless, should I focus only on the mysterious and mystical powers of Muldoon and Carson’s poetry as a whole, another essential trope would be easily lost: the re-visitation of an apparent authentic Irish myth. While Longley and Mahon fell back on myths of the Classical civilizations, Carson and Muldoon use the myths

of Irish folklore. The innovation Carson and Muldoon bring to Northern Irish poetry is the appropriation of ancient myths of Ireland to criticize the new ones created by technology and modernization. By doing that, they present their poetic self as wanderers who wonder if from the myths of their society are still capable of presenting another version of history and historical or political poetry. Moreover, the sense of strangeness a reader gets from their lyric suggests another myth of their own making: the artist as a different kind of human being, an eccentric whose visionary comments are not well comprehended by society as a whole.

In the poem “The Electric Orchard” (first poem of the collection *The New Weather*, 1973), Muldoon develops the idea of myth and technology in the tale of a special kind of people: the “Electric People”. Right in the first lines, the subjective voice is extremely ironic in saying “They knew all about falling off”. The polysemy of the word fall is explored in various levels, *fall off*, meaning to rebel and *fall out*, standing literally for a vertical fall and, metaphorically and allegorically, as the season autumn and the fall of mankind and the loss of innocence. These multiple references create an analogy between the Biblical Genesis and the development of this breed of “Electric People”. In addition to the religious tale, there are the famous poems by William Butler Yeats, “The Wild Swans at Coole”, and John Keats, “To Autumn”, not to mention Paul Verlaine’s “Chanson d’automne”, one of the most popular poems in the French language. Even though these three poems are only echoes in “The Electric Orchard” and have their own particularities, they address a similar concern, which is the sense of loss that stems from the passing of time. It is as if the swans for Yeats, the harvest for Keats, and the violins of Autumn made the contemplation of nature a unique moment, which is never going to be repeated in time. Such a sensation of fugacity brings nostalgia to the poets in question. Instead, Muldoon employs a device of the artificial and modern: an “electric orchard”. An electric orchard is an oxymoron: while orchards are natural and organic, electricity represents exactly the opposite, technological and inorganic. In this sense, the falling of this race and of the season is simultaneously coterminous with the fall of human reason and its failed attempt to replace God’s sovereign power. As Muldoon states in the first two stanzas:

The early electric people domesticated the wild ass;

They had experience of falling off.

Occasionally, they might have fallen out of the trees;

Climbing again, they had something to prove

To their neighbours. And they did have neighbours;
The electric people lived in villages
Out of their need of security and their constant hunger.
Together they learned to divert their energies

To neutral places; anger to the banging door,
Passion to the kiss.
And electricity to earth. Having stolen his thunder
From an angry god, through the trees
They had learned to string his lightning.
Burying the electric-poles
Waist-deep in the clay, they stamped the clay to healing;
Diverting their anger to the neutral (3)

In the first stanza of the poem (as quoted above) the author mentions the wild ass, a breed of donkeys that were domesticated around 4000BC and became an important pack animal for the civilisations of Egypt and Nubia. From this piece of information, the reader perceives that Muldoon wishes to refer back to an ancient detail that is associated with the present state of society: the animal was mainly used for work. As seen in the second stanza, working and living in villages, the electric people are masters of falling and of directing their attention towards passion (“kiss”) and anger (“the banging door”). They are also rebels, like a modern Prometheus, they have stolen the thunder from God in order to arrange the strings for their cities, something like the modern electric wires. In other words, the speaker of the poem is constantly shifting between ancient mythology – Zeus, for example, was the god of thunder – and technology in a mythic and atemporal setting in order to make a parallel between ancient and modern civilisations. Through these references, it is clear that Muldoon also takes advantage of the Greek mythology to describe the urban setting. However, the difference between his approach and Mahon and Longley’s is that he creates an almost science fiction poem to describe the history of the creation of the electric people. Even though the reader has little idea of who are these people, the first hint the poet gives is that they have created the modern urban setting.

In order to metaphorically highlight the modern faith in technology, in the following stanzas, Muldoon also admits that the fact that someone would eventually fall from the trees was expected – “There was something necessary about the thing”, he says. However, even with its degree of inevitability, the fall was criticised – “If one fell, there his neighbour might remark, Bloody fool”. As consequent events, railways, hospitals and legislations were invented on the account of the falls. Also, the people “climb again”—unlike the Christian idea of the Fall, the fallen state of Man is not inescapable and is redeemable by Man himself, and not God. In this chain of events, Muldoon also inserts the detail of “The North Wall of Eiger”, a mountain in the Bernese Alps in Switzerland in which one of the first climbers was an Irishman: Charles Barrington, who, accompanied by the Swiss guides Christian Almer and Peter Bohren climbed the west flank on 11 August 1858.

The electric people were confident, hardly proud.
They kept fire in a bucket,
Boiled water and dry leaves in a kettle, watched the lid
By the blue steam lifted and lifted.
So that, where one of the electric people happened to fall,
It was accepted as an occupational hazard;
There was something necessary about the thing. The North Wall

Of the Eiger was notorious for blizzards;
If one fell there, his neighbour might remark, 'Bloody fool'.
All that would have been inappropriate,
Applied to the experienced climber of electric-poles.
'I have achieved this great height';
No electric person could have been that proud.
Forty feet, of ten not that, (3)
If the fall happened to be broken by the roof of a shed.
The belt would break, the call be made,

The ambulance arrive and carry the faller away
To hospital with a scream
There and then the electric people might invent the railway,
Just watching the lid lifted by the steam;
Or decide that all laws should be based on that of gravity,
Just thinking of the faller fallen.
Even then, they were running out of things to do and see;
Gradually, they introduced legislation (3)

As quoted above, the detail of the Irish mountain climbers is relevant, for at no point in the poem is there a clear reference to the Irish, but for this small obscure allusion. However, this line changes the dynamics of the poem: the eight line stanzas oscillate between seven and nine until they go back to eight in the last two. The last two stanzas, due to the simple detail of the mountain climber, bring the reader back to Ireland and its issues. Even being obscure, in the fourth and fifth line of the stanza (“Deciding that their neighbours/ And their neighbours’ innocent children ought to be stopped”) the poet makes a veiled reference to the road blocks, in which suspects would be stopped by the police of any terrorist act. Also, the mentioning of the fences can be seen as a reference to the murals and walls from Belfast. Even though the poem is cryptographic, it is constantly making reference to the urban environment, and this last stanza recaptures an ethos of Belfast, as Muldoon states:

Whereby they nailed a plaque to every electric pole.
They would prosecute any trespassers;
The high-up singing and alive fruit liable to shock or kill
Were forbidden. Deciding that their neighbours
And their neighbours’ innocent children ought to be stopped
For their own good, they planted fences
Of barbed-wire around the electric-poles. None could describe
Electrocution, falling, innocence. (4)

The detail of the hospital in the fifth stanza, the recollection of prosecution and electrocution in the sixth, as quoted above, prefigure an ordered enumeration of alarming statistics that are related to Belfast. They relate to the “invention of a whole anthropology”, as Edna Longley calls the poem in the article dedicated to the comparison between MacNeice and Muldoon (*Poetry in the wars*, 216). Nonetheless, this quasi science fiction/ Genesis works in a double-edged figuration of the land:

At one level, the ritualised danger of this bizarre society may reflect the ‘electric poles’ of an ironically pre-lapsarian, pre-1969 Ulster... However, as MacNeice always emphasises: ‘The [parabolist’s] mythopoetic faculty transcends both his personal background and his so-called message (216, 217).

The poem achieves transcendence through the syntactic addition of characteristics. The dialogue between the local and the universal stems from technology, as in Carson’s “Judgement”. Even though both poets are peering at Northern Irish society from different lenses, whether through a mixed form of language or a proto-archetype ethnicity, both metaphorically reconfigure their place of origin through the relationship amongst people. Certainly, this is a significant addition to the portrait of the land, since they reproduce, through an imprisoned structure, the divisions of the city, which penetrated the interpersonal relations. The references to “no trespassing” and the fences stand for the impossibility of harmonious coexistence brought by the electric people. This motive is an early advancement of a theme that is reproduced in his later collections when Muldoon writes poems about the hunger strikers and the general historical situation in Northern Ireland. Apparently, the “strange fruits” this breed of people grew are likely to last. Another level of this anthropological neo-Genesis is seen through the romantic encounter. However, since the bourgeois and idealised love, immortalised in British nineteenth century novels is not likely to happen in Northern Ireland due to its social differences and historical configurations, what is left is mourning and loss.

For example, in the first poem of Muldoon’s collection *Why Brownlee left* (1980), “Whim”, subverts the idea of the romantic encounter. In order to do that he uses the sign of sexual intercourse as a treacherous moment in the couple’s affair that instantaneously leads them to death. As Clair Willis defends, “one of the ways in which Muldoon chooses to figure poetic impropriety, the breaching of the boundaries, is through sex” (198). In “Whim”, which has in the title the idea of the impetus of young lovers, the poet uses the metaphor of the

death of the couple as the distance between communities and personal involvement. Throughout the piece, the poet provides the reader with a sarcastic account of the fulfilment of a love-at-first-sight relationship in the Botanic Park in Belfast. As I have exposed a proposal of Botanic Gardens – specifically as a metaphor for the poetry of John Hewitt – the evocation of the park in Muldoon’s poem represents the opposite. Instead of representing a nostalgic ideal for a utopian Ireland, not yet corrupted by modernisation like the Garden of Eden, it is more interested in its actual, modern context. The Botanic Park is, not just the place where the lovers would blissfully go for a stroll, but the site of their death: “They lay there quietly until dusk/ When an attendant found them out. / He called an ambulance”. Park and city are not only inhospitable places for the peaceful fulfillment of the lovers’ desires. they actually actively prevent the couple from consummating their love affair peacefully.

Looking more closely at the first stanza of the poem, the speaker narrates the setting of their first meeting, the Europa Hotel, one of the most expensive hotels in the British Isles, and the most bombed hotel in Europe. According to Fred Heatley, “on over 40 occasions, it suffered from bomb or arson attack giving it a world-wide fame” (12) With the reference to the place, it is as if from the very beginning, when they exchanged a few words on the account of the translation of the story of Cú Chulainn ¹⁸ she was reading, they had been condemned to a tragic death. The typical drink of Ireland – a pint of beer – which was the one she was having – and the use of a distinctive Irish and religious expression – take a pew – in a refined place, creates a double exchange of myths: one of the old era, the immortal legends of Cú Chulainn and the modern idealized notion of a love affair that would start in a sophisticated place in Belfast. After the rupture of boundaries between prose and poetry in the second stanza, however, instead of falling back on the traditional prose poem, the author makes use of enjambment (excerpt below, verses 1 and 2, 8 and 9, 10 and 11, 12 and 13) and gives voice to the male figure that approaches the girl. In just two stanzas of five and thirteen lines, Muldoon is able to summon the main clichés related to love affairs – but with a little flavour of Northern Ireland: the setting of the Hotel, the Belfast expressions, the lonely girl who reads alone, the clever-witted man who takes the initiative and invites her over to his apartment.

‘Pardon me, for I couldn’t help but notice

You’ve got the O’Grady translation.’

‘What of it? What’s it to you?’

¹⁸ Also spelled Cúchulainn, Cúchulain, Cú ulainn, Cúchullain or Cú Chulaind.

‘Standish O’Grady? Very old-fashioned.

Cu Chulainn and the Birds of Appetite?

More How *Cu Chulainn Got His End*’.

He smiled. She was smiling too.

‘If you want the flavour of the original

You should be looking to Kuno Meyer.

As it happens. I’ve got the very edition

That includes this particular tale.

You could have it on loan, if you like,

If you’d like to call back to my place, now. (75)

The whole stanza is littered with an assortment of jargon that make up the beginning of a traditional love affair. But, the third and fourth stanzas change the narrative style of the poem: from dialogue to a narrative poetic third person.

Not that they made it as far as his place.

They would saunter through the Botanic Gardens

Where they held hands, and kissed,

And by and by one thing led to another.

To cut not a very long story short,

Once he got stuck into her he got stuck

Full stop.

They lay there quietly until dusk

When an attendant found them out.

He called an ambulance, and gently but firmly

They were manhandled onto a stretcher

Like the last of an endangered species. (75)

In the third stanza (reproduced above), the Botanic Park becomes the site of their dates and the last verses, which play with the word “stuck” – in the same way Muldoon plays with the word “fall” in “Electric Orchard. The word “stuck” is crucial in the poem because this is how the fortune of the couple turns into a major disaster. The final outcome is at the same time poignant and surprising, for they are seen as the last representatives of an endangered species. This is also ironic and ambiguous to the reader because first, the couple is representative of an era which is extinct, and second, their fault is collective, since they get carried away by the very same ideology that still deludes people in the modern era, the romantic myth of ever-lasting love. Thus, their final death is also suggestive of the end of romantic utopias – or the end of utopias in general. This device used by Muldoon is powerful enough to demonstrate how the modern city, with its fanciful images, is still a repository of ancient beliefs. This is also highlighted by Wills in the conclusion of her book: “Muldoon’s work serves to undermine redemptive approaches to everyday life, and the idea that the personal world of the individual contains truths generalizable for all” (241). Through its diversification of metric and tone, the poem also suggests these beliefs that are constantly perpetuated through different versions and variations.

The set of oppositions created by Muldoon is complex, but accurate. If on the one hand there is the collective myth of an organic form of love, which also summons contours of an eternal *jouissance*, on the other hand modern society with its contradictions and conflicts provokes unfulfilled desires and death. The myth of an idealised Irish lineage is symbolised by the book the lovers discuss and which attracts one to the other, *Cu Chulainn and the Birds of Appetite*. As opposed to the ideal of a fulfilled love in an organic Irish community, there is the flawed progress – the hotel was constantly bombarded and the grace of the park was also undermined by the situation of civil war – of the modern in the sumptuous style of the Europa Hotel and the graciousness of Botanic Gardens. Even though these places represent the civility of the enlightenment, they are constantly threatened by its opposite, the barbarity of war and terrorist attacks: this set of oppositions and lack of hope is symptomatic of the beginning of the eighties. While the Troubles led to unemployment, a decrease in sales and a subsequent failure in business enterprises, it also facilitated the rise of the public housing programme. This programme, by demarcating and reinforcing Protestant and Catholic areas by creating the so-called “peace lines”, prevented direct confrontations but paradoxically entrenched differences. The historian William Maguire highlights:

The most successful enterprise in Belfast in the period was the public housing programme carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The estimated number of 'unfit' houses in the city in 1974 was reckoned to be nearly 300000 or 24 per cent of total housing stock. The Troubles created both exceptional needs and exceptional difficulties, which upset all the calculations of planners and delayed the action that was urgently needed (239)

This situation is symbolically filtered in the poem through the contradictions of the couple's affair, an earnest but futile drive for completeness and love – can also be read as an allegory of the political stagnation of the Northern Irish society. Moreover, with the subtle debate concerning the translation of the legend of Cu Chulainn, the poet implies that perhaps the lovers' story does not have a happy ending because they stem from different backgrounds. The myth of Cu Chullain was respected by both Nationalist and Unionist parties. If on the one hand, nationalists believe him to be the most important hero of Celtic sagas – his sculpture stands in the Dublin General Post Office (GPO) in commemoration of the Easter Rising of 1916 – on the other hand, the unionists claim he is the defender of Ulster from enemies – in Belfast, for example, he is depicted in a mural on Highfield Drive, on the Newtownards Road. In the poem, Muldoon shows a decline in the Irish romantic view of the land's myth and history symbolised by the idealised version of Cu Chulainn by Standish O'Grady. In Phillip L. Marcus's analysis of the translation by O'Grady, the debauched behaviour of the hero was neutralised by the insertion of a supposed wife and son, to whom he was devoted to. His version presented a:

[d]esire to preserve an idealized vision of the subject-matter are blended with a strong vein of sentimentality. Unable to resist the easy sentiment obtainable in literature from child characters, O'Grady... invented a younger offspring for Cu Chulainn, an infant named Fionscota, and several episodes involving the parental tenderness of the great warrior... most flagrantly of all, O'Grady introduced an elaborate scene depicting Cú and Laeg walking through the city of Dublin and looking in shop-windows (!) where they saw a moving wooden

model of a war chariot which Laeg, remembering the little child back home, bought as a present for him. This scene is purely imaginary. (25)

The placing of such a book in the hands of the girl may suggest she belongs to a nationalist family, whereas the man, because of his disdain towards the romanticised tale, may be part of a unionist background. Thus, the private theme of love and sexual relationships is also subject to the political segregation of Northern Ireland. In this sense, the lovers' drive for *jouissance* is also a drive for a national identity that would reconcile those contradictions. Nonetheless, since the divide continues to separate people and communities, their longing continues to be perpetuated.

Perhaps the most severe choice Paul Muldoon makes in the poem is the silencing of the woman. In the second stanza, the reader does not know anything about the girl but for the descriptions given by the subjective voice and the sentences uttered by the man. Through this poem, Muldoon also starts to experiment with the idea of Irish nationalism as a muse who is anorexic – making another eighties connection with the Hunger Strikers. Edna Longley, interpreting Paul Muldoon's poem "Aisling" (*Quoof*, 1983), understands "anorexia" as a conceptual category and associates it with repression, rejection and denial. What both poet and critic mean is that this spontaneous starvation is a symbol of the lack of alternatives for Irish nationalism. As Longley states:

Paul Muldoon asks whether Ireland should be symbolized, not by an abundant goddess, but by the disease anorexia: 'Was she Aurora, or goddess Flora,/ Artemidora, or Venus bright,/ or Anorexia, who left/ a lemon stain on my flannel sheet?'. In blaming the hunger striker's emaciation on their political idealised cause, the poem equates that cause with a form of physical and psychic breakdown. 'Anorexia' is thus Cathleen Ni Houlihan in a terminal condition. Anorexic patients pursue an unreal self-image – in practice, a death wish. Similarly, the Irish nationalist dream may have declined into a destructive neurosis. (*The Living Stream* 173)

The poem "Whim" is a foreshadowing of a concept which would be fleshed out more fully three years later in "Aisling" (*Quoof*, 1983) in which the "destructive neurosis" points to a phantasmagorical picture of women as a nationalistic trope. Longley argues that "anorexia"

could signify Irish women themselves, who are “starved, and repressed by patriarchies” (*The Living Stream* 173) through the exploitative way of using the female body for the purpose of Irish politics. In this sense, the personal theme of love transgresses the border between public and personal through first, the failure of the idealised view of a fulfilled love, second, the stereotypical view of Nationalism and Ireland. Again, the ship-wrecked woman of MacNeice’s Belfast comes into play through different tonalities and approaches. It is significant that both are presented as disempowered figures whose voices are not only silenced, but whose very bodies are also literally diminished. In his figuration of nationalism through the image of a woman, Muldoon touches the theme of Belfast obliquely. Instead of addressing the division of the city openly, he falls back on symbols and metaphors that have been already used in order to represent this social tension in the form of the poem. Thus, poem and society become one through a figuration of reality.

The unstable relationship between national symbols and idiosyncrasies of modernity and tradition is seen in the one stanza poem “Ireland” from the same collection as “Whim”, *Why Brownlee left* (1980). Through a simple stanza of five verses, Muldoon recalls fears and uncertainties originated in opposed national ideologies. Once more, touching on the theme of love, the poet appears insecure about the right image to represent the nation. Although the poem starts with the figure of the land as a Volkswagen stuck in a hole, suggesting immobility and paralysis, in the second line, the poet reverses this affirmation by saying it is gently ticking over. This indicates the person who is driving is trying to find a solution to this problem. As the poem states:

The Volkswagen parked in the gap,

But gently ticking over

You wonder if it’s lovers

And not men hurrying back

Across two fields and a river (82 – 83)

The borderline between verse and prose is once more blurred and the poet outlines the instability of the land in the vagueness of the verse. The second half of the poem is exclusively related to the personal level, but when those lines are read in the historical context of Northern Ireland they become collective and revealing – a move similar to that which occurs when reading “Whim”. The question whether the people who are in the car are lovers or “men hurrying back/ Across two fields and a river” is again related to the male

commitment to the land as a woman – the male figure is shown in an act of conjunction to the land. Nonetheless, this union is subject to preconceived views and clichés used in traditional lyrics – fields, rivers, etc. The opposition established by the automobile and field is analogous to city and country, tradition and modernity, which is basically the social antagonism of the Northern Irish situation at that time. Thus, the myth of Ireland as a bucolic space – fields and rivers – is violated by the modern – car – and produces an artificial sphere of an unsettled hesitancy.

In his analysis of the poem, John Goodby associates the couple's sexual preliminaries in the car to the political preliminaries of Northern Ireland, a country that struggles with the solidification of a political system that is neither Irish, nor British. In his words, the poem "Ireland" "justifies its title by the fact that, while it is about Northern Ireland it is clearly set in the Republic and considers the blind eyes sometimes turned there to the IRA's activities as well as the North. Although the poem shows Muldoon's recourse [to] MacNeicean allegory, a reader's response is more a bruised wonderment at... society" (253, 254). Because the couple represent the social distress in the city and its lack of security, the major opposition between modernity and tradition brings the readers back to the city of Belfast. This city, as a modern symbol, encapsulates all this personal wrangling into a constellation of crises and individual distresses.

This personal anxiety is also absorbed by Ciaran Carson in a poem that uses Louis MacNeicean allegories as a framework. The piece "Bagpipe music", as I have highlighted in the first chapter, shows how the poet ironically and musically articulates corruption in the colony as a consequence of the mercantile framework of modern societies. Looking more closely at the poem now, I can see that Carson, with his sharp outlook on literary tradition and social relations, reproduces "Bagpipe music" as an enigmatic encounter between past and future.

The first thing which most readily captures the reader's attention to the poem is the complex and intricate musicality of the verse. In addition to being a composition that privileges the metric aspect, it also narrates intriguing events and small serendipities. Instead of going on about his subjective quandaries, the speaker draws conclusions about certain situations that he got involved in. However, going against the blunt narrative, the poet falls back on the typical sounds and noises produced by the Scottish and Irish bagpipe. The choice of the instrument is also significant, since MacNeice and Carson were born in Northern Ireland and very much acquainted with traditional folk music. The most reasonable answer to their preference is that the bagpipe is an instrument that carries an ambiguity in itself: if on

the one hand it can produce delicate and joyful melodies, on the other hand, it will always emits a background noise, hampering complete harmony. In the poem, the manner through which this ambiguity is transferred to the technique of the poem is through a subjective voice that is divided between conscious and unconscious states through italics and normal writing.

He came lilting down the brae with a blackthorn stick the thick
of a shotgun

In his fist, going, *blah dithery dump a doodle scatterly idle*
fortunoodle –

When I saw his will-o-the-wisp go dander through a field
of blue flax randomly, abandonly,

Till all his dots and dashes zipped together, ripped right
through their perforations

Like a Zephyr through the Zodiac: the way a quadrille,
in its last configuration,

Takes on the branches of a swastika, all ribs and shanks and
male and female chromosomes;

Till I heard his voice diminish like the corncrake's in the last
abandoned acre –

Scrake tithery lass a laddie nation aries hiber Packie, he'd be (254)

At the same time it is based on real observations, these are filtered by other blurred perceptions, such as drinking states and dream-like reveries. Thus, the poem follows the structure of the instrument in its double-edged nature. Furthermore, Carson combines the musical rationality or the musical polyphony as a metaphor for the multiplicity of voices present in Belfast. If “thinking in music... is able to bring together the sensuous and intellect with unique intensity” (Hamilton 78), in the poem, the space of the city of Belfast is going to be sensuous, through the musicality of the place and the unconscious awareness, and intellectual, due to the complex use of language and poetic structures.

Another manner through which Carson reproduces the musicality of the bagpipe is the experimentation with language and the demystification of the poetic aura for he is constantly

mocking not only himself as a poet, but also the reader who tries to make sense of the musical annotation reproduced in the piece. Divided into six stanzas of fifteen, twenty-two, sixteen, ten, twenty and twenty one verses, the writer recounts his encounter with a figure that appears out of the blue, like a will-o'-the-wisp coming from a mythic dream. Nonetheless, at the same time this man seems to be unreal, he is actually true and terrifying because not only does he possess the gun, an instrument that can oppress and kill, but also he has the control of the atmosphere, for "like a Zephyr through the Zodiac" he strolls into the locus of the poem, "the way a quadrille, in its last configuration" and plays his tune. The importance of this verse to the sequence lies in that fact it assumes control of both time and the space: while the way he speaks reproduces the logic of music, an art of time, the manner in which he positions himself against the poem shows his control of the space. Moreover, this combination culminates in the image of the city, musical and multiple, for as typical in Carson's oeuvre, Belfast is more than a subject, but a condition of existence to the poem; all the elements are subject to the pace of the urban movement.

This urban approach is seen also through the symbolic interplay between public and private, which enables the reader to comprehend a broader historical picture through private circumstances – similar to Muldoon's exploitations of love affairs. In this case, the poet examines a single figure and his individual desires. Comparing the man's member with written signs "till all his dots and dashes zipped together, ripped right through their perforations", the poet establishes a domesticated structure to the human desire. No sooner does the poet ridicule his chastity than he contrasts the humane with the political dimension "Takes on the branches of a swastika, all ribs and shanks and/ male and female chromosomes". Also, the reference to the swastika points to the political interpretation of the piece. Along these lines the subjective voice represents the political as a natural dimension of the musical reasoning reproduced by the poet. In the same way that MacNeice's "Bagpipe Music" evokes the mythology of the market (as seen in chapter I) Carson reflects about politics as a matter of desire, as if belonging to a political affiliation meant being involved in a mystical cycle of religion, desire, commodities and empire.

With a linguistic apparatus permeated by uncertainty, extravagance and scorn, the second stanza leads the reader to believe this man is English and part of the British Navy. Thus, his contact with other cultural habits is simply seen on a material level. However, the most significant detail of the poem is seen in the last two verses of the sequence when he discloses there are three walls between the poet and the observed man, and the fourth is made of glass. The glass suggests window shopping and reveals that the poet as a writer is already

in the market, in the same way as the man, who is a product to be exploited by the economic ventures of the British Empire. Also, by placing the glass between himself and the man, the poet constructs a mirror-like image: depending on the point of view, both are commodities, or both are consumers, but with an equal desire for expenditure. This is precisely why, in the next stanza, they will initiate their conversation and break their silence.

The dialogue recollected by Carson's "Bagpipe Music" tends to be obscure and its images hard to be revealed for not only are the bodies of the speaker and the sailor in the game of the market, but also their words and artistic experimentation. While MacNeice was portraying the actual state of affairs in his "Bagpipe music", his subjective voice, one step removed from his narrative as a painter from his canvas, Carson takes a step into the narrative and positions himself at the centre of the market bustle. It is as if the poet was bargaining or auctioning meanings and testing which one would be more efficient or suitable in the age of late capitalism. For example, in the third stanza, he peers at the theme of violence and chance, as if he were taking "the lucky shot" that would either bring wealth or poverty. At the end of the stanza, in the last four stanzas, there is a hidden metaphor implied in the internal rhymes and the expression "psychobabble handbag". When Carson states:

Pick and pock morseway through the stench of a rooting flax.

For it seemed

The grandmother produced an alarm-clock from her

psychobabble handbag (255)

The implicit rhyme would possibly be "stock", implying a tryst between poetry and stock market. The image of the "psychobabble handbag" also points to the stock market, since in many Latin languages stock is related to a handbag. Also, the alarm clock introduces the timing necessary to invest in stocks. However, as any action in the market has to be precise and on time, the fortune-hunter has to restrain himself and be cautious at times. As a result, the fourth stanza mentions the danger of this kind of action, since dogs start to sniffle the handbag, probably indicating a connection between stock and crime. The last line of the stanza finishes with a "bridle", a temporary pause from the hectic movement of the sales. However, as soon as it stops, it reinitiates in the fifth stanza: as a *flâneur* and explorer of Belfast, Carson's shelters are the streets of the city where he bumps into policemen, members of the I.R.A., balaklavas, walking sticks, political parades, and other reified images that picture the space as a dangerous bet that the poet chooses according to his needs. This is the

reason why the language is so cryptographic and ambiguous; it is as if every word had a rational and a musical meaning, such as the logic of the bagpipe.

The comprehension of the city and its metonymical aspects, which is presented in the fifth stanza with the objects such as “black-and-white minstrels”, “balaclavas”, “daz forsenic”, “gloves”, “walking sticks”, “guns” and “bullhorn” reifies the city as an objectified space. Not as a mere observer, but as a part of the market, the poet leaves the privileged position of observer to become an object to be himself observed, a player in the gamble of the market. In order to represent the fall of his aura, Carson, in the last stanza affirms he is out of place. After monitoring the man’s mannerism and language, he is hindered by the music of the Orange drums:

Just then or pen it down, but the Lambegs wouldn’t let me,

And fingers smeared up to the wrist with Lion ink. My hand/

is dis-/

Located – (256)

With the break of the word and the verse, the poetic entrepreneurship shows signs of exhaustion. It is a clear example of that obsessive mechanism of desire, culture, empire and gamble. This is the point where MacNeice’s poem [Bagpipe Music] is mentioned and the poet concludes his experimentation by affirming that MacNeice’s poem is a mysterious entity that whispered the words to him and that he would just recollect that on the following day. So cynical is such an affirmation that the poet lines up with the market speculators who confidentially invest their funds on titles which are not likely to last – Bagpipe Music becomes another product for sale. But this leads to apprehension, is Carsons’ own poem going to be up to par with the one previously “produced”? From this point of view, the intertextuality, as used here, is an alternative for the poet to display the kind of physiognomy Belfast would assume in the beginning of the Peace Process: a commodity in the hands of international corporations. The double melody, as I have called attention to earlier, serves the purpose of highlighting, as a droning music in the background, the economic forces and market interests that prevail over art, history and individual sensibility. In its enigmatic tone, the whole poem presents the obsessive mechanism of desire, culture, empire and gamble.

The instability produced by Carson’s poem is also seen in Paul Muldoon’s verse. Both are poets of the post modern world, in which absolute truths are constantly questioned and revisited. In a globally economical and politic context, certainties and libertarian ideologies

are revised, since the path designed by Soviet utopias were taking different courses and frustrating many of its followers. This intellectual questioning was product of the “crisis decades”, as Eric Hobsbawm highlights,

the history of the twenty years after 1973 is that of a world which lost its bearings and slid into instability and crisis. And yet, until the 1980s it was not clear how irretrievably the foundations of the Golden Age had crumbled. Until after one part of the world – the USSR and the Eastern Europe of ‘real socialism’ – had collapsed entirely, the global nature of the crisis was not recognised, let alone admitted in the developed non-communist regions. (403)

This “loss of bearings” has an application to apprehension about the future of Belfast: the slight movement of the car in “Whim” [literally a spinning of wheels] and the obscurity of the poet and figure encountered in “Bagpipe music” bring hesitation to the whole composition. With an obscure and symbolic use of language and forms, both artists return to the social instability of their historical time. Thus, they interrogate the legitimacy of the bourgeois myth of the city that functions in a steady manner, without abrupt changes. Through this questioning of the myth, the pieces defy the escapism of lyric poetry by demonstrating how an effective critical and artistic perspective would bring about new alternatives of thinking about the present. According to the critic Richard Kearney in his book *Post Nationalist Ireland*, the main distinction between ideology and utopia (123) is that, whereas the former refers to complex myths that maintain the status quo, the latter is related to the deployment of images and myths that challenge the status quo.

For example, in the free-verse sonnet “Immrama” (*Why Brownlee Left*, 1980) Paul Muldoon picks up on the idea of emigration – along with its promises of social ascension – and challenges ethnic and social roles. By doing that, the poet performs metaphorical travels to deprived places (Wigan, Argentina and Brazil) in order to challenge the ideological characteristic of these places vis-à-vis the ideology of his own native place, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Through three stanzas that describe a personal journey of leaving Ireland to America, the poet connects himself to his familiar roots and their longing for a place that would provide them material stability. Nonetheless, the poet’s journey is as frustrated as his father’s since he treads the same paths and, similarly ends up in an underprivileged place (a slum in Brazil), face to face with a mysterious man whose origins are unknown.

The image of the sons fostered by a dislocated father and in an underprivileged locality reveals, through stylistic features, the ideology behind those myths and discloses, through the aspect of estrangement, the loss of idealism in the contemporary world. It is as if, in the maze of an intercultural dialogue, the poet could focus on a specific residue from his family past and detach himself completely from the composition. In the first stanza of the poem, Muldoon describes his father leaving Ireland and the place he almost reaches, Argentina:

I, too, have tailed my father's spirit
From the mud-walled cabin behind the mountain
Where he was born and bread,
TB and scarlatina,
The farm where he was first hired out,
To Wigan to Crewe junction
A building-site from which he disappeared
And took passage, almost, for Argentina (85)

From the passage quoted above, the reader envisions, through a few details, the scarcity of his father's life: the small house, the diseases, the places where he worked as a farmer and the place where he departed from. In this passage the longing for a better life is translated into emigration, or the ideology that life in a foreign country would be more fulfilling in terms of material opportunities. If on the one hand the poet is recollecting his father's departure, in a flash-back stanza, in the second stanza, the image of the place he would probably be is revealed:

The mountain is coming down with hazel,
The building-site a slum
While he has gone no further than Brazil (85)

Even though the image of Brazil Muldoon constructs is a cliché for contemporary readers, in the eighties, the country was going through a late modernization process and still subject to a dictatorial form of government. Thus, that portrayal was actually true. The combination slum and mountain in a hazel color represents, probably, the shanty-towns in Rio de Janeiro or in the Northeast. However, it does not seem that the author is worried about

the veracity of the information about Brazil, but essentially with its comparison with the poor country-side of Ireland, where his father is from. In the same excerpt, the reader is aware that his travel does not fulfill the promise of a better future, rather the continuation of the deprived life. The last stanza, though, suggests, with the image of children sleeping under a mosquito net that perhaps, there is something else rather than material condition which made his life different.

That's him on the verandah, drinking rum

With a man who might be a Nazi,

His children asleep under their mosquito-nets. (85)

Annulling his subjective voice, in the last stanza (quoted above) Muldoon focuses only on his father and his distant brothers and sisters. By doing so he reconstructs his subjective voice as a “self differential space”¹⁹ in which he rehearses a journey to silence until his complete extinction, such as the ambiguous comfort the reader feels at the end of the poem. By assuming the role of his father, the poet refuses to mourn his loss, but acknowledges the loss of self-recognition in any culture. The gain of the comprehension of “Other” culture, in this case, working class Latin American is, to acknowledge the perverse logic of the exploitation in a global scale. This perception produces a mixed subjective voice that transits in binary oppositions: materiality and immateriality, belonging and disconnectedness, and finally consciousness and unconsciousness.

As seen in the poem, the lines are very brief and are full of omitted details, such as how did his father end up in such a place, who is the mother of his children, who is the man he is drinking with. Those gaps represent measured silences of what *cannot* be said. Most likely they are part of the failure of his father's social assertion and represent the poet's criticism towards civilization and its myths of self made men and emancipatory projects. This self referential space is not simply where the poet de-constructs his Northern Irish identity, but where he constructs a global lack of agency and what cannot be revealed, except in dreams – this case, they represent the unconscious states. At the moment when one falls asleep is when the conscious forces cease to act and desires, which are repressed, come to the surface. In addition to that, these are the locus where, in more primitive societies, there is the myth of the spirits of the ones who passed away establish contact with the ones that remain

¹⁹ In the terminology elaborated by Spivak, the subaltern is the name given a differential space which through difference reconstructs his self. Spivak, Gayatri S. “Can the Subaltern Speak”. In. <http://www.unigratz.at/aya/archive/spivak%20-%20can%20the%20subaltern%20speak.pdf> , (Web 4 March, 2010)

living. In this case, the poem is transformed into a repository of a wide overview in which civility and primitivism co-exist. More than being present in the same state at the same time, these stages of consciousness represent a flight of imagination from reality. In other words, the myth of progress is compared to the myths of primitive societies, but what is of crucial importance, though, is the flight from these two places that gives space to the peaceful dream to escape from this very same repressive reality. However, such departure is never thoroughly fulfilled, since it bears out the traces of domination and exploitation – tuberculosis and scarlatina are present in places where poverty prevails.

From the pieces, it is quite clear that Muldoon and Carson do not disregard reality, but rather displace it. Their intent is to prove that within the irrevocable plurality that any social space seems to be immersed in, utopian projects are neutralised by a myriad of circumstances—be they lost hopes or repressed desires. This desire is given in “History” in which Paul Muldoon the poet inserts a sexual intercourse in the room where Louis MacNeice wrote the poem “Snow”. Interestingly enough, this is a poem in which MacNeice stresses how the world is “irrevocably plural”. However, if the world entails such a flabbergasting plurality, why is the poet constantly demonstrating scepticism as regards the contemporary world? The answer lies in the identity crisis of the Northern Irish poet, as expressed in the poem “The One Desire” that, Muldoon, surprisingly enough, mentions again the Botanic Garden. It seems that the excellence of Irish literature and lyric is to be similar to and yet different from the English. The evocation of angels and the potential of the modern city construction to excel in exuberance were somewhat indebted to the English tradition. However, this tradition is not placid and smoothly achieved, but painfully and artificially sought. Throughout the volume, the reader perceives that the entangled game between history, modernity and tradition is a dangerous one when poetry is concerned. While Muldoon and Carson wish to misplace universal truths, they end up confined in them. The reason for their imprisonment is that they see their self as part of a divided culture and nation. A nation, whose foundational myths, more than configuring a utopian thought, are there instead to perpetuate inequalities and divisions, in other words, ideology.

Based on the following argument, I wish to emphasize the reason why the Crumlin Road Gaol is the visual allegory of this selection. While both poets wish to escape the ideology that permeates their birthplace due to their consciousness of Northern Irish society, they are imprisoned by it. Their poetic experimentations set into motion a subjective annulment that cannot find answers or solutions to the present state of their culture. In the same way “the fusillade of the question marks”, that concludes Carson’s “Belfast Confetti”

incarcerating him in a linguistic jail, also imprisons the general population of the city. The fusillade is also a metaphor that Seamus Heaney uses in “Summer 1969”, which is going to be analysed further on. “Belfast Confetti”, though represents the myriad of questions ordinary citizens cannot even formulate in such a distressing scenario. Concomitantly, these questions represent the questions the artists themselves have. Making a cross reference to Heaney, it also means the predicament of artists during that time: trying to be political they felt the need to detach themselves from propagandist or partisan ideals.

In addition to the lack of choices within the poem, the verses are literally and metaphorically characterized by a political binary that express the social uncertainties of the seventies and eighties. In the historian Richard English’s words, the importance of both I.R.A. and the Provisionals lay in their problematization of social paradigms:

The provisional IRA has embodied what have been arguably the most powerful choices in modern world history: the intersection of nationalism and violence, the tension between nation and state, the interaction of nationalism with socialism and the force of aggressive ethno-religious identities as a vehicle for historical changes. (xxiv)

These interwoven possibilities resulted in fear and uncertainty to the general population. The movements that were happening inside prisons – such as the hunger and bathing strikes – were reflected in society and such tense climate permeated people’s experience. As suggested throughout the section, Carson and Muldoon took on board this social tension and transform it into their poetry. The lack of choices is not merely a symptom of lyric weakness, but rather of the whole population’s paralysis. Poetry, in this sense, is not forcibly revolutionary, but vulnerably fragile, since it absorbs the historical fears and reflects them through its form and causality. Nonetheless, even exposing its own fragility, poetry is able to remain true to its rules and a sense of humanity since it represents individual and collective fears through a well-established structure. Carson and Muldoon are masters of language and poetic craft, thus, the effects produced by their poems are of self-questioning and not self-fulfillment. Both readers and poets are left in a world of gambling and confusion, mystery and betrayals, which are unquestionably the social effects of a place in war and in crisis.

IV. THE MURALS OR REAL COMMUNITIES

In a BBC article published in 2009, the journalist Arthur Straina specialist in stories about Northern Ireland—professes a quite blunt, but actual truth in relation to Belfast: “in Berlin they have been marking 20 years without their wall, in Belfast the division of the city remains set in concrete, wire and fencing” (Web 20 March, 2011). the reporter’s view not only represented the divisions of the city two years ago, but also thirty years before, when the Troubles were at its peak. Nonetheless, a detail which is missing from the reporter’s analysis is that the building of the peace lines and segregated housing is what Maguire claimed to have saved the Northern Irish economy throughout the decades of strife and social disturbance. According to the critic, “the most successful enterprise in Belfast in this period was the public housing programme carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive” (230) It comes without much of a surprise that the walls would remain part of the cultural landscape of the city not simply due to its historical, but also its economic value. What used to demarcate the division between Catholics and Protestants has become a touristic lure that attracts foreigners to the working class districts. Even though alien crowds tend to praise the art painted on those walls, which has the function of creating a passionately engaged Nationalist or Unionist identity, this can sometimes overshadow the fact that some of the inhabitants from those communities (and the very same ones responsible for such visceral art) are expressing not only dissatisfaction but a wish to exterminate the other physically and psychologically. In the same BBC article, Straina quotes a few youngsters who are utterly despondent with those walls. Some of them even point: “Throughout the province the barriers are really in people’s hearts and minds, there are the physical barriers in Belfast, but throughout the country we are divided”. This is expressive and symptomatic of a history of division that penetrates people’s minds and psyches.

The social divide that the troubles provoked affected not only people’s perception of their external space but also of their internal homes – their house. The two poets this section is going to address, Seamus Heaney and Mebdh McGuckian deal with private and recondite matters, and fall back on the metaphor of the house to describe their personal predicament. Nonetheless, in their use of surrealist landscapes and impressionist portraits, for example, their creative attempts to portray Belfast transport them from the open spaces of the city and into the imaginary landscape of the self. By doing that, they create a negative portrait of the city. However, this negative is not merely a critical or pessimistic portrayal, but rather more like a photonegative in which the image is the city is the total opposite of reality. In

photogenic terms, when a negative is created at the same time, the bright spaces become gloomy and vice versa, the colors assume their negative complement. In order to have a positive portrait, both negatives must be superposed. Following the image of a photonegative, I intend to analyse the intimate attempts of both poets to uncover their own selves which were indeed hidden by the political situation, and how these selves, instead of autonomous monads are actually part of this bigger whole. The poems chosen for analysis are in Heaney's *Door into the Dark* (1969) and *North* (1972) and McGuckian's *On Ballycastle Beach* (1988).

Although there is a historical distancing in terms of books and aesthetical projects, the point that I wish to make with the present subdivision is that there is a version of Belfast that is not as objective and literal as the one presented by the previous poets, but a version of this city that runs in the "collective substratum" of the history of Belfast "that makes of language the medium in which the subject becomes more than just a subject" (*Lyric Poetry and Society* 31), but an individual with place and time. McGuckian and Heaney's poetry, while appearing to be internally reclusive and self-reflexive, actually belongs to a collective substratum that transplants the public feelings and outlooks into the individual experience. In each particular case, the outcome is going to follow a specific line of gender and thematic reasoning. Nonetheless, the reality of the communities I address in the title of this section is going to be preserved as an established specificity of lyric poetry: the singularity of a lyric voice.

The poem "On Ballycastle Beach" is about exile, the familiar desire to bond and the sublimation of this repressed desire. While effectively exposing loneliness of the lyric, also transcends its condition and reaches for a more complex whole. In an interview, the author makes explicit that in this specific poem, the voice she is addressing is her father's, on the verge of a heart attack:

My father had a lot of heart attacks, major and minor, before his final one.

When he felt the pain coming on, he would clench and unclench his fist in a rhythmic heartbeat. That's what he was doing as we stood on the water's edge.

The poem was my attempt to join him physically and mentally, as if art and poetry were also a metrical controlling of pain and experience. (112).

Although talking about the experience of her father, the poet creates ambiguous spaces in the stanzas that can correspond, on an initial level to the poet's own exile, and then to her father's. The lines are charged with a continuous sense of alienation, not only in geographical, but also in personal terms. Such is the subjective caesura of the poet that right

in the beginning (quoted below), she states she wishes to read out the poem's blank verses to her father, but only if she saw him on the edge of the sea. But then she poses another condition: she would only read the words aloud late at night, when children are taken in by their parents. With the simile "like a ship," the words would arrive and, paradoxically have multiple and empty meanings. Also, this plurality and nothingness are related to another oxymoron: the "flow of life", which does not have a home nor in the open spaces of the ocean, nor in the closed spaces of a homesick room. Although the poet clings to universalizing statements, such as the state of lack of home and consolation, the poem is localized in Ireland, reinstating the importance of the context to the piece:

If I found you wondering round the edge
of a French-born sea, when children
should be taken in by their parents,
I would read those words to you,
like a ship coming in to harbor,
as meaningless and full of meaning
as a homeless flow of life
from room to homesick room. (50)

As quoted above, the placement of her father on the edge of a "French-born sea" refers to one of the most enigmatic events of Irish history when, in 1607 the Gaelic earls left the coast of the North of Ireland for France after being defeated by the British Tudors. More than the end of a civilization, this event represented the beginning of a political system that would divide the Gaelic counties and neutralize old Irish ways of life. The poet recollects this event in the 1980's, at the very height of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government and the establishment of the Anglo-Irish agreement which would provide Northern Ireland with a semi-autonomous government. Once again, McGuckian is not simply praising her father as a sentimental figure, but someone who was part of history and suffered its psychological effects.

In this sense the "homeless flow of life" is not simply the poet's father's lack of shelter, but of a whole history of contests and grievances. In addition to that, as McGuckian explains:

This is a summary of my father's life. He was always trying to get back to Ballycastle where he had grown up. It's where he would have been happy. But, then he was exiled to Belfast, where he got a job. He was always homesick and homeless – he suffered it. To go back there he would have had to leave my mother, because she didn't want to go. (113)

The theme of exile, in this sense, creates a mechanism that interrelates personal experience and collective history and brings the reader exactly to the place where the poet's father did not wish to remain: Belfast. In this sense, the second stanza opens up for another movement. The actual arrival on the shore and the utterance of the poetic words create a dreamy atmosphere that encourages the lyric voice to advance inland. This time, the exile becomes a home where its vanished portrait has failed to regain its language. Her words then, more than evoking a resistant past, become the instrument to express this "city".

The words and you would fall asleep
sheltering just beyond my reach
in a city that has vanished to regain
its language. My words are traps
through which you pick your own way
from a damp March to an April date,
or a mid-August misstep; until enough winter
makes you throw your watch, the heartbeat
of everyone present, out into the snow. (50)

As seen in the previous stanza, the poet highlights that her words have a hypnotic effect. They would shelter her father in a city "beyond reach". Even though the reader can identify this city with Atlantis or any other hidden city of the sea, it represents actually the demarcated lines and divisions of Belfast. However, her words also make him lose track of the time, represented by the verse "you throw your watch ... out into the snow". Thus, the lack of language to communicate to her father is, in reality, the inability of Belfast citizens to communicate with each other because their hearts are guided by the ticking of the watch, or the work time. The political treaties of the decade, added to the protests of the hunger

strikers, enunciate an interpersonal silence. As for McGuckian herself, she identifies her father's inability to speak with a whole generation of people:

A lot of the reason that he and I couldn't talk to each other was that English wasn't a language we could use easily. For his generation, English wasn't the native tongue. Not that he spoke Irish either. He wasn't a speaker at all – he was dumb. A lot of people like him went into a dialect of quiescence. Of course, I think that a lot of what everyone talks is gibberish because they just give up. The real language is dead, and the new one is anathema yes for emotional reasons. When your tongue goes around the words, and they're the natural ones that you have to use, but your consciousness doesn't reach far enough back in time for English to be a language you're fully at home in. I resist and I'm angry – we're always angry, because every time we open our mouths we're slaves. (113, 114)

The poet is crystal clear on her positioning in relation to the English language. Perhaps for being born and bred in a religious institution, most likely for being part of a Nationalist community, McGuckian expresses passionately her mixed feelings towards the English language, a language which is not hers, but also gives voice to her displaced self and its familiar stories. Thus, in the middle of these contradictions, which are acting at the personal level, there is what Seamus Heaney beautifully calls “the inner lining of English itself” (qtd. McGuckian *Selected*, back cover). It is the amphibious movement “between the dreamlife and her actual domestic and historic experience” (qtd. McGuckian *Selected*, back cover). The lining of the English is then the understanding of a collective ethos and the inability to express so much with an alien language – alien even to herself.

Another important aspect of the second stanza is the line “words are traps/ Through which you pick your way”, which approximates her to Baudelaire's ragpicker. I insist on the comparison with Baudelaire, since “traps” in English has different meanings which are not often accounted for: at the same time that it means an ambush or something dangerous, it also stands for personal belongings and igneous rocks used to make roads. The last meaning makes sense to the whole composition because it creates the perfect metaphor of words as a path. With the pace induced by the poetic words, this path is transformed by time and

people's experience. In this stanza, thus, the poet internalizes her lyrics as her dad's exile, which becomes not only history, but also his heartbeat. The lyric is transplanted to the internal rhythm, then it is exteriorized through time, and again taken in as physiology – a physiology that is fragile since her father dies of a heart attack. In these few lines McGuckian lines up with the English and with the modernist tradition of poetry, since she does not feel completely comfortable with a foreign language, but quite at home with the modernist sense of self.

In the third stanza, McGuckian starts with the metaphor of a forced birth: “My forbidden squares and your small circles/ were a book that formed within you/ in some pocket, so permanently distended/ that what does not face north faces east” creating an alignment of proportions, as if father and daughter, by being so different, complemented each other like Leonardo DaVinci's Vitruvian drawing. Even though McGuckian does not mention DaVinci's widely known portrait in her interview, it is quite clear that she uses herself and her father as a human guide to the elaborate perceptions of the artistic form. The fact she used the metaphor of the city in the second stanza and now of Vitruvian men mirrors the project envisioned by Marcus Vitruvius, a Roman architect in 1 BCE, who conceived a treatise on architecture entitled *De Architectura*. (Web 25 March, 2011). The oeuvre, composed of 10 different books – each dealing with different aspects of architecture, city planning, and machines – defended the thesis that urban planning must be related to the proportional dimensions of the male body. However, McGuckian's poem is an architectural unit that, instead of being harmonious as in DaVinci's project, is rather characterized by a loss of bearings that does not distinguish north or east. In the continuation of the stanza she alludes to natural metaphors to characterize her father's worker's hands – dark, and tired of low light:

Your hand, dark as a cedar lane by nature
grows more and tired of the skidding light,
the hunched-up waves, and all the wet clothing,
toys and treasures of a late summer house (50)

In contrast to Vitruvius, the square and circles of daughter and father compose a book in an abandoned house. As quoted above, this is the moment when the city becomes internal and poet and father embark on separate journeys, although in the same house. The “late summer house”, the intimate place, is then the locus where the familiar unit dissolves and the poet diminishes both her and her progenitor until the complete cession of the lyric. In the last

stanza, with a sound and a light, reminiscent perhaps of repressed desires and silenced emotions, since the poet uses the image of a pre-wedding dress:

Even the Atlantic has begun its breakdown
Like a heavy mask thinned out scene after scene
in a more protected time – like one who has
gradually, unnoticed, lengthened her pre-wedding
dress. But, staring at the old escape and release
of water's speech, faithless to the end,
your voice was the longest I heard in my mind,
although I had forgotten there could be such light (50)

The entangled relationship between daughter and father also presents contours of a literary Oedipus complex that ceased to exist on the very brink of existence. The reference to the “heavy masks” sequentially stripped, the “lengthened wedding dress”, “the old escape” and “water's speech” represent the enchantment the daughter has towards her father. The voicing of the poem, is thus the voicing of her father, who echoes the longest in her mind. The lyric is then the product of the repressed possession of the father by daughter. Her wrestling with English language, combined with his experience of repressing his desire to return to Ballycastle and the forced life in Belfast, is an attempt at gaining of power over the determinations of her geographical and psychological position – as a poet and a woman in a sexist and politically divided society. As Moynagh Sullivan points out:

Modernist critical practices compounded the legacy of the language of incarnation and self-sufficiency as an aesthetic standard, and this combined with modernist reclamations of the metaphysical poets and Milton have resulted in a poetics in which the achievement of canonical status in twentieth century tradition relied heavily, if not almost exclusively, on organicist metaphors of birth. (76)

Those organicist metaphors that Sullivan points out are not simply on the level of the evocation of “metaphors of birth”, as the critic develops on her article dedicated to Maedbh

McGuckian and Seamus Heaney, but also metaphors that suggest an organic connection between human beings and place.

In this case, the imaginary possession of the city Ballycastle during the family's exile in Belfast and the loss not simply of the father, but of the longing to be in a different location, stand for the completion of the lyric as a unstable structure. This architecture, in this sense, is bound to collapse in the sight of the minimum light or at the recollection of the voice of the father. McGuckian is indeed subtle in her poem, but Belfast is there, as an internal echo that is exteriorized with small details and evocations. Like a photonegative, she focuses on the internal perceptions of her father and of her deep desires to voice their proximity and distance from the city of Belfast. Although promising to "read these words to you", there are conditions for her action: they have to be by the water, late at night. The lack of light is like a negative that is revealed throughout the poem, and become clear with the very last verse: "although I had forgotten there could be such light". The light here represents the purging of her thoughts and feelings about the city, but also, is the voicing of a family relationship that has been somewhat segregated just like that of the city.

Going back to the organic metaphors, Sullivan also highlights that Seamus Heaney's relationship to the land stems from metaphors of birth, such as the ones found in "Strange Fruit" and "Act of Union", both from the collection *North* (1975). The poet's Belfast is gendered because it refers to the private stories of the Troubles. By dealing with the feminine metaphors that related to the land as a female entity and the craft of working within the realm of a well structured lyric is actually creating another version of Belfast: intimate and distant, but implanted in the structure of the verse. The distancing from the land, in Seamus Heaney's case, created a sense of guilt that is prolonged through an imagery that relates to a symbolic repossession of the land through the poetic act. This procedure is actually similar to McGuckian's, but her relationship with the English language is entangled and dubious, such as the poem "On Ballycastle Beach" shows, whereas Heaney, as seen in poems such as "Station Island" (*Station Island*, 1984) mourns and purges his guilt in the poetic act. McGuckinan reminds the readers of her loss and the idiosyncratic relationship between her language and familiar bonding – such as the quotation mentioned earlier expressed.

As for Heaney, in the article entitled "Belfast" the city is divided into three sections: the first describes The Group, the second describes Christmas, 1971 and the last, 1972, which is not quite about Belfast, but rather about the Irish lyric as a hybrid structure that encompasses:

craft and determination... chance and instinct... I think the process is a kind of somnambulist encounter between masculine will and intelligence and feminine clusters of image and emotion. I suppose the feminine element for me involves the matter of Ireland, and the masculine strain is drawn from the involvement with English literature. (*Preoccupations* 34)

Not only is this statement problematic due to its gender associations, but indeed enigmatic for the city of Belfast, a dark working class town. Defined by many of his poets, Belfast is dystopic and sectarian place, which might be ironic or attracted to a crescent speculative capitalism, in Heaney's view Belfast becomes poetry simply: craft and technique. Perhaps, interpreting beyond the apparent sexist approach the poet boldly assumes, the association may be revealing mainly because it reinstates that Belfast in poetry is actually composed of the prejudices and the stereotyped versions of Ireland by the British colonial system, and even by the eye that other cultures cast on Ireland. Following this train of thought, Heaney is not simply a prejudiced poet, but someone who tries to purge his own guilt in reproducing the very same stereotypes.

Investing his lyric with a high sense of sensibility, Heaney suggests his lyric may be interpreted as an "alternative spirituality". The critic Fran Brearton sees that as the essence of his creative process: it communicates "the sense of art as an alternative spirituality; in varying degrees, this 'traditional' or romantic assumption makes it a mode of subversion all the more telling in a context where sectarianism is rife" (109). This assertion made by Fran Brearton pertains not simply to Heaney but also Mahon and Longley. Nonetheless, this is much more related to Heaney since his Catholic spirituality is partially what binds him together with the Irish soil. For example, one of the most blatant examples is the poem-pilgrimage "Station Island" (*Station Island*, 1984) in which he describes his spiritual experience of fasting and praying for three days in the isle of Lough Dergh in the coast of Northern Ireland. The sense of guilt for leaving and being far from where the conflicts happen is much more present in a Catholic teleology because the images and the powerful icons do not cease to incite new associations and motifs. As I have exposed in the section in which I presented the poetry of Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, their poetry is aligned with a sense of ethics and poetry's universality. But with Heaney, the matter of Belfast reminds him of his guilt. Thus, continuously and consistently the poetic act is a confession in which the poet assumes his

faults and tries to go back to that stage: the moment when he lived in Belfast and faced daily the confrontations on the streets.²⁰

The collection poems “July” and “England’s Difficulty” (*Stations*, 1975) tend to produce a metonymic approach to the city of Belfast, through which the Orange drums seem to be the element that defined the dense status of the city. In a historical approach, the marching of William of Orange is exactly the past event that made a world of difference in Northern Ireland, since the Dutch King conquered the British Isles after James II’s defeat. Partially, the Orange drums also belong to the cultural hegemony of the Orange Order, to which the parades are perceived as a legacy of the cultural and political hegemony. Falling back on the rhythmical aspect of English – perhaps the masculine element, as the poet states – Heaney transmutes history into drums, drums into poetic sounds, and sounds into raw material for poetry’s rhythm. In the poem “July”, the closed vowels and the guttural sounds are what define the essence of the lyric. Through a prose-poem with five paragraphs the poet reproduces the sounds echoing from the land to drummers that “lead chosen people to their dream”. The sounds and land connected to people’s dream is once again the concept of utopia operating in the poetic level. Nonetheless, the poet does not seem to be part of this reproduction, he is merely an observer, who later becomes, in the following poem, a “double agent”, “among big concepts”.

The parallelism between the symbols of the Orange drums and the sense of being a spy culminates in the most problematic, but also striking affirmation in the poem “England’s Difficulty”:

I moved like a double agent among the big concepts.

The word ‘enemy’ had the toothed efficiency of a
mowing machine. It was a mechanical and distant
noise beyond that opaque security, that autonomous ignorance.

‘When the Germans bombed Belfast it was the bitterest Orange parts were hit
the worse.

I was on somebody’s shoulder, conveyed through the starlit yard to see
the sky glowing over Anahorish. (85)

²⁰ For a close reading of the poem Station Island see: Annuniação, Viviane Carvalho da. *Seamus Heaney: A Polifonia (da) Poética do Exílio*. MA Dissertation: FFLCH/USP, 2006.

Following the nationalist saying “England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity”, the poet, in the voice of a young boy, recalls his impressions of the day when Belfast was literally bombed by the Germans. Perhaps as an excuse to the poet go as far as to profess this assertion, but most likely, since it was the general commotion of his nationalist home, the poet makes an ironic contradiction between title and sentence. The effects of the war resulted only in difficulty, and no opportunity, for both England and Ireland.

Interestingly enough, this poem is written right after the onset of The Troubles, 1975, but it goes back to the poet’s childhood when the city was the target neither of native Unionists nor Nationalists, but of a more foreign enemy: the Nazis. On account of its being a ship building town, Belfast attracted heavy shelling by the Germans. Strangely, despite Belfast’s military importance, the British authorities did not believe it was going to be bombed. As Maguire explains:

The lack of serious planning, on the other hand, and the failure to take adequate precautions in the event of an air attack, were largely due to the government’s complacency in the early stages of the war. The fall of France and the Battle of Britain in 1940 led to some action, notably the ministry of Public Service which encouraged the building of air raid shelters and the recruitment of civil defense volunteers and firemen, but by that time, other priorities made material hard to find. When the Blitz came in April 1941 most of the people in Belfast had no physical protection. (209, 210)

Most likely, the poet is absorbing the general surprise of the event through infantile eyes in order to demonstrate the lack of caution and preparation the British government presented at that time: “Grown-ups lowered their voices and resettled in the /kitchen as if tired after an excursion”. Fundamentally, the poet’s intention is to insert a caustic comment as regards society in order to criticize not only the government, but also the people’s fault in believing nothing would happen. Indeed, the prose poem helps to convey this idea since it makes a parallel between the modernist flight of conscience and the poetic sensibility. The fact that the poet is a small “double agent” is symptomatic of his lack of place and uncertainty in the company of his family. His adult subjectivity, that recalls that moment, indeed identifies with the victims and wishes to mourn their loss, but his movement through “big concepts” leads to a never ending road of despair and scarcity.

This is a path which is also tread in the collection “Whatever you say, say nothing”, part of the volume *North*, 1972. In this section of the book, Heaney addresses the Troubles openly and expresses his desire of leaving Belfast. For instance in the poem “Exposure” he states:

I am neither internee nor informer;
an inner émigré grown long haired
and thoughtful; a wood kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows; (143)

From the lines, the reader perceives the poet feels guilty for leaving his land. The sentence “escaped from the massacre” exposes the typical view people had when he left. However, these poems are just a prelude to something that is much deeper and concrete in the book: the polyphonic poetics of an absolute exile. Thus, the multiple “comfortless noises”, which fills the island – as Heaney affirms in “Sybil” – is present in a form of poetry that does not only mourn the dead, but wishes to recollect them through symbolic poems. The image of a polyphonic exile that constitutes a Belfast through uneasy noises, sounds and music comes from an empirical advancement of the concept of “contrapuntal consciousness”, elaborated by Edward Said and which I presented against the poetry of Padraic Fiac in chapter I. In Heaney’s case this consciousness is pushed through an extreme since the poems that deal with the theme of the Troubles in the city of Belfast are seen through the lens of the foreign land and of the multiple lyric sojourns that absorb their styles and the mnemonic echoes of his own native place.

Although present throughout all poems in *Whatever You say, say Nothing* (1975), the poem in which this mechanism becomes clearer is “Summer 1969”. Such is the importance of this poem that the whole history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland is seen through the lens of the Spanish history. Considerably polemical due to its slight deviation from actual history in order to expose the human tendency towards violence and war, the book was, both heavily criticised and highly praised by the general reviews. While Christopher Ricks claimed that

North was a powerful source of civilization for “bending itself to deep excavations within the past of Ireland and of elsewhere [and] achiev[ing] a racked dignity in the face of horrors” (5), Ciaran Carson himself disapproved of the technique for “applying wrong notions of history” which transformed the poet into “the laureate of violence – a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for ‘the situation’, in the last resort, a mystifier”. (84). Even though Carson has a point, Heaney does use myth to capture the essence of the work of art, however, by tackling the situation of Northern Ireland indirectly – the artist used the Viking rites as a metaphor – he perpetrated the cliché that wars, violence, battles and rapes have always happened, and will always happen in the future.

However, both critics fail to mention that any poetical representation of history, whatever the pretence to verisimilitude, is by definition polyphonic and prone to myth. This is permitted, often – sought in any poetic work and perhaps unavoidable by definition. The value of one’s poetry stems from his or her connection to more universal histories and artistic experiments. From this point of view the first lines of the poem align two distant geographical places: Madrid and Belfast:

While the Constabulary covered the mob

Firing into the Falls, I was suffering

Only the bullying sun of Madrid. (140)

In addition to aligning his hometown with the town he happens to be in, Heaney is depicting his lyric voice as someone who “trying to come to terms with himself instead of churning it out” (86), and the manner to do that is through the reification of this place. In addition to that, there is an alliteration of plosives and sibilants that is broken when Heaney mentions “bullying sun”. This literary device is probably the manner through which the poet formally expresses his coming to terms with opposites: plosives versus sibilants. Also, the metonymic view of representing Belfast through the Falls road, centre of the Catholic and Nationalist community, is revealing an elimination of opposites – for Heaney Belfast is represented by its Catholic constituents – he has poetically omitted the Protestants – most likely because this is not his community. Although displaced and distanced, Heaney knows exactly where he belongs. In view of his guilt, the next lines show how he tries to materialize the place where his mind dwells:

Each afternoon, in the casserole heat

Of the flat, as I sweated my way through

The life of Joyce, stinks from the fishmarket
Rose like the reek off a flax-dam.
At night on the balcony, gules of wine,
A sense of children in their dark corners,
Old women in black shawls near open windows,
The air a canyon rivering in Spanish. (140)

This is reached through the presentation of the life of Joyce in the fish market. This is a detail that transports the reader to the universe of *Ulysses*, episode 12, entitled “Cyclops” in which the hero, Leopold Bloom faces a prejudiced Fenian, anti-semitic Citizen who almost injures him with a biscuit can. Thus, the road that leads Heaney back home is not actually the Spanish market – whose smell is quite different from Joyce’s reference – but the novelist’s representation of the extremist points of view that his fellow countrymen assume. The reference to Dublin’s Corporation Market interconnects sensorial perception with the city’s frenetic mood. The second detail of the stanza is what brings the reader definitely to Belfast. When Heaney states the life of Joyce “rose like a putrid smell from the market, like a flax-dam”, he is literally referring to the linen industries of Belfast. The flax-dam are the seeds that yield linseed oil, and slender stems from which a textile fiber is obtained. Through a series of associations, the poet intermingles cultural ideas and values up to a point at which Madrid, Dublin and Belfast become one. There is a gradation in the characterization of the place: the sense of children in dark corners, women in black shawl, starlit streets, until the poet reaches the Guardia civil, Civil that shine like poisoned fish. The ending returns to Joyce, and in this sense, to Dublin and Belfast, in other words, Ireland.

Relentlessly, in this first part, the author compares Northern Ireland and Spain: Nevertheless, in the last two stanzas, he summons up both entities in a single symbol: a canvas by Goya. The second stanza is where he inserts the evocation to Federico Garcia Lorca, apparently the first pure evocation to the Spanish universe. As Heaney states:

For my generation Lorca was the horizon always. The Spanish poets were to
Anglophone readers in the forties and fifties what the eastern Europeans would
become in the sixties and seventies – examples of writers under pressure... I
also remember being lifted by the glamour and drive of his essay on the

duende. I think that Lorca was implying there that poetry requires an inner flamenco, that it must be excited into life by something peremptory, some initial strum or throb that gets you started and drives you farther (*Stepping Stones* 182)

Although the inner flamenco of the Spanish poet stirred his mind and perceptions, Heaney chooses as his own medium to go “back” and “touching the people” the virtual reality of television. Firstly, he goes back to the real through news reports, and then through an immediate retreat in the Prado museum.

‘Go back,’ one said, ‘try to touch the people.’

Another conjured Lorca from his hill.

We sat through death counts and bullfight reports

On the television, celebrities

Arrived from where the real thing still happened (140)

The question still remaining is where is this place where “the real thing” is happening? The poet, through virtual glimpses of the city, constantly tries to come to terms with a sense of guilt. Even Carson acknowledges that the second part of *North* (where the poem is inserted) does justice to Heaney’s talent since it shows someone “trying to come to terms with himself instead of churning it out” (Carson, *The Honest Ulsterman* 86). The reference to bullfighting is also something of an animal instinct, but it causes awe and horror, feelings that terrify the placid poetic subjectivity. Heaney, when asked about his impressions on bullfighting, affirms, “there was something hypnotic about the clack-work, something vaguely satanic about that black crumpled horn killing-cap on the matador’s head – when it was over, you blinked and ask yourself ‘Where was I?’” (*Stepping Stones* 183) The sense of paralysis in view of the slow, rhythmical death of the bull is similar to the vision of the war killings in Northern Ireland. Both are effects that neutralise perceptions of time and space and make the subjective voice long for escape. The third stanza of the piece is solely dedicated to the canvas “The Third of May 1808” and “The Colossus”.

I retreated to the cool of the Prado.

Goya’s ‘Shootings of the Third of May’

Covered a wall - the thrown-up arms

And spasm of the rebel, the helmeted
And knapsacked military, the efficient
Rake of the fusillade. In the next room
His nightmares, grafted to the palace wall –
Dark cyclones, hosting, breaking: Saturn
Jewelled in the blood of his own children,
Gigantic Chaos turning his brute hips
Over the world. Also, that holmgang
Where two berserks club each other to death
For honour's sake, greaved in a bog, and sinking. (140, 141)

The description of both canvases is an engagement in reversal: at the same time that the poet wishes to engage in a political activity, exteriorising his fears and terror, internally, he wishes to annul himself completely by engaging with art. If on the one hand his pity and terror is present, on the other hand, art neutralises these feelings and reigns completely. Thus, his escape to art is also paradoxically a way to keep his connection with the world open. As Steven Matthews concludes about Heaney, "Poetry's 'way in happening emerges as a model of active consciousness'" (158). Because he is conscious of the importance of Goya to art and to art in times of war, Heaney, in the last stanza, gives a dramatic ending to the composition, reinstating the importance to Goya:

He painted with his fists and elbows, flourished
The stained cape of his heart as history charged.
(141)

Through the excerpt the reader perceives the weight Heaney gives to Goya, mainly for the reason that the poetic stance wishes to emphasise how he imprinted his personal dilemmas and tones in the Spanish war against France. By stating that the poet "painted with fists and elbows", Heaney conveys he was not just an ordinary painter, but also an artist who showed that making art is a struggle, such as war. Hence, he has not just simply represented the conflicts, but also critically conceptualised the sensation of producing art at the moment his country had been compared to a battlefield. Through this last part, the poet also builds

bonds of solidarity between Spain and Ireland because his experience becomes part of a greater whole whose effects and vibrations are seen and felt elsewhere. On the one hand, Heaney depicts his personal anguishes and antinomies, which are embodied in the structure of the poem – the poetic foot indecisively oscillates between ten, eleven and twelve and its stanzas follow the same pattern, having between two and fourteen verses. On the other hand, because those are symptoms of guilt, typical of someone who had left the battle field for the cool air conditioner of the Prado museum, his arguments are more emotionally bound than intellectual: they “call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions” (Yeats 157). Nonetheless, by being faithful to his emotions, he is true to the nature of the lyric.

Having established this parallel between the political situation and the personal engagement of the poet, the question that is still in the open is Heaney’s truthfulness to the city of Belfast. All in all, the true commitment to art, in the first place, and to politics, in the last stance, stems from the initial verses of the poem, in which he mentions Belfast by the evocation of the Falls road. In the continuation of the collection, the poem “Fosterage”, locates not only place, Royal Avenue, but also time, 1962. It also reenacts a past dialogue with either a fellow poet or with a less mature self, still on the road for exile. The dedication to Michael McLaverty is also essential because it produces an ambiguity as regards who the poet is meeting: is he talking to himself a few years earlier, or is he talking to the poet who was also a mentor? The answer is still open, but in reality, the core of the problem lies in the fact that the subjectivity of the poet is split. While wishing to remain in Belfast, he is actually away from Northern Ireland and recollects the period of relative tranquillity. In this poem, Heaney is taken by surprise, and having his elbow gripped by McLaverty, listens attentively to his pieces of advice, and the reader knows very little about the speaker of the poem, for he is a mere listener to whom these words are directed:

‘Listen, go your own way.

Do your work. Remember

Katherine Mansfield – *I will tell*

How the laundry basket squeaked... that note of exile.

But to hell with overstating it:

‘Don’t have the veins bulging in your Biro’.

And then, ‘Poor Hopkins!’ I have the *Journals*

He gave me, underlined, his buckled self
Obeisant to their pain. He discerned
The lineaments of patience everywhere
And fostered me and sent me out, with words
Imposing on my tongue like obols. (142)

Through twelve lines of a free rhythm that imitates a quasi prose, the suggestion made by the poet is divided into three parts which are concerned with artists whom Heaney should imitate: first Katherine Mansfield, then Gerard Manley Hopkins, The initial note of exile stems from Katherine Mansfield's psychologically introverted characters, such as Miss Brill, whose actions were very much centred in a distant utopia. Moreover, the quotation by Mansfield can be found in the posthumous published short story "The Decision". Gerard Manley Hopkins was one of the greatest Victorian poets, the inventor of the so called "sprung rhythm", and a mystic, for he was also converted to Catholicism. Just as Mansfield was exiled to England to study music, Hopkins left his native England to work in University College Dublin. While Mansfield profited from the change, since London at that time was an intellectual centre, Dublin was still a small provincial backwater for an original mind such as Hopkins'. In both cases, what is left for Heaney is to see them as paradigms for his depiction of the city of Belfast *in absentia*. Just as John Hewitt could not leave Belfast while being distant, the listener of the poem is advised not to forget it, but rather "go [his] own way, do [his] work". Nonetheless, the final atmosphere is of oppression, for the interlocutor imposed his words on the poet's language, like obols, the ancient coin left on the mouth of those who passed away, so that they would find their path in the realm of the dead. The "words imposing" also suggests McGuckian's hostility to English on her tongue.

Through the image of a semi-dead speaker – probably a reference to the short story "The Dead" by James Joyce – Heaney carries on with his journey and is, simultaneously, liberated and entrapped by his relationship with his hometown. It is also a synecdoche of his own relationship with McLaverty, which can also be summarised by the poet's explanation:

I was a young teacher and he took a genuine interest in me. He was a very fine artist and he had a very sure discrimination. Like everybody, he had his own bees in his bonnet and he had things he didn't like and things he did. But there was 'a passion and precision', as W. B. Yeats would have said about him. He

lent me Kavanagh's *A Soul for Sale*, where 'The great Hunger' appears (...) the transmission of energy in cliques, in friendship and in mockery is a very important element in a young writer's life (qtd. Anluain 87).

Since it is clear that Heaney had an affectionate relationship with McLaverty, why does he finish the poem with the reference to the obols? Perhaps it is because the imposition of a language and a literary tradition is also a reference to the intercultural and colonial status of Ireland. At the same time, it is a reference to the land's articulation of language and power through an acquired form. All in all, poetry is concerned with metre and specific rules that were developed throughout the centuries. Thus, the "go your own way/ Do your work", is a metaphor of the restrained liberty a poet has. In this sense, Belfast is a location for the self to depart from. It is a geographical and a metaphorical location from where the subjective voice constitutes not only itself, but also the place where he is from and where he finds himself in.

The same predicament of being lost is found in the "Ministry of Fear", another poem from the same collection, which plays with the alliterative similarity between the words Belfast and Berkeley. Throughout the poem, Heaney describes his early childhood and later adolescence in order to reach a political conclusion at the end of the piece. Artistically representing a series of dislocations that start when he leaves his parents' house to study in St. Columb's school, Heaney compares the fear that is generally in society to his poetical fear of altering the poetic tradition of Northern Ireland. The last verses of the poem, "Ulster was British, but with no rights on/ The English lyric: all around us, though/ We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear." The enjambment established in these the lines represent a creative attempt to fuse aesthetic and politics – the connection that Heaney's poetry wishes to achieve. Discussing the aesthetic bridge between poetry and politics in the poem, the critic Richard Kirkland states:

The poem pulls towards the practices of the traditional academic intelligentsia while insisting on difference even within the text's own exoticisation of its author as a subject coming from 'beyond the mountain'; the traditional home \ of the barbarian. With this, Ireland is recognised as divided along both east-west and north-south axes. The national territory is only signified by its internal stresses and the marginal spaces thereby created. (126)

The dislocation of the self is a metaphor for this lack of consensus in a territorial definition of frontiers. Indeed, the transition between borders is also established in the poem through the questioning of the division between poetry and politics. The poem is committed to art and to politics in such a way, that the fear of the title represents his fear of change and of what is yet to come, should the poet decide to reinforce his nationalist position – from the last lines, and the poems previously analysed it is clear the poet identifies with nationalistic ideals. Returning to McGuckian, the question of nationalism is yet another characteristic that binds her together with Heaney, but it is the theme that distances her from Belfast and transposes her subjective voice to a dysfunctional relationship between society and individuality.

McGuckian's poetry is closely connected to the Northern Irish experience, but she also presents a longing for an Irish mythology that was being challenged and refused by the poets from the south, such as Eavan Boland and Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill. The reason for that is, on the account of the Anglo Irish Treaty (1922), the poetic sensibility of the North of the island became utterly dissimilar from the one from the Republic. In McGuckian's words:

The Catholics were being attacked and burnt out; the police were coming round with their guns, shooting at the Catholics in the name of defending the Protestants against them, which was crazy because the Protestants were coming into the Catholics' districts... Then we did eventually get out of this district which was not safe and moved into a mixed middle-class area, where we lived for most of the Troubles. When the soldiers at first arrived we thought they were somehow there to save us, but very quickly we saw that our enemies were the soldiers, the police, and the local Protestants. We had these three groups all armed against us; we had no arms. You see, the poets from the South haven't had this experience of not being free to walk down the street or of having a gun pointed at you, which Heaney has and Paul Muldoon has. So I feel more connected to them as poets than any woman from the South who has never experienced that.(qtd. Früh9)

Although the poet presents a political sensibility towards the Troubles and the experience of growing up as a Catholic and in a divided district, her poetry is much more subtle, since she never mentions politics in such an open and clear way. Nonetheless, it seldom omits the “fear” Heaney mentions in “Ministry of Fear” or the split subjectivity in “Fosterage”. Having considered that, it is relevant that exile was not an option for her in the same way it was for Mahon, Muldoon and Heaney. As Clair Wills points out:

The woman’s link to a place is necessarily dependent on her sex, that because of her social position (as a mother with young children) the tradition of exile among male Irish writers is not available to the female writer. Exile is not the way for her to create new possibilities – hence her continual return to the same images, to her own body, as the place from which new things can grow. (171)

This mechanism happens because the female experience, in Ireland and in bourgeois society, is intimately linked to the private work of raising children and looking after their spouses. This transposition from the public to the private is not smoothly done in McGuckian’s poetry. It entraps the speaker of the poem in the recondite spaces of the house: the house is an extension of body for McGuckian.

Poems like “Singer” and “From Hollywood Bed” and “Spoil Map” that are in her first book of poems, *The Flower Masters and Other Poems* (1982) depict the internal rooms of the house as cages in which images of repression and frustrated desires spring up. In the “Singer”, the poet find herself “In the dark” where she “drew the curtains on young couples” and studies by herself, alone. In “Hollywood Bed”, the family gathering is a possibility for the poetic voice to feel “imperial as a favoured only child”. “The Soil-Map”, although being about marriage and the imminent change that is about to take place in her life, uses the words “porch”, “dark cage”, and “roof” repetitively, constructing in itself a trap-like form in which the poetic self discloses not simply a victimized female discourse, but a social one, which includes the wider society. The pictorial language and the excessive use of metaphors transforms her poetry into an object which bears little comparison to the other poets of her generation mainly because, while being true to the poetic imagery and artistic experimentation, she does not cease to represent the historical tensions of her place.

Whereas Longley, Carson and Muldoon dwell on the streets of Belfast and Mahon and Heaney in an exiled space between self and location, McGuckian does that in a different way. Her connection to Belfast is more localized: internalized, it escapes to the self and home

rather the outward escape to utopia, or Madrid, or a painting, or even abstraction. Thus, this difference is also a political stance, as in the example of the poem “The Soil-Map”, the cage-like metaphors are also related to a specific detail of the politics of Northern Ireland: the Hunger strikes, the almost hero martyrs who embarked on a long period deprived of food in order to be regarded as political prisoners. In relation to Bobby Sands, McGuckian affirms his crime was “to be in possession of a gun which didn’t work” (qtd. Früh 6), and such was his political and emotional importance that she decided to use his quote as a metaphor for her poems throughout the book *Ballycastle Beach*:

Bobby Sands’s code name was the lark-wing. So there's always that connection with birds and the prisoners, these people who are fighting for the freedom. They will fly when they obtain it. When they get to learn to sing they will transcend and go to the sky, get above the country. It’s this sort of bird’s solution. (qtd. Früh 13)

As a ramification of her lack of place in the land, McGuckian engages in a quest for the Irish culture – and Irish legends that were not so common Northern Ireland. McGuckian relates that:

When I was eight or nine and at school, they took us to the film *Mise Eire*, which had an amazing effect on me. It was a black and white film about the Rising, with beautiful Irish music. I didn’t understand what it was; they didn’t explain it to us, but this was something that I could identify with. This was my country, although I had no idea what it meant or what it was about. I loved the music; I just felt the music. It was incredibly sad, but I connected to this totally, and I will not forget it. And I don't know if Nuala or Eavan would have needed that. (qtd. Früh 7)

In the light of the poet’s assertion it is quite clear she is always at odds with modern Northern Irish society. Her estrangement with English language, discussed previously prevented her from discovering this culture she is fascinated with. Her issues with the English language stem not only from an expressive mode – in this case the verse – but also from a temporal break with the history. In the poem “Elegy for an Irish Speaker”, the poet rehearses

a mythical awakening of an Irish speaker who transmits, directly, his knowledge to her. It is mythical and symbolic since she directs her attention to Death, and, as a reincarnation of a mystical John Donne, McGuckian renders her homage to this creature. The poetic foot is enlarged throughout the piece, and so are the stanzas that reach its peak in the final hypothesis.

This symbolic awakening is her attempt to configure, metaphorically, the resurrection of the Irish lineage in Belfast. It is as if she was excavating the layers of history in order to give birth – again – to the Irish culture that had been buried by the Troubles. This is the reason she starts the poem with the image of the deep roots – she wants to stress that even in the bustle of the city, there are deep roots that are relative to the understanding of the present.

With its deep roots,
I have yesterday
I have minutes when
You burn up the past
with your raspberry-coloured farewell
that shears the air. Bypassing
everything, even your frozen body (80)

The metaphorical awakening of this body reveals, through the discovery of a symbolic Irish language access to concrete notions of past. McGuckian views the body as a vessel, which she creates, like the home, for storing memories and myth. Whereas the English language enables the readers to have a general grasp of a brief yesterday. This cultural search is her way to construct a Belfast that would connect with the Irish collective unconsciousness. At the moment the speaker awakes, the poet asserts:

He breaks away from your womb
To talk to me,
He speaks so with my consciousness
And not with wonder, he's in danger
of becoming a poetess. (80)

Again, the generative imagery of birth “your womb”, which Clair Willis alluded to above, to which McGuckian escapes, represents the notion of a collective unconsciousness

that this body would represent is ironically challenged. The telepathic communication between creature and poet cast them into the same material. Thus, the next stanza oscillates between a self referential language and a desire to transcend this language. The transcendence would then enable the poet to reach the very substance of language, the stuff that connects Irish people beyond the English and the Irish language, a metaphorical zero mark between self and collectivity – since she is writing in English. From this point it would be possible to build a hybrid language that would give access to a real past, and not simply a yesterday. In the light of the line “I have yesterday”, this “yesterday” could be as well a metaphor for the independence process and the past and a chance to overcome history. The symbiosis is also the accessibility to “poetic simile lost somewhere”, a device that completes the poetic language and gives a sense of closure to the piece.

As this thesis has been arguing for the past two chapters, the fractured lyric and the sense of incompleteness are symptomatic of Belfast poetry – and also of Modernism, one would argue. However with McGuckian, Belfast is a presence in the corners of the house and of the poetic images, rather than in the alleys of its city centre. The final advance of the poem, “bypassing/ everything, even your frozen body,/ with your full death, the no-road-block/ of your speaking flesh” envisions a sense of possibility: while the streets are littered with road blocks and policemen, the access to the past language reveals a sense of possibility, opposed to society and its determinations. McGuckian reaches a sense of fulfillment with the discovery of Irish ancient myths that no other poet is able to reach, and the reason is that she transcends the immediate representation of the streets and, like a criminal, transgresses a subjective “road block”. The poet Nuala Archer explains:

Although Belfast and the Troubles are never explicitly named, Medbh’s lyrics are Bel-wrought, fast-turnings, very much in touch with her times and its tortured history... If, as a poet Medbh resists the absorption of her lyric by history and the often polemical use of language by politics, her images, nonetheless, are saturated with the sort of existential giddiness that is symptomatic of places where terror and violation have become ordinary. (*Two Women Two Shores* 7)

McGuckian’s poetry is a longing for a deeper meaning, as if poetic language, through its evocative images, reveals more than a tasteless wine, but the women’s experience in the

space of Northern Ireland. In this sense, she goes deeper than Heaney himself, for while the Nobel Prize winner still uses street names and actual references, McGuckian uses metaphors and images to represent her exile and dislocation within this society. By being faithful to the lyric essence, McGuckian is political because she refers to the deep roots, to what is buried in the recondite of the self and the body, and its effects in the present situation.

* * *

The second chapter of the exploration of the theme of Belfast through poetry demonstrates that there is a common characteristic that unifies the poets who composed the Writers' Group during the early Troubles period: the representation of the city of Belfast. Advancing the themes proposed by Louis McNeice, John Hewitt and Padraic Fiacc, we can see that the poets composing the Writers' Group—Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian and Seamus Heaney—create their own city of Belfast. While the first pair of poets still dwell on a mythical and universalist imagery, the second pair turned to the Irish mythology and the intricate structure of the verse and the third produced a city in absentia, in the recondite of the private experience and in the distance of the land.

While the first chapter used the architect Charles Lanyon as a sort of metaphorical structure to explore the dialectical images of the poets, the second chapter is inspired by Sir Charles Brumwell, the entrepreneur who changed the landscape of the city through his building projects. Instead of the Gothic red brick façades, Brumwell opted for the sophistication and refinement of the New Baroque Style. In an analogous manner, the poets selected choose a sophisticated tonality for their poems: an intertextuality with Greco-Roman themes, a poetic anthropology of Irish myths, the displacement of the city from interpersonal and private relations, and exile are theme through which this rather diverse Group displays high achievement in terms of craft and technique. This poetic excavation of the potentiality of the verse produced a generation of writers committed to the task of reviving poetry in its most basic essence: meter, rhyme and foot. As a result of that, contrary to the appealing tendency to reduce art to identitarian, feminist or economic discourses, these poets gave a artistic treatment to poetry, giving it back to the realm of art.

From the point of view of form, the Writer's Group's strength lies in being committed to art in a historical moment when writers and artists were pressured to give a political

response to the province's conflict. Instead of deconstructing the fallacies behind city and community discourses, the poets were engaged with their place of origin through the reconstruction of Belfast's cityscape in their verse. Even if this portrayal meant a single reference to a sparse word, or the evocation of a building or the summoning of a street, their reference to the city was constant and coherent. Their example created not simply a tradition of writing, but encouraged the practice of poetry reading. It is valid to stress that in the North of Ireland not only creative writing workshops are popular, but also poetry readings and events that invite poets and poetry lecturers to talk about art and culture.

POST-TROUBLES MEMORIES

I. EXPOSÉ – THE ALBERT CLOCK, OR “HISTORY’S DENT AND FRACTURE SPLITTING THE ATMOSPHERE”

*Do not sing your city, leave it alone./ The song is not the movement of the machines or the
secret/ of the houses./ It is not music heard in passing; nor the sound of the sea/ in the streets
near the edge of spume./ The song is not nature/ Or men in society./ For it, rain and night,
fatigue and hope mean nothing./ Poetry (do not make poetry out of things)/ Eliminates
subject and object.*

*(“Search for Poetry” by Carlos Drummond de Andrade –
Translated by Elizabeth Bishop)*

Throughout the Troubles, the ideal of a major historical transformation was impregnated with political discourses. Different interpretations and versions of events that surrounded the Peace Process, which led to the “Good Friday Agreement” (1998), were portrayed and understood according to personal allegiances and individual experiences. Despite this, the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties brought a major change in political paradigms for all parties concerned. Not only did this change affect societies that were trying to establish a solid political and economic system, such as Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but also liberal societies with a high level of economic development and democratic participation, such as France and Germany. As Michael Dartnell argued, the nineties:

has... been a very dynamic period of transformation in Western Europe in which several major events have directly impacted nation-states: (i) accelerated EU integration; (ii) the end of the Cold War and disintegration of former Warsaw Pact regimes; and, (iii) global economic crises such as that which started in Asia in August 1998. Altogether, such influences suggest that traditional notions of political organization based in the state are weakening

because states are less and less able to manage coherent responses to them and increasingly seek solutions in multilateral and international fora. (73, 74)

In Northern Ireland the situation was slightly aggravated by a continuous process of regionalization (its insertion in the European Community) and the beginning of the Peace Process. Dartnell also states that “the above developments raise questions as to the meaning of nation on the island, and recast local issues in a light similar to that of other European democracies” (74). In this sense, it is clear that the Northern Irish situation did not correspond simply to a localized regional conflict, but to a broader social spectrum. In the nineties, after the exhaustion of the IRA campaign and the final decision of a shared government between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland was given a semi-autonomous regime that painstakingly acquired freedom. On this account the cultural critic Fintan O’Toole observes: “the British and Irish governments have been forced “to act more like poets and novelists than like politicians: massaging fixed meanings so that they become supple and fluid; complicating the definitions of words so that they become open and ambiguous” (56). In the previous decades, as I have demonstrated with the previous chapter, Belfast – and the Northern Irish society it entangles – became a subject for artistic exploration: not only literal, with Ciaran Carson, Michael Longley and Paul Muldoon’s wanderings, but also more symbolically, in the cases of Derek Mahon, Seamus Heaney and Medbh McGuckian. However, a new, post-Peace Process generation of poets approached art, and Belfast, somewhat differently. While Northern Irish’s peace process politicians embraced a project that is similar to what Walter Benjamin called the “aesthetization of politics”, poets like Sinead Morrissey and Leontia Flynn who have become known during and after the peace process have pursued – and continue to pursue, its converse: the task of politicizing art. Interestingly, Benjamin also foresaw this. Nonetheless, these terms should not be taken literally, but filtered through a radical revision of Walter Benjamin’s concept of sensory perception, or what he identifies as the experience of the shock, which was developed in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Web 24 May, 2011).

Nevertheless, in order to understand how the politicization of art functions in poetry after the Troubles, I am going to take on board language which Michael Longley may have unreservedly employed, but which presents a high degree of credibility. A propos of the aesthetic which functions within the poetry of Northern Ireland, he bridges sectarianism by identifying an “embattled aesthetics” which unify the poets, even though they are not exactly unified through a sense of common beliefs. In his words:

Belfast has been called ‘the armpit of Europe,’ ‘a cultural Siberia’: not somewhere you would expect to produce a flurry of poetry. Perhaps ‘we’ registers the relief of embattled aesthetes who have come through. ‘We’ also implies that imagination and creativity dissolve what is called here ‘the sectarian divide.’ ‘We’ embraces Catholic and Protestant. ‘We’ acknowledges friendly rivalry. But not for one moment did we think in terms of school or coterie. There were no manifestoes. We never hunted in a pack. ‘We’ in my book now includes the astonishing next generation of Muldoon, Carson, McGuckian, Ormsby and brilliant younger poets such as Sinéad Morrissey and Leontia Flynn. (*Interview Colby Quartely* 299)

Actually, I would argue somewhat against Longley that, this group of “embattled aesthetes”, even if they do not share something as explicit as a manifesto, do in fact share an “embattled aesthetic” which goes beyond mere shared survival. Even without having “hunted in a pack”, as the poet wittily states, the poets have hunted and (to carry on with the metaphor by Longley) their artistic prey has been the naturalization of violence through which Belfast becomes so notoriously known. I wish to borrow the term “embattled aesthetics” to define the kind of poetry that acts as an urban antidote against the naturalization of violence. In other words, the representation of Belfast after the Troubles is a re-structuring of the senses in order to de-naturalize the traumatic experience of violence. As I argued in chapter I and II, Walter Benjamin suggested defended that the activity of the *flâneur* was a self-trained capacity to distance him or herself in order to represent the phantasmagoria of reality. More than distancing, he or she slows his pace and observes the crowds intoxicated by the feast of senses of modernity (Arcades 366). Nevertheless, in a situation of violence, in which the crowds are motivated by ideological impulses, the task of this new *flâneur* is to destabilize time, space and senses through a mnemonic and artistic revalidation of poetic themes and structures. In this sense, the “nothing to declare” that I chose to entitle the last section of this chapter, more than being a denial of the artistic assertion, is an affirmation of the lack of alternatives for lyric poetry. The choice left for the poet then, is to revisit, reinvent and recast new interpretations of the past in order to illuminate the present.

A new generation of poets became known in Northern Ireland, through the weekly meetings conducted by the Writer's Group at Queen's University. This dynamic dialogue inspired and encouraged new poets to develop their own style. The older generation of more mature poets did not cease to recreate and reinvent their style and the city of Belfast. The writers mentioned in Chapter II are still very much active and engaged culturally with their place of origin, and it would be reductionist not to examine their new creative impulses in the light of the old ones. Since the poetic work in contemporary Belfast is characterized by this radical revision of senses and representations, through a parallelism between Troubles and Post-Troubles, I wish to understand how poets, both old and new, represented this transition moment of change – from war to peace – in the city of Belfast. If on the one hand, the eighties and nineties were still troubled periods of governmental agreements, the first decade of the 21st century was preoccupied with a cultural uprising of Irish history.

This was result in part of economic development. While the Republic was, simultaneously elevated and dismantled by the financial boom, the economic situation in Northern Ireland was not so disastrous. Its economic development is seen in the growth of upper middle class neighborhoods – such as Malone and Stranmillis – and modern enterprises such as the “Odyssey Arena”, a cultural complex designed for spectacular concerts, “The Belfast Wheel” (Belfast's own version of “The London Eye”) and the surge of new touristic offerings – such as touristic tours to the Crumlin Road Gaol and the Titanic Quarter, amongst others. An architectural emblem of this new era – if such an emblem were to exist—would have to also bear traces and conflicts which somewhat belonged to a not so remote past. I would suggest that Albert Clock stands as a paradoxical visual allegory for the present that wishes to recapture and re-sense the past, and to even come to terms with this past that was made complex due to the civil war. In Fred Heatly's words:

The Albert Clock, or more correctly The Albert Memorial, is Belfast's equivalent to Italy's famed Leaning Tower of Pisa... the memorial is out of plumb, noted as back as 1901, caused by the fact that it was erected on a site reclaimed from the tide the dying out of the sub-soil is leading to foundation instability. (52)

The Albert Clock was raised in 1861 in homage to the Prince Consort, who accompanied Queen Victoria in one of her visits to Belfast. However, on account of a dubious competition it was not Prince Albert, but rather the architect that would be chosen to

design the memorial who caused great furor: while the young Newry engineer Willaim J. Barre was victorious, the project was secretly given to Lanyon, Lynn & Lanyon, who was already a MP and a figure of great importance. However, the plot was soon revealed and the contract given back to Barre. Heatley highlights that a similar scheme happened with Scrabo Towers at Newtownland. Completed in 1869, its German Gothic style turns the Albert Clock into a flamboyant and mysterious work of art, which at the beginning of the First World War became the meeting point for many prostitutes who would render their services to the sailors from nearby Belfast harbour. Nonetheless, now that Belfast has been going through a process of economic renewal, the region is revitalized by the cutting edge Waterfront Concert Hall and the area surrounding the clock has been turned into an attractive modern square with trees, fountains and sculptures.

The transfiguration of time that I wish to argue the Albert Memorial entails is metaphorically represented through the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey. Highly praised as one of the most talented writers of her generation, Morrissey was awarded the Patrick Kavanagh award in 1990, short listed for the T.S. Elliot award 3 times, and received the Irish Times Poetry Now award for best poetry collection of the year in 2010 for her masterpiece *Through the Square Window*. Even though some critics, like Pat Boran, suggest that she belongs to a Europeanized generation of poets for whom “the old sense of Ireland is gone” (qtd. Howard 666) her poetry works via a thorough revisitation of some of the motifs and themes developed by the previous generation of Northern Irish poets. It is clear that her work bears little resemblance to that developed by poets in the Republic, since it does not review or mention the old Ireland. However, it is utterly inadequate to place her artistic endeavors completely outside the island.

Morrissey’s first collection, *There was a Fire in Vancouver* (1990), represents a basic Modernist attempt to capture a vanishing moment of beauty in a city haunted by history and political strife. In her initial stage, she assumes the mask of the Modernist poet, who sought to find beauty and truth “not only in [life’s] direct statements, but in its peculiar difficulties, short cuts, silences, hiatuses and fusions”. (Hamburger 41). Engulfed in a colloquial simplicity, Morrissey is basically a Belfast writer, a mixture of Carson’s *Flâneur* and McGuckian’s intimacy, a juvenile voice coming to grips with her sense of artistic self and the political changes around her. In this process, there is a contrast between the Sinead Morrissey of 1990 and the one who writes *Through the Square Window* (2009), whose style is grounded more on a delicate gaze on the ordinary and transitory experiences of life, one which “rediscover[s] the world in all its plenitude... reveal[ing] the surprise and visual dislocation

that a simple kaleidoscope can provide; ... [and] the suddenly-unfamiliar sights of a world that has ‘spangled / itself in ice.’ (Editor’s notes 6). While discovery and identity characterize Morrissey’s early phase, evanescence and ambivalence predominate in her late style.

Of the forty-two poems of *There was a Fire in Vacouver*, at least ten have references to Belfast. Nevertheless, after almost twenty years after its release, the book has become at least partially dated, since its urban atmosphere reflects the worldview at the end of the eighties, precisely the time I have been referring to. Nonetheless, with the minimalism of an Imagist tonality and the colloquialism of pop songs, Morrissey’s Belfast is still represented as city characterized by a series of uncertainties and fears. For citizens for whom crossing the town still represented a huge challenge, as she argues in the last verses of the poem “Double Vision”²¹, the poet’s Belfast is similar to Ciaran Carson’s: it has labyrinths and cul-de-sacs. But, in contrast to Carson, there is always a way out, even if it’s an ironic or poetic one: “And every street lamp a chorus in neon: You’re back – / Glimmering with victory” (9). Such is the weight given to the city, that the first three poems of the book depict not only the city of Belfast, but also the beginning of the collapse of utopic ideals. The three initial poems, “Double Vision”, “Among Communists” and “CND” place the reader in time and space: while the first poem describes the danger of driving on the roads of Northern Ireland, the second lays out in the open the *bourgeois* individuality of communist meetings, and the third describes the epiphany of a youngster discovering that the world is much bigger than her own individual dreams and convictions. More than being political, Morrissey is faithful to the individual tradition of the lyric, portraying, thus, the historic and subjective predicament of the eighties.

When Morrissey’s *There Was a Fire in Vancouver* was published, Ciaran Carson had launched *Belfast Confetti* (1990) and *First Language* (1993), volumes that solidified the poet’s image as the poet of the city of Belfast, and Seamus Heaney’s *The Spirit Level* (1991), whose formalist retreat and high artistic sensibility awarded him the Nobel Prize for Literature. Furthermore, it was also the period when Michael Longley published *The Ghost Orchid* (1995), the book that contains “Ceasefire”, a symbolic poem that demarcates the exhaustion of the Troubles and the general longing for peace. Within this literary context, Sinéad Morrissey’s poetry is not only important because it gives a continuation to the themes

²¹ Friday. Eight o’clock. Pissing rain./ Belfast a shallow bowl of light./ The Black hill a power failure./ Touching the sky./ I’ve seen it all. But the places in your head/ Stay shut to me, and I’m grasping at why./ You’ve travelled up as I have,/ Shifted home for the odd weekend,/ Same road, same car, same weather/ With me none the wiser./ None of what I saw was in there./ You saw somewhere go into, somewhere gone./ Elsewhere you wish./ The REDUCE SPEED NOW sign/ A red flag now in your face/ And every street lamp in a chorus in neon: *You’re back –/Glimmering with victory.* (9)

and motifs developed by older poets, but due to the fact that it includes its personal voice in this turmoil: feminine but virile, bright but not pedantic, political but not propagandist. Whereas Carson annihilates the lyric subject of the poem, and Heaney and Longley opt for the proclamation of an engaged art, whose end is to symbolically support the peace process, Morrissey presents a contemporary outlook: skeptical, and, most importantly, radically city-centred, since its background is the glimmering lights of Belfast. And this is highlighted by the initial tone of her first volume, as I mentioned previously. Having set her poems in road blocks, communist meetings and protest parades conveys a rebel, but at the same time infantile tone, since she wants to demonstrate how this atmosphere of change and insurgence was absorbed by the poetic sensibility.

In this sense, Morrissey's poetry embodies a singular style of interpreting place, and specifically, the urban. Her poetry relies on irony as an antidote against politically loaded ideologies. In this sense, it is resistant because it exposes the false consciousness that permeates the political discourses. Nonetheless, at the same time that Morrissey's work is highly critical, it is also idealistic – as if her experimentations with the nature of the image were so intense that each poem becomes a self-contained unit. In this sense, it approaches W. B. Yeats' idea of intellectual symbol: "symbols that evoke ideas alone, or ideas mingled with emotions; and outside the very definite traditions of mysticism and the less definite criticism of certain modern poets, these alone are called symbols" (Web 10 June, 2011). Mingled with a straight-forward lyric, the poet starts to polish the style which would characterize her future books. This style I denominate symbolical, since it is self-referential and unified through a singular rhythm and metric structure, and carries in itself a singular idea – be it about a life experience or a single object. Nonetheless, it is seldom about emotions or abstract units, nor utopian projects, but rather about objects and materially constructed concepts. Even being her first book, *There Was a Fire in Vancouver* is important because it exposes a form of art that would represent this place in which neither public nor writer is centered in a singular tradition.

Sinéad Morrissey's early poetry is highly important because it shifts, not always smoothly, from one form of lyric to another. Sometimes she tends towards a symbolic lyric, such as "The Juggler" and "Monteverdi Vespers", but at other times she is more political and challenging, such as "English Language" and "Thoughts in a Black Taxi". Even the form and size of the poems tends to vary, showing how she is trying to find her feet (as she literally states in the poem "Finding my feet") in a form and style that would be relevant for her beliefs as an author. –Mostly likely, it is the artist realizing she lives in

a fractured rather than an integral tradition”, an artist that represents a new group of writers who “do not know which voice is to be trusted. Most speak English, but they have a sense, just barely acknowledged, that the true voice of feeling speaks in Irish, not a dead language like Latin but a banished language, a voice in exile. English, Irish: protestant, catholic: Anglo-Irish, Gael: in Ireland today [writers] not know what do with this fractures” (qtd, Donoghue 130).

Although it may seem a little extreme proclaiming that Irish writers do not know what to do with those fractures, I wish to infer that writers like Morrissey know exactly what to do with them. It is to transform those questions into a fresh and renewed poetry, one which does not seek a political agenda, or an individualistic emotional appeal, but one that poetically constructs a reality that peers into objects and elements of the past and present, suggesting the fugacity of life and long lasting beliefs. The poems that most represent this sense of fracture are the sequence “Europa Hotel”, “Belfast Storm”, “English Lesson” and “Thoughts in a Black Taxi”. On the account of the material placing of the scenes in specific features of Belfast, the author concentrates her gaze in a singular object, and then dissipates her glance with the vanishing of the image she constructs.

The very short poem “Europa Hotel” consists of five long and unrhymed lines that briefly describe the sensation of waking up at the Europa Hotel – the most bombed hotel in Europe. The last two verses conclude with a sense of shock and paralysis. They imply the person who wakes up in such a circumstance has his or her eyes temporarily affected by the experience:

It’s a hard truth to have to take in the face –
You wake up one morning with your windows
Round your ankles and your forehead billowing smoke;
Your view impaired for another fortnight
Of the green hills they shatter you for. (16)

From the last two verses the reader comprehends terrorism and human suffering work in a war situation and, in a few lines, similar to prose, depicts how a political ideal turns into violence and how this violence affects both land and society. The concentration of the

whole scene in the room is dispersed in the look, even impaired for another fifteen days is directed to the green hills outside. Its continuation, “Belfast Storm”, relies on the obscure image of angels, who throw heads over the population from Heaven. Although this is just a metaphor to refer to the heavy rains that usually afflict the city throughout the year. Furthermore, the evocation of angels and the Europa Hotel has already been summoned by Derek Mahon in “Spring in Belfast”, and Paul Muldoon “Whim”. Thus, her revisiting of those themes represents the continuation of the imagery developed by the previous generation, but with a singular tone. Morrissey’s voice is unique due to the short stanzas and the fluid colloquial cadence of the sentences. In addition to this fluidity of tone, the final couplets are also one of the strengths of her literary personality, since they cast whole poems in another light. It is as if something hidden throughout the poem had been suddenly revealed. Similar to that of a metaphysical wit, Morrissey’s wit is contemporary and urbane – sharp and feminine without clichés. In the poem “English Lessons”, the poet plays the symbolic role of a terrorist attack. In order to teach her German students about Northern Ireland, she uses ironic images and devices.

Today I taught the Germans about Northern Ireland.

High on their interest, I paraded as the gunman

On the Falls Road. Death holds the attention –

BANG! Blew them off their seats and got away scot free

‘A Fiddler in a death camp’ –

Beyond the lot of it.

The only honesty is silence. (18)

This brief poem, composed of short stanzas, conveys the idea that in order to give an accurate account of the historical situation in Northern Ireland, the most adequate testimony would be silence, since any attempt to recover history would end up in a biased account. The humor the poet applies in order to tell the tale to her students, altogether with the colloquial expressions such as “got away”, “scot free” and the word “bang” in capital letters – resembling a cartoonish version of a gunman – recapture the black and white position most of the parts in the conflict assume. . The only political resonance of the poem is the word “scot”,

which applied to the poem, is used harmless, meaning free, but in the context of Northern Ireland, it is quite different, since the word also echoes the historical context of Northern Ireland, when the Scottish people settled in the land. However, without assuming explicit political ideologies, the poem is faithful to the historical happenings of the late eighties. In regard to the failed agreements and nebulous international politics that both republicans and unionists were assuming, the historian Richard English states that:

Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams remained loyal to aggressive republican orthodoxy, but hinted that change might still be possible. There was no doubting his public commitment to the legitimacy of force: ‘where you have an occupation force, Sinn Féin believes, whether it be here or South Africa, the people that have the right to engage in armed resistance. (269)

Perhaps the simplistic portrayals of Adam’s political engagement, or even the British decision to maintain military forces in Northern Ireland, even though arguing “the British government [had] no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland” (qtd. Bew 542), led the poet to the ironical response to the political discourses that were present and available in society. The humor, then, is used as an anti-political answer to this situation: the lack of beliefs and ideals that something different would finally arise from this situation would be probably the answer of the many citizens who remain waiting for a solution. What is relevant, though, is the fact that Morrissey does that without annihilating her subjective voice, as Carson does, or embodying a cryptographic writing like McGuckian, but by being herself and questioning the dichotomy between politics and social living. The abrupt jump from the classroom situation to the fiddler in the death camp suggests also a comparison between Ireland and Germany or how poetical language – is able to recapture historical traumas. In the poem, while the gunman is in the Falls road, the fiddler is in the death-camp and the poet, disguised as an English teacher in Germany, tries to fill in the gaps left by art – and by an engaged form of art whose answers are not enough to embrace the whole of the experience. It is as if she, by shocking the students with the Northern Irish situation, would annihilate her subjective voice in order to portray the most grievous part of German history, the Holocaust. Thus, the conclusion of the poem leads to the silencing of both parts and the recognition that while art may raise an awareness in terms of politics, but it is never going to be able to respond or to give a straight-forward solution. In this sense, she is already voicing the questioning that Seamus Heaney would further embrace in his Nobel Prize discourse:

As writers and readers, as sinners and citizens, our realism and our aesthetic sense make us wary of crediting the positive note. The very gunfire braces us and the atrocious confers a worth upon the effort which it calls forth to confront it... And when this intellectual predisposition co-exists with the actualities of Ulster and Israel and Bosnia and Rwanda and a host of other wounded spots on the face of the earth, the inclination is not only not to credit human nature with much constructive potential but not to credit anything too positive in the work of art. (419)

With this remark, Heaney heeds the dangers of artists either being blissfully positive or cynically negative about art. While there continues to be a huge debate about the worth of art, what needs to be carefully examined in Morrissey's poetry is how she innovates: it is how her Belfast comes to life. The conclusion of the sequel, "Thoughts in a Black Taxi", then, is the most perfect example, since it recaptures the ideal of the *flâneur*, but now in a closed space: the automobile. Moreover, combined with the myths of speed and technological advancement that the car represents, it is also a typical vehicle of Belfast, used by many working class people – especially during the Troubles – in order to avoid the degraded public transportation and also because they could not afford having cars. As the poem's context, Morrissey herself affirms:

Society in Northern Ireland... is rigidly divided between the Nationalist and Loyalist communities. Coming from a Communist household, militantly atheist, was just one factor that contributed to a sense of dislocation, of belonging to neither community. (Web 14 June, 2011)

As a symbolic response to her sense of alienation in Belfast, Morrissey writes a long poem "Thoughts in a Black Taxi", with three parts, which symbolically reflect her childhood, as she stated:

Both my brother and I were given Irish names, attended protestant schools, lived in Catholic areas, knew neither the Hail Mary nor the words of 'The Sash', were terrified by agonised Catholic statues and felt totally excluded

from the 12th July celebrations.” Her poem ‘Thoughts in a Black Taxi’ recalls ‘the threat that we often felt from both communities because of assumed allegiance to the enemy. To be nothing – neither Catholic nor Protestant – was too removed from the dominant frame of reference to be believed. (Web 14 June, 2011)

The first part of “Thoughts in a Black Taxi”, with three stanzas of four lines each, describes her watching the preparations for 12th. of July bonfire and expressing a spontaneous desire to ask those people where they got the material to build such a huge construction, since the July bonfires tend to be the size of a two or three story building. The second, a little shorter, with two stanzas of four verses, depicts her father scolding her, saying that since they live in a UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force, a loyalist paramilitary group in Northern Ireland) controlled region, she must be careful when she says something out loud. The four lines of the last stanza is a reflection about the past via a description of a journey: it reveals that this journey was her usual route to the Royal Victoria hospital in order to visit an orthodontist. She then adds that her uniform was an indication that she attended a Protestant school – a detail that made her frightened of the frequent Molotov cocktails of the Catholic community. Thus, in three movements, not only does the poet translate her identity, but also reveals a plural subjectivity, in relation to her personal recognition and, more importantly, in relation to the city of Belfast. Thus, city and poet become one – divided, fragmented, violent (as shown in the poem “English Lesson”) – and also, skeptical of ideologies, be they democratic, Republican, Unionist or even communist. Throughout the piece, the speaker of the poem has an epiphany and realizes the dangers of belonging to a segregated society.

While the poet is in the black taxi, she is experiencing the organic artificialities of Belfast. Carefully cultivated in its urban landscape, such as the bonfires in July, the segregated districts and the peace lines, these characteristics of the city makes the poet realize the artificiality of republican and unionist utopias. In addition to that, Morrissey identifies her sense of a fragmented self with the possibility of the “bottle”, or the bombs in West Belfast. The conclusion of the piece hints to a sense of self discovery and self destruction as well:

I always walked with my heart constricting,
Half expecting bottles, in sudden shards
Of West Belfast Sunshine

To dance about my head. (20)

The poems, when read in sequence, resemble a metaphorical construction and deconstruction of the city. In a metonymical (part for the whole) portrayal of some of the motifs and ideas that were developed by previous poets, Morrissey constructs and deconstructs her literary self. The set of images displayed in the selection of poems reveals the writer's artistic self as somebody who is, ultimately, scared in front of the actual discovery of the drawbacks of society. The contemplation and revelation produces a rather blank irony: a sense of alienation, a laugh that is neither comical nor ironical, but rather melancholic: the *pathos* of this observation is tragic and concludes in a gradual silencing of the lyric voice. The usage of the word "constricting" with the verb "walking" creates a sense of impossibility: the actual *flanerie* of the modern poet is impossible in this context since the danger of death is imminent. Thus, the melancholic angel that Walter Benjamin alludes to in Paul Klee's painting is a shadow cast in Morrissey's literary voice: the gothic angels throwing heads on the streets, combined with the enormous bonfires, road-blocks and black taxis create a depressive state of post-war and post-utopias. The poem is neither the place to embrace a temporary release from this society, nor an antidote against the pains and sufferings it causes, but an allegory of this empty state.

From the point of view of time, Morrissey's poetry is a perpetual crystallization of the images of Belfast reproduced by previous poets. Nevertheless, the brilliance with which Morrissey executes this crystallization stems from her singular metaphors and her colloquial rhythm, which become a kind of chanting – which can be even more thoroughly appreciated in her poetry readings.

Moving on to her later work, I would like to argue that the kind of poetry created by Morrissey insists on the importance of the present, or the Benjaminian (*jetztzeit*) not on political projects. Falling back on a poetic concept developed by the Brazilian concrete poets of the fifties, her poetry can be identified as post-utopic. According to Haroldo de Campos, the post-utopic poem is an alternative political engagement, different from the one avant-garde art felt compelled to assume. As Campos defended:

Without utopic perspective, the avant-garde movement loses its meaning. In this context, the poetry that is possible, in the present, is a post avant-garde poetry, not because it is post-modern or anti-modern, but because it is post-utopic. In response to the totalizing project of the avant-garde, which,

ultimately, can be only sustained by the redemptive utopia, the poetry that follows is a pluralisation of the poetics of the possible. The hope principle turned to the future is succeeded by the reality-principle funded and anchored in the present. (268)²²

The post-utopic possibility is what sustains her poetry into the second and the third books. Although Belfast is present in all of her books it tends to vary with its historical transformations. Although this history is not cited literally, it is portrayed by her private and personal history, created within the poet's subjectivity. This sense of multiple possibilities start to take shape more concretely in her third book, *Between here and there* (2002), especially in the initial poem, which is named "In Belfast"., this volume is characterized by returns and cultural displacements, since the poet, having spent some years in Japan decides to, when returning physically and emotionally to Northern Ireland, dedicate the first poem of the book to this place, and the second part to Japan, the place of her sojourn – or exile. Travelling, for her,

has been important. It's been the central theme of both collections I don't want to write any more travel poems, but travel was the dominant thing in my experience for those years. It opened me up to things I wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise. They were a real spur to writing; especially the shock of arriving in Japan, meeting this American and getting married. It was all very exciting. My poetry changed significantly, well I think it improved, from the poems in the first collection to the Japanese sequence... I was in Japan for two years. I did lead a certain kind of sustained existence there. There's a lot in the Japanese sequence about the isolation and disorientation of being in a culture that is not your own. (Web 27 June, 2011).

²² Original: Sem perspectiva utópica, o movimento de vanguarda perde o seu sentido. Nessa acepção, a poesia viável do presente é uma poesia de pós-vanguarda, não porque seja pós-moderna ou antimoderna, mas porque é pós-utópica. Ao projeto totalizador da vanguarda, que, no limite, só a utopia redentora pode sustentar, sucede a pluralização das poéticas possíveis. Ao **princípio esperança**, voltado para o futuro, sucede o **princípio-realidade**, fundamento ancorado no presente. Campos, H. de. "Poesia e modernidade: da morte da arte à constelação. 268.

Certainly Sinéad Morrissey is no exile or travel poet, but a writer that represents through a poetically formed structure her personal divisions in the segregated society of Northern Ireland, wherever she may be geographically. Her moving to Japan, and the actual act of returning and re-adapting to an environment that had changed since the Good Friday Agreement, led her to a shift in her aesthetic experiments. From the opening reference to Belfast, Morrissey's poetry becomes characterized by the impressionistic revision of older forms of verse. Indeed, Morrissey does not align with any avant-garde movement, or with any speculation in political terms, but simply to a revisitation of formal poetical procedures. "In Belfast" is divided into two parts of three quatrains each. Following a parallel structure, while the first three stanzas describe monuments of the city of Belfast (the City Hall, The Royal Avenue, The Transport Workers' Union and the Albert Bridge), the second deals with the abstract concepts that the summoning of those places evoke: history, wishes, rediscovery and home. While the first is an architectural portrait, the second is an emotional one, of a poet whose concrete buildings of the city represent a real "correlative object"²³ to support the subjective dilemmas. Even though I am taking advantage of the concept developed by T. S. Eliot, I do not wish to convey Morrissey as a late Modernist, but would only like to suggest that that the city becomes a catalyst for her subjective questioning. Throughout the book, she does not mention Belfast openly, however, since "Belfast" is the first poem of the collection, is an indication this poem is a prelude to her re-discovering of Belfast and home – against the backdrop of her poetic self.

This view is also by expressed by Morrissey in one of her interviews. As she states, Belfast

was such a different place from the place I grew up in (which is a positive thing. I'd always had a horror of ending up back in the Northern Ireland where I grew up). I'd never wanted to do that. But I'd missed the crucial years of the peace process and I was fascinated to come back and see Belfast under the peace. My family had all moved on to different places... Even though it was where I was from, it was still a new space for me. And it felt nice to just settle.

I'd enjoyed the freedom of travelling, mostly, but there was always that

²³ According to Antony Easthope "Eliot... insists that... 'Emotions' or 'actual emotions' belong to personality and to life, but 'feelings' are specific to poetry because language is integral to them [and] the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion." (136).

tension of being somewhere which wasn't where you were from. Which can be a drain on your energy. Even though Belfast isn't ideal, I feel that now I'm there more of my energy can go into writing. (Web, 27 June 2011).

While the author does not feel particularly excited about living in Belfast, the sense of rediscovery is present in the creative impulse she mentions in the interview. Seen in this light, the first stanza of the poem oscillates between the description of natural elements, such as seagulls and lakes and artificial ones, such as Victoria Regina, ships and the City Hall. In the second stanza, there is an inhale/ exhale logic that works towards describing the alluring nature of market and commerce: while she inhales "shop-fronts", she exhales the Royal Avenue and the prosperity of the stores open on a rainy Tuesday. The first part concludes with the sight of the "Transport Workers' Union" and the Albert Bridge, the place where workers' rights are supposedly defended. The last verse "the river/ is simmering at low tide and sheeted with silt" concludes the section with a metaphor: the words "simmering" and "sheet", in spite of referring to cooking procedures, also points to veiled emotions that provoke anxiety states. It is as if, due to her distance from Belfast, the sight of those places, in addition to the natural activity of breathing, would bring to the surface hidden feelings.

The second part reveals what has simmered and sheeted throughout the years. The reality of sleeping there, which is more real than history's dent and fracture that divides the atmosphere makes a clear reference to the division of the city into different communities and affiliations. The "delicate unraveling of wishes" stated in the second stanza may refer to the hidden desires of fulfillment or belonging. These desires refer back to the second and third stanza of the first part, in which the author mentions the new commercial boom and the old socialist utopias. The desires she seems to be recollecting are to reconcile oppositions – Shankhill and Falls, capitalist and socialist, natural and artificial, etc. The final stanza of the poem also refers to a new symbiosis between poet and city. At the moment when she affirms "the city weaves itself so intimately" is also an indication that she, as a poet who is returning to her homeland is a poetic weaver herself, trying to reconcile oppositions in the warp and weft of her verse.

The concept of home, although made complex throughout the poem, is also filtered through the images and myths created by other poems dedicated to Belfast. Morrissey, acknowledging the poets that came before her and her own previous work, develops an original line of thought, using devices that MacNeice used, such as "ballast" and the industrial imagery, in her poems about Belfast in *There was a Fire in Vancouver* and

recreates her style. In this volume the Belfast that she had discovered in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” is being invigorated by the Peace Process. If on the one hand it is made new by appealing shop-fronts, it also repels with the sight of the Albert Bridge and the City Hall. In this chain of associations, the sublime and the grotesque are paired in order to reveal that this city is able to disclose the beauty of the self-discovery.

This city weaves itself so intimately
it is hard to see, despite the tenacity of the river
and the iron sky; and in its downpour and its vapour I am
as much at home as I will ever be. (13)

Through the hardness of the river and sky (opposites, one facing the other), the author is able to find herself not in the solidified water, such as the river and the rain, but in its airy element, which is vapor. In the fluidity and invisibility of the air she finds herself. However, even though the picture of the city is grotesque, her personal fulfillment is sublime, since it reveals that even though her home is uncanny and strange, she is able to find in it a source of creativity. The “between here and there” of the title hints to a post-modern epiphany, which is not as thorough as the modern, but which can be quite enlightening nevertheless. The revelation for Morrissey comes from the noises of the street and its disturbances. The constant rains and this tension, remains in the whole book and is expressed through the form of the poem: the lines are extended (when compared to her previous books), the metric structure becomes more regular and the rebel-pop-tone of the past is substituted by a grotesque melancholy: a post-utopian perception which acknowledges urban living is more complex and plural. The departures and arrivals in pieces like “Jo Gravis in His Metal Garden”, “On Waitakere Dam” and the whole section about Japan, demonstrate how she is influenced by “The Spirit Level” by Seamus Heaney. The poem that seems to have served as a model for the book as a whole is “Postscript”:

And some time make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones

The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. **You are neither here nor there,**
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open. (444)

This descriptive poem that Heaney published in the Irish Times is defined by the poet as a guarantee of his work to himself. In his words, it is about:

a windy Saturday afternoon when Marie and I drove with Brian and Anne Friel
along the south coast of Galway Bay. We had stopped to look at Mount
Vernon, Lady Gregory's summer house – still there, facing the waters and the
wild; then we drove on into the glorious exultation of air and seas and swans.
(Stepping 345)

In spite of the poet being in Galway, which is in the South part of Ireland, Heaney speaks about the Irish landscape in a touristic manner. It is as if the poet did not belong to his country anymore. For him, it has become a foreign land which he visits for pleasure and leisure. The whole concept of "being neither here nor there", which Morrissey absorbs, represents her also distanced and estranged glance towards the city. Although she lives in Northern Ireland, her sojourn outside the country has forced her to find new ways to connect to this place. Her poetry is an instrument which seeks to recuperate the lost memories of the past and reinvent new ones. It recreates an imaginary umbilical cord that has been cut when she travelled. Taking into consideration Heaney's assertion once more, the revalidation of something old and quite untamed, such as the country side of Galway is contradictory to the ever-changing nature of the city. However, the sense of re-discovery, which comes from psychological and geographical displacements, is similar in both Heaney and Sinead's cases.

The line Morrissey has used to entitle her book and which I have highlighted, is a statement on the fugacity of human experiences. Although Heaney is observing the natural landscape, his discovery stresses the importance of Lady Gregory – an intellectual and writer – in his appreciation for the place. In a similar way – as I have analyzed in Chapter II (65) – Heaney observes the city of Belfast and the Troubles through the Spanish paintings by Goya in “Summer 1969”. Also, feeling of alienation and exile is heightened in the poems “Fosterage” (69) and “Ministry of Fear” (71), when he recollects his childhood. Morrissey, in addition to absorbing Heaney’s exile, has also literally chosen to entitle her collection with one of his verses. In addition to being her way of inserting her individual characteristic in a bigger tradition, this verse represents her new discovery of the city of Belfast, after being far from it for many years. Also, while recognizing the city, the poet is also re-discovering herself and the place where she grew up.

In this self discovery through poetry stresses the fact that places might be grasped according to a literary texture. Morrissey is spearheading the most striking change in the Belfast’s group trend: the acknowledgement of place not through experience, but through literature. In this sense, for her, and for many poets of her generation, in order to write about Belfast, the poet must be in contact with what previous poets and writers have described it. It is as if Allen Gillis had to read Ciaran Carson to be a complete poet, the same case with Leontia Flynn, who has clear influences of Paul Muldoon and even Sinéad Morrissey, who shifts smoothly between exiles and discoveries. In addition to that, she shows, for the first time, hope within the environment of the city. Not so painfully sought as Carson, Mahon or Longley, Morrissey’s Belfast is a place of self discovery. But her self is a literary subjectivity – one that must, in the contradictions of the present, forge a place where art can be cultivated without political pressures, but fully committed to itself. By being faithful to art and to a literary imaginary that was created before her, she is also faithful to the contemporary dilemmas that cities in the world face.

In the book *City, Fears and Hopes*, Zygmunt Bauman defends that throughout modern history, “cities have been the sites in which the settlement between contradictory interests, ambitions and forces was intermittently fought, negotiated, undermined, broken, revoked, re-fought, re-negotiated, challenged, found and lost” (Web 28 June, 2011). The parallel between Bauman’s point and Morrissey’s poem is that in “In Belfast” a series of oppositions is presented, however, none of them seeks to be resolved. Thus, this is the resistance of the poem in relation to society: its creativity stems from the oppositions and tensions, and the subjectivity does not have to necessarily be fulfilled with such a panorama,

but can rather find its alien and familiar home within this lack of comfort and lack of idealism. Through her poem, what is invigorating is the debate between old and new and the inability of society and contemporary institutions to deal with these contradictions. Thus, feeling at home does not mean comfort, but distress – which is irrevocably reverted to poetical tensions and arguments.

The “reality principle” that I quoted from Campos’ theory about the post-utopic poem is indeed the reality that Herbert Marcuse characterizes in his interview to the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney. For him, art “refuses to obey the established reality, its language, its order, its conventions and its images. As such, it can be negative either in so far as it serves to give asylum or refuge to defamed humanity and thus preserves in another form an alternative to the ‘affirmed’ reality of the establishment” (85). This is exactly what Sinéad does. Without giving any ready solutions rather her poetry raises questions and discomfort. Within the beauty of its images and the intelligent play with words and concepts, this art is a negative counterpoint to society and to the new physiognomies assumed by the city of Belfast.

II. THE ULSTER MUSEUM, OR “LOCAL CURIOSITY”

According to the critic and poet Tom Paulin, the poetry by the northern Irish writer Leontia Flynn is “smart as a whip, lyrical, always on point – the real, right thing” (Web 26 October, 2011). While in the previous section I developed the concept of “post-utopian poem” – which entails the ‘reality principle’ poem within the realm of Belfast poems written by Sinéad Morrissey, I would like to argue that Flynn’s reality is of a different kind. Instead of exposing the city’s contradictions in an “embattled aesthetic” between subjectivity and reality, Flynn’s minimalistic style consists of scorn and denunciation. The form through which her poetry achieves this effect is through dark humour and sarcasm. Instead of using a moralising or superior attitude to denounce Belfast’s contradictions, the poet ridicules its new mercantile impulse to transform history into fetishised cultural commodities. In the second stanza of her poem “Belfast”, which is in her second collection *Drives* (2008) she writes with a quick-witted dynamic language that resembles Emily Dickinson and e. e. cummings:

Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction.

What was mixed grills and whiskeys (cultureless, graceless, leisureless)

is now concerts and walking tours (Friendly! Dynamic! Various!). (2)

The first line indicates Belfast's incompleteness and changes, while the play with the exclamations marks in the third line and the use of colloquialisms and conversational English enable Flynn to remove the high art aura of poetry. In this sense, the question her poetry urges its readers to answer is what is left of the city's "graceless and leisureless" culture and history? How to transform this new, generic, prosperous, touristic Belfast into poetry? In Flynn's work the answer lies in the idea of "local curiosity": not simply interesting facts that enhance the visitor's attraction to Belfast, but also a therapeutic and hopeful stance, since from an etymological point of view, the word "curi-osity" is akin to cure. Seen from this perspective, local curiosity may represent more than simply additional pieces of information, but agents for social transformation. As the cultural critic Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes of the role that curiosity plays in historical knowledge:

The senses are intelligent. The body knows. Facts are felt. Curiosity is an emotion. Historian of science Lorraine Daston writes a history of curiosity (and its emotional structure) in relation to the other emotions as a way of illuminating the history of science in the early modern period. As curiosity "shifted its position in the European map of the emotions from a close proximity to lust and pride, to a similarly close relationship to greed and avarice," the "curious object" came to be associated with the exotic, bizarre, beautiful, rare, novel, monstrous, diverse, small, detailed, hidden. Wonder arose from an ignorance of causes, but a major shift occurred from a divine explanation of what were viewed as marvels and miracles to a search for natural causes and the understanding that "Without wonder, there would be no curiosity, and without curiosity, no science." (Web 20 Oct, 2011).

I am taking into consideration Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's explanation of "curiosity" because I believe that Flynn's poetry about Belfast ridicules the new impulses to transform the city into a touristic place. In her sarcasm there is, more than mere mockery a sharp criticism that

compares Belfast unfavorably with other European glamorous cities. Flynn's laugh requires readers to go beyond a simplistic or touristic view of history. If on the one hand curiosity can be enticing, on the other hand, once commercialized, this feeling ceases to refer to a natural drive for knowledge and starts to be guided by ideological purposes. Her poems, then, following the simple language of advertisements and billboards, urges readers to go back to the past and understand it in relation to place and circumstance.

This is particularly true in Flynn's most recent book, *Drives* (2008), in which poems are presented as places, circumstances and literary personas. Although she writes poems about Belfast, for the most part she seems to emulate a museum of the city where the reader and spectator, in a joint voyage, go back in space and time. These poems contain within themselves information about the deep ambiguities and contradictions of this place, for example being commercially fashionable yet still coming to terms with its violent past. This is the reason why the comparison between her poetry and the Ulster museum, a monument of culture whose façade is creatively divided between Classical and Modern forms of architecture. Along with a traditional search for the beauty of the forms and the harmony of style, there is also the modern drive for the functionality of the form and the practicality of twentieth-century modernism.

More than portraying a flashback of traditional and modernist forms of art, the collection *Drives* (2008) presents fifty-two poems that recollect not only cities, such as "Monaco", "Barcelona", "Rome", "Paris", "Berlin", but also novelists, playwrights and poets, like "Virginia Woolf", "Samuel Beckett" and "Elizabeth Bishop". Among those, there are four poems that address directly the city of Belfast: "Belfast", "Leaving Belfast", "Sky Boat" and "Cyprus Avenue", demarcating the point of departure of those visitations. While the most immediate comparison would be to a touristic guidebook, those poems, because they transfigure the place and the writers into an object of art – the poem – they represent etymologically the origin of the word *museum*, as the place of the muses, something that has a deep connection to the past.

As Theodor Adorno explains a propos of the institutional museum, "It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present." (*Prisms* 173). The journey the poet takes into the past is significant to because this past is able to either illuminate or destroy the present. And the figure of speech that enables the ambiguity is irony: Flynn's language, even with the mournful tone of death, impedes absolute identification. While speaker tries to entice reader to identify with herself, it also distances himself or herself through an ironic process.

The process is set into motion right in the first poem of *Drives*, “Song”, in which the poet transmutes the natural stars to the coldness of the computer screen: what belonged to the natural world is now reproduced in the artificiality of the most important object of post-industrial society, the computer – as quoted below:

The blinds are drawn
but over and over
the stars rush forward
on the screen saver. (1)

The transposition of the stars into the computer is an ironical move from the divine inspiration of the poet to the private space of the desk and the motionlessness of the space, since in the beginning of the poem, Flynn states: “Your hands are still/ nothing is moving”. With the stasis of the poet, reader and poetic language itself, Flynn writes “Belfast”, a poem that localizes the book in time and space (specifically, Belfast in the year 2000). However, the open reference to McNeice’s “Belfast”, precisely stated in the poem, and referred back in her “Acknowledgements”, intrigues the reader to question the real changes in the city. In addition to making complex the connection between place and time, the poet’s mentioning of McNeice is also an attempt to transform the poet’s verse into a mummified object – a verse from the past that echoes in the present, leaving the reader unsure whether the meaning is the same in a contemporary setting. The poem “Belfast” with its six quartets fragments the city of Belfast into self-contained microcosms that capture a snatch of the life of the city. Unsurprisingly, similarly to McNeice’s “Belfast”, Flynn starts the poem with a panoramic view, but instead of merely copying the gloomy tone of McNeice’s poem of 1938 Flynn’s poem captures the ironic contradictions of the beginning of the twenty first century. While the first blank quartet, with loose foot, gives a brief description of the sky as a backcloth for “new façades”, “gas works” and “sails of scaffolding”, the second captures the frenetic rhythm of the tourism and commercialization. The first and second stanzas represent a contradiction in tone and meter: while the first recaptures the murky modernism of T.S. Eliot and W. H. Auden, the second plays with a simple language that mixes brackets, punctuation and repetition with irony and jokes.

The sky is a washed out-theatre backcloth
behind new façades on old baths and gasworks;
downtown, under the green sails of their scaffolding,

a dozen buildings' tops steer over the skyline.

(2)

From the stanzas, it is clear there is a subtext involved in the use of parentheses and punctuation, and this subtext is deeply involved with the dichotomy of the museum. While the first stanza presents the contradiction “new façades on old baths”, the second is quite unsure of what should be done with the old “mixed grills and whiskeys”, are those simply “cultureless, graceless, leisureless” as the explanation in parentheses suggest? As Adorno argued in the beginning of his article on museums, any attempt to modernize tradition is fated to failure, because reconstructing the past is impossible (*Prisms* 174); This happens because while the utter renovation of the old means its insertion on the commodity market, its renunciation represents, in the words of the philosopher, the denial of “the possibility of experiencing the traditional... [the capitulation] to barbarism out of devotion to culture” (*Prisms* 175). In this contradiction, the parenthesis of the poem serves not only as an explanation but an interrogation: its commas and exclamation marks represent an attempt to interrogation. Instead of separating adjectives or imitating the new advertisements of the city, they question new state of affairs in Belfast: one should dismiss or absorb the past.

This is the moment where I would like to make a connection with the contradiction of the Ulster Museum itself. It is characterized not only by its remarkable history, but also its unique and exquisite design. Since its foundation in 1821 as the Belfast Natural History Society, the museum has undergone three major changes: the first in 1929 when it moved to its present location in the Queen's Quarter, right across from the Botanic Gardens; the second in 1961 when it received its actual name and its distinctive façade; and the third in 2005 when the Lottery Heritage Fund and the Department of Culture, Arts and development invested seventeen million pounds in its refurbishment.

Flynn's poem states bluntly that “Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction”, such was the Ulster museum. The renovation of the place that preserves the past is similar to the architectural revival of the city – its new enterprises and projects encompass a wish to neutralize the past. However, if this past is bound to be commercialized, it becomes a commodity in the gallery of post-industrial society. In the same way that viewers who visit museums seek to contemplate the past and consume knowledge, the poet wishes to consume the city of Belfast, its past, its present, and, more importantly, its poetic renewal. The transition from the second to the third stanza is performed through an enjambment: “A tourist pamphlet contains an artist's impression// of arcades mock-

colonnades, church-spires and tapas bars”. These two lines hold, in the plurality of the present, the reification of art. However, the continuation of the stanza is even more ironical because the poet is not even sure if those places are worthy of any commercialization at all. This is also the moment when she quotes McNeice, “are those *harsh attempts at buyable beauty*?” In other words, is the city of Belfast a worthy commodity in the world of fancy tourism?

This questioning is a comic reversal of the poem. While in the first two stanzas Leontia assumed a more serious tone, which stems from McNeice’s poem (analyzed in Chapter One), in the next two quartets she utterly demystifies this environment. She summons up pieces of information such as “There are 27 McDonald’s... in Northern Ireland”, “A match at Windsor Park has fallen in Gay Parade week”, and “I listen as ‘We are the Billy Boys’ gets mixed up... with ‘Crazy’ by Patsy Cline”. These details, in themselves seem naïve and banal, but Flynn’s is not only borrowing in style from McNeice but also from an important poet in the Ulster Renaissance: Paul Muldoon. As argued in chapter two, Muldoon is interested in mocking the past, fragmenting its structure and revealing its tragedy against the backdrop of history. In this sense, Flynn is doing the same thing. With the sarcastic attitude taken from Muldoon, the poet creates symbols of the past. The reference to McDonald’s is, in fact, an oblique way to figure Belfast’s insertion in the multi-brand commodification. The mentioning of the football match and the gay parade in the same way is Flynn’s way of affirming that Belfast is also subject to mass industry and low forms of cultural display. This leads to another crucial question: is this artistic aura, which is involved in its poetry of the North, out of place or disconnected to modernity? The fourth and the fifth stanzas, alone, do not answer this question; they simply create a comical portrayal of the roar of the Rangers theme song (Belfast’s football team), “We are the Billy Boys”, and the hackneyed song, “Crazy”, by Patsy Cline:

Of arcades, mock-colonnades, church spires, and tapas bars;

are those harsh attempts at a buyable beauty?

There are 27 McDonald’s, you say, in Northern Ireland

(but what am I supposed to do with this information?).

A match at Windsor Park has fallen in Gay Pride week.

At two a.m. the street erupts in noise.

I listen as 'We are the Billy Boys'

Gets mixed up, four doors down, with 'Crazy' by Patsy Cline. (2)

The stanzas quoted above reproduce the colloquialism of ordinary language, and because of this demystification of poetry, Flynn does not seem to be interested in idealizing or even victimizing this city, she seems to be merely engaged in the task of making a joke about its present condition. While in the beginning she even attempted to assume the marketable idea of commercializing the past of Belfast – its art, its poetry, its architecture – in the middle of the poem, she lets go of this possibility and assumes the identity of a renewed poetic voice, one that does not dismiss the tradition of the verse, but one that does not want to commercialize its essence. The irony is her way of protecting Belfast, and poetry about Belfast, from the commercialization. Irony stands for her vanishing effort to capture the city's realism, outside the artistic impression that was written on the touristic pamphlet mentioned in the last verse of the second stanza. In her reconstruction of Belfast, she recreates one of its peoples' characteristics, the tendency towards the "banter", or the teasing joke that is simultaneously jesting and deadly serious. Critics have often misunderstood Flynn's use of banter. Flynn's poetry incorporates the "banter" because she wishes, in her realistic portrayal of the city, to defend it from its capitalization by the philistines of art, or by the happy-go-lucky mass media market. She wishes, in reality, to safeguard Belfast in the museum of contemporaneity – a landmark of a past, present and future that do not easily reconcile. The last stanza translates Flynn's worry with the present and the seriousness of her questioning:

And gathering in the city's handful of bars,

Not sunk in darkness or swathed in beige leatherette

men are talking of Walter Benjamin, and about 'Grand Narratives'

which they seek to 'fracture' and 'interrogate'. (2)

The last stanza, mentioned above, reassumes the seriousness of the beginning by also recollecting the intellectual debates, which "fracture" and "interrogate" Walter Benjamin and the grand narratives his image symbolizes. If the great narratives are utterly wrong, why do they seek to dismantle the theoretician of the city (and which is the ground of this thesis)? Perhaps Flynn is also mocking these intellectual classes, including herself, in order to defend the Modernist search for a communal language and identity. In a period when Belfast, and Northern Ireland, is searching for a communal identity, what is the use of dismantling a past that is already dismantled through political discourses and sectarian perceptions? Flynn's

images are much more complex than meet the eye and ask for a second look, a second read that dismantles and ruptures the first read. The use of parenthesis, the quotation by McNeice and the comic images are her way of reproducing the Northern Irish banter. Nonetheless, instead of producing a comedic laugh, her laugh is somewhat gloomy because underneath it actually mourns the loss of unity: not a romantic idealized unity, but one that is faithful to the place's identity and people. Her poetry wants to represent the Ranger fanatic, the gay couple, the tourist, the intellectual, the plurality of the city into the unity of the verse, through the use of banter.

Not so much high culture, which Adorno defended, not so much to mass culture, which Benjamin claimed, Leontia's Belfast seeks to recreate its realism, perhaps one that recognizes there is a sense of unification in this environment, but a unity that is like a constellation – to borrow again a term from the first chapter. It is not the ideology that guides the space, but the internal cognition, the reader has to make his or her particular connection with the city: be him or her, Ranger supporter, gay or intellectual. In Flynn's work, labels do not matter, but do the concrete realizations of the people represented in the poems represent the citizens of the city? Do they interact with the environment? The answers to these questions are left for the readers themselves to answer, since the poet is simply a builder of images who composes the ironical piece of reality.

Once more, focusing on the individual relationship with the place and its most particular characteristics, the poet writes her next poem about Belfast, "Leaving Belfast". Here, instead of using poetic "banter", she recovers the theme of exile and immigration, characteristic theme typical of Northern Ireland poets and citizens. Dedicated to John Duncan, a photographer and personal friend to the poet, "Leaving Belfast" is about his departure from the city of Belfast and his take on its most basic characteristics prior and post departure. Nonetheless, instead of hearing Duncan's voice, the reader has access just to the poet's impression about him and the city. It is practically the opposite of "Belfast": instead of focusing on the variety of voices of the city (the football supporter, the homosexual, the intellectual, etc), now Flynn focuses on a single individual's relationship with the place. However, instead of being one face in the crowd, this Duncan has a special connection with the city: he completed a project in 2008 – the same year *Drives* was published – which portrayed Belfast's bonfires. According to Duncan, the photographs were taken over a three year period in a hundred sites in Protestant areas. The bonfires are part of the annual twelfth of July celebrations, in which the Protestant community commemorates William of Orange's of the Catholic James Stuart at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. More than just portraying the

huge structures of the bonfires, which usually reach the height of a three storey building, the pictures scrutinize the dilemma posed by the bonfires: do they fit in the new Belfast, with its drive for modernity and the overcoming of a partisan and violent past?

Probably acquainted with his work and his examination of the landscape, Flynn writes a visual poem which is divided into two stanzas: while the first takes a bird's eye view snapshot of the city, the second rehearses an imaginary dialogue between poet and photographer in which she repeats, with her own words, his own vision of the city. The language adopted by the poet is also bifurcated and accompanies this shift of tone: while the first stanza is lyrical, falling back on similes and metaphors, the second is conversational and informal, with colloquialisms and expressions typical of local conversation. The most striking characteristic of the first three lines of the eight of the first stanza is the use of a simile and a metaphor. If, on the one hand, in the first verse Flynn compares the planes in the city to the stomachs of big birds, on the other hand, in the second, she likens the sky of the city to the heartbeat of a difficult patient. In two comparisons – a simile and a metaphor, two different ways of comparing – the poet translates the desire and the agony of the artist that longs for departure, but is at the same time struck by an almost visceral attachment to the city and its familiar surroundings. The opposition sky and river also translates the distress of the artist's heart: should he leave and obey his "difficult heart", or should he sink in the "ragged sky" of Belfast:

The planes fly so low over the houses in the east
their undercarriages seem like the stomach of giant birds,
the skyline in town is ragged, monitored heartbeat
of a difficult patient; the river holds its own (8)

The first lines of the poem describe billboards, pigeons and litters, images that are not artistically beautiful or pleasant, but which create a lack of idealism in the portrayal of the city. However, it is in the realistic description of the city where the poet finds new possibilities, in spite of people's hopes and fears:

And for every torn-up billboard and sick-eating pigeon
and execrable litter blown street round Atlantic Avenue
there's some scrap of hope in the young, in the good looks of women,
in the leafiness of smart zones, in the aerobatics of starlings (8)

However, the hope that is portrayed in the poem is not so much related to the “ragged skyline” or in the “litter-blown street around Atlantic Avenue” of the working class districts. It is instead found in the more affluent parts of the city. In Belfast, the main difference between the lower and upper class areas is the presence of trees, and in consequence, starlings, which are attracted by fruits and open fields. Due to this reason (maybe unconsciously), this hope is partially directed towards a wealthier sector of the population. But the ambiguity of the first stanza is not prolonged to the second, which starts with a popular cliché in a dialogic tone:

There are good times and bad times, yes, but now you are
burning your bridges, and you are leaving Belfast
to its own devices: it will raise or fall, (8)

The opening of the second stanza (quoted above) focuses on John Duncan and his decision of leaving. The poet, echoing the popular voices, reproduces the jargon that “there are good and bad times”, and those do not last forever. Also, it is a reference to a pop song by Led Zeppelin, in which the poet mentions him leaving home. However, although there is the conversational mark, “yes”, in the middle of the poem, the poet is not actually talking to the photographer, but recollecting poetically a chat they must have had. The continuation of the poem, with a series of idiomatic expressions “burning your bridges”, “leave it to its own devices”, “bury its past”, “paper over the cracks”, “make itself new” is an indication that there is a general silence over the problems Belfast has to openly face. The use of jargon is a quick and precise way to deviate from important matters to conventional ideas: the verbiage of words actually do not mean a lot, since they simply revolve around the issue without resulting in any relevant idea or concept. In addition to using many clichés, the stanza continues with references to the noble areas of the city – which can be found in Stranmillis Gardens and Upper Malone road.

it will bury its past, it will paper over the cracks
with car parks and luxury flats, it will make itself new – or perhaps
become the place it seemed before you left. (8)

The assortment of clichés, at the end of the poem, seems to do very little to the stanza as whole, for the city, with all its attempts to make itself new in the profitable areas, will still be indebted to history – the working class regions will take long to overcome the sectarian

past and perhaps, just the rich will benefit from Belfast's insertion in the world market. The last image suggests a complete stop and a general silence that even cliché is not able to surmount. Neither the poet nor John Duncan seems willing to give an answer to the past. It is relevant to note the fact the poet does not focus on the city itself: she focuses on its skies and rivers, but not really on its walls or writings. Nonetheless, Leontia does remember the walls and murals, but not in "Belfast", nor in "Leaving Belfast", but in the poem called "Berlin":

Visiting Kreuzberg, between Turkish bars
near where the guide says Peter Fecher fell
The Exiles Club and hotspots of the West
where deadbeats boozed and binged – and Bowie *et al*
recorded music close to the East
the red guards who surveyed them on patrol
should have got writing credits. Here and where the past
recent and awful, brick and bullet-hole
stands on street corners – here, the Berlin Wall
reminds you, you say, of peace walls in Belfast. (8)

This poem operates on two levels of meaning: one, in the surface, which is given by its most immediate signification, which is Germany and the history of the Second World War, and a second, cryptographic meaning inserted in the sequence of rhymes. Flynn, in this poem, such as the spies from the Cold War, plays with meanings and fools her readers, since the poem is simultaneously about Berlin and Belfast. It carries a secret message that cannot be revealed and, because of that, has to be hidden in the most central and vital characteristic of the poetic genre, the rhyme. As a tourist who becomes rapidly familiar with the history of the city, Flynn starts the poem by locating the city where she is: Kreuzberg, the famous city of East Germany, which became famous for the Turkish immigrants, students, artists and alternative people who moved there during the sixties in order to find cheap housing and modest conditions of life. Moreover, being enclosed by the Berlin wall on three sides, the city became known worldwide when the bricklayer Peter Fletcher tried to escape East Germany and was murdered in cold blood by border or GDR guards (1962). The episode caused a great popular turmoil and was reported all over the globe. Due to its unconventional cultural

manifestations, the city was also the cradle of the punk rock movement in Germany its most celebrated visitors were Iggy Pop and David Bowie. It is remarkable how Flynn, in the first five lines of the poem pieces these simple pieces of information together in an assonant form that resembles punk rock lyrics. Not only does she find poetry in historical facts, but also she breaks meter when mentioning the “past” in line 6 and playfully mocks David Bowie and his supposed affiliation to the city. In the lines four to seven, she seems to be suggesting the inspiration for Bowie’s lyrics did not come quite from his involvement with the city, but from his reflection on the violence of the border of the Berlin Wall.

The closing lines of the poem start to turn the reader away from cultural references to the city of Kreuzberg. After the full stop in the seventh line, Flynn poses a moral reflection that brings her back to Belfast, and this moral reflection is bound up with the idea of violence. When the poet affirms that the bullet in the walls is what forces the city dwellers to reflect on history, she leaves the realm of linear history and builds bridges between the two places. Being faithful to a conversational language, the poet mentions Belfast, which makes the reader return to the beginning of the poem and realize that Belfast was also a important city for the punk rock movement, that it is walled by the peace lines and that it also the home of alternative citizens. In this sense, the imperfect and oblique rhymes of *bars, et al, West, East, past, Belfast* tell the story of the city. Belfast has both bars and walls; it is divided into West and East, and also has a violent past. The other sequence of imperfect rhymes *fell, et al, patrol, hole, wall*, also recollects the story of those who tried to cross these lines and ended up murdered in terrorist attacks or road blocks. In a simple poem, with ordinary language and symmetrical assonances, the poet discusses complex concepts and forces readers to go back and take a closer look. Although the ironies and the playful nature of her verse is closer to Paul Muldoon’s style, the secret messages and the air of suspiciousness is inheritance from Ciaran Carson and his veiled messages – such as the one in “Belfast Confetti” examined in chapter two.

The last poems that contain clear references to the city of Belfast are “Sky Boats” and “Cyprus Avenue”. Instead of being explicit, such as the last three that were analyzed in this section, these two poems are more subjective and focus purely on the individual. These poems represent the contemporary immersion of the individual in his or her interior. In the terminology adopted by the French philosopher Gillis Lipovetsky, they represent the “the era of emptiness”, in which the main figure is mythological character, Narcissus. According to the philosopher, the most essential concern of the post-modern man is self knowledge and self control: interested in his or her well being, the political vocabulary is replaced by a

psychological vocabulary. This is true especially in the poem “Cyprus Avenue”, in which the lack of worry with the future, reproduce an eternal present – the search for a eternal youth that is portrayed in the pop songs and young love. “Sky Boats”, on the other hand, describes an airplane in North Belfast Waterworks. However, instead of any realistic information about what the direction of this place, the poem concludes with a clichéd comment about the world being upside down, somewhat twisted and out of place. In these two poems, Belfast is not the unified constellation as I defended previously, but simple sites that harbor individual emotions and extraordinary events. These poems illuminate the present by being true to the individualistic characteristic of post-modern society.

Reconstructing the mood and atmosphere of rock and roll clips, Flynn writes a poem after the song “Cyprus Avenue” by Van Morrison. Divided into three quartets of blank verses with five, six, ten and twelve poetic feet, the poem is about a couple who is spending a summer day in the country side region of Mourne Mountains. Driving the car that belonged to the speaker’s boyfriend, the couple listened to the song and blissfully celebrated their youth and lack of worry with the future. Invested with a lyric-like language that resembles the song itself, the poem seems to be simply about this moment of joy in their lives. In the first stanza she localizes the poem in space:

Van Morrison is singing ‘Cyprus Avenue’
on the car stereo system
when you turn into Mournview
car park. The ignition (44)

In the stanza quoted above the reader is presented not with the place, but with a reference to the place. Instead of being about the avenue itself, the poem is about the song. In addition to not being in Cyprus Avenue, the poet and her boyfriend are actually far from it, in the football stadium of Glebe F.C., in Lurgan, a city that is around twenty five miles away from Belfast. In this case, the memory of the city is transfigured into a quotation mark that is the song itself. Such as in Morrissey’s case, the place is known not through a direct association, but through a cultural production made about it. The second stanza focuses on the sexual encounter in the car and the young discovery of passion and sexuality. The puns made with the “grind the gears” – reference to the rubbing of skin – “sheathed interiors” – reference to condoms – and “practice the clutch” – which means one of the cars’ pedals, but also the act of holding something tightly – transfigures the poem into the act of lovemaking.

With the vocabulary borrowed from cars, the poet describes what could have been the speaker's first time. Nonetheless, the metaphors, instead of being debauched, rely on playfulness and wit, resulting in a clever poem:

Sparked, we grained the gears
of your dad's hatchback
with the Sheathed interiors
and practice the clutch (44)

The last stanza concludes the poem with an ironical remark regarding humanity in general. In the second line, instead of reproducing "Cyprus Avenue's" original lyric, the poet changes it slightly. The verse, "I am captured in a car seat", is actually "I am conquered in a car seat" in the original lyrics by Van Morrisson. With this change one wonders, what kind of effect does Flynn want to provoke on the reader? I would argue this is her way of breaking the softness of the second stanza and concluding in an obscure tonality:

An old song plays on the radio
I am captured in a car seat
On the pointers of summer and youth
the whole world pivots (44)

The assertion (as seen above) that the world revolves around summer and youth is a total refusal of the politics – nothing matters, but that day, in the car, with that song. Nonetheless, the difference between *conquered* and *captured* should be a disturbing detail. And this detail is what approximates the poem to the political interpretation again: while "conquer" is related to battles and war deeds, "capture" is used to refer to less significant seizures, such as animals. In this sense, the reversal of the meaning of the song is also the reversal of the position of the lovers themselves. Instead of conquering each other's love, they actually capture their bodies sexually. Furthering the interpretation to the political realm, "Cyprus Avenue", affirmed Van Morrisson:

is about a street in Belfast, a place where there's a lot of wealth. It wasn't far
from where I was brought up and it was a very different scene. To me it was a

very mystical place. It was a whole avenue lined with trees and I found it a place where I could think. (qtd. Hinton 96).

If Cyprus Avenue encouraged the musician to have insights, what effect does the mispronounced song produce in the couple? The effect is the absolute annulment of the past and of history, since not even a song, composed in the time of the troubles, is able to deviate them from their love making. With the word “pivot”, more than meaning the male member, Flynn wishes to expose the couple’s lack of connection with their place of origin and to their past. Thus, the world, instead of going round battles, conquests and victories, is simply about the intercourse. The approximation of the human to the animal, since it is animals are captures and not really human beings, is another hint of the speakers’ delusion with her generation. The epic and heroic aspect of battles and contests is left behind, and what is left is the body. It is as if Flynn had peeled John Donne from its grandiose images of the sexual encounter and the ultramarine expeditions, and replaced them form an ordinary date, in a small car, in a quick car trip to the country side.

The ending of the poem is a refusal of the political and the traditional. It is an assertion of the present and the pleasures of the body. The poem represents an ideal escape that captures the lovers and encloses them in the security of an old car. It is a post-modern Innisfree, where the speaker is not alone, but already accompanied, and hence, in an idealized structure that safeguards her from the world. If on the one hand, not mentioning any political references is a rejection of politics, its negation in itself is political, because it represents the ethos assumed by the two thousand generation: summer and pleasure. However, instead of depreciating the youngsters of her time, she also criticizes the failed attempts of the past, since “the whole world pivots/ on points of summer and youth”. The poem is cynical and concludes without any linguistic euphemism. By doing it, it inserts a new language to poetry, one that is quick-witted and represents what the youngsters of Belfast have to say about the city. Although listening to Morrisson’s song, the couple care little about it – the speaker even misspells one of the words. In the same way their attention is directed towards the past. The possible history behind the song is of little regard, since they seek their individual satisfaction. In this cycle of self pleasure, “Cyprus Avenue” is reduced to an intertextual association that reminds the reader of the fugacity of artwork in the post-modern environment.

The last poem that has a direct reference to Belfast in Flynn’s *Drives* is “Sky Boat”. In two quatrains, the poet describes a plane caught in a tree in North Belfast. However, with a

weird manner to describe a plane “caught” in the trees, the sky turns upside down and the sky is compared to the ocean. As Flynn states in the first stanza:

An aeroplane caught in the branches of a tree,
Struggling over North Belfast Waterworks,
Makes for the open water of the sky
There is white foam following in the aeroplane’s wake. (13)

The word “wake” indicates a progression, in which moving objects leave a ripple, either in the air or the water. In addition to conferring movement to the poem, the double meaning of the word “wake” as funeral may imply metaphorically that the plane has already fallen.

In the next quatrain, the naval meaning of “wake” transports the poet to “Nice” and “Cannes” on the coast of France – destinations that are amongst the most fashionable and expensive winter retreats in Europe. Nonetheless, those place are so beautiful that the sea resembles the sky:

As white plumes follow the yachts across the bay
at Niece and Cannes – and break for an horizon
so indistinct (so blue the sky and sea)
today, we say, the world is upside-down (13)

The difference between Northern Ireland and France is seen through the images of the poem: while the first cannot hold a plane in the air, the second lifts its boat up to the sky. The fantastic portrayal of the two means of transport is resolved with an ironic comment: “the world is upside down”. This displacement of the world is a symbolic response to the subjective incomprehension as regards the place where she is from. Throughout the book, the poet seems to be “reaching out from her homeground (the McNeicean debt acknowledged in ‘Belfast’) to the big wide world” (Brearton Web 20 Oct, 2011). However, if on the one hand she tries to make sense of these places through “interesting cross-cultural encounters” (Brearton Web 20 Oct, 2011), “Sky Boats” displays the opposite: confusion and bemusement. Although the image of the plane reveals some traumatic post 9-11 fears, above all, it displays the idea that even though the contemporary world is made of fast-track transports, movement and speed, these features also have consequences that leave ripples on the surface, like the wake of boats in the water and the plumes of airplane exhaust in the sky. In addition to that,

the poet compares the artistic cities of France with Belfast, suggesting an ironic difference: Belfast, with its walking tours “(Friendly! Dynamic! Various!)” is trying to be a cultural capital as well. In this mirror reflection – Belfast, Nice and Cannes – the sarcasm is: “the world is upside down” because Belfast, a city which had been dominated by war and sectarian conflicts, is now trying to embrace the intercultural dialogues. But, the image of the plane being “caught” in trees also suggests that perhaps this attempt is not successful as one would have thought.

In Flynn’s poems the duality of the city of Belfast, which is also present in the façade of its most famous museum, is still operating. Through her verses, the reader envisions that this city, and the greater province, is trying to awake to a multiply marketable renewal, but its history still impedes complete regeneration. Like a museum that incites readers to engage with the artwork through images and colors, Flynn’s poems offer not a comic depiction – as one would define her poetry at a first read – but rather an ironic revelation about Belfast. Her poetry does not cease to question and counterpoint opposites and because of this it is still open to discoveries, which are more meaningful than “walking tours”, and perhaps even Van Morrison’s songs about Belfast. The past therefore, is engaging for Flynn and leaves traces on the distorted picture of the present, like the wake that ripples in “Sky Boats”, and the displaced murals in Berlin. Her sense of wit, irony and social perception are the features that enable critic Fran Brearton to define her voice as “one of the most strikingly original and exciting poetic voices that emerged from Northern Ireland since the extraordinary debut by Muldoon” (Web 20 Oct, 2011). Nonetheless, it is the play with opposites, the varied images and the fast speed that makes Leontia Flynn not just a Northern Irish poet but a true Belfast poet: someone who sees in the blissful fascination with the present, the pleasure with innocent encounters and the end of history, a disturbing echo of a not-so remote past. Banter, is Flynn’s way of belonging, not to a sentimental or pious Belfast postcard sketch, but rather a contemporary and distressed, and perhaps unfinished, canvas.

III. THE NORTH ARCADE, OR THE WALKING TOURS

The North Arcade of Belfast was built in the 1930s and survived not only the blitz during the Second World War, but also the Troubles of the last decades of the twentieth century. Due to a fire in 2004, the Arcade was almost turned into dust. Nowadays, the

leftovers of its structure, together with its wrecked façade, remain a ruin in the centre of the city, opposite to the John Hewitt, a trendy pub attended by intellectuals and tourists. In the same year as the fire, the poet Alan Gillis published his first book *Somebody, Somewhere* (2004). Capturing the natural rhythm of the street talk with such an exuberance that can only be compared to Ciaran Carson, the book portrays the contemporary picture of the high-tech gadgets, the drug-driven parties, the pop song culture, and the intricate maps of matches and mismatches of contemporary Belfast. Invigorated with a renewed passion for the city, “Somebody, Somewhere” is a quasi-love declaration for the streets and its dwellers: the young students, the immigrants, the waitresses and waiters and the forgotten inhabitants of the *ghettos*. Some of the poet’s images even manage to recapture a Gothic Beauty, such as seen in the poem “Love Bites”: “The tulips he sent her lurched like a fusillade/ of fingers that she snipped and tied tightly, her heart’s/ tourniquet”, while there are other images that teeter on the verge of inebriation and hallucination. Such is the case of “Last Friday Night”:

So there wi were like, on the fuckin dance
floor and the skank was fuckin stormin like,
shite-posh, but we’d fuckin chance
it, great big fuckin ditties bouncing, shite,
an thighs, skirts wi fuckin heart out fer. (27)

In addition to the reproduction of Belfast accent and slangs, Gillis’ poetry expresses its citizens’ complex relationship with the past, especially in relation to interpersonal bonding and violence. As the critic Malachi O’Doherty points out: “if Belfast is progressing from moving backwards, then can look forward to seeing violence in reverse” (27). In the poem “Progress”, Gillis colloquially states:

They say that for years Belfast was backwards
and it’s great now to see some progress
So I guess we can look forward to taking boxes
from the earth. (27)

If on the one hand the image of the boxes represents a violent past, since people would find bombs hidden in them, on the other hand, the unsettling closure of the poem convey that this past is not so distantly remote: “a reassembled head/ will look out and admire the shy young man/ taking his bomb from the building and driving home”. In addition to not

being distant, the noun “box” also evokes the image of a coffin. With this word, the poet also brings to mind the idea that it is impossible to bring up the dead who were victims of a sectarian past.

The concept of progress in the poem “Progress” is metaphorically reversed; it implies that progress is actually its opposite. It is as if Gillis was using the image of a rewind film in order to rewind the cycle of violence in Northern Ireland. In addition to subtly convey the idea that progress is slightly out of place in Belfast, the act of taking the bomb home represents a migration of violence from the public to the domestic field. What was once directed to the streets is now brought to the personal inhabitancy of private spaces. Seen that “home” is the affective elocution used to signify the attachment one has towards the house, this bomb may also refer to one’s violence towards him or herself, or towards the other. In the poem as a whole, the idea of progress is dismantled like a rewind tape one watches at home. This violence, then, is not so remote, nor so distant: it arises in private spaces and is reproduced in society.

Another device that Gillis uses in order to represent violence is the reproduction of a colloquial form of language, such as the end of the poem “Last Friday Night” in which he states: “Fuck sake like, my knuckles are still cut. / Shame ye wernie there, ya nut”. Through the glorification of aggressive language as a kind of collective entertainment, violence becomes a cultural code that is rooted in language – and this language translates the street corners of Belfast as dubious meeting points which cannot hold the fugacity of the present. Similarly to the ruin of the North Arcade, Gillis’ poetry entraps a kind of language that, as Flynn also points, wishes to be dynamic and prosperous, but which cannot surpass its noxious determinations.

The poet’s employment of a spontaneous linguistic flow made Ciaran Carson, the greatest Belfast poet, assert: “Belfast features in many of the... poems, but it is not a conventional ‘Troubles’ landscape. Here, the city is a state of altered consciousness, a reeking of desperate late night parties, the drink-and-drug-clouded boundaries that join and separate the protagonists” (qtd. Gillis back cover). Starting *Somebody, Somewhere* (2004) with a negative poem, “The Ulster Way”, Gillis defends the idea that, “Everything is about you”, which means that everything that he symbolically states is connected with Ulster: its landscape, its language, its habits and culture. Also relevant is the fact that The Ulster Way is a hiking path through the province. According to the official government website, the Ulster way is a “625 mile (1000 km) circular long distance walking route that is one of the longest in the United Kingdom and Ireland” (Web 13 Feb, 2012). The different trails and paths that

walkers can take reveal a natural landscape that is less known than the typical Belfast troubled landscape. However, instead of idyllically praising this landscape, Gillis tries to deconstruct stereotypes and the first one is the ironic use of the negation particle “no”. One of the characteristics commonly attributed to Northern Irish people is the fact that they cannot say no – even Ciaran Carson wrote a collection called *The Irish For No* – but in the poem, Gillis breaks with this social stereotype and starts right away:

This is not about burns or hedges.

There will be no gorse. You will not

notice the ceaseless photosynthesis

of the dead tree’s thousand fingers,

the trunk’s inhumanity writhing with texture,

as you will not be passing into farmland.

Nor will you be set upon by cattle. (9)

The sequence of negations in the first stanza of the poem states what Gillis’s poetry is not going to be about. In this first stanza, it says it is not going to be about the natural landscape of Ireland, even though he is using the name of one of the most famous hiking paths of Northern Ireland. In the second stanza, though, the negations cease and he starts to describe how cattle, which are typical of Irish landscape, observe the people who walk. Even though he is referring to the animals, such is their humanity they can be read as a metaphor for a certain kind of people, usually unrefined and ordinary.

Ingleberried, haunching and haunting

with their eyes, their shocking opals,

graving you, hovering and scooping you,

full of whatness that sieves you through

the abattoir hillscape, the runnel’s slabber

through darkness, sweating for the night

that will purple to a love-bitten bruise (9)

In the verses quoted above the poet simultaneously confers animosity and humanity to the cattle. They represent a group of the population who judges other’s behaviours and

beliefs. The reference to “shocking opals” that “grave”, “hover” and specially “scoop”, a journalistic term which refers to breaking news, is actually related to gossips and one sided ideologies which reproduce simplistic versions of the Northern Irish conflicts. However, as he stated in the first stanza, the poem it is not going to be about the “shocking opals”, or the blue eyes of those who stare and point their fingers to the others. It is as if the poet is trying to come to terms with the past and stating, “all this is in your head”, which means that much of the stereotypes and rivalry does not come from the past of colonisation, but rather from people’s ideology itself. In the last stanza, the poet provokes the readers with a challenging comment:

If you walk
 don’t walk away, in silence, under the stars’
 ice-fires of violence, to the water’s darkened strand.
 For this is not about horizons, or their curving
 limitations. This is not about the rhythm
 of a songline. There are no paths to follow.
 Everything is about you. Now listen. (9)

The last stanza prepares the reader for what is to come and the rest of the poems. Gillis is transposing to the lyric the stereotypes of the land and pleading people not to walk out on them, but listen and face them, instead. The use of the negation, more than his mode of affirmation, suggests once again the negative of the “Bagpipe Music” chorus – “It’s no go... it’s no go” – which was analysed in the first chapter. So important is McNeice’s legacy that not only is he a constant presence in the Belfast Group poets, but also in the younger generation. The Belfast-speak that Gillis adopts is also a residue of McNeice. However, he does that inserting not only the motifs and themes adopted by a previous generation of poets, such as Ciaran Carson, but also the new ones that are present in Belfast’s contemporary scene. In other words, he quotes fellow young poets as well as older ones. In order to see how this re-writing of the city works within the poetry of Gillis, the poems I am going to analyse more carefully are “Cold Flow”, “To Belfast”, and “Traffic Flow”, from the collection *Somebody, Somewhere* (2004), and “Laganside” from his second collection, *Hawks and Doves* (2007).

The first poem that mentions Belfast is the poem “Cold Flow”, with lines borrowed from the song “In the Ghetto” by the American rock-and-roll icon, Elvis Presley. Gillis describes a snowy and cold Belfast morning. The opening lines, “Presley singing *In the Ghetto*/ The Sky is almost blue./ Belfast, under blankets of snow, lies like a letter/ not written”, echo the original lyrics of the Presley song, “As the snow flies,/ On a cold and gray Chicago morning/ A poor little baby child is born”. From the parallelism between song and poem, it is conceivable that the poet would be comparing this “baby child” with Belfast – a city that was also a motif for the pop song “Belfast Child”, a number one hit from 1987, which has The Troubles as its main theme. However, instead of being committed to a socially engaged story, which was the case with both songs, Gillis instead focuses on the individual. In the first stanza, there is a man, walking and observing the streets of Belfast. Not completely alone, he is with his partner to whom he offers a cigarette. Interestingly, Gillis use the personal pronoun “you” in order to refer to his own literary persona. This linguistic manoeuvre enables him to construct a collective ethos. It is as if his discovery of the streets paved with snow is not simply his own poetic realization, but part of a general apprehension of the city in winter. However, at the end of the stanza, there is a particular detail that distinguishes him from the rest of the people: the comparison between the smoke on the top of the lake to Cadbury’s Twirl, one of the most famous chocolate brands in Ireland. Ironically, his poetic contribution to the city is this simple child-like comment.

Presley is singing In the Ghetto. The sky is almost blue.

Belfast, under blankets of snow, lies like a letter

Not yet written. You aim a cigarette, as though it were a
snooker cue,

at the red ball of her lips. Which never tasted better.

The hill path is glazed with rippled glass, you gaze through
a frozen sea of trees, at town’s oyster bedded pearl,

while smoke fudges the lough like a Cadbury’s TwirlTM. (13)

Repeating the last verse of the first stanza in the first line of the second stanza in a kind of enveloped stanza sequence, as the poet Padriac Fiacc had previously done in the poem “Gloss” (see chapter I)– or even a pop song chorus. The insertion of the acronym TM (Trade Mark) also confers irony to the poem. It is as if the lough and its snow could be

bought or consumed like any other commodity. In the second stanza, the look is directed to the streets and he observes the people walking with their umbrellas and the wet top of the buildings – but he also stops to wonder about the girl he is with.

While smoke fudges the lough like a Cadbury's Twirl

You see colour-fleck cars and butterfly people sprinkling

Their hundreds and thousands across the soft icing roads

thinking

of singing to Elvis. But she turns away, as if to say how stinking

the snow will become. What a whizz. What a whirl. What a girl.

So clever. So bitter. You could have hit her. The sky-dome

Douses

Whipped-cream snow, coating the strawberry brick of houses. (13)

As quoted above, the second stanza establishes a contrast between the pedestrians and the poet's girlfriend. Calling the citizens "butterfly people", the poet confers a happy and naive characteristic to their appreciation of the snow. For the poet, they seem to be happy about the weather, since they feel motivated to sing "In the Ghetto" as well. But as soon as he mentions Elvis, he directs his attention to the girl again and realizes she is not happy with the snow. She is mainly thinking about how fetid the streets are going to get after the storm is over. In a mixture of love and hate the poet admires, and at the same time, diminishes his partner. Starting with a song-like line in the fourth line of the stanza, "What a whizz. What a whirl", the poet recaptures the universe of Hollywood movies. In the film *Wizard of Oz*, the title song goes: "You're off to see the Wizard,/ The Wonderful Wizard of Oz./ You'll find he is a whiz of a Wiz/ If ever a Wiz there was./ If ever, oh ever, a Wiz there was". The similarity between the song and the poem is not accidental and Gillis is aware of his linguistic play.

The poet introduces his partner like a wonderful girl with the interjection "What a girl", but at the same time he says she is clever, he also reveals she is also bitter. And because of her bitterness, he wishes he could have hit her. The use of the *Wizard of Oz* lyrics to introduce the girl's dualistic nature seems to recapture the illusion of the *Wizard of Oz*, who was not really a Wizard, but a normal person who could perceive things that normal people could not. Also, this use of the American culture is there to recreate a new Belfast: infantile, like children who watch *The Wizard of Oz* and indulge themselves with chocolates. But, the

digression from the city people to the girl lasts just two verses and the poet is again captured by the city's movement. While in the second stanza the city and girl are equally important, in the third stanza the image of houses, like strawberries coated with whip cream, assume the main focus as the poet distances himself from the girl. Again, the metaphor of strawberries coated with cream also belongs to children's imaginary.

whipped-cream snow, coating the strawberry brick of houses,
while Aeroplanes levitate like Aero BarsTM over the tip
edge of Belfast's fruit bowl. The sweet snow flies as the
cloudless
sky cries, and you wipe your runny nose as the cold wind
blows.
It was the cigarette that tasted good. Not her strawberry lips.
She is melting into the horizon's bones and, as an aeroplane
drones,
desiccated coconut flakes fall on your face that turns toward
home. (13)

Following the same pattern of sweet brands, the poet uses another chocolate variety to describe the airplanes flying over the city. Now it is Nestle's Aero, another chocolate snack bar that is popular in Ireland. As the woman distances herself from the poem, the poet compares himself with the boy from the ghetto in Elvis's song, he blows his runny nose, like the boy does in the lyrics of the song: "And a hungry little boy with a runny nose/ plays in the street as the cold wind blows/ In the ghetto." Since the woman is leaving, he uses the simile of the end of the day as a horizon with bones and these bone slices, like coconut flakes, which falls on his face as he approaches home. It is as if her girlfriend is not important anymore, but the vision of "home". With the thought of "home", the movie *The Wizard of Oz* is evoked again. Also, the poet adds that it is the cigarette that tastes good, not her strawberry lips. But strawberry is also the metaphor used for the houses in Belfast. Through repeated similes, in a mixture of illusion, reality and amazement, the poet equalises girl and city.

In the last stanza, as he turns away from the picture, the city and people assume the main focus and the poet returns to the image of the butterfly. Throughout the poem, Gillis

uses creative and innocent metaphors to describe the city covered with snow. Mostly, they are associated with an infantile atmosphere: films, songs, chocolate and sweets, treats that appeal to children, and also creates the connection with Elvis's boy.

Desiccated coconut flakes fall on your face, turned toward
home
laid out like a blanket, through trees that are ice cream cones
The melting path sparkles like a genuine American Miller™.
bottle. And 100,000 butterflies will die, jealous of caterpillars,
while flowers ignite themselves in protest, then surrender
to the infinite cold flow, icing the Milky Way through.

Presley is singing *In the Ghetto*. The sky is almost blue. (13)

The fourth and last stanza (quoted above) is perhaps the most enigmatic, but the most revealing of the whole composition. The first line, repeated from the last line of the previous section in the enveloped form of stanza, is changed slightly to give more prominence to the city. From the infantile chocolate bars, the metaphors progress to beers – the melted path resembles an “American Miller”, a lager that is also appreciated in Belfast, but also goes back to chocolate, since Milky Way is another famous brand. Moreover, the image of the butterflies returns to the piece and the poet affirms they will die, jealous of caterpillars – this is probably because these caterpillars are more resistant to winter, having a shelter (like a home) to protect them, whereas the more fragile butterflies, cannot the cold weather. Gillis mentions flowers' self-immolation against the cold, however, their protest is not strong enough to defeat the “infinite cold flow” that also freezes the Milky Way, both literally and metaphorically – the chocolate bar. The poem concludes with the image from the beginning, Elvis singing *In the Ghetto* and the sky almost blue. The whole poem displays metaphors related to sweets and insects like butterflies and caterpillars, which also inhabit the infantile imagination.

With the multiple allusions to films, songs and trade mark, what kind of Belfast is constructed through Gillis' poetry? Is Belfast a city whose homeless wanderers roam in the cold and consume a lot of chocolate and beer? The most innovative procedure of the poem is that, through the profuse use of similes and metaphors, Gillis re-writes Belfast according to references to pop art, such as Elvis Presley and *The Wizard of Oz*, to marketable goods, such

as the chocolate and beers, and to natural metaphors, such as animals and snow. The traditional division between poetry and song, high and pop art is broken and the city of Belfast architected through Gillis's poems is true to its youngsters' passion for sweets and beer, and to mostly American culture.

By being faithful to the rhythm of the city and its people, Gillis's Belfast is auto reflexive. Even though he is observing his partner, his perceptions are rapidly shifting according to different stimuli: the sight, with the snow and the vision of the people and the shopping signs, the hearing, with the lyrics of the song, the touch, with the cold wind and warm cigarette, the taste, with the chocolate bars and beer and the smell with the girl's reference to unpleasant smell of the streets after the snow. Moreover, his intellectual perception is affected since the poet unravels an imaginative response to this assortment of sensations. Mentioning Walter Benjamin in the beginning of this chapter, I called this hotchpotch of sensations a project that entails a re-education of the senses. Through an active response to the sensations that surround him, the poet turns an apparent playful poem into an identitarian response not only to its local context, but also to its broader social spectrum: the poet creatively crosses references to Northern Irish and American culture. Since the poet is walking through the streets of Belfast, he creates the idea of a new *flâneur*, who responds back to what has been published before him and creates art out of an apparent chaos. In this case, Gillis is looking back to Louis McNeice "An Autumn Journal", Ciaran Carsosn's *flanerie*, Michael Longley's "Graffiti", in which he observes a graffiti picture of a billboard woman, and Derek Mahon's "An unborn child", in which the image of the moth serves as a guide to a baby who is going to be born in the conurbation of the city (for in depth analysis of these poems, see chapter II).

If on the one hand, Gillis does not leave Belfast geographically on the other, both, culturally and artistically the surroundings used by the poet alternate between international and national references – the chocolate, the beers, the song, the movies and the poets. The presence of the local in the poem, which responds to the cosmopolitan, corresponds to a political wish to transcend the provincial references. However, this transcendence is only realised through mass media and reproduced artefacts – the radio and the globalisation of goods. Thus, the poet realises art's fragility and the failed rebellion of the flowers, against the "cold flow". This simile represents the failure of poetry – it cannot bring about any change, neither in the course of the girl's way back home, nor in the continuation of winter. Perhaps this is also a reference to Northern Ireland's inability to provide a safe home for its inhabitants. Or maybe it's a reference to a "false spring" of hope.

In Gillis's "Cold Flow", the rebellion is present in the flowers. Thus, the political allegory it suggests is a total paralysis: since the people – represented by the butterflies – are faded to a gloomy future (death) it is the responsibility of the flowers to perform a revolution against sectarianism that still divides the city of Belfast. This image can also be associated with the outset of the Peace Process, in which the people were petrified. As one newspaper described the mood before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (1998), "people in Belfast now fall silent at television and radio news bulletins, waiting in dread to hear whether and where the gunmen have struck again, wondering how long the slaughter will go on at this appalling metronomic rate" (qtd. McKittrick & McVea 219). Although the book was published in 2004, the poem may be reflecting this generalized state of impotency of the general population, since the period after the Good Friday Agreement was of readjustment.

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) announced its ceasefire, in 1994, but ended it in 1996. With the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, Northern Irish citizens started to feel more hopeful, since Northern Ireland would have its own assembly and a joint executive based on cross-community power sharing. As a progression, in 1999 "death toll was seven, the lowest figure since the outbreak of the troubles in the 1960s" (McKittrick & McVea 227). But at the turn of the century, anxiety remained: would it be possible for Belfast to overcome its sectarian past? Would the situation swiftly and smoothly change, or would there be a false spring? The poem is indeed about this "cold flow", an abrupt stop in the sectarian and violent course of history, which would later provide a positive outcome. The freezing of the interpersonal relationships is counterbalanced with the sweetness of the chocolate brands and the addiction to beer and cigarettes. The poet captures a suspended moment in the history of the city of Belfast – the transition from the violence to peace. Thus, sweets, alcohol, tobacco and music serve as pacifying agents that would, at the same time, soothe and comfort these people. The introduction of the trademark sign "TM" also functions as the introduction of trans-national corporations and a more global market to Northern Ireland. This transition is also performed through the re-education of the senses, the new perceptions that this newly born city is offering.

"Cold Flow" also prepares the reader for the next poem, "To Belfast", in which, through four stanzas of six lines, the poet addresses the city as a woman. His approach is similar to Morrissey and Flynn's principle of blurring the frontiers between high and low forms of art, assuming in this case the identity of a cinema star. However, instead of assuming a male identity, he blurs the gender distinction and affirms that he is Grace Kelly,

the famous American star who became a European princess. In addition to gender, Gillis breaks many barriers in terms of language and tone. Even using the traditional sestina form, the poet dissolves the distinction between religious chants and poetry. In the very first line, the poet introduces the auxiliary verb, “may”, which is very much used in Irish blessings²⁴ and popular folk ballads. But, instead of continuing with the pious tone of such discourse, he inserts a comic remark. After using irony, the poet returns to the seriousness of religion:

May your bulletproof knickers drop like rain
And your church-spires attain a high state of grace
My lily-of-the-valley, the time is at hand
To ring your bells and uproot your cellulose stem.
I bought hardware, software, and binoculars to trace
Your ways of taking the eyes from my head (16)

The contrast between the first and second lines of the first stanza (quoted above) represents the poet’s response to the new “state of grace” of the city of Belfast. As Maguire states:

The Good Friday Agreement (the Belfast Agreement) of 1998 was widely regarded as a turning point in the long period of decline, made worse by decades of violence and dereliction which had left the city in pretty demoralised. Nevertheless, as soon as people come to believe the war was nearly over Belfast began to revive. A sustained period of investment produced new buildings and new jobs. (250)

From the quote above, the city of Belfast, toward the end of the nineties and the beginning of the 21st century was in a period of change – the violent past was being left behind and new technology was invading the place. However, In contrast to the modernization of goods, there was still an influence of religion in people’s sense of identity and culture. Because of this contrast, the stanza skilfully composes an oxymoron in order to depict these social antagonisms. The “bulletproof knickers” of the first line refers to the

²⁴ Eg. May the road rise up to meet you./ May the wind always be at your back./ May the sun shine warm upon your face,/ and rains fall soft upon your fields./ And until we meet again,/ May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

potential hypocrisy of Northern Irish morality and religious mores – if on the one hand there was a strong moral code that prevented women from having sexual intercourse before marriage, on the other hand, the new frame of mind could change that. Also the word “bulletproof” is a not-so-subtle reminder of the terrorist attacks and the deaths in road blocks.

The religious references do not stop in the first and second verses, but continue to the third and fourth when the poet calls Belfast, “my lily-of-the-valley”, a flower that has a religious connotation for both Catholics and Protestants. While Catholics associate the flower with the Virgin Mary’s tears by the Cross of Jesus and the Song of Songs 2:1 in the Bible (Web 13 Dec, 2011) the Protestants usually opt only for the biblical reference. More importantly, the Lily is a flower that is worn by republicans on Easter time so that the revolutionaries of the Irish Easter Rising of 1916 would be remembered. However, Instead of dwelling on political connotations, the poet asserts it is time for the city to ring her bells and get rid of these roots. It is as if the poet was telling people to let go of the sectarian past and embrace a new surge of energy.

However, instead of uplifting the lyric with liberal ideas, once more Gillis fractures the distinction between joke (the banter used by Flynn) and poetry, and, breaks the readers’ expectation. He brings “hardware, software and binoculars” to celebrate the city’s plucking his eyes out. This removal of the poet’s eyes is not only related to the re-education of the senses I mentioned in the previous poem, but also a reference to Tiresias, the blind prophet of Greek mythology who lived as a woman and a man during his life. Tiresias was punished by Hera when he hit two snakes that were copulating. After living seven years as a woman, he was given another chance, when he saw two snakes copulating again and let them go. In another episode, as a consequence of his double life, Hera, quarrelling with Zeus, summoned Tiresias to give his account on her argument. She claimed that men had more pleasure in a sexual relation, whereas Zeus, the opposite; when the seer agreed with Zeus, Hera blinded him. Not being able to do undo her spell, Zeus gave him the power to predict the future. In the poem, the figure of the poet almost predicts he is going to be blinded by the powerful city that resembles Hera, the great goddess, wife of Zeus.

The multiple references to mythology, history and symbols create layers of meanings, which dissociate the poem from its ludicrous nature and bring the poet to the discussion of social antagonisms in that period of change. In the second stanza, the poet pronounces the failure of these technologies in controlling the confusion of the present. And he does that by mentioning technology itself: aircrafts, screens and cameras. While trying to escape from

technology in myth, the poet falls back on his own trap – the systems of knowledge – technology and myth – are so intertwined that any distinction is bound to fail:

And none of it worked. We've been coming to a head
for too long, aircraft prick the veins of your rain-
bow as they shoot you in soft focus to trace
the timelines of your cellulite skin. But with the grace
of a diva on a crackling skin, you never stem
to the cameras, you're forever getting out of hand. (16)

As seen above, the second stanza provides the reader with information of the past of the city: the “aircraft pricking” the city’s skies and the shots out of focus are direct associations to the Belfast blitz in the Second World War and the Troubles, in which the gunmen would not kill just one single person, but various in terrorist attacks. The “timelines of your cellulite skin” makes a comparison with a damaged woman’s skin, saturated by fat (perhaps from eating too much chocolate in “Cold Flow”?). However, instead of getting her down, these imperfections do not affect her, for she is always getting out of control – like a capricious lady who cannot manage her personal desires. It is highly pertinent how the American culture penetrates the structure of the poem – first in the state of “Grace” – “Amazing Grace”, although being an English hymn, refers to the anti-slavery feeling spread in the United States. Also, “Graceland” is the mansion where Elvis Presley lived in Memphis, Tennessee. Second, there is the mentioning of the cameras and the reference to a perfect beauty which the soft focus of the movie camera encapsulates. Through the lenses, it is hard to see cellulite or other minor imperfections. The American cinematographic references serve as an annulment of imperfections, or the softening of subtle differences which are not seen through the cameras – actresses are also eternally young on films. The image of the female body continues in the third stanza. However, the poet returns to his school days, when he was requested to draw a map of the city:

Once in school, on a greaseproof page we had to trace
the bust and booms of your body and I was ashamed to hand
mine because it lacked what Da called grace.
And I wish I was the centre of the rain-

drop that's falling on your head, the key to your hand-
cuffs, the drug that could re-conjugate your head.

Once in school, on a greaseproof page we had to trace
the bust and booms of your body and I was ashamed to hand
mine in because it lacked what Da called grace.

And I wish I was the centre of the rain-
drop that's falling on your head, the key to your hand-
cuffs, the drug that could re-conjugate your head. (16)

The connection with the first and second stanza is kept in the third, since the poet holds the idea of grace, violence, womanhood and representation through the use of polysemic words and references to American movies and songs. For example, "greaseproof" resonates with "bulletproof" of the first stanza; the "busts and booms" resonates with the "aircraft pricking the city's veins" and the "cellulite skin". Through the images, Belfast becomes a vulgar lady whose poet lacks the "grace" to draw. Its "busts and booms" have at least three meanings: besides the obvious inversion of the economic "boom and bust" that Belfast, in addition to every Western city, has experienced in the recent economic crisis, it can refer to the sensual parts of a woman, as well as signifying the noises of bombs or guns. Also, the poet voices his wish to re-conjugate her head (mind, thought, reason), or her reasoning in a contemporary setting. The allusion to desire, handcuffs and head are also part of a sexual image that has also a war zone component. Altogether with the polysemy, Gillis' has indirectly referenced the song "Rain drops keep falling on my head", a number one hit song written for the Western Film, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). The evocation of American pop culture once more reinforces the idea that, since Belfast has adopted a more American way of life, her reasoning is also going to be affected. There is an intricate sexual desire involved: Belfast, poet, the United States and the power of history and literary tradition. The last stanza, though, resolves this sexual tension with a hermaphroditic reversal: the poet is Grace Kelly (another American reference, since Kelly was of Irish descent.) leaving Belfast for a symbolic Monaco – the place where she lived after marrying Monaco's prince, Rainier III. Thus, the whole cycle of desire and mutual aggression will soothe the "sting" of the rain, or the traumas of the past.

For Belfast, you'd be a Hollywood film, then I'd be Grace
 Kelly on my way to Monaco, to pluck the stem
 of a maybell with its rows of empty shells, its head
 of one hundred blinded eyes. I would finger your trace
 in that other city's face, and bite its free hand
 as it fed me, or tried to soothe the stinging of your rain. (16)

Inasmuch as the poet keeps repeating the same themes throughout the poem – as the structure of the sestina allows – the image of Grace, the flowers, the blinded eyes and Greek mythology return once more to the stanza. In the conclusion of the piece, the poet decides to leave the city. However, before that, even blinded, he is going to face the one hundred-eyed monster: this is perhaps Typhon, the son of Gaya, the largest creature ever born. With a hundred heads instead of hands, Typhon caused panic in the pantheon, but was destroyed by Zeus. Both poet and city change roles in this last stanza, as a male, he becomes female, and as a female, the city is transformed into a Typhon. Since the monsters can also allude to American movies, it is as if the city of Belfast was progressing, from an old lady – image that was used by its major male poets, as I showed in chapters I and II – to a creature whose heads and hands are a mixture of rain and grace – as the repetitive structure of the sestina suggests. In this sense, Belfast became a commodity, a tourist attraction that is captured by the American industry and represented through its stereotypes. The abundant use of jargons and clichés reinforces the idea of a stereotype – of a mass-reproduced series of fallacies about Irish independence and Irish question.

Gillis' insistence in inserting American pop culture in his poems is perhaps due to Bill Clinton's involvement in the Peace Process. According to Terence Brown, the fall of Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War encouraged Bill Clinton in 1992, then the newly-elected American Democratic President, to invest his efforts in making a resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland as a foreign policy success (Brown, *Ireland, a Social and Cultural History* 387). In Brown's account of the IRA ceasefire, Clinton played a key role, organizing coalitions and meetings of both Unionist and Republican parties. Neither critical nor judgmental about the American involvement, as an artist, Gillis introduces this relevant historical detail into the cultural references of his poems. Also, there has historically been a close relationship between Northern Ireland and America, due to immigration. With a view to avoiding taking political sides on the Irish question, the poet instead turns to non-Irish, more

specifically American, pop songs and movies in order to represent the contemporary atmosphere of the country. It is as if he wished to translate symbolically and linguistically the new choices of Belfast youth. The poem “Don’t you”, which is not going to be analyzed in depth here, is constituted solely of lines picked up from rock and pop songs of the eighties, conveying another form of art – one that reproduces the catchy melodies of mass produced songs. It is also the time when music and television, particularly MTV, invaded the world’s culture and became a youth fever.

The next poem, “Traffic Flow” is perhaps the only one that talks about Belfast without references to women or American culture. However, it is a short poem that maps the plurality of voices and references of this new land. Through one stanza of twelve unrhymed lines, the poet reproduces a postman’s drive around Northern Ireland: From Baltic Avenue to Moneyglass – one of the smallest villages in Ireland – the poet describes what people have been doing in these places. With a reference to the title of the collection, “Somebody, Somewhere” the poet describes the arbitrariness of people’s attitudes and feelings:

Letters from Vow and Moneydig are sent to Baltic Avenue,
while from Friendly Row parcels are sent to Drumnakilly
and to Tempo?. From Whitehead, past Black Head, and up
to Portmuck, Byron steers his bright red van, dreaming of
Sara economy Place, whose handheld has just gone dead.
Down on Cypress? Avenue, Katie from Downhill texts Conrad,
lingering in Joy’s Entry, listening to *Here comes the Night*.
She keys ‘Sorry, but I had 2’ while the busker, Sharon, thinks
of phoning home to Gortangallon. On Dandy street somebody’s
Da says to somebody’s Ma: ‘Come on to fuck’. It’s good to talk.
Moneyglass falls with disillusion. Everybody scampering under
the same weather, crossing lines, never coming together. (17)

Describing letters sent, messages delivered and incomplete chats, the poet seems to be expressing the contemporary disconnectedness of people. Even though there are fast track posts and mobile phones through which people chat and send text messages, forms of technology which theoretically should bring people closer together, communities are

shattered and connectedness become just “crossed” telephone lines. The long lines of the poem, combined with the little they convey resembles an empty map that reader has lost the ability to interpret. In the middle of the crossed connections, the name of people evoke literary personas – Byron (Lord) and Conrad (Joseph) and famous pop actress and movie characters – Sharon (Stone), Dandy (Crocodillo). Similarly to the inhabitants’ names, the places also evoke different references: they are either single syllables (Drum, Port, Gort,) or related to colours, (White and Black), or associated with money (Moneydig, Moneyglass). Pop music plays another important role, the mentioning of the song *Here comes the Night*, with the reference to a busker, highlights the importance of pop music – the urban space the city becomes an iPod in which people dissociate themselves from the noise around them and accompany their inner thoughts with their own particular soundtrack. The gloomy atmosphere ends with the poem’s conclusion “Moneyglass falls with disillusion”. Even though there is a famous racetrack in this town, it can be also de disillusion of the new Northern Ireland, which instead of connecting its citizens, is dividing them in their technologies and portable devices.

Progress in terms of themes and formal experiments, attitudes and tone, Alan Gillis, three years later, published his second collection, *Hawks and Doves* (2007). From a more geographically- distanced point of view (he now lives and teaches in Scotland), the poet still portrays the city of Belfast, but a city that is less Americanised and truer to its present moment. Also, this is an echo of Ciaran Carson’s preference for the poetry of the city of Belfast. Even though Carson since *For all we know* (2008) has changed his themes, he continues to be the greatest Belfast poet alive. According to McDonald,

Gillis has written a volume which puts into poetry a new Belfast – one which is partly ‘the new Belfast’ of contemporary perception – in such a way as to change the literary map. The strong precursor for Gillis is Ciaran Carson (too strong, at times, in his first book), whose poetry gave the city of Belfast an extraordinary (and often menacing) literary life; now, Gillis has moved on decisively, and has become secure in a voice that is all his own. Belfast also, of course, has been moving on in the meantime – into the life of a modern city, with all the good (and the bad) things that life generally entails. (Web 8 November, 2011).

Without the necessity of portraying Belfast's streets and alleyways, the city becomes an absence, with only sparse references to its streets, avenues and spots. The poem "Laganside", the last one of the book, offers a different perspective from what?, It is not about the people of Belfast and their small niceties, like "Traffic Flow", but about new entrepreneurship projects. Through twelve stanzas of twelve verses each, the poet describes the *Laganside*, the name given to the area in the city centre, around the river Lagan that was revitalized in the nineties and given a new surge of life. With theatres, parks, walking tours and attractions for all kinds of public, this new entertainment area realises the heavy investments made on the city after the Troubles. However, the poem does not wish to praise such a change, since the poet sees that this project of transformation entails a necessary fault: a collective historic amnesia. In this new regenerated city, the past is lost and the present is simply a signifier which has lost the ability to signify. In each line of the poem, Gillis creates assonances and alliterations that do not go beyond their sonority. It as if the poet, after all the trouble from the past, wishes to capture the new street noises, ones that are less associated with bombs and fusillades, but to innovative architectural undertakings.

The number of stanzas – twelve – is a numerological reference to the twelve areas that were renewed: Lanyon Place, Cathedral Quarter, Donegall Quay, Pottinger Quay, York Street, Custom House Square, Queen's Quay/Bridge End, Gasworks, Maysfield, Sirocco, Greater Clarendon, and Ravenhill Reach. All of these areas were run-down spots that received special attention and were renovated or completely transformed. Nonetheless, Gillis does not mention them in the poem, but rather gives hints that the landscape has changed, although his own memory is too weak to recall the past. But as the poet states in the middle of the poem, "these airs, this river, these sights have not/ been to me happy-clappy totem,/ not a masochistic home truth tucked away/ in the dark corner of my room". This is a comment that indicates the poet is not living in Belfast anymore. The city for him, instead of becoming a nostalgic land of playful memories, is entrapped in an eternal present. This eternal present is what Flynn's couple celebrates in the poem "Cypress? Avenue". Even though the poet is trying to configure a new poetic voice for this moment, he is not alone. In addition to the wanderers who cross his way in the poem, his own "better half" his partner, whispers the central line of the poem: "Happiness is good health and bad memory". However, this is a bad memory of what? For the historic Troubles? For personal traumatic moments, perhaps unrelated to the Troubles? For what was written before the poet? And what is this post-modern happiness? What does it entail? Right from the first stanza of the poem, the poem rehearses a journey to amnesia:

I cannot call back the time, lasso the millions
 of minutes by the scruff of their scrawny
 wee seconds, or knock the lost years,
 bop the back of their heads and bale
 them into a gateway van that will welly it
 to a warehouse where time is put right
 by a crack team of agents in tandem
 which a renegade but brilliant neurobiologist.
 No, the missing months are truly missing,
 Marooned, cut adrift, left for bye bye to dry
 Out in the wreck of themselves, then stalk
 An undead and hallow land forever thirsting (73)

Using the violent image of torture, the poet affirms in the stanza reproduced above that time will not go back. He is asserting the months he spent away far from the land are forever gone any attempt to bring them back is faded to stalk an “undead and hallow land forever thirsting”. This reference to *The Hollow Land* (1856) by William Morris confers a mournful and gloomy tone to the poem, since the novel by the romantic author talks about a Medieval Land in which knights discover that God displays no signs of his judgment (Hollow 446). In a gloomy tone, Gillis compares Belfast to this atemporal and fantastic land in order to give an unreal fantastic character to his poem. Regaining lost time is quite unconceivable; hence, he prefers to leave it in the past, in medieval stories or in thirsty lands. Another possible reference is the poem “The Hollow Men”, by T.S.Eliot, which, also inspired by Morris’s novel, tells the story of “The Hollow people”, who are suffering in a pre-purgatory land.

But the “anyway” in verse seems to bring the reader back from his fantastic reverie to the actuality of the place where he is: the Laganside. The second and third stanzas are linked through an enjambment that delays the point of the poem. Gillis loses himself in a contrast: the image of what this area used to be and its present condition. First, he seems quite pleased with the fact that no one wrecked the newly planted vegetation that is growing along the path which follows the river Lagan. However, he also attests that in the past, they used to be

“pissed-over” and “ripped-up”. In the third stanza, there is a huge digression, and in an almost Joycean description of the botany of the towpath, the poet does not complete the sentence. He starts the sentence in the penultimate line in the second stanza stating that he is tired of his landscape. Thus, the examination that he does in the third stanza simply recreates the musicality of the place through the names of flowers and bushes.

After getting tired of linguistically miming the sounds of the nature, the poet asks his partner what she knows of life, and her answer is “good health and bad memory”. Instead of actually changing something in the surface of the poem, nothing changes, since in the fourth stanza the poet describes a teacher with a rowing team going round the Laganside. Instead of feeling nostalgic with the sight of nature, the poet remembers the time when men would love to practice shooting using ducks in the lake. This memory directs his eyes back to the lake and he enumerates the electric products reflected on its surface. In the same way he described the names of the vegetation in the third stanza, in the fourth and fifth he describes the products and marketable goods he sees advertised in the shops around the area. In the fifth stanza, particularly, Gillis relates the products to the language of Belfast, giving authenticity and reliability to the place. The sequence of rhymes, extremely musical and dynamic, ends the fifth stanza with a humorous tone of a drunk neighbor who could not find the house because of his altered state of consciousness. Actually, the rhythm follows the intoxicated logic of free and somewhat absurd connections.

The sixth stanza, introduced with the interjection, “Anyway”, also indicates another digression. In this stanza, Gillis intertwines both natural and manmade landscapes, giving special attention to the “cranes”— the most characteristic feature of Belfast’s landscape. After a crossing a sprawl of tourists, the poet states that he does not miss Belfast. By way of contrast, he quotes Derek Mahon’s poem “Ovid in Tomis”, a poem that was analysed in the second chapter, and which talks about Mahon’s feeling of exile. In contrast to other poets analyzed in this chapter, from his generation, the departure from the city does not cause trouble or anxiety; it is simply part of the flow of life, although he seemed troubled earlier in the poem when he mentioned he was leaving the city.

Following the same logic of digression and reflection in the previous stanzas, Gillis describes a neighbour’s face, road ways, and ghettos, reaching the final conclusion that he is stuck in Belfast:

while the sky arrests an outbound plane,
and my better half lags behind to savour

the shifting terrain, leaving me to find
our way back to the streets, knowing
I'll never leave here, or come back again (77)

Even though the poet digresses and has a short span of memory, this is the place to which he is stuck. Happiness is, then, the total dissolution of history in the musicality of the words and the new goods of the city of Belfast. The excessive use of images and signs signify the overproduction of meanings of this city. However, they do not bear connectedness to history and resignification of the past. Belfast paralyses people with new goods and an impressive number of art and architectural projects. The American writer, Djuna Barnes asserted in her novel *Nightwood*, “What is a ruin but Time easing itself of endurance?” (125) As a decadent author, Barnes talked about civilization itself. On the other hand, her quotation is significant to what Gillis does in his last book. He eases Belfast from its endurance, and like the North Arcade, it represents a landmark of what the past could have been – but to which nobody, in the present, pays any attention. The burden of history is not so heavy, since happiness lies in the oblivion of the most traumatic events and circumstances.

The excessive signs are meaningless to Gillis since, what is relevant for the present is the size of the new projects and the social intervention of those buildings. However, what still matters to the poet is the linguistic rhythm of Belfast-talk: a mixture of a drunken-like slangs mixed with a disconnected airy imagery. The most significant line of the poem is perhaps “I’ll never leave here, or come back”, which summarizes the poet’s intents. Gillis is trapped by his memories of the old Belfast, which follow him wherever he goes, and when he returns to the new Belfast he is a pop culture zombie, wandering the land and trapped by his own memories, unable to digest the present ones. Thus, he lives off these memories, ruined objects that belong to this old Belfast that does not cease to haunt him.

IV. THE ODYSSEY ARENA, OR “I HAVE NOTHING TO DECLARE”

The Odyssey Arena is a huge sports and concert hall in the Titanic Quarter, in the city centre of Belfast. Built at a cost of over £120 million, the “Odyssey” opened in 2001 and since then, has been the site of innumerable concerts and sports events, specially boxing matches. By being part of the new Belfast, the building, together with the Greek myth of Ulysses going back home, is also a landmark of the city’s economic and entertainment power.

The Odyssey Arena is a venue of mass culture. Singers such as Lady Gaga, Van Morrison, U2, and Snow Patrol have performed there, whereas classical European orchestras were directed either to the Waterfront Hall, or the Ulster Hall, the traditional theatre dedicated to classical music since the nineteenth century, where the city's Ulster Orchestra performs also on a weekly basis. Impressive for its size, since it was elected one of the six major concert venues in the world, and its architectural design, recalling a Roman arena, the Odyssey is the also the landmark of a proto-political wish. This desire related to the transcendence of the city: is the goal of its construction was to open Belfast's port to mass culture and reveal its capacity to overcome its provincial status. More than that, the arena symbolizes the truce between mass culture and Belfast's citizens – specially a young middle class who are now able to afford the concert prices and who, most of the time, prefer American and British pop stars for their cultural entertainment.

In the year 2009, after forty years of conflicts, terrorist attacks, destruction and lost hopes Belfast faces a new challenge. If on the one hand, "people have become more secure and self-confident and are taking the opportunities offered to them", on the other hand, "Belfast remains a divided city: 98% of public housing is still segregated along religious lines" (Maguire 258). This future presents a new challenge to Belfast:

tackle what has been described as 'self imposing apartheid' (Mary O'Hara, The Guardian, 14 April 2004) – the social and the political division that continue to characterize the city – [and]... also to sustain and maintain its recent positive developments (258)

Maguire's remark also highlights the economic trouble that investments with "positive development" can cause. The Odyssey Arena is the visual image selected for the last part of this chapter because it represents the social ethos of the period the young poet Miriam Gable refers to in her first volume *The Squirrels are Dead* (2009). I do not wish to equate or reduce her poetic energy to the Odyssey's concerts, but to produce a contrast and answer a simple question, one facing not just Belfast by many other "reborn" cities in the 21st-century: how can a marketable culture spearheaded by industrial projects produce interesting works of art? Gamble's collection, with its obscure title, tries to answer this question by being truthful to the work of poetry with craft and technique. Moreover, her poem about Belfast, "Spring in Belfast", translates this new Belfast that has opened up to the cosmopolitan postmodernism and, at the same time, is trying to overcome its sectarian past.

“Spring in Belfast” is a nine -couplet poem that echoes McNeice’s “Belfast”, Mahon’s “Spring in Belfast”, and even Sinéad Morrissey “In Belfast”. Subtracting a personal voice, the poem disrupts the lyric introspective tone by telling the story of a piece of linen that travels from Ireland to her summer trip in her bag. The choice of the theme is already objectified in a metonym: the city is represented as a piece of cloth that is transformed according to the line of production. From the raw material to the product and person who wears the product, the poem metaphorically compares the industrial city of Belfast to an ongoing palimpsest, such as Gamble defines city and fabric right in the first stanza:

Creased like a palimpsest, this piece

Of Irish linen, hacked crudely (22)

The second stanza is introduced with an enjambment that creates suspense: the fabric could have been turned into anything, but it is transformed into trousers, an article of clothing that gives people mobility to go from one place to the other. In the second stanza, it starts to travel to different countries, suggesting that the capitalist mode of production is global and not simply local anymore:

Into trousers, labeled in Spanish,

price-marked in Euros, then in pounds. (22)

Diverting from the object, the poet places the trousers in her Karmor suitcase. She also adds the detail of the radio program that is on: BBC’s *Sound of the Sixties*, a show dedicated to songs from the sixties.

I lay them out in the spring light,

Stem and flatten it, and fold up

Neatly in the *Karrimor* –

As *Sound of the Sixties* changes over (22)

The poet’s placing the trousers in her suitcase represents the continuation of the production line. The linen is fabricated in Ireland, since the raw material is there, then it travels to other countries to be sewn and labeled, to the store where it is sold and then, finally to her house and suitcase, for further foreign travel as a purchased product. The end of the line of production in the poet’s journey incites a reflection not about the people who actually

fabricate it, but solely about herself, since the trousers were the product of her “labours”, which means that she worked in order to purchase it:

The smooth product of my labours,

fresh as a new development,

plush layerings of plasterwork

behind which silences repair

to carry to Dubai, Karachi (22)

The image of “plush layerings of plasterwork” points to the city of Belfast itself since plasterwork is usually found in interiors as decorative motifs. The continuation “behind which silences repair” evokes the silent atmosphere of the city which was once troubled by surveillance and attacks. In the middle of the seventh couplet the scene changes again and the poet is not in her house anymore, but at the airport. The letters in italics reproduce the voice of the flight attendants who help to organize queues at the boarding gates. As quoted below:

(this queue for diplomats, please

then make a right for customs)

like some old peddler of wares

across the continents. No thank-

you. I have nothing to declare. (22)

At the end of the poem, Gamble states she has “nothing to declare”, literally conveying the idea there are no foreign purchased goods on which duty needs to be paid to Customs and Excise on arrival. Moreover, her leaving Belfast also suggest an exile, even for the summer. Of course, the more important, obvious meaning is metaphorical: “Nothing to declare” is the “nothingness” of this postmodern city that struggles to overcome economically and socially its problems and history. The reference to the linen industry directs the readers to

the history of Irish industry in which the linen played a central role, and which elevated Belfast in the Victorian period to a central position. According to Merlyn Cohen,

the time period between 1830-1870, characterized by extensive accumulation and spatially concentrated production” (7). With this expansion of industries, a new kind of city emerged, the “competitive industrial city” or “nodalities. By being a port city, “Belfast was at the apex of the linen-based nodality in the Irish northeast and was a representative competitive industrial city. Rural competitive industrial towns, and villages along the Rivers Lagan and Bann also flourished during this period.” (8).

It is therefore not arbitrary that Gamble has chosen linen to represent Belfast metonymically. Nevertheless, it is not simply that traditional raw material that has triggered the city’s industrial development; it is also described as a “palimpsest”. The traditional Greek “palimpsest” was a manuscript which was scraped off and used for other texts, is here used as a metaphor for a city which has been re-written and re-interpreted. This comparison also applies to the politics of Belfast, which was altered according to political interpretations. The image of the palimpsest indicates this place is volatile and temporary, its stories and narratives were and are written and erased at the same pace. In addition to that, the industrious property of fabricating linen is coterminous to the production of poetry: while the city functions as a palimpsest the poems about the city are the messages engraved in the parchment. These poems are the evanescent material, and the city, the continuous material for their construction.

* * *

In the aphorism dedicated to boredom, Walter Benjamin (*Arcades*, 101-120) cites the psychological treaty *L’Ennui* by Emile Tardieu. According to Benjamin the book’s main thesis is that “life is purposeless and groundless and all striving for happiness and equanimity is futile” (104). Benjamin goes on as far as to argue that this is the breviary for the twentieth century. In the light of the poets studied in the third chapter of this thesis, boredom continues to be part of the breviary for the twenty-first century. Still on the theme of boredom,

Benjamin affirms, it most often happens “when we don’t know what we are waiting for” (104). Based on this uncertainty about what to expect or believe, the poets discussed above not only wait, but also creatively act on this waiting. Instead of longing for a miraculous change or defending a totalizing utopia (as some of the poets of the thirties did), these authors develop their “post utopic” lack of ideals. They use irony as their weapon to produce a distinctive form of poetry. Exposed through different modes, Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Allan Gillis and Miriam Gamble not only openly declare their lack of utopia, but using a filtering process of irony and humour, they present their personal architecture of the city of Belfast corresponding to their lyric voice. In other words, they construct their literary identity based on ironic comments and descriptions of the city of Belfast, while still working within the standards, styles and themes that were created by their predecessors.

Distinct from the previous two chapters, in which the architects Charles Lanyon and Sir Charles Brumwell inspired the dialectical images of the poets, the third chapter is grounded on the revitalization of Belfast’s architectural sites. The Albert Clock and the region now entitled as Titanic Quarter – where the Odyssey arena is located – serve as a dialectical image for this younger generation of poets whose impulse is to challenge the new mass media projects that seek to transform the city into a touristic site for walking tours and pop concerts. Instead of being centered in an architect, this chapter is centered on the ironic mask the poets wear. Aware of these projects in their mind, but still affected by the past of civil distresses, these poets disclose their lack of hope in present and future.

For Sinéad Morrissey, Belfast has two phases: a first which is distant, when she was either in Japan or, travelling, and a second, current phase which is represented by her return to the city where she grew up. Conscious of her alienation from the city, Morrissey constructs a new Belfast, based on past memories which would help her to trigger a self-discovery. The poet shows that a city being reinvented by the Peace Process can also help her to reinvent her literary persona. Leontia Flynn, on the other hand, mocks the walking tours and a potted, easily digestible version of Belfast history. As the main figure of speech in her work, Northern Irish banter represents her way of dealing with a naïve happy present that is trying to erase its past. Following the same pattern, Allan Gillis presents a Belfast that has more in common with other British cities: one inhabited by young groups of people who spend their time drinking and going to night clubs. For him, the Belfast of the waitresses and young couples comes to life and offers an alternative version to the tragic love story portrayed by Paul Muldoon’s “Whim”. Concluding this attempt to map the contemporary site of Belfast in poetry, Miriam Gamble’s poetry represents the “nothing to declare” of the present. It is as if,

in the face of a post-modernity that has little to offer, other than a revisitation of old themes and ideas, poetry has to be a 'nothing' in order to again become relevant. In other words, it has to leave the production line and instrumental reason in order to become art.

Although the Belfast poetry scene is vibrant and its poetry readings are well attended by an invigorated generation of poets, these four poets that I have selected represent a core part of the portrayal of the city itself. Perhaps their irony is not the only response to the post-modern predicament, but I believe that these poets' artistic choices represent a continuation of the work of the two preceding generations of poets. Their art is the answer to a general plea of self discovery after a civil war and a Peace Process: through their irony and lack of hope, they voice the general longing of Belfast population for a more certain present and future – one without segregation, fear, discrimination and violence – maybe another utopia.

CONCLUSION

*She's handsome, she's pretty, she's the belle of Belfast city.
She is courting one two three, please won't you tell me who is she
(Traditional Irish folk song)*

In the words of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, the “city is an oeuvre, closer to a work of art than to a simple material product... If there is a production of the city, and the social relations in the city, it is a production and a reproduction of human beings” (101). Throughout this thesis I have tried to define how a specific city, Belfast – which is not one of the most important capitals of Europe and which has an inglorious past of wars and sectarianism— has been transformed into a work of art. The human beings that Lefebvre refers to are the ones who make history a work of art, according to the historical circumstances that are available to them. Based on Lefebvre, I argue that in the depiction of the city of Belfast there is a correlary relation between history and art. While the former affects the production of the latter, art replies back with statements that seek to either illuminate the present with challenging positions or heal the wounds left by traumatic events.

Following this train of thought, city dwellers construct the city, but the city's history also shapes traditions and behaviors typical of its dwellers. In this mechanism both common men and artists are products of the same history. If the ordinary passer-by and the prized poet are equally determined by their environment, what makes these artists particularly special? Their exceptionality lies in their acute observation of their society and art, which enables them to have a broader perception of the contradictions of history and tradition. Their artistic rationality illuminates the present with a challenging review of the past – the possibility of change lies within this temporal exchange, which results in a broader social sensibility.

In the three chapters of this thesis, I have been defending the city of Belfast, in addition to being the artistic product of its dwellers, has been transformed into a work of art by its most prominent poets. Complementing Lefebvre's idea, I would like to add that in order to be a work of art, cities require an aesthetic project, which is primarily the work of architects, engineers, city planners, sculpturers, fresco painters, mural artists, graffiti artists, etc. In the case of Belfast, Charles Lanyon played the role Haussmann played in Paris – he was responsible for more than embellishing the city, but giving it a distinctive characteristic and an architectural identity. However, instead of falling back on one distinctive style, he employed eclecticism to configure the city of Belfast. Divergent in its architecture, the

shipyards and linen factories contrasting with a Gothic University and a Marble city Hall; its most famous clock, The Albert Clock, is next to a state of the art concert hall; quiet parks rub against a bustling city centre. Altogether with Lanyon, Alfred Brumwell changed the landscape of the city. The project which he conceived for the City Hall created an aura of civilization and sophistication for Belfast. It has transformed the cultural autonomy of the place, by subordinating important political events to this particular space. Another important detail of the city of Belfast, which has not been the work of important architects, but of the people itself, is the paintings in the murals. They work as an open political pamphlet where citizens from different communities express their fears, hopes and ideas. Due to its contradictory and pluralistic characteristic Belfast is as varied as the its most prominent poets' styles in representing this city.

Belfast's incongruous landscape inspired both the poets selected for analysis and the division of the chapters of this thesis. Faithful to the city, the architectural trademarks presented in the chapters were applied as a dialectic image, a visual and material object that helped the readers to visualize how each aesthetic project of the poets in question reflect a greater intention: the poetic architecture of Belfast. Carved out of the poets' sense of exile, alienation and longing for a transcendental home, the representation of the city of Belfast unifies the poets from the North of Ireland and gives them more than an identity. It gives them an aesthetic principle.

In an era where literary criticism is overcome with a multicultural fallacy that elevates writers and artists due to their sectarian membership – either to minority groups or socially excluded classes of society – the poets from the North of Ireland refuse to follow a propagandist political project. Contrary to what would be expected of poets in a time of civil crisis and injustice, these artists go against the grain and make poetry based on work with meter, rhyme and rhythm. It is relevant to observe that other than in their biography, little is known about their religious or political association. This is highly relevant because it shows the poets are united not because of parochial views, but due to a genuine commitment to poetry. One of their impulses is to poetically portray the city of Belfast, which has been interpreted by this as an attempt to symbolically voice and chronicle the political and social divides that separated – and still separates – the North from the South of the land, Protestant and Catholic, Nationalist and Unionist. Each with his own personal perspective, these poets portray the city through a varied set of images, allegories, myths, and colloquial expressions, all of which together compose the “constellation” of the city of Belfast. As Benjamin argued at the end of *The Arcades Project*, art stands at the threshold of commodity (898): instead of

being utterly commercialized by the utilitarian logic of capitalism, art opens itself to the exercise of creativity and autonomous thought. This autonomy is absorbed by the poets in order to portray the city. While the city restricts citizens' political autonomy, the poetic representation of this space encourages freedom and, perhaps, utopian visions of a thorough and communal unification.

Quoting Jorge Luis Borges in an article that analyses the short story "Hunger" (1928) by the Irish author James Stephens, the Latin American critic Laura Izarra asserts that "literature is the space of the probable, the possible and even the impossible, where past, present and future exist simultaneously as it happens in our dreams." (76). Developing Borges' association of literature with dreams, Izarra suggests that literature is a *space of confluence* where different world views and histories intercept and interconnect. Observing the chronological progression of this thesis through this idea, it is possible to observe that the poems about the city of Belfast are not solely about Belfast. Rather, in the conurbation of urban space of the city, they summon other cities and make parallels with other realities and modes of perception. Perhaps this is the most revealing aspect of the poetry of the city of Belfast.

In chapter one Louis MacNeice mentions his exile and lack of belonging in both Carrickfergus and London. Since MacNeice's geographical home is actually de-centered, both in his own experience and collectively, every attempt to a homecoming reminds the subjectivity that he is estranged from his place of origin. Due to this reason, his constellation of memories aggregates gloomy and ironic images: his portrayal of the land ranges between a squalid woman to a place where gambling and commodities prevail. The significance of these images are such that practically every poet in the Ulster Renaissance and in the contemporaneity recollects or rewrites his pieces such as "Valediction", "Snow", "Belfast" and "Bagpipe Music". In addition to that, disenchanted with the utilitarianism of capitalism and authoritarian downturn of socialism, the poet still serves as a model, mainly because his poetry cannot be reduced to political propaganda. The confluence in MacNeice is present in his portrayal of history the beginning of the century. The dilemmas of Northern Ireland were part of the social ethos of the period, but they also reflected a broader scenario.

Sill in chapter I, the poet John Hewitt displays a clear despise for the city of Belfast – or any other city. Instead of the prosperity and hope foreseen by many of the modern poets, he sees in the city the downfall of civilization. However, his preference to the countryside was based on a firm belief in socialist ideals. By reproducing the language of his fellow countrymen and comrades, he envisioned a utopian future. Although Hewitt is not as

extensively quoted as MacNeice, his example as a socially engaged artist grants him a respectable image. His deeds and poems are often recollected and quoted in poetry readings and cultural events around the city of Belfast. Concluding the first chapter, the poetry of Padraic Fiacca demonstrates how the experience of living in the United States of America created a distinctive poetic sensibility. The reason for that in addition to comparing Belfast to Paris, his poetic language reflects a sense of alienation and disengagement with any national or political project. Fiacca's work is the first that completely embodies the figure of the *flâneur* the one who strolls around the city and absorbs the comings and goings of its dwellers and the ups and downs of history. However, his subjective voice does not seem to transcend the pathos of reality, rather it absorbs this pathos and transforms it into raw material for his poetry.

In chapter two, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley demonstrate the confluence of Belfast with other cities in their absorption of not only Greek and Latin myths, but also traditional themes from Northern Irish poetry. In their depiction of Belfast, the readers observe the longing for home and a cure for their alienation from the city. In Mahon's case, Belfast is a memory evoked in poems like "Spring in Belfast" and "Ovid in Tomis". Following the example given by Louis MacNeice, the city gives Mahon an artistic identity in his dwelling in different places. Michael Longley, on the other hand, uses the myth of the "Hebrides" in order to rehearse his journey back to Belfast. Associating myth and reality the poet finds his place as an artist in the city.

Differently from Mahon and Longley, Ciaran Carson and Paul Muldoon relate Belfast to other spaces in different manners. Inspired by Baudelaire and the streets of Paris, Carson establishes himself as a *flâneur*. Wandering through the road blocks and the cul-de-sacs of a troubled city, in "Belfast Confetti", Carson configures a specialized form of poetry that is entrapped in the fears of the civil wars. In a special form of displacement and confluence, Paul Muldoon explores Belfast as a quasi-science fiction landscape in the "Electric Orchard" and as a distorted mirror in the slums of Brazil – "Immrama". Through an expressive work with irony and sarcasm, Muldoon challenges the lyricism of poetic language. As masters of language and poetic craft, Carson and Muldoon interrogate the social tension of their place through self-questioning poems. Instead of self-fulfilment, readers and poets are presented with a confluence of confusion, mystery and betrayals, which are signs of a human and universal expression of the social effects of a place in war and in crisis.

In the last section of the second chapter, Medbh McGuckian and Seamus Heaney recreate their own city of Belfast. While the former produce a city in absentia, in the

recondite of the private experience the latter reproduce its landscape in exile and in the distance of the land. McGuckian uniqueness lies in her highly personal absorption of the city of Belfast. Without explicit reference to street names or relevant characteristics of the place, she creates her connection with the city through a symbolic language. Reenacting the relationship with her father in the poem “On Ballycastle Beach”, Belfast becomes an internal echo of their ambiguous bond. There is also the depiction of the city in the private space of the house. Poems like “Singer” and “From Hollywood bed” and “Spoil Map” that are in her first book of poems, *The Flower Masters and Other Poems* (1982) depict the internal rooms of the house as cages in which images of repression and frustrated desires arise.

Differently from McGuckian, Seamus Heaney’s Belfast is distant. In poems like “Summer 1969” and “Fosterage”, the city is evoked as a synecdoche: the Falls road or even the name Belfast, represent his purging of the guilt of leaving the land in during the time of distress and violence. While McGuckian’s poetry is also a private longing for a poetic language that would reveal the women’s experience in Northern Ireland, Heaney represents his exile and dislocation within this society. Both poets’ Belfast is intermingled with other spaces: private experience, the house, the exile in Spain and the United States and the sense of a permanent lack of home.

In the last chapter, the confluence of the city of Belfast is broader and more explicit. With the Peace Process (1998), the advent of mass communications and globalization, the social relations of Belfast started to change. As a consequence, the generation of poets who began writing in the eighties and nineties also changed their depiction of the city. With a heavier focus on irony, the themes revolved around pop songs, casual dating and touristic attractions. Sinéad Morrissey’s early phase show a more fluid city. Belfast, for a teenage girl, as shown in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” is a place of self discovery and revelation: a place that can trigger internal epiphanies. After the experience of living in a foreign country, Belfast becomes a place of memories. The piece “In Belfast” exposes a poet who is trying to readjust to the new reality of the city – and who is settling down there after a period travelling. The confluence is present in Morrissey’s discovery of not only other spaces, but of her personality in the city of Belfast.

Aligning with Morrissey’s ironical tone, Leontia Flynn’s portrayal of the city is more dynamic and humorous: it follows the language of advertisement in order to show the economic expansion of the city after the Troubles. The poem “Belfast” from her collection *Drives* (2008) create a city that has opened itself for tourism and which is also transforming its own history in commerce. In Flynn’s poetry, the city of Belfast also embraces a global

version of history, which is found in the enigmatic sonnet “Berlin”. There, she compares the concentration camps from the Second World War to the Belfast City walls. With a reference to contemporary events, the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York is cryptographically revealed in the poem “Sky Boats”, where sky and sea change places. Through her verses, the reader envisions that this city, and the greater province, is trying to awake to a multiply marketable renewal, but its violent history still impedes complete regeneration.

Completing the confluence in chapter three, the poetry of Alan Gillis intertwines references to North American cinema and pop songs with traditional forms of poetry like the sonnet and the sestina. Gillis’ attempt to fuse high and pop forms of art configures a confluence of artistic spaces. His poetry, more than recovering traditional poetic forms, as seen in poems like “To Belfast”, produces a globalization of popular references, from Elvis Presley in “Cold Flow” to big night outs, in poems like “Love Bites” and “Last Friday Night”. Gillis offers the picture of a new Belfast, where its youngsters are not scared of being in the streets at night, partying and enjoying American movies and songs. Miriam Gamble, on the other hand, in her poem “Spring in Belfast” sees the city as a piece of fabric, which is transformed into a pair of trousers in the production line. In the same way the city produces work, her poetry about the city is primarily a work with language and concepts. The confluence is given by the work with the fabric and the work with words that is transformed into poetry.

All these relations, just to mention a few, demonstrate that the study of a peripheral city in Europe serves as an illustration for wider social interactions. John Hewitt’s engagement with socialism, Mebdh McGuckinan’s exploration of unconscious relations and Allan Gillis’ representation of big night outs characterize the different nuances of history: socialism in the thirties, the psychological, introspective turn of the eighties, and the parties of the nineties and two thousands. All in all, the poetic architecture of Belfast points to wider sociological spaces. It is never alone, or even single, but always plural and globally referential. Taking advantage of the idea of the *space of confluence* that Izarra develops regarding the literary space, I would like to argue that this concept is useful in describing the city, since confluence is also used to describe crowds of people – a scene that achieved its height in the beginning of the twentieth century. When used to characterize the poetry that has as its main theme modern city itself, this space becomes, undoubtedly, confluent and plural, and the most evident reason is that cities unite a variety of people: different races; ethnicities and social classes intermingle disclosing what seems to be a democratic space. However, in my position, it is not enough to define the poetry of Belfast simply as a *space of*

confluence. In addition to bringing together dissimilar discourses, the poems selected for analysis present a home. The poets studied in this thesis display a will to inhabit this space, be it metaphorically or literary. Because they are concerned with the confluence of people and the distinctive character they give to this space they seek to be part of this place.

In the Introduction of the thesis, I have pointed out that one of the main reasons for a subjective caesura in northern Irish poetry stems from the fact that while the Republic of Ireland could engage on the creation of an artistic identity for their country, the North of the land was still part of a complex intersection of cultures and values. The longing for a cultural habitat led Belfast poets to possess its social and cultural spaces through metaphorical and imaginative associations. This is the reason why the concept of confluence works better with the intricate logic of dwelling. Etymologically speaking, the Latin word *habitat* “was a technical term in Latin texts on English flora and fauna”. (Web 12 Jan, 2012). It also expressed the idea of *habere* – to have, to hold, possess. Thus (in)habiting is therefore also a form of possession. Similarly the poetic representation, or inhabiting, of Belfast also means its poets are reclaiming the urban environment in their artwork. However, at the very same time that their will to transcend historical determinations is seen through their construction of the city, this will to transcend history is often hindered by the images they choose.

These images, for being varied and plural, represent an original dialogue with tradition and individual talent – to make a parallel with Eliot once more. The myth of Ireland as an old woman or Kathleen Ni Houlihan and the socialist engagement by Louis MacNeice, the Greco-Roman legends by Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, the irony by Ciaran Carson and intermingling of cultures by Paul Muldoon and Seamus Heaney, the psychological landscape by Medbh McGuckian and the contemporary city by Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Alan Gillis and Miriam Gamble are attempts to repossess this space. This selection of images is what composes the stars for the constellation of Belfast. Although intersecting dissimilar realities, these poets build a singular landscape, collectively unfolding through a desire to possess artistically what was once the space of civil war and material exploitation.

Since the city is not thoroughly unified, nor its communities centered in a singular idea of culture, what these poets share is what the critic Robert F. Garrat has called the *condition of discontinuity*:

Poets can no longer simply celebrate the local and the familiar, nor can they portray their surroundings realistically without risking the charge of imitation even stagnation. Instead, the contemporary writer must scrutinize the condition

of discontinuity, explore its consequences and declare its own isolation; if he cannot make them new, he must push these subjects to a new plane (261).

The poets from the North of Ireland have a different perception of literary history. Their themes and motifs, together with their notions of the city of Belfast frequently vary. Discontinuity comes through their impulse to break with crystallized notions and preconceived perceptions; they are simultaneously alienated from the community and liberated artistically to write and configure new notions about their place of origin. It is their form of inhabiting an irregular space of confluences and ideological presuppositions. In their disruptive work, the poets from the North of Ireland quite aptly embody what the Mexican poet Octavio Paz foresaw as the ethos of poetry. In an article that revised his theoretical oeuvre about Modernism, he predicted that the poetry of the new century (at that time the two thousand) would be the art of convergence, contrasted with the tradition of rupture:

The poets of the modern age sought the principles of change; the poets of the age that is beginning seek the unalterable principle that is the root of change...

The aesthetics of change emphasized the historical character of the poem. Now we ask: is there a point at which the principle of change will be fused with that of permanence? The poetry that begins with this century's end neither begins nor returns to its starting point: it is a perpetual re-beginning and a continual return. The poetry beginning now, without beginning, is seeking the intersection of times, the point of convergence.

In the light of the poems studied in this thesis, the convergence of the poetry of Northern Ireland derives its organizational principle from the urban landscape itself, the plural and discontinuous space of Belfast where the past haunts its inhabitants, but in which the future is uncertain – maybe just a promise of an eternal youth for the younger generations or an unfulfilled promise for the older artists.

In my theoretical parallels with Latin American critics, I identified a melancholic longing for unification: confluence and convergence are central themes for the critics I am taking on board. Contrasted with the concept of “discontinuity” elaborated by Robert F. Garrat, I wish to convey that the poetry of Belfast has a pretense to a unified whole, grounded on the conviction that traditions, in the same way as literary movements and artistic

ideologies, are a product of a specific time and space. But if this time and space converge and intersect, this past is plural, and so is the future, thus, the city of Belfast – at least poetically – is not going to be simply a place whose ominous past casts its shadow over the present, but a city that carries in itself the potentiality of change in a revision of this past. “The Capital city with Titanic Ambitions” (Web, 12 Jan 2012), as National Geographic denominated its continuous enterprises, thrives artistically and culturally. A generous budget is invested in its entertainment industry and its sectarian past is even becoming an attraction for foreign investors. But how is poetry different from the hotchpotch of the marketable tourism?

Poetry refuses to smoothly unify opposites in its confluence and convergence. It leaves out in the open the contradictions of modernity – and of a failed modernity. It seeks to demonstrate that the Falls and the Shankhill road are still sites of sectarian strife; it shows the yearning of its youth in embracing an eternal present in a feast of sensations; it describes the lonely trajectory to silence: the “nothing to declare” that Gamble asserts is the confluence of these histories and a violent past. When Morrissey states in the poem “English Lesson”, “the only honesty is silence”, she means that this silence is not one of convenience or complacency, but rather the only alternative in a historical moment in which hopes and political ideals may have the same destiny as Belfast’s most famous ship, the Titanic. However, the actual denunciation of the ideological basis of the future and the recognition that the present is littered with contradiction is actually the strength of this poetry: self-engaged and self-reflective, but still silent to propaganda and empty discourses.

The conclusion of this thesis, instead of rehearsing the same ideas that have been developed throughout the three chapters, wishes to convey the city of Belfast is more than varied and plural in its poetical representation. It is a space of confluence, where art, history, memories, hopes and dream intermingle and interact in an aesthetic and dynamic manner. Images, styles and ideas are carried from generation to generation and create this constellation of fearful but also hopeful dreams. It engages past and present in a fruitful reflection on identitarian and artistic belonging. However, one of the questions that still needs to be answered – and will probably in further studies about the city of Belfast is, what future projections this place inspire? In the analysis of the poems chosen for appreciation, history is a central theme in most of the poems: knowledge of history, cure from history even erasure of history is present in most of them. The future, however, remains a blank sheet that needs a powerful sketch to be colored and built. Perhaps, after almost fifteen years from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the city still needs some time to heal these wounds left by the Troubles. But arts, like poetry, play an important role in this reconfiguration of history.

Through curiosity and self identification, poetry can promote a self identification and self healing.

At the end of the play *The Cure at Troy* (1990) – which is a symbolic translation of *Philoctetes* by Sophocles – Seamus Heaney, in the voice of the young warrior Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, opts for hope in a “greater sea change”. At the core of this change lies intimate and personal self-healing, one that would create conditions of possibility for the construction of a more civil and peaceful future:

The innocent in goals

But on their bars together.

A hunger striker’s father

Stands in the graveyard dumb.

The police widow in veils

Faints at the funeral at home.

History says: Don’t hope

On this side of the grave.

But then, once in a lifetime

The longed-for tidal wave

Of justice can rise up,

And hope and history rhyme.

So, hope for a great sea-change

On the far side of revenge.

Believe that a further shore

Is reachable from here.

Believe in miracles

And cures and Healing wells. (77)

Instead of being totally co-opted by the cultural market, this form of plurality and understanding the poetry of the city of Belfast offers is similar to the one projected by Heaney in this excerpt. Even in its forgetfulness of history, the poets' attempts call attention to a wider configuration of history and society that heals the wounds of this past. The artistic portrayal of how the troubled history of the city in the twentieth century produced relevant works of art is also a portrayal of the construction of a home in the form of poetry. In each case, either in exile or in presence, Belfast is a source of inspiration for its poets. But with the advent of the cyber-space and virtual communities, what will the poetry of the city do, how is it going to come to terms with new technologies and social interactions? While the wounds have started to heal, the question that lingers on is: what does the future promise?

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The rest of the pictures were taken by me.

ANNEX – THE POEMS

Louis MacNeice (1907 – 1967)

BELFAST

The hard cold fire of the northerner
Frozen into his blood from the fire in the basalt
Glares from behind the mica of his eyes
And the salt carrion water brings him wealth.

Down there at the end of melancholy lough
Against the lurid sky over the stained water
Where hammers clang murderously on the girders
Like crucifixes and gantries stand.

And in the marble stores rubber gloves like polyps
Cluster; celluloid, painted ware, glaring
Metal patents, parchment lampshades, harsh
Attempts at buyable beauty.

In the porch of the chapel before the garish Virgin
A shawled factory-woman is shipwrecked there
Lies a bunch of limbs glimpsed in the cave of gloom
By us who walk in the street so buoyantly and glib.

Over which country of cowed and hunted faces
The sun goes down with the banging of Orange drums
While the male kind murders each its woman
To whose prayer for oblivion answers no Madon

CARRICKFERGUS

I was born in Belfast between the mountain and the gantries
To the hooting of lost sirens and the clang of trams:
Thence to Smoky Carrick in County Antrim
Where the bottle-neck harbour collects the mud which jams

The little boats beneath the Norman castle,
The pier shining with lumps of crystal salt;
The Scotch Quarter was a line of residential houses
But the Irish Quarter was a slum for the blind and halt.

The brook ran yellow from the factory stinking of chlorine,
The yarn-mill called its funeral cry at noon;
Our lights looked over the lough to the lights of Bangor
Under the peacock aura of a drowning moon.

The Norman walled this town against the country
To stop his ears to the yelping of his slave
And built a church in the form of a cross but denoting
The list of Christ on the cross, in the angle of the nave.

I was the rector's son, born to the anglican order,
Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor;
The Chichesters knelt in marble at the end of a transept
With ruffs about their necks, their portion sure.

The war came and a huge camp of soldiers
Grew from the ground in sight of our house with long
Dummies hanging from gibbets for bayonet practice
And the sentry's challenge echoing all day long;

A Yorkshire terrier ran in and out by the gate-lodge
Barred to civilians, yapping as if taking affront:
Marching at ease and singing 'Who Killed Cock Robin?'
The troops went out by the lodge and off to the Front.

The steamer was camouflaged that took me to England--
Sweat and khaki in the Carlisle train;
I thought that the war would last for ever and sugar
Be always rationed and that never again

Would the weekly papers not have photos of sandbags
And my governess not make bandages from moss
And people not have maps above the fireplace
With flags on pins moving across and across--

Across the hawthorn hedge the noise of bugles,
Flares across the night,
Somewhere on the lough was a prison ship for Germans,
A cage across their sight.

I went to school in Dorset, the world of parents
Contracted into a puppet world of sons
Far from the mill girls, the smell of porter, the salt-mines
And the soldiers with their guns

BAGPIPE MUSIC

It's no go the merrygoround, it's no go the rickshaw,
All we want is a limousine and a ticket for the peepshow.
Their knickers are made of crepe-de-chine, their shoes are made of python,
Their halls are lined with tiger rugs and their walls with head of bison.

John MacDonald found a corpse, put it under the sofa,
Waited till it came to life and hit it with a poker,

Sold its eyes for souvenirs, sold its blood for whiskey,
Kept its bones for dumbbells to use when he was fifty.

It's no go the Yogi-man, it's no go Blavatsky,
All we want is a bank balance and a bit of skirt in a taxi.

Annie MacDougall went to milk, caught her foot in the heather,
Woke to hear a dance record playing of Old Vienna.
It's no go your maidenheads, it's no go your culture,
All we want is a Dunlop tire and the devil mend the puncture.

The Laird o' Phelps spent Hogmanay declaring he was sober,
Counted his feet to prove the fact and found he had one foot over.
Mrs. Carmichael had her fifth, looked at the job with repulsion,
Said to the midwife "Take it away; I'm through with overproduction."

It's no go the gossip column, it's no go the Ceilidh,
All we want is a mother's help and a sugar-stick for the baby.

Willie Murray cut his thumb, couldn't count the damage,
Took the hide of an Ayrshire cow and used it for a bandage.
His brother caught three hundred cran when the seas were lavish,
Threw the bleeders back in the sea and went upon the parish.

It's no go the Herring Board, it's no go the Bible,
All we want is a packet of fags when our hands are idle.

It's no go the picture palace, it's no go the stadium,
It's no go the country cot with a pot of pink geraniums,
It's no go the Government grants, it's no go the elections,
Sit on your arse for fifty years and hang your hat on a pension.

It's no go my honey love, it's no go my poppet;
Work your hands from day to day, the winds will blow the profit.
The glass is falling hour by hour, the glass will fall forever,
But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather.

John Hewitt (1907 – 1987)

BECAUSE I PACED MY THOUGHT

Because I paced my thought by the natural world,
the earth organic, renewed with the palpable seasons,
rather than the city falling ruinous, slowly
by weather and use, swiftly by bomb and argument,
I found myself alone who had hoped for attention.
If one listened a moment he murmured his dissent:
this is an idle game for a cowardly mind.
The day is urgent. The sun is not on the agenda.

And some who hated the city and man's unreasoning acts
remarked: He is no ally. He does not say that
Power and Hate are the engines of human treason.
There is no answering love in the yellowing leaf.
I should have made it plain that I stake my future
on birds flying in and out of the schoolroom window,
on the council of sunburnt comrades in the sun,
and the picture carried with singing into the temple.

IRELAND

We Irish pride ourselves as patriots
and tell the beadroll of the valiant ones
since Clontarf's sunset saw the Norsemen broken...
Aye, and before that too we had our heroes:
but they were mighty fighters and victorious.
The later men got nothing save defeat,
hard transatlantic sidewalks or the scaffold...
We Irish, vainer than tense Lucifer,
are yet content with half a dozen turf,
and cry our adoration for a bog,
rejoicing in the rain that never ceases,
and happy to stride over the sterile acres,
or stony hills that scarcely feed a sheep.
But we are fools, I say, are ignorant fools
to waste the spirit's warmth in this cold air,
to spend our wit and love and poetry
on half a dozen peat and a black bog.
We are not native here or anywhere.
We were the Keltic wave that broke over Europe,
and ran up this bleak beach among these stones:
but when the tide ebbed, were left stranded here
in crevices, and ledge-protected pools
that have grown salter with the drying up
of the great common flow that kept us sweet
with fresh cold draughts from deep down in the ocean.
So we are bitter, and are dying out
in terrible harshness in this lonely place,
and what we think is love for usual rock,
or old affection for our customary ledge,
is but forgotten longing for the sea
that cries far out and calls us to partake
in his great tidal movements round the sea

ONCE ALIEN HERE

Once alien here my fathers built their house,
Claimed, drained, and gave their lands shape of use,

and their urgent labour urged no more
than shuffled pennies from the hoarded store
of well-rubbed words that had left their overtones
in the ripe England of mounded downs
The sullen Irish limping to the hills
bore with them the enchantments and the spells
on every twig of every thorny hedge,
and gave the rain pocked stone a meaning past
and blurred engraving of the fibrous frost.

So I, because of all the buried men
in Ulster clay, because of rock and glen
and mist and cloud and quality of air
as native in my thought as any here,
who now would seek a native mode to tell
our stubborn wisdom individual,
yet lacking skill in either scale of song,
the graver English, lyric Irish tongue,
must let this rich earth so enhance the blood
with steady pulse where now is plunging mood
till thought and image may, identified,
find easy voice to utter each aright.

THE RAM'S HORN

I have turned to the landscape because men disappoint me:
the trunk of a tree is proud; when the woodmen fell it,
it still has a contained ionic solemnity:
it is a rounded event without the need to tell it.

I have never been compelled to turn away from the dawn
because it carries treason behind its wakened face:
even the horned ram, glowering over the bog hole,
though symbol of evil, will step through the blown grass with
grace.

Animal, plant or insect, stone or water,
are, every minute, themselves; they behave by law.
I am not required to discover motives for them,
or strip my heart to forgive the rat in the straw.

I live my best in the landscape, being at ease there;
the only trouble I find I have brought in my hand.
See, I let it fall with a rustle of stems in the nettles,
and never for a moment suppose that they understand.

Padriacc Fiacc (1924)

GLOSS

Nor truth nor good did they know
But Beauty turning away.

They were the dark earth people
 of old

Restive in the clay...

Deirdre watched Naisi die
And great king Connor himself
 said

Did you ever see a bottomless
 bucket
In the muck discarded?

And comradely Dermot was destroyed by Fionn

Because of the Beauty of a girl.
Because of the Beauty of a girl
The sky went raging on fire
And the sea pushed into
Rage

They were the earth people
of old

And Deirdre pitched herself into
the sea.

Turn the page. Turn the page.

INTIMATE LETTER

Our Paris part of Belfast has
Decapitated lamp-posts now. Our meeting
Place, the Book Shop is a gaping
Black hole of charred timber

Remember that night with you, in-
valided in the top room when
They were throwing petrol bombs through
The windows of Catholics, how
My migraine grew to such
A pitch, Brigid said 'Mommy,

I think daddy is going to burst!’

We all run away from each other’s
Particular hell. I didn’t
Survive you and her thrown
To the floor when they blew away up the Co
Op at the bottom of the street or Brigid
Waking screaming after his
Or that explosion. Really,
I was the first one to go:

It was I who left you.

Derek Mahon

SPRING IN BELFAST

Walking among my own this windy morning
In a tide of sunlight between shower and shower
I resume my old conspiracy with the wet
Stone and unwieldy images of the squinting heart
Once more, as before, I remember not to forget.

There is a perverse pride in being on the side
Of the fallen angels and refusing to get up.
We could *all* be saved by keeping an eye on the hill
At the top of every street, for there it is
Eternally, if irrelevantly, visible –

But yield instead to the humorous formulae,
The spurious mystery in the knowing nod;
Or we keep sullen silence in light and shade,
Rehearsing our astute salvations under
The cold gaze of a sanctimonious God.

One part of my mind must know its place
The things that happen in the kitchen houses
And echoing back streets of this desperate city
Should engage more than my casual interest,
Exact more interest than my casual pity. (13)

UN UNBORN CHILD

I have already come to the verge of
Departure. A month or so and
I shall be vacating this familiar room.
Its fabric fits me like a glove
While leaving latitude for a free hand.
I begin to put on the manners of the world,
Sensing the splitting light above
My head, where in the silence I lie curled.

Certain mysteries are relayed to me
Through the dark network of my mother's body
While she sits sewing the white shrouds
Of my apotheosis. I know the twisted
Kitten that lies there sunning itself
Under the bare bulb, the clouds
Of goldfish mooning around upon the shelf.
In me these data are already vested;

I know them in my bones – bones which embrace
Nothing, for I am completely egocentric.
The pandemonium of encumbrances
Which will absorb me, mind and senses –
Intricacies of the box and the rat-race –
I imagine only. Though they linger and,
Like fingers, stretch until the knuckles crack,
They cannot dwarf the dimensions of my hand.

I must compose myself in the nerve-centre
Of this metropolis, and not fidget –
I must compose myself at the nerve centre
Of this metropolis, and not fidget –
Although sometimes at night, when the city
Has gone to sleep, I keep in touch with it,
Listening to the warm red water
Racing the sewers of my mother's body;
Or the moths, soft as eyelids, or the rain
Wiping its wet wings on the window-pane

And sometimes too, in the small hours of the day
When the dead filament has ceased to ring,
After the goldfish are dissolved in darkness
And the kitten has gathered itself up into a ball

Between the groceries and the sewing
I slip the trappings of my harness
To range these hollows in discreet rehearsal
And, battering at the concavity of my caul,

Produce in my mouth the words, 'I want to live!'
This is my first protest, and shall be my last.
As I am innocent, everything I do
Or say is couched in the affirmative.
I want to see, hear, touch and taste
These things with which I am encumbered.
Perhaps I needn't worry; give
Or take a day or two, my days are numbered. (26)

OVID IN TOMIS

What coarse god
Was the gearbox in the rain
Beside the road?

What nereid the unsinkable
Coca-Cola
Knocking the icy rocks?

They stare me out
With the chaste gravity
And feral pride

Of noble savages
Set down
On the alien shore.

It is so long
Since my transformation
Into a stone

I often forget
That there was a time
Before my name

Was mud in the mouths
Of the Danube
A dirty word in Rome.

Imagine Byron banished
To Botany Bay
Or Wide to Dawson City

And you have some idea
How it is for me
On the shores of the Black Sea.

I who once strode
Head high in the forum,
A living legend

Fasten my sheepskin
By greasy waters
In a Scythian wind.

My wife and friends
Do what they can
On my behalf;

Though from Tiberius,
Whom God preserve,
I expect nothing.

But I don't want
To die here
In the back of beyond

Among these morose
Dice-throwing Gates
And the dust of Thrace.

No doubt, in this time
To come, this huddle of
Mud huts will be

A handsome city,
An important port,
A popular resort

With an oil pipeline,
Martini terraces
And even a dignified

Statue of Ovid
Gazing out to sea
From the promenade;

But from the moment
It is merely a place
Where I have to be.

Six years now

Since my relegation
To this town

By the late Augustus.
The Halieutica,
However, desultory,

Gives me a sense
Of purpose,
However fictitious;

But I think it's the birds
That please the most,
The cranes and pelicans

I often sit in the dunes
Listening hard
To the uninhibited

Virtuosity of a lark
Serenading in the sun
And mediate upon

The transience
Of earthly domination,
The perfidy of princess.

Mediocrity, they say,
Consoles itself
With the reflection

That genius so often
Comes to a bed end.
The things adversity

Teaches us
About human nature
As the aphorisms strike home!

I know the simple life
Would be right for me
If I were a simple man.

I have a real sense
Of the dumb spirit
In boulder and tree;

Skimming stones, I wince
With vicarious pain
As a slim quoit goes in

And the six foot reeds
Of the delta
The pathos there!

Whenever they bend
And sight in the wind
It is not merely Syrinx

Remembering Syrinx
But Syrinx kneeling
Her naked terror

Of the certain future
She and her kind
Being bulk destined

For pulping machines
And the cording
Of motor-car tyres.

Pen is dead, and already
I feel an ancient
Unity leave the earth,

The bowl avoid my eye
As if ashamed
Of my failure to keep faith.

(It knows that I
Have exchanged belief
For documentation.)

The muse is somewhere
Else but not here
By this frozen lake –

Or if here, then I am
Not poet enough
To make the connection.

Are we truly alone
With our physics and myths,
The stars no more

Than glittering dust,
With one there
To hear our choral odes?

If so, we can start

To ignore the silence
Of the infinite spaces

And concentrate instead
On the infinity
Under our very noses –

The cry at the heart
Of the artichoke,
The gaiety of atoms.

Better to contemplate
The blank page
And leave it blank

Then modify
Its substance by
so much as a pen-stroke

Woven of wood-nymphs,
It speaks volumes
No one will ever write

I incline my head
To its candour
And weep for our exile.

Michael Longley

GRAFITTI

It would be painful, tedious and late
To alter awkward monsters such as these
To charming princess – metamorphoses
That all good fairy tales accelerate

One kiss and, in the twinkling of an eye,
The Calibans accepted, wars and all,
At long last resurrected from the sky,
So blond, so beautiful and six feet tall

Through billboard forests, mists of lingerie,
These track a princess unequipped to change
Herself or them: her hair no winds derange,
Her thighs are looked, her cleavage legendary.

Lips where large allure but response is,
Her all too perfect body they endure

By penciling those bouquets of moustaches
As love's own emblem, their own signature.

Despite an aura was enough to toss
Her neon constellations through the land
She, in a realm too fragile to withstand
A single hair that is superfolous,

In paper places lies wintering,
While these who decorate her lovely crotch,
With public shrubbery and with a notch,
Unwittingly imply a sort of spring –

Such passion thwarted such artistry released!
O where would Beauty be without the Beast

THE HEBRIDES

I

The wind's enclosure, Atlantic's promises,
Last balconies
Above the waves, The Hebrides –
Too long did I postpone
Presbyterian granite and the lack of trees,
This orphaned stone

Day in, day out, colliding with the sea.
Weather forecast,
Compass nor ordnance survey
Arranges my welcome
For, on my own, I have lost my way at last,
So far from home.

In whom the city is continuing,
I stop to look,
To find my feet among the ling
And bracken – over me
The bright continuum of gulls, a rook
Ocasionaly

II

My eyes, slowly accepting the panorama,
Try to include
In my original idea
The total effect
Of air and ocean – waterlogged all wood –
All harbours wrecked –

My dead-lights latched my whelk and barnacle

Till I abide
By the sea wall of time I kill –
My each nostalgic scheme
Jettisoned, as crises are, the further side
Of sleep and dream.

Between wind and wave this holiday
The cormorant,
The oyster-catcher and keep in line
While I, hands in my pockets, hesitant,
Am in two minds

III

Old neighbors, though shipwreck's my decision,
People my brain –
Like breakwaters against the sun,
Command in silhouette
My island circumstance – my cells retain,
Perpetuate

Their crumpled deportment through bed weather.
And I feel them
Put on their raincoats forever
And walk out in the sea
I am, though each one waves a phantom limb,
The amputee,

For those are my sailors, these my drowned –
In their hearts of hearts,
In their city I ran aground
Along my arteries
Sluice those homewaters petroleum hurts.
Dry docks, gantries

Dykes of apparatus educate my bones
To track the buoys
Up sea lanes love emblazons
To streets where shall conclude
My journey back from flux to poise from poise
To attitude.

Here, at the edge of my experience,
Another tide
Along the broken shore extends
A lifetime's wrack and ruin –
No flotsam I may beachcomb now can hide
That water line

IV

Beyond the lobster pots where plankton spreads
Porpoise turn.
Seals slip over the cockle beds.
Undertow disheavels
Seaweed in the shallows – and I discern
My sea levels.

To right and left me there intervene
The tumbled burns –
And these, on turn boulder weaned,
Confuse my calendar –
Their tilt is suicidal, their great return
Curricular.

No matter what I repose holds shore and sky
In harmony,
From this place in the long run I,
Though here I might have been
Content with rivers where they meet the sea
Remove upstream,

Where the salmon, risking fastest waters --
Waterfall and rock
And the effervescent otters--
On bridal pools insist
And fin and generation they unlock
The mountain's fist.

V

Now, buttoned up, with water in my shoes,
Clouds around me,
I can, through mist and misconstrues,
Read like a palimpsest
My past – those landmarks and that scenery
I dare resist.

Into my mind's unsympathetic trough
They fade away – and to alter my perspective
I feel in sharp cold
Of my vantage point too high above the bay
The sea grow old.

Granting the trawlers far below their stance
Their anchorage,
I fight all the way for balance –
In the mountain's shadow

Loosing foothold, covet the privilege
Of vertigo.

Paul Muldoon

THE ELECTRIC ORCHARD

The early electric people domesticated the wild ass;
They had experience of falling off.
Occasionally, they might have fallen out of the trees;
Climbing again, they had something to prove
To their neighbours. And they did have neighbours;
The electric people lived in villages
Out of their need of security and their constant hunger.
Together they learned to divert their energies

To neutral places; anger to the banging door,
Passion to the kiss.
And electricity to earth. Having stolen his thunder
From an angry god, through the trees
They had learned to string his lightning.
Burying the electric-poles
Waist-deep in the clay, they stamped the clay to healing;
Diverting their anger to the neutral

The electric people were confident, hardly proud.
They kept fire in a bucket,
Boiled water and dry leaves in a kettle, watched the lid
By the blue steam lifted and lifted.
So that, where one of the electric people happened to fall,
It was accepted as an occupational hazard;
There was something necessary about the thing. The North Wall

Of the Eiger was notorious for blizzards;
If one fell there, his neighbour might remark, 'Bloody fool'.
All that would have been inappropriate,
Applied to the experienced climber of electric-poles.
'I have achieved this great height';
No electric person could have been that proud.
Forty feet, of ten not that, (3)
If the fall happened to be broken by the roof of a shed.
The belt would break, the call be made,

The ambulance arrive and carry the faller away
To hospital with a scream
There and then the electric people might invent the railway,
Just watching the lid lifted by the steam;
Or decide that all laws should be based on that of gravity,

Just thinking of the faller fallen.
Even then, they were running out of things to do and see;
Gradually, they introduced legislation

Whereby they nailed a plaque to every electric pole.
They would prosecute any trespassers;
The high-up singing and alive fruit liable to shock or kill
Were forbidden. Deciding that their neighbours
And their neighbours' innocent children ought to be stopped
For their own good, they planted fences
Of barbed-wire around the electric-poles. None could describe
Electrocution, falling, innocence.

WHIM

She was sitting with a pint and a small one
That afternoon in the Europa Hotel,
Poring over one of those legends –
Cu Chulainn and the Birds of Appetite

'Pardon me, for I couldn't help but notice
You've got the O'Grady translation.'
'What of it? What's it to you?'
'Standish O'Grady? Very old-fashioned.
Cu Chulainn and the Birds of Appetite?
More How Cu Chulainn Got His End'.
He smiled. She was smiling too.
'If you want the flavour of the original
You should be looking to Kuno Meyer.
As it happens. I've got the very edition
That includes this particular tale.
You could have it on loan, if you like,
If you'd like to call back to my place, now.

Not that they made it as far as his place.
They would staunter through the Botanic Gardens
Where they held hands, and kissed,
And by and by one thing led to another.
To cut not a very long story short,
Once he got stuck into her he got stuck
Full stop.
They lay there quietly until dusk
When an attendant found them out.
He called an ambulance, and gently but firmly
They were manhandled onto a stretcher
Like the last of an endangered species.

IRELAND

The Volkswagen parked in the gap,
But gently ticking over
You wonder if it's loves
And not men hurrying back
Across two fields and a river

IMMRAMA

I, too, have tailed my father's spirit
From the mud-walled cabin behind the mountain
Where he was born and bread,
TB and scarlatina,
The farm where he was first hired out,
To Wigan to Crewe junction
A building-side from which he disappeared
And took passage, almost, for Argenina (85)

The mountain is coming down with hazel,
The building-site a slum
While he has gone no further than Brazil
That's him on the verandah, drinking rum
With a man who might be a Nazi,
His children asleep under their mosquito-nets.

Ciaran Carson

JUDGEMENT

*The tarred road simmered in a blue haze. The reservoir was dry.
The railway sleepers oozed with creosote. Not a cloud to be seen
in the sky*

We were sitting at Camlough halt – Johnny Mickey and
myself – waiting
For a train that never seemed to come. He was telling me this
sorry of a Father Clarke, who wanted to do in his dog. A black and
white terrier.
He says to the servant boy, *Take it out that old bitch, he says,
and drown her.*
Johnny Mickey said the servant boy was Quigley, and now
that he remembered it,
He'd been arrested by a Sergeant Flynn, for having no bell on his bike.
Hardly a hanging crime, you might say. But he was fined fifteen
shillins.

The prisoner left the courtroom and his step was long and slow

*By day and night he did contrive to fill this sergeant's heart with
woe*

So there was this auction one day, and Quigley sneaks in
the back.
A lot of crockery ware came up. Deeft bowls. Willow-pattern.
Chamberpots.
The bidding started at a shilling. Quigley lifts its finger. One-
and-six.
Everyone pretending not to look at one another. Or to know
each other.
Nods and winks. A folded *Dundalk Democrat*. Spectacles put on and off.
And so on, till he won the bid at fifteen shillings. Name, please,
Says the auctioneer. *Sergeant Flynn*, says Quigley, Forkhill
Barracks

*For to uphold the letter of the law this sergeant was too willing
I look the law upon myseld and fined him back his fifteen shillings*

He rambled on a bit – how this Flynn people on his mother's
side
Were McErleans from County Derry, how could you never trust
A McErlean who set the whole thing up. That was in '98,
But some things never changed. You could trust a dog but not
a cat.
It was something in their nature, and nature, as they say, will out.
The pot would always call the kettle back. He hummed a few lines

Come tender-hearted Christians all attention pay to me
Till I relate and communicate the verses two or tree
Concerning of a gallant youth was cut off in his bloom
And died upon the gallows tree near the town of Toome.

Which brought Johnny Mitch back to the priest and the terrier
bitch
Quigley, it transpired, had walked the country – Ballinliss and
Aughaduff,
Silvercap, Carnavaddy – looking for a place to drown her.
It was the hottest summer in living memory. Not a cloud to be
seen in the sky.
The cully Water was a trickle. The Tullyean and the
Ummeracam were dry.
Not a breath of wind. Not so much water as would drown
a rat. After three days
Quigley and the bitch came back. They were both half dead and
with thirst

*He looked her up he looked her down in his heart was ne'er a pang
I'll tell you what says Father Clarke if she be drowned she'll
hang*

Johnny Mickey said that priests had a great way with ropes
and knots
It was one of the tricks that they learned in the seminary.
Something to do
With chasubles and albs. In less time it takes to tell,
Father Flynn
Had rigged up a noose. They brought the bitch out to the
orchard
And sprung her up from the crook of an apple tree. And who
was passing by
But the poet McCooey. He peeped through a hole in the hedge.
He spotted the two boys ad their trade, and this is what he said

*A man with no bell on his bike a man with a single bed
Is hardly any wonder that you'd go off your head
Poor old bitch poor old friend you died with a bark
Sentenced by Johnny Quingley and hung by father Clarke*

*Of course, said Johnny Mikey, your man, McCooey's long
since dead.*
A white plume of steam appeared around the bend. A long
lonesome blast
The tracks begun to shimmer and hum. Our train was coming in
And not a minute late. It shivered to a halt. We both got on.
We would pass the crazy map of a dried up reservoir.
A water-tower.
We would watch the telegraph lines float up and down till
we arrived
At the other end. I would hand Mickey Quigley over to the attendants

*Farewell unto sweet Drumaul if in you I had stayed
Among the Presbyterians I ne'ver would have been betrayed
The gallows tree I ne'er would have seen had I remained there
For Dufferin you betrayed me McErlean you set the snare.*

BAGPIPE MUSIC

He came lilting down the brae with a blackthorn stick the thick
of a shotgun
In his fist, going, blah dithery dump a doodle scatterry idle
fortunoodle –
When I saw his will-o-the-wisp go dander through a field
of blue flax randomly, abandonly,
Till all his dots and dashes zipped together, ripped right
through their perforations
Like a Zephyr through the Zodiac: the way a quadrille, in
its last configuration,
Takes on the branches of a swastika, all ribs and shanks

and male and female chromosomes;
Till I heard his voice diminish like the corncrake's in the
last abandoned acre –
Scrake tithery lass a laddie nation aries hiber Packie, he'd be

Oblivious to the black-and-tan, leaf-and-muck-bestrewn
squatting figure
Whose only obvious features are the almost-blue whites
of his two blue eyes, who crabs
From leaf to shadow, mesmerised by olive and burnt umber,
the khaki, lion patches
Of his Cockney accent, going, *hang bang a bleeper doddle
doodlebug an asterix*.
The Pisces rod of his aerial twitched just now, as if he'd
got the message,
That the earth itself was camouflaged. Bluebells carpeted
the quivered glades, as,
Three fields away, the tick-tock of the grandmother
reassures us with the long extended
Skillet of its pendulum. The wife in all of this is sidelong,
poised Egyptian
In her fitted kitchen, though the pictograph is full of *Ireland's
Own* – type details, Virgin
Marys, blue and white plates ranged like punctuation
in the lull of memory
The walls are sentences. We see the three walls and the fourth
is glassy us.

Ocularity a moiety blah skiddery ah disparity: the shotgun
made a kind of statement, two
Crows falling in a dead-black umlaut.
The Lucky Shot, my man would say, and feed
Me yet another yarn: how you find a creeper in the
undergrowth and yank,
And a rippled, ripped net shivers through its warp of black-
damp earth aroma.
There's ink embedded in his two eyes blue, like children's
dots. Listen close
Enough, you'll get the blooming of the retting dam, parturient,
as bubbles
Pick and pock a morseway through the stench of rotting flax.
For it seemed
The grandmother produced an alarm-clock from her
psychobabble handbag.

That was at the checkpoint. Meanwhile, the trail was
beginning to leak and waft
Away, but the sniffer dogs persevered in their rendition
of 'The Fox-Chase', lapping
And snuffling up the pepper-black Stardust fibrillating

on the paper, till
The interview was thwarted by Aquarius, a blue line
on the map that was
Contemporaneous with its past. *Skirl girn a snaffle birdie*
Griddle on the griddle howling

Here a squad of black-and-white minstrels wheel in from
Stage Right, or rather, they
Are wearing balaclavas, and it only looks like that, their
grinning
Toothpaste lips, their rolling whites of eyes, their Tipp- Exed
teeth, their Daz forensic
Gloves. They twirl their walking-sticks as thick as guns
to marching tunes
That blatter in that fourth green field across the border,
upstairs in a tent,
With capricorn-skin drums and fifes, while Blavatsky hollers
through a bullhorn
Give ye thirty shillins for yer wan poun ten, yer wan poun
ten, yer –
Fair exchange they say, sure six of one and half-a-dozen
of the brother –
I get the drift of the Bloo in the portable loo, John, like, it's one
ping cancels out
The pong, going, *January, February, March! April, May, June,*
July!

He was blabbing with his Jew-or-jaw's-harp finger on his
lower lip, when the breech
Of the gun snapped out its breach of the peace. The linen
handkerchief had got
A brack in it, somehow, the dots and dashes of some other's
red. I tried to pin it down
Just then, or pen it down, but the Lambegs wouldn't let me,
and anyway, my thumb
And finger's smeared up to the wrist with Lion ink. My hand
is dis –
Located. The unmarked car came quietly, enquiringly, while
in a no-go zone
Three streets away, I heard two taxis crabbing, like Gemini
in Gethsemane, which
Of them was black: *honk parp a bullet billet reverup and harp*
a ballad
Scrake nithery lou a mackie nice wee neice ah libralassie ...
Just before I put the thing to bed, I closed a pair of scorpion's
inverted commas round it.
Tomorrow I would glance at the decapitated headlines, then
flick forward to the Stars.

Maebdh McGuckian

ON BALLYCASTLE BEACH

If I found you wandering round the edge
Of a French-born sea, when children
Should be taken in by their parents,
I would read these words to you,
Like a ship coming in to harbour,
As meaningless and full of meaning
As the homeless flow of life
From room to homesick room.

The words and you would fall asleep,
Sheltering just beyond my reach
In a city that has vanished to regain
Its language. My words are traps
Through which you pick your way
From a damp March to an April date,
Or a mid-August misstep; until enough winter
Makes you throw your watch, the heartbeat
Of everyone present, out into the snow.

My forbidden squares and your small circles
Were a book that formed within you
In some pocket, so permanently distended,
That what does not face north, faces east.
Your hand, dark as a cedar lane by nature,
Grows more and more tired of the skidding light,
The hunched-up waves, and all the wet clothing,
Toys and treasures of a late summer house.

Even the Atlantic has begun its breakdown
Like a heavy mask thinned out scene after scene
In a more protected time—like one who has
Gradually, unnoticed, lengthened her pre-wedding
Dress. But, staring at the old escape and release
Of the water's speech, faithless to the end,
Your voice was the longest I heard in my mind,
Although I had forgotten there could be such light.

ELEGY FOR AN IRISH SPEAKER

Numbered day,
night just beginning,
be born very slowly, stay

with me, impossible to name .

Do I know you Miss Death,
by your warrant , your heroine's head
pinned against my hero's shoulder?
The seraphim are as cold
to each other in Paradise:
and the room of a dying man
is open to everyone .
The knitting together of your two spines
is another woman
reminding of a wife, his life
surrounds you as a sun,
consumes your light.

Are you waiting to be fertilized,
dynamic death, by his dark company?
To be warmed in your wretched
overnight lodgings
by his kind words and small talk
and powerful movements?
he breaks away from your womb
to talk to me,
he speaks to my consciousness
and not with words, he's in danger
of becoming a poetess

Roaming root of multiple meanings
he shouts himself out
in your narrow amphora,
your tasteless, because immortal, wine.
The instant of recognition
is unsweet to him, scarecrow word
is sealed up, second half
of a poetic simile lost somewhere.

Most foreign and cherished reader,
I cannot live without
your trans-sense language,
the living furrow of your spoken words
that plough up time.
Instead of the real past
with its deep roots,
I have yesterday
I have minutes when
you burn up the past
with your raspberry-colored farewell
that shears in the air. Bypassing
everything, even your frozen body,
with your full death , the no-road back

of your speaking flesh.

Seamus Heaney

EXPOSURE

It is December in Wicklow:
Alders dripping, birches
Inheriting the last light,
The ash tree cold to look at.

A comet that was lost
Should be visible at sunset,
Those million tons of light
Like a glimmer of haws and rose-hips,

And I sometimes see a falling star.
If I could come on meteorite!
Instead I walk through damp leaves,
Husks, the spent flukes of autumn,

Imagining a hero
On some muddy compound,
His gift like a slingstone
Whirled for the desperate.

How did I end up like this?
I often think of my friends'
Beautiful prismatic counselling
And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible tristia.
For what? For the ear? For the people?
For what is said behind-backs?

Rain comes down through the alders,
Its low conductive voices
Mutter about let-downs and erosions
And yet each drop recalls

The diamond absolutes.
I am neither internee nor informer;
An inner émigré, grown long-haired
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows;

Who, blowing up these sparks
For their meagre heat, have missed
The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
The comet's pulsing rose.

THE MINISTRY OF FEAR

Well, as Kavanagh said, we have lived
In important places. The lonely scarp
Of St Columb's College, where I billeted
For six years, overlooked your Bogside.
I gazed into new worlds: the inflamed throat
Of Brandywell, its floodlit dogtrack,
The throttle of the hare. In the first week
I was so homesick I couldn't even eat
The biscuits left to sweeten my exile.
I threw them over the fence one night
In September 1951
When the lights of houses in the Lecky Road
Were amber in the fog. It was an act
Of stealth.

Then Belfast, and then Berkeley.
Here's two on's are sophisticated,
Dabbling in verses till they have become
A life: from bulky envelopes arriving
In vacation time to slim volumes
Despatched 'with the author's compliments'.
Those poems in longhand, ripped from the wire spine
Of your exercise book, bewildered me –
Vowels and ideas bandied free
As the seed-pods blowing off our sycamores.
I tried to write about the sycamores
And innovated a South Derry rhyme
With *hushed* and *lulled* full chimes for *pushed* and *pulled*.
Those hobnailed boots from beyond the mountain
Were walking, by God, all over the fine
Lawns of elocution.

Have our accents
Changed? 'Catholics, in general, don't speak
As well as students from the Protestant schools.'
Remember that stuff? Inferiority
Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on.

‘What’s your name, Heaney?’

‘Heaney, Father.’

‘Fair
Enough.’

On my first day, the leather strap
Went epileptic in the Big Study,
Its echoes plashing over our bowed heads,
But I still wrote home that a boarder’s life
Was not so bad, shying as usual.

On long vacations, then, I came to life
In the kissing seat of an Austin 16
Parked at a gable, the engine running,
My fingers tight as ivy on her shoulders,
A light left burning for her in the kitchen.
And heading back for home, the summer’s
Freedom dwindling night by night, the air
All moonlight and a scent of hay, policemen
Swung their crimson flashlamps, crowding round
The car like black cattle, snuffing and pointing
The muzzle of a Sten gun in my eye:
‘What’s your name, driver?’

‘Seamus...’

Seamus?

They once read my letters at a roadblock
And shone their torches on your hieroglyphics,
‘Svelte dictions’ in a very florid hand.

Ulster was British, but with no rights on
The English lyric: all around us, though
We hadn’t named it, the ministry of fear.

SUMMER 1968

While the Constabulary covered the mob
Firing into the Falls, I was suffering
Only the bullying sun of Madrid.
Each afternoon, in the casserole heat
Of the flat, as I sweated my way through

The life of Joyce, stinks from the fishmarket
Rose like the reek of a flax-dam.
At night on the balcony, gules of wine,
A sense of children in their dark corners,
Old women in black shawls near open windows,

The air a canyon rivering in Spanish.
We talked our way home over starlit plains
Where patent leather of the Guardia Civil
Gleamed like fish-bellies in flax-poisoned waters.

‘Go back,’ one said, ‘try to touch the people.’
Another conjured Lorca from his hill.
We sat through death counts and bullfight reports
On the television, celebrities
Arrived from where the real thing still happened.

I retreated to the cool of the Prado.
Goya’s ‘Shootings of the Third of May’
Covered a wall - the thrown-up arms
And spasm of the rebel, the helmeted
And knapsacked military, the efficient
Rake of the fusillade. In the next room
His nightmares, grafted to the palace wall –
Dark cyclones, hosting, breaking: Saturn
Jewelled in the blood of his own children,
Gigantic Chaos turning his brute hips
Over the world. Also, that holmgang
Where two berserks club each other to death
For honour’s sake, greaved in a bog, and sinking.

He painted with his fists and elbows, flourished
The stained cape of his heart as history charged.

FOSTERAGE

For Michael McLaverty

‘Description is revelation’ Royal
Avenue, Belfast, 1962,
A Saturday afternoon, glad to meet
Me, newly cubbed in language, he gripped
My elbow. Listen, go your own way.
Do your work. Remember
Katherine Mansfield – *I will tell*
How the laundry basket squeaked... that not of exile.
But to hell with overstating it:
‘Don’t’ have the veins bulging in your Biro’.
And then, ‘Poor Hopkins!’ I have the *Journals*
He gave me, underlined, his buckled self
Obeisant to their pain. He discerned
The lineaments of patience everywhere
And fostered me and sent me out, with words
Imposing on my tongue like obols.

Sinéad Morrissey

EUROPA HOTEL

It's a hard truth to have to take in the face –
You wake up one morning with your windows
Round your ankles and your forehead billowing smoke;
Your view impaired for another fortnight
Of the green hills they shatter you for.

BELFAST STORM

With a rain like that, lashing into the city
And a wind that blew streets dark before you could blink –
It's as though the angels are angry, sitting in the sky

With heads in hands and howling it all out over us.
I can't think that they haven't got used to by now.
The great gap in the street where his knees hit the wall
Meant wheelchairs, rather than coffins.

ENGLISH LESSON

Today I taught the Germans about Northern Ireland.
High on their interest, I paraded as the gunman
On the Falls Road. Death holds the attention –
BANG! Blew them off their seats and got away scot free

'A Fiddler in a death camp' –
Beyond the lot of it.

The only honesty is silence.

THOUGHTS IN A BLACK TAXI

1

Four days to go until the twelfth, and the bonfire is fourteen feet high.
I want the driver to drive ten times around the diamond.
I've been gone too long –
I want to stare and stare.

I imagine winding my way through the *Dump Wood Here* signs
And the fallout of black tyres,
Dismantled shelving and donated sofas
To the bare-chested men swanking about on top.

Fascinated by the organization,
I want to ask them where they got their ladders from.
One 'What are You called? From them, and it would all go black.
I'd have to run to stay whole.

2

It's not as though I haven't blundered before –
Asking what UYM means by the Rushpark estate,
Or laughing at how the Germans think Paisley is mad
In the taxi heading east of the city.

3

My teeth were so crooked it took six months at the Royal Victoria
Before I could smile without denting my lower lip.
Six years of the Governor Road in a state high school uniform
Was like having *Protestant* slapped across your back.

I always walked with my heart constricting,
Half expecting bottles, in sudden shards
Of West Belfast Sunshine
To dance about my head.

IN BELFAST

Here the seagulls stay off the Lough all day.
Victoria Regina steering the ship of the City Hall
in this first and last of her intense provinces,
a ballast of copper and gravitas.

The inhaling shop-fronts exhale the length
and breadth of royal Avenue, pause,
inhale again. The city is making money
on a weather-mangled-Tuesday.

While the house for the Transport Worker's Union
fights the weights of the sky and manages
to stay up, under Albert Bridge the river
is simmering at low tide and sheeted with silt.

I have returned after ten years to a corner
and tell myself it is as real to sleep here
as the twenty other corners I have slept in
More real, even, with history's dent and fracture

splitting the atmosphere. And what I have been given
is a delicate unraveling of wishes
that leaves the future unspoken and the past
unencountered and unaccounted for

This city weaves itself so intimately
it is hard to see, despite the tenacity of the river
and the iron sky; and in its downpour and its vapour I am
as much at home as I will ever be.

Leontia Flynn

BELFAST

The sky is a washed out-theatre backcloth
behind new façades on old baths and gasworks;
downtown, under the green sails of their scaffolding,
a dozen buildings' tops steer over the skyline.

Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction.
What was mixed grills and whiskeys (cultureless, graceless, leisureless)
is now concerts and walking tours (Friendly! Dynamic! Various!).
A tourist pamphlet contains an artist's impressions

Of arcades, mock-colonmades, church spires, and tapas bars;
are those harsh attempts at a buyable beauty?
There are 27 McDonald's, you say, in Northern Ireland
(but what am I supposed to do with this information?).

A match at Winsor Park has fallen in Gay Pride week.
At two a.m. the street erupts in noise.
I listen as 'We are the Billy Boys'
Gets mixed up, four doors down, with 'Crazy' by Patsy Cline.

And gathering in the city's handful of bars,
Not sunk in
darkness or swathed in beige leatherette
men are talking of Walter Benjamin, and about 'Grand Narratives'
which they seek to 'fracture' and 'interrogate'.

SONG

In the silver-grey
dark of your room
your hands are still
nothing is moving

The blinds are drawn
but over and over
the stars rush forward
on the screen saver.

LEAVING BELFAST

The planes fly so low over the houses in the east
their undercarriages seem like
the stomach of giant birds,
the skyline in town is ragged, monitored heartbeat
of a difficult patient; the river holds its own
and for every torn-up billboard and sick-eating pigeon
and execrable litter blown street round Atlantic Avenue
there's some scrap of hope in the young, in the good looks of women,
in the leafiness of smart zones, in the aerobatics of starlings

There are good times and bad times, yes, but now you are
burning your bridges, and you are leaving Belfast
to its own devices: it will raise or fall,
it will bury its past, it will paper over the cracks with car parks and luxury flats, it will make
itself new – or perhaps become the place it seemed before you left.

BERLIN

Visiting Kreuzberg, between Turkish bars
near where the guide says Peter Fecher fell
The Exiles Club and hotspots of the West
where deadbeats boozed and binged – and Bowie *et al*
recorded music close to the East
the red guards who surveyed them on patrol
should have got writing credits. Here and where the past
recent and awful, brick and bullet-hole
stands on street corners – here, the Berlin Wall
reminds you, you say, of peace walls in Belfast.

CYPRUS AVENUE

Van Morrison is singing 'Cyprus Avenue'
on the car stereo system
when you turn into Mournview
car park. The ignition

sparked, we grained the gears
of your dad's hatchback
with the Sheathed interiors
and practice the clutch

An old song plays on the radio
I am captured in a car seat
On the pointers of summer and youth
the whole world pivots.

SKY BOAT

after Medbh McGuckian (sort of)

An aeroplane caught in the branches of a tree,
Struggling over North Belfast Waterworks,
Makes for the open water of the sky
There is white foam following in the aeroplane's wake.

as white plumes follow the yachts across the bay
at Niece and Cannes – and break for an horizon
so indistinct (so blue the sky and sea)
today, we say, the word is upside-down Allan Gillis

Allan Gillis

LAST FRIDAY NIGHT

So there wi were like, on the fuckin dance
floor and the skank was fuckin stormin like,
shite-posh, but we'd fuckin chance
it, great big fuckin ditties bouncing, shite,
an thighs, skirts wi fuckin heart out fer. I
was fuckin weltered an Victor was ripe
aff his head cos we'd been round wi Johnny
like, downing the duty-free fucking gargle, aye.

Anyway, wee Markie must've taken
a few tha aul disco biscuits like,
a loved up da fuck, going like a mad yin
when some dicklicker come over like, for a fight.
Slabberin! So the fuckin lads go 'righ!'
an a huge fuckin mill-up started but
I fucked all when this tit's head cracked all a light.
Fuck sake like, my knuckles are still cut.
Shame ye wernie there, ya nut.

PROGRESS

They say that for years Belfast was backwards
and it's great now to see some progress
So I guess we can look forward to taking boxes
from the earth. I guess that ambulances
will leave the dying back amidst the rubble
to be explosively healed. Given time,
one hundred thousand particles of glass

will create impossible patterns in the air
before coalescing into the clarity
of a window. Through which, a reassembled head
will look out and admire the shy young man
taking his bomb from the building and driving home.

ULSTER WAY

This is not about burns or hedges.
There will be no gorse. You will not
notice the ceaseless photosynthesis
of the dead tree's thousand fingers,
the trunk's inhumanity writhing with texture,
as you will not be passing into farmland.
Nor will you be set upon by cattle.

Ingleberried, haunching and haunting
with their eyes, their shocking opals,
graving you, hovering and scooping you,
full of whatness that sieves you through
the abattoir hillscape, the runnel's slabber
through darkness, sweating for the night
that will purple to a love-bitten bruise

If you walk
don't walk away, in silence, under the stars'
ice-fires of violence, to the water's darkened strand.
For this is not about horizons, or their curving
limitations. This is not about the rhythm
of a songline. There are no paths to follow.
Everything is about you. Now listen.

COLD FLOW

Presley is singing In the Ghetto. The sky is almost blue.
Belfast, under blankets of snow, lies like a letter
not yet written. You aim a cigarette, as though it were a
snooker cue,
at the red ball of her lips. Which never tasted better.
The hill path is glazed with rippled glass, you gaze through
a frozen sea of trees, at town's oyster bedded pearl,
while smoke fudges the lough like a Cadbury's Twirl TM.

While smoke fudges the lough like a Cadbury's Twirl
you see colour-fleck cars and butterfly people sprinkling
their hundreds and thousands across the soft icing roads
thinking
of singing to Elvis. But she turns away, as if to say how stinking

the snow will become. What a whizz. What a whirl. What a girl.

So clever. So bitter. You could have hit her. The sky-dome douses

Whipped-cream snow, coating the strawberry brick of houses.
whipped-cream snow, coating the strawberry brick of houses,
while Aeroplanes levitate like Aero Bars TM over the tip
edge of Belfast's fruit bowl. The sweet snow flies as the
cloudless

sky cries, and you wipe your runny nose as the cold wind
blows.

It was the cigarette that tasted good. Not her strawberry lips.
She is melting into the horizon's bones and, as an aeroplane
drones,
desiccated coconut flakes fall on your face that turns toward
home.

Desiccated coconut flakes fall on your face, turned toward
home
laid out like a blanket, through trees that are ice cream cones

The melting path sparkles like a genuine American Miller TM.
bottle. And 100,000 butterflies will die, jealous of caterpillars,
while flowers ignite themselves in protest, then surrender
to the infinite cold flow, icing the Milky Way through.
Presley is singing *In the Ghetto*. The sky is almost blue.

TO BELFAST

May your bulletproof knickers drop like rain
and your church-spires attain a high state of grace
my lily-of-the-valley, the time is at hand
to ring your bells and uproot your cellulose stem.
I bought hardware, software, and binoculars to trace
your ways of taking the eyes from my head.

And none of it worked. We've been coming to a head
for too long, aircraft prick the veins of your rain-
bow as they shoot you in soft focus to trace
the timelines of your cellulite skin. But with the grace
of a diva on a crackling skin, you never stem
to the cameras, you're forever getting out of hand.

Once in school, on a greaseproof page we had to trace
the bust and booms of your body and I was ashamed to hand
mine because it lacked what Da called grace.
And I wish I was the centre of the rain-
drop that's falling on your head, the key to your hand-

cuffs, the drug that could re-conjugate your head.

Once in school, on a greaseproof page we had to trace
the bust and booms of your body and I was ashamed to hand
mine in because it lacked what Da called grace.
And I wish I was the centre of the rain-
drop that's falling on your head, the key to your hand-
cuffs, the drug that could re-conjugate your head. (16)

For Belfast, you'd be a Hollywood film, then I'd be Grace
Kelly on my way to Monaco, to pluck the stem
of a maybell with its rows of empty shells, its head
of one hundred blinded eyes. I would finger your trace
in that other city's face, and bite its free hand
as it fed me, or tried to soothe the stinging of your rain. (16)

TRAFFIC FLOW

Letters from Vow and Moneydig are sent to Baltic Avenue,
while from Friendly Row parcels are sent to Drumnakilly
and to Tempo?. From Whitehead, past Black Head, and up
to Portmuck, Byron steers his bright red van, dreaming of
Sara economy Place, whose handheld has just gone dead.
Down on Cypress? Avenue, Katie from Downhill texts Conrad,
lingering in Joy's Entry, listening to *Here comes the Night*.
She keys 'Sorry, but I had 2' while the busker, Sharon, thinks
of phoning home to Gortangallon. On Dandy street somebody's
Da says to somebody's Ma: 'Come on to fuck'. It's good to talk.
Moneyglass falls with disillusion. Everybody scampering under
the same weather, crossing lines, never coming together.

LAGANSIDE

I cannot call back the time, lasso the millions
of minutes by the scruff of their scrawny
wee seconds, or knock the lost years,
bop the back of their heads and bale
them into a gateway van that will welly it
to a warehouse where time is put right
by a crack team of agents in tandem
which a renegade but brilliant neurobiologist.
No, the missing months are truly missing,
Marooned, cut adrift, left for bye bye to dry
Out in the wreck of themselves, then stalk
An undead and hallow land forever thirsting

Anyway, it's been ages since I last happened
by this riverside walkway, where the dead

wood reeked by weather is spring cleaned
And I never learned to name of anything,
But it's nice to see no one's ripped off the plants
Out by their roots and burnt and pissed all over
The empty burned space where the ripped-up,
Pissed-on plants used to be. And it is really
great to stick on names that you've heard
to whatever you like without caring. So,
along this riverside pathway the snakes
through the city, this laminate lagoon,

buckeyes and rose of Sharon bushes occupy
snowberry banks, restharrow and gillyflowers
garland bamboo perches to coo-coo
with currawongs and chuck-will's-windows,
orangequits and greenshanks tra-la twittering
tittering and tottering on high branches
of lacquer trees getting liquored on ylang
ylang, oakmoss, dragon's blood and thyme.
But tiring of this I ask my better half
If she knows whay anything is, and she quotes to me
'Happiness is good health and bad memory'

A man screams. I jitter. But he's shouting
and his pupils tinned in a pointy-headed
rowboat, and I'm almost insulted,
given the streets are full of men who would
think nothing of going right up to a tiger
lily and scrunching its corolla, who'd shoot
the crows for target practice if they could take out
their guns; and so, I shouldn't exaggerate,
given that if a duck even tried to quack-
quack in the water, it would be a stone-
dead mallard before long; given that beneath
the bokey fudged mulch you can see a 3D

nightmares of chains and pulleys, high school
bullies, trolleys, satanic creepy crawlies,
a Black&Decker and grinder, outstanding
debt reminders, buckled pushchairs, threadbare
ping and olive striped deckchairs, mustachioed
shots of headshots, roadblocks, deadlocks
English cocks and Irish Jocks, mutilated livestock,
A timer's tick-tock, confused with cistern's drip-
drop, keeping you up to a panic at midnight knock-
knock, which is just a drunk neighbor who though
his missus must ive change da fucking front-dure lock.

Anyway, while all this flows towards Belfast Lough
It's not exactly Xanady above water either,

not quite Honolulu, when above the beyond
the trees all I can see are weed-nooked rust-yards
fighting for space with erect hotels and pearly
office centres, tall cranes stalking everywhere
tower cranes, hydraulic cranes, cranes for all terrain
policing thin streets in bright-sprayed armatures,
lording it over buildings like a supreme new race,
looking towards their unused elders hung
in sorrow in the dockyards to the east; whether
in sympathy, or saying up yours, I'm not sure.

Closer to the riverside, terraced doors keep
their mouths shut and children are clamped
in by the barricade from this steep fall of river-
bank and clean public walkway, through buttered
faces size me up from behind a useless wall,
cursing the river's limitation, my trespass,
this tourist sprawl. But then, moving onward,
by a cream call centre, a sunbed-skinned sales team
have finished their shift and stream through
the fence-gate to traipse toward happy hour
promotions, blank power retro-nights, their navel
studs and highlights sparked by waterlight

But these airs, this river, these sights have not
Been to some happy-clappy totem,
nor a masochistic home-truth tucked away
in the dark corner of my room mid the nee-
nar drone of bling-bling neon of foreign
towns and cities where I ordered Pad
Thai noodles and drown the blinds to dwell
On the blank page at the end of Ovid
in Tomis. It's I've never come down
since this tracks were laid, and this path
is like my tongue after biting a Pink Lady
cling-wrapped in a thin film or cellophane.

Of course, this happens all the time: you walk
up to your neighbor and notice his nostrail
hairs, dimples, pocks, scars, cheeks and creviced
brown eyes in the light and all the features
of his face fuse into something whole but shifting
like this river; or your run your hardily-haired
fingers over the deep blue tails that line your bath
and soon they're pigeons necks or tortoiseshell,
turquoise flashing eyes on a peacock's wing;
so it's unsurprising I'm a bit bamboozled
by this crash and build of trees and concrete

under ice-blue skies, which are hardily ice

blue, but electric, kingfisher, and airforce
blue stretched over this crocodile river
preying straight for the lough's open maw
to leave behind all the guarantees, horse chestnuts
and hazel trees; the roadways' injured circuitry;
whellie bins and empties; wideboys hawking
blow the gothic daughters and the haute
bourgeoisie; and my better half and me
below clouds the taper the city's spires,
cupolas, scaffolding, lithe birds of origami.

No wonder I'm astray, a little bit this way
And that way, for the dockyards and ghettos
Look like a grey-quiffed and tattooed uncle
Intensely line dancing on a hot night-
club floor thinking he might yet score,
like I've been caught with my guard down
by this dizzy glint and easy rapture
of poplar and clover, wire fence and river
flooding towards the basin's broken jaws
ad if hit and-running from a crime scene,
though flushed and peach-blushed with pleasure
at the prospect of coming to a head,

having it out for once and forever
as the missing months and years dredge
past the massage of washed-out slogans,
sleek towers, ghosted union buildings,
the river overrunning its own ledge
to find itself played out in a final flush
into open seas, under drizzled rain,
while the sky arrests an outbound plane,
and my better half lags behind to savour
the shifting terrain, leaving me to find
our way back to the streets, knowing
I'll never leave here, or come back again.

Miriam Gamble

SPRING IN BELFAST

Creased like a palimpsest, this piece
Of Irish linen, hacked crudely

Into trousers, labeled in Spanish,
price-marked in Euros, then in pounds.

I lay them out in the spring light,
Stem and flatten it, and fold up

Neatly in the *Karrimor* –
As *Sound of the Sixties* changes over

The smooth product of my labours,
fresh as a new development,

plush layerings of plasterwork
behind which silences repair

to carry to Dubai, Karachi
this queue for diplomats, please

then make a right for customs)
like some old peddler of wares

across the continents. No thank-
you. I have nothing to declare.

NOTE: The Poems “A Belfastman Abroad Argues With Himself” and “Conacre” could not be reproduced.