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Alterity, literary form and the transnational Irish imagination in the work of Colum McCann

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PhD in English Literature
University of Edinburgh
2014

Declaration of own work

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Alison Garden

25th September 2014

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Abstract

This thesis explores selected texts by the contemporary author Colum McCann (b.1965), situating his work within a larger transnational Irish canon. The project traces how notions of Irish identity interact with experiences of diaspora, migration and race; throughout the thesis, close attention is paid to the role and function of literary form. After an introduction which maps out the material covered in the thesis, the project opens with a contextual chapter entitled '*Deoraí*: Exile, Wanderer, Stranger: (Post)colonial Ireland and making sense of place'. This chapter sets up the methodological frameworks that guide the thesis through a meditation on exile in an Irish and postcolonial context. My second chapter, 'Deterritorialised novels: McCann's short stories as Minor Literature in an (Northern) Irish Mode', focuses on McCann's short stories, paying particular attention to those set in the North of Ireland. Invoking Thomas MacDonagh's notion of an Irish Mode and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of Minor Literature, I argue that the rejection of the novel in favour of the short story is a form of literary politics inflected with anti-colonial sentiment. Continuing my examination of literary form, my third chapter, 'Nomadism and Storytelling in *Zoli*: oral culture, embodiment and travelling tales', highlights the ambivalence of orality within McCann's novel *Zoli* and works towards establishing what a textual practice of storytelling might be, in addition to probing at the representation of nomadic peoples across McCann's work. The next chapter is entitled 'Topography of Violence': race, belonging and the underbelly of the cosmopolitan city in *This Side of Brightness*'. This discusses the cosmopolitan ethics that underpin McCann's novel and how these are grounded by the close attention McCann pays to the experiential realities of America's (often racialised) underclass through McCann's depiction of interracial love. My final chapter *'TransAtlantic*: Frederick Douglass, the Irish Famine and the Troubles with the black and green Atlantics', maps out the overlapping histories of the black and green Atlantics, tests the validity of the ostensible affinity between the two groups and asks how useful conventional chronological narratives are in the representation of their histories. Finally, I finish with 'Minor Voices, race and rooted cosmopolitanism', which concludes that McCann's fiction articulates a need for rooted cosmopolitan and critically engaged nomadic thought which embraces Minor Voices and rejects exclusionary politics.

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INTRODUCTION: Alterity, literary form and the transnational Irish imagination in the Work of Colum McCann

This thesis explores the work of the contemporary, Irish-born author Colum McCann. When I first began this project, little had been written about Colum McCann's fiction. Since then, two monographs have been published, Eóin Flannery's *Colum McCann and the Aesthetics of Redemption* (2011) and John Cusatis's *Understanding Colum McCann* (2011). In addition to this, a collection of essays on McCann's work edited by Flannery and Susan Cahill, entitled *This Side of Brightness: Essays on the Fiction of Colum McCann* (2012), has also been published. All of these texts emphasise that McCann's is a 'body of work that is generously international in its array of characters and narrative contexts' but, crucially, none have actually sought to put any of McCann's work into a transnational dialogue with other national contexts or literary texts (Flannery 7). While Susan Cahill's *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years: 1990 to 2008* (2011) does discuss some of McCann's earlier texts within a comparative framework, the other authors included in her study are both Irish: Anne Enright and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne. Therefore, claims made about the 'international' dimension of McCann's work are largely untested. To address this issue, this thesis takes a transnational approach to the study of McCann's work, drawing upon critical, literary and contextual material from multiple locations as relevant to the texts under discussion. This being said, McCann self-identifies as an Irish writer; he is clear in articulating that, despite his wish to expand the boundaries of the novel (and short story), he 'ha[s] to be an Irish writer' and that he 'come[s] from that tradition' (Garden 4). Therefore, the thesis will naturally be particularly engaged with McCann's Irish historical and literary heritage.

Attention has also been drawn to both McCann's enduring interest in 'marginalized communities' and his ability to 'redeem and dignify even the most abject of lives' (Cahill and Flannery 1). This commitment to what McCann has termed the 'anonymous other' is made manifest through McCann's diverse subjects (Garden 1); the subjects across the texts discussed in this thesis include Northern Irish youths, a Romani woman, homeless mixed-race subjects and African-Americans. I argue that McCann's characters can be read as 'Minor Voices', a term that draws upon Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of 'Minor Subjects'. If the 'dominant image of the subject [is] masculine/ white / heterosexual/ speaking a standard language/ property-owning/ urbanized', then the minor subject is anything that falls outside of this definition (Braidotti 2011: 211-12). Indeed, this engagement with Minor Voices forms part of what I have termed McCann's '(post)colonial aesthetic',[1] which I will expand upon throughout the thesis. What this thesis hopes to ask, however, is why McCann, as a white, middle-class man, is drawn to these voices and whether there is something problematic in his adoption, or perhaps even appropriation, of these voices.

Flannery suggests that it is McCann's 'Irish heritage' that enables 'his engagement with the disenfranchized of Irish-American, African-American, and Eastern European histories during the twentieth-century' (4). McCann has claimed that being Irish has meant that he 'was never seen as part of the established order' and so, he suggests, his experiences were presumed to be somewhat aligned with those of his minor subjects (colummccann.com). These sorts of statements are alarming and

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[1] I place the prefix 'post' in parenthesis to indicate that those countries that were once colonised are often still subject to contemporary forms of neo-imperialism and that the legacies of colonialism far outlast the end of direct colonial rule. My use of (post)colonial also acknowledges the disputed nature of the North of Ireland, where many of the nation's inhabitants still believe that the northern part of the island is under colonial occupation. Where the term 'postcolonial' is used, this is in reference to the academic field of postcolonial studies; where 'post-colonial' is used, this is to indicate the literal state of an independent nation after the colonial power has relinquished control.

indicative of the kinds of issues that this thesis hopes to tease out. Is McCann trying to claim that the experiential realities of being Irish are equivalent to being African-American or a member of the Roma? Much of the recent scholarship on McCann is ostensibly engaged with these sorts of questions: the synopsis for Flannery and Cahill's collection claims that the essays pay attention to 'a host of central themes in McCann's writing', of which 'race' is one. The index for the collection, however, has no entry for 'race' and none of the chapters devote any substantial discussion to McCann's racial politics. This may be because, as Flannery's statement above implicitly implies, the 'existence of racist ideas and practices among Irish people - in Ireland and elsewhere - has been almost completely ignored' (McVeigh 1992: 32). Given Ireland's 'experience of colonisation and racialisation', the primary issue surrounding Ireland and race 'has been *whether*, not *why*, Irish people can be racist' (31; emphasis original). In literary and cultural studies, this negation of the potential for Irish racism may be due to an uncritical acceptance of Ireland as a post-colonial state and subsequent use of postcolonial theory in scholarship. My study of McCann's work seeks to question the validity of this postcolonial model for Ireland and assert the importance of proper historical and contextual engagement. It is vital that we remain attuned to the ambivalence of the Irish relationship to both British imperialism and the diasporic Irish relationship to American racism in the United States; the 'contradictory power location of the Irish within the modern world system means that we [the Irish] can both experience and reproduce racism' (McVeigh 32). This thesis hopes to perform a thorough consideration of the transnational dimensions of McCann's literature and his use of Minor Voices, while also remaining critically engaged with the specifics of both the Irish postcolonial experience and the ethical dilemmas posed by McCann's literary fashioning of experience so different from his.

This project differs from previous monographs on McCann in that it is not a survey of his catalogue. McCann's current output consists of two collections of short stories, *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (1994) and *Everything in this Country Must* (2000), and six novels: *Songdogs* (1995), *This Side of Brightness* (1998), *Dancer* (2003), *Zoli* (2006), *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) and *TransAtlantic* (2013). As noted previously, McCann's novels often put Irish experience into a transnational dialogue with other ethnic or cultural groups. In order to fully unpack the ethical import and historical viability of these comparisons, I felt that they needed to be fully contextualised and critically analysed; therefore, I decided it would be more productive to focus on fewer texts but explore them in greater detail. This thesis is driven by an interest in two key areas: McCann's use of literary form and his engagement of minor, and particularly racialised, subjects. The works that I have chosen to focus on include 'Cathal's Lake', a story from *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, *Everything in this Country Must*, *Zoli*, *This Side of Brightness* and *TransAtlantic*. These texts were chosen with the aim of assembling a selection of McCann's work scanning the length of his career to date, including early and more recent work. Given that I am particularly interested in McCann's use of both literary form and Minor Voices, I have focused on texts that have provided the most material for my argument.

The thesis will begin by reflecting upon 'exile': McCann's primary subject and 'obsession for two decades' (Cusatis 14). Given the importance that McCann invests in this topos and the ways in which it underpins his literature, it is important that this term is unpacked in full. Chapter One uses the Irish word for exile, *deoraí* – interpreted literally as exile, wanderer, stranger – as a means by which to examine the consonant and dissonant ways that 'exile' operates in McCann's fiction. This focus

also enables me to pull together the critical and contextual material that this thesis is grounded in through a meditation on exile in an Irish and postcolonial context. 'Exile' is a slippery and difficult word, which has been used to denote all manner of conditions and subject positions, from nomads, banishment, refugees and postmodern disaffection. We might argue that, in an Irish context at least, the term is particularly associated with migration; Flannery and Cahill have suggested that 'McCann tracks lives and narratives that are mobile – a mobility that energises but that also comes burdened with vulnerabilities and compromises' (1). The first part of this chapter, 'Wanderer', is focused on the idea of movement. The section opens with a discussion of voyage narratives and *dinnseanchas* from Early Irish literature. As exile also calls into question relations to space, place, home and nation, it is interesting to note the ways in which ancient notions of belonging in Ireland have fed into contemporary literature. This section also registers the discursive construction of the Irish people as 'nomadic' by English colonialism. In addition, this section also notes the prevalence of fictions about tramping and homelessness by Irish writers, which, as I highlight, provide important literary precursors for *Zoli* and *This Side of Brightness*. Like those authors with an interest in the lives of homeless and nomadic characters, McCann's fictions do not invoke these subject positions as metaphors: they involve engagement with the experiential realities of these lifestyles. To this end, the nomadic theory of Rosi Braidotti is introduced as a means of responding to the need for a body of theory attuned to both the affirmative politics and practical actualities of being a minor subject. This section concludes by outlining the importance of the transnational method of analysis utilised in this thesis, as well as advocating that we read McCann's literature as establishing 'connective' rather than 'comparative' assemblages of affinities and events (Hirsch 206).

McCann's fiction does not romanticise exile and, in this way, it sits at odds with much exilic theory. The next section of Chapter One will work towards distinguishing between different experiences of exile: existential, immigrant and (post)colonial. This is important because it illustrates the way in which the term has been appropriated by cultural theorists and indicates how McCann's engagement with minor subjects re-politicises the concept. Finally, in 'Stranger: (post)colonial Ireland and interculturalism', I discuss the applicability of postcolonial theory to Ireland, especially with reference to Ireland's new status as a destination for immigrants and the outcome of the 2004 Referendum on Citizenship.

I have noted that I believe we can trace a (post)colonial aesthetic within McCann's work; a key component of this aesthetic is his formal politics. McCann's prose is highly distinctive: in addition to his sophisticated use of the short story, his novels are episodic and dialogic, making use of multiple narrative voices. Chapter Two, 'Deterritorialised novels: McCann's short stories as Minor Literature in an (Northern) Irish Mode', focuses on McCann's short stories, paying particular attention to those set in the North of Ireland. The chapter begins by underlining the relationship between the nineteenth-century realist novel, nationalism and imperialism. Following this logic, I turn to Thomas MacDonagh's notion of an Irish Mode and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of Minor Literature to ask whether we could view the use of the short story as a literary form associated with an anti-imperial praxis. Given that Ireland's national and cultural condition has been shaped by the forces of colonialism, I contend that the Irish national fabric is particularly porous, and that the short story provides a productive means of representing this heterogeneity. I suggest that, as Minor Literature in an Irish Mode, the short story is especially well suited to articulating the (post)colonial situation in the North of

Ireland because the short story collection is able to house narratives from both sides of the sectarian divide.

I elected to focus on McCann's Northern Irish short stories, *Everything in this Country Must* and 'Cathal's Lake', from *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, for several reasons. Firstly, the short story has found great success in Northern Ireland but has been the subject of very little scholarship. Secondly, the North of Ireland plays a substantial role in McCann's novel *TransAtlantic*, also discussed in the thesis, so it made sense to trace McCann's engagement with the North in his earlier works. In addition to this, McCann writes about the North in ways in that are quite unusual; while many authors write about the North in 'hermetically compartmentalised terms', McCann does not (Cleary 2001: 77). McCann's construction of Northern Irish space actually does much to enhance the 'international' dimension of McCann's prose in ways that are yet to be recognised. The penultimate section of this chapter reads McCann's short stories in conjunction with Benedict Kiely's, arguing that the two use the short story form to subvert the notion that the violence of the Troubles is a problem indigenous to Northern Ireland. Using word play and intertextual border crossing, the two writers imbue the Irish topography with a sense of a violent pastoral that seems deceptively rooted in Irishness, while actually gesturing at a larger landscape of transnational trauma. The concluding section turns to McCann's novella 'Hunger Strike', noting the ways in which the novella puts the Famine, the Long Kesh Hunger Strikes and the Holocaust into dialogue with one another, demonstrating how this serves to critique the transnational phenomenon of violence based on exclusionary identity politics.

Chapter Two focuses attention on the importance of orality within Irish culture through both the oft-repeated argument that Irish short stories are so successful due to

the closeness of Irish culture to their oral past, and the anxiety over oral space that pervades McCann's 'Hunger Strike'. Chapter Three, 'Nomadism and Storytelling in *Zoli*: oral culture, embodiment and travelling tales', continues where this left off. Returning to the image of the hunger striker, I contend that we should view their bodies not just as vehicles for oral culture, but print culture too. Rather than see print modernity as an evolution of pre-modern orality, I argue that one is always troubled by the other. *Zoli*, through its printed fashioning of the oral and embodied epistemology of storytelling, is testament to these concerns. In the interview I conducted with McCann, he spoke at length about the role of the 'storyteller', rather than the novelist. As a text, *Zoli* provides a wealth of material to help us begin to unpack what the distinctions between a novelist and a storyteller might be; as a character, Zoli also probes at these sorts of questions – she becomes famous in Czechoslovakia for her poetry, which is heavily inspired by the oral culture of the Roma. Returning once again to McCann's use of literary form, I use Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller' to work towards establishing what a textual practice of storytelling might be. This chapter on *Zoli* also includes additional substance for our analysis of McCann's depictions of nomadic peoples; I turn to McVeigh's notion of 'sedentarism' to flesh out discussions begun in the first chapter about Irish racist and exclusionary discourse. Irish sentiment towards the indigenous travelling population, the Irish Travellers, has been particularly vitriolic,[2] and so *Zoli* might also be read as a pertinent statement on this issue.

Chapter Four is entitled '"Topography of Violence": Race, belonging and the underbelly of the cosmopolitan city in *This Side of Brightness*'. This discusses the

[2] It is very important to recognise that the Roma and the Irish Travellers are distinct and different ethnic groups. However, as explored in detail in the chapter, McCann describes *Zoli* as an 'Irish novel' so we could read the novel as being influenced by McCann's experiences of Ireland's travelling community (Hayes).

cosmopolitan ethics that underpin McCann's novel and how these are grounded by the close attention McCann pays to the experiential realities of America's (often racialised) underclass through McCann's depiction of interracial love between Irish-American Eleanor and African-American Nathan. Far from being a cosmopolitan and inclusionary space, I highlight how the multiracial city is divided by race and illustrate how the metaphorical racialised underclass of social theory finds its literal manifestation in the homeless Subway dwellers of McCann's novel. While McCann's sensitive engagement with these issues is to be applauded, the racialised and sexualised ways in which he constructs the bodies of Eleanor and Nathan Walker reveal uncomfortable tensions within McCann's racial politics. The interracial love story at the centre of the novel is a motif that McCann is particularly drawn to; nearly all of McCann's works have some element of interracial or interethnic attraction or romance. For this reason*, This Side of Brightness* allows us to explore a recurrent trope within his literature.

This exploration of racial politics continues with Chapter Five, *'TransAtlantic*: Frederick Douglass, the Irish Famine and the Troubles with the Black and Green Atlantics'. This chapter maps the overlapping histories of the black and green Atlantics in order to test the validity of the ostensible affinity between the two groups. McCann's novel sets up connective associations between slavery, the Irish Famine and the Northern Irish peace process in a manner that asks readers to make imaginative connections between the three. However, his invocation of Frederick Douglass, who was able to both champion the anti-colonial cause of the Irish and note the racism of Irish-Americans towards their black American neighbours, is revealing of the complexity of the black and green comparison. To conclude, this chapter returns once more to McCann's formal politics, to ask how useful conventional

chronological narratives are in the literary representation of black and green history in the face of trauma beyond representation. Finally, I conclude with 'Minor Literature, race and rooted cosmopolitanism', which suggests that McCann's fiction articulates a need for a rooted cosmopolitan and critically engaged nomadic thought that embraces Minor Voices and rejects exclusionary politics.

Chapter I: ***Deoraí*****: Exile, Wanderer, Stranger: (Post)colonial Ireland and making sense of place**

Exile is Colum McCann's primary thematic concern and he notes that it has been his 'obsession for two decades' (Cusatis 14). In tandem with his deep-rooted interest in exilic experience, his work is also testament to a desire to 'break national landscape and break borders' (Garden 4); so, he hopes that his work can operate within and without several different national traditions, like the figure of the exile. Often we find that his fiction wrestles with the tension between a desperate, nostalgic longing for home and an understanding that what constitutes home may not sit comfortably within a bordered nation state. This mentality is actually far more progressive – and unusual – than it may first appear, especially given McCann's stated position as 'an Irish writer' (Garden 4). With Ireland's history of massive outmigration, exile has been a foundational part of the Irish experience and, as this chapter will demonstrate, has been discursively constructed in very particular ways in Ireland. Although this chapter will work towards unpacking what exile means in an Irish context, historically, culturally and theoretically, it does so in the knowledge that the term is notoriously slippery. As this chapter (and thesis) will explore, to think about exile is also to think about place, home and nation; concepts that are equally fraught in the contested academic space of Irish Studies. Within critical theory and academic thought, a landscape so saturated with travelling theory, psychogeographies and narratives of mass postmodern displacement, exile has become a ubiquitous term and experience. This chapter notes that there is no longer consensus on what the term means and that we have moved beyond a univocal understanding of how it operates. To generate a productive means of moving through the methodological and contextual material that grounds this thesis, this chapter will think about McCann's work as it

intersects with the multiple meanings of the Irish word *deoraí*: exile, wanderer, stranger.

Deoraí illustrates the symbiotic nature of these positions, all of which, I argue, are central to understanding McCann's work. Thinking about the function of *deoraí* in McCann's work allows us to cluster together ideas about exile, Otherness and wandering across Irish culture and theoretical material in both rooted and routed ways. I borrow this homonym roots/routes[3] from the work of Paul Gilroy, who uses it to reflect upon identity formation in the black Atlantic, because it is a particularly constructive way of noting the ways in which Ireland (as any nation) is both shaped through its historical and cultural traditions (roots) and through its interactions with external forces such as diaspora, (im)migration and colonialism (routes). This first part of this chapter reflects upon 'Wandering' and this section will include a discussion about travel and exile within Early Irish literary culture, fictions of homelessness and tramping, nomadic theory and the transnational, connective practice that underpins this thesis. The second section, 'Exile', examines the historical and cultural role of exile within both a theoretical and Irish context, before evaluating the role of the exilic writer in Irish culture and working towards outlining different experiences of exile. Finally, this chapter will conclude with 'Stranger: (post)colonial Ireland and interculturalism'. This section will test the applicability of the post-colonial label to Ireland and discuss the differences between inter- and multicultural environments with reference to contemporary Ireland, post-Celtic Tiger. In conclusion, '(Post)colonial aesthetics: reterritorialising alterity' will argue that McCann's investment in exilic experience correlates with his commitment to Minor Voices and, what I have termed, (post)colonial aesthetics. The ramifications of these

[3] This pun is utilised further at several points in this thesis; see pages 148 and 183. See also, Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), 19.

(post)colonial aesthetics across McCann's literature and, in particular, his use of literary form will be explored throughout the rest of this thesis.

Wanderer: 'We are now, as we have always been, a land of exiles and wanderers'[4]

i. Immrama and dinnseanchas: space, place and travel in Early Irish culture

From its earliest existence, we can find strands of Irish literature that placed great importance on travel and wandering. Early Irish literature celebrated not only the voyage but also leaving the known spaces of Ireland; becoming an exile (willingly or not); the redemptive possibilities of travel and becoming strange to oneself; and embracing and interacting with Otherness. Within Early Irish culture, a type of travel literature known as voyage literature was a distinct genre and there exists within it 'three groups about visits to the Otherworld – *Echtra* (Voyage), *Immram* (Journey) and *Fís* (Vision)' (Bhrolcháin 6). These tales often involved a blend of Christian and pagan traditions, or what John Carey has termed 'the marriage of two cultures', in which men leave Ireland in search of the mystical 'Otherworld' (10). This 'marriage between two cultures' suggests a level of intercultural exchange and the stories themselves echo this openness to engaging with alterity and the unknown. Wooding writes that the 'earliest voyage tales' are 'short episodes in saints' *uitae'* found from the 'late seventh and early eighth centuries' and that within these stories, the 'notion of exile was the *leitmotiv*' (xiv, xxiv). The focus of these stories, 'the encounter of Ireland with the world beyond its shores', is shared with the generic hybridity of these stories (Wooding xxiv). *Echtrae* and *Immrama* 'cross boundaries', drawing on 'cosmographical and historical' epistemologies and are rich with 'imaginative detail' (Wooding xxiv). Within these texts, unlike the later narratives of Irish exile that we will explore further on, exile is regarded as something rewarding: it is usually holy

[4] Joseph O'Connor, from Dermot Bolger, ed. *Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad,* (1993), 15.

and sometimes even magical. There is certainly nothing to fear about the strangeness of the Otherworld, which is, Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin claims, ‘the perfect realization of this world, a place without death, disease, war, old age, sadness or decay’ (79). Even the names of the various Otherworlds encountered are positive, such as *Mag Mell*, (The Plain of Delight), *Tír Tairngire*, (The Promised Land) and *Tír na nÓg*, (Land of Youth). These voyage narratives often placed a real emphasis on the travel itself. The Irish word ‘*Immrama’* is ‘literally interpret[ed]’ into English as ‘rowing about’ (Dumville 75). These imaginative relationships to the alterity of the Otherworld and the journey towards it in Early Irish literature are markedly different to subsequent discursive construction of Irish understanding of both emigration and immigration. The legacy of these texts can clearly still be traced to contemporary literature too. McCann has spoken about the links he makes to this literary heritage and his own fashioning of these mystical places; in an interview with James Santel he remarked ‘America was for a long time a dream place, a *Tír na nÓg* of the imagination’ (Santel). Paul Muldoon has also constructed creative links between modern Irish emigration and these ancient tales of Irish voyaging. His ‘Immram’ from *Why Brownlee Left* (1980), is a lengthy poem exploring one man’s quest for knowledge about his family’s origins and this journey takes him, literally and imaginatively, on an expansive journey across Europe and the Americas (Muldoon 94-102). These medieval texts therefore form an important contextual component for our contemporary understanding of ‘the voyage’, or travel, in Irish culture.

In addition to this tradition of making something heroic out of the wanderer and the voyage, Early Irish culture also placed an important emphasis on place. Bhrolcháin argues that within ‘Irish tradition, stories are not just about events; they are also about the sites where the events take place, and the story may unfold in the

real physical contours of the countryside; story and place are inextricably linked' (7). *Dinnseanchas*, onomastic tales or 'place name lore', are the stories associated with one particular place and the landscape 'was seen as a living thing with a name for every feature' (Bhrolcháin 7). Of course, as Patrick Ward highlights, the 'reverse of such intense love and psychological attachment to one given locality was dislocation and deracination' if one was separated from this storied landscape (29).

Dinnseanchas fed into early narratives of exile and have also become of relevance once more as the (post)colonial situation, particularly within the North, has spilled into argument and violence over territory. In his *Terrorism and Modern Literature* (2002), David Houen touches upon how poets have subverted *dinnseanchas* in their efforts to comment upon the Troubles of the North of Ireland. He contends that poets such as Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon, Tom Paulin, Medbh McGuckian and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill have performed an 'examination of the dinnseanchas in the context of postmodern claims about linguistic arbitrariness, internationalism, and narrative fragmentation' (254). Through their linguistic play, the topography of Ireland becomes a disputed space in a poetic examination of belonging, colonialism and language (Gaelic/English). Whereas Heaney's early poems such as 'Anahorish' and 'Broagh', both from *Wintering Out* (1972), insist on nominal essentialism, other poets have challenged this reading of Irish topography and identity. These forms of Early Irish literary culture reveal the ways in which place, travel and alterity are of central importance to the Irish literary heritage. What they also do is alert us to what could potentially be two conflicting strands within this heritage: the dialectical drive to be both rooted and routed, both locally grounded and globally curious.

ii. "the Irish, like the Scythians, were nomads":[5] wandering literature, tramping fictions and nomadology

In the sixteenth century, English colonial powers sought to discursively construct Ireland as a nation of nomads; as a nomadic people, they therefore, most conveniently, had no claim to the land that the English were trying to colonise. In Johann Boemus's *Omnium Gentium Mores, Leges et Ritus* (1520), later translated to *The Manners, Laws and Customs of All Nations* (1611), it was argued that the Irish were descended from the Scythians, a semi-nomadic people. Edmund Spenser also wrote that the Irish were 'not of one nation' but 'of many different conditions and manners' in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596) (Morris 625). This 'nomadic' culture that these early modern figures were commenting upon was the clan-based culture of Gaelic Ireland, whereby Ireland was split into regions governed by local rulers, unlike the centralised monarchy and rule of England. Although the 'nomadism' of these early commentators is both unspecific and a patronising attempt to devalue Irish culture, it is true that, as Denis Zimmermann articulates, 'there had always been itinerants in Ireland' (434). Zimmerman continues, 'in ancient society they [these itinerants] had included "men of skill" with relatively prestigious positions, and well into the eighteenth century vagrants could be respected by the native population' (434). However, Zimmerman notes, attitudes towards these itinerant Irish began to change with the beginning of English colonisation of Ireland in the early modern period, as itinerants were 'diabolized' by the 'Tudor colonists' (434). A. L. Beier argues, in *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (1985), that the rise of anti-itinerant sentiment on behalf of the English colonial administration in Ireland tallies with a similar sentiment in England against

[5] Nicholas Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565-76* (1976), 126.

Irish immigrants fleeing the violence of the colonial incursion. Writing about the Irish in England during the Tudor and Stuart periods, Beir maintains that the immigrant Irish 'were essentially viewed as vagabonds' and as part of a criminal underclass (10). He argues that although the numbers of itinerant Irish were very small compared to the large numbers of English itinerants, they aroused particularly strong bitterness (64). Unsurprisingly enough, Beier claims that the Irish 'came in waves' by being 'periodically uprooted' in Ireland due to English colonial settlement (63). The work of early modern commentators to discursively construct the Irish as wandering people was evidently successful; in 1837, George Nicholls wrote that the 'Irish are naturally, or by habit, a migratory people, full of change, full of hope, eager for experiment' (6). Beier argues that this led to the itinerant Irish in England being associated with the Roma – an association that has often blurred the boundaries between individual Irish itinerants, the Roma and Irish Travellers, all of which are separate and distinct groups. This elision will be explored fully in chapter five on McCann's novel *Zoli*.

In this later chapter on *Zoli* we will assess how McCann engages with Roma culture and address how his representation of the discrimination faced by the Roma may be informed by his own experience of the Irish Travelling community in Ireland. In addition to writing about the nomadism of the Roma, McCann has also written about the homeless population that inhabit the Subway tunnels under New York City in *This Side of Brightness*, which is the primary focus of chapter four. Although being part of a nomadic community is very different from being homeless, the two groups do share common ground through their experience of not having a sedentary, fixed-abode to call home. Again, we can find precedents for this in Irish literature.[6] Numerous twentieth-century Irish authors have engaged with the figure of the

[6]There is also an American context for this that is more pertinent to our analysis of *This Side of Brightness* and so will be discussed in greater depth in chapter four.

wandering or dispossessed Irish individual (usually male), including Patrick MacGill, James Leo (Jim) Phelan and Robert McLiam Wilson.[7] Patrick MacGill's *Children of the Dead End* (1914) is largely autobiographical in content, detailing his experiences of being sold at hiring fairs and working as an itinerant farmhand in both Ireland and Scotland. As an itinerant labourer, the novel's protagonist Dermod Flynn tells of his existence 'out on tramp, homeless in a strange country' (95). It is a hard and thankless life, as Dermod cobbles together enough to survive: he 'seldom stopped longer than one fortnight at a time on any farm' and 'live[d] in byres, pigstys and barns' (83). Although he occasionally finds work for longer periods as a navvy in Glasgow and Kinlochleven, the threat of 'the road, the eternal, soul-killing road' haunts Dermod and he suffers 'the contempt which people with fixed abodes feel for vagabonds' (120). Another author who wrote extensively about life on the tramp was Jim Phelan in novels that drew upon his own autobiography such as *Tramp at Anchor* (1954) and *Tramping the Toby* (1955). David Cowell contends that Phelan's 'stories were better than those produced by other "tramp" writers such as Jack London mainly because, at this time, tramping was his chosen way of life rather than the occasional source of material for a book' (246). McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* (1989) is a more contemporary piece about a homeless man from Belfast, 'a filthy, foodless, cashless tramp', living in London (7).

Given the contemporary trend in critical theory to elevate the experience of the 'nomad', of which more below, we could be at risk of reading these texts as part of a privileged travelling culture. While it is true that Phelan was a voluntary wanderer, he did elect to follow this lifestyle after having spent fifteen years in prison:

[7] Another Irish author who relies heavily on the figure of the tramp is Samuel Beckett. Although Beckett was himself was a wanderer of sorts, I am excluding him in this list of itinerant Irish authors because all those listed above had experienced actual physical homelessness in a way that Beckett never did. As Wily Maley argues, Beckett's 'vagrant act is a form of minstrelsy' (68).

hardly the career progression that one would associate with the elite (Cowell 246). Instead, the fictions of MacGill and others that explore this wandering existence might best be understood as exemplifying the Old Irish *deoraid*, 'a legal term under Brehon Laws, meaning a person without property' (Mianowski 89). In her comparison of *Ripley Bogle* and *This Side of Brightness*, Marie Mianowski argues that the two texts share an exilic aesthetic due to the 'marginalized' statuses of McCann, an Irish writer living abroad, and McLiam Wilson, a Northern Irishman. She asserts that this enables the two authors to interrogate Irishness from the enlightened perspective of an outsider. Aside from Mianowski's uncritical adoption of the term exile, her analysis fails to recognise that what these two texts do is continue the work of a specific strand of their Irish literary heritage. With *Zoli* and *This Side of Brightness*, McCann's focus on the wandering, *deoraid* exilic experience is concerned with the underclass of the mobile experience of modernity: criminals, drug addicts, the homeless and the Roma, Europe's internal Others. Like the tramping fictions of those Irish writers who have come before him, McCann's wanderers draw links between violence, migrancy, poverty and trauma. His politics of place (and loss of place) is all the more potent because of his Irish literary and historical inheritance, wherein the lasting legacies of Gaelic culture, British colonialism and Irish emigration have meant that 'place, culture and identity are closely interconnected concepts' (Kennedy-Andrews 2008a: 1).

We noted earlier that the concept of the nomad has gained traction in critical theory during the latter part of the twentieth century; some figures have even asserted that the exilic experience of homelessness is the foundational condition of modern life. Firstly, although this will be dealt with in far greater detail later, we ought to address the fact that being nomadic is not necessarily the same as being either

homeless or an exile. Although there has been, in both cultural imagination and academic thought, an ‘uncritical obeisance to the image of the [Irish] artist as an exile’ this portion of this chapter will ask whether there might be other ways of reading some strands of Irish literature – hence the use of ‘nomadic’ (Ward 16). We will see below how positions of migrancy and exile have been appropriated by (privileged) artists and exiles as a means of articulating a sense of modern displacement and subverting a fixed identity. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s conception of nomadology and the nomad, as outlined in ‘Treatise on Nomadology – the War Machine’, from *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1998), stands in opposition to this. Rosi Braidotti insists that Deleuze ‘does *not* suggest that “homelessness” and “rootlessness” are the new universal metaphors of our times’ (2002: 84; emphasis original). Deleuze and Guattari are keen to differentiate between the travel of the nomad and that of the migrant, claiming that the ‘nomad is not at all the same as the migrant’ (1998: 380). Elaborating on this, the two suggest that if ‘the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization afterward as with the migrant’ (381). The nomad is defined by wandering and will never feel settled. For the nomad, or the wanderer, there is no stable concept of home, unlike for the migrant (even if the migrant’s home is associated with an impossibility of return). We could trace this nomadic aesthetic in the literature of the Irish writers mentioned previously. For Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad is just one component of their epistemology, which exemplifies their efforts at a non-hierarchical, de-centred and non-unitary way of understanding the world. Their work seeks to elevate the voices of minor subjects – ‘women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules’ (291).

It is Rosi Braidotti, however, who has done the most work to critically ground this nomad as part of her politics of becoming. Her emphasis on the non-metaphorical nature of Deleuze and Guattari's nomad is as much a part of reaffirming her own political agenda as it is a means of explaining theirs. Braidotti's becoming-subjects are a delicate balance between the affirmative politics of difference and the awareness that being a minor subject signifies both vulnerability and affirmation, and involves experiential realities that should not be appropriated for theoretical gain (Braidotti 2011: 41). She argues that she wants to 'actualize a nomadology that instils movement and mobility at the heart of thinking' and 'foregrounds the force of affirmation as the empowering mode for both critical theory and political praxis' (2011: 1, 3). While she is keen to endorse the subversive power of the margins, she also tempers this with an awareness of what existence is like for those at these margins: '[h]aving no passport or having too many of them is neither equivalent nor is it merely metaphorical, as some feminist critics of nomadic subjectivity has suggested' (14). The privileging of Minor Voices that nomadic theory entails 'critiques the self-interest, the repressive tolerance, and the deeply seated conservatism of the institutions that are officially in charge of knowledge production, especially the university but also the media and the law' (6). This aspect of nomadic theory makes it particularly applicable to what I will label McCann's '(post)colonial aesthetics', which will be fully outlined in the concluding section of this chapter. Nomadic theory is especially useful to this thesis because it privileges movement as a means of destabilising hegemonic discourses of power, which corresponds with the postcolonial project, while remaining attuned to the realities of those living on the underside of modernity. Braidotti's 'nomadic thought rejects melancholia in favor of the politics of affirmation' and in this way, tallies with Gilroy's assertion, in *After*

Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture (2004), that there *is* a post-imperial culture that can embrace difference (6). This thesis hopes to explore how the redemptive qualities of McCann's fiction can be read in light of both Braidotti's 'creative efforts aimed at activating the positivity of differences as affirmative praxis' (Braidotti 7).

iii. Literary wanderings: transnational travels and connective readings

So far, this chapter has examined wandering as a textual phenomenon across both literary and theoretical material; now, we will explore how a transnational connective mode of reading can enhance our understanding of this material and the work of McCann. I privilege *trans*national over 'multi', 'inter' or 'post-national' for numerous reasons. Firstly, the term 'multinational' has too many echoes of the business jargon of the corporate world, where we hear of 'multinational corporations'. Indeed, John Carlos Rowe insists that, when incorporated into 'such phrases as *transnational capitalism'*, the term 'transnational' actually serves to critique the omnipotent, relentless force of capitalism; it 'implies a critical view of historically specific late modern or postmodern practices of globalizing production, marketing, distribution, and consumption for neocolonial ends' (Rowe 78; emphasis original). 'Multi' also suggests the simple coexistence of, rather than direct engagement with, multiple groups (nations, cultures or ethnicities); this distinction, and its relevance to this thesis, will be fleshed out in greater detail in the concluding section of this chapter and with reference to contemporary Ireland. 'International' suggests greater engagement than 'multi', and so intercultural, interracial and interethnic will utilised throughout this thesis with this in mind, but it leans more towards intimate comparisons between small clusters of two or three nations. Comparative analysis is often fraught with problematic considerations, both ethical and institutional, that we

will return to shortly.[8] 'Post-national' is also problematic, suggesting as it does that we are post and therefore after the nation-state. The thesis will suggest, most notably in Chapter Two, that the nation-state is still of great importance to the contemporary world on both macro- and microcosmic levels. When thinking about migration and diaspora, 'post-national' is unhelpful, especially as many diasporic groups define themselves via identification with their nation of origin (Irish-Americans,[9] Haitian-Americans, etc.) and thus these diasporic groups can also be profoundly nationalist.[10] The prefix 'trans', as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is also imbued with movement, or what we might productively term a 'nomadic energy'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the prefix 'trans' is 'with the sense "across through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing, or state to another"' (OED.com). This nomadic energy is also coupled with, in a similar vein to 'post', the idea of being 'beyond, surpassing, transcending' (OED.com). Unlike the prefix 'post', which arguably reduces the complex to the simply 'after', 'trans' implies change, *trans*ition or *trans*formation. There is something more pertinent about 'trans' to the acts of creative or imaginative practice, too; hence the use of *trans*literation or *trans*lation. I believe it is also worthwhile to think here of Cuban Fernando Ortiz's concept of *trans*culturation which he developed in order to describe the processes of cultural creolisation at play in Cuba: 'the term *transculturation* better expresses the different phrases of the process of transition from one culture to another, because this process does not consist solely of acquiring

[8] Comparative Literary Studies has also come under scrutiny from those who have now adopted a postcolonial approach. Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), suggests that 'the study of comparative literature originated in the period of high European imperialism and is irrecusably linked to it' (49). Susan Bassnett, however, has posited that postcolonial critique is essentially 'comparative literature under another name' (10).
[9] See Niall Whelehan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867–1900* (2012), for a study of one faction of militant Irish Nationalists based in New York.
[10] See Benedict Anderson on 'long-distance nationalism'; *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (1998), p.58-75.

a foreign culture, which is what the Anglo-American term *acculturation* means' (1978: 96, translation by Claire Taylor 123; emphasis original). Claire Taylor argues that transculturation 'could well be viewed as a postcolonial theory before postcolonial theory itself was fully formulated in a francophone and anglophone context' (122). Writing about how literary influence travels, Jahan Ramanzani alerts us to a 'Transnational Poetics' (2006) in modern poetry, outlining that 'poetic transnationalism can help us both understand and imagine a world in which cultural boundaries are fluid, transient, and permeable' (355).

Randolph Bourne first used the term 'transnational' in 1916 to describe the social and ethno-cultural fabric of the United States. We can see that the term was originally applied to the co-existence of multiple cultures and ethnicities within one nation.[11] In this way, the term is useful for our study of McCann's work, which, as we will see, often depicts interracial and interethnic engagements within a bounded space (a nation; a city). But the term also denotes travel, as Susan Stanford Friedman articulates: 'transnational models emphasiz[e] the global space of ongoing travel and transcontinental connection' (533). If we think about the travelling dimension of texts, as in how texts travel through networks of readerships, this necessarily leads us to thinking about the nomadic nature of the lives of some authors themselves. This is a central focus of Rebecca Walkowitz's 'The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer' (2006). Although Walkowitz acknowledges that 'not every book that travels is produced by a writer who travels', she is particularly interested in the lives of writers who have travelled and therefore 'belonged or who continue to belong to more than one nation, region, or state and who now participate in a literary system that is different from the system in which they were born,

[11] The multiracial nature of the United States was left curiously absent from Bourne's analysis. This, and Bourne's article more generally, is discussed in more detail on page 171 of this thesis.

educated, or first published' (532, 533). Using the author Caryl Phillips as an example, she notes how, in the paratextual biographical note that prefaces each of his texts, the author lists the numerous places that he has inhabited. In *Crossing the River* (2006), which informs part of our discussion of McCann's *This Side of Brightness*, it reads, 'Caryl Phillips was born in St Kitts and now lives in London and New York'. The biographical note in his collection of essays, *A New World Order* (2002), also utilised in this thesis, has slightly more information and reads 'Caryl Phillips was born in St. Kitts, West Indies. Brought up in England […] Phillips lives in New York'. This paratextual information, argues Walkowitz, 'suggests that the book we are about to read has many sources and has been shaped […] by the interplay among several literary cultures' (535). McCann also emphasises his travels; the biographical note for *Everything in this Country Must* (2000) asserts that 'Colum McCann was born in Dublin in 1965. He has lived in America, Japan and Ireland […] His work has been published in fifteen languages. He lives in New York with his wife and two young children'. McCann, too, gestures to his own wandering lifestyle as a means of enhancing the transnational dimension of his work, indicative, perhaps, of the hope that his readers will not imagine his texts as 'exist[ing] in a single literary system but may exist, now and in the future, in several literary systems' (Walkowitz 528). The transnational circulation of these texts could be read rhizomatically; the rhizome being another notion borrowed from the work of Deleuze and Guattari. A rhizome is a subterranean root system but, unlike the root, it works its way laterally through space rather than vertically downwards. In this way, it becomes the perfect metaphor for Deleuze and Guattari's non-hierarchical understanding of space. The circulation of the transnational text, like the rhizome, is shaped by 'principles of connection and heterogeneity' (1998: 7). This enables 'any point of a rhizome' to 'be connected to

anything other' (7). Books too, like the rhizome, can be put into connective relationships with other books. In this way texts become part of transnational networks of circulation, enabling texts to be read through rhizomatic connections to other national literary traditions.

In addition to the transnational travels of both author and text, transnational literature may also be thematically or ideologically concerned with the motives for and experiences of travel. For example, the oeuvres of both Phillips and McCann contain texts set in multiple and diverse locations (often within one text); characters of numerous ethnicities, races or nationalities; and explorations of migration and transnational travel. In her article, 'From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature' (2002), Carine M. Mardorossian argues for what she calls a 'migrant aesthetic' in literature written by certain postcolonial figures including Phillips, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat, amongst others. She suggests that contemporary migrant fictions differ markedly from those written by previous generations of 'exilic' authors, because the migrant author does not place old and new worlds in competition. Accordingly, this 'shift from exile to migrant challenges the binary logic [of old/new] by emphasizing movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages' (16). In stressing the importance of movement, the migrant aesthetic parallels the nomadism that we have associated with transnationalism. In addition to this, however, this migrant aesthetic echoes the primary tenets of Braidotti's nomadism: for the 'identity' of the migrant writer 'is no longer to do with *being* but *becoming*' (16; emphasis mine). Most interesting to us, as will become apparent throughout this thesis, is Mardorossian's assertion that the migrant aesthetic 'challenges the kind of opposition between the modern and the traditional, the country of destination and the country of origin which motivates the

discourse of exile' (21). McCann's fiction privileges literary forms such as the short story and episodic novel which, in their relationship to older, traditional forms of Irish storytelling, subvert this opposition between modern and traditional forms.

Earlier, we noted that comparative scholarship has the potential to be problematic. McCann's literature is prone to wandering across historical and geographical places, assembling diverse narratives together in a way that could pose ethical dilemmas. In Chapter Two, for example, I argue that the shadow of the Holocaust haunts his novella, 'Hunger Strike' from *Everything in this Country Must.* In juxtaposing the Irish 1980/1 Hunger Strikes of Long Kesh prison with the Holocaust, McCann is at risk of making a very dubious comparison. In Chapter Five of this thesis, I ask whether McCann's suggestion of an affinity between black and Irish experience works to underpin a narrative of Irish victimhood. However, Luke Gibbons asserts that to 'reclaim the memory of those who have been forgotten or who have been written out of history […] is not to indulge in the self-absorption of victim culture but the opposite: to engage in an act of *ethical imagination* in which one's own uneven development becomes not just a way in, but a way out, a means of empathising with other peoples and societies in similar situations today' (2002: 104; emphasis mine). Of McCann's tendency to establish relations between disparate events, I find Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'connective' rather than 'comparative' literary practice illuminating: she prefers the term 'connective rather than comparative' because 'it eschews any implications that catastrophic histories are comparable, and it thus avoids the competition over suffering that comparative approaches can, at their worst, engender' (206). This idea of 'connective' rather than 'comparative' can also lead us back to the lateral, non-hierarchical logic of the rhizome. Therefore, this thesis will

consider McCann's literature using a connective transnational methodology, situating McCann's own wandering texts as part of a nomadic Irish literary inheritance.

Exile

i. Exile and the (post)modern experience

The previous analysis examined how 'the wanderer' of the Irish word *deoraí* could be usefully situated within certain strands of Irish literary history and how ideas of travel, migrancy and nomadism provide a productive theoretical framework within which to read McCann's fiction. Wandering is, however, only one facet of the exilic experience as understood both theoretically and experientially. If, as Eva Hoffmann has written, 'exile is the archetypal condition of contemporary lives', then what does McCann mean when he claims that *exile* is his 'obsession' (Hoffmann 197)? This section of the chapter will work towards assessing the consonant and dissonant ways in which exile has been utilised and defined by theorists. McCann self-locates as an Irish writer and it is, therefore, important to trace how the term has been utilised and understood, both historically and culturally, within Ireland. David Emmons suggests that exile has been 'the emblem of [Irish] identity' and emigration has certainly been an unexceptional reality for many in Ireland (127). In the United States alone, the 1990 census revealed that forty-five million American citizens 'claimed Irish as their primary ethnicity' (Kenny 2003a: 16); worldwide, approximately seventy million people claim Irish ancestry (Delaney 86). The historian Kerby Miller argues for the existence of an 'Irish exile motif', a very specific idea of emigration, coloured by the loneliness and dislocation of 'exile', as a distinctly national phenomenon in Irish and disaporic Irish culture.

Exile is now an unstable term that encompasses multiple and diverse meanings. The term, with its biblical roots in the story of the Book of Exodus of the Israelites

from Egypt under Moses, has a long and varied history. In contemporary academic thought, ‘we notice a critical insistence upon exile as the trope that best signifies all modes of displacement in modernity, along with an accompanying ambivalence toward redemption and return as well as a celebration of distance and alienation’ (Kaplan 35). Traditionally, exile was not an experience endured by masses of migrants but an experience reserved for the elite. Some modern critical theory has tended to conflate experiences of migration – those of the immigrant, the exile, the émigré, the expatriate and the refugee – together, despite their very different political and socio-economic connotations. Others critics have argued that exile is a problematic term because it is laden with connotations of privilege and that the term is actually ‘outmoded’, no longer applicable to contemporary experiences of migration (Smyth 147). The problems of the term are also exacerbated by the fact that a substantial proportion of contemporary fiction and literary criticism extols the possibilities of disaporic identity, multiculturalism and hybridity, without acknowledging that migration is not always voluntary, desirable or productive. This elevation of exilic experience to a position of existential angst for a privileged few writes out the pain and suffering of history’s casualties; an essential part of McCann’s project is therefore to reclaim the stories of these ‘anonymous voices’ and ‘insert it into the larger historical frame’ (Garden 8). This chapter continues by examining how the historical experience of exile has become complicated by problems of terminology and in attempting to untangle exile’s multifarious meanings, this chapter will work towards extracting working definitions for different exilic experiences: immigrant exile, (post)colonial exile and existential exile. Of course this is not to suggest that these experiences cannot overlap, but that there is enough difference between them to warrant separate states.

ii. Exile, emigrant, refugee: definitions and historical overview

Madelaine Hron, in her work *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (2009), suggests that 'historically, exile denotes a form of banishment and ostracism imposed as a societal punishment, be it in Ancient Greece or in eighteenth-century Europe, or as a response to religious or political persecution' (11-12). Once exiled, to return to one's homeland (unless pardoned), would usually incur death. However, Hron argues that the status of the exile, unlike that of the immigrant, is a position imbued with privilege. She continues: 'only influential persons were generally exiled, such as kings (from Tarquin to France's Charles X) to important public intellectuals (Ovid, Dante or Hugo)' (12). In contrast, if 'ordinary persons irritated rulers or monarchs, they would generally be dispossessed of their property or simply killed off' (12). Hron argues that 'in comparison with the immigrant experience, the exilic condition, rich in historical and metaphorical connotations […] represents a privileged position in its political and intellectual dimensions' (11). She suggests that this figure of the privileged exile is often conflated with the image of the existential or 'academic exile' (11). She maintains that because the original experience of exile was only for the elite, something of this elitism has been mapped onto our understanding of the term in contemporary academic circles; the term exile is often applied to intellectuals or artists who feel unable to live in their home nation because of religious or political reasons. For Hron, these existential exiles leave not because of any reasons that would endanger their lives (for example, war, extreme poverty or persecution) but because they choose to accommodate personal preference.

Hron sees a clear distinction between the immigrant and the elevated position of the exile. There are other examples of migrancy in addition to these two: both Hron and Said also explore the positions of the refugee, émigré, and expatriate. As Barbour

articulates in his work on Said, ‘exile resembles but is not the same as being a refugee, expatriot or member of a diaspora’ (293). He laments that in contemporary academic ‘practice, however, these terms are now often used interchangeably to refer to people displaced from their original home, even when they leave it willingly’ (293). To avoid this lack of clarity, Hron is keen to carve out definitions for the terminology she utilises in her work. Her definition of the term ‘refugee’ is based on its legal one:

> Legally, a “refugee” is a person seeking asylum in a foreign country because of persecution, war, extreme poverty, or natural disasters. In most industrialized countries, however, asylum claims are usually only granted for political or religious reasons, as expressed both in the U.N. Charter and the Geneva Convention. In the U.N. Charter, refugees are defined as persons “fleeing persecution, attack or discrimination because of race, religion, nationality or membership in a certain group”, who according to the Geneva convention can demonstrate “a valid reason [to flee] based on a well-founded fear” (7).

Said contends that ‘that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile’ and refugees clearly fit into this category (2000: 181). However, unlike ‘exile’, the term ‘refugee’ is a recent one, ‘a creation of the twentieth-century state’ and its meaning is fixed and defined by a clear legal framework (Said 181). It is unlike exile which has tended to be loosely used to describe anyone who is no longer living in their home nation. Even though refugees are exiles in the purest historical sense, both Hron and Said dismiss refugees early on in their work. Given that both critics are keen to explore unexamined realities of exilic experience, this seems troubling. Said does attempt to grapple with other forms of migrant experience, arguing that the possibility

of choice is the distinguishing feature between an exile and an expatriate or émigré. He maintains that lack of choice is crucial to the exilic experience, suggesting that 'exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born in to it or it happens to you' (184). Whereas the historical exile, 'banished' from their home and nation, suffers 'an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider, the expatriate chooses to 'voluntarily live in an alien country' (181). Said sees the émigré as more 'ambiguous' and the concept of choice is not as prescribed as with exile and expatriate (181). Said simply states, 'an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country' (181). However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an émigré as 'an emigrant of any nationality, especially a political exile', making note of a 'Frenchman who has left his country for another, especially one of those Royalists who fled at the French revolution' (OED.com). It appears that the politicised connotation of the word, unacknowledged by Said, denies the émigré the same element of choice enjoyed by the expatriate.

However, this idea of choice becomes problematic. For example, exiles and émigrés are both 'prevented from returning home', but the experience is not the same. An émigré decides to leave, although this choice may be based on facts which make it impossible for them to live in their home country, whereas the defining feature of exile, historically, has been expulsion, or banishment, from one's own land: the biblical Exodus was the expulsion of the Jews from Egypt. It is odd that the term 'exile' has a much wider circulation than 'émigré', when in reality, very few groups of people were forcibly banished from their home countries and threatened with death if they attempted to return. However, if we take the example of the aristocracy fleeing France during the Revolution, we should technically view them as émigrés: no individual or institution expelled them from France. They left for fear for

their lives; but they could choose to stay in France (and face almost certain death), if they wished. Choice, in this example, is so limited that the aristocracy may as well have been banished from France.

iii. Existential exile

As noted earlier, the original definition of exile has been associated with privilege and, in some respects, we can still see traces of this in what Hron has labelled 'the academic exile' (11). Hron's 'academic exile', associated with intellectuals and artists, is positioned in opposition to the focus of *Translating Pain*, the immigrant (usually a manual worker or similarly low skilled labourer); according to Hron, academic exiles are tormented in their home nation by 'pervasive feeling[s] of alienation, estrangement or angst' (12). They do not feel at ease in their country of origin, but neither do they feel at home in their host nation, and so define themselves as exiles 'to describe their home-less existential condition' (Hron 12). Hron goes further, adding that 'in academic circles, exile comes to represent an elevated position associated with intellectual value' (12); 'moreover, the idealized portrait of the academic exile – the intellectual experiencing existential angst or "inner exile" – draws heavily on the image of the victimized artist' (12). Henry Levin's *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (1966), notes the large number of authors that lived and wrote in exile, or outside their country of birth. He begins with Ovid and goes on to mention, amongst others: James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett, Joseph Wittlin, García Lorca, Dante, Voltaire, Karl Marx, Victor Hugo, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Henry James, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Thomas Mann, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The idea of the 'suffering author-in-exile' was, according to Ewa Thompson, 'refashioned in the period of Romanticism when exiles and outcasts invaded the literary world' (499).

Thompson goes on, explaining that ‘ during that period certain writers went into exile because they had to, as was the case with some French writers after the French Revolution and some Polish writers after the 1830-1 rising against the Russians, or because they fancied themselves persecuted’ (499). As a result, ‘in late Romanticism the portraits of gloomy exile could be found in the literatures of virtually all European countries’ (499). Caren Kaplan argues that our understanding of the writer-in-exile was altered again with the construction of high modernism, and this is something that will be explored in a later section on the Irish writer abroad. This position of the suffering writer-in-exile (Hron's ‘academic exile’) could encompass both academics and artists alike, but the overtones of existential angst, for Hron at least, apply to both.

There is perhaps another reason why the topos of the writer-in-exile has become more closely associated with academia in contemporary thought: the mass exodus of Central European academics in the middle of the twentieth century. Helmut Pfanner states that

> ‘because […] the policy of political and racial persecution which formed the core of National Socialist ideology was directed against all ‘non-Aryans’ and those who were opposed politically and philosophically, the decade after 1933 witnessed the mass emigration of Jews, Communists, Social Democrats, and members of other ‘undesirable’ groups from the Third Reich and its occupied territories’ (13).

This exodus, Pfanner outlines, ‘had a distinctly intellectual character’ (14). Krohn confirms that ‘about 12,000 intellectuals [including doctors, lawyers, artists, etc.] lost their jobs and were eliminated from Germany's social and cultural life’ as a result of the National Socialist Regime (11). Many of these exiled academics sought solace in the United States and Krohn notes that ‘of the scholars who emigrated out of

Germany during the entire Nazi period, it is estimated that slightly less than half came to the United States' (16). Of these migrants 'approximately one-quarter, about 180 individuals, were rescued by the New School' (Krohn 16). This New School for Social Research grew out of the 'University in Exile' and established a graduate programme 'staffed entirely by immigrants' (11). Many other academics, notably members of the Frankfurt School (which later became the Institute for Social Research), went on to teach at institutions across the rest of Europe and the United States. Sigmund Freud fled Vienna, finally completing his work on trauma, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), while exiled in London. Not only is the work about trauma, Kaplan argues, but also a by-product of trauma: 'traumatic markers dog the book throughout, not only in the many false starts, but in the repetitions, the constant return to past arguments, and the weaving in and out of positions vis-à-vis Moses' (2005: 44-5). The fact that Freud's work on trauma involves the story of the Jewish Exodus and was written when he was in exile seems significant in that it reaffirms correspondence between dislocation from home and trauma. The academics who fled Nazi persecution certainly could be considered 'exiles' in the sense that they left out of fear for their lives. Today, there are still many parts of the world where writers are not free to express themselves. Organisations like PEN International (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) are testament to this, as is ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network), which helps persecuted writers to relocate in new cities. It is for these reasons that I privilege the term 'existential exile' over 'academic exile'. To endanger your life for your political or religious beliefs is very different from feeling uncomfortable in the society you inhabit. Academic exile, Hron's preference, seems to diminish the real danger that academics and writers have faced at various points in history. Existential exile encapsulates the privilege of someone who has the financial

and social security to allow themselves to feel ill at ease in their home nation. Of course, existential exiles may well choose to leave their homeland as a result of these feelings of angst and alienation, but we should recognise that their experience of exile (and sometimes attendant migration) is fundamentally different from that of an individual fleeing their home nation due to famine, religious or political persecution.

iv. (Post)colonial exile

Like the existential exile, the (post)colonial exile also feels displaced when at home. Although classical ideas of exile involved a physical movement, its modern usage has been equally concerned with feelings of inner exile; 'exile is a way of dwelling in space with a constant awareness that one is not at home' (Barbour 293). The economic and political forces that led to mass migration, voluntary or not, have also resulted in feelings of estrangement and alienation for those who have *not* found themselves living outside of their country of origin: (post)colonial exiles. The expansion of European colonial projects from the sixteenth century onwards has left many people bereft of their original culture heritage as European colonial powers attempted to regulate and control indigenous communities as part of a Western missionary, and later imperial, vision. At best, this resulted in an ambivalent fusion between the two cultures, an ambivalent hybridity, as Homi Bhabha argued in *The Location of Culture* (1994). At worst, indigenous populations were all but wiped out when European colonisers began to settle. Both of these situations would have had the effect of eradicating indigenous cultures, so that natives living in the colonised space of their homeland would no longer feel at home. Rosemary George, in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-century Fiction* (1996), suggests that home has become an increasingly fraught concept and that (post)colonial fiction is testament to this: 'over the course of the last hundred or so years, the concept of home

(and of home-country) has been re-rooted and re-routed in fiction written in English by colonizers, the colonized, newly independent peoples and immigrants' (1). Numerous postcolonial theorists, including Bhabha, have grappled with how indigenous communities have responded to their colonisers. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), argues that colonised peoples internalise their colonisers' disdain and racism, developing a hatred for their own race and suppressing their true selves in an attempt to become like their colonisers. He suggests that 'by the time a century or two of exploitation has passed there comes about a veritable emaciation of the stock of national culture' (191). This would naturally lead colonised peoples to feel exiled from their own culture, even if they are in fact still living in their homeland. Edward Said, who seems to have produced critical material covering all aspects of the exilic experience, draws our attention to the Palestinians, who 'feel that they have been turned into exiles by the proverbial people of exile, the Jews' (2000: 178). For 'forty-six years', argues Said, the Palestinians 'have been painfully resembling a national identity in exile' (178). In Ireland, their experience as colonised subjects led Luke Gibbons to proclaim that 'there was no need to go abroad to experience the "multiple identities" of the diaspora valorised in post-colonial theory: the uncanny experience of being a stranger to oneself was already a feature of life back home' (1996: 176). Kiberd too, while acknowledging the Irish diasporic experience, echoes Gibbons's sentiment almost verbatim: 'the Irish were everywhere and nowhere, scattered across the earth and yet feeling like strangers in their own land' (1995: 328). Tracing how these geographically dispersed theorists find themselves articulating a similar position is interesting, suggesting that this (post)colonial position of exile is somewhat of a transnational phenomenon. 'Being a

stranger to oneself' is just as potent an experience of exile as that of those who are forced to leave their homeland.

There is also a crucial question of language and its loss, which often plays a pivotal role in the construction of this (post)colonial exilic subject position. In Ireland, the British Empire colonised Ireland linguistically as well as spatially and the native language of Irish was supplanted by English. As an English (and subsequently British) colony, the Irish language had been in decline since the seventeenth century. This decline was exacerbated by the loss of life as a result of the Famine years from 1845 to 1852, as well as the introduction of 'the system of national schools', implementing 'a deliberate policy of replacing Irish with English' (Flanagan 49). As a result, 'by the 1890s […] Irish lingered only in scattered and impoverished regions' so that 'by the close of the nineteenth century, Irish had come close to vanishing' (Flanagan 48-9). Kiberd maintains that 'the colonial education offered Irish children an alien medium through which to view their native realities' and this process of making the native foreign has had profound effects on the formal properties and development of Irish literature as I will argue in later sections of this thesis (1995: 332). Kiberd argues that this loss, and the experience of colonialism in general, meant that the people of Ireland 'suffer[ed] from that most modern of ailments: a homeless mind' (329). This 'homeless mind', a direct result of the colonial experience, is a key facet of the (post)colonial exilic subject.

v. Immigrant exile and the Irish exile motif

Ireland has a long historical relationship with emigration; Kevin Kenny asserts that 'for most of the nineteenth century, emigration as a proportion of population was higher in Ireland than in any other European country, and no other country

experienced such sustained depopulation in that period' (2003b: 135). Irish immigration was certainly at its peak during the mid-to-late nineteenth century; Enda Delaney puts the population of Ireland in 1871 at 5,412,000 and the number of those born in Ireland but living abroad at 3,068,000 (85). However, as Kerby Miller et al. illustrate in *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America*, *1675-181* (2003), Irish people had been emigrating well in advance of the nineteenth century. Even in the twentieth century, with Ireland's entry into global capitalism, emigration was still a key feature of Irish life: 'by the second half of the twentieth century, the likelihood of migration from Ireland remained a rite of passage for those coming of age' (Delaney 86). When examining the vocabulary that is used by cultural and literary critics to discuss and reflect upon this migratory history, it becomes apparent that this history is being constructed in a very specific vein. For example, Gerry Smyth contends that '*exile* and emigration have played a fundamental role in the construction of Irish identity at least since the nineteenth century, and arguably long before that' (146; emphasis mine). Patrick Ward's book on the subject is called *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing* (2002); in it he states that 'the importance of the phenomenon [of exile] is unquestionable – it has been an enduring and profoundly influential feature of life in Ireland since the time of Columcille' (3). Ward suggests that 'exile has always been an honourable fate in Ireland' (11): but given Ireland's history of mass *emigration*, just who exactly are the exiles he is talking about here?

Kerby Miller has proven that whereas exile is normally taken to imply a non-voluntary migration, the Irish language (Gaelic) does not have a word for voluntary migration: so all migrations are 'exiles'. As a result, 'the notion of emigration as exile was rooted deeply in Irish literary and historical tradition' and all socio-economic

classes thought of emigration/exile in the same manner (Miller 1900: 92). Therefore, exile was not seen as a status purely for the elite. Miller argues that both the Gaelic language and 'the traditional Irish Catholic worldview', misrepresented 'emigration as exile, as *in*voluntary expatriation' or 'political banishment' (93, 92); these forced migrations were predominantly seen as 'the political and economic consequences of "British misgovernment", "Protestant ascendancy" and "landlord tyranny"' (92). The British colonisation of Ireland caused lasting political and religious tensions: the indigenous Irish were largely Catholic and the British largely Protestant. This led to bloody and prolonged sectarian conflict. Although the British colonisation of Ireland is often seen as a considerable factor in Irish emigration, 'traditionally, emigration was understood as a colonial legacy', Miller illustrates that, in Ireland, the concept of emigration was in reference to the dislocation and trauma of exile (Smyth 146). Miller argues for an Irish 'exile motif', claiming that conflating emigration with involuntary exile has a historical tradition in Ireland that is shaped by specific cultural and religious factors; this equivalence (or conflation) was consolidated within the cultural imagination by the mass emigration caused by the Famine.

The Irish language was central to shaping this view of migration and that 'Gaelic poets commonly employed the word *deoraí* (literally, exile) to describe anyone who left Ireland for any reason' (Miller 92). Deploying the term 'exile' over emigrant removes any sense of agency or choice, instead indicating that the departure was forced and suffering was caused as a result. Miller also highlights that Irish Gaelic, unlike English, 'makes sharp distinctions between active and passive states of being' (93). Therefore, 'the most common way for an Irish-speaker to describe emigration has been *dob éigin dom imeach go Meirice*: "I *had* to go to America", or, more precisely, "going to America was a necessity for me" – an impersonal

interpretation entirely consistent on the use of *deoraí* (exile) to designate *emigrant*' (93; emphasis original). In short, the Irish language constructed migration not as a choice but as something compelled. Miller remarks upon the use of *deoraí* – exile, wanderer, stranger – as the chief means of describing emigration in the Irish language, but he fails to note how closely the term is related to the Irish word for tear(s): *deor*(*a*). This further emphasises the notions of trauma and suffering that cluster around the use of *deoraí*/exile. This mentality was inscribed not just in the Irish language, argues Miller, but also in Irish cultural traditions rooted in Catholicism. He explains:

> 'the idea that emigration was communal necessity rather than […] individual opportunity for self-betterment perfectly reflected a prevalent tendency in the traditional Irish Catholic worldview to devalue individual action, ambition, and the assumption of personal responsibility – especially when actions, such as emigration, seemed innovative and threatening to customary patterns of behaviour and thought which enjoined, by example and precept, passive or communal values such as duty, continuity, and conformity' (93).

Miller's argument about the 'traditional Irish Catholic Worldview' seems somewhat adversarial; presumably because he is keen to dispel the myths that have constructed Irish and, particularly Irish Catholic, emigration as a highly politicised exodus reduced to simplistic notions of British colonial victimisers and Irish (Catholic) victims. However, he does highlight how the Catholic Church fed 'the negative characterizations of emigration' (96). He contends that religious figures stressed 'the hazards of the voyage [out of Ireland] and the poverty and physical dangers which awaited poor emigrants in the new world', labelling the United States 'a vicious, materialistic, "godless" society which corrupted the emigrants' morals and destroyed

their faith' (96). Miller poses that this anxiety over emigration was due to nationalist concerns about the effect mass-migration would have upon Ireland's quest for independence and subsequent attempts at national growth: the 'development of Irish capitalism seemed threatened by the drain of potential entrepreneurs, workers, and consumers' (98). Indeed, 'in 1920 the Dáil's Minister of Defence issued a manifesto warning that the British government was attempting to stimulate emigration and thereby weaken the national struggle' for independence (98-99). We can see that modern ideas about migration in Ireland have been shaped both by notions of an antagonistic relationship to British colonial rule and by the Catholic Church.

Miller's reading of the Catholic Church might be a little unfair, but he is right to draw links between Irish nationalism and emigration for Irish 'exile' was seen as intimately tied to Irish struggles under British colonial rule. This relationship, however, was grounded more in myth and propaganda than fact. For a start, as Donald Akenson proves with the use of empirical evidence in *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1815-1922: An International Perspective* (1988), the largest group to migrate from Ireland in the pre-Famine period were not Catholics but Protestants, specifically Ulster Protestants (frequently referred to in the United States as 'the Scots Irish'); it would seem that the trials of 'exile' are not an exclusively Catholic experience. Another misleading notion surrounding Irish migration is that its root cause was Ireland's colonisation by the Protestant British: Miller argues that this was not the case, stating 'although Protestant landlords, businessmen, and professionals dominated the Irish economy, during the nineteenth century, many of the most compelling causes of emigration were generated within the Catholic community, especially by its emerging middle class of affluent farmers and townsmen' (91). The years of the Irish Famine, from 1845 to 1852 approximately,

were disastrous for Ireland and many hundreds of thousands left Ireland to escape its effects. Declan Kiberd claims that 'almost a million people died from starvation and associated disease: and, in the same decade, one and a half million emigrated' (1995: 21). Emmons puts the figures slightly higher, stating that 'at least a million people died in *an Gorta Mór* [the Irish for 'Great Hunger']; almost two million more emigrated – or, as the Irish would have had it, were exiled' (8). Here Emmons is making direct reference to Miller, who contends that Irish consciousness already thought about exile in a very particular manner and the Famine years added new depth to the already well-formed motif. Historians argue as to the degree of blame that can be levelled at the British government for their mishandling of the potato blight, but the situation heightened tensions between the British (Protestant) and Irish (Catholic) populations; the two different groups did not respond to these events in the same manner. Akenson argues that the Irish Catholic population at home and abroad were permanently scarred by their experiences of the Famine, writing that 'the Famine was built into the Catholic sense of history' whereas Irish Protestants (usually, but not exclusively, of British descent), 'developed no collective mythology about the Famine' (Emmons 144). Irish Catholics, predominantly descended from the indigenous, Gaelic speaking Irish, were culturally primed to view emigration as exile – a tragic, alienating process – and had suffered during British colonial rule: it seems logical that they would conflate the two experiences and blame the British for the twin tragedies of Famine and mass emigration. Miller highlights the way in which Irish Catholic cultural memory has tended to view emigration or 'exile', particularly after the Famine, as owing 'to Protestant landlords or British officials' (91). In truth, suggests Miller, the reasons for Irish migration were far more mundane, caused not so much by colonial oppression as by economical failings of a pre-modern society

sustained by agriculture: ‘much suffering and emigration among the rural lower classes (labourers, smallholders, farmers’ noninheriting children) were really more attributable to profit-maximization among Catholic graziers, strong farmers, and rural parents’ (91).

Miller argues convincingly that the primary reason for Irish emigration in the nineteenth century was economic rather than political in nature: migrants simply wanted a better standard of life. However, this idea of emigration as a painful exile continued well into the twentieth century, despite Ireland’s independence and subsequent entry into global capitalism. In John McGahern’s *Amongst Women* (1990), Moran’s relationships with his sons Luke and Michael are damaged and strained because of their decisions to leave his house and Ireland; the text circles round their absences like shameful wounds, never fully acknowledging them, creating silences where the narrative could explain their departures. Colm Tóibín, another Irish writer, produces fiction that also seems soaked in the suffering we would expect from exile, not the possibilities associated with emigration. In *Brooklyn* (2009), the central protagonist Eilis is only just beginning to settle in New York and put aside her homesickness when she is called back to Ireland upon the death of her sister; when in Ireland, she falls in love with a local man but must return to Brooklyn to honour her marriage to an Italian-American whom she had wed in secret. Tóibín constructs *Brooklyn*’s transatlantic space as one marked by heartbreak and suffering; he creates links between Ireland and America characterised by frustrated longing and death. Eilis’s migration to America, and chances for a better life, are overshadowed by trauma and regret. The narrator of Tóibín’s ‘One Minus One’, the first story in the collection *The Empty Family* (2011), also reflects on being summoned home to attend to his dying mother. His telling inclusion of the pragmatics involved in returning

home to deal with a family bereavement – ‘the discover[y] that a few seats were kept free for eventualities like this’ on Aer Lingus flights (4) – is a knowing nod to what has been termed the ‘“Ryanair Generation” – a modern cohort of supra-qualified, dynamic young Europeans constituting a mobile, professional work force’ (Smyth 147). This ‘dynamic young’ group of socially mobile professionals constitute a large proportion of Ireland’s migrants. Perhaps, given that the cultural articulation of these voluntary migrations still presents them as painful, we should still view these migrations as exiles, but immigrant exiles. In a sense, these immigrant exiles are the closest in experience to that of a historical exile; they may not have been banished from their homeland or be part of a privileged elite, but in their experience of leaving their homeland to make a new life somewhere else, they replicate most closely that we which associate with the traditional exilic experience.

vi. The Irish writer abroad (or across the border): emigrant or exile?

When entering into a discussion about emigration and Irish culture, it is impossible to ignore that a substantial proportion of Ireland’s most influential writers lived and worked abroad. James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Oscar Wilde all elected to live outside of Ireland. Roberta Wondrich contends that ‘the shadows of Joyce and Beckett’s self-imposed exiles have loomed large over the artistic output of modern Ireland, so much so that expatriation was turned into a kind of Irish stigmata, almost a *sine qua non* or at least a prominent facet of any major Irish literary career’ (1). Note how, even though these exiles were ‘self-imposed’, Wondrich suggests that exile has been constructed as a traumatic and painful necessity for an Irish writer to forge a successful literary career. The fact that Joyce was, in his own words, a ‘voluntary exile’ has been largely overlooked (1975: 56). Joyce emigrated because he thought continental Europe would be a better fit for his bohemian lifestyle and might therefore

enable him to write more freely. Could the lasting legacy of the Irish exile motif be why Patrick Ward locates an 'overwhelming and uncritical obeisance to the image of the artist as an exile' in Irish cultural studies (16)? The historian Roy Foster suggests that this may be the case, indicating that 'no matter how successful the achievements of the Irish abroad, however, automatic obeisance is made to victimhood and tyranny' (2001: xv). Of the exilic categories explored earlier, Irish writers might certainly have felt like (post)colonial exiles at home in Ireland and these feelings of alienation spurred many on to leave Ireland, becoming immigrant exiles in their new country of residence. What we should recognise is that, in their ability to leave and in their ability to pursue writing as a vocation in their new nation, they are occupying a very privileged position on multiple levels. We could contrast their immigrant exile to the victims of what Ashley Dawson has labelled 'cargo culture', which is her term for 'the conditions of extreme duress of those who are trafficked from one part of the world to another' (178). Although, as Smyth has noted, some modern immigrants, Irish and otherwise, form part of a 'cohort of supra-qualified' workers, the traditional immigrant experience has been one of poverty (147); having the resources to be able to make the journey out of Ireland was a position that many could never obtain. When these emigrants reached their destination, to be able to pursue writing as a career required a level of financial stability and literacy that many immigrants did not have. In the cases of Beckett and Joyce, flourishing in their new nations also required a cosmopolitan proficiency in multiple languages. Given the inherent privilege of their position, it is curious that this obeisance to the image of the tortured Irish artist in exile remains intact.

In *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (1996), Caren Kaplan argues that exile was a key component of Euro-American high

modernism. She maintains that in the early to mid-twentieth century 'Euro-American middle-class expatriates adopted the attributes of exile as an ideology of artistic production' (28). This, Kaplan writes, led to a problematic 'conflation of exile and expatriation by modern writers and critics', resulting in a specific critical mind-set in which 'distance has come to be privileged as the best perspective on a subject under scrutiny' (36). Kaplan actually suggests that modernism constructed 'detachment [a]s the precondition for creativity' and that 'disaffection or alienation as states of mind becomes a rite of passage for the "serious" modern artist or writer' (36). In this, we can see an echo of Wondrich's statement about exile as a necessary rite of passage for Irish writers; it seems that exile (or distance) from one's home country is positioned as desirable for Western authors, regardless of their country of origin. 'Whether or not the writer is, literally, in exile' is no great concern, as 'even those writers who do not find themselves actually exiled may easily extend the metaphor' through cultivating a persona of detachment (Kaplan 36). It is in this way that 'exilic displacement occupies a privileged position, legitimating points of view and constituting a point of entry into a professional domain' (Kaplan 36).

Questions of Travel explores how the historical links between writing and exile perpetuate a 'discourse of aesthetic gain through exile' (36). Edward Said was of the opinion that living outside one's home nation can also give rise to a different mode of thinking and suggests that '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" (2000: 186). Said makes the argument that once an individual is removed from their homeland, they can enjoy the 'unique pleasure' of their situation and cultivate this unique 'originality of vision' that

can lend their writing a cosmopolitan fluidity between subject positions and identities. Although Said acknowledges that ‘there is a great difference […] between the optimistic mobility [and] the intellectual liveliness’ of fiction written by the immigrant exilic writer ‘and the massive dislocations, waste, misery and horrors endured in our century’s migrations and mutilated lives’, he still prefers to explore the experiences of the ‘exiled’ author or academic over the refugee or migrant in his own work (1994: 403). He is also quite happy with ‘[Theodor] Adorno’s reflections [which] are informed by the belief that the only home truly available now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing’ (2000: 184). This seems to be an incredibly problematic assertion. Even if Said intends it to be read purely on a metaphorical level, his uncritical integration of it into his reflections on exile and, it might be added, his casual dismissal of other exilic experiences, like that of the refugee, are telling with regard to his own privileged understanding of the term. Perhaps Said is an example of Dawson’s observation that even literature or writers that ‘are more grounded in mass experience nonetheless reflect the tribulations of first-or second-generation diasporic populations who migrated to the developed nations of Western Europe and the United States *legally*’ (178; emphasis original). Dawson implies that many commentators on exile associate it purely with their own privileged exposure to it and so do not engage as fully as they might with other forms of exilic experience.

Kaplan highlights this privileged understanding of exile when she articulates that ‘few of the writers included in critical assessments of Euro-American high modernism are referred to as immigrants or refugees’ (4). Furthermore, Kaplan contends, their ‘dislocation is expressed in singular rather than collective terms, as purely psychological or aesthetic situations rather than as a result of historical circumstances’ (4). Again, we can see how writers have cultivated an exilic status that

is elevated above the 'uncountable masses' of the immigrant or refugee in favour of the 'solitude and spirituality' of their own personal exile (Said 2000: 175, 181). Kaplan writes that this 'modernist trope of exile works to remove itself from any political or historically specific instances in order to generate aesthetic categories and ahistorical values' (28). Kaplan's assertion may be correct for certain modernist figures such as Ezra Pound or T.S. Elliot, but we might argue that Joyce's (Irish) exile has been constructed in ways that are far from ahistorical. We have already noted how Miller's work on the Irish exile motif suggests that Irish culture represents exile in a particular way, and that their relationship to exile is filtered through their status as (post)colonial citizens, rightly or wrongly. Wondrich's article places Joyce at the centre of a culture that regards exile as a 'kind of Irish stigmata', where exile is a traumatic but essential part in the construction of Irish literature (Wondrich 1). Kaplan might have been aware that her argument about modernist exile as an ahistorical construction was contentious – this may explain why Joyce warrants only two mentions in the book and one of which comes through a direct quotation from Paul Fussell's *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1980). Granted, the focus of Kaplan's study is on how theories of travel and displacement have been utilised by critics and academics, and not on how fiction writers themselves negotiated these issues; yet Kaplan's reluctance to engage with Joyce as a key figure in the creation of this modernist trope of exile seems evasive. Despite the fact that Joyce self-identified as a voluntary exile,[12] there remains a strong tendency in Irish cultural studies to view his emigration as a dispossession intrinsically interwoven into his Irish identity and historical heritage.

[12] There is some argument that Joyce felt constrained by the 'nets of [Irish] nationality, language and religion', however these are not voiced directly, but through Stephen Dedalus, who has been read, quite uncritically, as the consciousness of Joyce himself. See Kearney, *The Irish Mind* (1985), 11.

Gerry Smyth is one of the few critics who comments upon the voluntary nature of Ireland's numerous exilic writers, suggesting that the 'voluntary exile chosen by many of the nation's artists' is another form of 'economic and career migration' (147). Indeed many artists and writers have left Ireland to work abroad. In addition to the celebrated examples listed previously, we could add that McGahern spent much of his life in England; Tóibín is currently a professor at Columbia University; and McCann too is now settled in New York where he is a professor of creative writing at Hunter College. In addition to the requisite financial security both to emigrate and to work as a writer, working abroad could also offer numerous benefits. Being abroad could supply inspiration, better job prospects, and, of course, 'exile has given some writers an audience for which they could not have hoped in the countries of their birth' (Thompson 501). Eóin Flannery argues that for contemporary writers, 'a process of cultural and artistic commuting has largely replaced the qualitative experience of early to mid-twentieth century artistic exile' (3). While Flannery is right to draw our attention to the fact that emigration can be (and was) a career move for some writers, he doesn't attempt to suggest *why* there has been such a critical obeisance to the image of the Irish writer, such as Joyce or Beckett, as an exile rather than an emigrant. It certainly seems to indicate that more thought needs to be given to the uncritical manner in which unstable terms like exile, emigrant and nomad are utilised in cultural studies and, as Miller highlights, the politics that they presume and perpetuate. Kennedy-Andrews, for example, claims 'we need to be clear about the differences between some of these categories [of displacement]' but his own interpretations of these terms are shaped by his own political beliefs (2008a: 16). He states 'the traveller is obviously a privileged figure, while that of migrant or nomad is conventionally less so, and that of the exile – that perennial figure of Irish tradition –

less so again' (16). As we explored earlier, exile can be a very privileged position. His understanding of exile is clearly driven by its function 'in an Irish context', as he argues, that 'the tropes of exile have traditionally been mobilised to describe the social, economic and cultural relations of colonial exploitation and oppression' (16). We could read Kennedy-Andrews's assertion that the exile is the least 'privileged figure' in the Irish cultural imagination because these twinned legacies of 'colonial exploitation' and emigration still form the potent Irish exile motif, a way of thinking about migration that still lingers, even in academic work. This Irish exile motif continues despite Miller's work on it, where he highlights that although 'colonial exploitation' did play a part in Irish emigration it was not the primary cause of it. There is perhaps that the field of Irish cultural criticism needs to address the way it thinks and writes about Ireland's long history of emigrant authors.

Stranger: (post)colonial Ireland and interculturalism

i. (Post)colonial Ireland: north and south of the border

There is another important factor to consider when thinking about exile and its Irish ramifications: the partitioned nature of the island. McCann has discussed how the North of Ireland is an important political and national question for him.[13] He devotes an entire short story collection, *Everything in this Country*, to an exploration of these issues, as well as other scattered references in his work. The political and literary value of this work in relation to Northern Ireland will be examined in greater detail further on in this thesis. Joe Cleary's assertion that the North of Ireland has been viewed 'in hermetically compartmentalised terms' is echoed in the wider critical

[13] McCann is highly engaged with the nature of Ireland's partitioned status, remarking that '[s]ome of the most informative years for me [McCann] were between the ages of seven and twelve when I spent a lot of time up North on my mother's family farm.' Further, McCann states, he wrote *Everything in this Country Must* as a way of grappling with 'the most overarching national question […] : what is going on in Northern Ireland? Why does this exist? How do we negotiate it?' (Garden 10).

commentary on exile and the Irish experience (2002: 77). It has tended to be the case that only texts focusing on the North of Ireland have engaged with a Northern Irish exilic experience, whereas texts considering the Irish exilic experience have thought predominantly about those who have left a pre-partitioned Ireland or a post-partitioned Republic. Patrick Ward's *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing*, for example, does not even contain index entries for the North of, or Northern Ireland, let alone a chapter focusing on the Northern Irish exilic experience. What many critics have noted, though, is that for some of those living in the North of Ireland, their experience can be that of living in a nation they do not feel is their own. Whether we can label this experience (post)colonial exile or not is a contentious issue, and will be explored over the following pages, but McCann's investment in the North of Ireland certainly speaks to his professed engagement with exile across his work.

The partitioning of Ireland in 1921 found its logic in the belief that the majority of people living in the six counties that constitute what we now term Northern Ireland were predominantly Protestants of British descent who were eager to retain a union with Britain. For the substantial numbers of Catholic Irish left living in the state of Northern Ireland, this partitioning, and their continued union with Britain, was not the desired outcome. Tensions between the two groups have always been high, with periodic outbursts of violence erupted from the seventeenth century onwards, and 'this fragmentation is so extensive that it could be argued that since the 1970s the partition of Ireland no longer stopped at the inter-state border: the militarisation of local territorial boundaries and the increased segregation of its two communities have effectively produced a whole series of internal partitions within Northern Ireland as well' (Cleary 99-100). Cleary also contends that 'a great deal of writing on the contemporary Troubles [...] focus[es] overwhelmingly on sectarianism

while relegating state boundaries to the margins of the narrative' (109). What this does is provide additional support for the idea that the Troubles are a 'distinct regional problem', and not part of a larger colonial history that includes both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom (Cleary 77).

We can see that the concepts of national identity and belonging in Northern Ireland are particularly fragmented and problematic. Firstly, it is important to note that for various reasons very few nations have enjoyed the national stability that some scholars of nationalism (and literature) like to argue. Throughout history various factors including regional differences, linguistic dialects, colonial expansion and im/migration, have meant that the national identity of any nation has been far from static and rigidly defined. However, the differing visions of Northern Irish identity have resulted in extreme and prolonged sectarian conflict. Kennedy-Andrews contends that 'the history of Northern Ireland is bloody testimony to the trouble that arises when discourses of "home", "belonging" and "nation" are linked to territory and bounded place' (2008a: 2). Edna Longley suggests in her essay 'Multi-Culturalism and Northern Ireland: Making Differences Fruitful' (2001) that the different ethnic groups within Northern Ireland are not so much plural as binary and not so much interacting as co-existing. She suggests that the level of national unity is so poor that 'Northern Ireland is potentially a diversified European region where you can live in three places at once (Ireland/Britain/'Ulster')' (43). Indeed, the intensity of sectarianism is so severe that Heaney has made the claim that 'Northern Irish writers [...] take the strain of being in two places at once, of needing to accommodate two opposing conditions of truthfulness simultaneously' (Heaney 1992: 127). Heaney's description of the experience likens it to the (post)colonial exile outlined previously, and he argues that 'each person in Ulster lives first in the Ulster of the actual present,

and then in one or other Ulster of the mind' (127). This being said, how to grapple with the 'twin-blocs' of Northern Irish identity, position oneself in relation to these conflicting ideas of home and belonging, or even how to meaningfully engage with the Other side of the sectarian conflict have been substantial challenges for (as Cleary has highlighted, predominantly Northern) Irish writers, especially during the Troubles at the latter end of the twentieth century (Longley 2). For some, the experience of living in the North of Ireland might engender feelings of being exiled from one's culture or nationality in a similar vein to the (post)colonial exilic position outlined earlier.

While this thesis draws on postcolonial thought and theory, it is worth fleshing out the antagonistic relationship between Irish Studies and postcolonialism; especially since, as figures like Edna Longley and Liam Kennedy imply, the 'importation of postcolonial theory into Irish seminar rooms has more to do with contemporary politics – especially in Northern Ireland' than any academic grounding (Hooper 12). At the risk of being reductive, Irish Studies has been split between Revisionism, which is mainly, though far from exclusively, associated with historians seeking to challenge the official, nationalist historiography,[14] and postcolonial criticism. Key figures associated with Revisionism include the founders of the journal *Irish Historical Studies* (founded 1938), Robert Dudley Edwards and Theodore Moody, the contemporary historian Roy Foster and, within literary criticism, Edna Longley. Within literary studies, the key debate has been primarily between Edna Longley as

[14] This 'nationalist school of Irish history' that Revisionism sought to challenge (and still does), was an 'important component in the building of the [newly independent] 'Irish nation' (Fanning 40). This nationalist school was associated with the 'greening of Irish history' and 'placed heavy emphasis upon the struggle against British imperialism and landlordism, the dignifying of Irish Gaelic culture, and upon the positive and often heroic, representation of the key figures of Irish nationalism and of nationalist struggle in general' (Fanning 41).

pitted against Seamus Deane and the Field Day Project, and others working with postcolonial thought including Declan Kiberd and David Lloyd. Although most critics and historians can agree that Ireland was successively colonised, first by the Vikings, then Anglo-Norman and later English and Scottish settlers, many reject the notion that a 'white, literate and Christian society on the edge of Europe have anything like the necessary credentials to discuss the realities, never mind the oppressions, of colonial endeavour' (Hooper 12). Naturally, Ireland's status as a former British colony is complicated by Ireland's integration with Britain in 1801, forming the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This being said, and this thesis illustrates this at numerous points, the Irish were discursively, if not legally, treated as second-class citizens for long stretches of this relationship. Glenn Hooper, in the very useful introduction for *Irish and Postcolonial Writing: History, Theory, Practice* (2002), does a good job of summarising the key 'reasons offered by critics hostile to a postcolonial reading of Ireland', which he suggests more or less revolve around the premise 'that Ireland was never really a colony', or, at best, it was atypical to other colonies (3). He also provides us with a third reason, which is that the study of literature 'should simply be divorced from political readings', so postcolonial theory is irrelevant regardless (3). Firstly, his latter reason does not resonate when reading the work of McCann, who self-consciously identifies as a political and socially engaged writer, to which this thesis will testify.[15] Secondly, while I would argue that it is indisputable that Ireland has been a colonised state at multiple points, this claim about Ireland being 'atypical' suggests a possible generalisation about a 'typical'

[15] When asked if he thought of himself as a political writer, McCann responded with 'yes', going on to add that 'it sometimes seems to me that the contemporary social novelist has muzzled himself or herself a bit in recent years. There is a fear of seeming too engaged. A crisis of disengagement. We want our novels, our screen plays, our plays untainted by politics. We don't want history or social activism' (colummccann.com).

colonial experience when, in reality, there was no such thing. This failure to pay attention to the specifics of the colonial encounter and experience is something which many postcolonial critics could be accused; John McLeod has written that a common 'accusation levelled at postcolonial studies is its alleged tendency to happily liquidate historical, political and cultural considerations in the pursuit of theoretical innovation and conceptual novelty' (13). This thesis seeks to avoid this liquidation by way of this methodological chapter and also by carefully introducing and situating the contextual background of each of McCann's texts in the following chapters.

Additionally, it is also important to note that even amongst postcolonial thinkers, there is no consensus as to the acceptability of Ireland as a postcolonial space. Ireland was famously not included in the first edition of Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), because, the editors concluded, Ireland's 'subsequent complicity with the British Imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonised people outside Britain to accept their identity as postcolonial' (31-32).[16] The revised edition of *The Empire Writes Back*, Raphaël Ingelbien argues, 'persists' with this mentality, 'where it is hardly compensated by a perfunctory acknowledgement of recent postcolonial work by Irish scholars' (Ingelbien 24; Ashcroft et al. 201). Ingelbien suggests there is a 'key distinction' to be made in postcolonial criticism 'between writing back and re-reading' (24). Although Ingelbien asserts the importance of postcolonial 're-reading' for Irish literary and cultural scholars, he does not see 'writing back' as a necessary strategy. He outlines that 'Ireland did not need to "write back": with their ready access to the London literary scene or other cultural metropolises in the West, Irish authors had more often than not been writing *within*

[16]Bryan Fanning asserts that in 'the nineteenth century the British army, colonial police forces and, at times, the Indian civil service, were disproportionately of Irish origin' (13).

the Empire' (25; emphasis original). This statement needs to be qualified, both historically and in terms of the writers discussed, for it excludes writers working in Irish. It is also important to note the differences between Anglo-Irish writers and those Irish writers who did not come from the same economically and socially privileged background. Writers outwith this Anglo-Irish group may also have found that, even if they did have easier access to this 'London literary scene' (although what 'access' means here isn't clarified), this literary scene did not adequately reflect their own cultural position or form a part of what they felt to be their literary heritage. In Chapter Two, we will look at Thomas MacDonagh's thoughts about Irish writing produced by writers descended from Gaelic-speaking Irish inhabitants and explore the possibilities for a different literary praxis. Chapter Two will also argue, despite Ingelbein's claim, that there is a formal politics to 'writing back' and that we should revaluate the importance of literary form in our discussion of (post)colonial Irish fiction.

The postcolonial critique within Irish Studies, according to Ingelbein, is primarily concerned with processes of 're-reading'; a claim he substantiates with reference to Seamus Deane's assertion that 'everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be re-written – i.e., re-read' (Deane 1984: 18; Ingelbein 26). Edna Longley would argue that Deane's efforts with Field Day constitute not simply a 're-reading' of Irish literature but a wilful neglect of central moments in Ireland's history and key voices in its literature. In *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (1994), Longley insists that the Field Day project is more involved with curating 'all Irish history' as, and here she quotes from Deane directly, 'a long colonial concussion' (Longley 28; Deane 1984: 58). Longley criticises the lack of 'primary texts' and notes instead the inclusion of 'political speeches and cultural

criticism', suggesting that the *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* is more interested in 'establish[ing] its own master-version of history' than reflecting the development of Irish literature (43, 27). Longley is quite happy to call herself a revisionist literary critic but is also able to accept that '"colonial" may fit some aspects of Irish experience', indicative of her perceptive and nuanced reading of Irish history (30). In drawing our attention to Field Day's efforts at establishing their own version of history, Longley illustrates that this act of 're-reading' Irish literary history is a terrain where the (post)colonial politics of Irish literature are most clearly visible. It would be worth thinking here of the inclusion of Irish writers in anthologies or university courses falling under the remit of English or British literature, despite protests by these writers. The famous example of this would be, of course, Seamus Heaney's 'Open Letter' (1983), written in response to his inclusion in Andrew Motion and Blake Morrison's anthology, *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1983). Luz Mar González-Arias highlights that *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (2000 edition) includes, in addition to Heaney, work by Paul Muldoon and Eavan Boland, although other writers from Britain's former colonies such as Anita Desai, Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul are also subsumed into English literature (109). Clearly, who has the right to Irish territory, both literary and not, is still something to which we might pay attention.

My own adoption of postcolonial theory is utilised by way of arguing for what I will term McCann's '(post)colonial aesthetic'. We will subsequently explore how McCann's fiction seeks to elevate minor or silenced voices from history's margins, and how the formal properties of his literature work in tandem with this project. In this way, I read his work as being both informed by but also transcending his Irish literary heritage. The transnational dimension to McCann's work further probes at the

legitimacy of the postcolonial claim for Ireland; the experiences of the Irish abroad have been markedly different from the Irish in Ireland and this thesis seeks to question how viable it really is for members of the Irish diaspora to lay claim to a narrative of victimhood and dispossession. While it is true that Ireland had tumultuous nineteenth and twentieth centuries marked by famine, poverty and war, those who emigrated to North America and Australia cannot lay claim to this historical experience. Ireland underwent huge financial growth towards the end of the twentieth century, especially during the Celtic Tiger period, attracting large numbers of migrants from Central Europe and Africa. These migrants, as we are discovering, have not been particularly well received. Ireland's ostensible postcolonial status has been put under greater pressure by the influx of these new migrants, who have altered the ethno-racial profile of Ireland. To this end, McCann's engagement with race prompts readers to question their own ideas about what 'Irishness' really is in the contemporary moment.

ii. Intercultural vs. multiculturalism: Ireland's monoculture and internal strangers

Towards the end of the twentieth century, with Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community in 1973 and the subsequent economic boom of the 'Celtic Tiger' years, [17] Ireland enjoyed a newfound wealth. Ireland's relatively rapid elevation to economic prosperity, in some ways, can be read as further complicating the (post)colonial politics of Ireland. Ireland became the destination of choice for substantial numbers of immigrants which therefore, both disrupted the ethno-racial profile of 'Irishness' and increased the visibility of Irish racism. Ireland's new wealth also provided further fuel for those who rejected a postcolonial reading of Ireland, as did the poor treatment of Ireland's new immigrants by both the Irish state and the

[17] The term was coined in 1994 by the economist Kevin Gardiner.

Irish population; the 2004 Referendum on Citizenship being exemplary of the xenophobia displayed by many in Ireland. In this referendum, 'a staggering majority (79%) of the Irish electorate voted in favour of amending the Constitution of Ireland to alter the terms of Irish citizenship to a basis in *jus sanguinis* – acquired through the bloodline' (Chan 4). Suzanna Chan discusses the ways in which this amendment denies citizenship to children born to immigrants in Ireland while reaffirming citizenship rights of diasporic citizens; an individual need only have one grandparent born in Ireland to be eligible for Irish citizenship and this right to citizenship can be passed on indefinitely to successive generations, provided the parent registers themselves in the Foreign Births Register before the birth of the next generation. It was clear, argues Chan, that 'the targets of the referendum were Africans, Asians, and Central and Eastern Europeans' (4). Chan suggests that this was a thinly veiled nationalist and racist attack on Ireland's immigrants and a 'validation of "migrant Ireland" over "immigrant Ireland"' (5): given Ireland's history of mass migration, this seems curiously reactionary. In an attempt to suggest a reason for this result, Declan Kiberd has claimed that 'the presence of black Africans in the streets of Dublin is a reminder of a colonial past of shame and shared humiliation that some might prefer to ignore' (2005: 318). In other words, Kiberd implies, these new immigrants remind the Irish of their own past of dispossession; however, this sentence reads remarkably like an attempt to justify Irish racism. Kiberd goes on to assert that 'the new immigrants are providing a priceless service, reconnecting people with their own buried feelings'; this use of the word 'service' seems particularly distasteful, not just because the majority of these new migrants are providing service-level employment, but also because it implies the role of Ireland's newest inhabitants is to labour for their hosts.

Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh insist that this ‘recent […] Irish racism’, directed at ‘refugees and asylum-seekers and on in-coming people of colour’, actually ‘developed out of older manifestations of Irish racism such as antisemitism,[18] anti-Traveller racism and racism against Black-Irish people’ (7). Furthermore, Edna Longley reasons that anti-immigrant and racist feeling ‘should not have been such a shock’ to the Irish population because it ‘continues the sectarian, exclusivist, conservative and insular attitudes that helped to produce the Troubles’ (2001: 5). Though she might be reluctant to admit it, Irish racism may be far more embroiled in the legacy of British colonialism in Ireland than Longley suggests here. Indeed, McVeigh declares that understanding the role of Ireland ‘within British imperialism is a necessary part of making sense of contemporary Irish racism’ (1992: 36). Drawing our attention to Belfast at the height of British imperialism, McVeigh contends that ‘the Protestant bloc encouraged racist ideas among Irish Protestants’ and nineteenth-century ‘Belfast self-consciously combined its sectarian and imperial chauvinisms’ (36). Furthermore, McVeigh adds, white Irish people often ‘make sense of their encounter with Black people through racist ideas they have been exposed to because of the influence of British popular culture in Ireland’, citing the racist abuse hurled at footballers in Ireland as imitative of similar behaviours learned from Britain (36). Conversely, however, Fanning locates within Catholic Ireland a similar relationship between imperialism and racism through the missionary project that denigrated the ‘primitive’ people who it sought to convert. Fanning reflects that is ‘no accident that the zenith of Irish missionary efforts coincided with the emergence of the Irish nation state and the subsequent half-century of Catholic hegemony in Irish life’, for ‘[n]ational pride and religiosity were constructed in relation to each other’ (15).

[18] Lentin and McVeigh use ‘antisemitisim’ rather than ‘anti-Semitism’ because ‘there is no Semitism’ (239). See ‘Who ever heard of an Irish Jew’? The intersection of “Irishness” and “Jewishness”’ in Lentin and McVeigh, ed. *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland* (2002).

Again, Irish racism reveals itself to be complexly positioned within and beyond British imperialism; while it can be partially traced to behaviours learnt from the British and colonialism, there is still evidence to suggest that this racism developed from 'indigenous' Irish traditions.

The formation of an Irish Catholic 'national identity formed in opposition to Britishness' may also be linked to the creation of a racialised notion of Irishness (Fanning 3). In the nineteenth century, Bryan Fanning contends, Catholic Irish nationalism developed the 'notion of an Irish race' in order to 'negate claims of the inferiority of the Irish within colonial ideology' (9). This notion of an Irish race 'resulted in the closure of dominant discourses of identity, enclosing it around the Catholic, Gaelic, idealised rural west of Ireland ideal-type' and this process was subsequently 'consolidated by the state and the Church in the early years of the Republic' (Garner 23). This 'ideal-type' of Irishness was obviously white. In an attempt to solidify this vision of Irishness, 'Protestants, Jewish people and Travellers became the focus of racialisations which, in each case, served as justification for their exclusion within Irish society' (Fanning 51). The role of the nation and nationalism within Ireland and the Irish imagination will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapters. We could argue though, that this racialised concept of Irish identity is actually a legacy of anti-colonial praxis. Colin Graham has written astutely about how within 'the Irish context, postcolonial criticism appears to be tied to a narrative which celebrates the entity of the nation as the logical and correct outcome of the process of anti-colonial struggle' (82). It is ironic that this postcolonial Irish nation has, to a large extent, excluded its 'indigenous minorities' (Fanning 21). Although 'Ireland was never the monoculture it told itself it was', how to grapple with an increasingly heterogeneous nation, in theory and in practice, has become a major

area of academic discussion (Lentin and McVeigh 21). We noted that this thesis would primarily privilege trans*national* modes of analysis, but it will also work with both multi- and inter*cultural*. An important distinction must be made between the latter two terms. Following the lead of critics such as Edna Longley and Robert Bernasconi, I use intercultural to suggest a level of engagement that multicultural does not. Longley suggests that '"inter-cultural" is a better term than the somewhat ambiguous "multi-cultural" for the project of engaging with genuine differences and making them fruitful' (2001: 9). For Longley, multicultural suggests 'signifies cultural co-existence rather than cultural exchange' (5). This thesis argues that McCann's literature is particularly invested in the engagement, dialogue and relations that exist between individuals from different ethnic, cultural and national groups, so intercultural is (largely) the most appropriate. In this thesis, the two are used with this distinction in mind.

iii. (Post)colonial aesthetics: reterritorialising alterity

I have suggested that, despite the fraught nature of Irish postcolonial studies, McCann's fiction displays what we might term a (post)colonial aesthetic. Ingelbien reads postcolonial criticism and theory as being primarily engaged with 're-reading' and 'writing back'. We could argue that 'the postcolonial' is a 'critical term signifying a theoretical and writerly force field preoccupied with *resistance to empire* and its post-imperial aftermath' (Boehmer 143; emphasis original). It is this 'resistance to empire and its post-imperial aftermath' that I am most concerned with in McCann's literature. Despite the misleading name, postcolonial theory is actively engaged with considering and disputing the imperial process and its lingering effects. Again, it's important to distinguish between these two terms. Catherine Hall is very useful in this respect. In her introduction, 'Thinking the postcolonial, thinking the

empire', to the edited collection *Cultures of Empire: colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (2000), she outlines how she uses '"colonialism" to describe the European pattern of exploitation and "discovery", of settlement, of dominance over geographically separate "others", which resulted in the uneven development of forms of capitalism across the world and the destruction and/or transformation of other forms of social organisation and life' (5). In other words, colonialism refers to the specific processes by which a European nation forcibly took possession of another territory. Hall suggests that she invokes '"imperialism" to refer to the late nineteenth/early twentieth century moment when European empires reached their formal apogee' (5). This 'formal apogee' involved the solidification of European notions of the enclosed nation-state and imperial concepts of racial theory; theories and ideas of which had been developed throughout the nineteenth century. These ideas, drawing upon certain strands of Enlightenment thought, (as we shall explore below), concluded that some races were 'naturally' superior and constructed a racial hierarchy through which all races could be positioned, policed and understood. In 'Sly Civility' (1985), Homi Bhabha traces how European imperialist and nationalist discourse 'normalizes its own history of expansion and exploitation by inscribing the history of the other in a fixed hierarchy of civil progress' (74). This imperial project led to the devaluation of non-Western cultures and traditions. We might consequently understand imperialism as a form of epistemic violence that resulted from colonialism.

This thesis will operate based on the idea that there is an underlying complicity between the 'Enlightenment project' and imperialism. This is not to suggest that there were no dissenters to these ideas within the Enlightenment, nor that there has been no questioning of the usefulness and validity of the term 'the

Enlightenment'. In *The Postcolonial Enlightenment* (2009), Lynn Festa and Daniel Carey attempt to illustrate that some contemporary critics engaging with the Enlightenment through postcolonial theory, such as David Scott, give the Enlightenment a cohesive ideology that was simply not present. As Sankar Muthu highlights in *Enlightenment against Empire* (2003), there were several key philosophers, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and Johann Gottfried von Herder, who were anti-imperialist in their thought. However, Muthu acknowledges that 'by the mid-nineteenth century, anti-imperialist political thinking was virtually absent from Western European intellectual debates, surfacing only rarely by way of philosophically obscure and politically marginal figures' (5). This argument is developed by Jennifer Pitts in her *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (2005), where she explores the ways in which anti-imperialist thought from the late eighteenth century had been 'displace[d] by an imperial liberalism that by the 1830s provided some of the most insistent and well-developed arguments in favor of the conquest of non-European peoples and territories' (2). The conventions set up by this Enlightened imperialism – history as progress and an hierarchical racial theory – underpin the evolution of the English literary tradition and, as this thesis will illuminate, are central to the formal politics utilised by McCann. Empire was largely discursively justified through concepts and ideas developed in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.

In Chapters Four and Five of this thesis I explore the relationships – imaginative, discursive and historical – that exist between black and Irish experience. I note the ways in which Irish and African subjects, at home and in their diasporas, have been discursively constructed as racially inferior to white Anglo-Saxons. This racism owes much to the work and theory of Henry Home (Lord Kames), William

Robertson and Adam Smith; in the middle of the eighteenth century, these men completed a body of work that outlined a theory of human societal progression known as stadial or conjectural history. In this theory of human progression, societies must pass through four stages of development including hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce. Susan Manning contends that 'a nation's history might be read either vertically through the succession of "stage" of development, or transversely in comparison with other societies in different geographical situations' (2013: 10). Manning draws our attention to Adam Ferguson's 'comparison between American Indians and Scottish Highlanders as societies in similar primitive stages of development' in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) (Manning 10); Chapter Five includes evidence of similar comparisons between the indigenous Irish and Africans. These notions of human progress, argues Manning, were 'part of a "science of man" […] which stimulated a range of new disciplinary frameworks built on an evolutionary model, from development psychology to literary history and comparative literature' (10). These sorts of ideas would have provided an intellectual framework for European imperial projects but Manning also alerts us to the ways in which the racism of these ideas infiltrated all disciplines of thought.

Dipesh Chakrabarty sees the postcolonial project as contesting these legacies of imperialism and epistemic violence. In his *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), Chakrabarty asserts that most academic thought displays a monocultural deference to 'the so-called European intellectual tradition' (5). Chakrabarty argues that we should seek to resuscitate, reclaim and reinstate non-Western intellectual, linguistic and artistic practices into academic discourse. This way, he claims, we can provincialise these European traditions. He also draws our attention to the fact that this intellectual tradition is 'a fabrication of

relatively recent European history' (5). Postcolonial criticism remains attuned to the continuing effects of the colonial past in the post-colonial present and postcolonial 'analysis of colonialism […] combines its critique of Western history with one of Western historicism' (Young 1990: 175). Robert Young concludes that the 'analysis of colonialism has shown the extent' to which this imperial legacy has shaped 'relations of power and authority' within the contemporary moment, arguing that these uneven relations 'are still endemic in current social and institutional practices' (175). These uneven relationships ask us to reflect on questions not of 'colonial discourse or even neo-colonialism as such but racism' (175). McCann's enduring interest in race and the uneven development of modernity is testament to his efforts to explore the racialised legacy of imperialism.

McCann's stated commitment to history's 'anonymous voices' concurs with postcolonial praxis. These 'anonymous voices' come from the margins of the European territories, both in Europe and abroad, which were established through European imperialist nationalism that sought to define the European nation as a fixed unit of a racially, culturally and ethnically homogenous group of people. The legacy of this constructed a 'falsely universalistic model', argues Rosi Braidotti, whereby, as noted previously, the 'dominant image of the subject [is] masculine/ white/ heterosexual/ speaking a standard language/ property-owning/ urbanized' (2011: 211-12). McCann's focus is the antithesis of this: instead his fictions deal with subjects that are 'women, blacks, youth, postcolonial, migrants, exiled, and homeless' (42). These subjects have traditionally been defined by their alterity, as the inheritance of the nineteenth century imperialism and nation-building has left 'fixed notions of one's cultural parameters and territory' (17). Braidotti suggests that, as a result, our contemporary 'ideas of "cultural difference" are deterministic, oppositional, and

hence exclusive as well as both intrinsically and explicitly xenophobic' (17). The thesis will examine McCann's depiction of these Minor Voices as part of McCann's rejection of exclusionary politics.

Writers of literary fiction who engage with postcolonial praxis often eschew the conventional formal properties of 'English literature'. Although this will be explored in far greater detail in Chapter Two, McCann's rhizomatic assemblages of narratives and use of the short story are emblematic of his (post)colonial aesthetic; we could read his work as 'creative efforts aimed at activating the positivity of differences as affirmative praxis' (Braidotti 7). The rise of the British Empire in the nineteenth century chimed with the rise of the English realist novel; of the two, Said has said 'the novel […] and imperialism are unthinkable without each other' (1994: 84). The realist novel was characterised by linear chronology and plot development and an omniscient narrator. This thesis will argue that the privileging of certain facets of this English literary tradition – chiefly, the novel, realism (in its temporal and spatial manifestations) and an omniscient narrator – have had a lasting legacy on ideas about high literature and national normativity across Anglophone transatlantic space. As we will see, McCann's formal and generic play subverts these conventions of the dominant English Literary tradition. Writing about the so-called "inadequacy" of the Irish novel' in the nineteenth century, David Lloyd asserts that the 'issue is not merely literary, nor merely a matter of the accuracy or inaccuracy of any particular representation of Irish history, politics or culture' (1993: 129, 128). He goes on to articulate that it is 'rather, a problem of *representation in general* as a crucial element in the intersecting matrices of politics, aesthetics and historiography' (128; emphasis mine). Therefore, the *form* of representation is especially important within (post)colonial politics as a means of contesting imperial legacies.

I noted above that we can trace within McCann's literature a (post)colonial aesthetic. With this term, I draw upon the wealth of critical thought that has highlighted how anti-colonial and anti-imperial politics meets praxis in literature written by (post)colonial subjects. For example, if the English literary tradition's prized literary form is the novel in a realist style (in its use of time and space) narrated by a singular, omnipotent force, then (post)colonial aesthetics privileges narrative plurality and non-realist, rhizomatic geographies and temporalities. This aesthetic is better accommodated by some literary forms than others and I argue that the short story and the episodic novel are inextricably linked to this notion of (post)colonial aesthetics. The narrative plurality that we associate with the short story and the episodic novel naturally enables authors to give voice to a wider variety of subjects than the traditional voices of English literature; a key feature of McCann's (post)colonial aesthetic is his use of minor voices and engagement with minor subjects. This notion of minor subjects is obviously informed by Deleuze and Guattari's work on minor literature (this is expanded in much greater detail in the next chapter); but further than this, it draws upon Braidotti's efforts to reterritorialise the subject while also remaining attuned to the experiential realities of minor identities. McCann's literature often puts these minor voices into dialogue, consciously or unconsciously, and another important aspect of his (post)colonial aesthetic is his creation of 'connective' fictions. I borrow this concept of 'connective' from Hirsch and believe that McCann's desire to bring the traumatic histories or minor voices of (post)colonial subjects into discussion can be read as a challenge to the postcolonial melancholia that Gilroy has argued is characteristic of post-imperial society.

Conclusion

In explicating the various meanings of the Irish word *deoraí* – exile, wanderer, stranger – this chapter worked towards establishing the relationship of McCann's fiction to a complex critical and literary heritage within and beyond Ireland. In so doing, it became apparent that Ireland is a country that has a distinctive relationship to (im)migration: while its early literature prized the redemptive possibilities of wandering, Ireland's history of emigration is often thought of in traumatic ways and finally, its contemporary status as a destination for immigrants is not something that Ireland has embraced. McCann, however, as this thesis will go on to explore, is generous to a variety of exilic experiences in his work; his literature contains figures that we might read as both immigrant and (post)colonial exiles. Although McCann himself falls neatly into the long tradition of Irish writers emigrating for artistic reasons, there are very few examples of existential exile in his work. It is important to recognise that McCann emigrated to find new material for his writing: he has claimed that he wasn't 'messed up enough' to write the 'great Irish novel'.[19] This statement says a lot about the cultural expectations of Irish literature and McCann's own privileged position as a white, middle class male. McCann's 'artistic commuting' ensures that he has dual citizenship and passports for both Ireland and the United States: something that positions him very well indeed with regards to literary prizes (Flannery 3).[20] Of course, McCann's own status does not negate his empathetic engagement to those with experiences different to his own, as this thesis will assert, but it is vital that we remain attuned to McCann's own status in relationship to his literary subjects, just as we remain aware of Ireland's complicated position within and outside of the British Empire.

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[19] Colum McCann in interview with Eileen Battersby. 'I decided to write the great Irish novel but couldn't. I wasn't messed-up enough', Eileen Battersby, *The Irish Times,* June 16, 2011.
[20] I am grateful to Sinéad Moynihan for this observation.

CHAPTER II: Deterritorialised novels: McCann's short stories as Minor Literature in an (Northern) Irish Mode

We ended Chapter One by thinking about the pertinence of form to McCann's (post)colonial aesthetic and this chapter will continue where this left off. In exploring the relationship between the short story and the novel, this chapter will argue that, far from the short story being a failed novel, the (Irish) writer's use of the short story could be read as a viable act of literary deterritorialisation that involves a rejection of the novel (and its imperial connotations) and an assertion of an empowering minoritarian stance that draws on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a Minor Literature. Returning to Thomas MacDonagh's concept of an 'Irish Mode', outlined in *Literature in Ireland: Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish* (1916), I suggest that the short story can be understood as a literary form that is particularly suited to articulating the (post)colonial realities of Ireland, including both the loss of the Irish language and the experience of living in a country divided along sectarian lines: remnants of Ireland's colonial history. Moreover, the specific formal properties of the short story are excellently suited to expressing the necessary silences and fracture that mark the experience of life in the North of Ireland. To this end, I will focus in this chapter on McCann's Northern Irish stories. The entire collection *Everything in this Country Must* (2000) examines the Troubles from the perspective of children, and 'Cathal's Lake', the final story from his *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (1994), also reflects on the violence in the North of Ireland. In parallel with MacDonagh's Irish mode, which seeks to align Ireland, transnationally, with Europe, McCann's stories constantly seep beyond the geographical, cultural and historical territory of Ireland. In this way, McCann's deterritorialises the violence of the Troubles, subverting the discourse that attempts to present it as indigenous to the area, reminding readers both that the

Troubles are directly linked to other nation-states but also that there is nothing exceptional about violence or exclusionary politics based on xenophobia: the fear of the Other.

Nation, form and theory

i. The novel as national longing for form

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson exposed the symbiotic relationship between the modern Western nation-state and printed literature. Timothy Brennan neatly sums up Anderson's ideas as the claim that 'the rise of the modern nation-state in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is inseparable from the forms and subjects of imaginative literature' (48). Anderson argues that the nation is an imagined community established through the dissemination of printed literature written in a standardised national print language, a language developed at the expense of regional vernaculars. Anderson contends that the novel and the newspaper were the key literary forms that aided the construction of these imagined European communities, for 'these forms provided the technical means for 'representing' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation' (Anderson 15; emphasis original). Raymond Williams, in *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970), argues that 'most novels are in some sense knowable communities', offering a vision of a stable national and social unity (14). It is important to note that when Anderson or Brennan mention the novel, we can presume that, given the historical period to which they are making reference – the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – they are referring to the realist novel. 'Classical realism', states Terry Eagleton, 'depends on the assumption that the world is story-shaped – that there is a well-formed narrative implicit in reality itself, which it is the task of such realism to represent' (147). We

can deduce that it was this *narrative* function of the novel that made it so particularly useful in articulating (or constructing) these new imagined national entities.[21]

Earlier, we noted Said's statement that 'the novel [...] and imperialism are unthinkable without each other' (1994: 84); we can see that the novel was used to reinforce both imperial and national projects. This is because the British 'nation and empire were not separate', argues Catherine Hall, but 'one and the same' (2). Caryl Phillips highlights that Britain is a 'country that partly defines its historical sense of self by first identifying, and then excluding, the "other"' and the imaginative policing of these boundaries through the novel constructed a narrative about who belonged within the nation-state and who did not (2002: 288). This policing is echoed, Said contends, by the way in which the English realist novel portrays 'the relationship between "home" and "abroad"' (85). Through the novel, England became a knowable, regulated territory, 'surveyed, evaluated, made known', in contrast to the unknowable foreignness of '"abroad" [which] was only referred to or shown briefly' (Said 85). The novel propagated an imagined vision of Britain as a unified national entity through representing England as a racially pure, homogenous unit that clearly demarcated English from Other. Note here the slippage between English and British: the English novel certainly did not flourish across all of Britain but, as Franco Moretti has mapped out in *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998), largely revolved around London and the surrounding areas: '[n]o Ireland; no Scotland; no Wales; no Cornwall' (13).

Although the casual use of Britain and England as interchangeable terms in cultural and literary criticism is problematic, Aaron Kelly usefully suggests that this slippage is reflective of 'the "Great Britishness" constructed by English Nationalism'

[21] Of course, it is not true that *all* late eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels 'narrate the nation'; nor is it true that all realist novels do. However, the arguments outlined in this chapter are certainly applicable to the majority of mid to late nineteenth-century English realist novels.

(2005: 27). Said suggests that in the 'narrative' of empire portrayed by the realist novel, the 'English presence' in the colonies is constructed 'as regulative and normative' (88, 89). In addition to the British presence in the colonies being constructed as 'normative', the vision of Britain propagated by the English realist novel seems to have been so effective that it has led critics to make totalising statements that claim that Britain's 'culture is politically homogenous' or that Britain is the template image for 'normal society' (Deane 1991: 682; O'Connor 1963: 17). This is despite the fact that Britain consists of three separate countries and the United Kingdom, which includes the North of Ireland, constitutes of four countries; within U.K there are also four separate national languages. We might read the novel as an attempt to create a stable and fixed national identity. Robert Young highlights that in 'the nineteenth century', the need to create 'a fixed English identity was doubtless a product of, and reaction to, the rapid change and transformation of both metropolitan and colonial societies' (3). The novel, 'as with nationalism', was a literary means of fashioning 'identities [that] needed to be constructed to counter schisms, friction and dissent' within Britain (3-4). The novel's status as a literary form that could reflect (or imaginatively construct) the ostensible 'stability' of Britain was echoed in its efforts to narrate the stability of the British Empire. Of this, Said says that the novel's 'main purpose is not to raise more questions, not to disturb or otherwise preoccupy attention, but to keep the empire more or less in place' (1994: 88).

The fact that literary and cultural critics have chosen to lament Ireland's failure to produce these realist novels could be read as evidence that they have internalised the rhetoric propagated by British imperialism and its novel. Eagleton's assertion that 'that the novel never really flourished' because a financially 'impoverished' Ireland lacked the 'material base' necessary to create its own 'culture'

is proof of this internalisation (145). Eagleton seems to suggest that the Irish, in electing not to reproduce the cultural artefacts of their colonisers, were somehow lacking in culture. Eagleton could instead have chosen to celebrate Ireland's *different* cultural heritage, and literary expression of its *different* national identity. In criticising Ireland for not being Britain, Eagleton repeats the same very same imperialist logic he seeks to subvert elsewhere. Patrick Lonergan suggests that 'the conventions of British fiction were dependent on a sense of shared values between reader and author: there was the notion that truths could be 'universally acknowledged' (even ironically), and a belief in the sense of 'realism' that was dependent on those values' (52). He continues, that 'such conventions simply could not be made to fit Ireland: the country lacked any of the stable bases that writers in more industrialized countries had depended on' (52). It was, arguably, as a result of this national and social instability that Irish writers turned to the short story.

ii. The short story: towards a Minor Literature

Many critics have made the claim that the adoption of the short story was a form of 'writing back' against colonial subjugation and the epistemic violence of imperialism. It is striking that the short story really came into being – and flourished – on the fringes of the British Empire. It is often argued that both American and Irish writers have been exemplary users of the short story form. For example, the United States found their 'first literary best-seller' in Irving's collection of short stories and sketches, *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819-1820) and McCann has stated that 'the Irish are good at the short story' (Bendixen 4; Garden 10). In addition to the success it achieved in Ireland and North America, the short story also found favour in

Russia and France, and, more recently, in postcolonial states.[22] Victoria Kuttainen, in *Unsettling Stories: Settler Postcolonialism and the Short Story Composite* (2010), proposes that (settler) postcolonial writers knowingly chose to write in the short story form because it was an explicit rejection of the English novel – a form inherently tied to colonialism. She says, 'the emergence of short stories and sketches in the settler colonies, at the times when the long novel was popular in England, has often been linked to such a questioning of and contending with received literary standards' (6). Although Russia and France were never British colonies (indeed, they had rather large empires of their own), both Sean O'Faolain's *The Short Story* (1948) and Frank O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice* (1963) put forward the argument that they lacked the social and cultural cohesion, or what O'Connor deems 'normal society', found in Britain or, more accurately, England (17). O'Faolain and O'Connor contend that this lack of social (perhaps we should read here national) stability in certain countries led short story writers to reject the novel and adopt the short story, a literary form that could better articulate their sense of fractured national identity and problematic ideas of belonging.

In *The Lonely Voice*, Frank O'Connor suggests that the short story is particularly well suited to writing about what he labels 'submerged population groups' (18). O'Connor defines these groups as consisting of 'figures wandering about the fringes of society', marginalised from a dominant social tradition (19). His text actually works towards a transnational reading of the short story form. In

[22] As this thesis is primarily concerned with the Anglophone literary tradition and short stories in English, the imperial projects made reference to here are the British Empire and, to some extent, the neo-imperial power of the United States from the latter parts of the nineteenth century onwards. Other postcolonial territories that have turned to the short story, O'Connor argues, are India and the West Indies too (20). Of the success of the short story in postcolonial nations, Mary Louise Pratt suggests that we consistently 'find the short story being used to introduce new regions or groups into an established national literature, or into an emerging national literature in the process of decolonisation' (104).

assembling writers from so many national traditions, as discussed earlier, and arguing that they are united in their projects of articulating marginalised voices, O'Connor positions these writers as having more in common with each other than with their own respective national canons. Perhaps O'Connor's reading of the rise of the short story across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries invites us to see the short story as an art form particularly well suited to the transnational phenomenon of problematic national belonging. We could argue that the adoption of the short story form, as a rejection of the colonially-inflected novel, has been used transnationally as a move to establish a literary (and often national) identity separate to that of the imperial power.

A useful way to think analytically about short stories would be to consider them as pieces of Minor Literature. Minor Literature, as conceptualised by Deleuze and Guattari's in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), is a politically conscious mode of writing that articulates a position of minority within a major national canon of literature. Using the literature of Franz Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari argue that a minor literature is an acutely political piece of work written by an individual enveloped in a major language or culture which is not their own, and is writing back against this through the use of this dominant language. Deleuze and Guattari stress that the use of the dominant language is key to their concept of a Minor Literature, affirming that 'a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language' (16). Writing in a language that is not their own often retains an element of strangeness, as 'minoritarian authors are those who are foreigners in their own tongue' (Conley 67). Franz Kafka, a German-speaking Jew living in Czech-speaking Bohemia, provides the perfect example for Deleuze and Guattari to illustrate their argument. They suggest that Kafka's work

performs a 'literary deterritorialisation that mutates content, forcing enunciations and expressions to "disarticulate"' (Parr 69).

We've already traced how the Irish language was gradually weakened in colonised Ireland. This meant that many writers could no longer speak Irish, and for those that could, the decision to write in Irish would seriously restrict the audience to which their work would be accessible. Therefore, writers had to work with a language which was not their 'own'. We can clearly see these processes of deterritorialisation at work in the literature of Irish writers such as Joyce and J.M. Synge, who remake the English language with an Irish inflection, thereby forcing the language to perform in entirely new ways. When asked about his use of the short story, McCann mentioned that he thought the Irish talent for short stories 'ties in with language: the Irish language was taken away from us' (Garden 11).[23] Seamus Deane suggests that this knowing subversion of standardised versions of British literary language might be 'because it is difficult not to be self-conscious about a language which has become simultaneously native and foreign' (1985: 13). It is perhaps this unease with the English language that led a substantial proportion of Irish writers to largely reject the realist novel in favour of their own literary forms and assertion of a subversive minoritarian stance through their use of the short story.

Given Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that a Minor Literature is one that takes the standard features of major literature and 'deterritorialises' them, making them perform in new ways, I argue that we could read the short story form as an act of literary deterritorialisation. Deleuze and Guattari ask us to read Kafka's work against the grain of most Kafka criticism, arguing that the psychoanalytic readings that have dominated our understanding of his work are reductive and ineffective. They believe

[23] McCann also mentions Joyce's expert use of the short story form and the English language, adding: 'One of the ways that Joyce thought about [form and language] was, 'I will take this language that was given to us and I will re-appropriate it and remake it' (Garden 11).

that his work is most powerful when understood as examples of a Minor Literature, and that seeking to read his work through traditional literary criticism, with attention to metaphor, character and plot, detracts from the political value of his writings. However, what Deleuze and Guattari (and most Kafka scholars) fail to discuss is the short nature of Kafka's work. His three novels are all comparatively short and, more interestingly, were never fully finished. The rest of his catalogue consists of short stories and novellas. Kafka's use of the short story could have provided further material for *Toward a Minor Literature* for two reasons: firstly, theory on the short story has often sought to stake a claim for it as a political tool and, secondly, the form of the short story can be thought of as a new way of using the novel. Could we not consider the short story as a form of deterritorialised novel? Of all the literary forms, the short story and the novel are most closely related, and in many ways, the short story operates in an uncanny way that could be seen as undermining and subverting the traditions of the novel. This act of deterritorialisation could be read as a political act in itself, and is most likely one of the reasons why the short story has been utilised so expertly by writers on the fringes of empire.

It seems a little short-sighted that Deleuze and Guattari failed to highlight this aspect of Kafka's work, especially given that twentieth-century literary criticism has sought to argue that adopting the short story over the novel is a politically loaded manoeuvre. O'Connor's suggestion that the short story is particularly suitable for 'submerged population groups' found in nation-states with a fragmented sense of national identity is a logical extension of the theory that the short story is an outright rejection of the (English) novel and its associations with imperialism and colonial expansion. This body of theory that surrounds the short story clearly positions the short story as a literary form that can be used as an acutely political and anti-

imperialist tool. It does seem as if theories of the short story and the concept of a Minor Literature are very much complementary ideas. Indeed, it is highly probable that the literature produced by O'Connor's 'submerged population groups' would constitute a Minor Literature, particularly if these groups consisted of immigrants or (post)colonised people who did not speak the dominant language.

iii. An Irish Mode: multiplicity and the short story

If, as has been argued, the novel narrates the myth of a homogenous nation, what then is the short story's role in the global literary landscape? Of Irish national identity, it is worth returning to Luke Gibbons's statement that 'there was no need to go abroad to experience the "multiple identities" of the diaspora valorised in post-colonial theory: the uncanny experience of being a stranger to oneself was already a feature of life back home' (1996: 176). Gibbons highlights that in addition to the tensions that existed between the predominantly Catholic, Gaelic-speaking Irish and the largely Protestant English, the Irish suffered at the hands of an imperialist discourse that resulted in their feeling like submerged or minor subjects in their own country. For the Irish writer, these 'multiple identities' pose a challenge: how best to grapple with them; give them a distinct and unique voice; and not subsume them into the totalising voice of a unified nationalism? The short story goes some way to addressing these concerns. Where the 'realist novel is the form par excellence of settlement and stability, gathering individual lives into an integrated whole', the short story refuses this integrated whole in favour of an expression of difference (Eagleton 147). However, it is important to emphasise that I do not argue that Britain was or is the national example 'par excellence of settlement and stability', but rather that the nineteenth-century realist novel narrates it as such. No nation can claim to have a completely homogenous culture; Caryl Phillips quite rightly claims in *A New World*

Order (2002) that 'the British character', so often positioned as the ideal which other nations should strive to emulate, is 'like that of most nations, [and] has been forged in the crucible of hybridity – of cultural fusions' (288). Nor do I intend to suggest that there is something exceptional about Ireland's heterogeneous and diverse national fabric. Cairns Craig surmises that 'the nation is and always was a dialogic entity, constituted by the ongoing argument – the suspended civil war – of internal differences' (241). While the nation may be a dialogic entity, the realist novel writes these differences out.

That being said, while we can recognise that Ireland is, like all nations, a fractious and porous entity, the long-term effects of successive waves of colonialism cannot be ignored. We have discussed Ireland's partition into two states, North and South, and how, in addition to the anxieties about immigration to Ireland, (post)colonial tensions have left a legacy of 'internal differences' – especially in the North (Craig 241). Although the metaphorical 'civil war' that Craig locates in every nation has spilled into actual violence in the North of Ireland, Craig's conceptualisation of the nation reminds us that there is indeed nothing exceptional about a nation where the national character is not homogenous. In fact, he argues that 'to accept the *ideology* of unity and continuity developed by the dominant nations of the imperial epoch as the basis on which to describe the actual *discontinuity* of one's own culture is to conflate and confuse the reality of national experience with the ideology by which it is explained' (242; emphasis original). This 'ideology of unity' to which Craig makes reference is the result of the imperialist discourse of former colonial powers, Britain and France, and Craig posits that is nothing more than an '"imagined" unisonance' (242). Therefore, to contrast 'Ireland against the supposed "unity" or "continuity" or "autonomy" of England or France, against the standard

development of some theoretical conception of the proper nature of the nation, will always produce a starting point which presents the relation of colonised to coloniser, of periphery to centre, as one of the deformation, of the discrediting, of the dysfunction of an already-failed "national" culture' (242). Cairns is right to remind readers again of the comparison of Ireland to Britain being that of colonised to coloniser, as the divisions within Irish society are largely a repercussion of Ireland's (post)colonial status. In our Chapter One, we noted how Irish anti-colonial efforts at strategic essentialism could be one contributing factor to contemporary Irish racism; we traced how within the academic field of Irish Studies, serious rupture can be seen along, what some have labelled, the quasi-sectarian strife between Revisionism and postcolonial criticism.[24] Even within the cultural nationalism movement of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Literary Revival, there were disagreements and divides between the Anglo-Irish and those in Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League.[25] Indeed, the schisms within Irish society are so pronounced that even Roy Foster argues in his introduction to *Modern Ireland: 1600 – 1972* (1988), 'Varieties of Irishness', that Irish society has a history of division that predates the creation of the two Irish states: 'in 1600, as later, Ireland was characterized by a fragmented polity' (Foster 3). Denis Donoghue contends that '*if* there is a distinctive

[24] Glenn Hooper suggests that Stephen Howe's *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (2000) creates an 'implicit association between support for postcolonial criticism in Ireland and support for the IRA' (16). This is despite Howe's own assertion that '[he is] not trying to imply that adherence to the 'colonial model' […] inherently endorses the Republican worldview, let alone that all or any of the individuals discussed support the policies or the actions of the IRA or any other group responsible for violence past and present' (Howe 5). Howe also states that 'others, like Seamus Deane, make equally dramatic claims in the opposite direction, suggesting that Irish "revisionist" historiography directly supports Loyalist violence' (5).

[25] The Revival was 'not (as is sometimes thought) a unified grouping of nationalist artists' and was made up of various groups that sought to define Irish national identity in different ways (Lonergan 54). The Gaelic League, fronted by Douglas Hyde, 'measured authentic Irishness in terms of Gaelic heritage and Catholicism', and were chiefly committed to raising Irish to the status it had held before the Famine (Arrowsmith viii). However, the dominant voices from the Revival are found in the literature of the Protestant 'Anglo-Irish cultural nationalists'–Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J.M. Synge – and for all their talk about an 'essential national identity', the 'popular view' of the Ascendancy Protestants was that they were 'un-Irish' (Arrowsmith ix, vii).

Irish experience, it is one of *division*' (16; emphasis mine). This is, of course, even further compounded when considering the partition of Ireland into North and South – Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Of this experience, Seamus Heaney reflects that 'for as long as [he] can remember, [he has] been used to living in two places at one time; and so have all the other people here from north of the border' (1990: 23).

In responding to the (post)colonial legacy of a heterogeneous Ireland, literary critics have turned their efforts to reflecting upon how Irish writers grapple with the contested idea of an English/British literary inheritance and how they might express their Irishness. One such critic that attempted to grapple with these issues is Thomas MacDonagh. In *Literature in Ireland: Studies in Irish and Anglo-Irish Literature* (1916), MacDonagh argues for an 'Irish Mode' of writing that is distinctly different from British writing, while still accommodating diverse and even transnational voices. MacDonagh's efforts to align Ireland with Europe, transnationally, are important, in that he rejects essentialist conceptions of 'Irish' literature. To this end, MacDonagh has 'little sympathy with the criticism that marks off subtle qualities in Irish literature as altogether racial, that refuses to admit natural exceptions in such a naturally exceptional thing as high literature, attributing only the central body to the national genius, the marginal position to this alien strain or that' (57). He subverts assumptions about what is 'essentially Irish' and refuses to 'rely on' justifications that Irish writing is defined by 'some indefinable quality not found elsewhere' (171).

This being said, MacDonagh is keen to articulate that 'the ways of life and the ways of thought of the Irish people […] have important differences from the ways of life and of thought which have found expression in other English literature' and so literature written in this Irish Mode will necessarily be different from other English

literatures (58). MacDonagh contends that the loss of the Irish language is of primary significance to this difference. He maintains that although literature of the Irish Mode will have been composed in English, it is unlike examples of Anglo-Irish literature from the nineteenth century and earlier because it will have been created by writers 'from Gaelic stock' whose ancestors would have spoken Irish as their first language (58). For these descendants of Irish speakers, 'the English language in Ireland has an individuality of its own, and the rhythm of Irish speech a distinct character' (58). Though MacDonagh supports his argument through poetry and not prose, his assertions about language seem additionally applicable to prose or drama, wherein you can trace 'the influence of the Irish way of speech' (171). He states that there is a 'freshness and power' to the Irish use of English, 'this language of our adoption', that 'the English of these days rarely have' (169). We can see parallels here between Deleuze and Guattari's Minor Literature and MacDonagh's Irish Mode: both forms of literature written in a major language while being informed by a minor culture. Like the political ripples of Minor Literature, MacDonagh believes that the Irish Mode has the ability to disrupt established literary canons and create a 'disturbance' for the 'critics and to the prosodists of the old order' (8). We could argue that the short story does exactly this.

In his efforts to re-root/route what is meant by Irish literature, rather than lament Ireland's divided (post)colonial population, MacDonagh instead celebrates Irish plurality and opens up Irish literature to greater multiplicity through external factors. In this way, MacDonagh's Irish Mode is generously transnational and outward looking, encompassing writers 'like Lionel Johnson and Nora Chesson who were born and who lived their whole lives out of Ireland, and yet are truly Irish' (60). The Irish Mode can also accommodate disaporic Irish voices, such as Edgar Allan

Poe and Emily Brontë, who were descendants of Irish immigrants. MacDonagh is eager to locate this Irish Mode within a comparative European framework, noting that Europe, through the latter half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, was 'suffering change and demanding different forms of expression' (7). He puts Irish writers in dialogue with Impressionism and Futurism, suggesting that inspiration comes from outside of Ireland's geographical borders and cultural traditions. The 'near kinship' that MacDonagh notes between the Irish Mode and Futurism is unusual (9); 'The Futurist Manifesto' (1909), written by the Italian poet Filippo Marinetti, was decidedly forward looking and embraced machinery, speed and modernity. It was quite unlike the romantic nostalgia of Yeats' dream of Ireland as a unified Gaelic Ireland, pre-Christian, pagan, inspired by Oisín rather than St. Patrick' (Donoghue 9).

Thomas Kinsella's essay, 'The Divided Mind' (1972), also seeks to re-root/route what is meant by Irish writing and Irish literary inheritance. This essay may begin by positioning the Irish writer as an uncomfortable heir to two literary traditions, English and Irish, but it ends with a suggestion that all literary influences are transnational. Although Kinsella notes that the Irish writer may not 'feel at home' in the English literary tradition, he argues that 'that the "divided mind", as a function of rootlessness, of historical or social deprivation or alienation, may not be the exclusive property of the modern Irish poet' (209, 214). For Kinsella, because no nation is a 'single animal with one complex artistic feeler' but diverse and multifarious, literary inheritance is not geographically bounded (216). Kinsella concludes by gesturing towards a plurality of literary inheritances, determining that 'every writer in the modern world, since he can't be in all the literary traditions at once, is the inheritor of a gapped, discontinuous, polyglot tradition' (209, 217). This,

of course, returns us to the 'transnational poetics' of Ramanzani, reaffirming the ways in which literature and imagination travels rhizomatically across multiple spaces and temporalities.

Richard Kearney takes up Kinsella's thoughts on the divided Irish mind with his edited collection, *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (1985). In his introduction, 'An Irish Intellectual Tradition?: Philosophical and Cultural Contexts', Kearney asserts that 'the Irish mind does not reveal itself as a single, fixed, homogenous identity', but, in 'contradistinction to the orthodox dualist logic of *either/or*, the Irish mind may be seen to favour a more dialectical logic of *both/and*' (9, all emphasis original). Kearney does ask 'whether this double vision is a quality *inherited* by the Irish mind or a quality *imposed* on it by distinctive historical circumstances' and decides that it is probably a 'dialectical combination of both' – 'a *cultural* phenomenon which develops and alters as history progresses, and *not* as some innate racial characteristic' (11; emphasis original). Kearney, like MacDonagh, is keen to avoid thinking about Irishness in terms of racialised exceptionalism. Furthermore, Kearney draws our attention to a 'Joycean counterpointing of the foreign and the familiar', which he suggests 'is arguably one of the most recognisable watermarks of the Irish intellect' (12). We might read this 'counterpointing of the foreign and the familiar' as a legacy of the Irish (post)colonial experience. Seamus Heaney, Kinsella says is 'at once exiled and at home, haunted by borders and partitions, exposed to the cultures of coloniser and colonised, Catholic and Protestant, Gael and Saxon', and has 'practiced an art of making contradictions dance' (12). These comments seem equally applicable not just to just to Heaney, but Irish culture and society at large (12). We are reminded once more of how potent a force the (post)colonial exilic experience can be, but also of the effects that emigration can

have on those left behind. Kearney continues these ideas in 'The Fifth Province: Between the Global and the Local' (1990) in which he contends that, due to high levels of emigration and advances in communication technology, 'the Irish sense of belonging is no longer predetermined by the map-lines of our island' and that 'the interconnectedness of Irish and non-Irish cultures' has profound implications for both those abroad and those resident in Ireland (109, 111). Here, Kearney alerts us to the ways in which Ireland, traditionally a nation of emigrants, has a symbiotic relationships with other nations and cultures through the patterns of communication and exchange fostered between Ireland and its diaspora.

There is, therefore, as MacDonagh, Kinsella and Kearney suggest, a sense that Irish national identity is not defined and fixed, but fluid and heterogeneous. All nations, as Cairns Craig articulates, are spaces of 'porous boundaries and overlapping territories' but, as we have seen, Ireland might be considered especially so given Ireland's history of emigration and colonisation (24). I argue that the short story form provides a productive way of exploring these multiple versions (or visions) of Irish national identity. If we consider a short story collection as a substitute for the nation, then the numerous stories contained within give voice to the multiple – and conflicting – ideas about Irish national identity. McCann's fiction is marked by a desire to give expression to multiple voices and narratives within one text and we can see this across his oeuvre. It is curious that McCann adopts the short story form in his two books that meditate most extensively on Ireland; all his other work uses a version of the episodic novel, to a greater or lesser degree. I posit that McCann uses the short story as a deliberate means of probing the nature of Irish national identity, and the ease with which 'critics and readers and writers often believe that they know what an Irish short story is and how it should conduct itself in the world' (McCann 2002: xiii).

The short story form, through its use of a ‘multiplicity of voices and narratives’, argues Eóin Flannery, ‘is suggestive of dispersal, a polyphony facilitated by the nature of the [short story] form’ (2011: 24-25). In *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, McCann uses the short story to perform an interrogation of Irish identity both ‘at home’, in the geographical spaces of Ireland, and diasporic Irishness, and explores how these national identities seep into other racial and ethnic identities, asking questions about constructing identities based on place and nation. The short story allows McCann to host multiple narratives located in diverse locales, populated by peoples of various ethnicities and nationalities. With *Everything in This Country Must*, McCann uses the short story form to focus on Northern Ireland, a region of Ireland where what constitutes Irishness and national identity is even more problematic than in the Republic of Ireland.

We could read the short story as a form of Minor Literature written in the Irish Mode. The short story has been a key literary form for Irish writers from the twentieth century onwards, with numerous critics claiming that it is the Irish ‘national’ art form. Mary Louise Pratt, like many others, sees the short story as an integral player in the development of modern Irish literature: ‘in the establishment of a modern national literature in Ireland, the short story emerges as the central prose fiction genre, through which Joyce, O’Flaherty, O’Faolain, O’Connor, Moore, Lavin and so many others first document modern Irish life’ (Pratt 104). Although ‘by 1880, a tradition of short fiction had been well established in Ireland by such writers as William Carleton, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and Anthony Trollope’, it was during the Literary Revival that the short story really moved into a position of central importance for Irish writers (Lonergan 52). According to Wei H. Kao, ‘revivalists, such as Yeats and Lady Gregory, compiled volumes of fairytales, stories about the peasantry, and wrote plays

based upon legendary figures, like Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Cú Cuchulainn, and Deirdre' (33). These stories, which were often collected on travels to the West (often understood as the most authentically Irish) of Ireland, were compiled into anthologies, such as Yeats' *Representative Irish Tales* (1891), and Lady Gregory's *A Book of Saints and Wonders* (1906). 'This call for attention to the native tradition[s]', suggests Kao, 'stimulated more critics […] to verify the political and racial significance of native culture' (33). Through translating and collecting Gaelic stories, the Revivalists began to construct a literary – and therefore national – identity for Ireland distinct to that of their British colonisers. Anthologies of specifically Irish stories meant that 'the 'submerged population groups' [of Ireland…] started being viewed and examined in the writing of the short story' (36). In these anthologies, stories were selected that subverted many of the stereotypical images of the Irish propagated by the British. Yeats, for example, 'objected to English critics' view of the Irish as a sentimental race – a view upheld by Matthew Arnold' and 'he also disliked the stage-Irish' figure so popular with English audiences (Kao 36). Yeats's anthology was compiled with a clear political goal in mind, for he 'only chose those works which did not appear to stigmatize the Irish' and, moreover, 'some of the works he selected obviously portray the English as a laughing-stock' (Kao 37). Kao's article makes the claim that 'the trend of producing anthologies in early twentieth-century Ireland involved political ambition', and he reads short stories and their folktale source texts as key aids to a nationalistic anti-colonial agenda (40).

Lady Gregory viewed the short story as a particularly successful literary form in Ireland because she believed 'that the short story is a form ideally suited to the traditions of Irish storytelling, which are oracular, rooted in colloquial speech, and episodic in character' (Lonergan 55-56). While the novel is situated within the

process of modern nation-state creation, it is often argued that the short story form is an evolution of the folktale – a traditional, pre-modern form of storytelling with its roots in oral culture. The success that the short story has found in Ireland is often attributed to this very link: the richness of Irish folklore and the 'closeness to oral performance' is frequently brought up in discussions about the number of short story writers that Ireland has produced (Eagleton 150). In Chapter Three, on McCann's *Zoli*, I will argue that certain types of knowledge have been devalued through their relegation to 'subaltern'. Folkloric and oral epistemologies are two forms of knowledge that been denigrated by what Walter Mignolo calls 'the colonialism of Western epistemology' (11). Given that all cultures were once oral, the desire to aggressively align the short story with folklore or oral culture speaks of an impulse to devalue the short story itself. This tension between orality and print, literary form and modernity will be examined in greater detail in the later chapter on *Zoli*. However, as we have discussed thus far, there are other ways to read the short story. Kao contends that early twentieth anthologies of Irish stories brought attention to the 'submerged population groups' of the Irish within British colonial and literary domination (36). As Minor Literature in an Irish Mode, the short story was, and is, perfectly suited to encapsulate the plurality of the Irish nation and articulate a (post)colonial Irish identity in the major literary culture of English literature. In this way, the short story may be especially useful for writers from the North of Ireland, as many still feel a displaced sense of national identity and the country remains divided by sectarian tensions. In order to explore this in greater depth, we will now turn to McCann's short stories that take the North as their focus: his short stories in a (Northern) Irish Mode.

II. 'Great Hatred, Little Room': Northern Irish Identity and McCann's Short Stories

Before we can begin to examine the Northern Irish short story, it is important to first map out the literary, cultural and political territory that is Northern Ireland, and how the partitioning of Ireland in 1921 impacted upon the sense of a Northern Irish identity. We have explored how Irish national identity, negotiated through an Other colonising force, has always had the potential to be unstable. This was rendered more problematic by the partition of Ireland in 1921. The partitioning of the island created a spatial rupture in an understanding of Irish identity, and in creating separate nation states, created separate nationalities for those on either side of the border (although those born in Northern Ireland can claim an Irish passport, as opposed to British, if they wish). As a result, the political status of a partitioned Ireland could never attain the supposed stability of other countries like England. This lack of social and political stability is of course problematic in itself, and led to the sectarian violence of the Troubles. However, for our purposes, in lacking this stability, Northern Ireland could perhaps never provide fertile ground for the flourishing of a realist tradition and the accompanying novel. The result of this partition, facilitated through the establishment of 'separate state and broadcasting companies, separate arts councils, separate tourist and heritage industries' has been that 'two different imagined communities, Northern and Southern' have emerged (Cleary 2002: 77). These different states are home to different imagined communities.

The literary and cultural output from these differently imagined communities have largely supported the division and, as Cleary states, 'it is notable that there are remarkably few narratives that deal simultaneously with Northern and Southern society' (77). The Northern Irish Troubles, in particular, have been dealt with 'in hermetically compartmentalised terms' and 'are viewed not as part of a shared history

that produced both states, but as a distinct regional problem with which Southerners may engage, but which has still little to do with the South' (Cleary 77). Cleary also notes that when Southern writers do write about the North, there has been an overwhelming trend for their fictions to be exclusively 'Northern': located in the North of Ireland, with Northern Irish characters, and more often than not, narrative material that focuses on the 'distinct regional problem' of the Northern Irish Troubles. To utilise the terminology we explored previously, the literature of Northern Ireland could be read as a Minor Literature within a Minor Literature. Although focusing too much on biographical details may be reductive, it is important to note that McCann was born and raised in Dublin, and so is a Southern writer engaging directly with the Troubles when others have not. The final story of *Everything in this Country Must*, 'Hunger Strike', involves a mother, whose brother is on hunger strike in the Maze Prison, and son who have left Northern Ireland to avoid the publicity and upset caused by this hunger strike, and have relocated (temporarily) to Galway. 'Hunger Strike' therefore unusually implicates both the Republic and the North in the Troubles. This will be explored in greater detail further on in this chapter.

This idea that the Troubles of Northern Ireland are a 'distinct regional problem' is troubling for multiple reasons, not least because the violence of the conflict was supported and armed through numerous sources, both beyond the Irish border, across the Irish Sea and indeed, across the Atlantic, as Jack Holland exposes in *The American Connection: U.S. Guns, Money and Influence in Northern Ireland* (1987). The violence of the Troubles was also not simply limited to the geographical space of Northern Ireland either, as McCann himself is keen to highlight in *Let The Great World Spin*, where Ciaran remarks that 'sometimes' the North 'seemed like an entirely foreign land, but in the spring of [19]74 the violence came south' to Dublin,

where he is caught in a bomb blast (22). There were attacks in the Republic of Ireland in the 1970s by British Loyalists in addition to attacks in England by the IRA; there were even occasions of Troubles-related violence spilling onto the European continent. Of course, the people of any one place, be in it Northern Ireland, the Republic, or in England, may also be involved in networks of relations that carry the effects of the violence of the Northern Irish Troubles much farther than the spatial parameters of Northern Ireland's territory. The families of those in the British military or civil service on active duty in Northern Ireland being one such example (and again, one that McCann gives voice to in 'Everything in this Country Must'). Furthermore, as the fiction of both Eugene McCabe and Patrick McCabe have suggested, the problematic and traumatic experience of living in a divided country is particularly unsettling for those living in the border spaces.

It is striking how often writers have turned to the short story as a means of grappling with these divisions in Northern Irish society. Writers can assemble multiple stories that give voice to both sides of the sectarian conflict in a short story collection. McCann's *Everything in This Country Must* contains one story told from the perspective of a boy in a Protestant family, and two from children (or young adults) in Catholic families. Eugene McCabe conducts a similar project with his 2006 collection of stories, *Heaven Lies About Us,* which has stories narrated by both Catholics and Protestants, and this same technique is at play in his *Christ in the Fields: A Fermanagh Trilogy* (1993). Patrick McCabe's *Carn* (1997), while neither technically a short story collection nor exclusively Northern Irish (the fictional town of Carn straddles the border), is a work of narrative fragments that again gives voice to both sides of the conflict. Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1997), although told through the voice of one individual from a working class Catholic family in

Derry, shares similarities with *Carn* in its narrative style, told through episodic fragments loaded with dread, hauntings, secrets and repressed traumas. The short story was also Benedict Kiely's literary form of choice and his novella *Proxopera: A Tale of Modern Ireland* (1977) is widely regarded to be the most damning indictment of the Troubles written to-date. Having said this, Storey highlights that 'critical attention to the Irish short story has been strangely paradoxical. On the one hand, the short story has been called Ireland's "national art form" said by some critics to exceed the Irish novel in achievement', but, on the other hand, the Northern Irish short story has been excluded from this national canon (7-8). Perhaps we can read this omission by literary critics as an example of an Irish or British nationalistic impulse to 'compartmentalise' Northern Ireland. Whether or not we can make this argument, we can say with confidence that using the short story allows the writers mentioned here the opportunity to combine these visions of multiple national affiliations within the one text, illustrating the national sense of fracture within the unity of a single work.

In addition to the formal properties of the short story and the short story collection being well suited to articulating Northern Irish identity, the stylistic properties of the short story are also particularly well suited to the intricacies of life in Northern Ireland. Due to its brevity in length, the short story relies on ellipsis and allusion and so is a literary form that Ronan McDonald argues is 'geared towards the unsaid and suggested, rather than the elaborately articulated' (249). McDonald sees the short story as a productive literary tool for writers in Northern Ireland because it enables writers to reflect 'the famous/ Northern reticence' that has characterised the North of Ireland (Heaney 1998: 132). McDonald argues that '"silence" in all its forms – muteness or cuteness, inarticulacy or reticence, both as a symptom of a colonial condition and as an aesthetic strategy seeking to resist this condition – is also often

discerned as a cultural presence in Troubles writing' and, of course, points us to Heaney's poem, 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' (1975) (253). The short story gains much of its power through what is left unsaid and unknowable. The fact that the short story's formal properties fit the needs of Troubles writers so well – a need for a form of fiction that is reticent, suggestive and understated – would also add a supplementary piece of evidence to support O'Connor's claim that the short story is a literary form that is particularly successful at giving voice to a specific thematic set: displacement, loneliness, and the trauma of a frustrated desire to feel at home.

The silence and secrecy that dominates both life in the North of Ireland and the Northern Irish literary imagination is supported through McCann's use of the child narrator. In addition to being what would constitute a 'minor voice', and so foster McCann's (post)colonial aesthetic, McCann's adoption of the child as a narrative voice does draws on a literary trope that has been heavily utilised by Irish short story writers. For example, the first seven stories of *Dubliners* (1914) are narrated by a child or adolescent, and numerous other Irish writers have used a child's voice to narrate (in either first- or third-person) their short stories, including John Banville, Elizabeth Bowen, Sean O'Faolain and Frank O'Connor. In using a child's voice, McCann gives us a narrator that lacks an adult's comprehension of the complexities of the sectarian hatred that surrounds them. This inability to comprehend adds to a potent sense of not knowing and contributes to a sense that Northern Ireland is not a 'knowable community', but instead one that is shrouded in secrecy (Williams 14; also quoted in McDonald 249). McDonald's use of Williams's 'knowable community' is a reference to the supposed 'knowable community' of the (English) realist novel and so the community reflected in the short story must therefore be an *un*knowable one. Again, Seamus Heaney has gestured towards the dangerously

unknowable aspect of Troubles-era Northern Ireland when he registers the need to be '[e]xpertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours' to avoid becoming the victim of another 'neighbourly murder' (131, 97). Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*, written in short narrative fragments, if not traditional short stories, uses a child's narrative voice to add another level of ominous innocence to a family story full of unknowable secrets. Edna Longley argues that *Reading in the Dark* is not just a novel but an 'autobiography' of Northern Ireland, suggesting that the episodic narrative form and elliptical silences are particularly reflective of Northern Irish society (1996: 34).

McCann's story 'Wood' shares many similarities with Deane's text. Both are narrated by the voice of a young man and involve a plot within which the narrator's mother could be seen as betraying his father. In both texts, the writers create a fabric woven with lingering trauma and ominous darkness. In 'Wood', a young Protestant boy, Andrew, aids his mother in making what will become the wooden banners and flagpoles for Orange Order marches; the boy's father would not approve of this work, and so it is conducted in secret. Despite the youthful naivety of the narrator – and his complete lack of sectarian feelings – the tone of the story is unusually bleak for McCann. The sick father, desperately nervous mother and eerie silence of the snow-covered house all contribute to a familiar Irish literary motif of terrible domestic traumas unfurling in family history. McCann seems keen to make intertextual links with texts by other Irish writers. In the figure of the bedridden father, we have overtones of McGahern and Tóibín. Andrew's father has very limited mobility after suffering a severe stroke, and although Andrew feels affection toward his father, it is an affection much tempered with fear, reminiscent of the way in which Moran is constructed in McGahern's *Amongst Women* (and the copious references to him as

‘Daddy’ support this reading). The father’s illness festers away at the heart of the story, a literary device reminiscent of Tóibín’s *The Blackwater Lightship*, and these images of sickness and death echo throughout the text too: ‘the engine’ of the tractor used for their work ‘was like the sound of a cough rising’ (McCann 2000: 19); the ‘metal links’ of the chains used to support the logs feel ‘dead in [Andrew’s] fingers’ (24). In the father’s immobility, Flannery argues McCann ‘gestures towards the endemic inertia’ of Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914) (121).

Due to the secretive nature of their work, all of the plot’s action happens in the dark of ‘night-time’ and in the melancholy weather of a Northern Irish winter full of snow, rain and biting winds (19). The fact this work must be kept secret also lends the story an undercurrent of fear: at one point Andrew comments that the logs ‘made a sound like they were nervous too’ (19); the ‘ivy on the walls’ of their house ‘looked like’ their ‘secret was climbing up the vines’ (22); his mother begs Andrew to keep this their secret multiple times, before imploring ‘God’ to ‘help [her]’ under her breath (26). Although the poles are crafted and sold on without the father knowing, and despite Andrew’s youthful innocence, there is something uneasy and disturbing about the story. Andrew’s simple, childlike narration is reticent, full of silences.

Andrew’s mother, too, barely speaks, and his father’s speech was severely damaged by a stroke – ‘when Daddy tried to say things he couldn’t. For a long time his words were all jumbled up like he had too many in his head’ (McCann 30). The narrator’s mother in *Reading in the Dark* also suffers a stroke and becomes ‘sealed in silence’ (Deane 230). This silence and secrecy is more effectively alluded to in the short story than the novel because the short story, as it only represents a moment, necessarily has less words, less prosaic description and less context than a novel. More is left unknown and unsaid. Conversely the novel, conventionally, is a rich and

comprehensive tapestry, full of detail that makes its interior world a 'knowable community' (Williams 14).

'Wood' is an unusual piece in McCann's oeuvre: in gesturing to the secrecy of life in Northern Ireland, the silent, subdued prose has none of the usual pulsing liveliness, vibrant imagery or hopeful quality that McCann's work usually displays. However, using the naïve voice of Andrew, and of child narrators throughout *Everything in this Country Must*, gives McCann the opportunity to explicitly reject violent sectarian identities. Andrew recalls photographs of the Orangemen parades, and says 'they were carrying a banner of the King on a white horse […] The King wore fancy clothes and he had a kind face. I really liked the picture and didn't see why Daddy got so upset' (24). The innocent way in which Andrew is drawn to the kindness of the King's face is ironically juxtaposed with the sectarian violence that these marches represent. The naivety of the child's voice is central to McCann's desire to move beyond sectarian bigotry. As children, the narrators have not yet accepted the naturalised sectarian attitudes of their families' and so, Flannery argues, they 'retain the possibility of escaping such future roles' (115). He views McCann's use of the child's voice as part of a redemptive project that seeks to cast a more hopeful light on the Troubles and Northern Ireland than other contemporary literature has attempted to do: Flannery's chapter on McCann's Troubles stories is entitled 'Hope and Youth'. Because these youths are not yet saddled with the weight of adult knowledge, they are willing to view the Other across the sectarian division in neutral and perhaps even compassionate ways, as we see in the tinges of a romance-across-the-divide in 'Everything in this Country Must'. Not only do children lack a full adult understanding of the complexities, and histories, that accompany these sectarian

identities, but this also lends them a certain vulnerability, and makes the dangers of living during the Troubles seem all the more potent.

It is hard to determine what we are to make of this story, as McCann's usual investments in hope and the possibility of redemption seem not to be present, and the final ominous image of the story is of oak branches 'slapping each other around like people' (37). McCann's intertextual border crossing is echoed in the plotlines of the other stories in this collection and across his catalogue of work as a whole; this 'shared history' includes not just the entirety of Ireland (thereby refusing to compartmentalise the Troubles as a Northern problem) but encompasses a much wider geographical scope, gesturing towards a transnational history of trauma and displacement. The key way that McCann does this is through his engagement with ideas of the Other and Otherness. In the first story of the collection, 'Everything in this Country Must', this engagement is not only across the gulf of Protestant/Catholic, but the British/(Northern) Irish divide too. In the last story of the collection, 'Hunger Strike', these Troubles expand from Northern to Southern Ireland, before drawing on other stories of twentieth-century trauma that go beyond the shores of Ireland. His primary literary precursor in this sense is Benedict Kiely, and McCann has been very vocal in acknowledging his debt to Kiely; you can feel Kiely's literary traces throughout McCann's short fiction.[26] What both authors do particularly well is imagine scenarios where their characters negotiate relationships with individuals from the other side of the sectarian conflict, without relegating this other to a menacing, unknowable Other. Kennedy-Andrews suggests that negotiating the 'irredeemable otherness' that divides the North's twin blocs is not often achieved successfully by

[26] Of Kiely's influence on his work, McCann has said, 'I love Kiely. Kiely was very important for me when I was about sixteen, seventeen, and he is still important to me today […] I think an awful lot of Kiely has seeped into my work, sometimes consciously, sometimes not' (Garden 14). McCann also wrote the introduction to *The Collected Stories of Benedict Kiely* (2002), see ix-xvii.

writers (2008a: 88). Here, we might think of Heaney's 'The Other Side' (1972) or Deane's remarks about the other side of Derry being 'really foreign territory, the estrangement of Protestants with their bibles' (Deane 1997: 143). McCann's short fiction, as we shall see, attempts not only to actively engage with this Otherness but to find redemption in these interactions.

i. Rooting/Routing violence: the North and the short story in McCann and Benedict Kiely

The threat of violence haunts the works discussed earlier in this chapter and we might read the short story as being particularly effective at representing the violence of lives cut short. Robert McLiam Wilson illustrates this point in his novel *Eureka Street* (1996), where the novel's plot is interrupted by an incongruous chapter about a fictionalised bomb blast in Belfast's Fountain Street. At this point in the novel, McLiam Wilson decides to introduce a new character, Rosemary Daye, to an already well-established cast. We follow Rosemary for a few pages as she thinks about a new lover then, upon entering a sandwich shop, she is killed by the bomb blast and simply 'stopped existing' (222). After this, McLiam Wilson introduces us very briefly to various other individuals who were caught in the bomb blast, including Martin O' Hare who, crucially, 'had a story too' (223). We are also introduced to the eight-year-old girl Natalie Crawford, her twelve-year-old sister Liz and their mother, Margaret. All three are killed in the bomb blast. Given that she was only eight, Natalie's life 'wasn't […] a very long story', but it should have been; 'in the normal course of events, her story would have grown, used a larger cast, involved more scenes and events' (223). After his wife and two daughters are killed, Robert Crawford is driven to alcoholism by grief and despair and his 'story became uncommercial'; he is no

longer hounded by the press wanting to turn his loss into a piece for profit (225).[27] We could also, though, read this as a critique of the novel, as the 'cultural power of novels' hinges on their capacity to 'offer imaginary solutions to intractable problems at the level of social realism' (Cohen 2010: 78). Short stories do not offer such easy resolutions. McLiam Wilson writes that these lives 'shouldn't have been short stories' but should instead 'have been novels, profound, delightful novels' (231). Through the shortness of their narratives, McLiam Wilson registers the ability of violence to murder stories; through the 'traffic of history and politics', 'some stories had been shortened' (231). Of course, given that this chapter interrupts a novel about the North, this critique is ironically positioned, but this chapter is by far the most powerful section in the novel. Like James Kelman's 'Acid', these short, searing snippets of narrative are much more effective at depicting the violence that these characters face than a novel (2007: 123).

Violence is at the heart of the two stories that we will now explore, McCann's 'Everything in This Country Must' and Benedict Kiely's 'Bluebell Meadow'. Indeed, the title of McCann's story is repeated in the text, when our young narrator Katie worries because she thinks that Stevie, a British soldier, and her father's 'draft horse [who is trapped in the river] were going to die, since everything in this country must' (10). However, where Cleary argues that Northern Ireland has been compartmentalised in literature and culture, both McCann and Kiely contradict this. This same logic that seeks to compartmentalise identity through restrictive and limiting paradigms (be it national or sectarian) can be seen in Elmer Kennedy-Andrews's argument that Kiely is a 'deeply "rooted" writer, drawing inspiration from

[27] Colum McCann is also attuned to the economic realities of the publishing trade. When discussing why he hadn't written any short stories until the publication of 'Gone' in 2014, McCann said, '[s]ome of it just comes down to the very vulgar notion that you have to sell books and novels sell more than collections of short stories do. I have kids to feed' (Garden 11).

his native place in and around Omagh. Co Tyrone' (2008b: 98). While it is true that Kiely draws extensively on Northern Ireland in his fiction, his work expands to gesture beyond geographic borders, re-routing the supposedly indigenous locality of the Troubles. Kennedy-Andrews' article, 'Benedict Kiely's Troubles Fiction: From Postcolonialism to Postmodernism' (2008), goes on to discuss Kiely's story 'Bluebell Meadow', a romance-across-the-divide between a Catholic girl and Protestant Boy in Northern Ireland, but makes no mention of the ways in which Kiely's story opens up, exploring immigration, racism in the United States and critical social problems based around exclusion and prejudice. Our unnamed female narrator is given six bullets as a gift by her teenage love, Lofty, but these bullets are not fired in Northern Ireland but in Detroit, 'kill[ing] six black men', widening the scope of the Troubles into a transnational scale (Kiely 2002: 461).

This story is a useful comparison for McCann's 'Everything in this Country Must' and is most likely a direct literary precursor: the six bullets that are fired and counted out in 'Bluebell Meadow' – 'one, two, three, four, five, six' are imitated in the three bullets fired and counted out – 'one two three' in McCann's story (Kiely 461; McCann 2000: 15).[28] 'Everything in this Country Must' is narrated to us by a young Catholic girl, Katie, whose mother and brother have been killed many years before in an accident with a British military tank. When the story opens, Katie's father's favourite horse has got her foot trapped in the rocks of the river and it looks as if she will drown, but a group of British soldiers appear at the scene and manage to rescue the horse. Both stories have at their heart an attraction between a young Catholic girl and, in Kiely's story, a Protestant boy who is also a member of the B

[28] When asked whether this was a deliberate intertextual allusion, McCann said '[n]o, not consciously'. He went to add that 'I [McCann] used the three bullets because I wanted the reader to think, first of all that's he's shooting at the British Army truck that's leaving, secondly that he's going to shoot himself and then that he's shooting the horse. Just to complicate it at the end. It was a dramatic effect for me' (Garden 14).

Specials, and in McCann's story, a British soldier. Although in Kiely's story the romance is more fully realised than in McCann's, where it is more of a fledgling attraction, both authors give their young protagonists a desire to transcend sectarian divisions. However, this attraction between Katie and the British soldier Stevie, added to his residual anger and grief at the loss of his wife and son, enrages Katie's father so much that he shoots his favourite horse.

What both authors do with these short stories is imbue the landscape – and particularly the image of water – with a sense of a violent pastoral that seems deceptively rooted in Irishness, while actually gesturing at a larger landscape of transnational trauma. In 'Bluebell Meadow', the unnamed narrator is warned to stay away from Lofty by the 'black man' Mr McClintock (Kiely 454). The narrator does not label Mr McClintock such 'because he was a Negro' but because he is a 'member of the black perceptory which was a special branch of the Orange Order' (454). Conflating McClintock's strong sectarian identity with that of a racialised Other reminds the reader that violence based on exclusionary identity politics seeps much farther than the borders of Northern Ireland. The violence associated with McClintock is underlined through his position as the village butcher, and further than this, the ominous conversation between the two happens on the banks of a river near a 'piggery' (458). The threatening tone of McClintock's warning is accompanied by the smell of 'blood and dirt' and the 'screams' of pigs being slaughtered (457). In combining the visceral horrors of the slaughterhouse with the image of the Irish river, it could be argued that Kiely is creating a textual suggestion for the idea that violence is indigenous to the Irish landscape. Given the menacing (Northern Irish) scene within which McClintock threatens the young narrator, and his status as a bloodstained butcher, readers could think that the six bullets our narrator receives at the beginning

of the text are loaded with proleptic irony that will be fired if not at her Northern Irish body, then at least on Northern Irish soil. Kiely undercuts these expectations. Firstly, although naming McClintock 'the black man' makes reference to a group within the Orange Order known as the Royal Black Institution, it also acts a means of suggesting links between the sectarian hatred of Northern Ireland and the racist hatred that black people have suffered throughout history. These connections are then reaffirmed when the six bullets exchanged between Lofty and the narrator are not fired in Northern Ireland but in Detroit, killing six black men. Kiely implies that violence and hatred are not an exclusively Northern Irish phenomenon but a transnational one.

This aim is shared with 'Everything in this Country Must', where McCann also uses the image of the Irish landscape and the violence associated with it in news ways that transcend national paradigms. Like Kiely, McCann establishes the river as a place of violent trauma and the slaughter of animals; the death of Katie's father's horse seems inevitable. A rescue is made possible by the British army, but their arrival reminds Katie and her father of the deaths of the other two members of their family. After the horse is rescued, she is shot by Katie's father, thereby forever associating the river, the Northern Irish landscape, with violence and sectarian hatred. However, it is the British army, complete with soldiers who speak in various British accents, who save the horse. In invoking their numerous other accents, McCann alludes to their difference, and while Katie registers this, 'they sounded like they had swallowed things I never swallowed', she still strives to forge a meaningful engagement with them (6). There are also intertextual references at work within the nicknames that Katie gives to the soldiers; this too, works to subvert the national reading of this story. Katie remarks that one of the soldiers had hair 'the colour of winter ice', 'one had a moustache that looked like long grasses and one had a scar on

his cheek like the bottom end of Father's barn hayknife', and so names the soldiers, Icehair, LongGrasses and Hayknife (6, 7). In another nod to Kiely, the naming process here is reminiscent of the process that Binchy performs in *Proxopera* when giving names to the IRA men who have taken him and his family hostage. Flannery contends that this process is a refusal to 'retreat to the distance of anonymity' and instead is an imaginative act of engagement with the Otherness of the soldiers (117).

The language used to describe each of the men is reminiscent of Heaney's poetry, which is often described as being heavily rooted in the Irish landscape. This view, propagated by Robert Crawford in *Devolving English Literature* (1992) and Richard Kearney in *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (1988)*,* amongst others, is problematic in itself and thoroughly disputed by Jahan Ramanzani. In 'A Transnational Poetics' (2006), Ramanzani argues that 'such provincialization of Heaney occludes' his many non-Irish literary precursors and that 'the imaginative topography of Heaney's poetry is an intercultural space, a layered geography' (346). McCann's reference to a soldier with hair the colour of 'winter ice' is suggestive of Heaney's bog poems which take the bog bodies of Jutland as their initial premise, before subverting the geography of these poems into an ambiguous landscape of re-rooted/routed trauma (6). McCann's 'winter ice' hints at both the stereotypical Scandinavian physical aesthetic (light blonde hair and blue eyes) and the extreme weather conditions found in Jutland and Heaney's imaginative construction of it, 'winter cold/ like the nuzzle of fjords' (1998: 113). The moustache like 'long grasses' reminds us of the repeated insistence on signs of a northern European landscape in Heaney's poetry, or the 'long grains' of 'Nerthus' in particular (Heaney 1998: 66). 'Hayknife' and his scarred face reminds us of the 'flesh of labourers', the 'turfcutters'

and ‘farmyards’ of Heaney’s ‘The Tollund Man’ or the ‘turf-cutter’s spade’ of his ‘Bog Queen’ (64-65; 113).

The ‘intercultural’ and ‘layered geography’ that Ramanzani locates in Heaney’s bog poetry, transposing to the bodies and their history of tribal violence from Jutland to Ireland, can also be seen at work in McCann’s description of the British soldiers. In using a Heaney-esque vocabulary that alludes to a body of work that has been read as both Irish and ambivalent, McCann situates his imaginative geography in a similarly slippery landscape. Heaney’s subversion of these ideas of geographic belonging is even more unsettling in that he seeks to reposition the fruits of the soil itself – the bodies, the ‘long grains’, ‘the bruised berries’ – which should be indigenous to a particular national landscape, but instead are displaced in a transnational sphere of dislocated geography (Heaney 1998: 66, 112). McCann’s gesturing to the Irish/non-Irish landscape of Heaney is made even more powerful in that his allusions to Heaney are woven into his representation of British soldiers – the supposed Other to the Irish, an alien force in the Irish landscape. Far from compartmentalising the Troubles as an indigenous problem for Northern Ireland, these intertextual references evoke a shifting geography that creates a profound sense of transnational dislocation and paradox. Heaney’s (Scandinavian) Irish and McCann’s (Irish) British are equally ‘lost,/ Unhappy and at home’ as Kiely’s black Orangemen (Heaney 1998: 65).

ii. Intercultural redemption: ‘Hunger Strike’ and ‘Cathal’s Lake’

Turning to the landscape as a means of representing an image of displaced (Irish) violence and trauma is something that can also be seen in another one of McCann’s short stories, ‘Cathal’s Lake’. ‘Cathal’s Lake’ is not from *Everything in this Country Must* but McCann’s earlier collection of stories, *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*; it is the

story of Cathal, a middle aged farmer who, for every fatality of the Northern Irish Troubles, finds a swan in his garden that he must dig out of the soil and settle on his lake. Speaking about the intercultural influences on the story, McCann notes the importance of the 'Irish myth, The Children of Lir,' but asserts that 'really, it goes back to a Jewish myth of the thirty-six hidden saints, the *Lamed Vavniks*' taken from the Talmud (Garden 13). These thirty-six men must bear the sorrows of mankind and McCann imagines Cathal as one of these righteous ones. It is curious that McCann chose to twin the Jewish folktale with an Irish one: 'Cathal is very much an Irish figure, he's a farmer, but he goes back to this Jewish myth: he is carrying the sorrows of the world, and he has lost his line of communication with God' (Garden 13). Through turning to an external source myth to write about the Troubles, McCann refuses to compartmentalise Northern Ireland.

Over the course of the story, Cathal is forced to dig up another victim due to the death of a boy in Derry. The teenage victim had been involved in a street riot and, although Cathal does not know the specifics of his death, he imagines that he might have been killed when a 'plastic bullet slam[ed] his chest […] hurtling against his lung', which results in him dropping the petrol bomb he is carrying and becoming engulfed in flames (1994: 173). As with McCann's other Northern Irish short fiction, he is keen to empathetically engage with voices from both of Northern Ireland's 'twin blocs' (Longley 2001: 5). In attempting to find humanity in the young soldier, McCann suggests that 'maybe the soldier who fired the riot gun was just a boy himself', who wanted nothing more than 'to be home' (175). Cathal imagines this teenage soldier 'having to call [his girlfriend], heartbroken' and explain that he 'didn't mean it' (175). Alternately, Cathal thinks, this soldier might have had a 'face like a rat' and have celebrated his actions, 'glorious in his black boots, being slapped and

praised' (177). However, even Cathal's creation of this unsavory British soldier has 'eyes dark as bogholes', returning us again to the slippery metaphor for Irishness even when posited as its antithesis. The swans themselves are '[a]ll of them generally shaped, sized and white-feathered the same', erasing the differences which proved so deadly for them in their human lives (181). All of the swans are described as looking identical: '[t]he girl from the blown-up bar looking like a twin of the soldier found slumped in the front seat of a Saracen' and this soldier, 'the twin of the boy from Garvagh found drowned in a ditch with an armalite in his fingers' (181). While the lives of these victims end in horror and violence, there is some strange sort of redemption for them, reborn and peacefully co-existing. The elements of magical realism in 'Cathal's Lake' are particularly well suited to the short story; if this were a longer narrative, it is doubtful that these elements could have been sustained without becoming absurd. Certainly, when dealing with the real humanitarian crisis and loss of life that was the Troubles, it is of paramount importance that representative treatment of this subject remain sensitive to its victims.

Despite taking his inspiration from the *Lamed Vavniks,* 'Cathal's Lake' is again steeped in McCann's Irish literary inheritance. McCann's descriptions of the Irish teenager, the most recent fatality of the Troubles and so Cathal's newest addition, have intertextual echoes of several poems from Paul Muldoon's *New Weather* (1973). The final stanza of Muldoon's 'Dancers at the Moy', taken from *New Weather*, forms a preface to *Everything in this Country Must*: '[t]he local people gathered/ Up the white skeletons./ Horses buried for years/ Under the foundations/ Give their earthen floors/ The ease of trampolines' (Muldoon 11). It evident that McCann locates within Muldoon's poetry something that shapes his own literature about the North. McCann's teenage boy is described as having 'a head of hair on him

like a wheat field' and 'eyes as blue as thrush eggs' (173). To denote the violence of his encounter with the British Army, McCann turns to metaphor '[t]hrush eggs broken and rows of wheat going up in flames' (173). This is subtly and loosely evocative of Muldoon's 'Blowing Eggs' and 'Thrush', two poems printed one after the other in Muldoon's *New Weather*. Although the violence and loss of innocence of the 'boy' from 'Blowing Eggs' is more in line with 'Cathal's Lake' than 'Thrush', the 'pale blue flint' of the birds eggs joins up with 'Thrush' to create McCann's boy with 'eyes as blue as thrush eggs' (Muldoon 5, 6). 'Blowing Eggs' seems particularly relevant; notice the way in which the flora of the poem is personified – the bird nest is found within 'the hedge's intestine' (5). This is not too dissimilar to the ways in which the soil in McCann's story gives birth to full-sized adult swans. There is a sense that McCann's teenage youth and Muldoon's boy are alike in that their deliberate attempts at violence escalate in ways that they cannot anticipate, and rupture their innocence; McCann's youth causes his own death and Muldoon's is left with '[o]f little yolk and albumen./These his wrists, stained and surprised' after he breaks the bird's eggs and kills the unborn chicks inside (6).

The Irish myth of the Children of Lir that McCann alludes to above has a rich cultural legacy in Ireland. A statue based on this myth has been erected in the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin, a memorial space for those who died in the struggle for Irish freedom. In his novel *Nothing Happens in Carmincross* (1985), Benedict Kiely notes the curious resonance of such a statue, while sardonically critiquing the triumphant narrative that has, on occasion, accompanied nationalist (and Republican) historiography. Kiely writes, '[t]o honour the patriot dead there is a square in Dublin city' with 'a splendid symbolic statue of the children of Lír casting-off their enchanted swan-shapes, awaking from centuries of dream to decrepit old age and

death: ironic symbol for an old-new nation' (20-21). Kiely immediately undermines any sense of this triumphant history by contextualising this within the Troubles, stating '[n]owadays the heroes, escaped from the heather, blow the legs off girls in city cafés' (21). McCann's use of the Lir story works in a similar vein, deterritorialising the heroic associations of this story by reterritorialising it through the civilian casualties of the Troubles. The focus on digging, too, performs the same act of re-rooting/routing this violence that we traced previously (and will explore again in our discussion of *This Side of Brightness* in Chapter Four); 'Digging' (1966), as Heaney's first professionally published poem, has become an action intricately interwoven with Irish soil and history. However, as gestured towards previously, to root Heaney too firmly in this Irish soil does him a disservice. McCann's (and Cathal's) digging mimics the 'Atlantic seepage' of Heaney's Ireland as Cathal bemoans the 'years of digging', so much digging that '[a] man could reach his brother in Australia, or his sister in America' (Heaney 42; McCann 1994: 178). The sediments of Irish soil are shifting and unstable, gesturing towards Ireland's diasporic reaches.

Some critics have noted the links between the diasporic nature of the Jewish and Irish peoples: Richard Kearney notes that both Ireland and the Jews could be viewed as 'migrant nation[s]' that 'embrace all those emigrants and exiles who live beyond the territory of the nation-state' (1997: 5). The Jewish experiences of dispossession and diaspora are indeed shared with the Irish, but both groups have also suffered the prejudices of being marginalised within Europe and treated as inferior citizens. Returning again to Muldoon's 'Immram' (1980), he writes '[t]hat the Irish,

the American Irish,/ Were really the thirteenth tribe,/ The Israelites of Europe' (99).[29] It is interesting to note that both Jewish writers (such as Kafka) and Irish writers, on the periphery of Europe, are frequently mentioned when discussing Minor Literature. There is also, perhaps, something in the idea of the shared experience of partition in both Ireland and Israel, territory that Cleary explores in his work on literature and partition. In appropriating this Jewish tale, and recasting it to tell a story about the Troubles, McCann subtly reminds us that sectarian violence and hatred are not found only in Northern Ireland. The shadows of major collective trauma also lurk in the Jewish and Irish imagination: the Holocaust and the Famine. Indeed, the image of the starving, skeletal body is something that McCann turns to on numerous occasions in both his short fiction and his novels.

McCann's novella 'Hunger Strike' is one such text. We noted earlier that 'Hunger Strike' forms the final part of McCann's Troubles trilogy, *Everything in this Country Must*, in which our adolescent narrator, Kevin, has been relocated from Derry to Galway by his mother. Kevin's uncle is on hunger strike in the Maze Prison and his mother is keen that they stay away from the North of Ireland to avoid the inevitable and unrelenting updates from the media as his condition deteriorates. While in Galway, the teenage Kevin befriends an elderly Lithuanian couple who invite Kevin to take up kayaking with them. Although it is never made explicit, the story suggests that the couple are survivors of the Holocaust. Kevin's uncle has been in prison for the entirety of Kevin's life and so the two have never met; he has been then, a persistent but haunting absence in Kevin's lived experience and Kevin's narration is full of the imaginings of his uncle's current skeletal state. His uncle is a spectral

[29] These lines are attributed to one of the characters in the poem who is discussing his father's theory about the American Irish. These lines are made to seem somewhat ridiculous, and this affinity between the groups undermined, when he follows this with 'All along, my father believed in fairies' (99): the implication being that an affinity between the Irish and the Jews is as farfetched and unbelievable as the existence of fairies.

presence in the text, a ghost of a never-fully-knowable trauma in a fashion imitative of the much-commented upon textual hauntings of the Famine spectre. The textual hauntings of an unknowable trauma are echoed in the backstory of the Lithuanian couple that is alluded to but never fully explained. However, given the focus on the starving body, the text suggests that these individuals have encountered the horrors of Nazi Europe. In so doing, McCann opens up an intertextual dialogue that creates transnational and intercultural spaces of redemption and healing. It is important here to note that I am not trying to assert that the actual experiences of the Irish Famine, the Holocaust or the Hunger Strikes were similar. Instead I hope to trace how the representation of these traumatic incidents share a similar representative code in depiction of the skeletal body and indicate what can be gained by putting these codes into dialogue.

In conversation with Maud Ellmann, Seamus Heaney suggests that we should read the bodies of these hunger strikers as 'quotations' of an Irish history of hunger and the political 'afterlife' of hunger as a form of protest (Ellmann 14). According to Heaney, the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s make reference to an Irish tradition of fasting to shame a wrong-doer or oppressor. In early Irish law, a plaintiff could fast outside the door of his debtor's house and this debtor would be compelled to pay-up. Using the body as a form of protest is an ancient means of securing justice in Ireland and the Hunger Strikers combined this national tradition with an anti-colonial politics in the early 1980s through their hunger striking. The devastating effects of the Famine have also been positioned by some as a crime of colonialism although revisionist historians have increasingly sought to illustrate the role of the Irish middle classes in exacerbating the food shortages. The Famine did create further problems between Ireland and Britain and strengthened support for Irish Nationalism. If, as Heaney

suggests, we are to read the Hunger Strikes as a legacy of previous fasts, then we could read these starving bodies as a visceral reminder of an earlier period of British colonial rule. The history of fasting and hunger in Ireland certainly means that the vision of the starving Irish body could be understood as a rich intertextual metaphor.

Christopher Morash's work on the Famine suggests that the Famine has been constructed as a haunting presence – both textually, in literature of and about the Famine, and culturally, as a repressed but haunting traumatic past. Morash suggests that before we can understand how the Famine has come to be represented in cultural memory, we must appreciate that 'even before the Famine was acknowledged as a complete event, it was in the process of being textually encoded in a limited number of clearly defined images' (113). These images were the stalking spectre and the green-mouthed corpse, which Morash locates haunting the work of William Carleton, Patrick Sheehan, contemporary accounts and newspaper articles, and even an anonymous poem published in London entitled 'The Spectre'. As numerous theorists on this subject have argued, this delay in acknowledgement of the event is not unusual for traumas – on both an individual and collective scale[30]. How to represent the sheer scale and horror of the Famine proved challenging; the repeated insistence of those who saw its effect was: 'It cannot be described' (Marcus 10-11). The Famine, through defying logic and reason, came to be visually represented by the phantom figure of the spectre, occupying the liminal position between life and death. In McCann's text, the starving uncle occupies a similar position, and the novella obsesses over the hunger striker's bodily disintegration as a means of suggesting his alterity: he has gone beyond human. It is striking that something that seems to defy representation can be reduced to a manageable set of symbols or images. Morash notes how these

[30] See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996)

symbols, the stalking spectre and the green-mouthed corpse, became part of what he labels 'the propaganda war' in the bid for Irish independence (113). By the turn of the twentieth century', Morash claims that 'such images were so widely known that they could be said to constitute a form of collectively maintained "memory"' (113).

The starving body appears in other visions related to the Irish national psyche: Paul Muldoon's 1983 poem 'Aisling', written in response to the Hunger Strikes of 1980 and 1981, imagines Ireland's female personification as Anorexia (127). Edna Longley famously uses this poem as the starting point for her essay 'From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands' (1990), maintaining that '[i]n blaming the hunger-strikers' emaciation on their idealised cause', Anorexia can be read as 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan in a terminal condition' (3). The power of Yeats for the Nationalist is picked up by McCann too; his hunger striker starts reading 'poetry and a play by W.B. Yeats' while fasting (2000: 91). We can consequently see that the starving body in Ireland, as Famine spectre or hunger protestor, has been frequently utilised by anti-colonial rhetoric but, in addition to this, it has also been closely linked by some to ideas of the national self-image. The Famine spectre, which found its genesis as a symbol of a repressed national trauma, later mutate through the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s into a symbol of the lingering trauma of colonial rule. Longley might not agree with me on this point, although she does note that this image of the anorexic body is intimately interwoven with the 'Nationalist dream' of a united and independent Ireland, albeit this desire has led the hunger strikers to 'a destructive neurosis' (3).

What interests me most in Heaney's use of 'quotation' is the suggestion that hunger and fasting are part of a textually coded system of representation through which connections can be made to *other* textually coded traumas. In this way,

intertextuality, with its allusive references to other texts and textual codes of representation, can actually be read as a form of haunting. Critics have noted that, under the weight of unimaginable horrors, traditional literary forms begin to break and instead of logical and chronological plot development, argues Morash, 'we find that the Famine as a textual event is composed of a group of images whose meaning does not derive from their strategic location within a narrative, but rather from the strangeness and horror of the images themselves, as dislocated, isolated emblems of suffering' (114). Kali Tal, too, contends that 'traumatic events are written and rewritten until they become codified', suggesting that we can now read the Holocaust as a 'metonym' with a 'set of symbols that reflect the formal codification of that experience' (6). The skeletal body is one such symbol that reflects the formal codification of the Holocaust. This codified symbol is shared with the most common symbol of the Irish Famine – a vision of the emaciated body that Morash has labelled the 'stalking spectre'. There are complete narratives that we would associate with both the Holocaust and the Famine but the image of the skeletal body acts as visual somatic shorthand for both. This code of representation was not lost on the Hunger Strikers either: a former prisoner from Long Kesh remarked that the situation 'just reminded [him] of the Jews in the concentration camp because […] we were all very thin and frightened'. This illustrates the ways in which one textual code of representation can be collapsed onto another, using this intertextual referencing to intensify meaning.

In titling his novella 'Hunger Strike', McCann echoes the title of Kafka's short story 'The Hunger Artist'. Kafka's story focuses on the skeletal body of a hunger artist, someone who performs hunger for a career, written as it was by a German-speaking, Jewish author may also evoke the starving bodies of concentration camp

victims for post-Holocaust readers. Some critics have also claimed that Kafka's work was eerily prophetic of the horrors of Nazi Europe; George Steiner reads Kafka's work as 'prefigur[ing] the furtive sadism [and] the hysteria which totalitarianism insinuates' of National Socialism (121). Bertolt Brecht also argued 'we find in [Kafka] strange disguises prefiguring many things […:] future concentration camps, the future instability of the law, the future absolutism of the state Apparat' (18). Lawrence Langer, however, believes that finding prophetic traces of the Holocaust in Kafka's work says more about the mentality of contemporary critics than Kafka's psychic talents. He says it 'betrays an urgent but misdirected modern need to find in past art (if not past history) "logical" precedents for the unprecedented illogic of the Holocaust' (113). Whether you agree that Kafka's work was prophetic or not, as a result of the discourse that surrounds the issue, an associative link between Kafka's work and the Holocaust is established within critical discourse around McCann's work. McCann's Hunger Striker acts as an intertextual quotation, making reference to the skeletal body of Kafka's 'Hunger Artist', and therefore establishing a connection to the Holocaust.

This is one of the textual hints that work to suggest that the Lithuanian couple, Rasa and Vytis, in McCann's story have fled from the horrors of Nazi occupation. The story is narrated through the third-person and opens with 'the boy', Kevin, watching the Lithuanian couple walking their kayak down to the harbour and taking it out to sea. As Kevin observes them, their bodies become the subjects of his gaze: he remarks that 'she', Rasa, 'was rakethin' and that 'he', Vytis, 'was carrying a paunch' (41). Kevin's presence is unobtrusive to such a degree that the reader is lead to believe that it is the couple – and not Kevin – who will be the main focus of the story. The narration lasts in this omniscient manner for two pages before switching subject

and focusing on Kevin instead. In opening the story with these two figures, McCann deftly establishes an associative haunting of the text. Firstly, given the scrutinising gaze that our young narrator fixes upon these two aging bodies, particularly the rake-thin Rasa, the text sets up a connective association between the hunger strikers that haunt the title and the bodies we are presented with. The focus on the bodies of the elderly couple is later echoed in the focus on the starving body of Kevin's uncle; Kevin's thoughts are dominated by 'what his [uncle's] body might look like – the chest caved in, his arms thin, his hipbones showing through his pyjamas' (125). Secondly: why are we denied the narrative of these two elderly figures? In gesturing towards their story but refusing to tell it, McCann positions it as a ghostly parallel to the central narrative – much akin to the absent presence of the hunger striking uncle. In this way, McCann positions both the Hunger Striker's and the Lithuanian couple's stories in a similar place – haunted by the trauma of starvation.

This Lithuanian couple are highly unusual examples of immigrants to 1980s Ireland. Ireland had not yet experienced the surge in immigration that was to take place in the Celtic Tiger era, so it is natural to wonder why they are there. Vytis remarks that the couple have been living outside Lithuania for over thirty years, having wandered across Europe; given that this would mean the couple left their country in the middle of the twentieth-century, it seems likely that they fled from the horrors and instability of war-torn Europe. Even as he locates this novella in the height of the Troubles, in the midst of these disputes about nationality and territory, McCann places reminders of the fact that these sorts of troubles have been experienced by other peoples at other times. Kevin decides 'that there must be a secret between' the couple, the memory of which constantly and painfully infiltrates the present (130). When Kevin and Vytis first take the kayak out to sea, Vytis is

described as ‘walking towards days that once had been’ (100). When learning about Kevin’s uncle, Vytis remarked that ‘he too had been unhappy as a boy for a reason that no longer mattered, that his joy was now in simple things that needed no memory’ (110). Rasa’s approach to Kevin’s grief is to tell him ‘when you get older, she said, you will learn that pain is not much of a surprise’, again suggesting that they have suffered a great trauma (131). Rasa reacts with such horror to the beginnings of a tattoo on Kevin’s hand that readers might deduce that she has witnessed the tattooed identification numbers of concentration camp internees. All of these brief textual allusions combine to suggest that Rasa and Vytis have survived the Holocaust.

Through the shared experience of kayaking both the couple and Kevin are able to manage their trauma. The physicality of ‘kayaking kept the thoughts away’ and offers relief from traumas both past and present (126). Through their excursions in the kayak, Kevin and Vytis enjoy a productive experience of synthesis; ‘[t]he boy sensed he had achieved a rhythm with the old man, that there was some invisible axle that joined them, making their arms rotate at the same time, that they were part of the same machinery, and together they were distancing themselves from all other machines’ (127). The productive and common space that kayaking opens up is positioned in antithesis to the isolationist trauma of starvation that haunts them both. Kevin’s uncle dies towards the end of the novella and Kevin responds by smashing rocks against Vytis’s kayak. Despite this, McCann makes it clear that this couple will remain an essential support network for Kevin – the text ends with them watching him from their house, eyes ‘large and tender’ (143). It is no coincidence that this redemptive activity takes place at sea – away from the problems of land: territory, borders and nation states. The neutral space of the sea offers the chance to reject these in favour of fluidity in a borderless place: ‘[t]he boy felt dizzy from the vast

geography that was contained in the harbour' (103). This need to move beyond the nation-state is also gestured towards by McCann's use of the intertextual starving body, which has been, as we have explored, closely associated with specific national traumas in Ireland. McCann, through putting the violence of this trauma into dialogue with the horrors of a different violence, seeks to push past this conception of a world that articulates who has a right to belong and who doesn't. In forging intercultural connections, he rejects the rhetoric of nationalism, or a politics of racial or ethnic exclusionism.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced how some literary theorists have argued that the English realist novel of the nineteenth century was used to propagate the myth of English national unity and to make British imperial dominance seem normative. If, as Said has argued, the novel's 'main purpose is not to raise more questions, not to disturb or otherwise preoccupy attention, but to keep the empire more or less in place', then we can see why the short story found such success with writers on the fringes of the British Empire (695). While I do not intend to suggest that all novels are associated with imperialism or that all short stories are a form of anti-colonial protest, there is a formal politics to the 'writing back' of the postcolonial project. Irish writers were no exception and we might argue that their short stories, written as they are in the language of their English colonisers, can be read as pieces of Minor Literature. Returning to Thomas MacDonagh's notion of the Irish Mode, short stories may simply be a literary form that is better suited to articulating the multiplicity and porous fabric of Irish society. As such, they are pieces of Minor Literature in an Irish Mode. McCann's Northern Irish stories in *Everything in this Country Must* take the Minor Voices of children as their subjects and so the minoritarian politics of this

literature is additionally prominent. In addition to this, the short story is a particularly pertinent form for writing about the Troubles, evocative of the secrecy and 'unknowable' aspect of the North of Ireland. The assembling of stories within a collection also enables the author to engage with both sides of the sectarian divide, while recognising that these groups may not be so much interacting as co-existing; Longley writes that '[t]he population-shifts caused by the Troubles, whether involuntary or voluntary, mean fewer mixed areas' (2002: 10). To this end, multiple writers from the North and border spaces of Ireland have used the short story collection to examine the deep divides between these communities.

This chapter also discussed the relationship between literary form, particularly the short story, and oral culture. There has been some argument that Irish writers were so adept at utilising the short story form because the culture of Gaelic Ireland was less removed from its oral past than that of its more modern coloniser, Britain. In the subsequent chapter, we will examine this in greater detail, but I find this to be an unconvincing argument that, as I will illustrate, is often relayed as a means of devaluing the serious literary intent of the (Irish) short story. However, I choose to conclude this chapter with McCann's 'Hunger Strike' as it probes at the anxiety and ambivalence that troubles ideas of orality within Irish literature. It is curious that the bodies of the hunger strikers, emblems of oral space through their disciplining of ingestion, have been turned into 'intertextual quotations'. This, far from indicating that there is a great divide between pre-modern, oral culture and modern print culture, suggests that that the relationship between the two is not dichotomous but porous.

CHAPTER III: Nomadism and Storytelling in *Zoli*: oral culture, embodiment and travelling tales

Zoli (2006) is loosely based on the historical figure of Bronislawa Wajs, or Papusza (1908-1987), a Romani poet from Poland. As a member of an oral culture that was and still is largely illiterate, and also particularly reluctant to educate women, both the historical Papusza and the fictional Zoli were ostracised from their people for their role in opening up Roma culture to non-Roma society. The conclusion of our previous chapter highlighted the resonance of oral space within McCann's work and, specifically, the disciplining of oral space. His fictions exploring the North of Ireland expose not just the unnatural silences, 'where tongues lie coiled', but also how self-imposed starvation can turn the body into a weapon (Heaney 1998: 131). Beyond this, the intertextual relations established in 'Hunger Strike' between the textual codification of the Irish Famine, the Holocaust and Irish Republican Hunger Strikes (specifically the 1980/81 Long Kesh strikes), suggest anxieties surrounding textuality, corporeality and oral space. *Zoli,* too, reveals a sense of profound ambivalence regarding the relationship between the body, orality and textual modernity. This chapter will initially provide a meditation on the idea of oral space and Ireland, before proceeding to explicate these tensions within the novel. Whereas David Lloyd, as we shall explore, reads anxieties surrounding oral space as a distinctively Irish phenomenon, something that 'marks Irish difference', McCann's novel elides a purely Irish reading (2011: 2). As our previous chapter highlighted, literary form is of crucial importance to McCann's work and this chapter will argue that *Zoli* can be read as a textual meditation on oral culture. The eponymous Zoli of McCann's novel is herself a transmitter of Roma oral culture but, in addition to this, *Zoli* is a literary depiction of another oral tradition: storytelling. However, as Walter Benjamin's essay 'The

Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov' (1936) makes apparent, there are some specific although slippery distinctions between the figure of a novelist and the figure of a storyteller, even when the storyteller works with printed and not oral stories. Finally, this chapter will conclude by addressing the nomadic nature of Zoli's existence and Irish racism towards travelling peoples. In keeping with the rest of this thesis and McCann's literature, a crucial point must be made about the non-metaphorical nature of Zoli's nomadism. While much contemporary critical and postcolonial theory fetishises ideas of exile and nomadism, as highlighted in the introduction, Robbie McVeigh's concept of 'sedentarism' argues that Irish, and indeed Western culture more generally, 'pathologizes nomadic modes of existence and normalizes settled society' (Burke 6). In short, while travelling theory has reached an elite status within the academy, travelling people, such as Irish Travellers, the Roma, itinerant labourers or immigrants, are becoming increasingly vilified in the popular political and media landscapes of the contemporary world.

Ireland, Orality and Modernity

In the previous chapter, we noted how oral culture is often positioned as a precursor to the development of the short story rather than the novel. This assertion establishes something of a false dichotomy: all cultures have their roots in oral traditions and so oral culture will have left its imprints on all cultural outputs. Texts – both literary and oral – are composed of language and although, as Walter Ong suggests, 'it would seem inescapably obvious that language is an oral phenomenon', contemporary dissemination of texts is largely done through print, which we are taught to read alone and in silence (6). The primacy of orality is of central importance to the evolution of language, as Ong testifies: 'language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in the course of human

history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all' (7). These practices of reading are, however, not shared by all ethnic, national or cultural groups. Isabel Fonseca's *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and their Journey* (1996) informs us that for the nomadic Roma people, the dissemination of texts is primarily done through oral transmission. Fonseca asserts that there 'are not words in Romani proper for "to write" or "to read"'; the 'common expression' for 'to read' is '*dav opre'* which means '"I give upwards", and so the phrase may be translated "I read aloud"' (11). This suggests that reading is not an established part of Roma culture and that when Roma people do read, it is often done aloud; this makes the act of reading a form of sharing and exchange, unlike the solitary process of silent reading that is normally performed in 'settled' society in Europe and North America. This idea of orally sharing texts, and the attendant relationship that this establishes to communal identity, is something that Benjamin explores and will be discussed in greater detail later on.

Our exploration of the relationship between national culture and literary form in the previous chapter alerted us to the importance that the novel has had in the development of the nation-state within print modernity, according to Benedict Anderson. Anderson's work is testament to the centrality of print culture to our contemporary understanding of the nation-state and a necessary feature of 'modernity', in the Western European and North American vein. As discussed at multiple points throughout this thesis, this vision of 'modernity' and progress was enforced upon numerous countries through European imperial projects. A direct result of these projects, fuelled by stadial or conjectural historiography, was that forms of knowledge that did not conform to visions of this European modernity were devalued. David Lloyd argues that 'accounts of oral and literate cultures tend to be driven by a

deeply historicist norm: literacy replaces orality in the progress of human kind' (Lloyd 2011: 4). Oral traditions became associated with folklore and were discursively constructed as far removed from the Enlightened reason and progress of the natural sciences. Walter Mignolo argues that the 'colonialism of Western epistemology' has turned numerous types of knowledge, 'traditional, folkloric, religious, emotional, etc.' into 'subaltern' forms of knowledge (11). These ideas about 'subaltern' epistemologies have lingered, haunting the contemporary reception of both the short story and oral cultures as marred by the legacy of being associated with the folkloric. Lloyd continues, suggesting that 'the oral signifies the pre-modern, the primordial, and is associated with myth and folklore, forms of consciousness that lack historical sense and imply the absence of a notion of change over time if not, indeed, an inveterate resistance to progress and development' (5). Lloyd's reading of oral culture is very much filtered through an Irish paradigm, but these comments have a intercultural application; as we noted in the earlier discussion of McCann's short stories, McCann's work moves beyond any narrow national framework while still remaining informed by McCann's Irish identity. For this reason, this chapter will first ruminate on the historical relationship between Irish culture and oral space before delving into a discussion of *Zoli*.

David Lloyd outlines in *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800-2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (2011) that the 'mouth is the privileged corporeal signifier of Irish racial and cultural significance' (3). Lloyd believes that the racialisation of the Irish as part of the English/British colonial project fixated on the Irish mouth, suggesting that the 'oral thus stands as the most resonant metonym for Irish bodily culture and for the distinctive matrix of habits and practices that marks Ireland's colonial difference' (3). Lloyd suggests that the impoverished, rural and

indigenous Irish who lived in *clachan* communities were able to retain a sense of communal identity, sustained through oral traditions, that thrived despite increasing colonial efforts at modernisation on behalf of the English/British colonisers. The distinctive habits and practices include both talking and drinking to excess; the starvation of the Famine and self-imposed starvation of the Hunger Strikes; the haunting silence of a post-Famine landscape and loss of the Irish language; most troublesome of all, according to Lloyd, for the British colonial powers was the communal sense of identity – and the potential for resistance – which orality offered the Irish people[31]. While much of Lloyd's argument about the relationship between certain forms of Irish national identity and oral culture certainly holds true, it is worth noting that some of his assertions run the risk of making something exceptional and essential about Irish experience. Lloyd's focus on the centrality of the mouth as a metonym for 'Ireland's colonial difference' also poses problems that are never entirely rectified: is this fixation on the Irish mouth a product, or even internalisation, of British colonial discourse, or an 'authentic' feature of Irish identity? Although McCann elegantly sidesteps these kinds of issues, his meditation on oral culture in *Zoli* is clearly informed by the types of Irish traditions, and the complexities of the Irish relation to oral space, that Lloyd explores in his book.

Lloyd begins his study with a discussion of the Irish Famine. His first chapter explores how the mass dependency on the potato was constructed as an emblem of an Irish recalcitrance to the progress of modern agricultural systems. His second chapter turns to the legacy of the Irish Famine and its role in the destruction of the Irish language. Lloyd insists that the haunting legacy of this doubly traumatic loss, both of approximately one quarter of Ireland's population to death and migration, and the

[31] Lloyd's chapter on the Long Kesh Hunger Strikers explores this idea of orality, communal identity and resistance further (pages 116-166).

devastation to Ireland's traditional language and ways of living in the *clachan*, has been represented in Irish cultural outputs through the twinned horrors of the keening animal/human and deathly silence. McCann himself resorts to these clichéd modes of representation to depict the Famine in a section of his most recent novel, *TransAtlantic* (2013), an analysis of which will follow in the next chapter. Although Irish is still spoken in some pockets of Ireland, and forms a major part of the contemporary school curriculum, it is worth noting that Irish was not only viewed as inferior in relation to the English language of the British colonial project, but it was the language of a largely illiterate, disenfranchised and impoverished people. These reasons ensured, in addition to the damage caused by the Famine in the early-mid parts of the nineteenth century, that Irish never cemented its status as a print language in the ways that English did. How then to represent the trauma of the Famine and the oral status of Irish is something that will be discussed in the following chapter on *TransAtlantic*. That being said, the difficulties surrounding the representation of the catastrophic nature of the Famine and the loss of Irish traditional culture are of interest to us here; the tensions between oral space, trauma and textual inscription are central to *Zoli*, too.

Ireland and Colonial Modernity certainly traces a convincing lineage between ostensibly disconnected episodes of Irish history through the evolution of oral space, but it is troubled by a tension that it does not fully address: the textual encoding of both bodies, events and oral space through printed literature. Lloyd is right to assert that 'orality in Ireland is *not* a mode of existence that is surpassed and supplanted by literacy' (4; emphasis mine) – although surely orality sits alongside all national traditions – but that the two cultures sit parallel to one another. His concluding chapter argues that Beckett's *How it Is* (1961) is an 'oral text' – a piece of literature

which ‘insists on its materiality, on its physical presence and texture as breath’ (214). This way of thinking about certain types of literary texts is particularly resonant to my chapter here, with its focus on storytelling, but the materiality of this transgressive relationship between oral and print culture could be pushed further. This chapter will argue that oral tradition is a fundamentally embodied mode of culture; given that then, is there not something that could be additionally explored about the relationship between bodies and text? If the embodied experience of oral culture can be textually encoded in print, can these bodies themselves not be textually encoded and texts be figured as bodies? This chapter will examine the way in which the body becomes a liminal threshold between print and oral texts within McCann’s novel *Zoli*.

If we return once more to the bodies of the Hunger Strikers, we will remember that Heaney labelled them ‘quotations’ that made reference to a history of Irish hunger and fasts (Ellmann 14); Ellmann maintains that ‘the starving body is itself a text’ (16). As ‘quotations’, their bodies became a part of a textual inscription of history – and this textual inscription can put them into a dialogue with other historical texts. As Lloyd highlights, oral space was central to the experience of being incarcerated in Long Kesh. The prisoners learnt Irish to converse openly while also eluding the comprehension of their warders; for those who took part in the Hunger Strike, the disciplining of what didn’t go into their mouths became a political tactic. We touched upon the politicised nature of oral space in the North of Ireland in the previous chapter and the necessary need to limit one’s utterances. What is curious about this enforced silence is that it is so frequently signified by the tongue, an embodied metonym for the political and social need to discipline one’s words. In addition to the textual encoding of these Hunger Strikers bodies, they became

'quotations' for other forms of resistance movements in a transnational context,[32] their bodies themselves became a space for the production and dissemination of textual resistance. The prisoners' bodies transformed into a site for the smuggling in and out of a range of items through their bodily orifices – in the anus, foreskin, nose and mouth – 'a practice to which they gave the resonant name "bangling"' (Lloyd 146). In these bodily orifices prisoners hid 'coms, messages to and from the prisoners written in minuscule handwriting on cigarette papers and wrapped in cling film' (Lloyd 146). These messages were used to convey support from the Republican community for the prisoners and cause; they were also used to pass information from outside onto the prisoners, who transmitted this news, or *scéal*, amongst each other in Irish through their oral community of collective resistance (Lloyd 148). The oral quality of *scéal* is very much emphasised by Lloyd, as it was a 'largely unwritten and unauthoritative [form of communication], and subject to discussion and interpretation, *scéal* had the status of rumour or gossip and was transmitted in analogous ways' (148). The ability of oral culture to unite individuals into a community is important and 'the passing of *scéal*, the transmission of the voice through and along the cells of the wing, becomes a medium that deconstructs the space of each individual cell, transforming them from isolating boxes into a communicating series' (148). Lloyd articulates that the transmission of *scéal* was not a didactic but a communal process where multiple voices were involved.[33]

[32] See 'Embodied Perception and Utopian Movements: Connections across the Atlantic', Denis O'Hearn from David Lloyd and Peter D. O'Neill, ed. *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (2008), 228-243.

[33] Where Lloyd focuses on *scéal,* which formed one part of the ancient Irish oral traditions, but Denis O'Hearn suggests that the prisoners 'resurrected the Irish oral storytelling tradition of the *shanachie*' (234). *Shanchie* is an Anglicization of *seanchaí,* which is commonly interpreted as 'storyteller' even though *seanchas* is more accurately translated as 'lore'. *Scéal* translates as 'story', so *scéalaí* is the more accurate word for storyteller. However, the two are often used interchangeably. See *The Irish Storyteller*, George Denis Zimmerman (2008), 34-35 and *The Collins Irish Dictionary,* ed. Séamus Mac Mathúna and Ailbhe Ó Corráin (2005), 200 and 205.

The oral dimension of experience in Long Kesh was evidently of great importance, but Lloyd's focus on the oral distribution of *scéal* does not engage with the centrality of textual messages from outside – messages that could only be disseminated through the body. The body becomes a liminal site for the transmission of both oral and written texts, suggesting that the relationship between the two is far more transgressive than Lloyd acknowledges. The body and legacy of Bobby Sands suggests that the corporeal, textual and oral are deeply interwoven. His body has become a cultural text for artists from numerous countries and in multiple mediums, from the Chilean poet Carmen Berenger's *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro* (*Bobby Sands is fainting from hunger on the wall*) (1983); Phillip Napier's 'Ballad 1' (1992), a sculpture which consists of an automated accordion and image of Sands' face; to Steve McQueen's film *Hunger* (2008), the final third of which is entirely devoted to charting the decline of Sands' body. Bobby Sands also managed to produce texts of his own while in prison, which were collated and published as *One Day in My Life* (1982) and *Writings from Prison* (1998). Furthermore, O'Hearn maintains that Sands was 'widely regarded as the best storyteller' in Long Kesh; crucially, however, the oral culture that Sands was creating was as transnational as his legacy would become (234); Sands 'told about struggles for freedom, from the life of Geronimo to a story about a US Marine deserter from Vietnam' (234). So while Lloyd takes pains to identify the orality of the community in Long Kesh as something exceptionally Irish, he fails to register both the numerous text-based sources that informed this oral community and the transnational tales told to bolster a sense of resistance.

Thus far we have explored how oral culture can be read as both resistant to modernity and, in Irish and wider (post)colonial contexts, to imperialist

epistemologies. Elizabeth McIsaac affirms this when she claims that 'the importance of memory and oral tradition' is an essential means of 'protecting knowledge necessary for the survival of society' (93). Furthermore, she argues, '[o]ral history as a cultural practice and mode of cultural survival is also important when it comes to expressions of cultural resistance' (93). Oral culture clearly retains the potential to be subversive, and sharing stories becomes particularly important when a culture is under threat – as evidenced in both the anti-colonial resistance spaces of Long Kesh, or for an immigrant trying to remember their homeland.[34] McCann has stated that 'storytelling is the glue of a scattered people' (Garden 5). Oral culture, as an embodied epistemology, might be read as recalcitrant to colonialism, but it is also essential that an analysis of oral culture remains attuned to the relationship between oral space, the body and the corporeality of texts themselves. As we shall discover, *Zoli* resists establishing a dichotomy between literacy and orality, instead emphasising the materiality of bodies, knowledge and textual inscription of the corporeal.

Embodied epistemologies: orality, the body as text and text as body

Oral culture, and particularly storytelling, is an embodied form of knowledge. Both oral and print cultures are consistently permeated, or even troubled, by the presence of the other. The analysis of the Long Kesh prisoners suggested that the body is refigured as a liminal threshold through which oral *and* print culture is received and given meaning; both oral and written texts are intimately connected to the corporeal. What this understanding of textuality, oral or print, articulates is that our perception of the world is a deeply embodied process that is intimately connected to our experience of being in the world. *Zoli* reveals an ambivalent anxiety over print and oral culture's

[34] As noted by March-Russell and referenced in the previous chapter, 'oral narrative remains a means for displaced peoples to reconnect with their submerged histories, and to comment upon their experience of emigration and exile' (March-Russell 29).

symbiotic relationship, which is always mediated through the body, and in so doing, unsettles the binary dialectics and 'transcendental assumptions' that have shaped classical Western philosophy (Braidotti 2). McCann achieves this through both the thematics and content of the novel, and his shaping of narrative voice and form: a literary version of the oral tradition of storytelling. The novel opens in Slovakia in 2003 with a journalist, Dávid Smolenek, entering a Roma settlement in an attempt to learn details about the life of the poet and songwriter Zoli Novotna; this lasts for 11 pages. Zoli's narration begins on page 15 and immediately McCann begins to subvert the boundary between the written and the oral. Zoli's narrative begins when she is 'six years old' and we learn, a few lines later, that this story is told for Zoli's daughter (McCann 2006: 15). Note how Zoli's written (indeed, print) narration instantly informs us that 'I *tell* this to you directly, there is no other way to *say* it' (15; emphasis mine). McCann's/Zoli's print narrative not only privileges the language of speech but also imitates the traditions of storytelling in which the teller informs the listener of details about the nature of the story. Conventionally, this would involve a sentence or two about the tale's origin, but given that this story is Zoli's, she can only tell it 'directly'. McCann's/Zoli's printed narrative therefore takes on the character of an oral story; in deploying standard tropes from oral storytelling, Zoli's narrative 'insists on its materiality, on its physical presence and texture as breath' (Lloyd 214). This textual translation of storytelling motifs becomes what Lloyd has labelled an 'oral text' (214). This intermingling of oral and printed cultures not only highlights the role of embodiment to epistemology, but it also asserts the materiality of the book itself. Zoli's narrative becomes Zoli's voice: the book 'speaks' to us. This corresponds to Roma culture of textual transmission where, as we noted earlier, the

Roma expression for 'to read' is comparable to 'I read aloud' (Fonseca 11); Zoli claims 'that a good book always needed a listener' (McCann 23).

In addition to her privileging of speech, Zoli also makes evident the import of her other senses to her cognition; in recounting the murder of her parents, siblings and cousins by Hlinka guards, she says 'I did not see any of it happen, daughter, but I could hear it in my mind' (15). Again, this retelling not only privileges the oral (note the use of 'hear' rather than, the more common and privileged within Western culture, 'see'), but it reaffirms that her relationship to the environment and history can only be negotiated through her own body. Her cognition is intimately interwoven with her corporeality, as demonstrated through the attention paid to her senses; history and memory are composed by sensual constructs. This focus on the embodied nature of cognition provides essential context for McCann's fiction, and *Zoli* in particular. McCann himself claims that his 'work spins around the body' and that he 'like[s] the idea that the movement of the body is reflective of the movement of the mind' (Garden 14). In keeping with the thread of (post)colonial aesthetics that we can trace throughout McCann's prose, this privileging of corporeal experience over the rationality associated with the enlightened mind also works to challenge the binary relationship between imperial epistemologies and 'subaltern' epsitemologies. McCann's investment in embodied experience transgresses the boundary between print and oral culture; Zoli's fate – she is exiled from her people – ultimately suggests unease with the print culture of modernity. Clear evidence for this can be seen early in the novel, when Zoli recounts her experience of being 'documented' when she and her grandfather, Stanislaus, arrived at Poprád because 'all Romani children had to be examined' (26). As part of this examination, Zoli has her nose measured, as well as 'the distance between [her] eyes' and the 'the length of her hands' (27). The clerk also

takes a set of Zoli's fingerprints in 'black ink'; in an attempt to remove the 'black' of the 'fingerprint ink', Zoli 'sucked at [her] fingers' (29). This act outrages Stanislaus, who chastises her by claiming that a 'respectful girl keeps her insides clean […] don't bring that ink down into your belly' (29). Stanislaus's anger could be a result of the strict hygiene rules that govern Roma culture and a fear that Zoli will become *mahrime,* or ritually unclean; indeed, this incident is a moment of proleptic irony that foreshadows Zoli's later expulsion from the Roma people after her oral songs and poems are printed and she is accused of revealing Roma secrets to the *gadže* (non-Roma). His worry about Zoli ingesting ink may also be inflected with an element of patriarchal sexism, especially in his emphasis on her keeping her 'insides clean', and therefore indicative of a culture that venerates female chastity. Although Zoli's grandfather firmly upholds some Roma ideas about gendered behaviour – note how 'he slapped [Zoli's] face twice' after she cuts her long hair because 'it was against our laws' – we should remember that it is her grandfather who teaches Zoli to read (17). This fear of Zoli's literal consumption of the written word is indicative of a deep mistrust of ink and the print culture it represents. In addition to his anxiety that Zoli might internalise the culture associated with that of the settled, *gadže* peoples, we could argue that print culture, represented by ink, is a metaphor for the instruments of European modernity. This metaphor is given real potency when set in the context of this scene: Zoli is having her measurements taken, as are 'all the Gypsy children', as part of a fascist eugenics project (29).[35] Another incident like this is repeated a few pages later in the novel, when a Roma woman, a renowned harpist and singer, is taken by the Hlinkas 'to the back of a bookshop' (45). Here, surrounded by tokens of the

[35] Poprád is located in contemporary Slovakia. The Slovak lands within pre-partition Czechoslovakia did not come under Nazi rule during WWII but 'it hardly mattered, the Hlinkas were just like the Gestapo, except they wore different badges' (McCann 43). The Hlinka Guard, the militia of the Slovak People's Party, were largely in sympathy with Nazi ideology; they helped with the 1942 deportation of Slovakian Jews to Auschwitz.

rationality and wisdom of European modernity, the Hlinka Guards pull out the woman's fingernails 'one by one' (45). As a result, the woman will 'never be able to pluck the harp again' (46). The violent intrusion of modernity, represented through the twinned metaphors of the Hlinkas and the bookshop, silences this traditional Roma oral culture[36] through wounding the woman's fingers.

The complexity of this anxiety is heightened if we return again to the idea of Zoli consuming print culture through her mouth; like the Long Kesh prisoners discussed earlier, Zoli's body becomes a threshold for both oral and print culture. Just as these prisoners used their mouths (and other orifices) for the reception and subsequent dissemination of written texts, Zoli's attempt to ingest the ink off her fingers performs a similar action of bringing her body into dialogue with print culture through the traditional metonym for orality: the mouth. The body is conflated with both oral and print culture at numerous points throughout the novel. Zoli refers to 'Eliška, a Polish woman with hair as black as thumbprints' (31). Note how the ink that was earlier associated with print culture is now inseparably intertwined with the body: Eliška's hair is not as black as ink, but as the ink on thumbs. McCann blurred the boundaries between print and oral culture through Zoli's putting ink in her mouth; here, and elsewhere, in the novel he does a similar thing with fingers and hands. For in addition to Eliška having 'hair as black as thumbprints', she is also a celebrated singer within their *kumpanija* (community of families travelling together); while McCann constructs Eliška as a key figure within the oral culture of Roma life, he draws attention to the hands and their role in the creation of print materials. McCann's textual portrait of Eliška positions her as emblematic of oral traditions and links her to

[36] The harp is also emblematic of traditional oral culture in Ireland too, particularly the pre-sixteenth century elite culture of patrons and Chieftains. After the Flight of the Chieftains (or the Earls), these harpists became travelling or 'itinerant' harpists. See also 'The Harp as a Palimpest of Cultural Memory', Mary Helen Thuente, from *Memory Ireland: History and Modernity*, ed. Oona Frawley, 52-63.

the materiality of print culture: fingertips rendered black from the production of printed texts. This being said, even as Eliška's hair becomes illustrative of print, it is also interwoven with the oral; she combs her hair with a 'fine enamel brush' that she 'found' in 'a theatre in Krakow' which belonged to 'a famous actress who could be heard on the radio' (31). However, Eliška – and McCann – attest to the privileged role of live oral culture, rather than its radio transmission, when she claims 'who needs a radio when you have Eliška!' (31). Again, McCann interlaces oral and print cultures through the hybrid medium of the human body; the hands that are used to produce print culture become marked by their interactions with it, which taints textuality, ostensibly abstract and transcendent, with the materiality of the corporeal. If we return to the incident in the bookshop, note how the transmission of oral culture, associated with the mouth, is obstructed by the damage done to the woman's fingers, which are traditionally associated with print culture and the practice of writing.

Zoli consistently emphasises both the material and corporeal nature of books, and twins the corporeality of print culture and language to the human body. In McCann's novel, the book itself is fashioned as a physical body that can be broken and reassembled. Stanislaus owns a copy of *Das Kapital*, 'his only book', and he had torn off its cover and 'stitched another cover on' (23). The value placed on stitching and sewing by McCann is something that will become apparent as we progress with our analysis; the stitching together of printed matter, rather than gluing, is a labour-intensive process that forces an embodied relationship with the material object of the book. It may also connote of the stitching of wounds in human flesh. This not only highlights the physical properties of the book as object – and its potential to be deceptive, hidden behind a façade – but also contests the notion that books, and their contents, are inherently fixed and stable in their meaning. McCann attests to the

problematic nature of interpretation when he follows up this statement about the physical malleability of books with Zoli's questioning of her grandfather's relationship to *Das Kapital*: 'I'm not sure […] if he ever got a lot of meaning from the pages, they confused him as much as they finally confused others' (23). Part of this act, on Stanislaus's behalf, is entirely pragmatic; as noted before, the Roma are suspicious of literacy: 'there was still talk of punishment for my grandfather because not only did he send me to school, but sometimes he sat in the open now, reading his book' (41). This suspicion does not dissipate over the course of Zoli's life and in her adulthood (pre-expulsion), 'when she was with the kumpanjia she sewed pages [from books] into the lining of her coat, or deep in the pockets of her dresses' (106; notice again the act of *sewing* the pages into her clothes). Curiously, McCann reasserts the corporeality of the book, a body of text that can be fragmented and reassembled, while he focuses on the sensuality of Zoli's own body. The 'lining of her coat' consisted of 'an early Neruda' collection, 'in Slovak', so that as 'she moved along, [she had] lovesongs at her hip' (107). Pablo Neruda's work is famously erotic and so the gathering of these pages alongside Zoli's hip, a particularly suggestive part of her body, amplifies the printed text through Zoli's embodied reassemblage of the book. This segment of the novel is narrated by Swann, a half-Slovakian, half-Irish man (he was also bought up in England – one of McCann's many restless and displaced figures) who is in love with his own idealised version of Zoli and largely responsible for the printing of her poems and songs. His narration informs us that he 'learned whole poems so that [he] could whisper them to her if [they] chanced on a moment alone' (107). McCann privileges the intermingling of oral and printed texts as mediated through the liminality of the body. Swann memorises the printed words of Neruda, associated with the sensuality of Zoli's body, so that he can attempt to seduce

her; these attempts appear to be successful, given the final sentence of this paragraph: 'when [Zoli] dropped her coat to the floor, she immediately got slimmer' (107). Similarly, Zoli also associates print with a degree of sensuality: on reminiscing about her former lover Swann, she remembers that his skin tasted like 'sweat' and 'ink' (181).

McCann also notes that many printed texts are actually formed of corporeal matter – although animal, not human. At one point in the novel, Zoli voices anxiety that the printed books of her poems and songs might be bound with horse glue: Zoli 'asked Stránksý and the Englishman Swann not to put the few pages of my first poems together with glue, rather to stitch them with thread' (49). She is particularly worried that the glue used in the binding may have come from her deceased horse, Red, and remarks that she 'could not stand the notion of the glue of Red travelling along the spine of the book, leaning down to things so foreign to her' (50). Her language connects animal, textual and human corporeal matter; the horse's name combined with the fluidity of glue suggests the red liquid of blood; the skeletal structure of the 'spine' is shared amongst all three. Blood is something that McCann connects with printed books on numerous occasions; earlier, we explored how the harpist had her fingernails pulled out in a bookshop. McCann constructs associations between the violence of the Hlinka guards, the bookshop and 'her hands [that] were streaming blood' (45): we could read the bookshop that houses this violence as emblematic of the bloodshed that marked European history in the twentieth century. At a later point in the novel, the secretive nature of Zoli's literacy forces her into 'writing things down […] on any paper [she] could find' (50). One source for her was 'brown butcher sheets', of which she had to 'dr[y] them out until the bloodstains were faint' (50). Again, this implicates actual corporeal matter in the production of written

texts; it might also suggest connections between the 'red rags' that mark Zoli's entrance to 'womanhood' that have been introduced on the previous page (48). The onset of menstruation for Zoli and of the ostensible sexual maturity that this signals requires that 'pebbles' are 'sewed' into the 'hem of [her] dresses to weigh them down' (48); although the purpose of this is not exactly clear, it may be to ensure that Zoli avoids 'the touch of [her] skirt' making contact with a male, for it 'could dirty a man', or it may be to act as a deterrent for 'boy[s]' who 'might take advantage' (48). Either way, the stitching of items into her skirts becomes associated with her burgeoning sexuality – she 'knew that soon it would be time to walk under the linden blossoms with a husband' – in the same vein that her stitching pages of Neruda's poetry into her dress as an adult is also associated with her sexuality (48). Within the novel, the physical, tangible quality of the printed word and the book is frequently interwoven with the corporeal matter of human experience.

In addition to the focus on the book as a corporeal object linked to embodied experience, the novel constantly positions language and print culture as a material object associated with the body. We noted above that ink becomes personified: it becomes 'black as thumbprints' (31). When Zoli is given a pencil by Stránksý, 'she put the end of it against her teeth, and held it there, as if it were describing her' (79); again, notice that the metonym for orality – the mouth – is put into dialogue with that of print culture – the pencil and hands. The use of the word 'describing' also hints at the problematic nature of representation within the novel; specifically, the representation of Zoli's voice and, ultimately, the oral culture that she comes from. In holding the pencil up to her mouth, Zoli's action prefigures the later instances in the novel where print culture or the written word will 'speak' for her on behalf of her oral culture. McCann establishes an interesting dynamic between language and the

animate human body; when Zoli gains confidence with her writing, Swann's narration articulates that she was 'beginning to move and stretch the language' (94). Later in the novel, Zoli remarks upon Swann and the 'syntax in his body' (134). Once again, McCann blurs the boundaries between the textual and the corporeal; while the novel remains heavily invested in the embodied nature of storytelling and oral culture, McCann also highlights how our experience of texts and print culture are always mediated through the body. In previous (and subsequent) chapters, we explored how the nomadic thought of Rosi Braidotti forms a useful conceptual framework for thinking about McCann's prose. The quotations from *Zoli* examined earlier illustrate many of the key facets of Braidotti's thought, which 'stresses the idea of embodiment' – something that can clearly be mapped onto McCann's privileging of both human and animal corporeality and oral culture (Braidotti 2011: 2). Zoli's fashioning of book and print culture also provides evidence for 'the embodied and embedded material structure' of the allegedly non-physical, abstract realm of print modernity (2). This corresponds with 'the emphasis [in] nomadic thought […] on bodily materialism [which] goes far in dispelling the transcendental assumptions of classical philosophy' (2). Braidotti views the focus on 'materialism' in her philosophy as something 'that unifies mind and body in a new approach that blurs all boundaries' (2). In emphasising the physical and material properties of the book and printed epistemologies, McCann paints the relationship between oral and print cultures as a transgressive one that resists constructing a simple dichotomy between the two.

We could read this indistinct boundary between print and oral cultures as a comment on the problematic nature of authorship and representation for such marginalised voices as those of the Roma. Writing about Irish Travellers in an article entitled, 'A Discourse on Nomadism: Travellers and Irish Writing' (2008), Paul

Delaney argues that, due to the high levels of illiteracy and the primacy of orality amongst Traveller communities, 'authorship' of texts by Irish Travellers is a complex issue. In a discussion about Nan Joyce's autobiography, *Traveller* (1985), Delaney notes that 'Joyce's acknowledgement [that she dictated her autobiography to her editor draws] subtle attention to the complexities which mark the relationship between herself, the editor and the text of her life story' (240). Although the Roma and Irish Travellers are distinct ethnic groups, Delaney's thoughts on the ambiguity of authorship could well apply to Zoli's work too. The songs and poems that become 'her' work are actually heavily drawn from a communal oral culture. It is Stránksý and Swann who actually turn Zoli's oral texts into written and subsequently printed texts; Stránksý also manipulates Zoli's voice, 'reworked her poems, added words' (124). He accuses Zoli of being 'formalistic and bourgeois', qualities that do not fit with his vision of what the Roma are and how they should be represented (124). He does not want her work to 'dazzle with any astonishing thought', or display intellect or reason, but instead appeal to emotion, 'to make one single moment of existence unforgettable' (124). Like the work of Nan Joyce, we might read the co-existence of oral and print within *Zoli* as McCann's recognition that the 'authorship of stories' and texts by Zoli 'is not necessarily clear-cut, as these stories have been transcribed and edited by others, and bear the traces of those editors who have translated the narrator's words from one medium into another' (Delaney 240).

These anxieties about orality, literacy and Zoli's relationships to them culminate across several pages in the middle of the novel, following her official banishment from the Roma. After being 'sentenced […] to Pollution for Life in the Category of Infamy for the Betrayal of Roma Affairs to the Outsiders', Zoli begins on an extensive walk from Czechoslovakia into Hungary and Austria before eventually

settling in Italy (147). As if a material punishment for her speaking out of turn, one of Zoli's teeth becomes infected: 'her mouth feels riven, her jaw huge' (147). McCann dwells on this physical pain, which becomes twinned with Zoli's grief for the loss of her people and culture – 'the pain shoots along her jaw, to her neck, her shoulder blades, her arms, her fingers' (147). Aware that Zoli needs to remove the infected tooth to avoid additional complications, 'she reaches for the tooth with the tip of her tongue, rocks it back and forth, waiting for the roots to snap' (147). While seeking shelter and hiding in a shed that she comes across, it becomes apparent that the tooth will not come out naturally and Zoli realises that she has to take out the tooth herself. She uses the lace of an abandoned boot that she finds to create a hook to pull out the tooth and as a result of this self-performed surgery, 'she feels the roots being dragged up from the bottom of her jawbone' (159). Again, note how the use of 'roots' suggests an unnatural and violent expulsion, much like the one Zoli has just experienced. In Chapter Two, we noted that Gilroy suggests that in the transcultural, transnational experience of the African diaspora (both forced and voluntary), instead of privileging a form of identity invested in 'roots', we should rather view 'identity as a process of movement and meditation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym *routes*' (1993: 19; emphasis mine). Where identity has been deeply shaped by experiences of travel or dislocation, one's roots may well be their routes. For Zoli, her nomadic roots are characterised by routes, but her expulsion from the Roma signals the end of her communal nomadism and the beginning of an uprooted displacement. The painful breaking of roots suggested here through the infected tooth indicates that the routes of her new nomadism will be marked by trauma.

When the tooth eventually comes loose, 'a sound rips through her jawbone like the tearing of paper, and the tooth lifts' (160). Once more we find the apparatus of

textual culture linked into human corporeality. A few days after this, Zoli encounters the farmer who owns the shed where she has sought shelter and his mother. His mother demands to know if Zoli is travelling with a larger group of Roma; when Zoli says she is alone, the older woman refuses to believe her and says, 'I can swallow hot rocks easier than I can the word of a Gypsy' (165). Even as an exiled Romani woman, Zoli's access to language and the right to speak is negated by her social status. Look also, though, at how McCann chooses to construct this woman's response: it is yet again related to the oral. Finally, the farmer who has allowed Zoli to seek refuge in his shed has been able to keep it a secret from his unwelcoming mother because 'he's mute' (166). When Zoli leaves this temporary shelter and begins her walk once more, she turns around to see the farmer, who 'grins and extends his hand: in his palm rolls the white and dark of Zoli's gone tooth' (167). If Zoli's rotten tooth is meant to function as a metaphor for her unruly mouth, perhaps the relationship that develops between herself and the man of 'tall and lumbering silence' is intended to construct a solidarity between the two (167)? The final image of him is of 'the farmer still looking fondly over his shoulder' towards Zoli (167). But is the act of stealing Zoli's tooth not an intrusion on the intimacies of her body; does it not perform some kind of fixation on orality and her suffering? The effect is, like so many other moments from the novel, curiously ambivalent; the grinning farmer, armed with a 'gun against his leg', smiling fondly but keeping hold of her gore stained tooth, 'dark and rotten at its base, the roots clotted and fibrous' (160).

Storytelling as subaltern; narrative voice and sharing; speech and silencing

Thus far, this chapter has explored how oral and print cultures are not mutually exclusive, but co-exist as filtered through the corporeal threshold of the body. We have touched upon the role and importance of storytelling within oral traditions and

have begun to discuss how the orality of storytelling might be transposed into a printed text. McCann himself frequently highlights the investment that he has placed in 'storytelling' as a mode of expression – the personal interview that forms an appendix to this thesis contains multiple references to this – but there has been little critical effort to define where and how storytelling differs from any other form of literature or type of narrative voice. Although it is certainly true that storytelling is a traditional oral art form and, therefore, an embodied mode of culture, it is also a narrative form that can be found in the work of 'writers', loosely defined.

Walter Benjamin is one of the few cultural critics to have written about literary storytelling, which he does by examining the role of storytelling within the work of the nineteenth-century Russian novelist and short story writer, Nikolai Leskov. As would be expected, Benjamin asserts that storytelling is an oral tradition, but he also highlights the significance of experience within the craft of storytelling; he argues that 'experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn' (84). Writing between the two World Wars, Benjamin contends that oral storytelling has lost its resonance because, after the horrors of WWI, individuals shied away from a communal sharing of experience: 'men returned from the battlefield [of WWI] grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience' (84). The communal nature of storytelling, versus the solitary nature of reading, and in particular, reading the novel, is of central importance to Benjamin's essay. Benjamin defines storytelling as a craft tradition constructed by people 'interacting with one another' and that from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, 'we are no longer familiar with this practice' (107). He writes that 'a storyteller takes what he tells from experience', whether it be 'his own or that reported by others' and then 'in turn makes it the experience of those who are

listening to his tale' (87). Benjamin makes some attempts to clarify how exactly the differences between a novelist and a storyteller manifest themselves in print; after all, Leskov, the essay's central subject and 'storyteller', was not an oral practitioner but a print storyteller. Benjamin argues that material that 'can be handed on orally' is of a fundamentally 'different kind from what constitutes the stock in trade of the novel' (87). According to Benjamin, where the storyteller retells stories from experiences (first- or second-hand), the novelist elects to grapple with more complex matter. The novel is composed of the sort of questions and narratives that cannot be disseminated through oral sharing; 'to write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life' (87). We may deduce that, for Benjamin, the storyteller provides stories of experience with the aim of opening up a communal dialogue; the novelist is focused on the pursuit of a solitary, interior investigation.

Benjamin implies that a key distinction between the work of a storyteller and the work of a novelist is the textual construction of communal space. He asserts that 'a great storyteller will always be rooted in the people' and that 'this includes' peoples from 'the rural, the maritime, and the urban elements' (100). This communal aspect to the craft of storytelling is an integral feature of live storytelling practices. Michael Jackson asserts that 'in storytelling events, the effacement of the boundary between private and public space is commonly lived through as a physical, sensual, and vital interaction between the body of the storyteller and the bodies of the listeners, in which people reach out toward one another, sitting closely together, singing in unison, laughing or crying as one' (28). This communal element of storytelling – both live and textual – is juxtaposed against the solitary practices of reading and writing novels: 'the reader of a novel, however, is isolated' (Benjamin 99). Where a man

‘listening to a story is in the company of a storyteller; even a man reading [a story rather than a novel] shares this companionship’ (99). David Lloyd has also pitched the communal spirit of oral tradition against print culture, asserting that ‘literacy induces individuation and interiorization, putting an end to the communal forms of oral culture’ (2011: 5). The novel and Western practices of reading focus on the isolation of a solitary individual, whereas storytelling is about the sharing of a space, experience and ideas within a communal environment. As an oral tradition, storytelling is a social form of narrative. In the historical oral cultures of both Gaelic Ireland and Scotland, storytelling was frequently part of the activities that took place in the *céilí* (Scots Gaelic is *cèilidh*) house. This was a place where local and travelling men would meet to share stories, songs and music. The *céilí* tradition encouraged not just a multiplicity of voices, but a reciprocity of voices based on the sharing of stories: you gave a story and received one in return.

The paratextual information within all of McCann’s works of fiction generously acknowledges a multitude of inspirations, literary and otherwise, that shape his work. In *Zoli*’s acknowledgements, at the end of the novel, McCann begins by claiming that ‘we get our voices from the voices of others’ and ends his first paragraph by testifying that ‘our stories are created from a multiplicity of witness’ (355). McCann uses the paratext to illustrate that his literature is created through from a collection of sources. *Zoli* opens with a dedication to McCann’s wife, three children and ‘to librarians everywhere’. Curiously enough, while his dedications page highlights the important role that printed texts have had upon the construction of *Zoli*, the subsequent page of preface quotations contains words from the Algerian journalist and writer Tahar Djaout, which privilege the role of the voice: ‘If you keep quiet, you die. If you speak, you die. So speak and die’. Again, we find the intermingling of the

orality and textuality that shapes the novel itself. Gérard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), argues that this indeterminate quality is the nature of the paratext, asserting that 'more than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold' (1-2). McCann's use of paratextual information certainly negates a fixed reading of his literature, opening his fiction up for numerous interpretations (the preface page to *Zoli* contains three different quotations from different authors). McCann himself has spoken extensively about the importance that he invests in storytelling, remarking that he is particularly drawn to the 'democratic notion of storytelling' (Garden 9). He suggests that, 'with storytelling there need be no regard for borders, no regard for boundaries, no regard for wealth: everyone has a story' and in this way, 'storytelling is the purest form of democracy that we have' (Garden 9). McCann values the stories of 'the ordinary person'; the role of the storyteller or 'the fiction writer', for him, is to go and 'discover the value of that supposedly anonymous life and then insert it into that larger historical narrative' (Garden 9). McCann clearly envisions the role of the storyteller as being 'rooted in the people', like Benjamin. Both seek to valorise the 'material, human life' and seek to 'fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, unique way' (Benjamin 107).

Thinking about the differences in narrative style and literary form could be a productive way of assessing how exactly print storytelling functions. McCann's narrative style, as elaborated on at numerous points throughout this thesis, is dialogic – created through multiple voices. He assembles various voices together through interconnecting narratives, resulting in the textual creation of communal space that Benjamin finds so essential to the work of the storyteller. Within *Zoli*, however, McCann utilises the tradition of 'retelling' from oral traditions; both Zoli's stories,

‘Czechoslovakia 1930s – 1949’ and ‘Compeggio, Northern Italy 2001’ and Swann’s story ‘England – Czechoslovakia 1930s – 1959’ are retellings of their own histories. These stories, as the dates indicate, overlap, and these stories end up being retellings of the same set of events from different perspectives. Fittingly enough, given the previous chapter’s focus on the short story, Benjamin articulates that ‘the evolution’ of the short story means that its previous ties to ‘oral tradition’ have been lessened: ‘that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings’ (92). This process is central to McCann’s textual project of storytelling: ‘to make sense’ of history, McCann states, we must ‘retell’ the ‘story over again’ (Garden 9). McCann believes that the sharing of stories can destabilise the traditional historical narrative, ‘for centuries we’ve told stories as if only one of them exists, but so many of them exist’ (Garden 9). His articulation that ‘every story is many stories’ returns us to what Benjamin believes is storytelling’s power to open up communal space; the sharing of stories of experience offers solace for others.

This act of sharing stories and different voices and experiences offers up a chance not just for the creation of empathy, a key feature of McCann’s work, but also, an engagement with Otherness. In *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity* (2002), Michael Jackson claims that ‘stories may confound or call into question our ordinarily taken for granted notions of identity and difference, and so push back and pluralise our horizons of knowledge’ (25). In sharing her own story, Zoli invites the reader to engage with her happy childhood (although marked by trauma at the hands of the Hlinkas), thereby encouraging empathy and understanding for one of the most marginalised groups in Europe, the Roma. *Zoli*

goes some way in introducing the reader to the misunderstood culture of the Roma and ‘traversing the borderlands that ordinarily demarcate different social domains’ (25). McCann’s assemblage of narrative voices includes those that are unfamiliar with Roma culture, including the journalist, Dávid Smolenek, who enters a Roma camp seeking to write an article about Zoli in ‘Slovakia 2003’, the novel’s opening section (there is another section focusing on him later on in the novel with the same title). Although Dávid acknowledges his own naivety surrounding Roma culture – ‘he is, he thinks, every idiot who has ever walked this way’ (5) – he has still been conditioned by popular consensus to be wary of the Roma. He labels their living environment ‘a terrible shitscape’ and notes that ‘what he carries: two bottles [of alcohol], notepad, pencil, cigarettes, instamatic camera, and tiny recorder, [are] all hidden away deep in his clothes’ (3, 5). This is not to say that the Roma are not adept at shaping their own narrative for contemporary media consumption; they tell him ‘all the things they know a journalist wants to hear’ and he suggests that ‘even the Gypsies have soundbites […] – *racism, integration, schooling, Roma rights, discrimination*’ (9; emphasis McCann’s). It is key to note though, how he labels them Gypsies – a term many Roma people refute – and that the use of italics suggests that these words, taken from the twenty-first century discourse of inclusionary politics, are unnatural and alien to them. Dávid is struck by ‘how foreign’ the Roma are to him, ‘how distant, how dark-skinned’ (7). This section contrasts greatly with both Zoli’s and Swann’s narratives, whereby the reader is encouraged to empathise with the violence inflicted upon the Roma by the Hlinkas and, later, the Communist government’s move to forcibly settle the Roma in government housing. This ‘programme to enforce the settlement’ of Roma people became known as ‘the Great Halt’ in Poland and ‘similar legislation [was] adopted in Czechoslovakia (1958), in Bulgaria (1958), and in

Romania (1962), as the vogue for forced assimilation gathered momentum' (Fonseca 7, 8). Readers who may have had similar feelings to the journalist upon beginning the novel will surely no longer feel the same by the end.

McCann's layering of different perspectives also performs another central feature of storytelling: the subversion of society's standardised narratives and norms. For, as Michael Jackson claims, 'although the stories that are approved or made canonical in any society tend to reinforce extant boundaries, storytelling also questions, blurs, transgresses, and even abolishes these boundaries' (25). As noted earlier, Zoli's own narratives form an important counterpoint to the conventional level of prejudice that the Roma are usually associated with; conventions that construct the discursive framework with which the novel opens. The multiple narratives of storytelling's formal structure – and the generous spirit with which these are shared – allow the listener/reader to transgress the limits of their own knowledge and experience (the sharing of experience being the defining feature of Benjamin's concept of storytelling). Jackson suggests that 'storytelling mediates our relation with worlds that extend beyond us', and draws our attention to 'how narrative enables us to negotiate an existential balance between ourselves and such spheres of otherness' (23). Like the majority of McCann's fiction, *Zoli* is a meditation on home, belonging and displacement, and how to engage with those beyond the remits of our own experience. It is also his most acute commentary on borders, boundaries and thresholds; the transgressive nature of storytelling befits his thematic concerns. As we illustrated above, storytelling, as an oral tradition, is a resistant mode of culture: as an embodied epistemology, it has a transgressive quality that can subvert colonial control or society's normative narratives. The textual figuration of storytelling retains these transgressive and subversive qualities, as the discussion of storytelling makes clear:

sharing multiple perspectives and experiences traverses the boundary between self and Other, facilitating a sense of both empathy and community.

Despite the redemptive intent of McCann's novel, Zoli herself demonstrates an ambivalence towards words and stories, the value – or not – of the written word, and an anxiety over whose voice is validated and whose is marginalised. José Lanters draws attention to 'how difficult it is to speak about a minority from a hegemonic perspective without coming close to patronizing the very people to whom the author seeks to defer' (2008b: 40). Lanters points to the silences within the novel, noting how it is striking, for example, that when Zoli gains fame as a respected singer, poet and storyteller, that it is not Zoli but Swann who narrates this section. She also mentions that in fictionalising the real story of Papusza through Zoli, McCann avoids speaking for, or on behalf of, Papusza. In an interview with Michael Hayes, McCann addressed directly how important he felt it was that he didn't attempt to speak for Papusza, given that she felt that her work and words were exploited by Jerzy Ficowski (fictionalised by McCann through two characters, Swan and Stránksý), a Polish poet who was responsible for publishing Papusza's poems. Swann eventually does publish Zoli's poems despite her opposition and this moment of betrayal provides additional impetus for the Roma suspicion of literacy. These poems are used by the government as further fuel for the forced resettlement of the Roma and Zoli realises that she has 'sold [her] voice […] to the arguments of power' (McCann 154). Through this act, McCann also illustrates how others are so keen to speak on behalf of the Roma and manipulate their situation to suit their own ends; we have already noted how Stránksý 'delved into Zoli's work and reworked her poems, added words and fixed rhymes' (124).

However, Lanters also suggests that 'McCann provides a number of crucial instances in Zoli where rhetoric about the Roma dissolves into, or is juxtaposed with, stunned silence' when characters realise the true desperation the Roma face (43). Lanters leads us to a moment at the end of Dávid Smolenk's second section, where he is confronted with the Romani 'man addicted to huffing paint thinner, the woman unhinged by desperation, the children starving' and as a consequence, he 'is robbed of his ability to comment meaningfully on their condition' (Lanters 43). In McCann's words, '[Dávid] narrated a brief line into his tape recorder and played it back to himself: it was empty and stupid and he erased it' (214). Zoli herself questions the power of the written word in the face of devastation, 'as if books could stop the massacres' (183). She also remembers when Stránksý 'told her, years ago, that only poetry was capable of capturing the true horrors of human consciousness, but she had doubted that idea immediately' (186). This, though, is juxtaposed with another moment where Swann remarks that 'it is astounding how terrifying words can be. No act is too shallow so long as we give it a decent name' (139). However, despite Zoli's questioning of the written word, she is aware that her voice is censored; she says 'they cut our [the Roma's] tongues and make us speechless and then they try to get an answer from us' (255). This silencing, Zoli suggests, is rooted in fear: for 'so many of us have spent our lives armed with little more dangerous than song' (255). Despite this ambivalence around the role and value of words, Zoli notes that 'you can die of madness […] but you can also die of silence' (251). Of course, McCann is in many ways giving Zoli a voice, but Lanters argues that he avoids, or 'refus[es] to speak for Zoli' (39). The novel ends with Zoli agreeing to sing at a conference on Roma culture and memory organised by her daughter; the final sentence is: 'She begins' (353). Lanters suggests that in these final moments, the novel ends as 'Zoli's authentic

voice, “the secret of it”, rings out in a space beyond representation’ (Lanters 40; McCann: 96).

Sedentarism, Irish Racism and Irish Travellers

The previous sections of the chapter have explored some of the various transgressive elements within *Zoli*; section II explored the body as a liminal threshold for the reception of both oral and print culture; and section III noted the potentially transgressive nature of storytelling, in both its oral and print manifestations. Both of these sections have touched upon the limits of borders and boundaries in various guises and *Zoli*’s attempts to subvert these. The transgressive nature of the text’s national identity is of interest here, particularly as McCann has stated that he wanted the novel to make his ‘most complicated statement about exile’ (Hayes). Clearly the novel is concerned with the nomadic Roma people; the novel’s historical inspiration, Papusza, actually lived all her life in Poland, but McCann’s Zoli is Czechoslovakian; the novel travels across Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, Italy and France. McCann has also stated that ‘*Zoli* is an Irish novel. How can it be anything else? I’m an Irish writer’ (Hayes). McCann’s Irishness, he says, has led ‘people [to ask] why [he] didn’t write about the Irish Travellers’, and he explains that he did not because he felt that there were others who were better placed to do this than him (Hayes). Given that the Irish Travellers and the Roma are the two largest and best-known groups of nomadic people within Europe, it is entirely possible that McCann’s own knowledge of travelling cultures from his Irish upbringing may have meant that the Roma held additional appeal for him. In a piece entitled ‘The Specificity of Irish Racism’ (1992), Robbie McVeigh suggests that, although it has been frequently debated whether it is possible that ‘Irish people can be racist [...] given our own experience of colonisation and racialisation’, the vast majority of Irish people are particularly prejudiced against

travelling people (31). McVeigh has developed a concept which he believes encapsulates the specifics of anti-nomadic sentiment, which he labels ‘sedentarism’. He defines sedentarism as ‘that system of ideas and practices which serves to normalise and reproduce sedentary modes of existence and pathologise and repress nomadic modes of existence’ (1997: 9). The concluding section of this chapter will examine *Zoli* as a text concerned with belonging and displacement, in conjunction with a discussion about Ireland’s historical relationship to itinerancy and contemporary anti-nomadic sentiments.

At various points throughout this thesis we have touched upon Ireland’s history of mass migration and how existential ideas of dispossession and homelessness became experiential realities for some Irish migrants. We noted that several Irish writers – such as Patrick MacGill, Samuel Beckett and Robert McLiam Wilson – wrote about tramping and itinerancy. In the section on the ‘Wanderer’ within Chapter One, we noted that ‘there had always been itinerants in Ireland’ but that attitudes towards these itinerant Irish began to sour with the onset of English colonisation (Zimmerman 434). We also looked at how itinerancy became associated with the Irish in England too. What is curious about A. L. Beier’s analysis, in *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640,* is the way in which he frequently groups the itinerant Irish alongside ‘gypsies’ or Roma. He says that the two groups ‘aroused fear and loathing’ in England, which he puts down to ‘the fact that the gypsies and the Irish were alien groups’, although ‘the Irish were probably seen as the greater threat’ (64). These immigrant Irish were persecuted by English vagrancy laws: ‘a vagrancy statute of 1572 ordered Irish vagabonds and beggars to be sent home after punishment’ and in 1634, ‘the government issued a proclamation that all the Irish should be punished’ (64). This history of persecution and vilification has

not deterred the contemporary Irish population from repeating many of the very same actions against its own travelling community, Irish Travellers. McVeigh contends that 'Travellers are subject to a whole series of stereotypes which combine to render them hugely problematic: they are criminals by 'nature', they come from outside the community, they are dirty, they are dishonest, they are immoral and amoral and, most importantly, they are "nomadic"' (1997: 8). These stereotypes are alarmingly similar to those that developed around immigrant or itinerant Irish in the early modern period in England. Indeed, McVeigh draws on the work of Beier to illustrate his point that 'most of these contemporary constructions of nomads draw on a long history of establishment fears about the travelling dispossessed', highlighting the 'obvious parallels with historic discourse about vagrancy and itinerancy' (8).

Irish Travellers are a distinct ethnic community, with their own oral culture and language, known as Cant or Gammon (often called Shelta within academic scholarship). This, Mary Burke argues, 'distinguishes them from other peripatetic groupings common in Ireland into the twentieth century such as beggars, itinerant traders, and roving entertainers' (3). As a distinct ethnic group then, it is important that we remember that Irish Travellers are not members of the Roma, for, as Burke affirms, '[d]espite apparent similarities to British Romanies, Irish Travellers do not classify themselves as Gypsies, nor are they defined as such by anthropologists' (3).[37] Both travelling groups are, however, subject to a great deal of contemporary anti-nomadic sentiment. McVeigh suggests this unease is because travelling people remain challenge conceptions of sedentary modernity; he argues that 'the refusal to work for others, the refusal to be "settled", and the refusal to recognise capitalist definitions of

[37] This important distinction is at risk of being lost amongst sedentary society in both Ireland and the United Kingdom; the successful Channel 4 TV programme 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding', despite the title, was primarily about the Irish Travelling community. The programme was widely criticised by the Irish Travelling and British Romany communities.

ownership and control, remain profoundly subversive acts' (1992: 43). It is for these reasons, he believes, that 'the nomad occupies a central position as a symbolic other within sedentary cultures' (1997: 21).[38] McVeigh labels this specific form of prejudice as 'sedentarism', noting the 'simultaneous degradation and exoticisation of otherness anywhere where racism is focused on 'outsiders', whether these are nomads or migrants or refugees' (1992: 44).

McVeigh's point about 'exoticisation' of Otherness is especially pertinent to the history of literary depictions of both the Roma and Irish Travellers; both groups have been romanticised in literature although, as we shall explore, there is nothing romantic about Zoli's nomadism. Mary Burke's book on 'Tinkers' (the derogatory term frequently used for Irish Travellers in Ireland) within Irish literature, *'Tinkers': Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller* (2009), traces how numerous Revival figures, most notably Synge, romanticised Irish Travellers as exotic, more deeply connected to the natural world and also, ironically given their contemporary standing, more authentically Irish. Burke states, 'in Synge's prose tinker culture epitomizes the threatened vigour of Irish rural life', associated as it was with the Irish countryside and the simplicity of the pre-modern period (81). Burke implies that this romanticising of Irish Travellers was deeply connected to Ireland's new post-colonial status and attempts at dismantling the image of Ireland constructed by British imperialism. She writes that 'the Revival's valorization of the Irish tinker rehabilitates the beggary, nomadism, and lack of productivity complained of in relation to Ireland by centuries of British commentators, allowing this inheritance to be the tinker's

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[38] In 2012, Channel 4 ran an advertising campaign for the second season of 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' which paired photographs of Irish Traveller children with the words 'Bigger, Fatter, Gypsier'. These advertisements were deemed offensive and accused of 'endors[ing] negative stereotypes'. See Mark Sweney, 'Big Fat Gypsy Weddings poster "endorsed negative stereotypes"', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 3 October 2012 (accessed 28th May 2014).

burden alone' (83). Burke also suggests that the orality associated with Irish Travellers was an important attraction for Revival writers, arguing that 'in an Ireland attempting to "recover" a lost orality and a pre-colonial culture […] it is not surprising that unregimented and non-literate peripatetics began to be celebrated as living relics whose authenticity was accessible to those willing to enter the earlier cultural time zone of the rural idyll' (85).

This Revival-era depiction of the Irish Traveller actually drew upon an earlier nineteenth-century vogue for Roma (or 'Gypsy') characters within literature from Britain. José Lanters explains that these images of the Roma within British literature were not consistent, maintaining that 'Gypsies were alternately constructed as pastoral figures who were living remnants of an ancient and authentic Britishness, and forces of anarchy and transgression that threatened the very fabric of the family and society' (2008a: 2). Burke adds that the Revival's 'reconstitution of the tinker is also a Hibernicization of the British discourse of the wanderer as representative of an unregimented way of life' (78). When we examine Synge's attempts to create the 'tinker as aboriginal exotic', it is important to remember that he himself was not part of the Irish Traveller community and neither did he have any experience of the dispossession that vagrancy entails (Burke 78)[39]. For Burke, the Revival's 'valorization of the wanderer is shown to partake in this new nostalgia for "pre-industrial" vagrancy' (Burke 59). 'Vagrancy' is, of course, not exclusively limited to travelling peoples but neither, as *Children of the Dead End* (1914) is testament to, was it limited to pre-industrial times. Once again we find certain writers patronisingly romanticising an experience without any real understanding of the lived reality of it. For post-independence writers of the Revival period, 'the wanderer is an inheritor of a

[39] For more on this, see Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays*, (Macmillan, 1975), p. 106.

kind of concentrated Irishness' (Burke 83). This suggestion that the 'wanderer' is authentically Irish returns us to the history of the migrant Irish in England and their construction as dangerously itinerant. It also reminds us of the mass migration that has characterised Irish history more generally. But it is also frustratingly unspecific, ambivalent and unstable, for wanderers are not necessarily Irish Travellers.

Given all this, should we read Zoli as emblematic of some form of romanticised and concentrated Irishness? She is, after all, both itinerant and exiled: subject positions associated very much with Ireland and its diaspora. However to read *Zoli* thus negates a proper engagement with the actuality of Zoli's displacement: her nomadism and exile 'are no metaphors, but social locations' (Braidotti 14). In this way, the specifics of Zoli's embodied experience of displacement cannot be mapped onto a wider metaphor for existential exile or post-colonial identity. Ultimately, McCann illustrates that for all the ostensible inclusionary politics and critical valorisation of borderless worlds and the nomad, Zoli suffers; the potentially hopeful and transgressive nature of the novel's formal politics is not echoed in the novel's plot. By the end of the novel and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Roma live in 'shitscape[s]' cobbled together in disparate locations across Europe, having 'built little shelters for themselves' (3, 327); they suffer from problems with addiction, poverty and social exclusion. Although McCann's use of storytelling seeks to textually recreate the communal space of oral culture, Zoli herself is exiled from her people and forced into 'walking in some terrible otherness […] cast off from everything' (153). Exiled from her community, Zoli begins to walk west out of Czechslovakia. After eventually making it through the Hungarian-Austrian border, Zoli finds herself in a displaced persons camp. Here, the brutality faced by unwanted migrants is made clear: she is forced to undress and is scrubbed with 'brushes on long

broom handles'; the nurses tell her 'that there was no smell on earth like a Gypsy'; her hair is shaved off; she is 'sprayed with a white powder that made [her] eyes itch' (245).[40] As Zoli does not fit into the strictly regimented Europe of the nation-state, she is informed that '[she] would have to apply for refugee status and then [she] would be allowed the status of the other displaced people' (246). Zoli's position as a citizen within Europe is profoundly subversive: she is female; she has no passport; she has been exiled from one of Europe's most marginalised ethnic groups; and finally, she is from Czechoslovakia, a country that no longer exists by the end of the novel. In choosing to make Zoli Czechoslovakian, rather than Polish like the historical Papusza, McCann reaffirms Zoli's liminality and exilic status. In emphasising the material dimension to Zoli's exile and the embodied nature of her displacement, McCann does not construct Zoli as a romanticised wanderer.

Zoli's experiences of migration are also marked by her gender. As a female migrant, she is both doubly marginalised and more vulnerable to violence, sexual or not. After Zoli's internment in the displaced person's camp in Austria for several months, Zoli decides to leave and manages to escape by simply by walking into the local town and away. Without a passport, or other proof of her (non-existent) national citizenship, Zoli is forced to make her migration westward in secret and alone; after all, 'how could [she] break a border without a passport?' (McCann: 274). She

[40] Zoli's forced internment and treatment in this camp may evoke images of the Nazi death camps for readers. Whether, in this instance, this is a deliberate tactic or not, the novel is undoubtedly engaged with the history of Roma genocide in Nazi camps. There are numerous references to the mass extermination of the Roma during the Holocaust, known as *porraimos,* or 'the devouring' in Romani (Fonseca 253). Zoli notes the horror of 'what the Hlinkas and Nazis had done with ovens and nails and knives' (McCann 25). The loss of Roma lives has not been adequately addressed, argues Fonseca, by either the academy or within popular culture; it has not even received sufficient official recognition. Of this silencing of Roma history, Fonseca writes that 'although sufficient documents were available immediately after the war, the mass murder of Roma and Sinti was not addressed at the Nuremberg trials, and no Gypsy witnesses were called' (274).

continues her westward travel by following the River Mürz but she cannot go over Austria's mountains and finds herself having to hitch lifts with truck drivers so that she can travel on the roads that cut underneath these mountains. However, as Ashley Dawson outlines in her article 'Cargo Culture: Literature in an Age of Mass Displacement' (2010), 'repressive border policing makes migration more difficult and more dangerous, increasing migrants' vulnerability' (187). This danger is particularly acute if the migrant is female, a fact to which *Zoli* bears testament. Most of Zoli's truck journeys pass without incident, despite occasional moments of anti-Roma prejudice, but after one of these journeys, the driver ominously claims 'that a little thanks would not go astray' (281). He 'ripped all the buttons off' Zoli's outer clothes and then 'tore [her dress] open too'. Zoli manages to prevent her rape by stabbing her aggressor with a stolen knife: 'the blade went into his eye socket with an ease not far from butter' (281). This moment, and indeed Zoli's entire characterisation, give her a voice and identity that are often denied to female migrants. Nikos Papastergiadis argues that women are 'not seen as active agents in the great migration stories: they [are] either left behind, or taken along as part of the man's family' (52). As a result, female migrants are 'rendered invisible', both by 'xenophobic public discourse' and 'also by dominant academic accounts of migration, which have tended to represent migrants as male' (Dawson 182). Zoli both reaffirms the vulnerability of the female migrant and resists being defined by this vulnerability.

The nature of the border and the experience of crossing this are essential components of McCann's novel. After walking through Czechslovakia, Zoli finds herself at the threshold between Hungary and Austria, at 'the other border, East and West' (214). Waiting until nightfall to attempt her crossing, Zoli asks herself, 'how many dead bodies lie along these imaginary lines? How many men, women, children

shot as they made the short trip from one place to the other?' (215). Although Zoli successfully makes it across the border, the potential horror and terror that characterise this crossing are exemplified by a hunting scene featuring the Russian soldiers that patrol the border and a herd of deer. The commotion that this herd of deer cause enable her to slip unnoticed through the woods and across the border, but McCann uses this to illustrate the predatory nature of the border patrol. Zoli notes the 'trained bloodhounds' and 'the deer with its belly split open' (217, 218). The fear of the chase is encapsulated by Zoli's asking if they have 'cornered their animal' (218); the implication being that she herself could very easily have been their prey. McCann comments upon the arbitrary nature of these borders and their divisive power when Zoli remarks that 'borders, like hatred, are exaggerated precisely because otherwise they would cease to exist altogether' (215). This section on Zoli's border crossing illustrates McCann's desire to 'break borders', but this desire is more complexly subversive than a simple, uncritical celebration of the 'nomad as multicultural hero' (Garden 4; Kiberd 2005: 253). As we have explored, *Zoli* displays a clear awareness of the dangers, instabilities and sorrows of existing out with the nation-state. Of being forced out of the Roma, Zoli says, 'I don't think that even now I can find the proper words to describe the feeling of having left my life behind' (249). McCann's novel is an indictment of the xenophobic politics that create borders and an appeal to move beyond these. This is why, despite the pain that being itinerant has caused her, Zoli laments that Swann 'did not learn for himself how to be lost' (351); Swann did not learn to disengage with the politics of territory and belonging.

Conclusion

We have explored at length what territory and belonging mean within an Irish context. Although *Zoli* does not deal with Ireland explicitly, Swann's mother is Irish

and McCann has labelled it 'an Irish novel' (Hayes). As a result, the novel could be read as a complex metaphor about migration and belonging, within and without the modern nation-state. It not only asks readers to reflect on the status of the Roma – both across Europe and in Ireland specifically - but also on Ireland's relationship to itinerancy: its history of migration and its indigenous Irish Travellers. Article 2 of the Constitution of Ireland (1937) states that 'the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage'. While the Constitution officially sanctions certain forms of itinerancy as Irish, the Twenty-seventh Amendment of the Constitution Act (2004), as a result of a referendum on the issue, changed the law so that citizenship was granted by *jus sanguinis* rather than *jus soli*. We have made reference in a previous chapter to Suzanna Chan's claim that this is an act of racist aggression towards Ireland's immigrants and a 'validation of "migrant Ireland" over "immigrant Ireland"' (5). Both Hayes and Lanters also note that *Zoli* coincided with 'the recent arrival of substantial numbers of Roma in Ireland', but when asked about this, McCann remarked that this 'had nothing to do with the writing of the novel' (Lanters 2008b: 42; Hayes). Lanters argues that 'readers familiar with Dublin' will find that the image of Parisian tower blocks at the end of the novel 'inevitably evoke the concrete towers of Ballymun' (42).[41] In *Zoli*, these Parisian blocks are inhabited by sedentary Roma; a similar situation occurred 'in the summer of 2007, a year after the publication of McCann's novel', when 'an extended family of Romanian Gypsies set up camp on the M50 roundabout' in Dublin (42). These Roma did not have the work permits necessary to work in Ireland, they could not claim welfare benefits and were not entitled to claim

[41] The horrific attack on a young Roma teenager in Paris during the writing of this chapter is testament to the ongoing marginalisation of the Roma. See Rory Mulholland, 'Roma boy attacked in Paris: the picture that will shock France', *The Telegraph*, 20 June 2014 (accessed online 1 July 2014).

asylum; after a few months, they were returned to Romania. McCann's novel illustrates the need for European nations to develop more inclusionary strategies for dealing with contemporary migration. This desire to refute the fixity of territory and exclusionary identity politics is echoed in *Zoli*'s formal structure. Print storytelling, and its focus on embodied experience, enables McCann to encourage readers to traverse the boundaries between self and Other.

CHAPTER IV: 'Topography of Violence': Race, belonging and the underside of the cosmopolitan city in *This Side of Brightness*

McCann's fictions consistently explore ideas of belonging, home and roots/routes in a multicultural modernity. Interested as he is in the fluidity of cultural affiliations, we could argue that his work is driven by an enduring sense of cosmopolitan ethics. His first novel, *Songdogs* (1995), and first collection of short stories, *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (1994), reveal ample evidence of his commitment to exploring the plurality of attachments to home and nation, or the markers of contemporary cosmopolitanism, which Bruce Robbins suggests is 'a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance' (3). Both of these early texts also explore the reality of intercultural dialogue: *Songdogs* involves a love story between a peripatetic Irish photographer, his Mexican wife and mixed-race son; *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* contains multiple stories of (im)migrant life within and beyond Ireland and the United States. Although there are a few Irish and Irish-American characters in *This Side of Brightness* (1998), the novel is primarily concerned with the interconnected narratives of an African-American man and his mixed-race (African-American, Irish-American and Native-American) grandson. The novel opens in 1991 with a section about a homeless man named Treefrog but the chronological beginning of the novel is 1916, with a segment focusing on the lives of a group of 'sandhogs', tunnel workers who built the New York City Subway. The novel follows the life of African-American Nathan Walker as he marries the daughter of Irish immigrant Con O'Leary, Eleanor O'Leary, and subsequently the lives of their mixed-race children, particularly Clarence Walker. Clarence joins the army and is sent to Korea where he meets a Native-American nurse, Louisa, who gives birth to their son, Clarence Nathan Walker. The novel slowly weaves these two interconnected narratives together as it

becomes apparent that Clarence Nathan and Treefrog are the same person;[42] Clarence Nathan marries a woman named Dancescaseca, who leaves him and takes away their young daughter, Lenora, after he inappropriately touches her.

As mentioned previously, the chronological beginning of *This Side of Brightness* (*TSoB*) is 1916. In Chapter One, we noted that in 1916 Randolph Bourne coined the term 'trans-national' in an article entitled 'Trans-National America'. Although McCann's novel was written in 1998, it is worth returning to Bourne's article to get a sense of Bourne's understanding of the contemporary moment in the United States; the article raises some interesting points with regard to the contemporary anxiety regarding immigration and multiculturalism which are relevant in our discussion of McCann's novel. In this article, which opens by lamenting the 'failure of the melting-pot' of America, Bourne argues that the levels of association felt by immigrants to their home countries should not be condemned but celebrated. Bourne astutely remarks that no 'hyphenated English-American' identity exists because the Anglo-Saxons 'ha[ve] been the ruling class' and it is this 'Anglo-Saxon tradition which they unquestionably label "American"'(88, 86). Extolling the benefits of the multicultural nature of the United States, Bourne asserts that 'America is already the world-federation in miniature, the continent where for the first time in history has been achieved that miracle of hope, the peaceful living side by side, with character substantially preserved, of the most heterogeneous peoples under the sun' (93). For this reason, Bourne believed that 'Only the American […] has the chance to become that citizen of the world' (96). There is very little interaction between the different cultural groups within the United States; this American 'cosmopolitan note' seems to be applicable only to privileged, white, European migrants (93). The groups

[42] For the sake of clarity, Clarence Nathan Walker will be consistently referred to as Treefrog throughout this chapter.

to which Bourne continually refers are ‘Germans, Scandinavians, Bohemians, and Poles’ and the example he provides of their cosmopolitan mingling takes place at one of America’s most infamously elitist universities (86, 93-4). There is no space for African- or Native-Americans in Bourne’s vision for the future cosmopolitan America. In writing that ‘America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors’, his transnation implicitly excludes those who are not white (96). Clearly, Bourne’s essay is outdated; but this chapter will seek to explore the vision of a cosmopolitan, trans-national America that *TSoB* offers us.

Conversely, while Bourne applauded American transnationalism, Woodrow Wilson asserted that anyone who thought ‘of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America, has not yet become an American’ in a speech he gave in May 1915 to a group of immigrants who had recently become American citizens, (129). However, in addition to this, Wilson paradoxically outlines his hopes for an American nation characterised by cosmopolitanism, stating that his ‘urgent advice’ to the immigrants is ‘not only always to think first of America, but always, also, to think first of humanity’ (129). It is, of course, a cosmopolitan notion that our greatest allegiance should be to universal ‘humanity’, but this insistence on humanity while also insisting that these immigrants forget their country of origin, and so deny a key facet of their human experience, is strangely ironic. Furthermore, Wilson’s speech is marked by a desire ‘to get rid of things that divide, and to make sure of the things that unite’; for, in Wilson’s thoughts, ‘[h]umanity can be welded together only by love, by sympathy, by justice, not by jealousy and hatred’ (129). Again, though the matter of nationality is present, the issue of race is not referenced. This is of interest to us because, in addition to being the only novel of McCann’s to date that is located

entirely within the United States, *TSoB* is also heavily concerned with the experiences of black and mixed-race individuals. One such figure who was engaged with the racial fabric of the United States in the early twentieth century was Charles Chesnutt, who, writing in 1900, noted the 'intense prejudice against color which prevails in the United States' (858). He also highlighted the system of segregation in the Southern states, which he understood as 'the persistent effort to degrade the Negro to a distinctly and permanently inferior caste' (859). This segregation speaks not of the 'unit[y]', 'love' or 'justice' of Wilson's speech, but of profound 'hatred' and deep 'divi[sions]' in the national tapestry (129). Although these articles far predate the writing of McCann's novel, they are contemporary to the period in which the novel is set; they also highlight the fraught relationships between transnationality, cosmopolitanism and race within twentieth-century America.

In engaging with the African-American experience, which is so different from his own, McCann must perform some of the cosmopolitan spirit that he examines in his fiction. Amanda Anderson maintains that 'cosmopolitanism endorses reflective distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity' (267). However, Anderson's brief summary implicitly affirms the privilege that often accompanies cosmopolitanism.[43] To be in a position where one can obtain a 'broad understanding of other cultures and customs', a good education is almost certainly essential; 'a belief in universal humanity' is a commitment that may be difficult to support if you are homeless, without access to healthcare, or a refugee. Although, as Brekenridge et al. argue, cosmopolitanism 'must always escape positive and definite specification, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an uncosmopolitan

[43] Anderson's article does go on to give a more nuanced reading of cosmopolitanism, but this condensed overview is useful because it illuminates some of the critiques posed against cosmopolitanism.

thing to do', Anderson's comment alerts us to the difficulties in attempt to construct and utilise theories of cosmopolitanism (1). Indeed, to be in a position where one can distance oneself from 'one's cultural affiliations', indicates that one feels secure enough in one's own sense of identity and belonging to be able to reflect critically upon these subject positions. Rosi Braidotti claims that for minor subjects, 'women, blacks, youth, postcolonial, migrants, exiled, and homeless may first need to go through a phase of "identity politics" – of claiming a fixed location' before they have the stability necessary for critical and reflective distance (2011: 42). The vital importance of being rooted, in whichever form that takes, is not lost on Braidotti: she claims that 'you cannot give up something you never had' (42).

This chapter will explore how the novel dwells upon these tensions within the modern cosmopolitan city of the twentieth century. The characters in *TSoB* fall into these minor subject positions: the novel hosts a collection of women, African-Americans, underprivileged youth, (post)colonial Irish migrants,[44] intra- and international migrants and homeless characters. The importance of 'claiming a fixed location' is central to *TSoB*; as this chapter will explore, the uncertainty of wrestling with a liminal, interracial identity can have devastating consequences for the individual. Large sections of the novel are located in the Subway tunnels underneath New York City, populated in the first decades of the twentieth century by migrant manual labourers and in the latter decades by homeless, 'wounded men and women living in their lazaret of hopelessness' (McCann 1998: 97). This chapter will map out

[44] The earliest chronological period of the novel begins in 1916 and this section of the novel includes two Irish migrants, Con and Maura O'Leary. It is implied that they have arrived in the very early years of the twentieth century, when Ireland was still under British colonial rule. The 1916 underground explosion that opens the novel is based on an incident that happened on March 27, 1905. John Healy reads into McCann's decision to change this date to 1916, noting that this is the 'same year of another Rising deeply embedded in Irish nationalist political mythology' (107). Despite Healy's inclusion of McCann's comment that *TSoB* is a 'consciously non-Irish novel', his article 'Dancing Cranes and Frozen Birds: The Fleeting Resurrections of Colum McCann' (2000) is very much invested in drawing out the Irish threads in the novel.

the ways in which this space offers McCann a metaphor for the underside of the cosmopolitan city. As such, it encompasses these contradictory impulses within cosmopolitan thought; while Anderson remarks that cosmopolitanism involves a reflective distance that can arguably only be produced through privilege, Breckenbridge et al. state that 'cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility' (6). For the 'sandhogs', or tunnel workers, in the early twentieth century, the tunnels offer a space of intercultural solidarity that goes beyond race or ethnicity: 'there is a democracy beneath the river' (McCann 5). Irish migrants work alongside Italians, Poles and African-Americans; this cosmopolitan intermingling of disparate diasporic peoples helps to build the multiethnic modern city of New York. However, by the latter part of the twentieth century, these tunnels are inhabited by a homeless population that is predominantly African-American. In tandem with much of McCann's fiction, this homelessness is not a metaphorical abstraction but a racialised lived reality. McCann stated that his research for the novel entailed spending long periods of time in the tunnels with this population and 'the vast majority of them happened to be African-American' (Garden 7). This homeless population are cosmopolitan, too, but more in fitting with Breckenbridge's 'victims of modernity'. Breckenbridge et al. also note how contemporary displaced cosmopolitans (rather than voluntary travellers) have been discursively constructed through a 'vocabulary of victimage and come to be recognized as constituting the "problem" of multiculturalism' (6). This '"problem" of multiculturalism' is particularly pertinent to us in our discussion of *TSoB* because his figure Treefrog, with his interracial heritage including Irish-, Native- and African-American, embodies interculturalism. Treefrog is one of the dispossessed living in the Subway tunnels, and this chapter will explore how the embodied cosmopolitanism

that Treefrog represents is tempered by the racism he counters and the misfortunes he experiences. Indeed, both Treefrog and his father could be read as ‘tragic mulatto’ figures: unable to root themselves in a stable ethnicity, their lives are marred by poverty, violence and loss.

Migrancy and the underside of the cosmopolitan city

The cosmopolitan city is at the heart of *This Side of Brightness*. Allen et al. contend that ‘cities have always been places of mixture and diversity’ and ‘are the sites of ceaseless flows of people, money, commodities, ideas, information and cultural influences’ (8). Cities, as Richard Sennett argues, have therefore always been ‘milieu[x] in which strangers are likely to meet’ and suggests that we might productively understand ‘the city as a collection of strangers’ (48). These strangers may be of different ethnicities; this is particularly likely in the Americas and in the former imperial metropolitan centres, which are now common destinations for postcolonial migrants. New York is identified by Sennett as an ‘ethnic city’ where these sorts of interethnic encounters frequently occur. New York was indeed the gateway to the United States for many migrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; over ‘80 million migrants entered the USA between 1840 and 1940’ (Allen et al. 99). Cosmopolitanism was tied to the city from its inception: it was ‘the Cynics of the fourth century BC, who first coined the expression cosmopolitan, “citizen of the cosmos” (Appiah 2006: xiii). In the Greek language *polis* refers to both citizenship (body of citizens) and the city; in ancient Greece these cities would have been city-states. Of course, in addition to the paradoxical nature of being a ‘citizen of the cosmos’ (which Appiah also highlights), we should remember that full citizenship in ancient Greece was not extended to women, slaves or ‘barbarians’, which were those the Greeks deemed to be uncivilised. Writing against this classical conception

of the *polis*, Henri Lefebvre suggests that modern theorists of the city, Lewis Mumford and G. Bardet, mistakenly locate 'freedom in the twentieth century according to the freedom of the Greek city' (98). Through arguing that the 'antique city' is very much 'identified with the ideal and rational city', Lefebvre suggests that the *polis* (and its attendant 'agora, place and symbol') has almost become a metonym for contemporary democracy; despite the fact that the classical vision of democracy was 'of a democracy limited to its citizens and excluding women, slaves and foreigners' (28). However, as this chapter will explore, even though Lefebvre is writing about a 'particular philosophy of the city' within academic discourse, McCann's novel explores the actual ways in which the city is inaccessible to those who fall outside its ideal citizenship.

For the philosopher Jacques Rancière, the *polis* of the Greek city is not a welcoming, or cosmopolitan, space but instead a space controlled through a strict hierarchy of citizenship and authority. Rancière makes a pun of *polis*/police, highlighting that the *polis* is 'always a police order, a coercive regimentation' (Kelly 2013: 27). While police might most obviously bring to mind what Rancière terms 'the petty police', the control of the police is more omnipotent than this; Rancière's notion of the police is of 'an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying' (1999: 28, 29). The city, in Rancière's understanding of it, is not a space of democracy but of demarcation and control. Furthermore, Rancière's thought on the policing of the *polis* extends into the role and socio-political purpose of art. Rancière argues that the aesthetic can be understood as functioning differently across three distinct periods from classical Greece to the contemporary moment. The first period, entitled the *ethical*, is concerned with classical Greece and the policing of art according to the *ethos* of the *polis*; 'Rancière's

key example of this regime is Plato's *Republic*, where only certain forms of expression are deemed acceptable or permissible within the *polis'* (Kelly 20). For Plato, true art was not just educational, but must also reaffirm the ideals and values of the *polis*. Rancière, then, locates in Plato's ideal *polis* a desire to regulate both art and ethics, creating the city space as a complex nexus that polices both who has the right to belong and what they have the right to think; this will be discussed in greater detail further on.

Plato's *polis* does not seem illustrative of the hospitality that we associate with cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan cities in particular. This early form of cosmopolitanism was evidently not one where ideals met praxis. For Greek cosmopolites, we can assume that embracing the stranger (as in strange rather than unknown, so non-white, non-male) was not a part of their beliefs. The idea of cosmopolitan cities is taken up by Derrida in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001), where he discusses the centrality of hospitality to construct what he imagines to be contemporary cosmopolitan versions of the Biblical Cities of Refuge. His focus on hospitality returns us to the cosmopolitan thought of Emmanuel Kant as outlined in the Definitive Article of his *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795). This notion of the ethical imperative to 'host' those 'guests' in need became subject to much discussion in an Irish context due to the boom in immigration experienced during the Celtic Tiger years. Declan Kiberd, in his essay 'Strangers in their Own Country: Multi-Culturalism in Ireland' (2001), notes that while 'racism of the most ugly kind exists in [contemporary] Irish society', he also remarks that 'the historical capacity of the Irish to assimilate waves of incomers should never be underestimated' (51, 45). Kiberd maintains that 'the history of the Irish, themselves dispossessed yet ever more sure of their communal identity, seemed to bear out the idea of a nation

open to endless joiners' (55). In other words, the Irish are ostensibly better equipped to be better than most because of their colonial and diasporic past. However, Bryan Fanning argues that throughout the twentieth century the Irish State's attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers was hostile, claiming that 'it was not until the late 1980s that the state began to move towards responsible participation in international regimes pertaining to both refugees and asylum seekers' (98). We noted previously that this famous Irish hospitality was officially tested in 2004 and found lacking. Despite the American focus of *This Side of Brightness*, the novel was published in 1998, during the early years of the Celtic Tiger and upswing of migration to Ireland. In *'Other People's Diaspora's: Negotiating Race in Contemporary Irish and Irish American Culture'* (2013), Sinéad Moynihan argues that '(re)imagining the Irish diasporic experience in the United States in various ways – particularly as it relates to Irish interactions with African Americans – became absolutely central to representations of multicultural Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years' (3).

The cosmopolitan challenge of how to engage effectively with the strangeness of the Other became pertinent to Celtic Tiger Ireland. But even within cosmopolitan thought, the dilemma of how to embrace genuine alterity is something that continues to confound resolution. Robbins remarks that 'we should not and perhaps cannot accept the old cosmopolitan ideal of transcending the distinction between strangers and friends' (3): a statement alarmingly devoid of cosmopolitan spirit for an essay that is attempting to reclaim the term from its detractors. Within *TSoB*, the city is most certainly a place where strangers meet, but this does not mean that they necessarily engage with one another. Treefrog captures the urban alienation of the modern city, noting the 'palpable viciousness in the air' of New York City and describing it as a paradoxical 'landscape of loving and hating' (McCann 185). The

racism to which all three generations of the Walker family are subjected, explored in greater detail below, is evidence that despite the multiethnic make-up of twentieth century New York, the city is still very much divided along racial lines. Walker and Eleanor live in Harlem, which from the 1930s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, was predominantly populated by African-American and Afro-Carribean people. When Walker's son, Clarence, is born, he takes his new baby boy 'down the street in his arms – past vendors of pigs knuckles and rice, past women eating tania roots on doorsteps […] On a corner he waves to some well-dressed men who are signing up soldiers for the struggle in Ethiopia […] He nods to a young girl on an outside stoop of a brownstone whose voice is in mourning for the fields of Alabama' (86). This intermingling of different black ethnicities signals a degree of mutual tolerance for their differences; Walker's joy at fatherhood is echoed in the smiles he shares with men playing dominoes and his encouragement of the young girl singing. This jubilant vision of a multicultural New York is abruptly cut short (although Walker remains unaware) when 'behind some conspirational windows he is indicted for carrying something that doesn't rightly belong to him', his own mixed-race son: '[m]ost redhaired nigger child I've ever seen' (87). There are clear limits to the degree of strangeness with which people are willing to engage; although the multiethnic community of Harlem may have come from different nations and cultures, their blackness provides a degree of sameness that they are unwilling to look beyond. The editors of *Unsettling Cities: Movement/Settlement* (1999) elaborate on these contradictions within the modern city, remarking that 'on the one hand cities are fluid collections of people who, through movement and migration, arrive in and move through city streets as strangers to each other; on the other hand cities are composed of a series of 'urban villages' - residential communities of settled neighbours – who

live much of their daily lives in a relatively bounded locality' (Allen et al. 96). In *TSoB*, it is the tunnels underneath the city that become a testing ground for the ostensible cosmopolitanism of life above ground, encapsulating the paradoxical nature of the urban metropolis: populated by an intercultural group of migrant labourers and, seventy five years later, inhabited by a group of predominantly African-American dispossessed.

The intercultural and international dimension to the construction of New York is emphasised in the novel through the depiction of two different groups of manual labourers, consisting of intra- and international migrants. The earlier group, of which Nathan Walker is one, are sandhogs working underneath New York to create the tunnels that will become the New York City Subway system. In addition to the doubly diasporic Nathan Walker, an African-American intranational migrant from Georgia, this includes Irish migrants Con O'Leary and Sean Power and the Italian migrant Rhubard Vanucci. This underground work is heavy with risk, 'all darkness and damp and danger', which the men do 'with the knowledge that they might be dead in just a few hours' (McCann 7, 3). For all the potential prosperity the United States promises as a land of opportunity, there is little social mobility for these men, as 'nearly all of them have worked as miners before – in Colorado, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Poland, Germany, England' (6). This lack of social mobility does not just affect first generation immigrants either, as Walker's grandson Treefrog also ends up working as a manual labourer, building skyscrapers during the economic boom of the 1980s. As with his grandfather's experience in the first few decades of the twentieth century, Treefrog's colleagues are also immigrants: 'from the West Indies and Grenada, and there is one Englishman, Cricket, who serves his vowels as if holding them out on a set of tongs' (196). 'A couple' of the men who work with Treefrog 'are Mohawks', a

people that originally occupied the territory that surrounds contemporary New York and were largely displaced by white settlement (196). Although McCann puts these diverse ethnicities together, he still relies on cultural and ethnic clichés to construct these workers. Walker repeatedly sings a blues song entitled 'Looking Down at Up' and 'Cricket', the English immigrant is defined by emblems of middle and upper class English culture (though perhaps his RP accent seems strangely incongruous with his position as a construction worker). Most problematically of all, arguably, is McCann's description of the Native-American workers, 'their blood distributed in such a way that it is balanced in all parts of their bodies, it comes from their history, it is a gift, they have pure equilibrium, the idea of falling is anathema to them' (196). This potentially reductive representation maps a physical attribute on to an entire group of people based on their ethnicity, defaulting to somatic cultural shorthand to describe them. McCann also does this at other points in the novel, dwelling on both Eleanor O'Leary's Celtic-coded red hair and Walker's black physicality, and across his fiction more generally; note how he describes the 'muscled' physique of Frederick Douglass in *TransAtlantic*, for example (37).[45]

Corporeality is of prime position across McCann's work, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter; within *TSoB* McCann is particularly keen to explore the embodied affects of migrancy and dispossession. The sandhog section illustrates the bodily labour that these men offer in their efforts to refigure themselves as American citizens; for Walker, who is already from the United States, his labour is an attempt to forge a corporeal connection to his new location. The digging that these men undertake, 'loading and shovelling, slashing their shovels into the soil', enables them to construct an intimate and physical relationship to their new land (8). Returning

[45] The full quotation reads: 'He dried the sculpt of his body. He was broad-shouldered, muscled, over six feet tall' (37). This will be examined further in the next chapter.

once again to Paul Gilroy's use of the homonym roots/routes offers a productive way of thinking about the roots/routes of these sandhogs and a relevant way of unpacking their experience. As migrants who have had to re-root themselves in their second home after re-routing themselves across Atlantic space, this act of digging into the very soil of this unfamiliar territory is a way of claiming belonging. The soil beneath New York is also the roots from which the city has risen; Walker 'turns up shells as he digs' and would like to find additional remnants of ancient or recent history, 'a slice of bone, an arrowhead, or a piece of petrified wood' (8). Modernity demands that for further growth, the city must be made more accessible and so new underground routes must be constructed. These re-rooted/routed men are the vehicles by which this is possible; 'the men are beating the river and they are happy': it is migrants who tame and shape the topography that New York roots/routes itself within (10).

This act of digging is also evocative of McCann's own literary inheritance and the thematic foci on soil, bogs and digging that, as already noted, are so prevalent in Heaney's work. But this, too, is an opportunity for McCann to re-root/route Irish identity; this returns us to Jahan Ramanzi, who contends that Heaney's bog poems reflect an Ireland that is an 'imaginative topography […] an intercultural space, a layered geography' (346). Although not bog, the 'oozy muck' under the East River is evocative of it, and also, as the quotations above indicate, consists of layers of decaying plant matter (McCann 8). We can see this layered topography echoed in the intercultural allusions of Heaney and McCann. In addition to the signs of the Northern European landscape that includes both Ireland and Jutland in Heaney's work, the layered geography of his poetry also includes the United States. Ramanzani points to Heaney's poem 'Bogland' and its juxtaposition of Ireland and the American west

(Ramanzani 347). The final two lines of this poem reflect an Ireland that is defined by its long history of outward migration, notably to America: ‘The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage./The wet centre is bottomless’(Heaney 42). Heaney’s Ireland is defined by its fluid, unstable boundaries, seeping into the Atlantic and his poems register the mobility of Irish cultural identity. In *TSoB*, McCann echoes Heaney’s layered intercultural geography in a North American context. In his efforts to reclaim the underground topography of New York, Walker populates the soil with flora and fauna from his native Georgia; he ‘imagines plants growing down there, yellow jasmine and magnolias and huckleberry bushes’ (8). In a further allusion to the wet, peaty bog spaces of Heaney, McCann writes that ‘the edges of Okefenokee swamp come back to [Walker] in waves, mucky brown waters that pile themselves into the Sewanee of his home’ (8). Walker’s reterritorialisation of this re-rooted/routed underground topography refigures the tunnels as a hybrid, rhizomatic space that will, as we will explore, later be re-claimed by his grandson, Treefrog.

However, these attempts at re-rooting/routing are tempered with physical and emotional violence. Walker’s sense of dislocation from his childhood home in Georgia is profound. Indeed, Walker’s sense of place is so potent that McCann describes Walker as an embodied extension of Georgia; he writes ‘when he speaks of Georgia, Walker sounds as if he has swallowed its river and mud in gulps’ (88). In coming to New York for work, Walker has severed an integral part of himself. The violence of this labour manifests itself somatically too and McCann makes much of the dangers that the men might face: ‘an avalanche of muck and water could sweep the men backwards’; ‘escaping air could suck them against the wall […] shatter their spines against a breast board’; ‘a shovel might slip and slice a man’s forehead open’; ‘fire could lick through the tunnel’; ‘the bends – the dreaded bends – could send

nitrogen bubbles racing to their knees or shoulders or brains' (9). These threats of violence are realised when the four men are victims of an underground blowout, although only 'three of them erupt through the surface of East River' and Con O'Leary's body remains trapped in the soil between the tunnel and the East River (15). Ironically enough, the poor English language skills of the tunnel workers exacerbates the accident; although the men call for the pressure of the compression machine to be lowered, 'the shouts get twisted and distorted in the languages they pass through and, instead of being lowered, the dial on the compression machine rises' (14). Those who survive the tunnels will have 'legacies of blackening lungs' (6). The novel is particularly concerned with Walker's physical disintegration and premature aging; like Con O'Leary who, before his death, is described as being 'a father to his real age, rheumatism in [his body], feeling seventy although he's only thirty-four' (13). Later in the novel, when Walker is only 37, 'arthritis has already begun to nibble at his hands' (76); at 53 he's 'confined' to the sofa for 'two hours a day, by pain, not desire' (108); when he coughs, he 'brings up a string of black dust from his lungs – a 'remnant of the tunnels' (173). Despite the cosmopolitan intercultural solidarity between workers, their bodies are broken by the labour necessary to build the multiethnic city.

Genuine friendship and respect develops amongst the sandhogs; the tunnels produce an equalising space separate from the racially segregated urban spaces found above the river. McCann takes pains to emphasise their differences: note how he describes the men 'arriv[ing] at dawn in their geography of hats', drawing attention to the diverse cultural traditions and locations that these men have come from (2). Walker 'knows there is a democracy beneath the river' and that the tunnels host a tolerance that cannot be found 'topside', the characters' preferred term for above

ground (5). Walker's focus on the lack of light in the tunnels seems to suggest that this has an intrinsic effect on ideas of racial equality, as 'it's only in the tunnels that he feels any equality of darkness' (37). Rather than the darkness obscuring racial difference, it is the undiscriminating danger of the work that generates equality, as 'in the darkness every man's blood runs the same colour - a dago the same as a nigger the same as a polack the same as a mick' (5). This reading of difference is much in keeping with Gilroy's assertion that we need to work towards a communal ontology whereby the 'strangeness of strangers goes out of focus and other dimensions of a basic sameness can be acknowledged and made significant' (2004a: 3). The basic sameness of human blood and mortality is more immediately apparent in the tunnels than above ground. 'It is only underground that colour is negated, that men become men', because it is only underground that these risks to their lives are so significant and indiscriminately apparent (37). McCann's implication that common sameness can only be revealed where suffering and risk are great is an uncomfortable reminder that although cosmopolitan ethics are often championed by the privileged, it is 'often the victims of modernity' who are forced into experiencing its lived realities (Breckenbridge et al. 6). That is not to say that this underground democracy did not find its way topside, for the 'the sandhogs were the first integrated union in the country' as part of the Central Labor Union (37). Again though, these small steps of progress are offset by a dominant racist culture, made clear when Walker encounters his friend and co-worker, Sean Power, with his young son on the street. The young boy calls Walker a 'nigger', to which Sean retorts: 'He ain't a nigger, son, he's a sandhog' (41). Sean refutes his son's statement but sanctions the racist language, thereby suggesting that Walker is an exception to a rule.

'Cartography of darkness': the Subway tunnels as maps of belonging and homelessness

This underground democracy flourished despite the strict ethnic and racial demarcation of space topside. It is important to note that the African-American experience of city spaces is not the same as for white Americans. In an essay 'City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction' (1981), Toni Morrison posits that black people do 'not have a claim to' the city in the same manner that white people do (35). Because African-Americans are 'a dispossessed people, a disenfranchised people, a people without orthodox power' they have 'not contributed to the major decisions in founding or shaping the city' (35, 37). Morrison suggests that the city, with the notable exception of the district of Harlem in New York, never becomes a part of the emotional geography of African-American writers because this is a space they do not feel they can claim. These limits to the African-American experience of the city are not just psychological but physical too. In *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (1965), Kenneth Clark argued that Harlem was the 'dark ghetto' of the United States, where 'invisible walls have been erected by white society' (11). Clark highlighted the 'restriction of [African-Americans] to a special area and the limiting of their freedom of choice on the basis of skin color' (11). In fact, the African-American novelist Richard Wright's novella 'The Man Who Lived Underground' (1945) is concerned with the life of Fred Daniels (in homage to Frederick Douglass), a black man who retreats to the subterranean space of an unnamed city to avoid the racism that he is subject to above ground. This novella, argues Carla Cappetti, 'was rewritten by Ralph Ellison as his well known *Invisible Man* (1952)' (60). In taking-up residence underground, both Wright's Fred Daniels and Ellison's unnamed narrators can be read as attempting to refigure their relationships to the spaces of the city.

Within *This Side of Brightness*, the sandhogs' re-rooting/routing of the underside of the cosmopolitan city in the early twentieth century is repeated again through the homeless community's reclamation of these forgotten spaces. In addition to the physical occupation of this underground space by the bodies of these homeless dispossessed, McCann highlights how relationships to space can be imaginatively transformed: Treefrog cultivates a sense of ownership of his underground 'nest' by producing his own abstracted cartographic records of his dwelling places and 'Papa Love', a fellow homeless man, reclaims space through creating mural artwork. We can read both of these embodied practices of forming relationships to space as acts of reclamation of these underground topographies. In *After the Cosmopolitan?: Multicultural cities and the future of racism* (2005), Michael Keith suggests that the 'unruly spaces of the city' – which these Subway tunnels are – 'disrupt the cartography of the neatly mapped and segregated ethnic mosaic' (151). In his work on racist and anti-racist graffiti within European cities, particularly within England, Keith argues that graffiti is an art form that 'simultaneously mediates creolisation and marks difference' (151). It is important to note that these homeless communities living in the tunnels do not fit within the American historical literary narrative of homelessness due to both their racial profile and their non-peripatetic existence; these are settled homeless communities. Therefore, they are able to make claims (or desire to make claims) over space that other itinerant homeless do not. They have not eschewed settled existence for a life on the road; they have found themselves, for numerous reasons, living on the margins of sedentary urban life. So we can read the spaces they occupy as creolised spaces: while they do not live in traditional houses, they still have their own sense of home. It was trauma that sent Papa Love 'down to the tunnels after this lover was hit by a bullet. The shooting was a 'simple drive-by,

the killers high on amphetamines' (135). Papa Love still maintains links to the topside world: 'the old artist still keeps a bank account from his days as a high-school art teacher' (135). The money from this account enables him to 'get food and paint' to create his murals on the walls of the tunnels (135).

These murals include his own reimagining of 'Salvador Dali's Melting Clock' from Dali's 'The Persistence of Memory' (1931), a portrait of a fellow tunnel-dweller and the 'faces of Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Miriam Makeba' (25, 136, 64). The hybrid and subversive nature of Papa Love's elective homelessness is echoed in the nature of his work. Papa Love's murals are nestled alongside text-based forms of graffiti. Papa Love's 'Melting Clock', inspired by Dali's celebrated art work, is an imaginative reterritorialisation of an emblematic piece of the twentieth-century high culture; 'beside it, the wall has been slashed with a drunken line of red graffiti', juxtaposing an intertextual allusion to a work housed in New York's Museum of Modern Art with a form of street expression often labelled as vandalism (26). Other examples of this hybrid graffiti-artwork include the toilet seat, which has been hung by Faraday (another homeless man), on the door of his cubicle. This toilet seat is accompanied by the graffiti-ed words: 'ALL I WANT TO DO IS SIT ON MY ASS AND FART AND THINK OF DANTE' (64, capitals McCann's). The juxtaposition of the toilet seat with the reference to canonical literary culture might remind readers of the iconoclasm of the Dada work 'Fountain' (1917, usually accredited to Marcel Duchamp), in which the artist replaces the triumphal fountains that had dominated European sculpture for centuries with a simple urinal. A further intertextual reference to the work of Marcel Duchamp could be read into the mural of 'Mona Lisa with a penis in her mouth', which is evocative of Duchamp's 1919 artwork, 'L.H.O.O.Q.' (McCann 64-65). Both images seek to sexualise Leonardo de Vinci's original portrait;

L.H.O.O.Q. is a pun and when spoken in French, the letters sound like '*Elle a chaud au cul*' – 'she is hot in the ass', or, she has a voracious sexual appetite. Although these intertextual reference may be unintentional, the iconoclastic impulse further affirms the subversive and hybrid nature of these underground spaces. These images are also accompanied by key figures in the struggle for Civil Rights across the black Atlantic: Martin Luther King, Miriam Makeba and Huey Newton, who is painted 'being crucified beside two white thieves Nixon and Johnson' (65). This wall art is evidence of the acute cultural and political consciousness of these homeless individuals. While he reminds us of this, however, McCann does not allow us to forget that these are lives marked by poverty, desperation and addiction; 'fields of cans and bottles and needles are strewn underneath the paintings' (65). On the printed page of the book, this sentence is its own complete paragraph too, emphasising its importance.

These murals and graffiti are part of marking what Keith argues is a 'spatial politics of entitlement and belonging within the city' (151). Keith reads graffiti as 'narrative in that it attempts to tell alternative stories about places' and that 'these stories at their most basic signal the failure of the public sphere to incorporate them' (152). The wall art of the tunnel-dwelling homeless population tell stories of the struggles for black equality and the racism that these communities have faced throughout the twentieth century. Although their existence in the secret tunnels below the city clearly 'signal[s] the failure of the public sphere to include' these marginalised voices, these tunnels are integral to the rooting/routing of the city, and the tunnel space is shared by topside riders of the Subway trains. If we are to read wall art as what Keith labels 'the embodied social landscape', then these stories of exclusion are an indictment of a shared social landscape that includes those above and

below ground (151). To return to our earlier discussion about Rancière's ideas of the *ethical* aesthetic and Plato's *polis*, we can read this graffiti as unsettling the ethical policing that Plato demands of art. Not only does this wall art offer voices without the citizenship the opportunity to speak, but it also allows them to register their dissent. Their reterritorialisation of high culture and reclamation of their own subversive socio-political inheritance further challenges Plato's thought. The *writing* of the wall art proves particularly subversive; in *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* (2004), Rancière highlights that where Plato trusts the spoken word, he is nervous of the written one. For Plato, the written word (*logos*), separate from the voice of any speaker, is an unattached 'orphan utterance' that can find itself 'anywhere at all, without knowing to whom it should and should not speak' (Rancière 103). The written word cannot be policed because it can end up in the wrong hands; as such it 'is an imbalance of the legitimate order of discourse' (103). Rancière labels this 'disorder' literarity (103). The homeless individuals' writing on the tunnel walls therefore disrupts the hierarchy of the policed racialised city they inhabit.

Treefrog's cartographic activities also allow him to tell alternative stories about places. Every morning – 'each day begins like any other' – after he wakes, Treefrog 'reaches for a piece of graph paper and a sharpened pencil' (23). With these in hand, he starts 'circling the small cave [where he lives], he trails his hand against the wall as he goes, feeling the crevices and coldness'; then, 'with each change in the landscape he opens his eyes and marks an increment on the graph paper', thereby creating his own cartographic record of his living spaces (23). For Treefrog, this activity 'is his most important ritual, he cannot start his day without it' (24-25). Mapping has a fraught relationship to colonial and postcolonial landscapes; McCann's Irish childhood and education will almost certainly have alerted him to the

British Ordnance mapping of Ireland in the early nineteenth century, during which many Irish names were anglicised. Mary Hamer argues that as a result, 'an official Ireland was produced, an English-speaking one, with its own ideology of Irish space' (185). Graham Huggan contends that colonial map-making projects entail 'the reinscription, enclosure and hierarchization of space, which provide[s] an analogue for the acquisition, management and reinforcement of colonial power' (115). We can read cartographic activities as an attempt to gain mastery over a particular territory through creating a textual representation of surveyed land. According to Hamer, maps 'offer a record of the colonizing process and of its effects; the relationship between the original culture and the soil is textually unpicked and a new ownership asserted' (185). Given that Treefrog's mixed heritage includes both Irish- and Native-American ancestry, the colonial role in the shaping of his ancestor's relationship to space is important. Hamer reminds us of the cartographic violence done to North America by white European settlers, asserting that 'seventeenth-century maps of North America reveal a progressive loss of American Indian names, for which names of English origin are substituted' (185).

Although mapping territory is associated with the epistemic violence of colonialism, we might productively read Treefrog's maps as a cartographic means of establishing both an embodied and an imaginative relationship to his 'nest', or home space. Deleuze and Guattari attempt to reclaim the map from its imperial past by suggesting that the map contains rhizomatic energy, arguing that a map is '*not a tracing'* (1998: 12; emphasis original). Their argument maintains that whereas a tracing simply *re*produces reality, the map contains possibilities to produce, or create, something new; they write that 'the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification' (12).

Treefrog's maps are not simple mimetic reproductions of his immediate surroundings, but imaginatively abstracted: 'he exaggerates the features to ten times their map size, so that, on the paper, the nest looks like a rumple of huge valleys and mountains and plains' (25). Treefrog's cartographic reterritorialisation of his underground urban environment imports topographic elements from rural spaces; his daily maps are 'transfer[ed …] to a larger map he has been working on for the past four years, a map of where he lives, hand-drawn, intricate, secretive, with hills, rivers, ox-bow lakes, curved creeks, shadows, the cartography of darkness' (25). This act echoes the imaginative reterritorialiation of space performed by Treefrog's grandfather, Walker, as he mentally transplants the flora of his native Georgia to the tunnels while he works. In 'Decolonizing the Map: Post-Colonialism, Post-Structuralism and the Cartographic Connection' (1989), Huggan notes the 'fascination of Canadian, Australian and other postcolonial writers with the figure of the map' (115). McCann's earlier fiction from the mid- to- late-1990s also illustrates a fascination with maps: in addition to these sections within *TSoB* there are passages in *Songdogs* about a Mexican child, Miguel, who makes his own cartographic collages. Like Treefrog's abstract interpretations of his nest, Miguel's maps are also imaginative, taking a multimedia format: 'sometimes he rubbed a little soil on the maps' to stain the land brown and so that 'if you put your nose to the map you could smell the soil' (McCann 1995: 53). For Miguel the urban is also associated with violence as 'the cities were shown with little pieces of metal that could rip the tips of your fingers if you ran your hands along them' (53). Huggan articulates that 'the reassessment of cartography' in literature by postcolonial authors 'indicates a shift of emphasis away from the desire for homogeneity towards an acceptance of diversity in the interpretation of the map' (124). The different imaginative attempts at mapping spaces suggest that postcolonial

authors are working toward Huggan's titular promise of 'decolonizing the map'; McCann's characters create their own cartographies of belonging by reimagining what their maps might look like. In this way, Treefrog is able to mentally reclaim some sense of home. McCann's depictions of the cartographic art of Treefrog and the wall art of Papa Love (and graffiti of unnamed others), place an emphasis on the vocabulary of space: Treefrog 'maps the geography of Angela['s face]' (165); 'the topography of violence' (164); 'the cartography of darkness' (25). In so doing, McCann asks the reader to focus on the centrality of space and the spatial politics of belonging, while also reminding us that his characters live in desperate poverty.

McCann's spatial vocabulary also alerts us to the violence and dispossession that mark these characters' lives.[46] Treefrog befriends an African-American woman, Angela, who has fled the tunnel where she usually lives after she is raped multiple times; Angela seeks refuge with Elijah, another tunnel-dweller who lives near Treefrog, but Elijah is also abusive towards her.[47] After a particularly vicious attack, Angela visits Treefrog, who tells Angela that he'd 'like to make a map of [her] face' (162). Angela's face has been badly hurt by Elijah, so 'she winces when [Treefrog] touches the bruise on the middle of her cheek – the topography of violence – and he tries to skim the very edge of her skin where it must be coloured blue' (164). Given that Angela is both female and the object of Treefrog's sexual desire, we could read Treefrog's wish to make her face a knowable cartography as repeating the imperial logic of colonial epistemic and cartographic violence. She might be read, as were the

[46] For a perceptive reading of how trauma is linked to the interwoven temporal and spatial politics of McCann's novel, see Sinéad Moynihan, '"Upground and belowground topographies": The Chronotopes of Skyscraper and Subway in Colum McCann's New York novels before and after 9/11', *Studies in American Fiction* 39.2 (2012): 269–290

[47] Although an engagement with the issue of the abuse and violence directed at homeless women falls outside the scope of this chapter, Anne Fogarty argues that McCann's literature does illustrate that it is women who are 'most at risk in transnational societies and global cities' (126).

'virgin' lands that became victims of the colonial incursion, as a territory ready to be possessed. Treefrog has also made maps from the memory of his daughter's face (Lenora) and his wife's face (Dancescaseca); he imagines his wife's face 'with all its perfect contours' (176). But this negates the 'maps [Treefrog] has made of his nest, his tunnel' (176); the map that he 'would like to make […] of the ceiling' of the New York Public Library (93); it also occludes the kindness that Treefrog shows when 'with infinite tenderness he maps the geography of Angela' (165). Instead, we might read his desire to make these maps as an extension of his Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), which we will explore in further detail below.

In *This Side of Brightness* and elsewhere in McCann's fiction, it is important to note that homelessness is not a metaphor for the alienation of the modern subject, as argued in texts such as Peter Berger et al.'s *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (1973), but a lived reality. The homeless figures that occupy the tunnels underneath the city suffer from mental illness, poverty and drug addiction. Treefrog and the fellow homeless figures live underground 'among all the leftovers of human ruin' and amid 'mounds of human faeces and the torn magazines and the empty containers and the hypodermic needles with blobs of blood at their tips' (56). To feed himself, Treefrog starts 'dipping into the garbage cans of Manhattan' hoping to 'find some cans or bottles to redeem' so he can buy some food (33). Even amongst this destitution, there is a sort of hierarchy amongst the homeless; Treefrog notes that 'all the topside bums are stupid enough to keep their money under the insoles of their shoes', implying that the easy way they store their money, or that the have money at all, indicates that they do not face the same struggle to survive as those living underground (95). Then there are those on 'Burma Road', under Grand Central Station, which is an area occupied by 'the truly damned […] wounded men and

women living in their lazaret of hopelessness' (97). These dispossessed people experience both violence and extreme levels of physical stress: in addition to the sexual and domestic abuse that women are particularly at risk of, as we discussed previously, there are 'murders and stabbings' (97). Faraday, one of the homeless men who used to be a police officer before moving into the tunnels, is electrocuted when 'fishing for electricity'; 'he stumbled and fell across the tracks and touched his hand against the third rail' (129). The details of his death are gruesome: 'every fluid in his body boiled first' and 'six hundred volts of direct current blew a hole in the top of his head' (130). The police come down to clear up: 'they placed a bit of his brain in a blue plastic bag, one of the cops puking up at the sight, and the people who lived in the tunnel stood around, staring, staying nothing' (130). When the police visit Treefrog and those who live near him, one police officer is disgusted with Treefrog's existence, telling him that 'you live like an animal! You should get some help, man, you're living like a goddamn rat!' (125). But this policeman also explains why Faraday, or James Francis, ended up living in the tunnels. Faraday was a police officer himself previously, and 'had himself an accident once. Lost his nerve. Shot someone. Never recovered' (128).

This traumatic back-story outlines why Faraday elected to seek solace in the darkness of the tunnels; by including these narratives, McCann resists defaulting to the 'compelling and powerful myth' of what Liam Kennedy calls 'the underclass' (5). This 'myth', argues Kennedy 'combines common assumptions about poverty and race' and 'generates images of criminals, delinquents, crack addicts and unwed mothers, and of an urban scene in which crime, drugs, unemployment, welfare dependency, indiscriminate violence and educational failure are norms of existence' (5). In *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (2002), Bryan Fanning

outlines the historical roots of this term, suggesting that the 'concept [of the underclass] harks back to nineteenth-century Victorian engagements with urban poverty that employed language and metaphors derived from colonialism in discussion of areas inhabited by the urban poor' (20). Moreover, the urban poor were discursively constructed through a vocabulary of imperialism and race: the children of these impoverished classes were labelled 'street Arabs' and the 'journalists and researchers […] who wrote about them were referred to as "social explorers" and their visits to the slums were likened to journeys to darkest Africa' (20). The use of the term 'underclass' continued into the twentieth century but, within the United States, 'a new emphasis on the deviant and transgressive nature of the poor emerged in the USA as a coded racialized discourse which discussed black families and communities within cultural stereotypes rooted in colonial racisms' (20). The metaphorical racialised underclass of social theory finds its literal manifestation in McCann's homeless Subway dwellers; we find the discursive parallels between poverty and imperial ideas of race conjoined in the lives of those inhabiting the Subway tunnels. Although there can be no argument that McCann's homeless figures *do* populate an urban scene of crime, drugs, unemployment and indiscriminate violence, his retelling of fragments of their personal stories highlights the trauma and the lack of support from the topside world that has led them to the tunnels. Treefrog's story unfolds slowly, curling as it does around Walker's narrative, but McCann begins to hint at the suffering that has marked Treefrog's life very early in the novel. He writes that Treefrog's 'chest is scrimshawed with stabwounds and burns and scars', the majority of which, it becomes apparent, are self-inflicted (30). Treefrog's fixation with balance leads him to develop a dangerous, self-harming form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). After his grandfather dies, Treefrog blames himself and takes to

deliberately inflicting pain upon himself, which is always ‘equally scorched on both sides of his body’, perfectly symmetrical (225). This OCD even extends into his relations with others, as we learn through a detail about when ‘Treefrog once stuffed a man with a knife and it slid through the gap in his ribs’, keen to create balance, ‘Treefrog felt that he had to stab himself on the opposite side of the ribcage’ (30). These moments demand an engaged, empathetic response from readers; in turning the trauma of his life into violence against his own body, McCann asks readers to engage with Treefrog as a person, rather than as a symptom of endemic urban decline.

Elsewhere in this thesis the ramifications of homelessness or itinerancy are discussed in light of the Irish and diasporic Irish experience, but there is also a specifically American context that frames *This Side of Brightness*. Of the settled homeless population that McCann found in the tunnels, McCann has said that ‘it seemed like such an American thing – to lay claim to a patch of land, to take on another frontier, only this one was a nightmare frontier’ (colummccann.com). In tandem with the American desire to lay claim to land, there is also a restless strand in American culture that embraces being ‘on the road’. John Allen’s *Homelessness in American Literature: Romanticism, Realism, and Testimony* (2004), suggests that being on the road is a well-respected position within American literary culture and that the itinerant characters who populate the literary texts of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jack London and Horatio Alger, owe much to the work of Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. In short, Allen suggests that the antebellum experience of homelessness was rendered ‘relatively invisible’ by ‘almshouses, police lodging houses, and local government support’, but that there was a ‘rapid increase in the number of wandering poor and tramps’ in the period between the end of the Civil War and the start of World War II (3, 6). Allen argues that while actual homeless figures

were demonised in the contemporary popular press, this level of fear was not echoed in their literary depictions; he notes that 'the reading public was certainly interested in tramps, as indicated by the publication of dozens of tramp autobiographies between the Civil War and the Depression' (7). Although not explicitly referenced, Allen could have included the success of Charlie Chaplin's figure 'The Tramp', which, like the literary works Allen discusses, provides further evidence for the sanitisation of these homeless figures. Post-1945, Allen contends, 'as the United States emerged as a global power, attention turned toward the cultural values of stability and security, and homelessness became discursively less visible' (8). Therefore, homelessness became culturally pathologised and 'the image of a single male alcoholic dominated the discourse of homelessness between 1940 and 1980' (8). Writers such as Jack London, W. H. Davies and Josiah Flynt, Allen believes, 'attempted to align themselves with the dominant culture by posing as intellectuals and sociologists' (9); their work served to 'romanticize the life of the tramp and conceal the reality of a migrant lifestyle' (107). Despite containing the possibility of subversion, texts by and about tramps have the potential to 'undermine the American work ethic, the stability of the family, and the need for a home', Allen confirms that these texts often 'conclude with the author returning home and renouncing the need to travel and/or extolling the virtues of the home' (19). Indeed, for many of these writers, tramping was an elective lifestyle; some authors 'chose to go on the road, a luxury which many tramps did not have' and Allen reminds us of the 'self-imposed "homelessness" of the Beat Generation' in later literary work (107, 8). This fact is central to our understanding of *TSoB* for, as McCann highlights, the characters in the novel are driven to abandon their homes by trauma and despair. In addition to the class privilege that many of these writers had, there is of course a racial element to their privilege: they were all

white. Contemporary literature, Allen suggests, ‘continues to either romanticize or objectify homelessness’ (10). However, McCann’s novel is critically engaged with both the racialised reality of contemporary homelessness in New York and the narratives of dispossession that lead these figures to vagrancy and continue to haunt their lives.

‘Halfbreed, mulatto, Sambo’: Race, interracial relations and cosmopolitanism at its limits

The interracial romance and marriage between African-American Nathan Walker and Irish-American Eleanor O’Leary, and experiences of their mixed-race children provides further testing ground for the cosmopolitanism of the American multicultural city. *This Side of Brightness* is a novel very much concerned with race and its relationship to American identity, meditating on the veracity of Judith R. Berzon’s claim that the mixed-race individual ‘knows, with other African-Americans, the pain of exclusion from the American dream’ (13). Interracial romance characterised encounters between the Old and New world from its inception, discursively and physically. In the discourse of early English colonialism, the New World was gendered female and ripe for imperial penetration; in naming the first English colony in North America ‘Virginia’, Louis Montrose argues, ‘considerations of gender difference interact with those of ethnic difference; the discursive power of inviolate female body serves an emergent imperialist project of exploration, conquest, and settlement’ (8). Joan Pong Linton furthers this when she states, ‘in the narrative invention of the New World, the domestic closure that gives husbands mastery of women as property finds analogous expression in promising adventurers the domestication of a rich and feminized land’ (3). This discursive equation of colonial territory and feminine corporeality did translate into actual interracial romance and marriage. Notable examples of relations between indigenous Amerindian women and

European men are Hernán Cortés and Malintzin from the early decades of the sixteenth century, and John Rolfe and Pocahontas from the beginning of the seventeenth century; both couples have been mythologised in popular culture. Martha Hodes suggests that figures such as William Byrd, writing in the eighteenth century, 'commend[ed] what he called the "modern policy" of racial intermarriage employed in French Canada and Louisiana by which alliances rather than warfare were effected' (10).[48] The American Frontier has a special importance in the history of interracial mixing because it became 'a cultural merging ground and a marrying ground' (Hodes 13). Numerous critics, including Frederick Jackson Turner in his seminal essay, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' (1893), have emphasised the centrality of the Frontier to the construction of American identity. It is curious how McCann notes the idea of a 'nightmare frontier' in relation to the homeless communities' occupation of the Subway tunnels. So, given the multiple interracial encounters that dominate his novel, we might read the Frontier as one of many metaphors for American national identity that ricochets throughout the novel.

In addition to marriages between 'English, French, and Spanish fur traders' and Native-American women, 'escaping slaves' from the Southern to Northern states also 'sought refuge among Native Americans', intermarrying and producing mixed-raced children (Hodes 13). This context of Afro-Indian mixing is pertinent to McCann's novel, too, as Louisa, the woman who marries the Irish-African-American Clarence, is Native-American. If we wanted, we could read into McCann's decision to fashion Louisa as Native-American; the links between the Irish and Native-American peoples have been mined by academics and artists alike. As will be discussed with reference to *TransAtlantic* in a later chapter Anglophone imperial discourse of the nineteenth-

[48] See also William K. Boyd ed., *William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1929) (reference courtesy of Martha Hodes, 28).

century was profoundly racist, associating savagery as an ethnic trait of both the indigenous American and the indigenous Irish population. These sorts of comparisons had been made by the English between the two groups since the early seventeenth century, as colonial literature likened the 'wild Irish and Indian' to one another (Reverend Hugh Peters quoted in Gibbons 2004).[49] This xenophobia directed at the Irish in Ireland also continued, to some degree, throughout the nineteenth century as starving and impoverished Irish migrants fled to the United States. David Emmons notes that the immigrant Irish in the United States were described by the New York Tribune 'as a "savage mob", a "pack of savages", "savage foes" [and] "demons and incarnate devils"' (Emmons 10). While contemporary Americans of Irish descent can no longer feasibly be said to occupy a position of cultural or racial inferiority within the fabric of the United States, this empathetic dialogue of solidarity between the Irish and Native-American has been taken up by various factions and figures as a means of commenting upon the (post)colonial situation in Ireland, the Northern Irish Troubles and Irish Republicanism. These images of Irish-Indians and Indian-Irish have populated the work of Paul Muldoon, particularly his collections *Meeting the British* (1987) and *Madoc* (1990), creating ambiguous hybrid literary spaces as a means of meditating on (Northern) Ireland's colonial legacy. Whereas Native-American characters may have historically been demonised, contemporary society tends to view the indigenous people in a more sympathetic light, as victims of an oppressive colonial regime. It is due to this change in perception that, as Elizabeth Cullingford argues, 'minority Northern Catholics frequently identify with the Native American underdogs', and points to a mural on Whiterock Road in Belfast, in which an American flag and Native-American chief are claimed for the Republican cause with

[49] See also, Gabriel Archer's *Pilgrimes* (1625), John Smith's *Works* (1884) and William Wood's *New England prospect* (1634).

the words ‘Your Struggle: Our Struggle’ (183, 174). The visual artist Elaine Reichek’s ‘Home Rule’ exhibition also sought to draw parallels between the ‘native warriors’ of the Irish Republican Army and Native-American culture. Significantly, Reichek’s exhibition juxtaposed images of the IRA with Native-American ones, but also drew extensively on images and symbols of the West of Ireland, such as ‘Whitewash (Galway Cottage)’, which twins a photograph of a stereotypical Western cottage with a traditional woolen skirt (Reichek 33).

In some respects, *TSoB* departs from typical interpretations of Native-American culture by contemporary Irish artists; Joy Porter suggests that the majority of Irish interpretations of Native-American culture have ‘reinscribed stereotype and reinforced colonial divisions’ (263). Porter contends ‘it has not been actual Indian cultures that Irish art has sought connection with at all, but, instead, with invented colonial caricatures of Indianness’ (263). While McCann’s construction of Louisa’s character does veer dangerously close to caricature and cliché, McCann avoids romanticising Louisa’s situation and he is attuned to the economic deprivation and dispossession that many Native-Americans face, either on reservations or in urban environments. To indicate that Louisa is Native-American, McCann describes her as having ‘high cheekbones’, ‘threaded hair’ and ‘brown toes’ (154). To further differentiate between the African-American characters and Louisa, McCann has her ‘spend[ing] her time fashioning ancestral beads’ and working on a ‘dreamcatcher’ (152). These terms of description are fairly mechanistic, defaulting, as McCann does, to obvious cultural markers of her ethnic identity. However, McCann does note his direct engagement with Native-American literary culture; his preface is taken from Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* (1988), which is part of the *Love Medicine* (1984) tetralogy and forms the earliest part, chronologically (there could also be something in Louisa’s

name, which is notably similar to Louise). The lines from *Tracks* in *TSoB* read: ‘We started dying before the snow and, like the snow, we continued to fall. It was surprising there were so many of us left to die’. Readers versed in Irish literature may put this into intertextual dialogue with Muldoon’s ‘Meeting the British’ (1987), which establishes similar connections between snow and death. The poem opens in the voice of a Native-American inhabitant: ‘[w]e met the British in the dead of winter./ The sky was lavender/ and the snow lavender-blue’ (160). In addition to Muldoon’s twinning of ‘British’ and ‘dead’, the final two lines indicate the lasting violence of this colonial encounter, ‘[t]hey gave us six fishhooks/ and two blankets embroidered with smallpox’ (161). Erdrich’s tetralogy explores the lives of several generations of Anishinaabe families on a reservation in North Dakota. The novel is, like McCann’s, marked by violence and familial trauma; one family becomes homeless when the government repossesses their land. The character Pauline Puyat also bears some similarities to Treefrog: she is mixed-race and performs masochistic violence on her own body like Treefrog. Louisa’s family also come from a reservation and live in a ‘trailer house […] in South Dakota’ (153). *TSoB* recognises the socioeconomic realities facing displaced Native-Americans and charts Louisa’s slow decline into substance abuse. First, it is alcoholism: ‘a bottle and a half a day. In the morning she stumbles out of bed and goes straight to the cupboard, doesn’t even wince at the first sip’ (167). Then, it is heroin addiction; marked by a ‘bracelet of tiny track marks on the inside of her wrist’ (169). These addictions are financed by her selling her body for sex: ‘a litany of men calls at the door and Walker has noticed – with a thickening sense of shame –the rise of her skirts high on her thighs’ (168).

The tokenistic means through which McCann signals Louisa’s racial and ethnic difference is also demonstrated in McCann’s descriptions of both Walker and

Eleanor. These descriptions of their racial difference hark back to colonial or imperial markers, which actually result in fixating on their race. For example, much is made of Eleanor's, and her mother's, red hair. Amanda Third suggests that in the British colonisation of Ireland, due to 'absence of a difference of skin colour', red hair 'became one clear physical marker, among others, of Celtic or Irish difference' (221). The novel eroticises this marker of Eleanor's 'Celtic' difference: 'passing men eye [Eleanor's] long red hair' and it becomes associated with the sensuality of Walker and Eleanor's relationship (50). When the lovers meet in secret, 'she asks Walker to comb her hair', which is 'heavy, pendant' (74); upon meeting in the darkness of an African-American cinema, she 'takes [her] headscarf off and her hair falls and she lets Walker's breath caress her ear' (89). The repeated insistence on the length and redness of her hair reinscribes both her ethnicity *and* gender. Third also highlights that red hair is intrinsically related to the feminine, arguing that 'while redheaded men are not entirely invisible', 'the redheaded man doesn't circulate in the same kinds of ways, and with the same kind of sexualized and spectacular prominence, as the images of the redheaded woman' (221). We noted previously that colonial discourse often constructed the colonised as feminine, but Joseph Valente argues that the 'sexual inflection of socio-economic dominance was unusually explicit in the case of Ireland' (189). In what Valente terms the 'gendered rhetoric of ethno-colonial difference', Ireland was the subjugated, inferior female to an English/British domineering male (192). Third reads the feminised figure of the redhead as a legacy of this colonial discourse, arguing that in 'signifying both womanness and Irishness, the redheaded woman embodies the feminine sexualized threat of the Irish racial other' (223). In addition to her long red hair acting as a metaphor for her Irish ancestry, McCann's portrait of Eleanor constructs her as delicate and youthful – the

embodiment of feminine frailty. Walker's (non-sexual) relationship with Eleanor begins when she is an infant; he is 19 years old than her and acts much like a father figure throughout her childhood. McCann elects to emphasise both her heteronormative feminine physique and her youth: 'her waist is wren-thin and adolescent' (77). On her wedding day, she is 'only seventeen' but McCann highlights that 'she looks even younger' (77). These fragments of description create an uncomfortable portrait of a sexualised young girl and, while Eleanor is granted sexual agency,[50] it does still suggest masculine dominance over a vulnerable female subject. While McCann undoubtedly does not mean to suggest 'England's feminized image of the Celt', his constant coupling of Eleanor's Celtic red hair with her sexualised, fragile feminine body does repeat the logic of this imperial discourse (Valente 206).

In *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995), Robert Young argues that nineteenth century racial theory was nominated by the 'issue of sexuality and the issue of sexual unions between whites and blacks' (9). This, Young suggests, resulted in a situation where racialised subjects were often conceived of as sexualised bodies and so '[t]heories of race were thus also covert theories of desire' (9). It is notable that within the instances above from *TSoB* and in some moments within *TransAtlantic*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, McCann racialises and sexualises his characters at the same time. For example, when the couple consummate their marriage, McCann writes that '[t]hey move like two chiaroscurists under the covers, black and white, white and black […] one hip a hill of bony pink, the other muscular brown' (77). In addition to intertwining sexuality with race, this quotation

[50] This could be read as affirming another stereotype of the feisty, sexually voracious red-headed woman. Third maintains that 'in English-speaking cultures, red hair is talked about as incendiary, and redheads are constructed as fiery, in every sense of the word'; she goes on to outline that redheads are discursively constructed as 'hot-tempered, hot-blooded, hot-headed, and hot under the collar […] and most notoriously, they are hot in bed' (225).

also highlights the ways in which McCann constructs Walker's blackness as hypermasculine. Walker is 'tall and muscular, he sends ripples along his arm' as he works in the tunnels and 'drenches his skin in sweat' (8). He is an exceptionally good labourer, described as 'the best of' the men and the 'other riverdiggers envy his fluidity' (8). Jeffrey A. Brown contends that 'muscles, as a signifier of "natural" power, have been strongly linked with the black male body' (30). Furthermore, Susan Bordo suggests that 'numerous film representations' of black male bodies have involved depictions of these bodies at work, producing culturally dominant images of 'sweating, glistening bodies belonging to black slaves and prizefighters' (195). These cultural stereotypes about black male physicality, Brown argues, are part of the legacy of 'white society's fear of the black man', which 'has been grounded in notions of masculine physicality and sexuality' (30). These ideas, like those of the feminised Irish, also have their roots in imperial discourse; Robert Staples maintains that the 'concept of black male hypersexuality dates as far back as the sixteenth century, when Englishmen described Africans as beset by an unrestrained lustfullness' (175). Redheaded women have also been discursively constructed as 'active figures of hypersexuality', which is again undoubtedly rooted in the discursive eroticisation of Otherness by colonial powers (Third 228). Although, as noted, McCann probably makes these links between gender, ethnicity and race in an unconscious manner, we could read traces of this imperial 'gendered rhetoric of ethno-colonial difference' (Valente 192).

Despite the uncomfortable tensions surrounding his ethno-racial character descriptions, McCann's construction of Eleanor and Walker's interracial relationship does expose the racism of the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Their love is a transgression that the multicultural city cannot embrace. On the day of their

wedding, Walker 'and Eleanor are turned away from four restaurants and refused admittance to a cinema' (77). As an interracial couple, the two cannot be seen together in public, for people 'on the streets people mutter about them. Cars slow down and taunts are hurled' (77). On one of the rare occasions when the two do decide to make it obvious that they are a couple, 'a passing pedestrian spits in Walker's face and shouts at Eleanor: 'Nigger-lover' (73). After they marry, this violence invades their home and 'a series of bricks greet them through the bedroom window' (81). To combat this, Walker elects to move the family unit into a flat higher from the ground, where these bricks cannot reach them; '[Walker] feels as if he has exiled himself to the air, but he knows that there is safety for Eleanor in the exile' (81). Instead, the lovers can only meet in public after dark – 'familiar and trembling, they meet in darkness' (74) – or in the blackness of the cinema we mentioned earlier; '[d]arkness hides them, an illicit love affair being made out of their own marriage' (88). This darkness, of course, provides an imaginative link to the darkness of the Subway tunnels and the democracy that Walker finds there. We discussed previously that interracial romance has been a staple of American history and literature for decades, but there has been a surge of such narratives in recent Irish fiction. Both Amanda Tucker (2014) and Jason King (2009) have commented on this, with King arguing that Irish writers such as Dermot Bolger, Clare Boylan and Roddy Doyle 'tend to imagine the positive idea of multiculturalism through metaphors of miscegenation and interracial romance' (159). Tucker and King both argue that Irish writers have turned to the interracial romance as an optimistic means of grappling with 'new'[51] multicultural Irish society and 'develop an interracial romantic plotline

[51] Although 'Ireland was never the monoculture it told itself it was', the ethno-racial profile of migrants coming into Ireland during the Celtic Tiger era was different from the Chinese and Jewish inhabitants that pre-dated this wave of migration (Lentin and McVeigh 21).

as a symbolic shorthand for the resolution of cultural conflict' but that these narratives 'eli[d]e' rather than 'reconcile' cultural differences (King 160). McCann's novel is not located in Ireland, but we can also deduce from the sections of *TSoB* discussed that his novel certainly does not use the interracial romance to act as a metaphor for an optimistic resolution of cultural conflict. Rather, it is acutely aware of the trials faced by couples in a mixed relationship.

Coinciding with the recent interest in Irish fiction featuring interracial romance, many Irish writers are now including mixed-race, or 'ambiguously raced characters' in their fiction (Moynihan 26). Sinéad Moynihan has been particularly perceptive in this area, discussing how figures such as Jeddo (son of Irish migrant Mary Duane in *Star of the Sea*) from Joseph O'Connor's *Redemption Falls* (2007) and Declan from 'Home to Harlem', from Roddy Doyle's *The Deportees* (2007), are widening and subverting ethno-racialised ideas of Irishness (although Jeddo is Irish-American). The mixed-race subject, like interracial romance, has a longer and more visible presence in American literature and history. In *Racial subjects: writing on race in America* (1997), David Theo Goldberg outlines that the 'mixed race [subject] provides the metaphorical anchor for multiculturalism' (60). Like the role of interracial romance in contemporary Irish fiction, the mixed-race subject 'may seem to offer exciting proof positive that a deep social taboo has been transgressed' but in reality, this is often not the case (Goldberg 63). What this interest in the mixed-race subjects actually performs, argues Goldberg, is a 'fixing in place [of] the racializing project', which 'naturalizes racial assumption, marking mixed-ness as an aberrant condition' (63). Goldberg is writing in relation to the status of mixed-race individuals in the United States, but the experience of being mixed-race varied greatly across the Americas. In

the Southern and Central Americas, under the colonial rule of the Spanish and Portuguese, relations between European men and both indigenous and enslaved African women were relatively common.[52] In various countries in the Caribbean, such as 'Santo Domingo and Jamaica', Judith R. Berzon argues that, 'mulattoes constituted a separate caste in a three-caste system' (9). Within the U.S., being mixed race did little to elevate one's social standing; Berzon contends that in the Southern U.S., 'as a general rule, whites made little distinction between blacks and mulattoes, thus relegating the mulatto to the lower caste' (Berzon 9). To be mixed-race, in addition to embodying a different race to both parents, and therefore strange to the first people with whom you are meant to identify, is to be marginal to both parents' cultures. Berzon maintains that 'the mulatto is defined in terms of his [or her] marginal position' within society (13). Moreover, Berzon states that 'one motif is repeated again and again in the literature on the mulatto experience: the tragic dichotomy between the promise of the American dream and the grim reality of life in America' for non-white individuals (52). Evidence of this can clearly be seen in the 'tragic mulatto/a' figure, a literary and cultural trope that Moynihan has termed a 'particularly American archetype' (171). Moynihan is keen to clarify that 'although the mixed-race subject and the tragic mulatto are by no means synonymous, the tragic mulatto is overwhelmingly pervasive in American cultural imaginings of biracial and multiracial identities' (170). The tragic mulatto/a figure was most commonly associated with female characters of mixed-race that could pass for white; these women were often bought up with all the socioeconomic privilege that whiteness entails, before the 'truth' of their mixed racial heritage is exposed and their happiness unravelled.

[52] See, for example, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America*, Magnus Mörner, (Boston, 1967); *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650*, Colin A. Palmer (Cambridge, 1976) and *Patterns of Race in the Americas*, Marvin Harris (New York 1964).

There are five mixed-race characters in *TSoB*: Eleanor and Walker's children, Clarence, Deirdre and Maxine; Clarence and Louisa's son, Treefrog; and Treefrog's daughter Lenora with his African-American wife Dancescaseca. The novel depicts the prejudice and racism that these characters face, gesturing, too, towards the sexual objectification of the Other that Deirdre and Maxine experience. At one point a neighbour, Hoofer McAuliffe, who will later kill Eleanor in a drunken road accident, is caught leering at the two teenage girls by Walker. He retorts that '[he] wouldn't touch it anyways […] mixed pussy's bad for a man' (111). However, the novel is primarily concerned with the life of Treefrog and, to a lesser degree, that of his father, Clarence. The lives of these men are undoubtedly marked by trauma and tragedy, as will be explored below, but McCann's tragic mixed-race characters are not simple replicas of the tragic mulatto/a archetype. Unlike many other tragic mulatto/a narratives, none of the mixed-race individuals in this novel attempt, or unknowingly attempt, to 'pass' for white. Tragic mulatto/a figures are often a 'product of the white man's imagination' deployed to elevate traits associated with whiteness and denigrate those associated with blackness (Berzon 99). Werner Sollors states that the '"Tragic Mulatto's" conflict was ultimately believed to be biological, generated by the "warring blood" that was believed to be coursing in their veins' (224). While McCann is a white writer, he has argued that his Irish identity might help to negate some of the racist attitudes associated with historical tragic mulatto/a narratives written by white men;[53] this is certainly a controversial correlation and this Irish/black relationship is something that will be tested throughout the thesis (most notably in the Chapter Five on *TransAtlantic*). Reading *TSoB*, there is nothing to indicate that any of the mixed-

[53] Of forging relationships with the African-American homeless population living in the Subway tunnels, McCann has said, 'Being Irish helped me – I was never seen as part of the established order, the system. I was outside. And they were outsiders too. So often I felt aligned with the people who were living underground.' (colummcann.com).

race characters are composed of conflicting 'white' or 'black' impulses; there is no sense that this is a novel 'conceived for white readers', with 'characters [that] invite empathy because they are so much like whites and so little like blacks' (Sollors 225). To be fair, these critiques of tragic mulatto/a narratives are levelled against those written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; one would hope that we had moved beyond essentialist notions of how somebody could be clearly delineated as white or black. Within McCann's work, empathy is invited from readers for characters of all ethno-racial backgrounds.

Treefrog also deviates from the archetypal tragic mulatto in that he is not of black and white heritage, but also Native-American. In this way, McCann subverts what Goldberg reads as the 'reimpos[ition of] the duality between blackness and whiteness as the standard, the measure, of mixed-race' (63). Instead, Treefrog's racial mixed-ness is clearly intended as a commentary of the mixed-ness of American identity more widely and the difficulties in sustaining and constructing fruitful, productive intercultural dialogues. Note how, in describing his self-reflection, Treefrog sees himself as 'black man white man red man brown man American' (94). The word 'American' ends that section of the text and breaks the repetitive nature of the rest of the sentence, but even while it jars with the text of the sentence, even the capital 'A' juts out of the typography like a small violence, the '-can' of the end of the word rhymes with the repeated 'man' of the rest of the sentence, pulling it together. It suggests an unnatural and uneasy unity, but still indicates a degree of cohesion. This self-reflection causes Treefrog great angst, making him want to 'slash at his reflection in the mirror' (94); the implication is that this mixed-ness of American identity is still somehow violent or undesirable. 'To be black' to any degree, suggests Berzon, 'is to be despised by white America, and perhaps by oneself as well' (4). Clarence also

displays a similar amount of self-loathing to his son; upon encountering his own reflection, Clarence is forced into 'seeing a person he doesn't want to be' (146).

McCann's delving into the realm of the tragic mulatto/a figure begins with the narrative of Clarence, whose life is very much marked by violence and trauma. As a young teenager, Clarence makes a trip to the factory where his mother works to proudly tell her that he has achieved an 'A' grade in a recent science test. Eleanor is so embarrassed by Clarence's presence that she refuses to admit that she's his mother. When Clarence comes to Eleanor saying 'momma', she responds by saying '[o]h, that's just a term of speech. I know his momma very well' (116). We learn about this incident through Eleanor's devastated confession to Walker, and although she is remorseful for her actions, claiming that she's 'never felt a sorrier thing in [her] life', this shocking negation of her son is a telling internalisation of society's racism and a revealing moment about the experiential reality of being mixed-race (117). Perhaps fuelled by this public rejection from his mother, Clarence joins the military to fight in Korea, hoping 'to be part of a bomb disposal unit, but they sign him up as a cook instead' (119). This is again indicative of the racism faced by black and mixed-race individuals; Clarence is a 'figure to symbolize the failure of the American myth of egalitarianism' (Berzon 52). In the photograph taken of him before he leaves, his eyes are described as 'deep and brown and serious, like two very carefully blown-out holes in his head' (119). In addition to the immediate corporeal violence that this suggests, it also acts as proleptic irony foreshadowing both the later accident with a mine that results in one of his eyes being blown out and the faces of 'wanted' black men that he sees on posters in Georgia, 'their eyes dark and grim, expectant of death' (146). In the 'catalogue of tortures endured by various mulatto characters', Berzon includes 'death through grief, murder, childbirth, abortion, and suicide; life with remorse, despair,

bitterness, alienation, and insanity' (102). We can see that the life of the tragic mulatto/a is likely to be marked by somatic suffering; McCann's novel does tally with conventional tragic mulatto/a narratives in this respect. After losing an eye, Clarence returns to New York to life with Louisa, who gives birth to their son, Clarence Nathan/Treefrog. Too poor to afford their own home, they move in with Eleanor and Nathan. While out picking up laundry for her infant grandson, Eleanor is hit by a car driven by a drunken neighbour, Hoofer McAuliffe, and killed. Filled with grief and rage, Clarence kills McAuliffe and is caught soon after by a police officer; fuelled by 'adrenalin [which] is huge and unstoppable in him', Clarence also kills the police officer in his efforts to get away (143).

Clarence flees to Atlanta, Georgia, but readers know that he will not survive this trip. Atlanta has already been associated with violence: Walker's stories of killing snakes and collecting pieces of alligator skeleton have made even the natural world seem menacing (37, 90). Walker often talks of taking the young Clarence for a trip to his old home in the South, but Eleanor knows 'that if the child was brought south, both father and son might just end up like the Spanish moss, swinging from the limb of a tree' (88). When Clarence arrives in Atlanta, he finds a newspaper with a front page 'report of a fourteen-year-old lynched in Greenwood, Mississippi for whistling at a white girl' (145). When he passes the 'wanted' posters, we know that he too is 'expectant of death' (146). After this, the narrative does not return to Clarence's point of view again and we learn of his death when his father goes to Atlanta, having been informed that the police have found him. As he looks at the body of his son, Walker reflects that 'not even the hands of the morticians can disguise the beating Clarence must have received, his jaw slopped sideways, his cheekbones bloated blue with bruises, a new eyepatch over an even deeper wound in the socket' (149). The police

fabricate a story that 'Clarence was shot dead' while trying to escape after robbing a 'liquor store at knifepoint', but it is clear Clarence was beaten to death by the police (149).

Clarence's murder by the police leaves his mixed-race son, Clarence Nathan/Treefrog, without a father. To cope with her grief, Louisa turns first to alcohol and subsequently to heroin. Treefrog's childhood is steeped in poverty and substance abuse; in one scene, the young boy takes his grandfather to the roof to display his impressive acrobatic abilities and the pair are accompanied by 'junkies […] slumbering on the other side of the roof, melting ice cubes in a bucket for shooting icewater into their veins' (171). He stumbles upon his mother 'sitting on the toilet seat, bent over […] her skirt is lifted and she is ferreting around her thighs for a new place into which to shove a needle' (178). It is Treefrog who funds his mother's heroin addiction and, after Louisa overdoses, he blames himself for her death: '[i]t's my fault. I gave her the money' (186). Later on in the novel, Treefrog takes the very elderly Walker down into the Subway system to ride the trains, a shared pastime that they have enjoyed since Treefrog was a child. However, on this occasion, the very elderly Walker decides that he wants to walk through the tunnel, along the Subway lines, between stations. It soon becomes apparent that they are too slow for the oncoming train and, although Treefrog manages to reach the next station platform safely, Walker is too slow. Treefrog is unable to pull Walker on to the Subway platform quickly enough, so Walker is killed by the oncoming train. As a result, Treefrog starts to suffer from a nightmare in which he is 'chopping his hands off and sucking out the marrow in his bones until there is a hollow corridor along which he walks, as high with despair as Manhattan' (222). In addition to grief and guilt leading Treefrog to self-harm, Treefrog becomes obsessed with his hands and their inability to

lift Walker to safety in time. Following on from an incident where Treefrog accidently touches his pre-pubescent daughter under the armpits, Treefrog continues to compulsively touch his daughter in this inappropriate manner, finding solace in repeating the lifting motion that failed to save his grandfather's life. This touching of his daughter is mistaken for something sexually motivated by his wife, who leaves him, and the whole affair affirms his hatred for himself, particularly his hands; 'he wishes he could murder [his hands], annihilate them, suicide them, they form no meaningful connection to his wrists – more than anything he wants to get rid of his hands' (237).

We might read this action and the development of Treefrog's obsessive compulsive desire 'for symmetry, for equilibrium' as stemming from a deep-seated need to balance his asymmetrical racial heritage (28). At the end of the novel, as Treefrog gains closer to the 'resurrection' that will see him abandon his life in the tunnels, he is able to gain greater insight into why he began to touch his daughter in this way (248). Treefrog contemplates how 'he hadn't meant what he did, he had been searching for ancestry, the gift of blood […] he had been lifting his grandfather up, he had been lifting the shoulders of Nathan Walker up from her body' (247). This is a strange and ambivalent statement; what is meant by this 'lifting' up? Is it lift, as in to elevate, to resurrect (the final word of the novel), or is it lift as to cleanse, or remove? It makes more sense when we read it in comparison with an earlier, similar phrase, when Treefrog remembers touching Lenora, 'his hands are at her armpits and he wishes he could lift *his* history out of her' (105; emphasis mine). Therefore, we might read this act as Treefrog's attempt at lifting out the traumatic imbalance of ancestry in his daughter. His own racial mixed-ness puts him outside a bounded racial identity and he is subject to racist bullying when a child at school. He notes 'all the taunts

scribbled down in a school copybook: Halfbreed, mulatto, Sambo, nigger, honkie, snowboy, zebra, cracker, jungle bunny, coon, Wonderbread, Uncle Tom, crazy horse, spade' (173). Even within the multicultural city of New York, the 'failure of the "melting-pot"' of the United States is stark (Bourne 86). Unsure as to what his identity should be, given his interracial and inter-ethnic parentage, Treefrog desperately tries to fashion for himself a fixed identity. He 'wears a dashiki', a traditional African garment and 'has been trying to cultivate the Afro', but because his racial heritage is only one quarter black, 'mostly his hair falls quickly out of it, lies lank and black down to his collarbone' (180 - 181). However, Moynihan asserts that while Treefrog's 'appreciation of balance becomes a self-destructive obsession', the novel 'hint[s] paradoxically at the restorative possibilities of imbalance (2012: 286). In support of her argument, Moynihan notes the 'signifan[ce], at the end of the novel, that the word "resurrection" rests on Treefrog's tongue as "a thing of imbalance"' (287, McCann 247). If we apply this same logic to the novel's racial politics, then what Treefrog/McCann are advocating is an embrace of racial mixing and hybridity, however imbalanced. Imbalance is also loaded with 'restorative possibilities' in the work of Rancière too; as we have already noted, who finds within the act of writing itself the ability to disorder and 'imbalance' the so-called 'legitimate order of discourse' whereby those within the *polis* are able to police its limits (103). Rather than read imbalance through its normative negative paradigm, we could instead see it as a potentially productive deterritorialisation of hierarchies of power.

Cosmopolitan Ethics: writing the Other

What Treefrog represents is both embodied cosmopolitanism and hybridity; McCann suggests that cosmopolitanism must be both critically engaged with experiential

realities of race and, paradoxically, be rooted. The act of writing about lives and experiences so different from his own also requires that McCann engage in an *ethical* form of cosmopolitanism. When approaching the novel, McCann admitted that he asked himself, 'is it culturally arrogant, economically arrogant, socially arrogant for a young white Irishman to write about a black American underclass?' (colummcann.com). This is a genuine concern, for as Kathleen Lundeen notes in 'Who Has the Right to Feel?: The Ethics of Literary Empathy' (2001), 'writers or readers who appear to empathize with another's life experiences are often accused of arrogating a cultural authority to which they have no cultural claim' (83). While, as we have explored at length, McCann is actively aware of the racism faced by those who deviate from strictly policed racial identities – such as those in interracial relationships and those who are mixed-race – his fixation on exotic and clichéd racial markers ends up reasserting race. This is not to say that his interracial love story is a facile attempt to heal the problems and 'cultural conflict' of multiculturalism, as in an emerging trend in Irish literature (King 160). Nor is his use of the illicit interracial romance and mixed-race stranger purely designed to appeal to those wealthy, middle class, white readers that, Zygmunt Bauman argues, gain pleasure from accessing a sanitised and commercialised version of the exotic and the strange (2001: 211). McCann's portrait of racialised contemporary America is too messy, too engaged with the realities of dispossession to fulfil those needs.

Nonetheless, although we cannot accuse McCann of either appropriating race or commodifying it, *TSoB* still makes much of race. We might contrast this with Caryl Phillips's novella 'Somewhere in England' from *Crossing the River* (1993), which also relays a narrative of interracial romance between a black American GI, Travis, and a white English woman, Joyce, and the birth of their mixed-race child, Greer.

However, the interracial dimension of the story is not made explicit until the seventy-third page of the novella. In this way, Phillips avoid obsessing over their race and focuses instead on the psychological and emotional experiences of Joyce's first person narration. Although the narrative registers the curiosity and disgust that their relationship inspires, the racialised dimension to this is never outlined. Again, while the lovers are initially attracted to each other because they see one another as 'different' – Joyce likes the 'unusual' gap between Travis's bottom teeth and Travis 'can't say how exactly' Joyce is 'different', but she is – you'll note how this difference isn't codified in racial ways (Phillips 162). Like McCann's novel, it is marked by tragedy: Travis is killed in the war and Joyce is forced into giving Greer up for adoption. We might argue that these plot developments are more probable than McCann's more dramatic tragic occurrences and so potentially arouse greater emotion from readers. Joyce's admission that she gave her son away out of the great pressure put on her to 'be sensible' is heartbreaking (228). Joyce makes little fuss about the colour of her mixed-race son – it is the nurse who says 'he's like coffee, isn't he' – but does remark on how 'beautiful' he is, how 'handsome', and, upon being reunited with him, how much she 'wanted to hug him' (228, 223, 224). 'Somewhere in England', like *TSoB*, ends on a quietly redemptive note, as Joyce's son Greer comes looking for her; but she knows 'that he will never call [her] mother' (223). In the opening pages of the novel, the narrator, the African father that opens and closes *Crossing the River,* claims that the other stories in the collection are voiced by his own children, members of the African diaspora: 'my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis' (1). At the end of the novel, he includes Joyce as his own too, 'my Joyce, and my other children', suggesting that the bond developed between

Travis and Joyce is deep and true, transcending a simple desire for the exotic Other (235).

Conclusion

Joshua Cohen argues that for the cosmopolitan, the 'highest allegiance must be to the community of humankind' (vii); within McCann's novel, we can see that this allegiance must be tempered by a critical engagement with the realities of cosmopolitan modernity for those in its racialised underclass. His homeless subjects are not romanticised metaphors, but disenfranchised figures who must reclaim their own relationship to the spaces of the city after being relegated to its subterranean limits. That being said, McCann's racial politics are ambivalent. While we must applaud him for his acts of ethical cosmopolitanism in engaging with the experiential realities of those African-American subjects beyond his own experiences, his insistence on race 'fix[es] in place the racializing project' (Goldberg 63). Likewise, his uneasy twinning of ethno-racial markers with sexuality eroticises race. When asked whether 'the multiracial, multicultural landscape of [his] prose' was an 'aesthetic effect' or a 'genuine reflection of the world' as he saw it, he responded by saying that he felt it was 'reflective of the world around [him] but when it gets put in a literary periscope it becomes a deeper issue' (Garden 6). Given this statement, we might read his narratives of interracial desire as an embodiment of McCann's own desire for a more tolerant, intercultural and interracial society outside of his fiction. Braidotti argues that a 'nomadic political theory of becoming is also a theory of desire: the only possible way to undertake this process is to actually be attracted to change, to *want* it, the way one wants a lover – in the flesh' (2011: 34; emphasis original). McCann's characters may be 'subjects who desire differently', but McCann

himself cannot escape fashioning these subjects through conventional frames of representation (Braidotti 34).

Chapter V: *TransAtlantic*: Frederick Douglass, the Irish Famine and the Troubles with the Black and Green Atlantics

TransAtlantic (2013), McCann's most recent novel, takes McCann's characteristic aesthetic – his narrative plurality and rhizomatic geographies – and turns his attention to the exchange and mobility that have forged the histories of Atlantic space. As this chapter will explore, *TransAtlantic* is especially concerned with the intersections of the black and green Atlantics. In particular, this chapter will examine how McCann's distinctive literary style challenges the imperialist epistemologies of 'history as progress' that have dominated thought on race, nation and culture, and the literary and historical representation of these, since the early nineteenth century (Kelly 2013: 149). This chapter will begin by discussing the thought and theory behind these 'black' and 'green' modes of Atlantic analysis, before moving on to an exploration of the ways in which the histories of these have overlapped and how these overlaps are depicted in McCann's novel. A careful exploration of these overlaps is vital: given the postcolonial framework that this thesis has utilised and the historical and political complexities that have often attended this theoretical field within Irish Studies, an attentive focus to the actual experiences of interaction and antagonism between these two groups is essential. Sinéad Moynihan asks whether 'parallels drawn between Irishness and blackness also serve to bolster a sense of enduring Irish victimhood' (39); a question which can only be addressed through a nuanced examination of the relations between the black and green Atlantics.

TransAtlantic is concerned with the counter-histories of the black and green Atlantics, representing this correspondence through a highly distinctive formal response. The novel was derided by Edmund Gordon in his review for the *London Review of Books* (2013), in which Gordon declared that the novel, full of 'heroic

bluster and lachrymose wonderment', 'manages about as much intimacy with its subject as the average Hollywood biopic' (23). It is true that McCann moves rapidly from narrative to narrative and so each character might not be as fully realised as they could have been. The multiple sections of the novel, although striking on a formal level, result in uneven character creation and underwhelming narrative development. This said, while *TransAtlantic* is perhaps not as successful as some of McCann's earlier work, the novel's thematic material provides a rich exploration of the complex connections of black and green Atlantic experience; it is unfair to suggest that the 'first half' of *TransAtlantic* is simply 'a Greatest Hits of historical journeys between North America and Ireland' (Gordon 23).

McCann utilises a non-realist conception of historical time through his construction of rhizomatic temporalities, which consist of connective layers of multiple historical times. McCann's decentred reading of Atlantic history sees the novel open properly (after a brief interlude in 2012) in 1919 with a section entitled 'Cloudshadow', which bypasses World War I and its clash between imperial powers and focuses on John Alcock and Arthus Brown's first transatlantic flight in a Vickers Vimy bomber plane. This flight, which takes the unusual reverse-Atlantic trip from Canada to Ireland, is invested with nomadic energy, as McCann takes 'the war out of the machine' of the aeroplane (2013: 35). The next section of the novel, 'Freeman', takes place between 1845-46, as Frederick Douglass undertakes a lecture tour through a Famine-ravaged Ireland. Book One concludes in 1998, following Senator George Mitchell during the final days of the Northern Ireland peace process. Book Two opens with a section spanning 1863-89 in the United States and Canada narrated by Lily Dugan, a house maid who met Douglass during his trip to Ireland and was inspired by him to emigrate to the United States. This is followed by sections in 1929 in Canada,

England and the North of Ireland and another section in 1978 during the Troubles, where we are introduced to Hannah, Lily Duggan's great-granddaughter. The novel concludes in Book Three in 2011, in the same cottage in the North of Ireland where the novel opens in 2012, introducing an element of cyclical time to his transatlantic history. Although Book Two, which focuses on narratives of fictive women interwoven among the narratives of the factual characters that populate Book One, does progress chronologically, the temporal linearity is complicated through multiple geographical locations. The narrative is never stable: the temporal chronology of Book Two is undercut through geographical flux. McCann's invocation of the overlaps between black and green in conjunction with the Northern Irish peace process asks the reader to remember the borrowings of the Northern Irish Civil Rights movement from their African-American equivalent, reminding the reader of the plentiful transatlantic exchanges between these groups. Furthermore, the inclusion of the North of Ireland and the Troubles also gestures towards the ambivalent position of Ireland within and without Britain and its Empire.

Of course, in establishing these relationships between different groups across the Atlantic, McCann is at risk of setting up comparisons that are simply not contiguous. Although Luke Gibbons argues that, in relation to the Irish experience of racialization through colonial discourse, 'skin pigmentation did not exhaust the complexities of race', it is still vitally important that we address this issue (2004: 10). Indeed, following on from Moynihan's suggestion that linking Irishness to blackness helps to support a narrative of Irish victimhood, Emilie Pine notes the 'tendency of Irish culture to refashion the past so that it is read exclusively under the sign of trauma'

(Pine 7).[54] I would also like to return to Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'connective' reading, outlined in Chapter One, and her preference for this term because it 'eschews any implications that catastrophic histories are comparable, and it thus avoids the competition over suffering that comparative approaches can, at their worst, engender' (206). Reading McCann's *TransAtlantic* as a connective fiction not only reaffirms his rhizomatic narrative structures, but places emphasis on the roles of empathy and engagement with Otherness within the novel, diffusing the competitive comparisons that might arise from such fraught comparisons between black and Irish experience. Douglass is a potent metaphor for McCann for precisely this reason, but he is also a key figure within Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). In addition to the transnational model of analysis that *The Black Atlantic* offers, Gilroy also suggests that 'a systematic account of the interconnections between Africa, Europe, and the Americas' can be used 'to complicate the exceptionalist narrative of black suffering and self-emancipation in the United States' (121). As this chapter will illustrate, McCann's novel similarly troubles a narrative of Irish suffering and self-emancipation through his inclusion of the ambivalent metaphor of Frederick Douglass, a keen commenter on the oppression of the Irish in Ireland and their tendency to oppress in their United States diaspora.

Crosscurrents of the black and green Atlantics

In *The Black Atlantic,* Paul Gilroy argues that instead of relying on the nation state as their primary focus, 'cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an

[54] See also Roy Foster's comment that 'the notion of [Irish] history as relieved experience rapidly narrows down to vicarious victimhood, based on an assumption of steady-state oppression. It reached a point, in the mid-1990s, where we were told the entire nation had suffered since the 1840s from post-traumatic stress disorder". 'Re-inventing the Past', in Andrew Higgins ed. *Re-Imagining Ireland*, (London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 188.

explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective' (15). Gilroy suggests that the histories and legacies of the slave trade and the African diaspora, including migration between the Americas and Europe, have created a transnational space of intersecting cultures and identities that 'transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity' (19). Gilroy negotiates this black Atlantic space through the chronotope of the ship, 'a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion', which 'focus[es] attention on the middle passage' of the slave ship and highlights the transcultural, transnational dimension of Gilroy's paradigm (4). The ship becomes a potent metaphor for the mass migration (or displacement) of modernity but its parallel connotations of water and fluidity also reinforce Gilroy's assertion that 'the history of the black Atlantic yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being made' (xi). Within *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy makes numerous references to the work of Rosi Braidotti, and Braidotti's work on becoming- and nomadic-subjects correlates with Gilroy's own articulation of identity as a fluid and constant process of becoming. A significant relationship can be made between both Braidotti's and Gilroy's celebration of Minor Voices and McCann's fictive project. A central component of both Gilroy's and Braidotti's ontologies is the assertion of the embodied, experiential realities that attend such subject positions; we have noted previously that Braidotti and Gilroy do not invoke the nomad as a romanticised metaphor.

Following on from the paradigm shift that Gilroy's deterritorialisation of Atlantic space offers for black identities, Kevin Whelan maps an Irish experience onto this, calling for a green Atlantic which takes into account Ireland's history of migration and the Irish impact on the development of the Atlantic world. Like Gilroy,

Whelan seeks to challenge and re-route the Anglo-American narrative of historical progress; Whelan's 'The Green Atlantic: radical reciprocities between Ireland and America in the long eighteenth century' (2004) aims to 'focus on the Enlightenment's excluded others' (216). In this vein, Whelan's project seeks to expose one of the 'counter-currents within the Enlightenment', which he proposes to do through a re-conceptualisation of Atlantic space bearing the traces of Irish involvement (216). We might read *TransAtlantic*, as with all of McCann's work, as an effort to focus on the excluded Others that are the legacies of imperialism. Despite sharing both Gilroy's aims (although on a smaller scale) and terminology, Whelan makes no reference to Gilroy in his essay. David Lloyd and Peter O'Neill make it the project of their *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (2009) to consider these two considerations of the Atlantic in tandem, illustrating the ways in which these two experiences might intersect. Lloyd and O'Neill seek to stretch and challenge the ostensible affinity between the two groups, claiming that their collection 'invokes the vexed question as to the relation between two historically oppressed peoples – the dispossessed and colonised Irish, forced into emigration and often indenture from the late sixteenth century, and Africans captured and enslaved during the same period' (xvi). Like Moynihan, Lloyd and O'Neill urge caution when attempting to compare these two groups, reminding us that the 'experiences of racialization and citizenship [between black and green] not only differed utterly but were constituted differentially' (xvi).

Utilising the terms 'green' and 'black' might run the risk of essentialism through reducing people to their ethnic or racial identity, suggesting that these are definitive of those identity positions. These modes of analysis may also cause problems because of the large-scale geographic and transnational area encompassed:

‘green’ is intended to house both Ireland and its (predominantly North American) diaspora; ‘black’ covers Africa and its diaspora, with a focus on the United States, the Caribbean and Britain. In Gilroy’s work ‘black’ is used precisely because it has the ability to trace the transnational interflow and exchange of people, cultures and ideas beyond the boundaries of a specific nation state. ‘Green’ is also useful for these reasons. Gilroy states that ‘the worth of a diaspora concept is in its attempt to specify differentiation and identity in a way which enables one to think about the issue of racial commonality outside of constricting binary frameworks’; he also highlights how important it is that diaspora concepts ‘counterpose’ both ‘essentialism *and* pluralism’ (120; emphasis mine). Using the terms in tandem is productive in that it allows for an analysis of the interconnected spaces of the Atlantic and an evolution of diasporic consciousness. This chapter will explore the numerous points of overlap between the black and green histories of the Atlantic, although the comparison is often fraught and complex, as Lloyd and O’Neill highlight in the introduction to their collection. It is important to note that, at any point in their history, the experiences of the Irish living in Ireland will have been different to the Irish living in the United States, and of course, experiences would have varied greatly according to class, gender, religion, regions within the nation-state and so forth. Although great attention will be paid to these specifics when necessary, conducting an Atlantic mode of investigation allows us to dynamically map the changing relationship between these two groups.

Before we move on to a discussion of these intersections between black and green, it would be helpful to turn once more to the components of Gilroy’s black Atlantic and how it shall underpin this chapter. The focus on the Atlantic as an oceanic mode of analysis is productive not only for the transnational and intercultural

paradigm that it provides, but also for the importance that is placed on the ocean, the Atlantic crossing and the ship. The triangular route of the slave trade and the horror of the Middle Passage are central elements to the production of black Atlantic space; for diasporic Africans, this notion of black Atlantic space is haunted by the trauma of slavery. In addition to the obvious transnational relations that were generated by the Atlantic slave trade, Whelan argues that ships were crewed by 'a multinational proletariat' and 'by the end of the Napoleonic Wars, one-third of the British navy was Irish, one-quarter was black' (231). The ship facilitates movement across huge distances and so becomes an emblem of transnational travel and experience, linking up the narratives of diverse, displaced figures. The sea and the ship also have particular resonance within Irish literary culture. In a previous chapter we discussed the small but important collection of texts known as voyage literature, *Echtrae* and *Immrama*, and the redemptive vision of travel that these texts propagated. Despite these ancient connotations of nomadic energy, the ship also looms large in the modern Irish imagination as an emblem of the sufferings of the Famine. The Famine ship will be explored in greater detail subsequently. The Atlantic crossing and Atlantic space is an essential component of McCann's novel.

Given the centrality of slavery to Gilroy's understanding of black Atlantic space and of Frederick Douglass to *TransAtlantic*, it is important, if we hope to understand the crosscurrents of black and green, that this chapter trace the Irish history of, and involvement with, slavery. Although it is not widely acknowledged, Nerys Patterson argues, in *Cattle Lords and Clansmen: the Social Structure of Early Ireland* (1994), that there was evidence of slavery on a small-scale in elite Irish life in pre-Viking Ireland (152). Most of these slaves, Brian Dooley maintains, actually came from the coast of Britain and Irish traders had been dealing in slaves since the

Roman colonisation of Britain. He reminds us that Saint Patrick came to Ireland as a slave from the coast of Britain in the fifth century and that 'written Irish history begins with his recollection of [St. Patrick's] abduction into slavery' (7). These early interactions with slavery are significant; if only to highlight that Ireland had been implicated in a slave trade of its own that predated the Atlantic slave trade.

With the first Viking invasion of Ireland in the final years of the eighth century, Ireland slowly became involved in the transnational Viking slave trade, with Dublin 'as the centre of an international market' which, by 1000 BCE not only included England and Scotland but also 'markets in Rouen [...], Iceland, Scandinavia and possibly Arabic Spain' (Rolston and Shannon 24). This obviously opened Ireland up to a new variety of foreign influence; although, of course, how far this extended beyond Dublin is debatable. Sources indicate that there were Irish interactions with Africans as early as the ninth century. The *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, a text probably of eleventh or twelfth century origins (possibly *Leabhar Cluana Eidnech*), mentions Ragnall, a Norwegian Prince, who took African slaves from their homeland to Ireland in 867 BCE (Radner 121). This mixing of cultures between Viking, African and Irish is evident in the Irish language; the Gaelic for 'black man' is *fear gorm*, which, translated literally, is 'blue man'; in Old Norse, the same logic applies and the term for black men was *blamadr*, which again translates as 'blue men' (Rolston and Shannon 25). This suggests that ancient Ireland was characterised by some degree of cosmopolitan interchange and interaction with otherness which very much prefigures that of the Anglo-Norman and English colonisation of Ireland from the twelfth century onwards. The celebration of travel that we find in the voyage literature may well be reflective of this early period of Irish mobility; it is certainly indicative that

early Irish society was part of an international economy and open to foreign influences in some capacity at a much earlier date than might be suspected.

Despite this evidence of much earlier interaction with the black Atlantic, studies that attempt to trace the relationship between black and Irish groups usually begin with the emigration or deportation of Irish people to the West Indies in the seventeenth century. The Caribbean island of Montserrat, for example, 'became particularly closely associated with Ireland' and Michael Malouf estimates that 'approximately 50,000 Irish […] emigrated or were exiled by Cromwell to Barbados in the seventeenth century' (Dooley 8; Malouf 153). This casual combination of both 'emigrated' and 'exiled' is perhaps revealing not only of a particularly Irish view of emigration (as discussed in Chapter One) but also of a certain uneasy relationship between Ireland and empire. For example, Sean O'Callaghan's book, *To Hell or Barbados: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland* (2000) expresses strong opinions about the forced deportation of Irish labourers to Barbados to work as slaves; his chapter titling, which includes 'The effusion of blood' and 'The rape of Wexford', illustrates how he understands the Irish involvement in one part of the West Indies. On the other hand, revisionist historians such as Roy Foster have been equally vocal about the kind of 'wishful thinking that leads to so many untested generalizations about the Platonic solidarity between struggling Irish nationalists and their supposedly analogous fellow victims elsewhere' (Foster 2001; xiv). Donald Akenson's *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730* (1997) clearly asserts that some slaveholders in this Caribbean island were indeed Irish and, on the whole, their approach to their slaves was fairly similar to that of other European slaveholders, like the English. While Ireland had no official involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, Thomas Truxes's study of *Irish-American Trade 1600-1783* (1988) reveals 'incidents of *individual* Irish merchants

selling slaves' (8; emphasis mine). Robbie McVeigh highlights how 'Presbyterian radicalism in the 1790s prevented Belfast from engaging in the slave trade', but this did not mean that Belfast did not benefit from its close relationship to the British slave trade (1992: 36). Bill Rolston and Michael Owen Shannon highlight how intimately Belfast's economic development was tied to the British slave trade, suggesting that its economy was 'no less dependent on slavery than that of Bristol or Liverpool' (4).

These relationships complicate Ireland's (post)colonial status and so, given that this thesis draws heavily on postcolonial thought, it is important to stress that while aspects of the history of displaced Irish and African people might invite comparison, these comparisons are not simple. Relations between the two groups have variedly vastly between different times and socio-economic groups. As we shall explore, while Irish Catholics in the North of Ireland took inspiration from the Civil Rights movement for African-Americans in the United States in the 1960s, many Irish-Americans were vehemently opposed to this Civil Rights movement. Steve Garner argues in *Racism in the Irish Experience* (2003) that the Irish in the United States have made a 'transition from marginalised minority (Catholic immigrants in a Protestant State) to mainstream ethnic group (whites in a racialised hierarchy)' (2). The Irish in Ireland have undergone a similar transition: at certain points in history the Irish were discursively constructed as racially inferior 'Celts' to their Anglo-Saxon British colonisers, but, as outlined previously, 79 percent of the Irish public voted in the 2004 Referendum on Citizenship to define Irish nationality through blood rather than birth. This is certainly indicative of a mistrust of strangers and a concern about maintaining some form of ethnic (and quite possibly, racial) purity. It seems at odds with the conclusions that we can draw from Early Irish literary culture, which appeared to prize engagement with Otherness; it also sits uncomfortably with recent

efforts by writers of both Irish fiction and criticism to parallel the Irish(-American) experience with that of African-Americans. It was perhaps Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1987) that initiated this contemporary wave of interest in the intersections of Irish and black experience after one of Doyle's characters asserted: 'The Irish are the niggers of Europe' (9)[55]. However, as Elizabeth Butler Cullingford cautions, 'what looks from a postcolonial Irish perspective like a sympathetic and intellectually coherent identification with the descendants of slaves may appear to an American Black as shameless appropriation, or strike a revisionist as spurious ethnic chic' (7). With these concerns in mind, the next section of this chapter will consider these convergences between the Irish(-American) and African-American experience and examine the complexities that have shaped their relationships. A rich understanding of this history is necessary if we are to examine whether this dialogue established by McCann is 'sympathetic and intellectually coherent' or a cynical attempt to promote a reading of Irish history as marked by trauma and oppression.

Famine, Slave ship and Atlantic crossing

Earlier, we noted the importance of the ship and the Atlantic crossing to Gilroy's black Atlantic. Indeed, within both the black and green Atlantics, the ship haunts the collective imagination, summoning visions of the dislocation from east to west of the Atlantic; for the black imagination, the slave ships of the Middle Passage loom large and for the Irish, the Famine ship still holds sway. Those who were lucky enough to get out of Ireland during the Famine years of 1845-1852 fled on-board overcrowded and aged ships (some of which had been used to transport African slaves across the Atlantic). These dangerous vessels became known as 'coffin ships' because of the

[55] Doyle uses the word 'nigger' but this is often changed (and misquoted) to 'black(s)', thus sanitizing the effect and making it more easily digestible as a humorous observation than political statement. The 1991 film, for example, also does this.

high levels of mortality on-board amongst their starving and disease-ridden passengers; those who survived the Atlantic crossing were often claimed by disease while ships were quarantined at harbours in North America such as New York City and Grosse Isle, Quebec. It is worth noting that the label 'coffin ships' finds an echo in the *tumbeiro* – *tumba* being the Portuguese for tomb – that were used to ferry slaves across the Atlantic from Portuguese Africa to Brazil.

The ship is at the centre of this comparison between nineteenth-century African slaves and starving Irish Famine refugees. Yet McCann's novel, which involves the narrative of an African-American slave in Ireland during the Famine, features no such transatlantic ship crossing. *TransAtlantic* opens, as noted, with a reverse Atlantic crossing: Alcock and Brown leave the North American soil of Canada and land in Galway. We might read this reversal of the voyage's geography as a rejection of the trauma and dislocation that is associated with the transatlantic passage from Europe or Africa to the Americas; instead, it is an assertion of hope. Alcock and Brown's flight embraces the possibilities of new technology as a means for facilitating intercontinental connection and mobility. McCann's Atlantic crossing takes 'the war out of the machine' and so imbues the Atlantic space with a narrative of active agency and optimism (McCann 35). In this way, it sits in opposition to another contemporary novel that 'invokes the black and green Atlantics by drawing parallels, both explicit and tacit, between the institution of American slavery and the Great Famine, most obviously by deploying the motif of the ship itself" (Moynihan 42): Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2003). Despite their similarities, including their disruptive temporalities and narrative pluralities, the two novels are marked by important differences. Within *Star of the Sea*, the subject of African(-American) slavery remains very much an undercurrent and one that, arguably, many readers

might miss. The novel is far more preoccupied with the tapestry of Irish life during the Famine: the problems of absentee landlords and the horrors faced by the peasantry. *TransAtlantic* lacks this level of complexity and intimacy with Irish life during the Famine period because, unlike *Star of the Sea*'s focused meditation on the window of a few years, for McCann, the Famine forms only one aspect of a far larger transatlantic history. Sinéad Moynihan suggests that the topos of the Famine ship in motion is placed as part of O'Connor's textual tissue in a way that suggests this Atlantic crossing is a type of Middle Passage for Famine refugees, although, in her careful analysis of the novel, she argues that *Star of the Sea* 'ultimately resists facile equations of Irish and black solidarity [and] refus[es] to romanticize the relationship' (49). McCann's novel also draws attention to the idea of transatlantic migration, but his connective assemblage of narratives places more emphasis on the Atlantic space as filled with the nomadic energy of the circulation of people. Whereas for O'Connor, the Atlantic crossing not only forces the characters (and their narratives) to reflect on their own stories of trauma, starvation and loss, but it is a crossing actively marked by death. As well as O'Connor's depiction of the factually accurate high mortality rate on a Famine ship, after a few weeks at sea, the intertwined, rotten bodies of two teenage lovers are pulled from the ship's hold: they have been asphyxiated while hiding as stowaways. Furthermore, the young girl is pregnant and so her unborn child – the archetypal metaphor for innocence and hope – is killed with her, marking the Atlantic crossing as doubly lethal. In addition, Merridith, the bankrupt Ascendency landlord, is murdered on-board. The threat of murder haunts the entirety of the novel: within the first few pages we are told there is 'evil which stalked among' the passengers and that there is a man aboard the ship that 'meant to do murder' (O'Connor: xi, xxi). This transatlantic crossing is drastically different to McCann's.

This radically different conceptualisation of the Atlantic crossing is revealing of the divergences between the two novels. Both novels are concerned with the possible connections that can be made between the dispossession of the Famine and the Atlantic slave trade, and both are, therefore, engaged with the (re)telling of Irish history. Eve Patten suggests that by the 1990s 'Irish fiction writers', inspired by the 'revisionist controversy' of professional historians, began to challenge the 'official and causal narratives of the modern nation's evolution' (260). She suggests that, by the latter part of the twentieth century, numerous Irish writers were 'beginning to exhibit a discernible self-consciousness with regard to narrative realism' (263). O'Connor's novel, which Patten cites by name, through 'drawing on tactics of subversion and irony' reflects on both the 'matter' and the '*status* of Irish history, updating the historical novel […] towards contemporary ideological non-conformism (263; emphasis original). O'Connor's numerous narrative registers and non-linear temporalities, like McCann's, disrupt this 'narrative realism' and in so doing, display an 'irreverence to traditional meta-narratives' (263). It is certainly true that O'Connor is sympathetic towards Merridith, a landlord and member of the Protestant ascendency who might well have been a traditional antagonist in the nationalist narrative of Irish history that revisionists have been so suspicious of. The novel is also damning of the violence inflicted by the 'Hibernian Defenders'; of course, this anti-British sentiment that fuelled Irish nationalism has on occasion morphed into violence. However, Patten fails to note how, although no longer 'formally conservative', *Star of the Sea* still depicts 'a haunted or traumatised Irish society and deep-seated disturbances in the national psyche' (259) – something that Patten argues is a feature of literature prior to the Celtic Tiger era and that novels such as O'Connor's have ostensibly moved beyond. She claims that in these earlier novels,

the ‘dysfunctional family, and within it in the child – abused, victimised or emotionally stunted – continued to provide stable metaphors of emotional crisis’ (259). Given that *Star of the Sea* involves a love affair between Merridith and Mary Duane, only to later reveal that they are half-siblings, and that Mary’s husband, driven to desperation by the Famine, kills both himself and her daughter,[56] it would seem that the ‘dysfunctional family’ was still, as of the early twenty-first century, central to O’Connor’s depiction of the Irish ‘national psyche’. *Star of the Sea* provides ample evidence of what Emilie Pine has asserted is the ‘tendency of Irish culture to refashion the past so that it is read exclusively under the sign of trauma’ (7). *TransAtlantic* rejects this reading of the Irish past. Whereas O’Connor uses the chronotope of the Atlantic-crossing ship to encompass the histories of dispossession of slavery and the Famine, McCann subverts the conventional narratives of Atlantic crossing: in a novel about a former slave in Ireland during the Famine, McCann actively eschews the Middle Passage for either group, reconfiguring the crossing instead as hopeful and redemptive. McCann also frames the devastation of the Famine through the eyes of Douglass, who makes empathetic and imaginative connections between the somatic sufferings of both groups. *TransAtlantic* subverts a Irish narrative of historical suffering in favour of a more affirmative celebration of intercultural dialogue.

Although the connections between black and green are implicitly established in O’Connor’s novel, they are largely paratextual or slight references for a careful and sophisticated reader; in *TransAtlantic*, McCann makes these connections explicit. While Elizabeth Butler Cullingford is right to urge caution concerning the identification between the Irish and African-American slaves for fear of performing

[56] Moynihan suggests that this act of infanticide draws parallels with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and its depiction of the horrors of African-American slavery (43).

‘shameless appropriation’, the letters of Frederick Douglass illustrate that he himself was making these connections between Irish and African-American experience (7). Despite Edmund Gordon’s assertion that ‘the real Douglass was curiously quiet on the subject’ of the Irish Famine, Douglass’s letters reveal that he was shocked by the horrors he encountered in Ireland (23). In a letter written to the American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison in February 1846, Douglass wrote that the ‘limits of a single letter are insufficient to allow any thing like a faithful description of those painful exhibitions of human misery, which meet the eye of a stranger almost at every step’ (1975: 139). Douglass made a comparison between the mournful songs sung by slaves and the ‘wailing notes’ of those sung by Irish Famine victims (1994: 184). He wrote passionately of ‘the extreme poverty and wretchedness of the poor of Dublin’, its streets ‘almost literally alive with beggars, displaying the greatest wretchedness’ (1975: 140, 139). McCann intertextually reconstructs these sections of Douglass’s letters in *TransAtlantic*, as McCann’s fictional Douglass notes ‘piles of human waste sloshed down the gutter […] Women walked in rags, less than rags: as rags’ (40). In his own letters, Douglass claimed, ‘of all places to witness human misery, ignorance, degradation, filth and wretchedness, an Irish hut is pre-eminent’ (1975: 140). Life expectancy for Irish peasants in the earlier part of the nineteenth century was, according to George Bornstein, only nineteen years compared to the thirty-six years of the African-American slave (Bornstein 174).

In his letters, Frederick Douglass asserted that in Ireland he saw much to ‘remind [him] of [his] former condition’ as a slave (1975: 141). However, rather than engaging in a form of comparison between the catalogue of miseries facing oppressed groups, Douglass uses these connective stories as a means of articulating a transnational mode of solidarity, claiming that ‘the cause of humanity is one the world

over' (1975: 141). Upon encountering a humanitarian crisis in Ireland, his empathetic response included his own experiences of oppression and suffering, stating that 'he who really and truly feels for the American slave, cannot steal his heart to the woes of others; and he who thinks of himself an abolitionist, yet cannot enter into the wrongs of others, has yet to find a true foundation for his anti-slavery faith' (1975: 141). We can see then that McCann's fictional recasting of Douglass's transnational mode of solidarity is echoed in his real writings about the transnational reach and effects of the slave trade. The very purpose of his tour to Ireland in 1845 was, as part of his campaign for abolition, to raise awareness of the horrors of slavery and encourage support, financial and otherwise for the abolitionist movement. He was aware that the trade networks of the Atlantic were intimately dependent on slavery and he hoped that encouraging sources in Britain and Ireland to retract their business from these networks would put pressure on the United States to abolish the system. In 1846, Douglass wrote that 'slavery is such a gigantic system that one nation is not fit to cope with it' (1975: 29). Despite slavery being, in contemporary thought at least, associated very much with the sufferings of one specific group of people, Douglass was able to see the ways in which its effects were far reaching.

The Famine too, was a humanitarian crisis that could not be contained within the boundary of the Irish state. In addition to the massive numbers of refugees that fled from Ireland, the news of the catastrophe itself was well documented in other countries. Christine Kinealy notes that amongst the transnational cast of figures and groups that sent aid as famine-relief to Ireland, including 'Queen Victoria, the Pope, the Sultan of Turkey and the Tsar of Russia' – donations were also received from 'London policemen, English Convicts and former black slaves in the Caribbean' and 'members of the Franklin Street and Crosby Street Synagogues, both in New York'

(111). Of all these donations, it is the money sent from the Choctaw Indians of the United States that has received the most commentary by contemporary critics and often cited as evidence of some form of solitary between oppressed peoples.[57] Frederick Douglass, as an individual with experience of both the Irish Famine and of African-American slavery, is perfectly poised to capture the transnational character of these two phenomena, becoming a key voice in a growing chorus of dissent across the black and green Atlantics and a potent example of how these Atlantics might intersect.

Douglass was not the only figure from the nineteenth century who was making comparisons between Irish and black individuals. Thomas Carlyle wrote of the Irish and West Indian colonies as analogous. Not only did he write about the perceived danger of creating a 'Black Ireland' in Jamaica without an increased influence from British imperial paternalism, his 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question' (1849; republished with a more racially derogatory title in 1853) also constructed black subjects in the same dehumanised, animalistic manner that he wrote of Irish subjects within *Reminiscences of My Irish Journey in 1849* (1882). The historian and clergyman Charles Kingsley also adopted this same rhetoric and described Irish people through a racialised discourse that utilised both animalistic metaphor and suggested a comparison between Irish and black individuals. In an oft-quoted reflection upon a sighting of some famished Irish peasants living in an impoverished country that had yet to fully recover from the potato-crop failure, Kingsley wrote in 1860, 'I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country […] But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black,

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[57] See David Emmons, *Beyond the American Pale : The Irish in the West, 1845-1910* (158); Elizabeth Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (173) and Mary Robinson's keynote address at the International Conference On Hunger at New York University in 1995, while she was President of Ireland (http://gos.sbc.edu/r/robinson.html).

one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours' (111). For these nineteenth century intellectuals, the suffering of the emaciated Irish invited comparisons to black bodies. When Frederick Douglass travelled to Ireland during the Famine in 1847, his letters reveal that he too made connections between the misery faced by the starving Irish and African-American slaves, as examined previously. However, unlike Carlyle and Kingsley, Douglass's connections were marked by concern and understanding. Carlyle and Kingsley chose to depict the starving bodies of the Irish as marked by an alterity that became racist in character. Perhaps Carlyle and Kingsley are unable to respond empathetically to the Irish that they encountered because of their privileged position within the British Empire. Instead of engaging with the victims of an oppressive system which caused very real human devastation, these two writers construct an Irish Otherness; a spectral presence of liminality shared with other racially 'inferior' groups in the stadial hierarchy of cultures. Douglass, who had himself escaped an oppressive system, was able to sustain empathetic and compassionate comparisons between the two groups.

In *TransAtlantic*, Douglass's most shocking encounter with the devastation of the Famine in the rural 'wild country' between Dublin and Cork is fictionalised (67). The register for this section of *TransAtlantic* is markedly different and McCann defaults to cliché when attempting to represent the Famine. As an event that strains at the boundaries of representation, McCann both resorts to the Gothic and invokes the frequently occurring image of the emaciated Irish woman and her dead baby to portray the horror of the situation. It is noteworthy that the two most harrowing Famine-related incidents in the novel only involve women. Margaret Kelleher has written about the extensive use of the starving female body as a trope for the national devastation of the Famine, noting that that the 'the representation of famine and its

effects' is often done 'through images of women' (2). At night, and on a rural road, Douglass and his companion Richard Webb, the abolitionist, stumble across two spectral female Famine victims. The scene is full of terrifying sounds: 'birds […] howl[ing] up out of the trees' and 'the cry of a wolf' which is suspected by Douglass's driver of being 'a banshee' (68). Their first encounter is with 'a dark young woman pick[ing] berries' whose dress is stained with the blood-like 'red juice' of these berries 'as if she were vomiting them up' (67). This is evocative of the famished Irish bodies that Gibbons argues confirmed colonial fears of a haunting Otherness which was racist in its inception, maintaining that the 'the association between famine, cannibalism, and the desperation of the Irish loomed large in the colonial imagination' from the Elizabethan writings of Edmund Spencer 'down to the modern period of the Great Famine' (12). The red juice that stains the woman's front evokes blood, suggesting links to this colonial notion of Irish Otherness and worries over cannibalism. This gory vision is made even less human through the disclosure that 'her teeth were all gone' (67). The alterity of the famine-ravaged Irish subject is confirmed when she 'repeated a phrase in Irish: it sounded like a form of prayer' (67). This suggestion that Irish is an ethereal language, coupled with the haunting image of the female, combine to imply that Irish is a spectral, dead language, spoken only by those who are beyond the pale of the human. Note how McCann makes no attempt to translate Irish into a written language; instead, it is lost to orality. Clíona Ó Gallchoir, in an article about Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea*, argues that conventionally 'the Famine is figured through a juxtaposition between silence and the inarticulate sounds of lamenting' (345). In *TransAtlantic*, the terrifying sounds of the Irish countryside are twinned with indecipherable Irish words coming from a wounded mouth, empty of teeth in a horrifying vision of lack. David Lloyd would read this terrifying Irish mouth

as further support for his argument about the oral as a marker of 'Ireland's colonial difference' (2011: 3). McCann's Gothic register dehumanises the woman, emphasizing her alterity rather than empathetically engaging with her humanity. His portrayal of the Famine victim recalls the 'stalking spectre' of literature about the Famine, discussed in Chapter Two, resorting to facile stereotype that implies the Otherness of the Irish instead of their desperate human need for help.

This encounter with an emaciated woman is followed by another, again with a woman, although this time she is cloaked in a 'gray woolen shawl and the remnants of a green dress', and drags along her dead female infant behind her (69). We might read this roadside apparition of a ghostly, starved woman dressed in green as the anorexic vision of Mother Ireland from Muldoon's 'Aisling' (126-127); another vision of 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan in a terminal condition' (Longley 3). After the meeting between Douglass and the famished woman with her dead baby, the next section of the novel consists of Douglass thinking about adverts for missing slaves, presumably in the United States. Unable to sleep, Douglass ruminates on a 'Negro girl […] Goes by name Artela'; she has a 'small scar over her eye'; 'a good many teeth missing'; the 'letter A […] branded on her cheek and forehead'; 'some scars' on her back; 'two missing toes' (71). In *TransAtlantic*, Douglass's reaction to the somatic devastation of the Famine is to put this into dialogue with the bodily traumas experienced by slavery; knowingly or not, McCann's novel recreates the same association between the racialised alterity of the starving Irish and the African-American that permeated imperialist discourse. In this way, McCann alerts us to the shared position that the Irish and African-American experienced within the racism of the imperialist nineteenth century. However, McCann's Douglass is haunted by the image of the emaciated woman, asking the daughter of his host, Isabel Jennings, to return to see if

she can locate the woman and offer assistance. Despite the troublesome associations that Douglass/McCann establishes between the alterity of the Famine-ravaged Irish subject and the African-American slave, Douglass is able to translate his horror at the encounter into a productive desire to offer aid.

Transatlantic Irish America

McCann's novel also examines the crosscurrents between black and green experience in the United States in addition to Ireland. Figures such as Kingsley and Carlyle discursively constructed the Irish in Ireland as racialised in a similar manner to black individuals, but the Irish in America were also subject to a degree of racism. Fleeing from the Famine, approximately one million Irish refugees flooded North America during the mid-1840s to early 1850s. A large proportion of these immigrants were Catholic and Gaelic-speaking, unlike the predominantly English-speaking, Protestant majority that dominated the United States. Anti-immigrant sentiment was particularly high in north-eastern coastal cities such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia; it was often directed at Irish and German Catholic immigrants and freed African-American slaves. The nativist 'Know-Nothing' party were particularly vitriolic in their dislike of Irish Catholic immigrants. Even though there was a substantial amount of Irish(-American) racism directed towards African-Americans, Irish immigrants 'were often regarded as belonging to the same social, if not genetic, category as black Americans' (Dooley 2). A variety of cartoons and illustrations that appeared in the popular press supported this view, even after the American Civil War (and therefore after the end of the mass migration of Famine refugees), as Irish(-American) migrants competed with African-Americans for labour. Thomas Nasts's 'The Ignorant Vote – Honors are

Easy' from *Harper's Weekly*, 1876, in which caricatures of an Irish-American[58] and an African-American balance each other out in a giant scale, suggests that gaining the vote of either group was both equally undesirable and equally unworthy. Somewhat surprisingly, W. E. B. Du Bois claimed that in his experience, the Irish of Massachusetts were subject to more racism than the black population (Du Bois 1986: 563).

In *TransAtlantic,* McCann uses the character of Lily Duggan to reflect upon the experiences of the Irish in America. Inspired by Frederick Douglass and his talk of 'ideas of democracy, faith, slavery, benevolence, empire [...which] suggested an elsewhere', she fled from her job as a maid in a house in Dublin and the horrors of the Famine for the United States (McCann 173). As discussed previously, in the early to mid-nineteenth century, both Irish (and Irish-American) and African-Americans were subject to a degree of racism by the dominant Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture; Steve Garner, author of *Racism in the Irish Experience* (2004) argues that 'in the eyes of WASP America, the two groups were perceived in racist discourse as being comparable if not interchangeable, as late as the 1870s' (98). However, as Brian Dooley explains, this 'sense of persecution shared by black Americans and Irish immigrants did not always lead to solidarity between the two groups' (2). The two groups, as unskilled labourers, competed with each other on the job market, leading to much tension. Lily's experience encapsulates the ambivalence of the Irish in America through her own conflicting thoughts. Within the space of a few sentences, Lily remarks that her 'own son had fought for the Union', but that when 'she saw Negroes on the streets [...] she felt a dislike moving through her' (174). This statement has been prefaced by other comments that display her shifting thoughts on the matter: 'It

[58] As of 1868, you had to have been a male citizen of the United States by birth to gain suffrage; therefore Irish-born residents could not vote. As of 1870, non-white men could vote (although not Native-Americans).

was not that she had anything against the Negroes. Why should she? […] They were men and women, too. They starved, they fought, they died, they planted, they reaped, they sowed' (174). That these remarks should come within two adjacent paragraphs reflects just how paradoxical the feelings between the black and green could be. The animosity between the two groups was made evident in the Draft Riots of 1863 in New York City and Detroit, when working class resentment at recent legislation, which enabled those with money to buy their way out of military draft, led to riots across the cities. Mobs of predominantly Irish Catholic rioters attacked African-Americans. Lily's narrative makes reference to these riots with characteristic equivocality; she sees no tension between claiming that 'there was such an upstirring about them [African-Americans]' and the following statements about the draft riots which clearly implicate the Irish as perpetrators of violence: 'Lily had heard there'd been riots from the Irish in New York. Men strung from lampposts. Children burned in an orphanage. Savage beatings on the streets' (174). Even her thoughts about Douglass have changed with her transatlantic migration, 'in Ireland she had thought of him as a proper gentleman, tall, piercing, commanding, but here [in the United States] he was more of a confusion' (174).

As Garner highlights, these two groups were not only in direct competition for the same jobs, but were also largely in ideological opposition: while the great majority of 'Blacks were abolitionists and Protestant', the Irish were, on the whole, 'Catholic and anti-abolition (if not pro-slavery)' (97-98). In addition to this, Garner argues, the two groups also had differing views on Britain – while African-Americans 'were fans of Britain, which had abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in 1838', the Irish 'regarded Britain as the overriding source of Irish suffering' (98). Frederick Douglass, who, as we have explored, was keen to foster 'the idea of

solidarity between oppressed ethnic groups', 'found himself forced to recognize the mutual antagonism and hostility between the Irish-American and African communities', noting that 'the Irish in Ireland and the Irish in America were two quite different phenomena, working within a quite different set of social circumstances and expectations' (Douglass 1994: 139). Douglass also wrote with dismay of the figures that succeeded Daniel O'Connell in the fight for Catholic emancipation and Irish independence; he was particularly scathing of John Mitchel, a key figure in the nineteenth-century movement for Irish freedom. When Mitchel made his way to the United States, he expressed a desire to own a 'slave plantation, well stocked with slaves' (Douglass 1994: 683). In *TransAtlantic*, McCann's imagines a meeting between Douglass and O'Connell, during which O'Connell laments the 'many Irishmen among the slave owners in the [American] South', whom O'Connell depicts as '[c]owards', [t]raitors' and a 'discredit to their very heritage' (61). As Bill Rolston and Michael Owen Shannon summarise, although 'sometimes the Irish showed tremendous solidarity with their black neighbours, helping slaves to rebel in the Caribbean or escape in the antebellum southern states of the US', they were also responsible for some of the 'most racist of attitudes and behaviour' (5). Lily Duggan and Frederick Douglass enable McCann to gesture towards this less celebratory confluence of the black and green and an unsavoury history of the Irish in America.

Conversely, there has been an imaginative relationship between black and green which is far more optimistic than the one discussed previously. This imaginative relationship, testament to the circulation of ideas and cultures that Gilroy is so keen to trace across the black Atlantic, involves people of African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Irish and Irish-American heritage who have attempted to forge connections between black and green; a shared rhetoric of anti-imperial vocabulary

can be detected in both art and activism. Through the figure of Douglass, McCann, knowingly or not, pays tribute to an extensive decentred intellectual history within which figures from the black and green Atlantics attempted to challenge the dominance of imperialism across Atlantic space. In the late eighteenth century, the freed slave Olaudah Equiano visited Belfast and found himself under the patronage of Samuel Neilson, a radical Protestant Republican who was later an integral and founding member of the Society of United Irishmen (Rodgers 75). Neilson also went on to found the liberal republican newspaper, *The Northern Star*; curiously enough, Douglass's own abolitionist newspaper, published in the nineteenth century, was named *The North Star*. Richard Robert Madden, an Irishman born in 1798, travelled to the Caribbean as part of the British colonial administration and had great sympathy for both the plight of Irish Republicanism and black slavery. He wrote a seven-volume history of the United Irishmen, *The United Irishmen, their lives and times* (1843); published narratives based on the lives of African Muslims as part of his *A Twelve Month's Residence in the West Indies* (1835); and most famously, translated the only slave narrative to have come out of Hispanic America, Juan Francisco Manzano's *Poems by a slave in the island of Cuba* (1840). Later on in the nineteenth century, Frederick Douglass found a great ally in O'Connell, who was a key figure in the nineteenth century movement for Catholic emancipation in Ireland and established the campaign for the repeal of the 1800 Act of Union between Ireland and Britain. Douglass even claims in one of his letters that he was christened the 'Black O'Connell' by O'Connell, something that McCann makes frequent reference to in *TransAtlantic* (60). O'Connell was also a fierce opponent of slavery. Douglass evidently invested much in his connections with Ireland, declaring in 1872 that he was 'something of an Irishman as well as a negro' (McFeely 280). By 1872, slavery

had been abolished in the United States, although the country was still deeply racist, but in Ireland no further progress had been made with regards to repeal.

This imaginative overlap between the black and green continued into the twentieth century, with many writers from the Harlem Renaissance drawing upon the literary and cultural nationalism of the Irish Revival for inspiration. In his introduction to *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (1925), Alain Locke draws attention to the way in which Harlem might usefully look to Dublin as its template for housing a new burgeoning cultural consciousness, arguing that Harlem should have 'the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland' (7). The Irish Revival, it could be argued, was an act of strategic essentialism that emphasised the difference between the dominant English culture and an 'indigenous'[59] Irish culture. The Irish Revival was part of a larger movement for Irish independence and, after the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War, the Irish Free State was established in 1922. African-Americans might have looked to this movement as an example of how they might assert their different cultural traditions within an oppressive, and often racist, dominant cultural landscape. George Bornstein has noted that this 'link between Irish and African-American liberation regularly appeared in more purely political contexts as well, as the spectrum spanned by the black nationalist Marcus Garvey and the Marxist apologist Claude McKay illustrates', although McKay was primarily a poet in addition to his non-fiction writing, and Marcus Garvey was Afro-Caribbean, not African-American (179). Marcus Garvey 'named his headquarters in New York Liberty Hall in direct emulation of James Connolly's headquarters at Liberty Hall in Dublin, and he justified the inclusion of

[59] The fact that this movement was led by a predominantly Protestant, non-Gaelic speaking, Anglo-Irish elite is somewhat problematic. That being said, Thomas MacDonagh's work on the 'Irish Mode' is illuminating and helpful in this context, as explored in an earlier chapter, in its efforts at working towards a non-essentialist idea of how indigenous Irish literature might differ from English literature.

green along with black and red in the familiar international African flag of the Universal Negro Improvement Association because green symbolized the Irish struggle for freedom' (Bornstein 179). In his piece written for *The Liberator*[60] in June 1921, 'How Black sees Green and Red', Claude McKay talks of attending a Sinn Féin demonstration in London, where he was, in a similar vein to Douglass before him, called 'Black Murphy' or 'Black Irish' (17). McKay also wrote that he 'suffer[s] with the Irish' and that his 'belonging to a subject race entitles [him] to some understanding of them' (21). It is not, however, a straightforward identification; McKay admits that 'American Negroes hold some sort of a grudge against the Irish. They have asserted that Irishmen have been their bitterest enemies' because 'the social and economic boycott against Negroes was begun by the Irish in the North during the Civil War and has, in the main, been fostered by them' (17). Here, Claude McKay touches upon a crucial aspect to this black and green comparison: while historically, black subjects may have been discursively constructed in much the same way as Irish subjects by imperial discourse, and may have been subject to similar treatment by the white Anglo-Saxon elite within the United States, this does not mean that the groups have always felt a shared solidarity. Brian Gallagher is right to suggest that while 'African-American literature is often placed alongside Irish-American literature' by scholars, the experiences of the African- and Irish-Americans were different and a more productive comparison might be made between the literature of African-America and that of mainland Ireland and their experiences of being what McKay terms 'subject race[s]' (Gallagher 168). As the twentieth century progresses, a comparison between the discrimination faced by both African-Americans and

[60] This was the socialist newspaper *The Liberator*, not the abolitionist newspaper (1831-1865) of William Lloyd Garrison.

Catholics living under British rule in the North of Ireland might prove even more fruitful.

The Troubles with Ireland, race and the black Atlantic

Gallagher's assertion is based on the premise that, within Ireland, Irish Catholics have historically been positioned as inferior by a predominantly Protestant state and were actively discriminated against at various points. Catholics had faced oppressive regulation of their religion and discriminatory legislation under the Penal laws that were established during the seventeenth century; when first instituted, these laws were not exclusively aimed at Catholics, but also affected Presbyterians until the latter end of the eighteenth century. Amongst other things, Catholics were banned from holding public office, voting and sitting in the Houses of Parliament; Catholics also had to pay tithes to the Protestant Church. Acknowledging the ways in which Irish Catholic culture was devalued by and forced to co-exist with an imperial power, George Bornstein suggests that Du Bois's concept of the 'double consciousness' of black people might be a shared feature of life for Irish people too. He twins Du Bois's idea with Yeats's articulation that despite his ties to Irish culture, he 'owe[s] [his] soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser [...] and to the English language' (Yeats 1994: 211). Yeats goes on to add to this remark, taken from 'A General Introduction to my Work' (1937), claiming that 'everything [he] loves has come to [him] through English' and that this results in an ambivalent intermingling of love and hate for the English language (Yeats 211). Yeats's angst-ridden declaration seems rather incongruous given that he was a member of the Protestant Ascendency and, even pre-Famine, Yeats's ancestors would not have spoken Gaelic as a first language. Bornstein's association of Du Bois with Yeats is therefore somewhat fraught: Yeats's status as a member of a privileged social and cultural class is never addressed and as Du Bois

was a black man in a 'racialised hierarchy', their positions are not really comparable (Garner 2). In addition to this, elsewhere in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois talks of his comfort with the Western literary canon, remarking that he 'sit[s] with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the colour line [he] move[s] arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas' (1994: 67). We might argue that while Yeats attempts to shrug off his privilege in an effort to claim solidarity with the indigenous Irish, Du Bois seeks to reclaim and demand access to a Western literary heritage. However, despite this unexamined and slightly clumsy twinning of Yeats and Du Bois, Bornstein's suggestion that this idea of 'double consciousness' might carry currency in Ireland seems fruitful. In a Chapter Two we discussed Kinsella's essay 'The Divided Mind' (1972) in which he argues that the Irish writer may straddle, but feel ill at ease with, an English cultural heritage (209). Brian Gallagher also works with similar ideas when he asserts that 'writers in both groups [Irish and African-American]' have had to grapple with 'how to survive, personally and artistically, in a hybrid culture' (167). If Gallagher owes his understanding of 'hybrid' to Homi Bhabha's vocabulary of postcolonial analysis as laid out in *The Location of Culture* (1991), then this is subtly different to Du Bois's notion of double consciousness. When Du Bois speaks of the irreconcilable 'doubleness' of African-American consciousness – 'an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body' – he notes the necessary separateness of these two aspects within one identity (1994: 2). Bhabha's concept of hybridity rejects these binary white/black identity positions and argues that postcolonial identity consists of an ambivalent intermingling of the two. It would seem as if Gallagher would be in support of the 'doubleness' of Irish identity given that he follows his statement about 'hybrid culture' with a quotation from John Montague's 'A Grafted Tongue' about the loss of

the Irish language: ‘To grow / a second tongue, as / harsh a humiliation / as twice to be born’ (Gallagher 167; Montague 108). Montague’s use of the word ‘second’ implies a doubling, not a mixing, indicating that his understanding of Irish identity is that it is something with two distinct components. This is echoed in the line ‘twice to be born’. That being said, the medical implications of the title[61] – with its connotations of inorganic synthesis between different tissues – suggests a violent but successful integration of parts. Although there are differences between the two concepts as constructed by Du Bois and Bhabha, the two do both explore a similar socio-cultural situation: existence in a country where one group of people is discursively – and often institutionally – positioned as inferior to another in a cultural and racial hierarchy.

Although this idea of double consciousness or the divided mind will undoubtedly influence post-colonial societies, it would seem likely that its effects would be particularly potent in a colonial situation. We might want to return at this point to the North of Ireland, where a Protestant/British majority has kept the six counties from joining the Irish Republic. We noted previously that in colonised Ireland, Catholics were subject to much discriminatory treatment. Many of the restrictions placed on Catholics were repealed in 1829 as part of the Catholic Emancipation movement, achieved through the efforts of O’Connell’s Catholic Association; those that were left in place were abolished for those counties in the Irish Free State in 1920. However, for those Catholics living under British rule in the North, there was still a great deal of unfair treatment. This led to the creation of a Northern Irish Civil Rights movement, and in 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formed to house members of several other smaller groups

[61] ‘A portion of living tissue transplanted from one place to another on the same or another organism, with a view to its adhesion and growth’ (Billings Med. Dict. 1890); also, the operation or its result, the adhesion and growth of such new tissue.’ (OED.com).

campaigning for improved rights for Catholics. This movement drew heavily on the Civil Rights movement of the United States that had taken place slightly earlier in the sixties. The importance of non-violent protest and a peaceful process of change were found within both movements, as was the aggressive and violent response they received. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association organised marches based on those made famous and successful by the Civil Rights movement for African-Americans in the United States. Nonetheless, Dooley illustrates, there were deep contradictions within the Irish and Irish-American response to the black civil rights movement in the United States. While individuals from the North of Ireland took inspiration from the black civil rights movement in the U.S.A., they were also, as Eamonn McCann mentioned in an interview with Dooley, aware 'that Irish-Americans were deeply racist, or an awful lot of them were, and there was something problematical about this emotional and ideological link between black American civil rights and civil rights here [in Northern Ireland]' (Dooley 78). Dooley notes that the police – who were often hostile to civil rights activists – were predominantly Irish-American: 'for example, the police commissioner in Birmingham, Alabama was the notorious Eugene "Bull" Connor; the Cook County State's Attorney who directed operations against the Black Panthers in Chicago was Edward V. Hanrahan, and the FBI agent tracking SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] in Mississippi was Thomas Fitzpatrick' (71). This identification between the black and green movements for civil rights is gestured to in *TransAtlantic* through the assemblage of sections on Douglass, the Troubles in the North of Ireland and Senator George Mitchell, who was a key figure in the negotiation of the Northern Irish peace process. The juxtaposition of these narratives illustrates that the symbiotic

relationship between the two groups was profoundly transatlantic and 'shared a common political vocabulary' (Dooley 4).

If the connective relationship between the black and green Atlantics rests on the experience of being a 'subject race', then the interchange between the North of Ireland and African-America seems especially pertinent (Gallagher 168). The Northern Irish aspect to *TransAtlantic* is particularly important within the novel, which both opens and closes in the North of Ireland, suggesting its centrality to the unfolding and interconnected narratives within. Artists that have sought to explore these connections between black experience and the North of Ireland include the Ghanaian poet Kwame Dawes and Seamus Heaney. Dawes's poem, 'Genocide' (2001), encapsulates the tensions surrounding the Irish relationship to empire and the postcolonial. Dawes writes that 'the Irish learned quickly to scalp neatly', which may be a reference to the Irish(-American) involvement in the task of displacing the Native-Americans from the lands that would become the United States and Mexico, seeing as he follows this with a line about 'slaughter of prairie dogs', suggesting that the Irish have been active agents of imperialism at various points, despite their status as oppressed by a colonial power in Ireland (24). Dawes also situates himself within the violence of Irish history, connecting himself to the miseries of both the Famine and the Troubles, asserting that '[i]t is not my culture, but this dialect of genocide/ […] is my birthright (25)'. Dawes ends his poem with 'all flesh turns black', cementing the connective associations that he made between the green and black (26). An earlier poem by Seamus Heaney, 'Strange Fruit' (1975), also dwells on blackened flesh. Borrowing its title from the song about lynchings in the Southern states of the U.S, made popular by Billie Holiday in 1939, Heaney's poem layers these varied cultural geographies onto each other as a means of writing about the Troubles in

Northern Ireland. The subject of the poem is ostensibly one of the Iron Age bog bodies from Jutland that Heaney found so useful for writing about the tribal-like violence of the sectarian conflict in the North of Ireland. Both Heaney's and Dawes's poems use the overlaps of black and green experience as a means of establishing connections between territory, dispossession and violence; something that the connective tissue of McCann's novel also attempts to construct. Across the three texts – Heaney, Dawes and Holiday – we can trace a vocabulary which is very much concerned with the natural world: Heaney's 'exhumed gourd' (1998: 119); Dawes's 'rugged cured hide of an old cow' (25); Holiday's 'strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees'. These metaphors of the organic are made violent, strange and hostile: the 'strange fruit' of Holiday's song are the swinging corpses of African-Americans and in Heaney's poem it is the severed head of an adolescent girl. In Dawes's poem we have 'rabbit teeth chattering sudden death' (25). The devastated topography of these three texts seemed haunted by bloodshed, as if the carnage of history had soiled the earth: the 'Southern trees' of Holiday's song are marked by 'blood on the leaves and blood at the root' and the soil of Heaney's Ireland produces equally corporeal horrors. While we might argue that the 'strange fruit' of Holiday's song grows indigenous to the United States, Heaney's layering of this earlier song with a remnant of an archaic Jutland and contemporary Northern Ireland suggests that his subject matter is more complex than a simple exploration of a nationally rooted problem. Dawes's evocation of the bloodstained sediments of Irish soil suggests Ireland consists of multiple layers of colonisation, Famine and contemporary sectarian violence: 'I can see the blood/ of bare feet rotting in potato-blighted peat' (24). Dawes and Heaney both utilise this sense of the layered, intercultural elements of Irish

history as a means of negotiating their relationship to their own cultural inheritance, establishing and complicating entanglements across black and green Atlantic space.

Although *TransAtlantic*'s explicit engagement with the symbiotic nature of the Northern Irish civil rights movement is touched upon only briefly, as explored subsequently, McCann himself is keenly aware of the important 'dialogue' between the two civil rights movements although he also questions 'whether it is logical or not' (Garden 7). He notes the 'particular identification between the Black and the Green' and how the 'civil rights dialogue' in the North took 'inspiration from the American civil rights movement' (Garden 7). He talks of 'the murals of Frederick Douglass in Belfast; murals of Miriam Makeba, Stokely Carmichael, Martin Luther King' and how people 'went through the streets of Derry singing 'We Shall Overcome' – a key anthem in the African-American civil rights movement (Garden 7). These touchstones are utilised in the novel through references to the students of Queen's University Belfast of 1976 'out along the footpaths with their Martin Luther King posters and Miriam Makeba T-shirts', singing '*We shall overcome*' (McCann 272; emphasis original). This identification between the black and green movements for civil rights is further gestured to in the novel through the assemblage of sections on Douglass, the Troubles in the North of Ireland and Senator George Mitchell. It is, however, the final section of the novel that really brings the triangular nature of Atlantic spatial relations into focus. 'The Garden of Remembrance' section, set in post-conflict 2011, introduces us to the Kenyan academic, David Manyaki and his Irish wife, Aoibheann. The interracial relationship between Manyaki and his wife Aoibheann provide an optimistic vision of contemporary intercultural Ireland. While McCann acknowledges that both non-white migrants and interracial marriage are not entirely welcome within Ireland – Aoibheann and her father 'were largely estranged

[…] possible due to the marriage with Manyaki' – he invests in their story a redemptive energy (284). This section of the novel, set in 2011, collides with visits of both the British Queen and Barack Obama, illustrating the divergent transnational crosscurrents that have shaped modern Ireland. The novel ends by indicating that it is Manyaki and Aiobheann will financially assist Hannah, another one of the novel's many characters, thereby avoiding her having to sell her house. In an echo of the empathy associated with Douglass, Manyaki seeks not only to engage with this unknown woman but also to offer her aid. While *TransAtlantic* acknowledges the deeply ambivalent relationship between the black and green across Atlantic space, this final act of transcultural solidarity is one 'lined with tenderness' (295).

If, however, we return to the descriptions of Manyaki and his wife, we can see that McCann is repeating the heavy emphasis on racial difference that we discussed in relation to *This Side of Brightness*. Manyaki has dreadlocks, 'his accent [… is] deeply African […] though there was a lilt of Oxford about it' (279); Aoibheann is 'a pale Irish beauty with a sophisticated accent' (282). Aoibheann embodies the typical Celtic aesthetic with her 'pale Irish' skin, whereas Manyaki is 'deeply African'. This emphasis on these lovers as raced bodies re-affirms the importance of race, even as it purports to transgress it. Douglass is transfixed by a young maid Lily, the same woman who will later make the racist remarks about African-Americans, but it is her whiteness that he is drawn to, her 'sandy-colored hair' and 'eyes ledged with freckles' (57); she is '[s]o very pale. The proximity of her sent a shiver along his arms' (37). The implicit desire is not unrequited either, as 'Lily blushed a little when [Douglass] came to shake her hand' upon parting and his impact on her was so profound that she elects to move to the United States (63). McCann's description of Douglass, touched upon earlier, also re-affirms the centrality not just of race, but more particularly, the

stereotypes of masculine blackness we examined in the previous chapter. In describing Douglass coming out of the bath and 'dr[ying] the sculpt of his body', which is 'broad-shouldered, muscled, over six feet tall', McCann asks his readers to dwell on naked, wet, black flesh (37). The erotic overtones can hardly be ignored, even if they are unintentional. In addition to this, he evokes exactly the same 'sweating, glistening bodies' that Bordo argues have dominated cultural images of black men (195). McCann takes this image even further by giving Douglass a set of barbells, made from 'melted [...] slave chains' (46); McCann describes Douglass as he 'lifted the barbells one after another [...] until sweat dripped down onto the wood' (47). Stranger than this, however, is McCann's description of Douglass 'position[ing] himself to watch himself in the oval looking glass' as he lifts these weights, turning the gaze of colonial desire back on himself as he watches his black body sweat (47). Like Treefrog in our earlier chapter, his own reflection also causes him discomfort, and '[h]e looked at himself again in the mirror, lashed out, stopped short, his knuckles trembling at the glass' (47). Curiously enough, in *This Side of Brightness*, Treefrog lashes out at his reflection after reeling through his own racial mixed-ness (and Frederick Douglass was mixed-race too): 'black man white man red man brown man' (McCann 1998: 94). After having, quite literally, constructed his identity through colour, Treefrog is driven to act of abusive self-harm. Treefrog does not describe himself as African-American, Caucasian, Native-American but black, white, red. McCann repeats that in this scene in *TransAtlantic*. After revealing that Douglass was prone to smudging ink on his face when writing, he notes that Douglass 'was told by Webb that the Irish words for a black man were *fear gorm*, a blue man' (47; emphasis original). Thinking about his identity in these coloured ways causes Douglass the same unhappiness that it causes Treefrog.

These sorts of descriptions return us to the inescapable issue of race that haunts these overlaps between the black and green Atlantics. Contemporary scholars working with critical race theory have drawn attention to the fact that Irishness is usually synonymous with whiteness and that this offers Irishness a level of cultural privilege unavailable to black people. Catherine Eagan argues that the 'dialogue' established by various writers and scholars between Irish-Americans and African-Americans 'demonstrate[s] the Irish and Irish American tendency to link 'Irishness' to a heritage of oppression that is in many ways very distant from their present-day lives' and that it tallies with Irish 'historians' and cultural theorists' interest in looking at the Irish and Irish Americans as victims of colonial oppression and racism' (21, 23). In her analysis of Irish-American identity, Eagan argues that this contemporary discursive relationship between Irish(-American) and African-American identities supports this postcolonial reading of Irish(-American) history. This desire to re-assert the centrality of oppression and trauma to Irish history, through an identification with African-America, corresponds with the trend in late twentieth century Irish literature to place an 'emphasis on trauma and traumatic experience' (Garrett 3). However, as we have explored, while McCann's novel does draw a link between black and green, he is keen to subvert the reading of Irish history as characterised by trauma.

Eagan argues that this new conceptualisation of Irish-American culture actually seeks to distance 'white Americans […] from white privilege' (51). Unsurprisingly enough, Eagan's article begins by quoting the ubiquitous line from *The Commitments* about the Irish being the blacks of Europe. However, in his 2008 collection of short stories, *The Deportees,* Doyle said of that statement that there are now 'thousands of Africans living in Ireland and, if I was writing that book today, I wouldn't use that line', adding that 'Ireland has become one of the wealthiest countries in Europe and

the line would make no sense' (xii). This underlines the range of complexities involved in drawing parallels between the black and green Atlantics, and challenges whether they are viable comparisons. For a start, Eagan's essay is primarily concerned with Irish America, yet she begins her critique of Irish-American culture by drawing from a novel about Ireland. When Jimmy Rabbitte compares the Irish to 'the blacks', we presume that he means African-Americans, given the novel's focus on jazz and Rabbite's attempt to suggest that the Irish are a form of racialised underclass, as in the United States. Yet in 2008, Doyle chose to retract his statement in light of the growing number of Africans in the Republic of Ireland. The unacknowledged slippage in Eagan's article between 'Irish' (which includes Irish-American) and 'black' is telling: it alerts us, as Gilroy has argued, to the racial and cultural identities that circulate beyond any one specific nation-state. But it also indicates that racially coloured-coded markers are still keenly felt and in operation, despite Irish(-American) efforts to construct solidarity between the two groups. Thus while it reaffirms the usefulness of thinking about the relationship between these two groups in terms of their non-nationalised, diasporic reach, it also suggests the alarming ways in which the contextual specifics of experience can be lost in the remit of comparative analysis.

TransAtlantic is also attuned to these concerns and McCann's novel demonstrates a knowing critique of the contemporary trend within academia to both align, and question this alignment, between black and green. In the latter parts of the novel, one of the characters, Hannah (the last remaining member of the family that the second half of the novel is engaged with), goes to see an academic at Queen's University Belfast to enquire about selling a letter that she believes was written by Frederick Douglass. Hannah, whose grandson Tomas was shot dead during the Troubles, is

financially destitute and desperately needs to source some money so that she can avoid selling her family home on Strangford Lough. The academic, Jack Craddogh, is intrigued by the letter and remarks that it had 'become fashionable of late for the Irish to think of themselves as tremendously tolerant' (271). We have already highlighted how this imagined tolerance does not tally with the results of the 2004 Referendum on Citizenship. The irony of this is not lost on McCann, when his academic notes that 'the academic question was when, in fact, *they*, the Irish, had become white' (271; emphasis original). Despite Craddogh being Irish himself, the emphasis gained through the use of italics serves to distance Craddogh from 'the Irish' as a homogenous group for academic study. Craddogh is of course making reference to Noel Ignatiev's 1995 work, *How the Irish Became White* and the uneasy relationship of Irishness to whiteness explored in Ignatiev's study, is, in Craddogh's words, 'stitched in with notions of colonialism and loss' (271). Again, McCann's representation of the overlaps between black and green are not 'stitched in with notions of colonialism and loss' but focus instead on Douglass's empathetic engagements with Famine victims as part of his anti-racist, anti-colonial praxis; the shared vocabulary and rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movements; and the interracial love story between African and Irish (despite the dubious lingering on their exotic racial markers).

Minor Literature: *TransAtlantic* as 'alternative history'

We suggested earlier that *TransAtlantic* is not the most successful of McCann's novels; in addition to the lack of engaging narratives and fully developed characters, we have also highlighted McCann's ambivalent racial politics. However, this being said, as well as providing a relatively nuanced history of the overlaps of black and green Atlantics, the novel does allow us to map and tie together several threads of this

thesis. In support of my own argument for the (post)colonial aesthetic in McCann's fiction, the novel's form is, again, of interest; *TransAtlantic* displays a clear engagement with Minor Voices: black men, women, Northern Irish, and so (post)colonial, subjects; the novel also inserts the Troubles back into a wider, transnational frame. Indeed, like the aims of postcolonial critics who seek to rewrite history from the margins, McCann has stated that he thinks of *TransAtlantic* as an 'alternative history' (Garden 16). McCann emphasises the primacy of history to *TransAtlantic* through his preface to the novel, a quotation from the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano's *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World* (2001): '[n]o history is mute. No matter how much they own it, break it, and lie about it, human history refuses to shut its mouth' (Galeano 210). Galeano's book reflects on the interplay of global power and inequality through various factors including the education system, race, gender and economics. Greatly influenced by the civil unrest and military involvement that has characterised the twentieth century in Latin America, Galeano's *Upside Down* illustrates the lasting impact of the colonial incursion. McCann's inclusion of this quotation at the opening of his novel could be read as an attempt to align the disparate experiences of colonialism and oppression across global histories; most notably within *TransAtlantic*, this is that of Ireland, Africa and their diasporas. Galeano's assertion that 'no history is mute' corresponds with the fictive project that spans McCann's later novels; *Dancer* (2003), *Zoli* (2006), *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) and now *TransAtlantic* have all featured and been inspired by a real historical figure in various guises and degrees of accuracy. McCann's desire to reinsert the 'anonymous other' into history through his fictive reconstructions of the past is achieved in *TransAtlantic* through interweaving the lives of several generations of imaginary, 'anonymous' women with his fictional narratives

based on the lives of John Alcock and Arthur Brown, Frederick Douglass and Senator George Mitchell (Garden 1).

The juxtaposition of these minor histories with *TransAtlantic*'s formal properties asks us to consider the intermeshed epistemologies of history, historiography and literature as Western forms of representation. McCann's rhizomatic geographies and temporalities challenge the teleological ideas of linearity and progress that have dominated European intellectual history. This European intellectual tradition, as discussed in Chapter One, has been intimately connected with the imperial projects and mindset of several European colonial ventures. The professional study of history within academic institutions owes much to the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke. Ranke, who emphasised the importance of archival research and empiricism, believed that 'from detailed scrutiny of the facts of particular events the historian should move towards a "universal view", identifying their unity and larger significance, ultimately contributing to the construction of a world history embodied in the progress of what Ranke termed the "leading nations"' (Gunn 6). Ranke, like the majority of early nineteenth-century thinkers, was also nationalist in outlook and this influenced his ideas about the appropriate study of history. As is evident from his belief in 'leading nations', Ranke's historiography is 'Eurocentric to the extent that it views Europe or the West as the originating source of certain historical models – of democracy, capitalism, progress – which the rest of the world is then seen as necessarily following at a later date' (Gunn 9). Simon Gunn argues that contemporary historiography is largely shaped by his ideas and that through Ranke's 'perspective history comes to be represented as a unified process with a single direction ("development" or "modernisation"), an historicism itself predicated on the definition of historical time

as linear and homogeneous, rather than as cyclical, multiple or rhythmic' (9). The importance placed on this notion of historical time as linear is essential to the rise of the English realist novel in the nineteenth century.

Dipesh Chakrabarty attempts to re-route contemporary notions of history through the experiences of Europe's colonial subjects. In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), Chakrabarty argues that this Rankean legacy of 'historicism enabled European dominance of the world in the nineteenth century. […] Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it' (7). For example, Gilroy argues that, as victims of modern capitalism, African slaves and their descendants were the 'first truly modern people' and not their ostensibly modern and progressive masters (221). Luke Gibbons, claiming that 'disintegration and fragmentation' are key to the modern experience, suggests that Ireland, like African slaves, 'experienced modernity before its time' through the colonial incursion (1996: 6). Both Gilroy and Gibbons challenge the notion propagated by Rankean historiography that history is the progress leading to European notions of modernization. *TransAtlantic* subverts this Eurocentric historicism in two key ways: firstly, *TransAtlantic* seeks to destabilise the premise that time need be linear rather than cyclical or multiple; and secondly, through his focus on and interweaving of Irish and African-American experiences, McCann's novel works to indicate that modernity did not necessarily originate in the European metropole but was experienced first by those displaced by European imperialism.

This European understanding of history and time working as a 'unified process with a single direction ("development" or "modernisation")' towards progress has shaped the evolution of English literature (Gunn 9). I have argued elsewhere in

this thesis that the nineteenth-century English realist novel can be read as normalising the narrative of the British nation and its imperial projects. To promote these aims, the realist novel constructs history and temporality in a specific way: through the myth of 'history as progress', the realist novel suggests that history is a positivist and linear narrative of progression (Kelly 2013: 149). As we have highlighted, these ideas about 'history as progress' have their roots in the discourse of European Enlightenment and subsequent nineteenth-century ideas about historiography. If ideas about history and time are shaped by an imperial inheritance, how then are we to make sense of these categories within an Irish context, and specifically, an Irish literary context? For to return to notions of history and time within an Irish context is to confront, according to some, a (post)colonial legacy of 'history [as] nightmare' (Joyce 1992: 28). Seamus Deane maintains that 'history is an inescapable category' in the Irish cultural and national imagination (1985: 12). I am cautious of adopting the uncritical narrative propagated by Deane and some other postcolonial critics that read Irish history as 'a long colonial concussion', without acknowledging Irish involvement in imperial projects and, of special resonance to this chapter, Irish racism both at home and in the diaspora (Deane 1984: 58). This being said, the Irish experience of colonisation has undoubtedly impacted on Ireland's relationship to historical temporality. By this, I mean that modern Irish history has been shaped by the colonial incursion and that the periodic eruptions of violence, the loss of the Irish language and devaluing of indigenous Irish traditions and society sit awkwardly within a narrative that posits history as linear and teleological. Moreover, due to the Famine and emigration in the nineteenth century, not caused by but certainly exacerbated by British colonialism, Ireland did not experience the same industrial modernity that many other European countries did. Both of these events also led to radically decreased population numbers

in Ireland; great losses that haunt the Irish sense of history. To combat this, David Lloyd suggests that we need an 'alternative conception of historical time' for Ireland, claiming that Ireland's position in relation to the temporality of imperial history is fundamentally different to the rest of Europe (2008: 4). Luke Gibbons maintains that 'Ireland is a First World country, but with a Third World memory' (3); a statement which, although seemed incongruous during the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger years, is testament to Ireland's status as the only country in Western Europe that was successfully colonised by another. These statements veer dangerously close to articulating that Ireland was exceptional in these ways, but Ireland is not the only country whose notion of history and temporality have been colonised by European imperialism. We could apply this to the diasporic African experience too; Gilroy suggests that Western ideas of historiography, categorised into the 'simple periodisations of the modern and the postmodern' need 'to be drastically rethought' to encompass the experiential realities of those who suffered through 'European imperial conquest' (Gilroy 42, 44). Irish or diasporic African literature might have a different sense of temporality to English literature; *TransAtlantic*, as we have explored, is a prime example of this.

Earlier in the thesis we noted Ireland's ostensible 'failure' to produce realist novels in the nineteenth century, arguably because they did not have the so-called normative national identity and stable, linear history needed for the novel to flourish. Seeing as McCann returns to nineteenth-century Ireland in *TransAtlantic*, it is worth reflecting further on the Irish nineteenth-century novel. However, as Jacqueline Belanger highlights in her introduction to her edited collection *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions* (2005), there were certainly novels written by Irish writers during the nineteenth century, but largely in genres other than realism.

Both Terry Eagleton, in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995), and David Lloyd, in *Anomalous States* (1993), assert Ireland's cultural, economic and political difference from England as reason to why Ireland did not produce realist novels. Lloyd argues the English realist novel must be understood as much for its 'socializing ends than of its mimetic function alone' and argues that the anomalous Irish subject (a minor voice) could not be socialised, unlike its English counterpart (133). We might want to dispute Lloyd's assertion that the English were easily socialised: the novel is a fictional form and the realist novel is primarily narrated through the voice of a member of the middle class as they come to maturity. Aaron Kelly argues that within the realist novel, the narratives of England's internal others – the working class, immigrant and rural populations – are simply 'translat[ed] into the 'register' of the middle class (2013: 151). There are Minor Voices within Britain too, but the realist novel simply elides their difference. To return once more to Lloyd, he also argues that the periodic outbreaks of violence in Irish history, including those ruptures caused by Irish Republican violence, ensure that the 'imported genre' of the realist novel has just not had the social stability it needs to develop (2005: 133). Joe Cleary takes issue with the 'pervasive' ways in which Irish literary history, and history more generally, are read as 'somewhat anomalous or strange regional variant[s] of a British (read English) historical "master narrative"' (2005: 203; it is likely a direct challenge to Lloyd as 'master narrative' is taken from Lloyd 1993:134). As suggested in an earlier chapter, Cleary is right to challenge to consensus that English history and modernity is the template for all other nations. He concludes his argument by drawing attention to the need for a transnational study of the 'early development of the novel', asserting that 'the Irish situation is the peripheral or colonial rule rather than a Western European exception' (211). Keen to avoid making Ireland an exception, Cleary calls

for comparative work that will deterritorialise our understanding of English history, literature and society as the prototype for normality.

We have explored previously the ways in which the teleological temporality found in the English realist novel can be read as developing in confluence with Rankean ideas about historiography and progress towards modernization. We have also noted how the absence of a 'normative' (or narrated) linearity to Irish history resulted in the absence of a realist tradition in the nineteenth century. One such instance of these anomalous 'ruptures' in Irish history is the Famine, which is a central component of McCann's 'alternative history' of the Atlantic. It is argued that the chaos that the Famine created – the loss of life, the mass-migration, the devastation to the Irish language, the impact on Ireland's socio-economic stratification – left a series of ongoing traumatic and destabilising repercussions that meant realism could not develop. It has also been argued, and we have noted this in a previous chapter, that the nature of the Famine itself was an event that could be adequately represented in any form: Christopher Morash argues 'that there is no single metanarrative of the Famine in literature' (1996: 114). We explored at length the image of the stalking spectre that haunts literature about the Famine and how the Famine was most often represented through the refrain: 'it cannot be described' (Marcus 10-11). Morash argues that this is a result of the catastrophic effect of the Famine, explaining that 'atrocity upsets our sense of cause and effect, [and] hampers our ability to construct sequential narratives which follow the *conventions of mimetic literary representation*' (117; emphasis mine). It is important to note that the conventions to which Morash makes reference are that of English realism, and that the Irish Famine could not be contained within its totalising narrative. The teleological temporality that marched characters to the socialisation of modernity

could not turn the victims of the Famine into a 'knowable community' or position them within 'a tale of evolutionary progress' (Williams 14; Eagleton 147). In returning to these victims, however poorly written this segment is, McCann reincorporates these lost voices into his alternative history.

Conclusion

The formal properties of *TransAtlantic* continue McCann's (post)colonial aesthetic: his rhizomatic geographies and temporalities unsettle notions of history as linear and teleological, instead remaking it as cyclical. These rhizomatic geographies also enable him to illustrate the unexpected points of connection across Atlantic space and to indicate the ways in which the Troubles in the North of Ireland are implicated in historical, transnational patterns of colonialism and violence that far predate the latter part of the twentieth century. A major strand of McCann's novel is his focus on the overlaps between black and green experience and how the empathetic dialogue between cultural differences can open up spaces of redemption. For Douglass, in both McCann's construction and as illustrated through his own letters, the agonies of the Famine set up connective associations with his experience of slavery because 'the cause of humanity is one the world over' (Douglass 1975: 141). Douglass's transnational mode of solidarity is a decidedly generous way of being in the world; it is also another example of McCann's enduring support for the ontology of Kwame Appiah's 'rooted cosmopolitanism', which insists upon the importance of attachment to the local before one can fully appreciate the position of the global. Douglass's deep investment in the struggles of his 'own' people enriches his understanding and empathy for the starving Irish. Both McCann's formal politics and Douglass's transnational investment in Minor Subjects can be read as 'creative efforts aimed at

activating the positivity of differences as affirmative praxis' (Braidotti 2011: 7). In addition to Douglass's empathy for the starving Irish, the novel is full of instances where individuals transcend their own experience to help those in need: Douglass is both emotionally and financially generous with the impoverished Irish in a way that Webb is not; McCann chooses to focus on the efforts of U.S Senator George Mitchell in the Northern Irish Peace Process; in the latter parts of the novel, Hannah is financially assisted by Manyaki, a Kenyan intellectual and, more or less, a complete stranger, to secure her family home in the North of Ireland. We should view these instances as evidence of a willingness to engage with and assist those who are Other to them and so a desire to transgress the boundaries of nation, religion or race. Perhaps, in this way, *TransAtlantic*, and McCann's literature more widely, might be read as a resistance to contemporary 'ideas of "cultural difference"' which Rosi Braidotti argues are 'deterministic, oppositional, and hence exclusive as well as both intrinsically and explicitly xenophobic' (17). It would be no great stretch to suggest that these contemporary ideas are coloured by the legacies of imperial thought about race and culture. Therefore, we might understand McCann's subversion of the teleological linearity that has characterised both conventional realism and historiography as underpinning this project of unsettling the xenophobic legacy of imperial discourse.

However, this is not to argue that McCann's imaginative investment in the transnational intersections of Irish history, for all its celebratory intent, is ignorantly naïve. The invocation of Douglass himself is a profoundly ambivalent metaphor. We discussed previously how Douglass registered the disjuncture between the colonial oppression of the Irish in Ireland and the largely racist attitudes of the Irish-Americans towards their African-American fellow citizens. *TransAtlantic* also

encourages readers to make connections between African-American struggles in the United States and that of Irish Catholics under British rule both pre- and post-partition (through sections on the Famine and the Troubles, respectively). Those familiar with Belfast will be aware of the Frederick Douglass mural on the Falls Road, in which a painting of Frederick Douglass is paired with some of his own words: '[p]erhaps no class has carried prejudice against colour to a point more dangerous than have the Irish and yet no people have been more relentlessly oppressed on account of race and religion'. While this remark is made in reference to the racism of the Irish-Americans Douglass encountered, this statement could be read as applicable to the sectarian troubles that have deeply divided the North of Ireland, although the Troubles are rooted more in debates about ethnicity, religion and nationality than colour. That being said, Douglass's words also prefigure the Irish-American involvement in the institutions that were so vehemently in opposition to the African-American civil rights movement. The mural itself in Belfast alerts us to these tensions within the confluences of the black and green Atlantics: also accompanying the image of Douglass is the telling inclusion that Douglass was 'inspired by two Irishmen to escape'. McCann's invocation of Douglass as part of *TransAtlantic*'s non-chronological connective assemblage of parts, Famine, Peace Process, Troubles, registers the ambivalence between Ireland's relationships with the British Empire and colonialism, but also Ireland's ambivalence within itself.

Conclusion: Minor Voices, race and rooted cosmopolitanism

Although *TransAtlantic* might not be McCann's finest literary achievement, it does tie together the ideas of this thesis and provide solid evidence for McCann's (post)colonial aesthetic. It illustrates McCann's commitment to Minor Voices; his use of the non-conventional episodic novel; and the rhizomatic temporalities and geographies that this form can generate. *TransAtlantic* also puts Irish experience into dialogue with black experience with, as we have traced, varying degrees of success. However, my argument for McCann's (post)colonial aesthetic does not negate the complexities of the ethics and politics that attend McCann's use of these Minor Voices. In the introduction to this thesis, I asked whether there was something problematic in McCann's adoption, or perhaps appropriation, of Minor Voices. Where Eoín Flannery celebrates how McCann allows 'recognizable patterns of Irish historical experience to converse with broader global flows of peripheral peoples', I suggest that these sorts of statements reveal an uncritical stance regarding Ireland's past and present attitudes towards these 'peripheral peoples' (4). Implicit in this statement is the suggestion that Ireland is still, or has been, a nation of 'peripheral peoples'. This thesis does not dispute Ireland's colonial past and I have highlighted at various points the epistemic and physical violence that English colonialism and subsequently British imperialism inflicted on Ireland. But it is vital that we consider the existence of Irish racism, both at home and amongst its diaspora. *TransAtlantic*, concerned as it is with the intersections of black and green history across Atlantic space, may imply to readers that Irishness is synonymous with whiteness but it does not truly interrogate the level of privilege that whiteness offers in our contemporary racialised hierarchy. Despite the inclusionary and redemptive intercultural and

interracial spaces that McCann creates in his fiction, Ireland is still a country that is not, as with the United States and many other European countries, particularly welcoming of either immigrants or refugees.

This being said, McCann's fiction *is* critically engaged with racism, exclusionary politics and the attendant experiences of dispossession that often condition minor identities. We noted in our discussions of *This Side of Brightness* and *Zoli* that McCann does expose the marginalisation and suffering that is experienced through being Other: involved in an interracial relationship; being mixed-race; being a Romani woman. So while we cannot accuse McCann of sanitising the experiential realities of modernity's underside, we might suggest that critics of McCann's work and Irish literature more generally need to be more wary of 'untested generalizations about the Platonic solidarity between struggling Irish nationalists and their supposedly analogous fellow victims elsewhere' (Foster 2001: xiv). Foster's suggestion that it is solidarity between Irish *nationalists* and fellow victims is astute. Though it is true that the indigenous population of Ireland, largely Catholic and largely nationalist, did suffer at the hands of settler colonialists and an anti-Catholic government administration, this did not stop Irish racism: at home, against travellers, Jews and black people; and abroad, against African-Americans and Native-Americans, in line with American imperial and racist attitudes. Robin Cohen's argument that the Irish, Armenian, Jewish, African and Palestinian diasporas are marked by 'scarring historical calamities' and so must be considered 'victim diasporas' may be true, but the extent to which the contemporary diasporic Irish citizenry can lay claim to this narrative of dispossession is debatable (4). Moynihan's insistence that we must question whether 'parallels drawn between Irishness and blackness also serve to bolster a sense of enduring Irish victimhood' is perceptive and necessary (2013: 39).

What has also become apparent through the writing of this thesis is the curious way in which McCann's writing is inflected with an affirmative, hopeful energy while still remaining deeply troubled by Ireland's traumatic past; an indication, perhaps, that there is an enduring sense of Irish victimhood, rightly or wrongly. I believe that McCann's literature is haunted by the shadow of the Famine: in addition to 'Hunger Strike' and the Famine section of *TransAtlantic*, emaciated bodies are a spectral presence in his story 'Sisters' from *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* and Zoli also recounts an experience with a hunger artist as a child. Zoli remembers 'watch[ing] him as his ribs grew clearer, stronger, almost musical' (216). These starving bodies, intertextual as they are, are constant reminders of a distressing Irish past interrupting the present. McCann has said that he thinks the Famine 'plays into the narrative of Irish culture in ways we don't even realise' and its painful legacy 'inhabits us much more than we will actually acknowledge' (Garden 15, 16).

McCann's affirmative, (post)colonial politics of difference is most apparent through his use of literary form. This thesis has traced how the English realist novel of the nineteenth century has often been positioned as the pinnacle of literary achievement and how Irish texts that did not conform to these imperialist literary ideals were found lacking. This analysis of the realist novel and its relationship to English and Irish literature is important because it enables us to understand how the rejection of it, and use instead of the short story and episodic novel, is part of an anti-colonial praxis. Turning to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of Minor Literature allows us to celebrate the use of these non-conventional forms, rather than repeat the accusations of '"inadequacy" or "underdevelopment" ascribed to minority texts' (JanMohamed and Lloyd: 6). Thomas MacDonagh's idea of the Irish Mode is a useful way of thinking about the differences between English and Irish literature without

defaulting to claims of exceptionalism. Instead, MacDonagh suggests that the differences in the Irish use of the English language mean that their literature will be different; I use this term to indicate that the Irish cultural and national fabric is different to that of England, so their use of literary form might be different, too. I have supported this argument by drawing on the extensive evidence of the Irish success with the short story; through this, I contextualised McCann's formal politics in a way that other critics of his work have failed to do. The short story has been especially productive as a literary tool for Northern Irish writers who have utilised it as a means of illustrating the sectarian divisions that are a reality of life in the North.

McCann's formal politics also extends into a textual practice of 'storytelling'. Despite the importance of Benjamin's essay on the storyteller, very little work in literary studies has considered how textual storytelling relates to oral practice, and how being a 'storyteller' is different to being a novelist. My work on this topic is far from exhaustive and this is certainly an area where further scholarship could be conducted. As I have illustrated through a close analysis of *Zoli* and the inclusion of several statements from McCann, storytelling plays a central role in McCann's work. McCann's episodic narratives often revolve around telling the same story from multiple viewpoints: this is especially clear in *Zoli*, but it is also key to *Let the Great World Spin*, *Dancer* and *Songdogs*. This notion of 'retelling' is a vital component of oral storytelling and, in examples of textual storytelling, works to heighten the sense that stories are collectively shared, or, in McCann's words, 'that storytelling is the purest democracy that we have' (Garden 9). For McCann, it is the role of the storyteller, *not* the novelist, to reframe historical narratives, opening them up to history's silenced and 'anonymous li[ves]' (Garden 9). Textual storytelling, through acknowledging and celebrating oral culture, reaffirms the value of these putatively

‘pre-modern’ practices, highlighting how history permeates the present. This recalcitrant tradition is able to subvert the epistemic violence of imperialism through its embodied nature; therefore storytelling can be understood as a form of anti-colonial praxis and McCann’s use of it strengthens the (post)colonial aesthetic of his work.

McCann’s (post)colonial aesthetic embraces Minor Voices and intercultural dialogue between these marginalised communities. To return to the earlier question posited in the introduction: *does* McCann appropriate these Minor Voices, making their alterity a commodity for artistic gain? This thesis would indicate that, despite McCann’s celebration of inclusionary intercultural interchange, his fiction is critically engaged with the realities of being Other: homeless; black; Romani. These subject positions are not romanticised metaphors for the exilic postmodern subject but experiential realities and McCann’s literature depicts them as such. McCann’s fiction is acutely aware of the need to be rooted and to feel like one belongs; Zoli is at home amongst the Roma even though she is a nomad. McCann’s literature echoes Appiah’s call for a rooted cosmopolitanism that can both welcome the stranger even as it acknowledges the need to have a firm sense of home, however nomadic this notion might be. McCann’s literature works towards a re-rooting/routing of belonging; paradoxically reasserting the importance of attachment, belonging and home while he rejects fixity. This contradictory notion is integral to McCann’s (post)colonial aesthetic: an ontology that refuses to restrict notions of attachment to bounded nation-states or territories; that refuses to be didactic or polemical; that embraces alterity; and, while remaining critically attuned to the experiential realities of life for those at the margins, celebrates the affirmative power of Minor Voices.

APPENDIX: An interview with Colum McCann

Q. A recent critical companion to your work, Eóin Flannery's *Colum McCann and The Aesthetics of Redemption* (2011), places you within the Irish literary tradition, whereas another, John Cusatis' *Understanding Colum McCann* (2010), considers your fiction as part of a series of books entitled 'Understanding American Literature'. How would you respond to this and how would you position yourself within the literary landscape; do you find national labels enabling or restrictive?

A. It's nice to be considered a part of both, so you sort of straddle the two. Michael Ondaatje has this thing called the 'international mongrels of the world'. He's a classic example for me. He was born in Sri Lanka, educated in England, moves to Canada, but writes his first book about a jazz singer in early twentieth century New Orleans. To me that's a perfect collision and that's the way I sort of see my fiction: not operating within any specific national boundaries. When it comes down to it, when you're finally asked what sort of writer you are – other than just *a* writer – and you have to put a label on it, I have to be an Irish writer. I come from that tradition. I was born into it. I still plough it. But what interests me is the idea that you might be able to break form and break ideas of national landscape and break borders, and so, for example, write a novel about a Russian ballet dancer and have it operate within the sphere of Irish literature as I tried to do in *Dancer*. So it can be interpreted in an Irish context, it can be interpreted in a Russian context, it can be interpreted in an American context, or even in the context of being an 'international mongrel.' So I am quite happy to think that all of these things operate for me: which is kind of greedy in a way!

Q. No it's not greedy, not at all. Following on from that then, do you think there is something about being Irish, given Ireland's long history of emigration, that means that your national identity is always already more fluid and transnational?

A. I would say so, yes. Yes. I come from a country that has always been leaving in one sense or another. Part of the sadness of the Irish character is the very fact that we have such a relationship with leaving. I'm not sure that the Irish identity is more fluid because of this or if there are a number of other factors too – we're a small nation, we're non-threatening, we fit in easily, we adapt. But we can also be very narrow-

minded and try to enforce our identity on other people. Sometimes we become more Irish when we go abroad. This is a little sad, but it's also the emigrant trying to remember. Sometimes I think we emigrate precisely because we want – and need – to remember. Joyce said, in a letter to the English painter Frank Budgen, that he had been so long out of Ireland that he could all at once hear her voice in everything. Also there is the notion that we can be very territorial about our past. But in essence I think we are a fluid people. Certainly I like the idea of being transnational and at the same time cleaving to where I came from. And I think we are held together by our culture. Storytelling is the glue of a scattered people. We need our stories to hold us together.

Q. You've also mentioned in other interviews that you con- sider yourself both Irish and a New Yorker. Cities have traditionally been characterised as more cosmopolitan and multicultural; do you think it's easier to associate with a city than a nation?

A. Well with this particular city it's easier because with New York it is such an international landscape. It's one of the few cities in the world where you can land and immediately have an allegiance to New York – you can become a New Yorker almost on your first day. You can't become a Glaswegian on your first day, I don't think, or a Dubliner on your first day. That's part of the fluidity that I suppose I've been looking for, or where I feel comfortable in that fluidity: because this is a transnational place. I have more of a difficulty with the idea of being an American writer. So instead I say I'm a New Yorker. Again there is a greediness here – I don't want to be labelled American but I want the benefit of being in New York. 'Do I contradict myself? Very well I contradict myself.' It's my Whitman moment. 'I contain multitudes.'

Q. You're just as perceptive writing about a multi-ethnic Ireland as you are a multi-ethnic US. Is the multiracial, multicultural landscape of your prose an aesthetic effect for you, or a genuine reflection of the world you see around you?

A. It is reflective of the world around me but when it gets put in a literary periscope it becomes a deeper issue because books themselves have their borders, they have their boundaries: they have their first page and they have their last page; they have a beginning and they have an end. Yet one's cultural ideas and one's cultural identity are more fluid than the books. But if the books are written in such a way that they have openness to them; what happens is that they can reflect those

cultural ideas. I think that an Irish writer confronting a multi-ethnic New York is also writing about Ireland – even if he or she doesn't mention Ireland once in the text. We allowing Irish readers to say that our experience of elsewhere is valid too. Our experience of Brooklyn informs our experience of Sherrif Street, Dublin.

Q. In your new novel, *TransAtlantic* (2013), as with some of your other work, most notably *This Side of Brightness* (1998), you explore the intersections between the Irish (and Irish-American) and African-American communities. In *TransAtlantic*, much is made of Frederick Douglass as 'the Black O'Connell', for example, in reference to the important relationship between Douglass and Daniel O'Connell, the campaigner for Irish Catholic Emancipation in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. Do you think the two groups share a particular affinity?

A. In *TransAtlantic* I take the story of Frederick Douglass arriving in Ireland [at the beginning of the Irish famine in 1845] and then in 2011 there's a character who comes into the story – a Kenyan named David Manyaki. He rescues a house and a letter that have been moving fluidly between these two sides of the Atlantic. So the narrative kind of goes back to a form of Douglass, but it's a confident young Kenyan intellectual who lives in Dublin. I don't know what that means or why it occurred. I suppose I have been exploring the relationship between Irish and African people for quite a while now. I cannot pinpoint a moment when it occurred to me that this is what I wanted or needed to do. It began when I started writing *This Side of Brightness*. Part of the function of that blurring between the Irish and African-American was purely logical; when I was in the tunnels [underneath New York City] hanging out with the homeless people, the vast majority of them happened to be African-American. If I was going to write an honest novel, it would have to confront some of the African-American experience. So I braided in the Irish experience with the African-American experience through the marriage between two of my characters. So part of that was just because of story and not due to any ideology or intellectual bent that I thought would work. So in a way it was an obsession born out of the practical. But the further I get away from it, the more I realise that I *do* think that there is this touchstone of common experience there between the two communities. I am aware that you can do that with many cultures. You know, the Irish and the Greeks; the Irish and the Swedes, the Irish and the Colombians. But there is a particular identification between the Black and the Green, if you will. The idea of

oppression. The idea of belonging. The idea of staking a claim to a piece of territory. Even if you talk about Northern Ireland and how we organised our civil rights marches, how we organised our civil rights dialogue – the murals of Frederick Douglass in Belfast; murals of Miriam Makeba, Stokely Carmichael, Martin Luther King; they went through the streets of Derry singing 'We Shall Overcome': you know, taking inspiration from the American civil rights movement. So there is an identification – whether it is logical or not is another question: one hopes it's not sentimental.

Q. That was a great answer, thank you. What is it about Eastern and Central Europe that attracts you? Both *Dancer* (2003) and *Zoli* (2006) deal with numerous countries from the region, including the former Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.
A. Well originally it was just because, again, it was a story that obsessed me. I'm generally corralled by images rather than ideas. So the image that led me to write *Dancer* came from a story told to me by a young man in Dublin. He told me that when he was seven years old, his family got his first TV. At first there was no reception and his father, a drunk, beat the living daylights out of him in frustration. But the next day my friend, Jimmy, plugged the TV into an extension cord and carried it out onto the balcony of the flats. The very first image that came on the TV was Rudolph Nureyev dancing, and he fell in love with him. And I thought, what an incredible story – about Dublin, about fathers, about culture, about celebrity and about Rudolf Nureyev. But I also knew that it would never fit into the larger part of Nureyev's 'official' historical biography. It deserved to be told but it was too 'anonymous' to be part of his official history. Yet I knew down deep in my bones that fiction operates in those anonymous moments. Those moments are, in fact, the lifeblood of good stories. I was also aware that fiction could tell a story as powerfully as non-fiction or 'history'. Part of the challenge, for me as a writer, is to find the anonymous moment and to insert it into the larger historical frame and for it to make sense as part of this larger historical frame. A fiction writer as an unacknowledged historian, if you will. Making it up to tell the truth.

Q. That actually leads on very nicely to my next question. You've said that in your work you try to give voice to the anonymous other and I was wondering if you could talk about that further. What is the relationship, for you, between history and fiction?

A. I think you’ve got to bring it down to the notion that history is written by the winners – and this is a notion that’s been around for a long time. And also the notion that history is a series of agreed-upon lies; and that generally history is ‘agreed-upon’ at a higher level than most people, like you and me, will operate in. So if we bring the history back down to earth and if we put it in the small house, or the field, or the factory, if we put history in these places, if becomes a new sort of history. A true history that wasn’t legislated before; it doesn’t mean that one history is necessarily better than the other. You can see it is a sort of – and this is interesting although it’s off the top of my head! – a sort of Celtic pattern: you know the outside circle, then coming slowly, slowly, slowly into the centre circle. I would always find the ordinary person at the very centre of that Celtic pattern. I like that idea. The wider circles are written by the politicians and the corporations and the supposed ‘winners.’ They have controlled the story for a long time. We have to learn to give it back to the proper owners of history – the ordinary person. I think it’s the job, the real job, of the fiction writer – or the poet, or the playwright or the journalist – to go in and discover the value of that supposedly anonymous life and then insert it into that larger historical narrative, if you can. To make sense of, and retell, the story over again. John Berger says, ‘never again will a single story be told as if it were the only one’. So for centuries we’ve told stories as if only one of them exists, but so many of them exist. There are so many facets. Every story is many stories. And this goes to the heart of the democratic notion of storytelling; that storytelling is the purest democracy that we have. With storytelling there need be no regard for borders, no regard for boundaries, no regard for wealth: everyone has a story. You have a story; I have a story; the woman down the street has a story. We all have a need to tell it, a desire to tell it, a compulsion to tell it: we *have* to tell it. Enter the poet or writer who acknowledges that and then we can start to reframe the story.

Q. I think that’s a really exciting way of looking at literature. I agree with it a lot; of course literature can be political and a force for change, but people working in and with literature are often put under pressure to defend it and its role in society. In many ways, it has the ultimate role in society. But moving on. In an interview with Michael Ondaatje, you asked him if he thought content dictated form. Do you?

A. Yes. What it all comes down to is language and language has the power. The

way you put the language down on the page will eventually reveal to you the structure of your story and the form of your story. It all comes from the soil of language. And it's also about embracing mystery. Mystery joining things together. Letting the content flow so that it finally finds the right form. The more experimental, or the more open, you're prepared to be with the fact that you don't really always know where you're going to go, or what's truly going on with your own thoughts, the richer your work will be. It's about being open to mystery. Which sounds kind of twee, or new age-y, but I don't think it really is. When it's properly examined, language gives us the vessel that eventually reveals the way the story should be told. That means you have to be open to poetry, you have to be open in all sorts of ways. Having an idea is all well and good – we can all have an idea – but we can't all write *Ulysses*, unfortunately.

Q. If we think about your use of literary form, your novels are quite unconventionally constructed and you've also written two collections of short stories. I was wondering about your use of the short story as the form you used to reflect on Northern Ireland in *Everything in this Country Must* (2000). You've mentioned Benedict Kiely's *Proxopera* (1977) and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996) as being key texts for you in illustrating what life is like, and was like, in the North of Ireland. Obviously Deane's text isn't a collection of short stories but it reads a little like it could be, consisting of often disconnected episodic fragments. I was curious to see if you consciously used the short story as a means of slotting your own work into that tradition?

A. I wrote *Everything in this Country Must* just after having completed *This Side of Brightness*, which had been considered very much an American novel, whether rightly or wrongly. And part of me bristled that people thought I was an American novelist and that I'd left my country behind. Some of the most informative years for me were between the ages of seven and twelve when I spent a lot of time up North on my mother's family farm. So I thought, in order to re-prove my Irishness, I'm going to go back into the heart of the matter and the most overarching national question, for me, at that time was: what is going on in Northern Ireland? Why does this exist? How do we negotiate it? I didn't consciously go with short stories, but I had a few ideas that I wanted to work on. I wrote the story 'Everything in this Country Must' first,

then I wrote ‘Hunger Strike’, then I went back in and inserted the story ‘Wood’, which has a different political slant to it. I was trying to talk about young people and how their political consciousness gets formed. In fact in some ways I think it’s my favourite little book; partly because it’s my orphan book and doesn’t always get read. It’s also because it goes to the heart of the political question, for me, anyway. Also, the Irish are good at the short story.

Q. Absolutely. I have a bit of theory I’ve been working on as short stories as a form of literary anti-colonial protest, because the English realist novel has been so closely associated with imperialism and I think perhaps this is why the short story has done so remarkably well in Ireland and also in the United States, in the earlier twentieth century at least.

A. That’s a very interesting notion. I think you’re possibly correct here. If you take many of the great Irish novels, you’ll see that they’re written in numerous voices, or from numerous standpoints, with a narrative generosity, whereas the traditional English novel tends to have that one voice; one tone; one movement. There’s nothing wrong with it, but it does have a confidence to it, a touch of Empire about it, if you will; a sort of ‘I have my story to tell and *this is it*’ and it doesn’t waver. A lot of Irish novels tend to be digressive, they tend to spin in different directions and don’t have a specific fulcrum along which they progress. I think that ties in with notions of colonialism, the experience of *being* colonised. It also ties in with language: the Irish language was taken away from us. One of the ways that Joyce thought about it was, ‘I will take this language that was given to us and I will re-appropriate it and remake it’. I’m sure that ties in with your argument.

Q. Yes definitely and I think that’s what short story writers were doing with the novel, re-appropriating it and making it work in completely different ways.
A. I have this idea that the short story is a universe and a novel is too, except the short story is an imploding universe and distils down to a very tight ball of energy; the novel is an exploding universe, sending out shrapnel in lots of different directions. I miss the short story. I have been writing novels recently. Some of it just comes down to the very vulgar notion that you have to sell books and novels sell more than collections of short stories do. I have kids to feed. ‘Children pry up our rotting bodies

with cries of earn, earn, earn.' Jim Harrison says that!

Q. Your treatment of the North of Ireland with *Everything in this Country Must* is actually quite unusual. Joe Cleary has argued in his book, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (2002), that the North of Ireland has been dealt with in 'hermetically compartmentalised terms' and 'not as part of a shared history' that includes both the Republic of Ireland and the UK (77). I think you are very adept at negotiating the relationship between the two Irish states but also gesturing beyond even the borders of Ireland, at even larger landscape of transnational trauma. I was hoping perhaps you might be able to talk a little about this.

A. That's exactly what *TransAtlantic* is about; that is part and parcel of what I wanted to do with my new novel, to pull them together. You have the North and you have the South and then in the final chapter there's this woman up North who goes to the Republic to try and sell a letter she believes belongs to Frederick Douglass. And so the novel goes to the heart of your question – expanding the border of what is national, crossing it, giving it breath, transcending it, questioning it, and even traumatising it. To be quite frank, a lot of people didn't think I should write about Northern Ireland. This was after *Everything in this Country Must*. This was bizarre to me, but it's true. I can write a novel about homeless people living in Subway tunnels, I can write a novel about a Russian ballet dancer no problem, but to write about the North? Oh no, no, no. It felt like people were saying to me, you're stepping out of your territory; how dare you? I found this staggering. I mean it's a hundred miles from Belfast to Dublin, but it's a hell of a lot more from Dublin to New York, it's three thousand six hundred. A lot of things were said to me – 'you've no right to go into this territory, leave the North to northerners' was one of them. It was as if I couldn't know it because I didn't live there. But I could know something else, I could know Africa or Alabama but I should not know the North. 'You should leave the North to northerners and the South to the South,' was the perception. But it seems to me that the proper process of peace, reconciliation, decency, involves understanding someone else's story, as I was saying earlier, stepping in the shoes of somebody else. In certain ways, I always had to make myself into an outsider to go back in and write about Northern Ireland. If my first book had been about Northern Ireland, it would have been a different thing. Although the final story, 'Cathal's Lake', in my first

collection of stories, *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (1994), is about the North. It's one of my favourite stories actually. Thankfully things have changed recently and the reaction to *TransAtlantic* has been very, very strong, and nobody has said anything to me about over-stepping my territory. Maybe that has to do with the peace process itself. Or maybe it's just that our lungs are bigger. We live, finally, in a wider world.

Q. 'Cathal's Lake' is a great story. I know there's some transcultural work going on with it too, which perhaps you could discuss: the layering of a story from the Talmud with a Northern Irish Context.

A. 'Cathal's Lake' is based not on an Irish myth, everyone always thinks of the Irish myth, The Children of Lir, and even though it is in a certain way, the idea of rebirth through the form of swans, really, it goes back to a Jewish myth of the thirty-six hidden saints, the *Lamed Vavniks*. In that myth there are thirty- six saints in the world, men – of course, although it should be men and women – humble men, carpenters, farmers, cobblers and they bear the sorrows of the world. But there's one saint who's lost faith and lost his line of communication with God; and it seems to me that's what Cathal is. Cathal is very much an Irish figure, he's a farmer, but he goes back to this Jewish myth: he is carrying the sorrows of the world, and he has lost his line of communication with God. Nobody needs to know that to read the story but that's where it came from for me. That was the force through the flower, if you will.

Q. I think it adds a really interesting element in terms of connecting to a larger transcultural framework of storytelling. I'm not sure if this was intentional or not but a lot of your stories are, for me, quite evocative of Kafka with their emphasis on the body and trauma as a performative act, particularly hunger and starvation. Is this something that you are consciously aware of? What is it about embodied experience that has such enduring appeal for you as a primary focus in your work?

A. Well, the short story 'Hunger Strike', from *Everything in this Country Must*, goes right to the heart of Kafka's concerns and work on the body. I wish I could say I was better versed in Kafka than I am. I was of course aware of 'The Hunger Artist', how- ever. And yes the body has often been a site of enduring focus for me, especially in *Dancer*. My work spins around the body and how it moves through space. I like the idea that the movement of the body is reflective of the movement of the mind. We be- come what we are thinking. We move through space as we move

through our imaginations.

Q. You've noted previously that the Northern Irish writer Benedict Kiely has been a huge influence for you. In your story 'Everything in this Country Must', there's an incident where the narrator counts out three bullets. Was this a direct allusion to a similar incident in Kiely's 'Bluebell Meadow', where the narrator counts out six bullets?

A. No, not consciously, no. I love Kiely. Kiely was very important for me when I was about sixteen, seventeen, and he is still important to me today. He used to hang out with my father. He helped me out when I was in my early twenties and encouraged me with my writing. I would go to his house and he would appear at the door in his pyjamas, at midday, with a bottle of whisky in his hand that he'd have just cracked open, as he'd have finished writing. No matter how late he was up the night before, he was always up at seven in the morning. I think an awful lot of Kiely has seeped into my work, sometimes consciously, some- times not. I used the three bullets because I wanted the reader to think, first of all that's he's shooting at the British Army truck that's leaving, secondly that he's going to shoot himself and then that he's shooting the horse. Just to complicate it at the end. It was a dramatic effect for me.

Q. I've another specific question about an intertextual allusion. I find the anorexic nun, Brigid, in 'Sisters' evocative of the iconic image of the Famine: Bridget O'Donnell and her children. This is just one of many instances in your work where intertextual connections are made to a large range of cultural texts and images. Could you comment on the role of literary influence in your fiction?

A. One of the things that I find important is acknowledging this debt to your literary forbears. A lot of writers will claim that these associations to other texts that readers find in their work don't exist, that they're not there. But if they're there for some- body else, it just makes the text richer, so that the literary experience, the critical experience, brings something to the novel that expands it as a work of art. So rather than people thinking that it's wrong or stilted to find some things in the work that weren't intentional, I think it's beautiful. So I'll steal that from you! My line is that we get our voice from the voices of others and even if we haven't read it, it somehow creeps in. I see lots of Irish writers who say things like, 'I don't know who Ben Kiely is', and therefore he didn't influence me, which is a sham really, be- cause

you're influenced even when you don't realise it. It's like music: you've heard it even if you haven't directly heard it. There's a certain guitar riff that somebody else steals and it becomes part of the whole fabric of the musical landscape and you have to acknowledge that you're never there on your own. The idea that you can be sprung from some sort of dry well and somehow have a voice is patently absurd. We are an accumulation of others. Which means that we're also an accumulation of other places. *E pluribus unum*. This is our DNA. We are bound to it.

Q. I just wanted to go back to an earlier question about your interest in, and use of, the starving body. In *TransAtlantic* you devote lengthy passages to the utter terror and horror of the Famine and its devastating effect. Do you think your earlier works that are not directly about the Famine but include starving bodies, like Brigid in 'Sisters' and Corrigan in *Let the Great World Spin*, are also a way of dealing with the traumatic legacy of the Famine?

A. It's something that in Ireland we haven't really, truly, properly confronted. Not in the same way that, say, Jewish writers have properly confronted the Holocaust. There's always a vague embarrassment in Ireland about the Famine, as if it's sort of twee somehow; something that's over and we can forget about it or at least not mention it too much. I think it plays into the narrative of Irish culture in ways we don't even realise, like the Hunger Strikes in the North for example. If you wanted to shame your landlord, in Ancient Ireland, you would go and lie on his door- step and not eat. It was a form of personal political protest. I think all this inhabits us much more than we will actually ac- knowledge, which is why *TransAtlantic* tries to pull that stuff out again. Yes, I desperately wanted to write about the Famine. It has ancient echoes for me. In some ways I think that *TransAtlantic* is an alternative history.

Q. In addition to the bodily trauma that you explore in relation to hunger, you often put your characters through horrendous accidents – car crashes and industrial accidents. There seems to be quite a link between trauma and modernity for you.

A. I suppose I do! Hmmm. Part of that has to do with plot and creating a dramatic line that I want for my characters. Is it accidental that it occurs? Obviously not, there's obviously some- thing going on in the back of my mind but sometimes I don't

want to think about it. I use this line from Dostoevsky all the time, that 'to be too acutely conscious is a disease'; and if I knew why I did certain things I wouldn't do them again. For example, a few years ago I did an interview where the interviewer mentioned that in my first three or four books I wrote a lot about maps. When I discovered that this was true, I couldn't write about maps again!

Q. In *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), the year 1974 acts some- what like a transnational connective tissue. You start off early on with the bomb in Dublin – again, moving the Troubles out- side of the North – then you have Philippe Petit's walk between the Twin Towers and the Vietnam War is an obvious undercurrent too. Petit's walk being used as an allegory for the attacks of 9/11 is interesting in itself. You've talked previously about how you thought about the importance of the words – World, Trade, Centre – and it seems to me like you've used all the disparate threads of your novel to weave a very global fabric in response to an event that, it has been widely argued, was dealt with in quite a nationalistic manner. Was this a knowing effort on your part?

A. Part of it was an accident that it all took place in 1974, but because everything took place in the same year, you notice the connections and your mind whirls in exactly the kind of ways that you're talking about. For Ciaran to come out of the bomb in Dublin in 1974 and make his way to the United States and then the legacy of what was happening in Vietnam speaking to what was happening in Iraq in the 2000s, speaks to that tissue that goes between these times and these wars. I think tissue is an important word, because it's not muscle and it's not ligament, it's that other stuff that surrounds them. I was aware of it, yes. I didn't want to become hyper-aware of it. You'll see with *TransAtlantic*, most of these ideas that you're talking about are coming together with *TransAtlantic*. But not in a direct way, because I think it's not interesting to be so direct about it. The reader will discover what their intelligence will allow. For some people the Alcock and Brown section will just be a rattling read about an airplane journey. Others will notice that goes to the heart of my argument about peace and decency – and my efforts to 'take the war out of the machine'.

Q. I think you can read all of your work as 'connective tissues' and that this is a vitally important context for your literature. Literary criticism and culture more widely tends to view the world through quite restrictive national paradigms. It's

something you yourself have written about; in your introduction to *The Collected Stories of Benedict Kiely* (2002) you said that readers often tend to think of books as having a national identity encoded in their spines and that this wasn't a helpful way of reading literature.

A. I think if criticism can embrace itself as a sort of poetry and can rely on some of its own intuition, then it becomes even better. The critic as someone who embraces mystery and contra- diction, even in their own arguments. So the criticism can be expansive and generous. So it doesn't focus in and really burn itself down to a particular segment of the page, so that the act of proper critical thinking, if it has an agile relationship to the text, it all becomes so much better. It doesn't become polemic or didactic.

Q. I wanted to ask you actually why the artist has such enduring appeal for you. You frequently explore the experience of artists of various kinds and yet you never resort to a clichéd representation of the artist as tortured by existential angst.

A. It really bothers me when writers propel themselves up on this holy pedestal of 'art' and start rattling on about the difficulty he or she embraces as part of making art. I don't like the idea that the artist is somehow more important than the person who buys the art or is the subject of that art. If you think about someone like L.S. Lowry, and all his matchstick men, those matchstick men are just as important to the intellectual canvas as Lowry himself. In fact they endure more. The subject of the art is certainly more interesting than the artist himself. I think that goes back to the idea that you leave your work open; you *must* leave your work open. That then elevates the position of the 'anonymous other.' The artist must realise that he or she is not *entirely* in control. But if you elevate the position of the anonymous, you also elevate the emotional intelligence of the artist rather than degrading the artist, which gives it a further depth. Am I talking shite? I might be. I'll have to go away and think about it. But I do like the idea that the subject of the art is as powerful to the creation of it. And that there is more dignity in the work when you don't complain about how hard it is. It should be a joy, even if it is difficult. 'The Fascination of What's Difficult' in the Yeatsian way.

Q. One such prominent artist is the photographer Michael from your early novel *Songdogs* (1995). You've mentioned previously that photography is your favourite art

form, but I find that it can be quite problematic – exploitative, even. Susan Sontag famously asserted that it led to individuals establishing a 'chronic voyeuristic relation' to the world. How does it fit into your thoughts on art?

A. I don't know. I love photography but I will say this: I do not own a camera. I don't believe I should carry a camera around. If I carried a camera around, I would always be taking photo- graphs and I would become hyper aware of the process. I think it comes back to this notion that you can't let your art intrude on your life in certain ways. You have to go ahead and just live things. But I do think I'm a photographer anyway. I love the idea that you can paint a photograph – which is an absurd notion. How can you paint a photograph? But that is what I'd like to think of my work as doing: painting a photograph with words. The reader then walks into that photograph and because you have painted the depth, the experience becomes three-dimensional. I wish I were a photographer; I wish I was a visual artist, but I'm not. But I try to recreate these things with language.

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