

**SELECTIVE TRADITIONS: FEMINISM AND
THE POETRY OF COLETTE BRYCE, LEONTIA
FLYNN AND SINÉAD MORRISSEY**

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ABSTRACT**Selective Traditions: Feminism and the Poetry of Colette Bryce, Leontia Flynn
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This thesis seeks to argue for the problematising role of tradition and generational influence in the work of three Northern Irish poets publishing since the late 1990s. The subjects, Colette Bryce (b. 1970), Leontia Flynn (b. 1974) and Sinéad Morrissey (b. 1972), emerged coterminously, each publishing with major UK publishers. Together they represent a generation of assured female poetic voices. This study presents one of the first critical considerations of the work of these poets, and it remains conscious of the dominance of conceptions of tradition and lineage which are notable in poetry from Northern Ireland from the twentieth-century onwards. In suggesting that this tradition is problematised for emerging women poets by precursor-peer dominance and the primacy of male perspectives in the tradition, this thesis combines a study of poetics, themes relating to gender, detachment and paratexts. From consideration of these elements, it proposes that contemporary poets are not necessarily subject to the powers of tradition and influence, but rather, are capable of a selective approach that in turn demonstrates the malleability of contemporary traditions.

The approaches are laid out in four chapters which move from a consideration of “threshold” paratexts (following from the work of Gérard Genette), including book reviews and dedications, through studies of thematic divergence and detachment, the changing status of women’s poetry traditions within Northern Ireland and beyond, the significance of gendered subjects in poetry, and influence found not in thematic or paratextual aspects, but in the individual aspects of poetic form. These aspects combine to form poems and the tradition(s) in which they continue. The thesis provides extensive coverage of the work of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, combining close readings with the application of theoretical frameworks interrogating the implications of literary traditions on later writers (especially when the writers are temporally and culturally close), giving particular consideration to gender and feminist politics. It explores a variety of different critical truisms applied to the poetic generations that precede the younger poets and identifies both compliance and divergences from the contemporary Northern Irish canon. In doing so, this study simultaneously illuminates the frailties of the popular, overwhelmingly male, tradition, particularly as regards to representations of women, and provides direction for studies of post-millennial Northern Irish poetry.

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So there was nothing new for us about
The dialogical imagination.
All useful training for the life
Of letters, learning to distinguish
Between revisionists in the horse and trap,
Modernists off to the pictures, realists
Drinking tea from a gallon in the meadow,
And historicists taking it all in.

Bernard O'Donoghue, "Child Language Acquisition" (21-30)

“If you can fashion something with a file in it for the academics
To hone their malicious nails on – you’re minted.
And another thing, don’t write about anything you can point at.”

Leontia Flynn, “My Dream Mentor”

“I’ve been inside these letters it seems for years, I’ve drawn them
on paper, palms, steamed mirrors and the side of my face
in my sleep, I’ve waded in sliced lines and crossed boxes.”

Sinéad Morrissey, “To Encourage the Study of Kanji”

“It was painful; it took years.

I’m my own witness,

guardian of the fact

that I’m still here.”

Colette Bryce, “The Full Indian Rope Trick”

1. Introduction: The “Generation” Game and Begetting Newness

“None of us can say who will succeed, or even who has or has not talent. The only thing certain about us is that we are too many”: such was the verdict of W.B. Yeats on his literary contemporaries and their significance (“The Trembling of the Veil” 151). Yeats’ Irish Literary Revival (for in many ways it was *his*) was remarkable in terms of productivity, particularly of poetic and dramatic works: so much so that critics continue to engage with its implications and effects on twentieth century writing even in the post-millennial period.¹ One of the notable facets of this “Celtic Twilight” was that it was to a degree a movement created, not only by the literature under its auspices, but a movement created by an idea repeatedly reinforced by interpretative “propaganda”. As an American observer commented in 1904:

For twelve years now, since the beginning of the propaganda of the Irish Literary Society, London, in 1892, there has been much discussion of “The Irish Literary Revival” [...] In this discussion, there has been no little logrolling, absurd overpraise, and contemptuous depreciation [...], and several earnest attempts on the part of the workers within the movement to realize its significance. (Weygandt 420)

On the emergence of a number of Northern Irish poets in the latter half of the century, understandably, comparisons with Yeats’ era, and the Literary Revival, were made. Chris Agee suggested “Northern poetry of recent decades has parallels with the cultural revitalizations of the Irish Literary Revival early in the century” (xxix) and, accordingly, Christina Hunt Mahony suggests that “contemporary Irish

¹ See, for example, Frank Shovlin’s *Journey Westward: Joyce, Dubliners and the Literary Revival* (Liverpool UP, 2012), Eugene McNulty’s *The Ulster Literary Theatre and the Northern Revival* (Cork UP, 2008) and Yug Mohit Chaudhry’s *Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* (Cork UP, 2001).

poetry has been enjoying such a flowering, second only to that experienced a century ago in the Irish Literary Renaissance itself” (1).

A key feature of recent studies of Northern Irish poetry, regardless of whether they in fact consider the implications of the tradition they acknowledge and construct, is the recognition of “generations” of Northern Irish poets. Broadly speaking, in its use in criticism of Irish poetry, “generation” refers to groups of poets who begin to publish concurrently and which share one or more distinctive (albeit contested) characteristic. When Frank Ormsby published an exultant anthology entitled *Poets from the North of Ireland* in 1979 as a celebration of the recent flowering, the selection of strong new voices from Northern Ireland was remarkable. Among the first generation in this context were Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley; whose respective first major collections *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Night-Crossing* (1968) and *No Continuing City* (1969) appeared in the late-1960s and who were establishing themselves in the early years of the Northern Irish Troubles. Second generation poets such as Paul Muldoon (*New Weather* [1973]), Ciaran Carson (*The New Estate* [1976]), and Medbh McGuckian (*The Flower Master* [1982]) followed within less than a decade, but their more postmodern and disruptive approach set them apart from their immediate precursors. The development of these writers and many other credible new poets within and from Northern Ireland was so rapid that Ormsby was able to publish a revised second edition of *Poets from the North of Ireland* in 1990 including those more recently published.

Indeed, so numerous were the emerging poets that some critical disparity begins to emerge when designating groupings beyond the 1980s: a generation game. In 1995, Ron Marken suggested that the first generation of Ulster poets included not

Heaney but John Hewitt, Louis MacNeice and John Montague (130). Heaney, Longley, Mahon and James Simmons were thus a second generation, and “worthy successors”, Muldoon, McGuckian, Ormsby, Robert Johnstone and Michael Foley constituted a third (Marken 131). The strength of the later poets in this case prompted revitalized critical considerations of previous generations in the light of newer developments. For Jonathan Hufstader, Heaney, Longley and Mahon are a first and distinct generation and Muldoon “head[s] the second generation of post-war Northern Irish poets”; “in a poetic population as dense as this, a generation lasts only a decade or so” (290). Jamie McKendrick concurs: “the first” included “Heaney’s triumvirate”, “the second” included Muldoon, Tom Paulin and Carson (988). As in 1904, poetry published by the writers who emerged in the mid-1960s from Northern Ireland, and those generations which followed them, has been subjected to “no little logrolling, absurd overpraise, and contemptuous depreciation [...], and several earnest attempts on the part of the workers within the movement to realize its significance” (Weygandt 420).

By the mid-1990s, the significance of Northern Irish poetry was clear and thus it seemed inevitable that new poets, poets born in Northern Ireland within the lifetime of these publishing generations, would emerge in this wake. This success, the first chapter of this study indicates, made later emergence inevitable. As Agee proposes, “there soon developed some expectation of a quick poetic succession [...] whichever poets were so recognized would benefit from existing enormous interest” (xxxii). By the time this occurred, Northern Irish poetry had moved from “generations” to “tradition”, even, “canon”. For the purposes of this study of contemporary writing by Northern Irish women who began publishing in the late 1990s, the grouping will be: Sinéad Morrissey, whose first collection *There was Fire in Vancouver* was published in 1996; Colette Bryce, whose first collection *The*

Heel of Bernadette was published in 2000; and Leontia Flynn, whose first collection *These Days* was published in 2004. To paraphrase Yeats, this study cannot say who will succeed, or even who has talent, only that these women poets are many women poets in the Northern Irish tradition which has thus far included too many who are nearly all men.

Tradition, T.S. Eliot states, “cannot be inherited”, for “blind or timid adherence to its successes [...] should positively be discouraged” (Eliot 37). And thus, it is a degree of non-adherence that Edna Longley praises in Northern Irish poetry: in being a “complex blossoming with debts to Yeats” it “collectively dramatizes the protean nature of form as it remakes tradition” (E Longley, “Altering the Past” 16-7). Thus, “the collective aesthetic meaning of Northern Irish poetry”, the way that the poetry within it complements and challenges, “may prove a notable signpost” for other poetry and studies of it (E Longley, “Altering the Past” 16-7). It is this protean nature that this thesis seeks to interrogate, and to draw, as Longley does, on Steven Connor’s assertion that “Only tradition can beget newness” (Connor 3). Phrased differently, to draw on Eliot again, no poet “has his meaning alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead” (Eliot 37). In this case, the poets are women, and the dead are not dead, but living, yet still somehow influentially “immortal” for the era (37). As this thesis will go on to demonstrate, it is not merely gender or relative youth that is the distinctive characteristic of these poets. Their individually distinctive poetry is, in each case, subversively engaged with Northern Irish poetry, and with wider questions of identity, literary expression and the self. As Flynn suggests,

If McGuckian et al [sic] reacted, brilliantly, against the authority of their forebears (and Heaney, of course, believed that poetry could be a ‘revelation of the self to the self’), in what way could one react to the authority of their poetry? (Flynn, “What do I know?”)

Further, the “feminism” of the thesis title is not prescriptive or solidly defined although it is clear that the poetry discussed is a product of feminism(s) as much as it is a product of its national lineage (and that lineage’s lack of feminism). The socio-political feminist context of post-millennial poetry, its own protean nature and the continuing necessity to redress male authority pervades throughout. Just as the “(Northern) Irish question”, despite the peace process, has never gone away, so the “woman” question, despite advances in many areas, is not fully answered.

Feminism, in fact, has not really been addressed at all in Northern Irish writing. Some recent and laudable work, for example *Irish Poetry After Feminism* (2007) edited by Justin Quinn, has suggested that there is interest in opening such a discussion, and critics capable of undertaking the task, but thus far the impact of an otherwise significant critical movement has been minimal, at least beyond critiques of Heaney’s writing such as those by Elizabeth Butler Cullingford and Patricia Coughlan. This thesis seeks to develop the ways in which such feminist criticism might engage with the complexities of a Northern Irish poetry tradition by extending the coverage and providing new points of reference. Further, this thesis represents the first time (to my knowledge) that extensive research into the writing of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey has been undertaken, and the first work that seeks to do more than consider them comparatively or as appendix in support of the existing notions of tradition.² While the brief exposition on “generations” above indicates that considerably more research has been undertaken into the relationships between post-WWII Northern Irish poets, this has thus far primarily engaged with the relationship

² Some critics have appended Morrissey and Flynn to wider studies of Northern Irish poetry, including Michael Parker (in the last chapter of *Northern Irish Literature 1975-2006: The Imprint of History*, vol. 2 [2007]) and Rui Carvalho Homem (in the conclusion of *Poetry and Translation in Northern Ireland: Dislocations in Contemporary Writing* [2009]).

between Heaney, Muldoon and the interplay betwixt and between their contemporaries in the context of the (first and second) generations. Much of the key critical work done on the previous generation was published in the late 1990s, for example Steven Matthews' *Irish Poetry: Politics, History, Negotiation* (1997) and Peter McDonald's *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (1997). John Goodby's study *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness Into History* (2000) pointed disdainfully at previous instances of "generational transmission" and asks if the year 2000 marked "The end of an era?" (317). Over a decade later, with the newness that tradition built well established, it may be time to respond to his reservations and consider if, how, why and to what effect transmission has taken place, and to delve deeper into the issues new poetry raises by its existence in such a context.

The opening chapter, "Paratexts and the Northern Irish Tradition", proposes that prefatory and supplementary materials have a relationship to meaning and demonstrate ways in which tradition is created, acknowledged and subverted in the contemporary moment. This follows the model of Gérard Genette's study *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987, trans. 1997) in expanding and reconsidering the characteristics of these texts. A consideration of book reviews, cover copy, laudatory comments, epigraphs, dedications and acknowledgements shows that texts exist within a "marketplace" of relational value. It will argue that these materials reinforce the view that that poetry's meaning is constructed not only by the poem, but also by the context which it creates for itself. The ways in which these contexts (some conscious and some ascribed) situate the poetry in relation to a Northern Irish tradition are shown to be complex and possibly even contradictory.

Having established one way in which the complexity of the inter-generational relationships can be explored, the second chapter considers detachment

as a strategy which indicates divergence from the work of precursory poets. The first section of “Thematic Divergences, Detachments and Dislocations” draws on theories of influence by critics including Harold Bloom, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Reading poetry through these frames demonstrates two competing critical narratives of influence and anxiety, but the main focus of this chapter is a thematic view of detachment. This perspective is explored in the second section, which interrogates how motifs of magic tricks and miracles (Bryce), travel and globalisation (Flynn) and window-panes of separation (Morrissey), can be viewed as ways in which detachment is thematically manifested.

The overwhelmingly male constitution of the mainstream Northern Irish poetry tradition marks another point of divergence for the more recent generation of poets. Adopting a more overtly feminist approach, the third chapter, “Marginal and Mainstream: Women’s Poetry Traditions”, proposes alternative perspectives on women’s poetry, suggesting that Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey may simultaneously participate in a mainstream women’s poetry tradition including figures such as Carol Ann Duffy and Eavan Boland and also participate in a marginalised Northern Irish tradition. The local tradition is represented in this reading by an out-of-print anthology of women’s poetry published by the Northern Ireland Women’s Rights Movement in the 1980s, the aptly named *The Female Line* edited by Ruth Hooley, and comparisons with the relatively unknown women of this anthology are drawn. The reading of Duffy and Boland also seeks to align the later poets with their mainstream radicalism, suggesting that they continue a feminist and female-centric poetry through lesbian love poetry (Bryce) and the exploration of the “mere domestic” (Flynn and Morrissey).

The final chapter, “Poetics and Selectivity”, will indicate how selective and subversive approaches to tradition can be explored through attention to distinctive devices in received forms and effects. Through close readings of sonnets, sestinas, long poems, Japanese effects and translational practice, this chapter will set these formal modes within the context of recent Northern Irish poetry. Considering the intricacies of individual poems within a continuing formal turn, it will suggest that hybridity allows for a compromise between the traditional forms of poetry and subversive and feminist originality. It will propose that conscious selectivity in the ways in which form, rhyme, rhythm and syntax are used highlights what textual elements build a tradition, how a tradition makes poets and how poets can take a selective approach to influence and tradition.

Through these varied but related strategies, this thesis will suggest that tradition, when considered in relation to contemporary poetry, should pay heed to a selective conscious and unconscious process in terms of the paratextual, the thematic, the political and the poetic. It will propose that there is a sensitivity and consciousness of influence and that notions of tradition are affected not only by personal taste, but by political movements such as feminism and regional cultural forces. In introducing these arguments, it makes reference to significant twentieth century Northern Irish poetry, existing work in the field on influence and tradition, and to relevant studies of Irish writing. It represents a diversion and a critical interjection that, in the wake of Heaney’s death on 30 August 2013, is timely and reflective.

2. Paratexts and the Northern Irish Tradition

“I had read *The Poor Mouth* – but who was Seamus Heaney?

I believe he signed my bus ticket, which I later lost.”

Leontia Flynn, “When I Was Sixteen I Met Seamus Heaney”

i.

The contemporary contexts surrounding poetry from Northern Ireland in the second half of the twentieth-century and into the twenty-first century illustrate the ways in which referential relationships create and sustain immediate traditions. By focussing on how these relationships act through “paratexts”, this chapter addresses how poetry from the different generations of poets from Northern Ireland is inter- (or trans-) textually linked. Paratexts are elements of the text which play a part in our appreciation of it by their often implicit meanings and the reader’s socially constructed understandings of them. Genette, the theorist who first studied these elements in his 1987 French work *Seuils*, described them as “a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its *raison d’être*. This something is the text” (12). Paratexts consist of a combination of epitexts, messages which are received either in public or in private outside of the text, for example from book reviews, and peritexts which are messages included within primary texts such as epigraphs and prefaces. They are materially similar to the marginal borders and frames identified by Jacques Derrida as *parergon* as they are both beside the art and a part of it. Drawing on Immanuel Kant, who describes four “General Remarks” appended to *Religion within the Limit of Reason Alone* (1793) in a note, Derrida explains the role of the *parerga* thus:

They are in some measure *parerga* [...] they are not integral parts of [the work ...] but they verge on it (*aber strossen doch an sie an*: they touch it, they push it, press it, press against it, seek contact, exert a pressure at the frontier) (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 55)

In terms of their purpose, paratexts are increasingly recognised as a “forum in which the author can present ideological agendas more directly to an audience, define a sense of community [...] or simply contextualize new poetry within literary and historical traditions familiar to a broad range of readers” (Vanderborg 5). Susan Vanderborg interrogates these aspects in her study *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry Since 1950* (2001). While recent Irish poetry, characterised by traditional forms, does not have many direct links with the American avant-garde tradition, in the post-avant-garde landscape, Vanderborg’s contention stands, that “paratexts are no longer secondary background material for the poetry but forms complex enough to be analyzed as artistic experiments in their own right” (5). An artistic experiment on the nature of the paratextual is one way to view Flynn’s “When I Was Sixteen I Met Seamus Heaney”, lines from which form the epigraph to this chapter. The paratextual appears in both the title of the poem, which references a meeting with Heaney, and in the action of the poem as he signs a copy of Flann O’Brien’s *The Poor Mouth*, and a bus ticket, which Flynn loses. The meaning attached to the textual items outside of this poem, the book and the misplaced ticket, is clearly integral to the message it intends to relate. Without these items, the poem might have no meaning: just as the meeting itself and the resulting poem has no meaning without the literary celebrity of Heaney.

Considering paratexts, parerga material, in relation to the emergence of a younger generation of poets from Northern Ireland is fitting because these framing materials are still engaged in the process of negotiating a place for these writers in the contemporary context as other sustained textual criticism is limited. Thus, in order to provide a full consideration of paratexts in recent Northern Irish literature, this study refers to both peritexts and epitexts by considering prescriptions of inter-generational influence presumed in book reviewing, the lineage designated by

aspects of book marketing such as cover copy, and the self-situating deployed by referential prefatory texts within the poetry (epigraphs, dedications and forewords). By considering how the poetry of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey is paratextually engaged with the Northern Irish tradition, this chapter suggests how extra-poetic texts are an instrument which can aid our understanding not only of the text, but also of the ideologies, communities and traditions in which it participates. In doing so, this study will indicate some methods by which the poets and their poetry select their tradition through relational participation (or ascribed participation). It will in turn be an opening of the book, a grounding for the matters discussed in the following chapters which address the alternatives to, the divergences from, and poetic features of the Northern Irish tradition by addressing the poetic texts proper.

ii. “The Mutual Admiration Society of Northern Poets”

In suggesting that paratexts have significance when understanding a tradition in their reference to a literary culture, an existing tradition which the emerging poets refer to is thereby presumed. Thus, before situating Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey by their paratextual markers within the contemporary Northern Irish tradition, the health of this tradition must be considered. While some indication is given in the preceding discussion of poetic generations, with a view to the paratextual, a fitting and effective method of proving the esteem and success of Northern Irish poets in recent years is by acknowledging paratexts which indicate this. Proving the great flowering of Northern Irish poetry post-1960 through reference to publishing culture is, thankfully for the critic, not an especially complex feat. The poetry of Heaney, Longley, Mahon, Muldoon and their contemporaries is widely esteemed and the shared background of these poets and their coterminous emergence prompted

commentators to acknowledge “the Ulster Movement, the Honest Ulsterman School, the Belfast Group, the Mutual Admiration Society of Northern Poets” centred around Belfast from the early 1960s (Clark, *Ulster* 1). Dillon Johnston notes that this “ascendancy of Irish poetry” “has been evident [...] for some time” (xxiii), and as it has been nearly half a century since the publication of Seamus Heaney’s first *Eleven Poems* (1965) for the Queen’s University Festival, this longevity is assured. The resounding success and dominance of Northern Irish poetry post-1960, whether it is regarded as a continuation of the Yeatsian renaissance or as a separate entity, means that it has already entered the semi-mythic world of “literary tradition”. This is surely both a cause and effect of paratexts which state and restate the esteem and success of the generations.

One indication of the health of a tradition is the way in which publications are gathered and titled within it, and how often these are produced. Anthologies, then, provide evidence of the vigour of Northern Irish poetry, and the prevalence of these in the past fifty years certainly indicates a tradition-building impulse. From the mid-1970s, exultant anthologies of poetry associated with Northern Ireland have appeared with regularity and consistency of quality, from Padraic Fiacc’s 1974 anthology *The Wearing of the Black: An Anthology of Contemporary Ulster Poetry*, to Ormsby’s first edition of *Poets from the North of Ireland* in 1979 which was revised and re-released in 1990, followed by *A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Irish Troubles* in 1992.³ In the post-millennial era, the bringing together of contiguous anthologising continues apace, with John Brown’s *Magnetic North: The*

³ Changes in the publishing and retail landscape in recent years, in fact, have made “national” groupings an increasingly popular choice, for example in the recent annual *Best of British Poetry* series (Roddy Lumsden, Salt Publishing, 2011-13). In Northern Irish (and pan-Irish) poetry, this has been an important publishing strategy for many decades.

Emerging Poets (2006), Ormsby's *The Blackbird's Nest: An Anthology of Poetry from Queen's University Belfast* (2006), and Chris Agee's *The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland*, which was published first in the United States in 2008, before being revised and released in the UK in 2011. Even a very general overview of these titles surely indicates that these anthology editors are curating poetry in such a way as to, first, instigate a tradition of poetry from Northern Ireland, and latterly to continue in that tradition with the revolutionary introduction of newness to the field.

Anthologies alone cannot create a literary tradition, although Seamus Deane's landmark *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, vols. 1-3* (1992) of over 4000 pages and produced in Northern Ireland, might be regarded as a fair attempt to establish what constitutes this in Irish culture. Within the "Contemporary Irish Poetry" selection of this edition, poetry from Northern Ireland is noticeably dominant, representing as it does the period in which "the revival of poetry in the North has attracted most attention", while poets from the Republic of Ireland are "less consolidated into groups or schools" (Declan Kiberd, "Contemporary Irish Poetry", *Field Day* vol. 3, 1316). As with many literary terms, "tradition" is undoubtedly complex and malleable, but an attempt at an inclusive definition would be that a tradition is made of a substantial body of work linked in style, time, nationality or outlook. If this were true, the writers included in the anthologies would require a larger body of work than the handful of poems included in those selections. To this end, it seems apt to point out that the major poets of the Ulster renaissance tradition's first two generations have a large number of critically acclaimed *Selected* and *Collected* volumes, and have even published a variety of *New Selected* volumes in more recent years. The tradition cannot be faulted in terms of longevity or productiveness.

The poets who followed Yeats most immediately have often been viewed as struggling with his influence. Johnston can provide a roll call of ten poets who he claims Yeats posthumously “thwarted” (xix). Yet, by the second half of the twentieth-century it does not seem that Yeats or any other poet’s influence is prohibitive. Quite the opposite, for the esteem of this tradition self-serves, simultaneously creating and sustaining the temperature in the poetic hothouse through the play of intra-poetic influence. Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene seem to put this down to an element of fortunate geography:

In as small a country as Ireland with what must necessarily be a tiny literary culture, individual voices are bound to crowd upon one another and the issue of influence may be more immediate than in the broader and more heterogeneous literary circles of Britain and America. (4)

Johnston too finds that “the most distinctive characteristic of Irish poetry resides in the dynamic relationship between the poet and his tradition. This relation is stronger and more insistent than in American poetry and more unsettled than in British poetry” (53). It certainly does seem to follow that in Ireland, where there is strong evidence of relatively recent poetic achievement, the simultaneous or later poets must continue in this tradition consciously or subconsciously, either thriving or dying under the yoke of the influence of their precursors.⁴ Paratexts, on the thresholds of the poetry participate clearly (and on occasion obliquely) with the more marketable aspects of poetry. Their connection to meaning as it is shaped is crucial, and thus this study of them relates to a culture that, for better or worse, is a part of an industry that relies on them: the book market.

⁴ Northern Ireland, as a relatively recent (twentieth century) political creation, relies on the broader Irish literary history and tradition in the longer view. It is only in more recent poetry, within the contemporary “generations”, that the specificity of *Northern Irish* poetry is deemed important in this study.

iii. “negotiating the mixed blessing of having such illustrious antecedents”

Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey are recognised as representing three of the more exciting voices to come to poetry in the last fifteen years. They have between them published eleven collections of poetry: choosing to publish with the major UK publishers — Picador, Jonathan Cape and Carcanet. For these collections they have garnered numerous accolades from both the British and Irish poetry communities and institutions including three Eric Gregory Awards, two National Poetry Competition wins, two Rupert and Eithne Strong Awards, a Forward Prize, a Patrick Kavanagh Prize, an Academi Poetry Competition win, a Cholmondeley Award, a place on the Whitbread Prize shortlist, a Forward Prize shortlisting, and five T.S. Eliot Prize shortlist places. This list is undeniably remarkable, particularly considering that they are all under 45 years of age and thus, in the context of poetic development and average ages of publication, particularly for women, relatively young. Yet, despite the obvious merit and originality of their work (which will be addressed in later chapters) it can seem that the Northern Irish tradition described above is tied to them even in their individual successes, for they cannot be seen apart from their Northern Irish predecessors who have gathered even more prizes during their poetic careers.

Being shortlisted for, or winning, major book prizes is used above as an indicator of poetic esteem, and it is one which plays a crucial role in contemporary understanding of what constitutes (or might constitute) significant poetry. Despite eloquent arguments from prize detractors, such as John Sutherland who argues that “The book prize jamborees never stop”, the process of poetry prize judging generates more influential and publically accessible coverage of poetry than any

other aspect in the twenty-first century. The T.S. Eliot, Forward and Whitbread prizes are retrospective accolades attesting to the strength of poetry collections, and thus, inclusion on their prestigious lists contributes to our understanding of their (contested) merit. While poetry prizes get their power from their prestigious judging panels and their apparent good taste, book reviews have the same authoritative status. As Sutherland suggests,

What are reviewers, after all? They are judges, advising readers how to choose among the huge over-supply of fiction [and poetry] barraged every week into the public domain.

And what is the Booker panel? It is exactly the same thing: judges, advising the public where they can best invest their valuable time and energy.
(Sutherland)

If prizes are retrospective paratexts, book reviews, usually at the other end of the media-poetic timeline, are a prospective paratext, contributing to our understanding of the text often before it has even been read. Thus, book reviews are on the “threshold of interpretation” in two ways: they often offer the first critical interpretation of a recently published book, and they are often one of the first ways in which a contemporary readership encounters a book. Book reviews are an epitext, an extra-textual periphery material which communicates something about the text, and, especially with such contemporary work they are important as the first critical consideration of the work.

A good review was described in 1951 by Gladys Borchers as “one prepared by an expert in the particular field; it contains essential specific information; it classifies and summarizes the book; it evaluates the author with his book; it places it in its proper frame of reference; and it presents an accurate, trustworthy, critical examination in an acceptable style” (qtd. in Tauber iv). Maurice F Tauber elaborates; “he is expected to present his interpretation and criticism in carefully chosen statements” (Tauber v). Over half a century on from this particular

statement, despite changes to literary journalism in the digital age and an apparently declining interest in poetry reviews (thus, even being reviewed in broadsheet pages might be a marker of esteem), the authority of the reviewer remains largely unchallenged, and, bolstered by a history of authoritative reviewing, readers still expect an expert opinion from the reviewer that contains these “carefully chosen statements” (v).⁵ As this study shall show, in reviews of recent poetry from Northern Ireland, these statements rather consistently refer to a Northern Irish tradition through a key signifier. This signifier is the comparison of younger poets to their precursors, and this prescribed influence indicates a presumed relationship with the living tradition, and offers a starting point for my consideration of paratextual selectivity.

Some critics nod in a broad fashion towards the strength of the recent poetic heritage in Northern Ireland and speculate on its potential impact on younger writers in their reviews. Andrew Neilson notes that “it is unavoidable that Bryce will be seen as the latest in a very rich line of Northern Irish poets, from the generation of Heaney, Longley and Mahon, through to Muldoon, Paulin, McGuckian, Carson and others” (Neilson 33). This observation is fair given that Neilson was reviewing *The Heel of Bernadette* (2000), Bryce’s first collection. Yet, perhaps less fairly, comparisons continue despite the poets’ independent publishing records and developing reputations and oeuvres. Paul Batchelor comments on precisely the same lineage issue in his review of *Through the Square Window* (2010) some fourteen years after the publication of Morrissey’s debut. He still feels it necessary to

⁵ The influence of reviewing in a crowded marketplace remains undiminished. As recent author “sock pocket” reviews on bookselling websites such as Amazon indicate, while the move towards aggregated or “crowd-sourced” opinions may be on the increase, the presence of informed reviewers is still key in providing authoritative opinion.

contextualise, supplementing his consideration of the collection with the comment that “[a]long with Colette Bryce and Leontia Flynn, Morrissey is one of a number of younger poets from Northern Ireland who are negotiating the mixed blessing of having such illustrious antecedents as Mahon [...] and Seamus Heaney [...] To honour such an inheritance requires all the confidence and care of a high wire act” (Batchelor). These comments may, arguably, be valid, but to a certain extent they create the popular idea of this tradition which comes to supersede the individual consideration of the poetic text which supposedly continues in it. Comments such as those made by Neilson and Batchelor in their reviews are thus sustaining the idea of the tradition which they refer to, fanning the flames through prescriptive influence.

Two reviews of Flynn’s debut collection *These Days* (2004) can illuminate the critical obsession with generational dimensions in Northern Irish writing and the continuing poetic lineage. In these reviews, Flynn’s collection is reviewed with two stalwarts of the tradition, they are considered in the same critical breath; Peter Denman critiques the collection alongside Longley’s *Snow Water* (2004) while Michael Kinsella considers it alongside three recent McGuckian collections. The reason for these pairings needs little explanation; not only are there shared geographical roots, but all three of these writers remain based in Northern Ireland and are writing there at the same moment. However the company she keeps in these reviews does Flynn few favours. Denman finds her poems “are a long way from the carefully constructed and construable poems of Longley; they do not offer to make sense of or impose shape on experience through balanced form” (144). Kinsella too finds something amiss for “[a]fter reading McGuckian’s collections, we might come away thinking that the most distracting aspect of reading a poem is clarity and [...] it is the straight-forwardness of [...] *These Days* which is its weakness” (“Meanings” 74). The tradition in this case, and the comparison it so temptingly invites,

disadvantages the younger poet. It may, in fact, even appear unfair to review a debut from a thirty year old with the same critical standards as two well developed, practically canonical, writers. The standard represented by Longley and McGuckian overshadows the not inconsiderable achievements of *These Days* that were praised in other reviews. Had Flynn been considered alone, or with other more poetically similar authors, or other debut collections, *These Days* might have been more fairly compared. Denman and Kinsella seem to find fault in the differences between Flynn and her predecessors, and in these comparative readings they suggest that her work does not quite meet the grade of the Northern Irish tradition (yet). An equation between longevity, a notable facet of contemporary Northern Irish poetry, and achievement is clear.

Perhaps what Denman and Kinsella found lacking was some kind of imitation in Flynn's work that would have neatly tied their reviews together coherently? While it isn't the case in the Denman and Kinsella reviews, the most prevalent recurring feature in reviews of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey is comparison through name-dropping which refers back through the Northern Irish line. Bryce's *The Full Indian Rope Trick* (2000), for example, reportedly contains poems whose "technique often recall[s] Medbh McGuckian's early poised and sexy-strange lyrics" (Wills 10). At the same time, another reviewer finds that "[h]er models are Muldoon and Lowell, and, at times, you can hear Muldoon's voice almost ghosting Bryce's (see the poem "Satellite" which could in many ways have stepped straight out of *Why Brownlee Left*" (Bainbridge), Her later collection, *Self Portrait in the Dark* (2008), contains a sestina, "The Harm", which Vidyan Ravinthiran finds "follows Heaney and Muldoon in using the form to develop an atmosphere of obliquely

impending violence”, and goes on to say that “Bryce strains the form deliberately like Muldoon”.⁶

Flynn too is authoritatively compared to Muldoon as shorthand for stylistic qualities which are worthy of approval and note. For Claire Crowther he is to be found in the intellectual intertextuality game, for “it’s entertaining to spot echoes of, for example, Paul Muldoon” (69). John Knowles draws comparisons in terms of style and substance, asking of *Drives* “Is there substance to the poems? Is there anything much being said? A question familiar to readers of Paul Muldoon” (90). Fran Brearton makes the comparison in voice, observing that “Flynn’s is one of the most strikingly original poetic voices to have emerged from Northern Ireland since the extraordinary debut by Muldoon 35 years ago” (Tower Poetry). Her debt to earlier Ulster poets is also suggested, as in *Drives* (2008), Steven Matthews notes that “Flynn’s updating of MacNeice’s “Belfast” well captures the city” (92). McGuckian is used in Philip Coleman’s review of Flynn’s *Profit and Loss* (2011) to indicate not a style *per se*, but as testament to Flynn’s serious academic credentials, “one is in the company of a serious poetry scholar – Flynn wrote a PhD on the poetry of Medbh McGuckian”.

In the same reviewing style, Morrissey moves from being “[I]ike the young Heaney in his early eulogies to craftsmen” (M Parker 160) in her debut *There was Fire in Vancouver* (1996), to being “as good a craftsperson as Michael Longley” by *The State of the Prisons* (2005) (Topping 26). This comparative mode of understanding is not just limited to reviews, but appears in academic monographs too. Notably, Rui Carvalho Homen makes particularly gratuitous use of it when

⁶ A consideration of the poetics of “The Harm” in relation to the sestina mode as used by Heaney and Muldoon is provided in the “Poetics and Selectivity” chapter.

writing of Morrissey. He finds in just one collection, *Between Here and There* (2001), “Mahonian disaffection”, “a debt to Longley in her yearning for communal liturgies” and “an affinity with Medbh McGuckian’s politics of women, home and familial rites” in “Eileen, Her First Communion” (205).

There is of course nothing especially original about reviewers using comparison to judge success or noting similarity to situate work. At a loss to describe adequately what is original, or in an attempt to prove their own familiarity and expertise in the field, the reviewer takes some respite in prior knowledge, even drawing these parallels for parallel’s sake. Brearton speculates on how frustrating “for [Nick] Laird, as for any youngish poet from Northern Ireland - must be the relentless comparisons with the earlier generation of Heaney, Longley, Mahon and Muldoon”, before acknowledging that “these tend to be irresistible”, and then freely giving in to this particular reviewer urge, “Laird has been described as Muldoonian, but in this book the metaphysical bleakness of early Derek Mahon [... is] more apparent” (“Scissoring”). Using the name of a well-known poet as a by-word for a particular style, form or theme in the work of the younger poet, is also nothing new (Shakespearian, Wordsworthian, Keatsian *etc*). However, that it is something of a phenomenon in criticism of contemporary Northern Irish poetry, and that the references are intergenerational and clearly based on a national literary line is striking. It is not a case of *your reputation precedes you*, but rather, *your tradition precedes you*. While Alan Gillis argues that it is a “common fallacy [to make the] automatic assumption that it’s a bad thing to bear the influence of Heaney and Muldoon” (Tower Poetry), surveyed widely as above, even the more substantiated parallels are weakened; they seem confusing and often even a little bewildering . After all, can Flynn actually be “strikingly original” (Brearton, Tower Poetry) if she is simultaneously comparable to Muldoon in several different ways? Is it possible

for *Between Here and There*, or any collection, to resound with echoes of three very different poets and still hold its own among such a din? Why are these reviewers so keen to consider this new poetry through generational simile and the symbolic order of national tradition? Regardless of the strength, evidence, or validity of the parallels they draw, it seems obvious that these types of comparisons are caused in some substantial part by a concern with the locality of Northern Irish writing, and that there is a prevalent conception of tradition at play.

It may be that the reviewers above who use this mode are attempting to assist both poet and reader since the audience might be more predisposed to the reviewed collection if they can approach it with nostalgia for a prior text. In this case, the authoritative reviewer suggests that the only way to approach the new is to understand it in the context of its precursory links. Further, given the incredible success of the post-1960s generation of Northern Irish poets and focus in media and criticism on poetic responses to the Troubles, it might seem that these post-1990s poets serve to cement the romantic mythology of a kind of tragi-national poetic gift. Comparisons thus serve the precursors and the notion of literary tradition or generations as much as they serve the younger poets being favourably compared, the reviewer demonstrating their intellectual nous, and the reader to whom the review is addressed. Where there is tradition, these reviewers find, influence can be sensibly presumed to follow and through this presumption the tradition is reinforced. Bryce, Flynn, Morrissey and their contemporaries and precursors, write from within a tradition of presumed influence.

This common reviewing practice prescribes influence after the fact of writing and sustains a tradition of influence. However, the sheer number of reviewers who comparatively frame the younger poets in terms of their similarities

and differences to the previous generation does raise the question as to not only the validity of their many comparisons and the validity of their various ways of interpreting the characteristics of the previous generations, but also the extent to which these reviewers autonomously reach these conclusions. Poets from Northern Ireland have clearly been so successful in recent years that they have created an irresistible reference point for reviewers. Given this tendency, there is an opportunity for the younger poets to be considered in the same critical field. It follows, that there may in turn be something more self-conscious at play in the new work which pre-empts even the prospective epitext of the book review in order to invite the comparison.

There are, of course, a number of paratexts, which can help to shape readers (and reviewers, before they are reviewers, are readers) earliest perceptions and understandings of a text. The paratext which in most cases will be foremost is the first manifestation of the text, the cover, from which the book may indeed (against the conventional wisdom) be judged. This is described by Genette as the “*publisher’s peritext*”, “the whole zone of the peritext that is the direct and principal (but not exclusive) responsibility of the publisher” (16). This is the paratext most materially on the threshold of interpretation, “the outermost peritext (the cover, the title page, and their appendages) [...] decided on by the publisher, possibly in consultation with the author” (16). In the case of contemporary poetry collections published within the author’s lifetime, it is clear that while the publisher may take the lead on the selection of suitable materials for the outermost peritext, the author is certainly involved in some consultation at the proofing stage. The extent of involvement may vary and be difficult to quantify, but nonetheless, collaboration is likely, if not totally necessary.

The back cover of these texts is, Genette contends, a “strategically important spot” (25) for the publisher’s peritextual material. This space allows for more elaboration than the front cover which is reserved for the essential detail of the author’s name, the collection title and an evocative and appealing image. The back covers of Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s work accords with the materials highlighted by Genette in his study, containing “[p]ress quotations or other laudatory comments [...] (this latter practice is what the British and Americans customarily refer to by the evocative term *blurb*, or, more literally, *promotional statement* [...])” (25). In the case of Bryce and Flynn, the material promotes the poets as categorically Northern Irish through a combination of quotations and laudatory comments.

The Heel of Bernadette, Bryce’s first collection, laudably “announces one of the most unusual and distinctive voices to have emerged from Northern Ireland for a generation”, according to its own cover, so for most readers she has been situated as an inheritor of this recent literary history before one reaches the contents page. *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, her second collection, offers a slightly less obvious appeal to tradition, but does still note in the blurb that the author has previously been the recipient of “the Strong Award for best new Irish poet”, before describing that this collection takes “an Ulster childhood and the child’s growing awareness of her divided community” as one of its subjects. While these are factual descriptions, and their absence would be curious, it is still clear that Bryce’s own biography and blurb prefigures her as an Irish poet, addressing thematic ground that is well known as the domain of the previous generation of Northern Irish writers.

These Days, Flynn’s debut, also seeks to align her with her poetic precursors by including endorsements from them on the back cover; three of the five quotations

included are from Northern Irish poets. Michael Longley, Paulin and Carson roundly praise the collection as “the real thing”, “the real, right thing” and “[s]urefooted and unsettling” respectively. Flynn keeps the endorsements from Paulin and Longley for the back cover of her second collection *Drives*, and, even keeps the Longley quotation for the same spot at the top for her third collection *Profit and Loss*. This time, it is bolstered even more convincingly by a comment already highlighted above from a Brearton review (“Flynn’s is one of the most strikingly original and exciting poetic voices to have emerged from Northern Ireland since the extraordinary debut by Muldoon 35 years ago”, [Brearton Tower Poetry]). While by the cover copy of Bryce’s third collection there seems to be a diminishing sense that she needs to be heralded in relation to the Northern Irish tradition, Flynn’s (or her publisher’s) promotional statements seem to yet more urgently insist on it. While it is impossible to quantify whose hand leads this practice, the effect of it on the text as an item within a tradition is clear: it situates the work within that lineage.

Morrissey’s promotional statements less conspicuously situate her within the Northern Irish tradition matrix, referring instead (somewhat unusually) in the description of her first collection, *There was Fire in Vancouver*, to “the Welsh poet R.S. Thomas” from whom she owes a debt for a clarity. The absence of explicit or implied tradition-marketeting in the production of Morrissey’s books emphasises that the statements on Flynn’s and Bryce’s books are not in fact inevitable or compulsory. However, the part the publisher’s peritext plays in the construction of the text’s meaning is as notable as the reviewers’ prescriptions of influence. The tradition and influence complex is identifiable in reviews and can be said to be, to a certain extent, inherent in some contemporary composition practices (insofar as books as complete texts are compositions), as well as being a critical prescription.

iv. “(sort of)”

The paratexts considered so far are unpoetic in the sense that while they do contribute to our understanding of the poetic text, they can not be said to contribute directly to its interpretation. While it has been demonstrated that reviews and the laudatory comments on books suggest a tendency to align the work with, and thus continue in and strengthen, the literary tradition, this has not been based on decisions openly presented by the poet in their work. While no text is ultimately the production of a single author, reviews and cover copy are elements that are particularly, even necessarily, susceptible to third party participation. Thus, to take the paratextual discussion further, and closer to the poetic texts under discussion, it is necessary to move from the broadsheet pages and cover copy to between those collection covers and discuss two paratexts which contribute more artfully to meaning: dedications and epigraphs. While Genette and other critics consider epigraphs and dedications noteworthy in all texts, within poetry, perhaps, these two paratexts may take on additional significance since they are used at the opening of individual collections, and are also attached to individual poems. They can thus appear not just around the text (on the “thresholds” of interpretation in Genette’s theory), but also deep within the pages of the collection and in very close proximity, mere centimetres from the poem itself. Further, as this study shall go on to discuss, their intent, sincerity and worth is often oblique and thus open to interpretation, just like the poem(s) they assist. By considering these textual embellishments using Genette’s theories, this chapter will interrogate how these devices reinforce convergence and participation with tradition and the canon, particularly through inter-generational relations.

Within Northern Irish poetry in the second half of the twentieth century, there is a noticeable mode of intertextuality between the poets. Fran Brearton notes that the 1960s, the decade in which poetry from Northern Ireland began to flourish, was also “a decade in which friendships and connections were established between a generation of Irish poets – Mahon, Longley, Heaney, Boland, Kennelly, Simmons and others” (“On ‘The Friendship’” 265). She considers in particular the personal relationships between Longley and Mahon (and Scottish poet Douglas Dunn), drawing on archived correspondence and also on the textual evidence of these relationships provided through dedications. She notes that “the penultimate poem of [M] Longley’s first collection, *No Continuing City* ‘To Derek Mahon’ (later re-titled ‘Birthmarks: for D.M.’) posits Mahon as his co-conspirator” (266). In return

Mahon reciprocally dedicates his first collection, *Night-Crossing*, ‘For Michael and Edna Longley’; when his first selected poems appears, *Poems 1962-1978*, ‘The Spring Vacation’, one of the poems from *Night-Crossing* (originally titled ‘In Belfast’), appears with a dedication ‘for Michael Longley’ (266)

This is certainly evidence of one strand in a “complex dedicatory network” (266) in the poetry of this generation.

In considering such a network, Brearton indicates some affinity, even friendship, between the work of other Northern Irish poets of this generation (although dedication does not automatically imply such affinities as this chapter shall go on to demonstrate). Brearton, however, preaches caution on too rapidly drawing conclusions on a “national line of descent” as, “however pervasive and necessary these patterns might be (not least in their marketability), the tendency to tell literary history along national lines obscures some poetic relations” (276). Yet, it seems negligent not to consider the dedicatory relationships when they do seem to be so prevalent. In Ormsby’s anthology *Poets from the North of Ireland* (1990), for example, a Hewitt poem is for Fiacc (35), a Fiacc poem is for Deane (92), a Roy

McFadden poem is for Robert Greacen (85), a Montague poem is for Heaney (111), a William Peskett poem is for Muldoon (275) and Michael Longley receives a dedicated poem from both Mahon (166) and Simmons (117). Not only are these dedications numerous, but they are often quite specifically linking the poets to other poets from Northern Ireland.

It is testament to the rapidity of the establishment of this tradition in Northern Ireland that it is possible to explore the relationship between these poets through their dedicated poems and books, their archived correspondence, and their own accounts of the period.⁷ From their own accounts, for example, we learn of the importance of friendships, relationships and mentorships. McGuckian recalls how Heaney, signing her books “with the Irish spelling of my first name”, made her “less self-conscious about it and more honoured” (195). She describes Muldoon as “a friend and an inspiration with his precocious wit and searing intelligence”, and notes that “I was Ciaran Carson’s girlfriend while he was working on his first book, *The New Estate*, the first edition of which was dedicated to me with the English spelling of my name. Being so close to someone involved in writing poetry taught me a great deal about the craft” (195). In the case of Irish poet Dennis O’Driscoll, a reviewer of his second collection, *Hidden Extras* (1987) incorrectly assumed that “Shelter”, a poem dedicated “for Seamus”, was for Heaney. In fact, it was for O’Driscoll’s brother, which might be clear from the line “while, at my brother’s nursery, a pheasant nests” (2). So prevalent were the perceived and actual links between Irish

⁷ Correspondence and papers are held in Irish literary collections such as those held in Emory University’s Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library and the Heaney Manuscript Collection (MS20) at Queen’s University, Belfast. The online Irish Literary Collections Portal indicates where many of these correspondence papers are held in North America.

<<http://irishliterature.library.emory.edu/doc.php?id=generalinfo>>

poets in this era, that inter-poet dedications were more naturally assumed than family, inter-sibling, dedications.

Given that dedicatory networks and such other affinities were important to the work of the previous generation, it seems necessary to interrogate (without blindly celebrating) the line of descent by considering how affinities between poets have been carried through into the millennial generation. It should be noted that while the act of a dedication within Northern Irish poetry can demonstrate friendship and the poet's position within a "network", as in Brearton's reading ("On 'The Friendship'" 266), there are other uses. A dedication is also variously a sacrifice (with the partial transfer of possession), a declaration of influence, and a highly performative act for the readership:

Whoever the official audience, there is always an ambiguity in the destination of a dedication, which is always intended for at least two addressees: the dedicatee, of course, but also the reader, for dedicating a work is a public act that the reader is, as it were, called on to witness. (Genette 134)

While the focus above is on poetry dedicated to poets, the previous generation do frequently dedicate their work to other friends and family. In fact, it would be to overlook the overall purpose of dedication entirely not to mention that the primary purpose of dedication is to denote kinship, and this is not exclusively poetic or artistic kinship. As a poetic convention, this also happens in the works of the younger poets, and it is clear that this kind of dedication is not a wish for affinity with the Northern Irish tradition specifically, but that it is rather a recognition of a more broad literary convention. For Flynn, these dedications appear in particular before poems with a personal significance. For example, "Our Fathers" from *These Days* is a poem which explores the diminishment of father figures who become "creatures, / almost, of air" as they age (5-6). The title has religious connotations, and the "Our" of the title and first line might refer to a shared ground with the

reader, but through the dedication “for Nicky Carey” it becomes quite distinctly a poem which explores the decline of the fathers of Flynn and Carey, with which the reader may empathise, rather than a communal address inviting immediate reader access.

For Morrissey, the mode of dedication is often even more private in that it does carry out the performative act of the dedication but holds back the detail which would make a clear public pronouncement. Morrissey’s “You” from *There was Fire in Vancouver* is “for D.W.”, which is frustratingly cryptic given that the “You” of the title is, presumably, “D.W”. D.W. would then be the subject of the short eight line poem which recalls a relationship wherein the two parties were initially shy, “Two fast crabs digging into the sand” (4), before the subject overcomes shyness to such an extent that the speaker “slipped out with the tide” (7). There are other enigmatic addresses in Morrissey’s work; *There was Fire in Vancouver* is “for Conor”, *Between Here and There* is “for Joseph” as is “Zero” from *The State of the Prisons*. “Matter” from *Through the Square Window* is “for S.P.” while the collection itself is “for Augustine” and *Parallax* is “for Sofia”. Some of the mystery of these dedications is dispelled in interviews in which Morrissey discusses her family life and its impact on her work (Brankin). However, as a paratext without the aid of another, the initials and forenames are oblique.

Bryce engages in the cryptic dedicatory mode in “Lines” from her first collection, but elsewhere avoids it. Given that “Lines” is a surreal poem wherein the speaker begets “a see-through child” (1) which causes the speaker anxiety before smashing when a “cab-driver drops it as I try to pay” (11), the relation of the text to the paratextual dedication is intriguing. Perhaps “P.B.” is the sister who skips over and puts the baby back together at the close, but unlike poems with personal

dedications by Flynn and Morrissey, this poem is surreal and the scenario is removed from realistic, anecdotal, descriptions of the other works. Ultimately, these dedications are only understood by the author, the dedicatee (presumably, but not necessarily) and perhaps a few other personal friends or an over curious reader. If, as Genette suggests, dedications are written with “the dedicatee, of course, but also the reader” (134) in mind, then Morrissey and Bryce are denying the reader their “witness” role: there is an element of exclusion which provokes curiosity as well as situating a wider poetic audience reader as voyeur and intruder, despite the “public act” (Genette 134).

While Brearton acknowledges the friendship aspect of the public dedications, there is another performative use of “public dedicatees” (“On ‘The Friendship’” 131). The public dedicatee “is a person who is more or less well known but with whom the author, by his dedication, indicated a relationship that is public in nature – intellectual, artistic, political, or other” (Genette 131). Morrissey uses a dedication in “The Wound Man” from *The State of the Prisons* to situate herself as the apprentice to a master writer: the poem is “for Federico García Lorca”. Written to commission for a public event at the Royal Festival Hall which invited poets to respond to New York post-9/11 and to Lorca’s sequence *Poet in New York*, the poem featured a “tall and imperious” (23), “[s]turdy and impossible” (31) wounded man walking through America. The poem was inspired not only by Lorca, but by “an old German woodcut showing a man with every possible kind of weapon stuck into him” (Pollard). While many of her personal dedications are enigmatic and exclude the reader, this dedication is purely *for* the reader, since the dedicatee, Lorca, died in 1936.

The dedication in “The Wound Man” is for the reader in order to imply some contextual background, to name drop a precursor and a specific kind of tradition or style in which the poem which follows it wishes to be situated. The same kind of contextual background is made available in another poetic paratext which Morrissey uses. This paratext is the explicit denotation of the precursory influence, which in Morrissey’s work can be found on several other occasions; in *The State of the Prisons*: in “Driving Alone on a Snowy Evening” (“after Frost”), “Polar” (“after Brecht”) and in “The Yellow Emperor’s Classic” (“after Gong Sun”, the reputed Yellow Emperor) and in *Parallax* in “Daughter” (“after Robert Pinky). Bryce also has examples of a similar preposition; in *The Heel of Bernadette* “Song of the Vagrant” is “after the Spanish”, in *The Full Indian Rope Trick* the title of “Blind Man’s Buff” is simply followed by “(Goya)” and “Song for a Stone” is “after Iain Crichton Smith”. When the poet James Fenton introduces “The Kingfisher’s Boxing Gloves” from *The Memory of War* (1982) in readings, he notes that it is “after Baudelaire” and light-heartedly explains that the poem is literally after Baudelaire since he died in 1867. On the page, in the collection, the note “after Baudelaire” has decidedly more gravitas, but this is undone by the comic tone of the poem. The same is true of Morrissey and, to a lesser extent, Bryce in this case. All of these references are to deceased influences, or, in the case of the living, to cultural icons and traditions to which the poet wishes to ascribe some artistic solidarity that transcends their different times.

It cannot be said that this remembrance mode is the intention in every instance. The title of “Seven in Bed” from Bryce’s 2008 collection *Self-Portrait in the Dark* is followed by “(Louise Bourgeois)”. It is clear that Bryce’s poem is inspired by the “muddle of thick limbs like a knot” (1) in the 2001 Bourgeois sculpture from which the title is taken, but as Bourgeois died two years after the

poem's publication in 2010, the circumstance of this context can be seen to have changed during the life of the text. The parenthetical reference (not technically a dedication with the weight of a "for" or "to") initially merely indicated the provenance of a source artwork, but later comes to represent an artistic relationship which overcomes death.

Likewise, poems from Morrissey's *Parallax* indicate a poetic exploration of other artists and their work although it is through a paratextual implication that has been merged into the text proper via the title. "Shostakovich" takes its title from the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich and is written in the first person as a pseudo-autobiography and artistic manifesto for a writer who, we are told, "wrote down / the sound of a man's boots behind the mountain" (14-15) in his plainsong. "Photographs of Belfast by Alexander Robert Hogg" and "'Ladies in Spring' by Eudora Welty" from the same collection also give their authorial source in their titles. "Photographs of Belfast by Alexander Robert Hogg" describes the practice of a Belfast photographer in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The narrative is omniscient, and introduces the period with reference to the building of the Titanic in Belfast before describing how the soot of such industrial activity caused Hogg to notice "the stark potential / of tarnished water" (17-8). As in "Shostakovich", which immediately precedes it in *Parallax*, the poem suggests the subject's understanding of art through their life. Hogg makes "his tidy living" (46) in a "tidy shop" (47), but documents too the "toppled bricks // and broken guttering" (36-7) of the impoverished Belfast where "each child strong enough / to manage it / carries a child" (76-8). "'Ladies in Spring'..." is, according to Morrissey's prefatory text, "a translation", but rather than a linguistic translation (discussed later in this thesis) it is an artistic translation which recreates the narrative of a work of short fiction by Welty which was published in 1955.

These contextual notations might be more humbling than a dedication because in most cases (especially when the figure is dead) they can only know them through their work and reputation. They do not imply a personal relationship but perhaps subservience to the achievements of their precursor whom they wish to elevate with their own verse, and even a wish for fame or artistic kinship by association. While the text in italics under the title or the name suggested in the title itself may seem coincidental, even throw-away, it is always deliberate and vital. When the reference is to another artist (living or dead), the kinship implied is even more crucial to interpretation. Morrissey's "The Invitation" from *Through the Square Window* offers an unusual example of an obviously considered dedication. Like Bryce's "Seven in Bed", "The Invitation" is inspired by the work of an artist who is living at the time of writing. The dedication is "for/after Benjamin de Burca", a hybrid instance that belies a self-consciousness in the process of dedication while denoting a kinship which is both personal and artistic.

Genette does not investigate the use of an "after –" or other prefatorial notes in his study, but this *context* can be rightfully considered a paratext since it is "dedicated to the service of [...] the text" (12). The author accepts responsibility for this paratext; in the cases discussed, the poets are offering it to the audience by way of background and in doing so are implying, either, a wish to introduce the reader to the precursor, or a desire to celebrate a shared knowledge of their work and style. Further, "after-" notes have parallels to dedications in their position: they appear where a dedication might, between the title and body of the poem. As in a dedication, it also implies a transfer of some ownership of the text back to the usually unaware influence or inspiration. As in any gift-giving, dedications and similar texts are as much about the person who gives as the person who receives.

Flynn also includes dedications which demonstrate an implied relationship that is artistic and intellectual, and like poets of the previous generation, these are often a very Northern Irish affair. “Leaving Belfast” from *Drives* is “for John Duncan”, a photographer in whose work “Belfast has been the subject [...] for nearly two decades” (Duncan, *Bonfires* 6). His work often focuses on derelict residential and industrial sites, their “unease”, and their relation to Belfast’s recent past and development (O’Kelly, Duncan et. al 21). The imagery deployed in Flynn’s first stanza depicts the run-down and dilapidated nature of Belfast - a city of “torn-up billboard[s] and sick-eating pigeon[s]” (5) - which is characteristic of Duncan’s own work which produces what Inka Schube describes as “photographs [which] disappoint. They do this so single-mindedly it’s disturbing. This is indeed Belfast but I don’t see it.” (Duncan, Schube, Allen 22). The dedication, as in previously discussed personal dedications, changes the meaning of the poem. In prefacing the poem as such, it suggests that the “you” to whom it is addressed, a “you who [is] leaving Belfast / to its own devices” (10-11), is Duncan. This has quite a different effect compared to referring to a named, but unknown, person such as Ruth from “The Morning After Ruth’s Going-Away Party” in *These Days*, especially given Duncan’s artistic connection to the city. By marking Duncan’s departure with a poem, Flynn demonstrates a public kinship with the artist, and in the style of the poem, with his work too. He may be leaving, but she, and her poetry, are staying.

The dedication of other Flynn poems appears to acknowledge apparent Northern Irish artistic similarities, although it spans across the poetic generations, which changes the perceived meaning from mere friendship to tradition-building. “The Peace Lily” from *Profit and Loss* is “for Michael Longley”, which in many ways is not only a dedication but a contextual detail because it sets out to the reader that the poem reflects the tenderness of tone which is a marker of Longley’s own

poetry. This all the more noticeable as a departure from Flynn's more common depreciating observational mode (of which the "sick-eating pigeon" from "Leaving Belfast", referred to above, is one such poignant example [5]). "The Peace Lily" ruminates on the enduring presence of a neglected pot plant, "passed from friend to friend" (4). However, in many ways it is also a "demonstration, ostentation, exhibition" (Genette 5) which proclaims Flynn's wish to participate actively within the Northern Irish tradition through the dedicatory network which has already been established. This kind of oblique dedication is explained by Genette:

Its basic message is not the message presented as basic. If I say to you, "Last night at dinner So-and-So seemed to me in top form", and if So-and-So is someone famous and whose company is considered flattering, it is certainly clear that here the main information conveyed is not his apparent good health, but indeed the fact that I dined with him. (158-9)

This meaning is clearly understood by Ian McMillan in a radio interview about *Profit and Loss*:⁸

McMillan: You dedicated your poem "The Peace Lily" to the great Northern Irish poet Michael Longley, and we've mentioned Muldoon. I can hear echoes of Longley and Muldoon in your work, but do you see yourself in that Northern Irish poetic tradition that includes them?

Flynn: I would wish to. I mean, I'd be very flattered to be included. I think Northern Ireland has had a great run of poets [...] whose work I admire enormously [...] I dedicated that poem to Michael Longley because it had a sort of gentle quality and he has written so nicely about Northern Ireland since the peace process and "The Peace Lily" reminded me of him. ("Interview with Leontia Flynn")

However, the sincerity of this dedication may be queried. "The Peace Lily" sits opposite another poem which recounts a forgotten item in a room, "The Vibrator". In this comic verse, the speaker reflects on the "nice surprise for next week's settling

⁸ Such media is an *epitext*, like book reviews, a paratext which occurs outside of the book, so one paratext assists another.

tenants” (11) who are sure to find the ominously irretrievable “vulgar implement” (6). The charming crudity of this companion piece to “The Peace Lily” suggests that sincerity, if it is sincere, is short-lived. A similarly jocular dedicatory effect is deployed in “Sky Boats”, from *Drives*, which is “after Medbh McGuckian (sort of)”. If the poem is only somewhat influenced by McGuckian’s work, then why refer to this fact at all? Like going to dinner with So-and-So, this prefatorial comment reinforces the importance of McGuckian and the Northern Irish tradition she is a part of, to Flynn’s writing more widely.

Morrissey’s only in-text dedications to Northern Irish poets are not to precursors but to peers. “February” from *Between Here and There* and “Found Architecture” from *Through the Square Window* are for Kerry Hardie who grew up in County Down and first published *A Furious Place* (1996) in the same year as Morrissey’s own debut. *The State of the Prisons* is dedicated “for Jean Bleakney”, another woman peer, who published *The Ripple Tank Experiment* in 1999. As in the case of Mahon and Longley and other poets of the previous generation, the dedicatory network is restated in returnings, for in her second collection, *The Poet’s Ivy* (2003), Bleakney dedicates “Synchronous Gardenias” to Morrissey. Hardie’s collection *The Silence Came Close* (2006) contains poems dedicated to Morrissey and Bryce. The poem for Morrissey, “Your China-poem Came in the Post”, suggests that artistic correspondence between Northern Irish poets is as important a part of the writing processes as it was for the preceding generation. Hardie’s response reworks Morrissey’s “China” from *The State of the Prisons*. “and that last part when China / met China in the market place / and they conversed” (Hardie, *The Silence* 19-20) is a paraphrasing of the final section of “China”, making the two poems dialogue as in the original poem:

suggests that the dedications here indicate a kinship with a power structure in which Morrissey is a precursory poet, marking her relationship with emerging writers.

It may appear through these dedications that Morrissey does not refer or defer to the previous generation of writers in the Northern Irish tradition in the same way as Flynn. Her dedications appear to be a repetition of the friendship mode discussed by Brearton and which is so prevalent in the work of the previous generation. While this may be the case within the text proper, it is not the case elsewhere. An extract from the “Acknowledgements” section of *Through the Square Window*, for example, is enlightening:

‘Cycling at Sea Level’ was written for inclusion in *From the Small Back Room: A Festschrift for Ciaran Carson* (Netherlea Press, 2008). ‘Electric Edwardians’ was written for inclusion in *Love Poet, Carpenter: for Michael Longley at 70* (Enitharmon Press, 2009). (6)

Acknowledgements are another paratext not widely considered to have a meaning to the text. Genette, for example, does not discuss them in his study. Yet, as John Barton suggests, an “acknowledgements page acts as an alternate to the contents page, a skeleton key to the literary world in which a poet aspires, even succeeds, to function” (qtd. in Guriel). Acknowledgments contribute to the text in a number of ways and imply different meanings according to their position in poetry books. In Morrissey’s case they have always been between the collection dedication page and the contents page, while for Flynn they are between the contents page and the first poems in her first two collections, but are tucked away to the very rear in *Profit and Loss*. This changed position, although undoubtedly a publisher’s decision and not a deliberately aesthetic choice, does denigrate the importance of the comments made. The acknowledgements section serves a practical use in that it provides a place to give thanks to some of the poetry organisations which have made the collection possible, often through grants or residencies, and to magazines, anthologies and

broadsheets which have published some of the poems collected. However, they also serve an intellectual purpose insofar as the kind of publications included by the author betray something of their stature and also the aesthetics they subscribe to through letting their poems appear in certain journals or anthologies. By contributing two of the poems in this collection to *festschriften*, anthologies in honour of the achievements of Carson and Longley, Morrissey signals her close relationship to literary culture and that culture's celebration of precursory writing. In indicating that the poems were both written "for inclusion in", the poems are dedicated "for" the poets the collections celebrated, reinforcing her participation in a Northern Irish tradition in a similar vein to Flynn's dedication and prefatorial mention of Longley and McGuckian.

However, noting that these poems were dedicated to Carson and Longley by their inclusion in W.R. Irvine's *From the Small Back Room* and Robin Robertson's *Love Poet, Carpenter* in the "Acknowledgements" section, rather than nearer to the poems themselves through a dedication between the poem title and text is curious. Morrissey, as we have seen, is not averse to dedications of individual poems; there are nearly twenty cases of named or acronymic dedications in her five published collections, and some of these are to some precursory influences such as Brecht, Frost and Lorca. "The Peace Lily" by Flynn was also included in *Love Poet, Carpenter* without an explicit dedication, yet when published in her full-length collection Flynn chose to add the dedication to the poem on the page as well as mentioning it in the acknowledgement, which was a considered move recognised by McMillan in his radio interview. Morrissey's placement of the reference to Carson and Longley within the formalities of the section which notes where formal acknowledgements are due to editors and funders, rather than the more ostentatious dedication such as Flynn's, might suggest some uneasiness with the practice of

naming explicitly the major poets of the Northern Irish tradition in such close proximity to her own text. In lacking this showiness of a dedicatory gift, the aspect of shared ownership is somehow taken back.

Uneasiness might be notable in Flynn's *Profit and Loss* too, for there is a discontinuity in her dedication practice. "The Peace Lily" is accordingly dedicated to Longley after its appearance in *Love Poet, Carpenter*. However, "Robert the Painter" (an earlier title for "The Notorious Case of Robert the Painter") and "The Day We Discovered Pornography Catalogues in the Mail" (an earlier title for "The Day We Discovered Pornography in the Mail") both appear in *From the Small Back Room* (81-2) yet are not dedicated to Carson in their appearance in *Profit and Loss* (5, 13). The relationship of these poems to the celebration of Carson's work is not made explicit within Flynn's own collection, and this distancing is almost aggravated by the distancing of the acknowledgements page which is, for the first time, at the end of the collection rather than to the front. It seems unusual that Flynn chose to dedicate to Longley after the poem appeared in his *festschrift*, but not to extend the courtesy to Carson in the same circumstance. "The Peace Lily" is aesthetically suitable for Longley, while the Carson *festschriften* poems owe little to his style, suggesting again the relationship between poems and their publication medium. In Carson's *festschrift From the Small Back Room*, Flynn even takes the slightly unorthodox step of dedicating "The Day We Discovered Pornography Catalogues in the Mail" "for "S" – wherever you are..." (82). In a collection dedicated to the achievements of Carson, the dedication to another person might be a slur, but the dedication in that context does reassure that the "we" who discovered "a sudden windfall" of explicit material through the post did not include Carson, thus preserving some of his modesty and esteem (9).

Flynn's dedications are often calculated so they become part of the text's intended effect and meaning, and seen in other poems where the dedication has the humour and wryness of the verse itself. "Pet Deaths", for example, is an elegiac poem about the death of a childhood pet, "our late lamented dog; the terrier of my adolescence – his cataracts clear" (21). There is a nod to the convention of posthumous *im memoriam* dedication; the poem is "for Harvey". Doing this, though, is something of a deflation of the mode for it is morbidly comic to attach such heightened importance to a dog. "Poem for an Unborn Child" from *Drives* offers a similarly amusing mock-serious dedicatory prehumous epistle: "may you be dull... for Dara Jane Flynn O'Dwyer". The dedicatee of this poem does not exist (yet), and to reinforce this, the name is a compound of both male and female highlighting the indeterminacy of their gender. Such dedicatory epistles are conventionally (and historically) used to honour achievements. Flynn instead wishes that the unborn might do nothing notable.

Dedications in Northern Irish poetry are the textual manifestation of the practice of inheritance and exchange between the generations. The very concept of the dedicatory network is about exchange and influence, and as Flynn demonstrates these might be playful as well as sincere. Between authors who are contemporaries as well as contemporary, there is another aspect of the dedicatory network which Genette does not acknowledge: that the purpose of the dedication is not just to recognise the influence of a person, but that through the act of dedicating, the dedicator might presume to influence the dedicatee in turn. This, after all, seems to be a main purpose of the dedicatory network regardless of the generational differences. It is a mark of intellectual engagement, an invitation for a return, and a plea for mutual kinship.

As with the use of dedications, the inclusion of epigraphic quotations represents a paratext which is “dedicated to the service of [...] the text” (Genette 12), and contributes to its meaning. In Genette’s study, he proposes the “attribution of the quotation raises two theoretically distinct questions, although neither is as simple as it appears to be: Who is the author, real or putative, of the text quoted? Who chooses and proposes that quotation?” (150-1). Thus, given that epigraphs introduce an aspect of authorial intention in their existence and at the same time reveal an attitude towards an existing authority-text, they may reveal something of the author’s wish to place themselves within particular traditions or intellectual schools, just as an appropriately placed dedication might. In the same way, there may perhaps be an element of name-dropping in the appearance of an epigraph: “very often the main thing is not what it says but who its author is, plus the sense of indirect backing that its presence at the edge of a text gives rise to [...] one can obtain it without seeking permission” (159). In this sense, epigraphs are often a form of dedication in that they emphasise the epigraphee’s importance and may imply artistic or intellectual equivalence between works in the way that their proximity invites comparative reading. Unlike dedications, epigraphs are not explicit; like poetry itself their meaning is often elusive, their relationship might be abstract and their use is open to interpretation as to their effect and intended function. Michael Riffaterre describes the epigraph as “tell[ing] us what is essential in the work of art by a double detour: saying it through another author, and letting it out in the guise of some trivial detail apparently unconnected” (191 n. 63). Genette considers epigraphs as “a mute gesture” (156), and notes that “[t]he ordinary reader, when not helped by some editorial note, most often remains in a state of uncertainty as the epigrapher intended, and is left to his conjectures or his indifference”(153).

What is to be understood of the muteness of Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's epigraphic gestures? Something that is noticeable, most especially so when considered within a discussion of national literary tradition, is their relative lack of epigraphic reference to other Northern Irish poets, even considering that epigraphs by living poets are rare in themselves. There are only two such instances of epigraphs lifted from the regional tradition in the published collections of Bryce and Morrissey (and none in Flynn), and these two instances have little in common with each other.

The instance by Bryce is intriguing as she is the poet arguably most distanced from the tradition of poetry in Northern Ireland as she lives and writes in Great Britain. *Self-Portrait in the Dark* is prefaced by the opening line from Louis MacNeice's "Selva Oscura", "*A house can be haunted by those who were never there*", and attributed to "Louis MacNeice": a correctly attributed but not full reference (vii). This quotation relates to some of the gothic themes explored in poems such as "Ghost Words" (21-2), "One Night in Glasgow Central Hotel" (19-20) and "On Highgate Hill" (14). However, other meanings are implicit too; the work is "haunted" by MacNeice as precursor and by the tradition of poets from Northern Ireland, perhaps even if they "were never there". By quoting from MacNeice without a full reference to the poem it is taken from, Bryce implies that MacNeice is well enough known not to need a full reference, or that she doesn't feel it is necessary for readers to cross-reference with the full poem. Without the details, the epigraph itself is spectral, the meanings elusive until the collection's themes reveal the epigraph's importance to its meaning in the context she has created.

That MacNeice was, until recently, the only Northern Irish epigraph in the collected work of three poets who do engage in so many other ways with the

contemporary tradition was in many ways remarkable. Assuming though, that as “with a great many epigraphs the important thing is simply the name of the author quoted” (Genette 159), then as an epigraphee, MacNeice is an unoriginal choice for Bryce. Clark notes that there has been “a sustained campaign to win back MacNeice from his position as a minor English poet over-shadowed by Auden, and to reclaim him as an Irish poet of major significance”, and claims that this has been undertaken by Longley, Heaney and Mahon “wield[ing] their collective literary influence” (Clark, “Revising” 77). A key method of this revisionism of literary history has been through paratextual allusion, including epigraphic referencing as in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1986) edited by Muldoon, which featured a transcript of a BBC interview between F.R. Higgins and MacNeice by way of a prologue (17-8) as if MacNeice himself was the prologue to contemporary Irish poetry. Mahon’s “Carrowdore (*at the grave of Louis MacNeice*)”, earlier titled “In Carrowdore Churchyard (*at the grave of the poet Louis MacNeice*)”, is another clear indication that MacNeice is a major figure in conceiving poetic tradition, and Heaney celebrates how MacNeice’s “contribution [is] increasingly recognised and his importance ever more verified by the critical and creative work of poetic heirs” (Heaney, “MacNeice Centenary”). Thus, it seems true that, as Neil Corcoran observes, “[t]he reappropriation of MacNeice has [...] been virtually coterminous with the development of the poetry of Northern Ireland since the mid-1960s” (115). In this sense, then, Bryce’s epigraph of MacNeice is, like a dedication, a restating of the conventions of the contemporary Northern Irish poetry lineage informed by paratextual efforts to demonstrate his significance.

The second instance of a Northern Irish epigraph occurs in Morrissey’s work. The epigraphed author is Muldoon, and Morrissey prefaces her poem “The Doctors” from *Parallax* with “blurting it out like a Polaroid”. The use of this line

relates to the theme of photography and truth which is explored in Morrissey's work with reference to the erasure of perceived political opposition in Soviet photography and propaganda "[w]ith scissors, / nail files, ink and sellotape" (17-8). The practice being discussed is in stark contrast to the apparent truth that photographs supposedly present, the "generosity of outlook" (10) which is symbolised in the Western mind by the instantaneousness of publication by cameras such as the Polaroid (an American invention).

The epigraph to "The Doctors" is oblique, intended to be understood in this case in the service of Morrissey's poem rather than offering an alternative, outward looking, function as in Bryce's MacNeice reference. The quotation is attributed to Muldoon but the source is not elaborated on in the poem or in the collection's notes. There is a note to this poem offered in the collection's endnotes, but it refers to the inspiration for the poem, David King's 1997 study of "how photographs were systematically falsified in Soviet-era Russia", rather than providing additional detail on the artistic context she has consciously introduced (69). The Muldoon line comes from "Three Deer, Mount Rose, August 1999" and is the desperate bleat of a trapped fawn in a surreal scene:

this black-tongued fawn wanted to free itself, to make a clean breast
of something, to blurt
out something to the effect, perhaps, that these were the Perseids
rather than the Pleiades, to blurt it out like a Polaroid. (13-6)

The Muldoon lines are so contrary to the Morrissey poem. "Three Deer, Mount Rose, August 1999" is surrealist, whereas "The Doctors" is based on fact established after research. Further, Muldoon's poem, set in August 1999, is set in the future as *Hay*, the collection in which it appears, was published in 1998: Morrissey's poem is retrospective. Morrissey's epigraph even minorly misquotes, replacing the present

tense “to blurt it out like a Polaroid” with the past participle “blurting it out like a Polaroid”, which suits the look backward to the Soviet era and to a time when Polaroid cameras were technologically advanced.

Where epigraphs are used by Morrissey, Bryce and Flynn, they indicate the diverse range of sources which the writers draw upon and wish to contextualise in their work. Epigraphs are not as common as dedications, but since they are quotations, and thus a paratext that is a text in its own right, they arguably have more artistic significance. Epigraphs which are “allographic, that is, according to our conventions, attributed to an author who is not the author of the work” (Genette 151) are the most common form used in the collections, as is the norm established in modern poetry. The epigraph, then, brings an existing text to the new text, and Flynn’s *Drives* is the collection which does this most freely. The collection is prefaced by two epigraphs, the first quoting Elizabeth Bishop’s “Arrival at Santos” which addresses a tourist:

is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,

and a better life, and complete comprehension

of both at last...(v)

The use of this quotation relates to the tourist persona Flynn adopts in the short “postcard poems” from different destinations (discussed later in the exploration of thematic detachment). The use of Bishop, a poet and a woman, works as an effective preface to this theme of the collection. The second epigraph, though, is a much less conventional opener for a poetry collection as it quotes comedian Bill Hicks on Freudian theory: “*Freud had an interesting theory, the Oedipal theory. You know that all men, he said, want to sleep with their moms. I thought that was bullshit, until*

one day I saw a picture of Freud's mom..." (v). The use of this epigraph is to indicate Flynn's interest in psychoanalytic re-writings of the lives of cultural figures, of which Bishop is one, and which is another theme which is woven throughout the collection. It also indicates her darkly comedic approach and her ease in relating to more popular aspects of culture.

Genette claims that "the epigraph in itself is a signal (intended as a *sign*) of culture, a password of intellectuality" (160), and in this sense in *Drives*, Flynn intends them as a code through which readers may translate the themes of the collection, her approach to them and their context. The postmodern detachment, high and low cultural resonances, dark humour and interest in neuroses set out in the Bishop and Hicks epigraphs are reflected in the other epigraphs used in *Drives*, where they similarly serve as context and password. A line from the 1942 film *Casablanca* prefaces "Casablanca, Backwards"(6): "*Rick (to Ilsa): Who are you really and what were you before? What did you do, and what did you think?*". Detached from its immediate context in the film, Flynn manipulates the line to reflect her own postmodern predicament, separated from a loved one for four months, and rewinding the video of *Casablanca* to see the separation of Rick and Ilsa becoming a reconciliation. The questions relate to romantic intimacy, but also to a very probing consciousness of the self.

On the adjacent page, a Virginia Woolf quotation is a sort of epigraph, in that it forms the first two lines of the poem "Virginia Woolf", "*Why have the body and illness not taken their place / with battle and love as the primary themes of literature?*" / Virginia Woolf sits back to admire her phrasing" (1-2). This quotation is subversive; it subverts the epigraph form in that it is not set apart from the poem but becomes the poem. Further, it is not fully attributed and it is inaccurate. Flynn's

source text is *On Being Ill* (1930), and the line is actually “it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature” (Woolf 9-10). Thus, it is not Woolf sitting back to admire her phrasing, but Flynn sitting back to admire her conversion of the prose statement into a more arresting and rhythmically appealing, broadly dactylic, opening two lines. Flynn is, perhaps, taking advantage of Woolf’s statement later in *On Being Ill*: “We need the poets to imagine for us” (25). Flynn takes this further by imagining Woolf and the creation of the text itself.

While Woolf’s statement is attributed within the poem through the title (even if it is incorrectly quoted and not fully referenced), the epigraph to “We Use Brilliantine” later in *Drives* is wholly unattributed, as is the title, which is also a quotation (and is accordingly enclosed in quotation marks). The epigraph “*Time rushes towards us with its hospital tray of infinitely varied narcotics, even while it is preparing us for its inevitable fatal operation...*” (47) relates to the interest in neuroses set out in the Hicks epigraph, and carried through poems such as “Virginia Woolf”. “We Use Brilliantine” presents a “male artist” (9) who “self-sedates / for dizziness and mood-swings – sharp anxieties” (3-4) in the 1950s with a variety of drugs. He mysteriously uses Brilliantine — a hair product — for “the blue spells” (7), and there is a woman who experiences similar fears and finds no comfort from the man or drugs. The quotations which form the poem’s title and epigraph are by the American playwright Tennessee Williams. The epigraph comes from the preface to *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), “The Timeless World of a Play” (Williams, *Five Plays* 129), and sets up a defeatist attitude towards the purpose of life as a means to fatality. The title comes from a reference to Williams’ use of Brilliantine as a lubricant during sex recorded in his notebook in 1940: “I whisper ‘Turn over’. He does. We use brilliantine.” (Williams, *Notebooks* 202). Yet, Flynn denies the reader

the context of her source material, providing “a signal (intended as a *sign*) of culture, a password of intellectuality” (Genette 160), but shares the full meaning only with those who are already familiar with the work of Williams, or who are prepared to work the connection out themselves.

The use of epigraphs as quasi-semiotic *signs* of culture, in some ways reflects the confidence of the writer and their command of influential texts. There are no epigraphs in Bryce or Flynn’s first collection, and only one in Morrissey’s. Further, by indicating their ability to participate in an intellectual network by knowing the language and conventions, the use of epigraph demonstrates their ability to engage with literary tradition. And, if epigraphs are a marker of assurance and ability to work with the complexities and subtleties of tradition, then the epigraph to Morrissey’s *Between Here and There* indicates her command of literary authority because it is an “autographic epigraph, one explicitly attributed to the epigrapher himself” (Genette 152). Or, it is a poem styled as an epigraph: an untitled verse, placed on the right hand page, before the section heading of part one with a blank page on the reverse and presented in italics. The poem/epigraph describes the experience of writer’s block, when her “*voice slipped overboard and made it ashore*” (1), and while the second section looks forward to the voice’s return “*eager, weather-worn, homesick, confessional*” (10), the existence of this verse in itself is testament to the voice’s return and the experience this brings to the collection which follows. The conventions of the epigraph have been preserved, reinforced by their corresponding position to the *Parallax* epigraph; a dictionary definition of the title which functions as context rather than poetic text itself (9). Another practitioner of this autographic epigraph is Longley, who prefaces his collections with dedications followed by a few short lines (M Longley, *Collected* 1, 39, 81, 113, 149, 163, 195, 241, 285). Morrissey does not epigraph Longley, or any of his peers, in the

“headline” spot of her own collections, because it is clear that she can epigraph (for) herself, and does not need to epigraph *for* a precursor.

We might expect some recent Northern Irish poets to be epigraphed since, like dedications of poems in *festschrift*, epigraphs indicate artistic solidarity and are actions which indicate intellectuality and denote one’s position within literary tradition. As Genette puts it, “[w]hile the author awaits hypothetical newspaper reviews, literary prizes, and other official recognitions, the epigraph is already, a bit, his consecration. With it, he chooses his poems and thus his place in the pantheon” (160). With the parallels between the work of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey and their precursors being so clear for reviewers and the publishing industry, it seems strange that they don’t choose to situate their work firmly with epigraphs from their precursors, and claim their place in that pantheon. The refusal to do this ostentatiously, which, given their dedicatory exactness, comes across as a refusal rather than an oversight. The poets of the previous generation are close enough to dedicate to, but not close enough to elevate with the textual materialisation of the attributed epigraph. Yet, this is not a divergence, since except on very few isolated occasions, the precursors don’t epigraph each other either. Epigraphs arguably elevate the epigraphee higher than dedications since they refer to the exact text of influence or inspiration. Given the immediate chronological proximity of Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s precursors, there is an unwillingness to elevate them too far out of reach lest they overshadow too darkly. And yet, since there is no such epigraphatory network for the previous generation either, even a reluctance to epigraph precursory poets can be a characteristic of a literary tradition.

v.

This study of marginal textual materials presents two (in)distinct kinds of paratext. The critical paratexts such as book reviews and, to a lesser extent, publisher paratexts such as laudatory commentary, contribute to interpretation largely independent from the poetry and its author. These aspects are in some ways indirect, because, as Genette states, “we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, in order to [...] ensure the text’s presence in the world” (1). On the other hand, poetic paratexts such as dedications, acknowledgements and epigraphs are “authorial” (2) aspects, legitimated by their presence in the text. These indirect and direct paratexts are inextricably linked. After all, would reviewers proclaim similarity and influence so confidently without the prefatory context? There is an existential complication as to what comes first in the life of the text: tradition and influence or the mere idea of tradition and influence.

It is into this ultimately unknowable space that paratexts exist on the interpretative threshold. As the epigraphs, dedications and acknowledgements demonstrate, Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey are poets conscious of the characteristic kinship of the tradition which precedes them. Their engagement with tradition through epigraphing and dedication can be variously interpreted as an attempt to celebrate or praise their precursors or an attempt to celebrate a geographically rooted community. However, as the fractures in their technique, tongue-in-cheek references and shirked acknowledgements imply, there is more to this than meets the eye. Sincerity should not be assumed to be an unquestionable value because paratexts can be oblique, deploying what Marcel Proust calls the “insincere language of

prefaces and dedications” (273), so that in reading with and through the poem(s) the meaning can author itself. There are many ideological agendas at play in the paratexts as they are ultimately authored and edited, and accordingly the surrounding texts are imbued with the politics and sentiments of the poem they assist. Also on the agenda, as this chapter has endeavoured to show, is a problematising attitude towards literary tradition and the influence which can be assumed by biographical similarities. With the possibility of authorship comes the opportunity to engage with existing traditions; and with insincerity, comes the possibility of subversive and selective engagement.

3. Thematic Divergences, Detachments and Dislocations

“One is disadvantaged by illustrious company

Left somehow undivided. Divide it with animosity.”

Sinéad Morrissey, “Advice”

i.

Surveying the paratexts on the outskirts of poetry by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey has indicated the seemingly contradictory interpretative impacts of their work. They are at once acknowledging a debt to tradition through paratextual conventions while simultaneously suggesting challenges to it through the highly calculated effects of their practice. Moving from the thresholds to the poetry proper, this chapter will survey the ways in which the poetry of the later generation indicates a divergent participation within the limits of the tradition, and, going further, even indicates through the theme of the detachment, the ways in which their work is new. Such a proactive divisive urge caused by the proximity of “illustrious company” is suggested in Morrissey’s “Advice” from *The State of the Prisons*, lines from which form the epigraph to this chapter, “Left somehow undivided”, the response is to “Divide it [the company] with animosity” (3, 3, 4).

The issues of literary tradition (continuity, originality, influence, repetition, imitation, and artistic self-assertion) are not, of course, unique to poetry in Northern Ireland in the past five decades. These elements have been inextricably bound up with canonicity, tradition and literary emergence for as long as esteem for previous writing has been communicated. This chapter will begin by considering Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s poetry in the context of theories of tradition and influence which seek to identify and analyse the ways in which generational connections can be understood through later poetry and its strategies for addressing tradition. Applying these theories, which in their own right seek to assert themselves against each other, to three contemporary poets who participate in a tradition relatively recent itself (characterised as it is by the recent Northern Irish socio-political

context) should demonstrate how “tradition” and “influence” are not terms only to be retrospectively applied. Rather, since no poetic utterance exists in a vacuum, “tradition” and “influence” are immediate issues for criticism. And, perhaps, nowhere less immediate than in the cultural sphere of an extraordinary literary renaissance, as in Northern Ireland.

A consideration of division and detachment in the work of three women poets who are, this study argues, selectively participating in an overwhelmingly male-dominated tradition should rightly remain conscious of gender as a significant marker of difference. This thesis does not seek to consider existential issues about whether there is in fact any difference inherent between a male- or female-authored poem. A consideration of “women’s poetry” as a genre with its own markers of tradition and canonicity follows in the next chapter. However, as this thesis is, overall, a consideration of “Northern Irish poetry” as a genre with its own markers of canonicity, the implications of author gender difference should not be overlooked, or confined only to the “women’s poetry” chapter as if in some way it is a containable issue. As this chapter will go on to show, tradition and influence are overcome (and thus paradoxically continued) through various discontinuities and shifts which assert themselves as complications: of these gender is just one.

In arguing for the subtleties of thematic discontinuity in recent poetry, which as this study already indicated is inextricably bound up in inter-textual relationships with poetry of a national line, this chapter will move from a reading informed by theories of influence to a reading of three motifs in the poetry of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey. These motifs, magic tricks and miracles, travel and globalisation, and window-panes of separation, speak not only of the contemporary and individual

consciousness of these poets, but indicate a self-consciousness about their shared literary past and thus enact a significant divergence to the literary line.

ii. “who was Seamus Heaney?”

A poem which seems in a most simplistic reading to undo any argument for generational detachment is Flynn’s “When I Was Sixteen I Met Seamus Heaney” from *These Days*. The title appears to refer to the late Nobel Laureate in an almost paratextual manner. As Genette so concisely suggests of dedicatory name-dropping, “the main information conveyed is not his apparent good health, but indeed the fact that I dined with him.” (159). Yet, rather than suggesting that Flynn dines with Heaney (and thus might be in some way inclined to or impressed by him), the poem itself deflates the potentially transformative meeting between this cultural celebrity and a formative poet. She recalls, “I had read *The Poor Mouth* – but who was Seamus Heaney? / I believe he signed my bus ticket which I later lost” (9-10). Perhaps unremarkably (given the interest in lineage and influence suggested in reviews and set out in the previous chapter), Flynn’s critics have thus far reserved particular attention for this poem, describing it as “affectionate”, “highly irreverent” and “playful” (Brearton, *Tower Poetry*; McGuire 100; Bryce “Leontia Flynn”). That Flynn remembers the meeting with such clarity, and that it is a significant enough subject for a poem, attests to its true importance. She may at sixteen have lost the bus ticket which Heaney signed, but she now knows well his cultural significance (working as she currently does in the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen’s University, Belfast), and thus the recollection becomes not a lampooning of the authority of Irish poetry, but a re-stating of the line from the author of *The Poor Mouth*, Flann O’Brien to Leontia Flynn via Heaney. As Matt McGuire notes, the

connection between Flann and Flynn is “merely the jump of a single letter” (100). The comedic value of apparently challenging Heaney’s literary esteem arguably continues in the tradition of comic Irish writing, the parodic tone of *The Poor Mouth* itself. Thus, this verse is not only an avoidance of tradition or influence, it is a celebration of it, via the proactive divisiveness suggested in Morrissey’s “Advice”.

Flynn, notably, is not the only poet to meet Heaney at sixteen. Muldoon recalls:

I met Seamus Heaney in April 1968, when I was 16. I was introduced to him by one of my teachers. Seamus Heaney was extremely welcoming to me and published a couple of my poems in a Belfast magazine he was guest editing [...] In addition, Seamus introduced me to Charles Monteith, his editor at Faber and Faber. Charles Monteith published my first book in 1973, when I was 21. So that meeting with Seamus Heaney was critical. (Fiegerman)

Flynn’s meeting was apparently less critical. Her poem deconstructs Heaney’s significance by focusing on the speaker’s failure to recognise him, and this is juxtaposed against his almost flirtatious wink as he signs a book by another author, “Heaney winked when he signed her copy / of *The Poor Mouth*” (5-6).⁹ The line which stands out as disconnected from the narrative of the meeting sets the scene of “UV-haze and bitumen fumes, etc.”, and seems to be a city-dweller’s choked parody of the pastoral scents and hazes characteristic of some of Heaney’s own poetry. Unlike in Muldoon’s anecdote, Flynn’s meeting was not critical and she was apparently not rushed to literary acclaim by it.

McGuire claims that “When I Was Sixteen I Met Seamus Heaney” is a “take on the Bloomian anxieties on influence” [sic] (99). It is true that the poem does address influence, even cultural rivalry, but it is not addressing any unease or

⁹ Close attention to the subtleties of language in this brief poem are crucial as the narrative voice reveals some potential unreliability in this line; “*As I have it Heaney winked*” (9), emphasis added.

anxiety about it in this poem; instead it is displaying with tonal virtuosity Flynn's mere acknowledgment of it. In fact, if cultural anxiety is the subject of this poem, it is to be found not in the exchange with Heaney, but rather in the relationship between the speaker and her friend which appears to have been totally overlooked in previous readings. The speaker is outside a Dublin gallery with a friend, a friend whom she grudgingly admits "knew her way around better than I did" (4). The friend is the one carrying *The Poor Mouth*, who recognises Heaney, but "hadn't even read" *The Poor Mouth* (7) despite proffering it for Heaney's signature. The speaker "ground my teeth" (7) not because of the daunting achievement of Heaney's own verse, rather, it is caused by a form of cultural one-up-man-ship between two precocious teenagers.

Further, if the poem was so explicitly expressing anxieties of influence, then that would not in itself make these anxieties of the type proposed by Harold Bloom since the relationships he posited in his model *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973) are altogether more complex than McGuire's statement implies. At its most simplistic level, a Bloomian reading would see "the strong poem [as] the achieved anxiety" (Bloom, *Anxiety* xxii), perhaps as the internalisation of tradition, as in Flynn's comedic tone, but the exhibitionist rendering of the heritage question here ultimately quashes any hints of the Bloomian mode. Further, Bloom's theory of influence depends entirely on what he terms "*misprision*", "a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction" (30). Rather than misunderstanding, misinterpreting or misreading, Flynn's poem relies on the altogether different act of not reading (and not even recognising) one of her prior poets. If Flynn is engaging with Bloom at all, just as she is engaging with Heaney, it is not with any earnestness, but wit.

“Flu”, a poem from Morrissey’s *Through the Square Window*, can more helpfully illuminate Bloom’s theories in *The Anxiety of Influence*. The poem recalls an extreme sickness, a flu so bad “[e]ven my eyes were infected. I lay back and hallucinated” (2). The illness changed the way in which the speaker was able to view things; magazines became “clusters of dots” which could be “a fortress / or Tyrannosaurus Rex if you only know how to lose focus” (10-11). Thus, through infection of the eyes new images are possible and the infected reader becomes an (admittedly still infected) author.¹⁰ The epiphanic centre of this poem both in subject and allegorical potential tallies with Bloom’s observation “Influence is *Influenza* – an astral disease. If influence were health, who could write a poem? Health is stasis” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 95). Faced with “page after page of unreadable scenes” (9), the stasis of the reading process in “Flu” is undone and instead misreading, “*misprision*” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 30), is possible and so the weak figure becomes the strong poet in Bloom’s allegory. That Morrissey writes this experience into a poem is the achievement of this feat.

In referring to the theories of Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*, it is important to be aware of their controversial nature, particularly when applied to women’s writing. Feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claimed in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (1979) that Bloom’s text was “offensively sexist” since it is “intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal” (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 147). Yet, while Bloom’s gendering of the poet as son and the precursor as father remains as offensively sexist as it was when it was published, that is not to

¹⁰ The link between illness and artistic practice is reversed in ‘Migraine’ from *Parallax* in which ‘vandals [are] set loose in the tapestry room / with pin-sharp knives’ (2-3).

say that the six revisionary ratios of his theory, which move from swerving away from the precursor to uncannily overcoming their influence, cannot be effectively applied to women writers, particularly in the contemporary era when, if the issues are not necessarily yet overcome, at the very least women writers are conscious of them. In doing so, women's writing further serves to illuminate the uses and shortcomings of Bloom's work, both in *The Anxiety of Influence* and his later work (such as *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* [2011]). It is clear from the paratextual markers, the critical prescriptions, and the Morrissey and Flynn poems considered above, that younger Northern Irish poets exist in an influence culture. An influence culture influenced, even, by Bloom's own hypotheses and the popularity of critical study of the phenomenon in Irish writing and beyond. Combining Bloom's theories with Gilbert and Gubar's notion of authorship can help to critically frame why detachment, division and divergence can be read in relation to tradition and influence in the poetry of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey.

The first of Bloom's revisionary ratios is a "swerve away from the precursor to execute a *clinamen*", an indeterminate or unpredictable swerve, in relation to the precursor's poem (14). The notion of a swerve is reminiscent of the divergence approach explored later in this chapter, but the sense in which Bloom uses this term in particular as a swerve in relation to a precursory poem can be illuminating in reading Flynn's "Snow" from *These Days*. The poem uses the same title as one of MacNeice's most enduring poems. The 1930 poem is set against the "great-bay window" (1) of a house in Belfast, and looking out at the falling snow the scene prompts the speaker to draw conclusions on the vastness and multiplicity of experience, for "[w]orld is crazier and more of it than we think, / Incurably plural" (5-6). That poem, notable enough for its own vividness, gained re-stated stature in the Northern Irish line through the reference made to it in Muldoon's

poem “History” from *Why Brownlee Left* (1980) (when “you and I climbed through the bay window” (6) and “into the room where MacNeice wrote ‘Snow’, / Or into the room they say he wrote ‘Snow’” (87). For Flynn’s *clinamenic* response, there is a swerve away from the room with the bay window, to Scotland as the speaker runs to catch a train back to the “fish-smelling ferry terminal” (6) that connects Troon to Belfast. Her use of MacNeice’s title, and possibly even a via-point reference to Muldoon’s poem, suggests that while these poems were accurate to a point, in order to be relevant to the poet’s own experience as a student and a woman in “the academic year of a millennium” (1) they need to go in another direction, that of frustrated access to Belfast. Thus, the direction in question is not the wonder of experience and meaning explored through the excess of snow and roses, but rather the lack of that excess, as “something is blocking the line. / It’s leaves perhaps – or that other obstinate cliché: / the wrong kind of snow. (8-10). While MacNeice’s poem is consumed with snow, Flynn doesn’t even know if it exists, it is just a cliché and bewildering excuse for what could be keeping her from completing her journey home. Her use of the title “Snow” suggests a use of MacNeice’s poem and the tradition it represents (shown through Muldoon’s revisiting of the bay window setting), but this use is also wryly ironic, she turns to tradition in frustration at her predicament, and aims to undermine it by producing a new “Snow” for the new millennium.

Morrissey is also using irony in her execution of a somewhat imperfect *clinamen* in “Publisher’s Notes” from *Between Here and There*. The voice of the fictional publisher states “Talent will rise” (1) in the opening line, and so it is clear that the concern is self-consciously with the poetic marketplace which impacted so clearly on the paratexts. The speaker compares “a school” (1) of writers with the “sickness” (2) of originality and claims that poets are “condemned to repeat, as from

a rubric, / the million poems stored in the memory of language” (10-11). The strength of this piece lies in its originality exemplified through the unusual voice, tone and observations; while publishers control what poetry reaches a readership they do not usually produce poems about their own process. Yet, its own nihilism about lack of originality undermines it to the same degree, and it is this enacting of an anxiety that swerves to dismantle the precursors as much as it takes itself apart. This is a failed revisionary ratio, but since the apparent voice and view is the publisher-narrator’s, not the author’s, perhaps Morrissey’s own work can overcome the very threat of unoriginality it proposes.

Tessera, the revisionary ratio which “antithetically ‘completes’ [...] by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 14), is best evidenced in Morrissey’s poem “Reading the Greats” from *The State of the Prisons*. The speaker goes, not to *Selected* volumes, but to “omnivorous *Completes*” because she wants to find the “failures” of the great precursor poets, named as “Larkin on Empire, say, or Plath on Aunts” (5, 1, 7). In fact, the speaker is almost evangelical about finding these inadequacies, the “froth”, “spite”, “avoidable mistakes”, she wants to find them out, to watch them “dip, trip up” (6, 8). Morrissey does not name any Northern Irish precursors in this poem, but as an exploration of tribute, achievement and literary celebrity, the recent lauded poets of Northern Ireland are implicated nevertheless. This poem is, if anything, an *over* reflection on tradition that ruminates on the manifest reading process. What makes this poem a manifestation of *tessera* is that the poet expresses her love for the poets but still seeks to antithetically complete and correct our reading and appreciation of precursory greats by exposing their weaknesses. This fond exposure of “the Greats” is a reductive movement, undoing in one fell swoop Larkin, Plath and others, presumably including her immediate precursors. The metaphor in the

second stanza suggests that their weaknesses offer “consolation”, although the consolation of the sea shore revealed to the “stinking of flies & fishheads & bladderwrack” is desolate. It suggests that Morrissey herself, in recognising their flaws, simultaneously learns from their mistakes in her own work and forgives her own errors: she reduces them in order to elevate herself.

The notion of *tessera* can also be illuminating in exploring the way in which Northern Irish writing is collected in the contemporary era. A consideration in the following chapter reflects on the significance of national curation (focusing on gender in this case), and the cultural marketing strategy of continuity and newness has already been highlighted through reference to publisher’s paratexts and reviews in the preceding chapter. Morrissey and Flynn in particular, due to their residency in Northern Ireland, have been positioned in anthologies as the latest writers to “complete” the Northern (and) Irish line. *The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland* (2011), *Magnetic North: The Emerging Poets* (2006) and *The New Irish Poets* (2004) are three recent anthologies which highlight the corrective nature of the later “new” poets which include at the forefront Morrissey, Flynn and Bryce.¹¹ Editors of these collections are often keen to indicate not only how their selections from newer poets indicate continued excellence, but also how more recent work represents divergences which in some ways “correct” absences in previous work. Agee suggests in *The New North* that “[e]ach of the poets here has staked a claim to some uninhabited space in the zodiac of Irish poetry” (xxxiii). Selina Guinness claims that “the best of these poets [in *The New Irish Poets*] will require some reconsideration of what Irish identity now means in the context of larger

¹¹ Bryce is not included in *The New North*, perhaps due to her slightly more marginal relation to Northern Irish culture caused in part by her residence in Great Britain for the entirety of her poetic career.

geopolitical structures” (31), while John Brown proposes that *Magnetic North* intends to “expose readers to new currents within language itself” (14). These anthologies in effect take the purpose of precursory anthologies such as Gerald Dawe’s *The New Younger Irish Poets* (1991), and as such the poetry included in them enacts an antithetical completion, retaining the terms but changing their meaning for the contemporary moment.

More complex and ambivalent is the third ratio, *kenosis*, which is “a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 14). Rather than reducing the precursor’s influence as in the examples of Morrissey’s and Flynn’s *clinamen* and *tessera*, *kenosis* is the move to become quite apart from them, to be original and to abandon repetition completely. Bloom even goes so far as to call this ratio an “‘emptying’, at once an ‘undoing’ and an ‘isolating’” movement (87). “The Full Indian Rope Trick”, the title poem from Bryce’s second collection, seems to hinge on this anxiety for separation and isolation. Her speaker performs *kenosis* in the form of the trick that makes her climb, “young, up and away” (11) from the Guildhall Square in Londonderry. The trick is “unique, unequalled since” (24), suggesting a discontinuity with the general populace of her home city, and this discontinuity continues into the form too. “The Full Indian Rope Trick” snakes over two pages, quite into the air of the long white space after it on the second page. The lines are short and make as much use of their punctuation and line breaks as they do their few words: “goodbye. // Goodbye, goodbye. / Thin air. First try” (12-4). The poem does continue in several other traditions, such as writing about adolescence, escape and magic, and will be considered in more detail later in these terms. However, it is also an imaginative escape from Northern Ireland; this is perhaps the partly subconscious trick of the poem for its uniqueness at the same time belies its fear of poetic continuity.

Morrissey's "Conrail" from *The State of the Prisons* also engages in a kind of poetic discontinuity in its relationship to anxiety. In this, insomnia "beckons" to "the Angel of Anxiety" which unsettles the speaker with the threats of childlessness, recollections of an unstable relationship with her mother and father (which could be both literal or literary) and "neither", which of course means something and everything else (5, 4, 8). Childlessness in particular, with its hints of desperate barrenness, is a peculiarly feminine trope for blocks to literary expression too, taunted by the frightening strength of precursors' achievements. Thus, it is fitting that the poem read in this way makes literary invention the denouement. Childlessness, "stretching out into the ether" becomes a simile in the tentative final line "like a plane" (10) which is set alone, orphaned from the other stanzas. It is this poetic understanding of her anxieties that offers some comfort, and without this simile, there could be no release, only the crippling continuity of repetition made tangible through the list of unsettling thoughts; "Sometimes my mother and father. / Sometimes neither. / Sometimes childlessness" (7-9). The simile thus changes the metaphors of the poem into potential similes and in doing so reduces their power over the speaker, and perhaps too lifts the worry at least partly away.

Daemonization is the next revisionary stage suggested by Bloom. This is the point at which the later poet opens herself to a "power in the parent-poem that does not belong to the parent-proper [...] to generalize away the uniqueness of the earlier work" (Bloom, *Anxiety* 15). This generalising movement intends to "make the [later poet] more of a daemon and the precursor more of a man" (15). "Nocturne" from *These Days* offers an interesting case of *daemonization*, for in it Flynn emphasises her power of composition which is ultimately the power of the parent-proper that all writers seek to better. The poet in "Nocturne" observes a man, "a clerical temp", attempting "to figure that *je ne sais quoi* a poem takes to get published" in the office

(1-2). She views him as he writes the line “[m]y tongue cleaves to my mouth O Lord, The Words not coming” (8), then the pretentious poem he is composing and the mock-pompous poem Flynn has composed and published come apart simultaneously: “Wha? /Whaddya mean already written? What? / Louis? Louis who?” (9-11). The language throughout is aiming to sound undistinguished to highlight the faulty discernment of the character. Yet, if he is unconsciously borrowing or repeating from other writings, it does not say much of their quality either, which must certainly undermine their uniqueness.

Ultimately, the created (anti)poet-character is unable to understand or compete with tradition since he is ignorant of it. Bloom sneers at “the wearisome industry of source-hunting, of allusion counting” (32), yet in the case of this poem it is central to the message. The “Louis” Flynn refers to is likely to be Louis MacNeice, reinforced by the ordering of this poem immediately after her other explicit MacNeicean debt, “Snow” (discussed previously). Indeed, just as “Snow” owes something to MacNeice’s poem, so “Nocturne” owes something to MacNeice’s “Elegy for minor poets” which similarly remembers those writers struggling from “those office[s]”, who “knew all the words but failed to achieve the Word” (30). Simultaneously, the tongue cleaving has a biblical source, recalling as it does verse six of Psalm 137; “If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth” (*King James Bible* 137:6). Both of these allusions and their significance would appear to be lost on their fictional creator, although certainly not to their literal creator. Flynn’s skill in layering this allusiveness behind character, speaker, narrator and poet thus generalises away the precursory literary history she draws on while simultaneously highlighting it. Her “Nocturne” is a night portrait of a minor poet, the portrait lifted from MacNeice. As MacNeice suggests in his “Elegy for minor poets”, “Do right to hang on the grave of each a trophy / Such as, if

solvent, he would himself have hung / Above himself” (39-40). Flynn’s poem insists that she is a poet capable of using literary history, seizing the “power” of the parent-poem effectively, and in doing so “underwrit[ing] them” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 274).

Power is at play in Bryce’s “A Spider” from *Self Portrait in the Dark* too, although it is closer to the *askesis* ratio than *daemonization*. *Askesis* “is the formation of an imaginative equivalent of the superego, a fully developed *poetic will*” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 119). Further, “in his purgatorial *askesis* the strong poet knows only himself and the Other he must at last destroy, his precursor, who may well (by now) be an imaginary or composite figure” (121). Thus, when in “A Spider” the speaker traps a spider under “a fine-blown wine glass” (2), the spider could in fact be a composite figure for precursory writers which are contained, but still in clear sight. Spiders, in being a common phobia, are known to provoke anxiety for many by their presence and hence this common movement towards entrapment; a description close to how later poets view their precursors too. The poem is the observation and manifestation of a contested hierarchy, for “still he taps against the glass / all Marcel Marceau” (10-11). The glass, “*the wall that is there but not there*” (12), is the curtailing of literary tradition which only a superego could achieve; it is a way of compartmentalising the anxiety.

The flippantly macabre hint in the poem that “I meant to let him go” (9) suggests that the curtailing ultimately kills the spider. Since the *askesis* ratio “is the contest proper, the match-to-the-death with the dead” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 122), it is unsurprising that Bryce’s speaker does not attempt to release the spider. Further, the poem is the triumphant culmination of a staring competition, the rendering of her voyeuristic gaze reflected in the detailed description of him (for the spider is gendered male here), “cap / at the hub of his eight spokes, / inked eyes on stalks” (5-

7). The microcosm and ultimate cruelty of this power struggle reflects the importance of what Morrissey, in “Advice” from *The State of the Prisons*, calls “[v]iciousness in poetry”; something that “isn’t frowned on, it’s *allowed*” (6). This short poem reads like an ironic confession and rallying call for *askesis*:

You think it ugly: drawing lines with a knife
Down the backs of those writers we exist to dislike. But it’s life.

One is disadvantaged by illustrious company
Left somehow undivided. Divide it with animosity.

Don’t be proud –
Viciousness in poetry isn’t frowned on, it’s *allowed*.

Big fish in a big sea shrink proportionately.
Stake out your territory

With stone walls, steamrollers, venomous spit
From the throat of a luminous nightflower. Gerrymander it. (1-10)

The final two words in particular give the poem a peculiarly Northern Irish direction since “gerrymandering” was the term used to describe “the claim that after 1921 the Unionist authorities deliberately manipulated electoral boundaries, particularly at local government level, for political purposes [... It was] one of the main issues raised by the civil rights movement in the late 1960s” (Melaugh and Lynn). The word is thus loaded with such cultural weight within Northern Ireland that it hangs heavily at the close of the poem. Morrissey, it is clear, seeks to change the boundaries not of electoral constituency but of the constituency of tradition, a curtailing movement to her own advantage. Furthermore, she celebrates her own desire to fight with “big fish” (7) of the Northern Irish sea and to stab the illustrious

company of her precursors in the back. This is a rather bitter expression that springs out of an awareness of the damaging effects of tradition and anxieties of the effect that it may have on her own legacy. Such statements could only come from a fully formed “*poetic will*”, that poetic superego Bloom suggests (119).

The final ratio in Bloom’s conception is *apophrades* which suggests that strong poets should be capable of controlling their precursors. Bloom proposes that strong poets achieve this when the later “poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem’s achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as through the later poet himself had written the precursors’ characteristic work” (16). This ratio is also perhaps the most abstract, and thus also the most complex to suggest applications of, since the achievement lies in the lack of the influence, rather than its ever pervasive anxieties, for the first time.

Yet, there are poems which do seem to offer the uncanny openness Bloom proposes. Morrissey’s “In Need of a Funeral” from *Between Here and There*, for example, does not contain the vicious anger of “Advice”, as one might expect from the title. Rather, this is a poem without a cause or subject, it exists “[e]ven though no one has died and there is no one / to touch in the coffin” (1-2). It could even be implied that the mighty dead, those great poets of influence (whether actually living or dead) are not returning, they have been positioned beyond death. The central act of this poem is not mourning, in either a literal sense or the sense that any obvious influence is a mourning of its own. The central act is actually when the speaker, alone, takes “flowers, an Oxfam veil, a bottle of Scotch, a speech / and made it to the sprawl of Milltown Cemetery” (20-1). Yes, this is the paraphernalia of

mourning, but there is still no death and so the uncanny funeral is a celebration of the absence of the dead and the intimacy of acting quite alone.

Another celebration of absence is Bryce's "The Residents" from *Self-Portrait in the Dark*. In this, the uncanny feeling comes from entering a comically derelict office, the poet's new home, a "[b]unker, funk-hole, new place-to-dwell" that belonged to a previous writer-in-residence (9-10). The room the poet inhabits allows her to "enter[...] the mind of the previous incumbent" (21), which is what makes this poem apophradic for the subject itself holds the poem open to the presence of the precursor in the role. Yet, the precursor is resolutely not there and while there has been no actual battle, it is Bryce who is left with the uninterrupted (although "mildewed" [36]) inheritance. There is no indication as to the identity of the precursor, although we are teased with a list of items available for forensic examination in a manner almost consciously recalling Philip Larkin's "Mr. Bleaney" (*Collected*). The room contains "various punched out blister packs" and "a half-smoked menthol cigarette" (32, 34) which suggests that the precursor found writing an anxiety-ridden task. Read as Larkinesque, it seems that Bryce sadly writes where her precursor wrote. However, read anew, Bryce is the creator of the precursor, the polar opposite of any view of influence which suggests precursors create later poets. The indicators point to a female precursor, a Miss Bleaney perhaps – there is a "single plimsoll, size five" and "a fingerprint in a lip-gloss compact" (38, 33) – and this perhaps complicates a Bloomian reading. Although the cigarette and blister packs may indicate authorial anxiety, it is an institutionally supported anxiety, and the cunning repression of a woman writer — what a Bloomian reading would propose — does not imply any feminist sisterhood.

There are many flaws in using Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* as a critical framework for understanding this poetry. It simply cannot offer a definitive and clear cut way of dictating or judging the approaches to tradition and influence in the work of Morrissey, Bryce and Flynn. Many of the imperfections in the readings above, and of course a necessary confession that there are also many poems by Morrissey, Bryce and Flynn which seem not to exhibit any anxieties, come down to the fact that much of Bloom's theory is rigid and remains so even in the 2011 critical swan song, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*. To apply the theory in a vague and broad sense, perhaps to suggest the prevalence of misreading rather than of anxiety itself, might offer many more examples from their work, but is also imprecise.

This reading has attempted to deconstruct the procedures of Bloom's anxieties through the poetry, rather than to simply propose that such vague anxieties exist. However, it is more imperative to note that if this had been an earnest reading of Bloom, gender would continually stall the effectiveness of his theory in this contemporary period. Regardless of his use of male pronouns throughout (perish the thought of a female poet!), which is at best mildly irritating and old-fashioned, at its heart Bloom's theory is totally male-centric. Effectively, the matrix of precursor/later poets' relationships depend on a father/son dynamic to which women poets can only partly have access. Bloom claims in his 1997 edition that he "never meant by 'the anxiety of influence' a Freudian Oedipal rivalry, despite a rhetorical flourish or two in this book" (*Anxiety* xxii). Yet, despite this protestation, his theory does rely quite heavily on some Freudian theories. *Askesis*, for example, "the formation of an imaginative equivalent of the superego, a fully developed *poetic will*" (119), utilises in its description one of the key structural elements in Freud's description of the psyche. Yet, women, and thus the poets central to the reading

above, were considered by Freud to be already castrated, to thus not identify with the father, and therefore “their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men” (Freud 342). It follows that since Bloom describes poetic will as the imaginative equivalent of the super-ego, that women may be unable to achieve this in the same way.

The masculine-centric direction of *The Anxiety of Influence* similarly is incapable of answering some prevalent questions that the emergence of women into the harsh light of the Northern Irish tradition raises. Bloom’s closing statement suggests that “[i]f this book’s argument is correct, then the covert subject of most poetry for the last three centuries has been the anxiety of influence, each poet’s fear that no proper work remains for him to perform” (Bloom *Anxiety* 148). Yet, if the later poet is female in an overwhelmingly male tradition, it would seem that politically there is still much work to perform for the woman writer is faced not just with the anxiety of influence but also the work of destabilising that tradition in order to place herself within it. For Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, *apophrades* may be as much about birth and survival as burial. This view equates with the criticism that Gilbert and Gubar put forward in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in the sense that my reading shows of “the patriarchal Bloomian model, we can be sure that the female poet does not experience the “anxiety of influence” in the same way that her male counterpart would, [...] she must confront precursors [...] significantly different from her” (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 48). Questions asked in 1979 can be validly asked of the work of women writers born later in the same decade as they were first posed by Gilbert and Gubar.

Where, then, does the female poet fit in? Does she want to annihilate a “forefather” or a “foremother”? What if she can find no models, no precursors? Does she have a muse, and what is its sex? Such questions are inevitable in any female consideration of Bloomian poetics (47)

Yet, while the political sentiment inherent in feminist readings of women's writing has not changed, there are also limitations in using their framework for a reading of contemporary poetry. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, influential as it is, is a work of criticism which focuses specifically on nineteenth century women's writing. It is an exploration contingent on that period, just as the subsequent chapter is a period-specific exploration of women's writing in more recent times. While it may be desirable that the methodologies might have a broader use, those methodologies in application are not always useful. Just as "[t]he older poet in 1990s Ireland, remembers, and lives in a different Ireland from those who are thirty or forty years younger", so these young poets not only live in a different Ireland from their immediate precursors, but also a world quite different from that of nineteenth century women writers (Hunt Mahony 6).

For example, Gilbert and Gubar investigate at some length "such afflictions as anorexia and agoraphobia [which] simply carry patriarchal definitions of 'femininity' to absurd extremes" in the work of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century writers (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 54). It seems that Flynn's poetry feels little of the anxiety of these "diseases and dis-eases" (58) for, as the latter half of this chapter will demonstrate, her poems are anything but agrophobic. Travel fragments, such as the postcard poems of *Drives*, come with the can-do attitude of the eager tourist, for while "Rome" "wasn't built in a day" the visitor declares "'Rome? / We will take the lot in one short afternoon'" (1-2). Similarly, Flynn's travelling is so brash it has the confidence to parody radicalism as in "Paris" "students march once more" (1). What is celebrated in poems such as "Leaving Belfast" is that "you are / burning your bridges" (9-10) which is indicative that Flynn's generation are able to disconnect in the Bloomian manner. The poetic tradition seems to promote writing about Belfast (for example exalted in Patricia

Craig's *The Belfast Anthology* [1999]), yet Flynn demonstrates that she is capable of leaving the relative comfort of the city and traditions she knows, unlike many of the writers Gilbert and Gubar focus on.¹²

This is not to say that the kind of reading Gilbert and Gubar propose is wholly inappropriate for younger and contemporary writers such as Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey. The anorexia explicit in Bryce's "Form" from *The Heel of Bernadette* does suggest extreme anxiety, even hysteria, which makes the speaker's voice that of the madwoman at the centre of Gilbert and Gubar's reading. The link to authorship in this report of bodily wasting is subtle. The title "Form", relates to the form of the address as a poem, and the speaker is "writing this as my only witness / has been the glass on the wall" (5-6). The creation of the wasted body is a "vocation", something the speaker is "gifted" at, as she is "perfecting" the "concave line" of her stomach (12, 11, 16). Just as in a poem, "I would think I was losing my mind / if it wasn't behind this from the start" (35-6). As a haunting poem of reduction, it does not subsume as Bloom's strong poem might, but in fading out leaves a notable absence. Gilbert and Gubar's absence is the antithesis of Bloom's poetic presence. A similar absence is latent in the entrapment of Morrissey's *The State of the Prisons*, especially in "Flight" which is the monologue of a seventeenth century wife placed in a great iron gag. The gag would, in a Bloomian figurative reading, suggest weakness and inability to overcome the male precursory power. The wife in the poem has "torn my face / In two by swallowing silence" (28-9), and

¹² At this point, it is worth noting Morrissey's new role as "Poet Laureate" for Belfast (Brankin). In this role, she will be connecting with Belfast and its people in what is primarily a social position. The laureateship, of course, has clear ramifications for the visibility and stature of Morrissey within Northern Irish poetry, but given how recently the appointment was announced (31 July 2013), this is not yet clear and as such it is not discussed here or elsewhere in this work.

thus writing her into a poem is not an overcoming of mere influence, but the overcoming of vocalisation (or authorship) which accords with Gilbert and Gubar's feminist criticisms of Bloom. Even for Flynn, the exoticism of the travel poems considered later in this chapter lies uneasily and in contrast to the other recurring theme of *Drives*, mental illness. By exploring illness, and the connection between the body and the mind, in a variety of cultural icons, Flynn on the one hand seems to divide it with animosity (to borrow Morrissey's term) in a Bloomian manner. On the other hand, Flynn's poems humanise not to reduce the genius of these precursory figures, but to give them humanity they are not often afforded in culture. "Elizabeth Bishop" "has bronchitis. / And asthma. And eczema" (3-4), while "Virginia Woolf" has an "aura – bright, seductive" (4) before hearing voices in her head and "Sylvia Plath's Sinus Condition" lies between her "gee-whiz, perfect girl" image (1) and her "absent father's awful abscess / and mother-fury" (6-7). These ailments hint at the illnesses beneath – loneliness, madness, self-hatred, and perhaps, the anxiety of female authorship.

iii. "hurls it out again beyond its parallax"

As it has been used in various considerations of inter-generational or precursory-influence studies, the term "anxiety" is problematic because it suggests that poetry is in some way entirely psychological or physiological. Aspects of poetry and its effects may be so, but in thematic divergences and detachments, the subject of this section, there must also be the opportunity for a placidity of originality. In *The Writing of Fiction* (1925), Edith Wharton claims that "[t]rue originality consists not in a new manner, but in a new vision" (18). In literary tradition, this new vision, this chapter proposes, can be manifested in thematic concerns which in their newness are

thus a divergence. Across Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's work there is evidence of a commonality: a desire to be separated from the reality of the Northern Irish landscape and by extension that tradition which nationally specific elements indicate. The detachment, through its divergence, allows for a new vision of that landscape and tradition. In order to address this aspect, and draw conclusions on the extent and purpose of the younger generation's divergences, this section will address poems by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey which suggest a desire for escape, a desire for travel, a detachment from the local territory and other expressions of dislocation.

By foregrounding these common themes across the work of the three women poets, their work can be situated in relation to a critical framework which has been utilised in many different studies of women's writing from varied sources. Specifically, this is the identification of themes of escape, detachment and dislocation as an indication of an implied desire to escape from patriarchal spheres (whether literary or literal) and re-locate poetry. Jo Gill notes that "[o]f late, a number of women poets have chosen to focus on boundaries, parameters and borderlands as a way of registering their refusal to be considered merely as marginal or as ex-centric" (168). This is an "active assertion of agency" in that it forces engagement with the marginal spaces, and it is "an attempt not to switch from one position (on the boundaries) to another (in the middle), but to rethink the whole epistemology" (168-9). Thus, in a national tradition of poetry which arguably exemplifies and occupies "the middle" of contemporary poetics through its dominant position in critical and poetic hierarchies, the examination of parameters by the women of that tradition is a divergence, and assertion, and perhaps an epistemological crisis.

In order to emphasise the crucial importance of considering detachment when reading Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, this study will concentrate on three key themes which, by their reappearance in various guises across the work of the poets, can be said to define their individual approaches. First, a discussion of the theme of the magical and miraculous in Bryce's poetry will emphasise her desire to focus on that beyond our understanding and to perform at the limits of what is possible. Of note here is the fact that escapology or disappearance is often at the crux of the act and thus is the locus of the poem's meaning too. For Flynn, it is the overarching theme of flight which creates the sense of an often confused cosmopolitan identity which seems to be situated as uneasily at home in Belfast as in any other city explored with a tourist guidebook. In considering this theme, it is important to consider how Flynn's view is influenced by her position as someone "at home" or "abroad", as plane-watcher or traveller. This section will also consider the detachment often central to Morrissey's work which is to do with division and reflection. Windows, mirrors, and glass frame and distort understanding right across her work, and feature in various ways in poems about culture, community and the maternal line. In emphasising these singular (often overlapping) themes, this study highlights how this new poetry is engaged with an aesthetic which is shaped by the performance of a liminal contemporary identity. This liminality relates to experience and originality, and may be viewed as the newness begotten by tradition.

Magical realism is where the fantastic blends with the real so that the magical becomes "an extension of realism", while simultaneously resisting "the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism" (Zamora and Faris 6). This, however, is not the kind of magic implied in this reading of Bryce's poetry, for the focus is instead on the performance of a magic "trick" which is not supernatural (or even miraculous, where there are religious connotations) but

only appears to be so, and thus reality only *appears* to be extended. This means that suspension of disbelief is not required, seeing is not so much believing as not fully understanding how the act, whether apparently miraculous or dangerous, will be or has been successfully achieved. The importance of a trick as something that is performed is highlighted in the poem titled “The Trick” from *The Full Indian Rope Trick*. In this poem, the speaker informs us that “Jamie is up on the roof again. Jamie is up / on the raised edge, one mucky trainer raised” (1-2), and below his mother watches with grave concern as “a warning shout / might spin him to the ground, spin him / down like a winged sycamore pod” (7-9). The dual trick, that Jamie’s mother might stop time or that Jamie might perform roof-edge acrobatics, is only magic if it is achieved, until that moment it is remarkable only for its foolhardiness. The remarkableness and risk also reveal the dark side to “The Trick”: any external interference would cause Jamie to fall to certain death. In the context of the escape at the centre of this poem’s nearest name-sake, “The Full Indian Rope Trick” (which will be discussed later), the escape implied in “The Trick” is ambiguously suicidal; Jamie is up on the roof “again” (1), as if his macabre trick has not succeeded in previous attempts.

“Pillar Talk”, also from *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, takes its subject from the much-publicised 2002 performance “Vertigo” by American illusionist David Blaine in New York City. Blaine stood on top of a thirty metre high pillar for thirty-five hours, before jumping down onto cardboard boxes. A commentator argues that the act of standing still is a contemporary magic:

each age calls magic whatever stunt it needs to marvel at, and each age gets the magic it deserves. David Blaine, standing up there, is actually as good a magical metaphor for the moment as Houdini, fighting his way out of the straitjacket of immigrant identity toward prosperity, was for his [...] Blaine is the magician as stoic, the magician as the nonmagical bystander. (Gopnik)

Bryce, however, takes a much less sympathetic view. For her, the magician

knows nothing whatever
of loneliness

or how it is
for people like us.(5-8)

On the page, the poem looks tall and narrow as a pillar, but at the bottom of the pillar is no “soft acre / of cardboard boxes” (9-10) or “eggshell / flashbulbs of the press” (11-12), but only the foreboding lines “the hard, hard earth, // to break the fall. / Nothing at all.” (16-8) which themselves land in the nothingness of the white page, as in “The Full Indian Rope Trick”. The title “Pillar Talk” plays on the term “pillow talk” which refers to intimate chat between lovers, but unlike the pillow, the pillar has no comfort or intimacy. The real magic trick performed in everyday life and away from the press is the ability to keep going despite isolation and the lack of a safe landing. Like “The Trick”, there is a suicidal undertone, and the suggestion that continuing to live through the singularity of humanity and the darkest of thoughts is the true magic trick for our era.

The power of magic tricks in Bryce’s poems comes from the heady combination of fear that something might not be achieved and belief that somehow it has been. “Fabio’s Miracle”, again from *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, combines religious fear and a scepticism of the miraculous with belief. Like “Pillar Talk”, the source comes from real life and was the subject of media attention. The narrative closely reports the story of the apparently weeping Virgin Mary statue in the garden of Fabio Gregori in Civitavecchia, Italy which was the subject of much Catholic devotion, speculation, investigation and even legal wrangling after its “discovery” in 1995. The scientific tests on the statue revealed that the tears were blood, but male blood, and as such, science suggests that there is more trickery than magic in this miracle. Bryce’s poetic retelling, in the voice of Fabio, even quotes almost directly

from those involved; the line “[t]he blood of the virgin ought to be female, no?” (15) is very close to a comment made to the press by the sceptical local bishop, Monsignor Girolamo Grillo, “[o]bviously it was a hoax. The blood of Our Lady ought to have been female, no?” (Kirsta). In discussing this “miracle”, its spiritual positives (“This woman, she was cured today” [19]) and accompanying economic benefits (“We had nothing here / and prayed for bread. Now look around.” [21-22]), Bryce makes her own poem as mysterious as the provenance of the statue’s own mystery by concluding “I knelt and raised / my eyes to meet her raw, clawed face / her livid gaze. One of us smiled.” (30-32).

While “Fabio’s Miracle” is about the mystery/hoax binary in modern miracles, it is also a poem about escape and detachment. After the appearance of the weeping *La Madonnina*, Fabio and the whole town of Civitavecchia escaped obscurity and poverty and enjoyed the prosperity of being a site for spiritual pilgrimage, “The queue / of pilgrims snaked for miles” (29-30), in itself offering a sacred escape from sin for those queuing. However, in offering this escape, “Fabio’s Miracle” emphasises the restrictions it simultaneously applies, for there are guards at the chapel gate, and two keys to the case the statue is enclosed in, “one for the lawyer, one for the priest” (27), representing the dual powers of evidence and faith, two historically male-dominated power-value systems.

Elsewhere in *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, Faith plays an important part in “The Deposition”. In this poem, “the faithful” manhandle a body with awkward humour: they “are straightening the clothing / out of some sense of decency”, despite the fact that “the head [is] lolling” and the “cue ball” eyes are rolled upwards (1, 5-6, 8, 32). The title of the poem relates to Christ’s descent from the cross, immortalised in marble statues and paintings many times, but this religious and artistic heritage sits in uneasy contrast with the contemporariness of Bryce’s own

depiction. The “feet trail, leave behind a slipper”, the body is merely “inanimate meat and bone under gravity” (10, 12). The body, deposited in a bed, might be in an alcohol-induced stupor (although this is by no means explicit, “the faithful” are uncoordinated enough that they “fumble for a pulse, all fingers and thumbs” [2]). The magic of “The Deposition” is that the faithful “trust me to rise / and find my way back, lie down in the body, / wake to inhabit another of my lives” (15-7). The trick, then, is to muster enough skill to be more than one person at once. Like the dark and suicidal inferences of “The Trick” and “Pillar Talk”, the implication in “The Deposition” is that continuing existence itself is a performance worthy of praise.

Of all the poems about tricks and miracles in *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, it is the collection’s title poem which is the finest exploration of detachment. This poem relates the speaker’s independent performance of an Indian rope trick, in which traditionally

[t]he performer causes a rope to magically snake into the air and remain erect. His boy assistant then scurries up to the top of the rope and promptly disappears. The performer calls for the boy to come back, but he refuses to return. The performer [...] climbs the rope after the boy and also vanishes. (Lamont and Wiseman 175)

The lines sweep towards the breathless accomplishment of the trick, “There were walls, bells, passers-by: / then a rope, thrown, caught by the sky / and me, young, up and away” (9-11). The poem is quite clearly about escape, the “one-off trick / unique, unequalled since” (24), and by extension about detachment from a place. Usefully, the poem makes the location specific, “Guildhall Square, noon” (7), and this combined with the description of the rope as “a braid / eighteen summers long” (20), heavily indicates that the escapology being performed is autobiographical, creatively recounting the author’s move from Londonderry to London at eighteen years of age. Rendering this autobiographical dislocation as a performance “in front

of everyone” (8) and with “[a] crowd hushed, squinting eyes” (15) the poet uses the magic trick metaphor to re-tell the diasporic emigrant tale that has been a key theme of Irish literature for centuries. Thematically, applying a magical backdrop from an Indian performance tradition, rather than, say, a mythical Celtic story, Bryce proves that to tell of one’s own detachment from a place, the author must not necessarily replicate the tropes of that same place.¹³

The magic of the rope trick is a remarkable and highly visual spectacle. However, just as “Fabio’s Miracle” was indefinite about whether the weeping statue was an incident of divine intervention or an engineered hoax, “The Full Indian Rope Trick” is more ambiguous than it first appears. The final stanza recounts:

And what would I tell them
 given the chance?
 It was painful; it took years.
 I’m my own witness,
 guardian of the fact
 I’m still here. (25-30)

There is a suggestion in the final line that there is still some element of rootedness, that despite all the efforts to escape, the speaker is in some way “still here” (wherever here is), and so it is implied that the magic act has indeed been an act all along. This is reinforced by the choice of the rope trick context, for there is no concrete evidence that this trick has ever been achieved, and it has become a legend supported by various different hoaxes reported for over 100 years by the Western press (Lamont and Wiseman).

¹³ The replication of women in Irish myth, particularly as either the old hag, weeping mother, or distraught young wife, has been widely criticised in feminist readings of Irish literature. The result might, unsurprisingly, be that Irish myth is avoided as a subject in recent poetry.

Flynn's "The Amazing, Disappearing" from *These Days* offers an interesting point of comparison here. Like "The Full Indian Rope Trick", the title borrows some of the over the top language of magic to suggest the occurrence of something marvellous. The morning routine recounted, however, is one of the most unremarkable parts of any day, so dull it is described as "anaesthetic" (1). Initially it appears that the scene is a comic deflation of the title's anticipatory herald. However, Flynn's poems rarely renege on their promises, and so what actually vanishes is both the subject (the normality of this routine) and the poem itself (which might have been hinted at in the incomplete title):

'Mister' to the mail arriving misdirected
and mis-spelt; 'Hey!' to the winos
cooling their heels by the shopfronts and trafficlighs;
and even a 'Lady'
to the parent warning her headlong, crashing child:
'Watch out for that - ' (7-12)

If the morning salutations were a type of drum roll, concluding the poem on that line conjures a rather macabre ta-da to Flynn's trick. Just as at the end of Muldoon's 1980 collection title poem "Why Brownlee Left", the reader is almost as stupefied as the horses "shifting their weight" from foot to foot (Muldoon, *Poems* 13).

Flynn also turns to stage magic for the metaphor in "The Magician" from *These Days*. This poem finds the magician performing in the domestic space: the subject "turn[s] receipts to mâché, oxidize[s] keys, begin[s] to launder money" (7). In the final line, Flynn performs another "ta-da", noting "when you stretch your arm into the drum of the *Creda* / I think you might extract, as though from my sleeve, / A row of brightly coloured silk handkerchiefs", rendering the poet in some way a magician herself (12-4). As a textual manifestation of the magical and miraculous

occurrence, the poem becomes a performance of the act in itself. In the case of the disappearance poems (Bryce's "The Full Indian Rope Trick" and Flynn's "The Amazing, Disappearing"), this is especially clear: the poem is the reported evidence seen by the reader through the text's voice. This situates the reader as the audience, and the poem becomes a linguistic magic trick. Unsurprisingly, the poem-as-trick works best when the poet pulls a rabbit from the metaphorical hat, as in the closing lines of Flynn's "The Amazing, Disappearing" where the disappearance is immediate and arresting, or in Bryce's "Fabio's Miracle" when the mystery is solved (yet unresolved) in the smile of either the miraculous statue or the unscrupulous hoaxer.

Overall, the theme of magic tricks and miraculous hoaxes in this poetry suggest detachment because they question, through their implausibility, the notion of received truth, and blur the line between what is possible and what is impossible. The magician figure creates these spectacles beyond, or just at the edge of, common understanding. It is interesting to situate these performances in relation to the poet since, in Bryce's case, they are most often related in the first person (as in "Fabio's Miracle", "The Full Indian Rope Trick" and "The Deposition"). Magic and faith can also be seen as a popular method of escapism, and for observers the wonder of the display only exists if you are prepared to believe in a power beyond the individual. This particular aspect is emphasised since many of the "tricks" discussed here are either performed in seclusion (as in "The Trick" and "The Deposition"), or are acts of literal escape performed in public ("The Full Indian Rope Trick" and "The Amazing, Disappearing..."). In these poems, the dark side of the magical and miraculous is implied, not least because there is an ambiguity as to whether the magical and miraculous are in any way marvellous. Further, the performer puts themselves at some degree of risk in order to achieve their aim, and this is related in

some poems as a quasi-suicidal tendency (“The Trick” and “Pillar Talk”), especially when the performed magic is in the everyday process of living.

It is the same plainness of the everyday in which Flynn’s detachment poems can also be considered. The experience of travel, and especially air travel, which might at one time have been remarkable for its exoticism, is rendered as standard. Some of this might be due to Northern Ireland’s quite unique position as a nation with strong (albeit contested) commercial, political and cultural ties with Great Britain. Recent debates in the Northern Ireland Assembly urged the removal of air passenger duty on flights from Northern Ireland on the basis that “many people in Northern Ireland use air travel as an essential element of family and economic life — it is not a luxury” (Northern Ireland Assembly). The emphasis on travel in Irish studies is often on either travel writing about Ireland by visitors, or studies of the permanently displaced Irish living abroad. Michael Cronin recently observed that “commentary on travel writing by Irish writers travelling elsewhere in the modern period has been relatively sparse”, yet the immediacy and ease of modern travel and the creep of globalisation means that it can no longer be ignored (Cronin, “Minding Ourselves” 185). Following the growth of low cost airlines, the young, well-travelled, Irish were dubbed the “Ryanair Generation” by the writer Joseph O’Connor in 1991, and that label has remained prevalent in recent years (Roberts). Flynn indicates her detachment from Belfast and her membership of the Ryanair generation by the sheer volume of trips abroad that are recounted in “postcard” poems which record trips to “[a]nother budget destination: drain smells, / overarching skies...” (“The Human Fish” 2-3). This tendency began with “Holland” in *These Days*, but really dominates *Drives* with eleven location poems: “Monaco”, “Beausoleil”, “Barcelona”, “Rome”, “Paris”, “Berlin”, “L.A.”, “Washington”, “New York”, “Milos” and (closer to home) “Dungeness”.

“Holland” from *These Days* isn’t strictly a postcard poem like the poems in *Drives* due to its length; two short stanzas quite heavily separated by Roman numeral sequencing. It might be interesting as a prototype for Flynn’s travel writing style which she clearly develops, but it is actually an interesting exploration of detachment which emphasises the characteristics of Flynn’s mode. In the first stanza, there is a persistent rattle “from the heater in the daffodil shed”, which is where the subject now “continually pack[s] and unpack[s]” on some kind of plant production line (1-3). As the subject’s mind wanders, Larkin’s “If, my Darling” comes to mind, from which Flynn then effectively lifts the conclusion of this stanza, “was *this* what he meant? / This world unpicked by ‘meaning and meaning’s rebuttal” (6-7). As an inter-textual allusion to explore her sense of frustration in Holland, Larkin is particularly fitting as he was famously rather poorly disposed to foreign influences, quipping “I wouldn’t mind seeing China if I could come back the same day. I hate being abroad” in an *Observer* interview in 1979 (and disdainfully commenting in a 1964 interview “*Foreign poetry? No!*”) (Larkin, *Required* 55; Hamilton 77). In the second stanza of “Holland”, the poet is faced with a Dutch doctor with a “brunette handlebar moustache”, who is “sadly” prescribing Oxazypam, a drug used to treat anxiety and insomnia (8-9). Flynn makes light of the situation “(are these *cow* tranquillisers)”, before recounting that the doctor’s somewhat misguided advice; “taking your grime-stained urchin’s hand, he adds / ‘If I live in Belfast, I also perhaps feel bad’. / Now even your *neuroses* are unoriginal” (10, 12-14).

“Holland” is a poem about detachment in a number of ways. The subject is obviously far from home and working in a monotonous job. Faced with this, the subject detaches themselves from this situation and thinks of a poem (not William Wordsworth’s “Daffodils”, interestingly); “it’s insane that in the longest part of the

night / there's a moment to think of Larkin" (4-5). Finally, there is medicated detachment prescribed by doctor handlebar, and the detachment in self-prescribed drinking which it is implied is in some way inevitable and understandable; the doctor "giving a little shrug / at his own proposal to 'avoid these with alcohol'" (10-11). It is clear from this poem that working abroad is not naively glamorous as mockingly suggested in "The Furthest Distances I've Travelled" from the same collection which sardonically suggests that "[I]ike many folk", when the speaker "saddled a rucksack" they felt "Yes: This is how / to live." (1, 5-6).

There is nothing idealistic about Flynn's travelling persona. If anything, the attitude towards travel is sceptical, sardonic and exhausted, as if this is poetry written after spending too long waiting in the departure lounge for an inexplicably delayed budget flight. There are two poems from *Drives* which exemplify the weary-jetsetter's mentality well. "Airports" universalises the experiences which seem to be so generic, no matter how far flung the location. Airports are described as clinical; they "ring like swimming pools", are full of "sealed lounges", and "[I]ike hospitals, they are their own dominion" (2, 3, 6). The poem chants off the responses which are necessary, "[w]e have packed out bags ourselves, no one has tampered with them", and undergoes the obligatory security checks, "our keys and wallets drop from us like stones" (8, 10). These actions, like eating "dishes with plastic knives", are meant to be safety and security measures, but in the closing lines, the effect of these almost mechanical airport movements is shown to be negative; "when we return, the airports remain in us. / We rock, dry eyed, and we are not at home" (7, 16-7). The experience of travelling is so traumatic and destabilising in its familiar yet alien and sanitised processes that it detaches the subjects from their identity and their notion of home.

Whereas “Airports” suggests the difficulty of ever being at home after travelling through clinically “safe” airports with all their latent implications of contemporary terrorist threats, “Boxes” takes the customs procedures as the subject of its unenthused travel writing. Again, the scenario is generalised as the “grey-clad official” at the customs desk might be “by the outbound flights, or in some border town” (1, 2). It would seem, though, that this experience is in some way rooted in the autobiographical since the official is “like a feeding bird / on the worm of your struggling ... indigestible name” (3-4). The customs experience is exaggerated for comic effect as the official produced not only “reams” of forms, but other paraphernalia for identification including “bathroom scales, a measuring tape, / a fingerprint kit” (5-7). The questions on the forms are superfluously intrusive; “fields to be filled for your income! The length of your instep!” (10). As in “Airports”, “Boxes” makes use of the international linguistic markers of security and border control as the “tired and indignant” detainee cries “nothing to declare” (12, 11). In the boxes on the form, a small act of rebellion is committed as “[y]ou write ‘Yes Please’ for sex?; and ‘Northern Irish’ – ‘N. I.’ / Which also, privately, stands for ‘N[ot] I[nterested]’” (13-4). These closing lines make it quite clear that this apparently jovial situation comedy is in fact a withering interrogation of identity, identity markers, and identity controls.

Together, “Airports” and “Boxes” demonstrate some of the complexity at the heart of Flynn’s notion of home and national identity. They do indicate the effect of post-millennial global issues on the individual, in particular relating to the threat of terrorism on a previously unprecedented scale, and the resulting tightening of borders and seemingly excessive state intrusion into the metrics of identity. There is even a cursory nod in “Airports” to their complicity in global warming, as the “pale nostalgic sky / burns up its gases” (4). Almost paradoxically, for all Flynn’s attempts

to highlight the experience of the individual in a globalised world, she demonstrates how travel is disorienting and the process causes the individual to become estranged from it, and from any secure and safe notion of home or the self. This estrangement is self-preservationary and detaches the postmodern *flâneur* (*flâneuse?*) from the spaces she inhabits. Simultaneously, the generic and dull spaces invoked by the two poems, airports and customs desks, are border spaces that are detached from or sit at the gate to nations. By using sarcastic humour, the author sets the detached locations at a distance from the subject's lived experience, and so the detachment is doubled.

“Two Crossings” from *These Days* presents further observations of the travelling poet passing through an in-between space, recounting the experiences of “miserables” on a passenger ferry between Stranraer in Scotland and Belfast (22). An unusually long poem by Flynn’s standards in this collection, the twenty-four lines recount a sad litany of the trials of these travellers, who are all speaking with “one leviathan and clattering [Northern Irish] *accent*” (3). In the “airless” cabin, passengers “gloomily and gradually congregat[e]” in a diner which sells “chickenbones in batter in a basket” (5, 7, 8). Flynn is a shrewd observer of the less than appealing minutiae of such scenarios, and she also knows how to aggravate such dismal surroundings by introducing a “gigantic beery man / with a moustache” who is complaining about missing a free drink; “if you don’t complain about nuthin, / nuthin is ever done” (9, 12-3). If this crossing were not quite grotesque enough, the speaker recalls an earlier crossing “when a woman in a wheelchair / was carried back and forth by the boat’s rocking / for the length of a corridor between two glass doors”(14-6). In the final stanza, the mess is cleared up, the passengers thank the waitress and “the boat approaches harbour and home” (24). Although, in this case, the experience of travelling is made worse by the passengers as well as the surroundings, just as in “Airports” and “Boxes”, Flynn’s poems present a sardonic,

unsettled and unwilling traveller and she presents nothing to enlighten the misfortunate journey.

In the flippant tone of these poems, as well as their unappealing scenarios, Flynn subverts the common literary trope of fleeing Ireland for a higher purpose or, in exile, to come to a better understanding of Ireland as homeland. This idealistic notion is best and most popularly recognised at the end of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) when the young and melodramatic Stephen Dedalus comes to see he must leave to realise his artistic potential:

Away then: it is time to go. A voice spoke softly to Stephen's lonely heart, bidding him go and telling him that his friendship was coming to an end. Yes; he would go. He could not strive against another. He knew his part.
(267)

The *émigré* figure continues to appear with renewed vigour in contemporary Irish historical fiction (such as Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn* [2009] or Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* [2009]). Flynn's contemporary travelogues are certainly not prey to the same (often tainted) idealism of the Irish homestead, or even the appealing glamour of the destination. One reason for this is that her works are simply too contemporary to indulge in nostalgia, but more importantly, while travel does destabilise the notion of home, Flynn ultimately does always return. If there is homesickness, it might be described as two dimensional since she is partly sick of being away, but also sick of coming home. "Two Crossings" emphasises this latter aspect especially, since it might have described a journey there and back, but it doesn't, it describes two crossings from Scotland to Belfast; a double returning.

Flynn's persona in these poems is more the explorer than strictly an Irish exile, and this is particularly clear in the shorter travel poems from *Drives*. These are described in the collection's cover copy as "elliptical postcard[s] home to herself", and ranging between eight and twelve lines, they rely on each other for their

disjointed impact. The immediacy and directness of the experiences recounted in these poems is emphasised by the titles which are simply the names of the cities being reported upon. Within the individual poems, clustered together in twos and threes in the collection, the same kind of unforgiving observational tone is utilised to strongly evoke the speaker's opinion of the location. "Beausoleil" "is less a town; which is more a few roads stacked / on the suicide skid from a cliff to the sea" (5-6). "Barcelona" is "a glittering slagheap in the sun; / a forest of upright masts, the deserted marina" (8-9). "Berlin" is a city "where the past / recent and awful, brick and bullet-hole / stands on street corners", and perhaps predictably, recalls Belfast's "peace walls" (7-9, 10). Flynn is against exoticism, and in favour of the run-down reality of tourist destinations.

Often, the scrutiny of the locations in the postcard poems presents a very abrasive critique. "Rome" comes off particularly badly, for the speaker finds they "can not find Rome. There is too much *Rome* in Rome." (5). "New York" too is a victim of its own success, for this poem is a list of "several things we did not want to find in New York", and evidently did, including "the queue for the iPhone™ outside the Apple Shop / not no smoke in the bars, not no *real* New York Poets' school" (6-7). The speaker herself is not immune to the critical appraisal of each scenario, for often the eagerness and inexperience of the traveller is highlighted and lampooned. In "Paris", the student tourists are compared to the Parisian student revolutionaries, but it is not a sincere comparison for they are "leisured and Euro-ed", the "skilled voyeurs" of a bohemian cultural tourism which includes a "feast" in the cemetery on "Jim Morrison and Wilde – look! – oeuvre to oeuvre." (2, 7, 8). The speaker of "Rome" may be exasperated, but they still have unrealistic expectations, "Rome wasn't built in a day. "Rome? / We will take the lot in one short afternoon." (1-2). Raphael Ingelbien recently observed that this kind of tourism represents "an Irish

embrace of modern capitalism” which created and necessitated cheap air travel firms such as Ryanair, but it seems that for Flynn this is a self-conscious and uneasy embrace, and her work often seems to parody this view of tourist capitalism (117).

These accounts are largely emotionless but subjective reports of the actions of the subject as they move around the various tourist hotspots. Flynn’s tourist persona seeks exploratory engagement with these locations, but as the persona often finds they do not meet hyped expectations, the poems express a detachment from the idealism promoted by the travel industry. This might be *flâneur*-esque, if it wasn’t for the fact that the engagement is all at the showy surface level of museums, hotels, seafronts and gift shops selling “this postcard of the Pantheon / (in Rome!), and also this magnet of the Colosseum.” (Flynn, “Rome” 3-4). Cronin discusses how globalisation and our familiarity with viewing the earth as a global entity can cause such abstraction:

In the movement towards the modern, a practical sensory engagement with the world underpinned by the spherical paradigm is supplanted by a regimen of detachment and control. As the images of the globe proliferate [...] the danger is that these images themselves distort our relationship to our physical and cultural environment by continually situating us at a distance, by abstracting and subtracting us from our local attachments and responsibilities. (Cronin, “Afterword” 297)

Flynn’s travel writing similarly demonstrates not just her detachment from the locations she describes, but ultimately her detachment from every place, including “home”. The explorer persona thus makes her not strictly the traditional Irish exile seen in earlier literature, but a more fully globalised exile, the everywhere exile.

Bryce’s poem “Wish You Were” from *The Heel of Bernadette* offers an interesting parallel to Flynn’s postcard poems because the title (which is completed by enjambling into the first word of the first line, “Here”) is an archetypal postcard message. Bryce’s poem is an expression of a rooted detachment from a loved one

who is travelling, rather than detachment experienced by the traveller. This separation is aggravated by the paraphernalia of travel; “Here, airplanes leaving / Heathrow scare this house / to trembling” and “Your postcards / land in my hall like meteorites” (4-6, 11-12). Like many of Bryce’s love poems (addressed later in this thesis), the speaker’s intimacy is interrupted by distance.

Bryce’s “Wish You Were” also hints at common ground shared with Flynn’s and Morrissey’s work. Their work makes repeated references to planes; crossing the sky, taking off, landing, from the passenger’s view and observed from the ground. For Bryce in “Wish You Were”, the planes from Heathrow are so intrusively loud that their passing “scare[s] the house” (5). In “Stars”, grouped closely with “Wish You Were” and other poems about long distance desire, the difference between the speaker and their muse is amplified by the fact that “constellations overwhelm” while “Here, the skies have taken cloud cover. / For us, one helicopter star” (9, 11-2).

For Flynn too, the vision of a plane in the sky is an image which is deployed on several different occasions. The effect is more varied than when seen in Bryce’s work where it primarily represents the vast distances between lovers. For example in “Airports” from *Drives*, the planes above reinforce the disorienting unnaturalness of the scene as they are “like a child’s mobile, hung at random” (5). For the child playing in the garden in “A Plane” from *Profit and Loss*, the image from the title indicates a child’s formation of sensory recollection as “the bright fleck of a plane” is reflected back to the child through a puddle as it is “making its way across the sky’s blue arc / into the beginning of a memory” (6-8). Elsewhere in *Drives*, the planes indicate place, for example in “Leaving Belfast” (“[t]he planes fly so low over the houses in the east / their undercarriages seem like the stomachs of giant

birds” [1-2]) and “Sky Boats” (“[a]n aeroplane caught in the branches of a tree, / struggling over North Belfast’s Waterworks, / makes for the open water of the sky.” [1-3]). Both of these poems situate the landscape of East and North Belfast in dialogue with the planes which link them with the world beyond. Poems of landscape tend to anchor with landmarks, but in using planes as markers of the landscape Flynn indicates how inordinately difficult it is in the contemporary world to describe places since they can be transitory and constantly connected to movement. In this sense, Flynn’s use of the Waterworks is interesting, since the Waterworks is now a public park and not part of the water services industry; its name does not effectively belie its current use. As a marker, this reference point has shifted like a plane.

This use of the airplane as a way of futilely anchoring to a shifting world is used in another landscape in “Joe and Una’s Boat” from *Drives*. The speaker recalls:

We are sitting on the deck
of your moored three-bedroom boat
watching the planes criss-cross
over Canary Wharf

with its great cranes, like darts
in the sky’s continuum
that stitch you to the ghost
of the ghost of your home town. (1-8)

The poem’s length and syntax indicates its transience; it is quoted here in its entirety and it is a single sentence. The planes over Canary Wharf are an indication of the shifting nature and development of London’s cityscape, viewed from a property described as a “moored three-bedroom boat” which could, it is implied, be easily set adrift. The planes and cranes which populate the skyline recall “the ghost / of the

ghost” (7-8) of a home town; a reference to the airspace of Northern Ireland which facilitates the nation’s relationship with Britain and beyond, and perhaps to Belfast, where the cranes from the Harland and Wolff ship yard dominate the skyline as “ghosts” of the city’s once thriving industry.

Morrissey also indirectly uses the view of airplanes in a poem from *The State of the Prisons*. The title, “Pilots”, might suggest the centrality of air travel theme (just as “Flight” might five pages before). However, the theme is actually pilot whales, and so the topic is as unexpected as the arrival of the whales to Belfast Lough in the poem. The unanticipated arrival of the whales is paralleled in the first stanza with a quite extensive description of the arrival of flights coming in to Belfast City Airport (the same destination as the “giant birds” of Flynn’s “Leaving Belfast”):

It was black as the slick-stunned coast of Kuwait
over Belfast Lough when the whales came up
(bar the eyelights of aeroplanes, angling into the airport
out of the east, like Venus on a kitesring being reeled
to earth). (1-5)

This description is notable both for its relative length given that it is set out as parenthetical to the main topic, and for the density of its confused imagery which suggests at once eyes, Venus, a kite, and even fishing (“angling” and “reeled”). While the aeroplanes are relatively unimportant to the poem as a whole, they still serve as an icon worth a fairly extensive tangent in the opening lines.

If planes indicate transience, they are at least solid and concrete forms. The contrail (vapour trail) which often follows a plane under certain atmospheric conditions is yet another variation of the air travel theme addressed in the poetry which indicates detachment from locale (or locales’ detachment from the self), and

restates again the ephemeral nature of the contemporary life experienced in this poetry. For Flynn, vapour trails are found in “New York”, the postcard poem from *Drives* which lists the things the speaker did not want to find in New York; “[n]ot the vapour trails which ribbon the city’s sky” (5). These ribbons understandably frustrate a holidaying voice because they are a constant reminder of the limited time permitted for the visit, a signifier of the return. However, within post-millennial New York, the trails of planes more prominently offer a chilling reminder of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and each one could now potentially be the bringer of another atrocity. Morrissey titles a poem in *The State of the Prisons* “Contrail”, and uses the image to describe an insomniac anxiety of barrenness, “childlessness, stretching out into the ether // like a plane” (9-10). The orphaning of the final three words from the stanza above emphasises the disconnection of the image from the subject, and the lack of finalising punctuation also suggests the dissipating hopes and thus reinforces the apprehension that is central to the poem.

Even in instances where planes are experienced in their most physical form, when the poet speaker is on board, air travel is riddled with problematic relationships to the self and the land. Interestingly, Bryce’s air travel is to Northern Ireland (just as Flynn’s “Two Crossings” presents the dual return to Belfast). “+” from *The Full Indian Rope Trick* presents the passenger’s view of “the black shadow of our plane / free[ing] itself from the undercarriage” as they depart at one side, before the shadow “pencilled” on the runway below grows “larger under Irish rain” again (2-3, 19-20). Bryce deploys the shadows viewed from the air again in “When I Land in Northern Ireland” from *Self-Portrait in the Dark*, focusing on “Stratus shadows darkening the crops / when coming in to land, / coming in to land.” (4-6). This time they serve to draw attention to the other kinds of metaphorical shadows overhanging the Northern Irish landscape.

Morrissey's "Returning from Arizona" from *Through the Square Window* presents yet another vision of a Northern Irish homecoming by plane. In this piece, the descending plane is returning from the "kiln-fired punishment" of Arizona's intemperate August climate to "the now-usual August deluge of these islands" (1, 8). From the air, the change is quite striking:

Rain smears the windows. Rivers have overshot
 their mark and fields
 for miles around the airport
 sport pewter lakes. A heron stands by a cattle shed. (9-12)

The return should be a relief, but "[g]etting too much of what you've acutely missed / too suddenly" causes the speaker to feel wary of her homeland (13-4). The kind of wariness suggested is so strikingly corporeal that it suggests that the poem that is ostensibly about returning is really about the psychological impact of pregnancy:

like longing for weeks to be sick
 to prove the baby's taken,
 then failing to find a tonic
 for another being's foothold in your person. (17-20)

The returning, the change in climate, and the flight and descent are really only metaphors through which this final simile can be realised.

It is clear that there are a variety of different perspectives suggested by the use of flight and travel by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey. Further, even within an individual poet's work, the theme is used in diverse ways for distinctive effects. In particular, Flynn illuminates this well because her poems feature planes from so many different perspectives, whether they are bringing her to a destination city, flying over Belfast, viewed from the airport lounge or present only in their

dissipating vapour trails. While each does, in their own way, present different issues surrounding the individuals' place in a globalised world with economised air travel, the prevalence of this theme across their combined opuses certainly indicates that this is which is central to their understanding of the contemporary world through poetry. Whether the use of travel and flight in these poems indicates the distance between lovers as is the case in Bryce's poetry, leads into female concerns with barrenness or pregnancy as in Morrissey's work, or indicate the shifting nature of various cityscapes and the trials of individuality in a globalised world as evidenced across Flynn's work, it seems that a unifying theme is how travel and flight express a form of detachment and dislocation in their exploratory basis. Through the poetic rendering of travel experiences, or the use of travel as an image or symbol in poetry, the poetry indicates how the poets can situate themselves in the world through their considerations of their distances across it. This becomes more firmly a theme of detachment as the travel poems often explore the ambiguity of the individual figure, and specifically a highly ambivalent relationship to travel, and most especially the travel to and above Northern Ireland. This ambivalence is spurred by the paradoxical uncertainty prompted by supposed rootedness: this is provoked by the intermediateness suggested best by Morrissey's collection title *Between Here and There*, where "Here" is Northern Ireland and the current location of the speaker, and "There" is somewhere beyond.

As in the travel and flight poems discussed above, it is the point of view, the position of the observer and how this relates to the overall effect of the poem, which can be found to be the compelling element of detachment in Morrissey's work. The most notable recurring detachment mechanism is the use of windows or lenses as a transparent filter and barrier. As this chapter shall go on to demonstrate, a great many of Morrissey's subjects are situated behind windows, with the object of the

poem's narrative or description placed at the other side of the glass. More recent poems extrapolate, exploring photography and cinematography and its relationship with sight and understanding. The very title of *Parallax*, according to the collection's epigraph, relates to the "Apparent displacement, or difference in the apparent position, of an object caused by actual change (or difference) of position of the point of observation" (9). Thus, as each of the cases considered here indicate, poetry is an instance of seeing and it is through the apparent displacement of glass barriers that the poem occurs.

For example, in Morrissey's driving poems, the outward look sustains the poems through the image it sees, and the individual's creative response to it. This is striking in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" from *There was Fire in Vancouver* where the speaker sees the annual loyalist celebrations, preparations for the Twelfth of July bonfires, through the taxi window on her return. The view is so transfixing she "want[s] the driver to drive ten times around the diamond. / I've been gone too long - / I want to stare and stare" (2-4). It is this sight that prompts the thoughts of the poem's title which relate to the poet's ambiguous national identity in a nation where ambiguity is not commonplace. She recalls being told not to use a UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) run taxi rank because her name is Catholic, yet her school uniform was "like having *Protestant* slapped across your back" (24). These recalled instances, as in Flynn's experience of travel, reinforce the indistinctness of the speaker's identity as she is sitting in the back of a taxi viewing her home from a distance; she is in some way local, but is being driven around, even guided, by a man with a more full understanding of the landscape. Interestingly, the final image of this poem is of the speaker being the victim of an imagined sectarian attack for some identity-related transgression; an attack featuring the "sudden shards" of glass bottles thrown at her head (26).

A later poem, “Night Drive in Four Metaphors” from *Between Here and There*, can be read as a companion piece to “Thoughts in a Black Taxi”. It too recalls being driven, in this case by a woman unknown to the speaker. While in the taxi poem, the speaker wants the driver to continue in circles, in “Night Drive in Four Metaphors”, the speaker wants the driver “never to stop”, although the landscape viewed is of Japanese rice fields rather than Northern Irish bonfires (1). Further, there is a division between the speaker and a travelling companion; in this case it is not a physical screen which divides, but a vast communicative barrier represented by “how the stars are split between my window and yours” (14). The later poem does not address instances of identity crisis, but instead explores an imaginative drive. Each of the four stanzas presents the literal view as seen from the window, “the narrowest roads / that are straight as the line through the kanji for ‘centre’” and “flats for Brazilian factory workers [which] have shirts hung out on balconies to dry” (3, 9), and then concludes with the metaphor spurred by this scene. The metaphors are consciously set out as separate products as their difference is clearly rendered typographically through the use of italics as well as through their metaphorical language, as in “*The eye of an animal skewered and shown on its side*” and “*The buildings are ships on a wind sea trying to sail*” (4, 12). Ultimately, the descriptions of the landscape as seen from the vehicle lead towards the description of the barrier between the people in the car in the final metaphor. Just as with the landscape, the speaker describes the companion as a part of the scene, “you beside me with your hair overgrown watching the other side of the world” (13), but due to the detachment between them finds metaphorical expression a more appropriate communicative language: “*Two worlds split open to each other, stars spilling from each.*” (16).

While these two poems demonstrate the creative possibilities that come from viewing scenes through the windows of a vehicle, “Driving Alone on a Snowy Evening” from *The State of the Prisons* presents an interesting counterpoint. Clearly and openly modelled on Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”, Morrissey not only draws on that poem’s title, scenario, setting and poetic form, but also on the suicidal subtext. Instead of the speaker looking out of car window, in the opening stanza they decide that there is nothing to live for and so “turn the urgent wipers off / And watch the screen sift up with snow” (3-4). While Frost’s poem is about stopping, Morrissey’s is about not stopping as “I do not brake. / The choice of crash I leave to fate” (9-10). More so than the previous two poems, this example demonstrates the detachment at the heart of Morrissey’s use of windows: internal struggles are often projected through the windows, as a means of addressing them more objectively and creatively. In the extremity of this scenario, the mental distress has become so severe that the view through the window is obscured in an (admittedly somewhat ambivalent and ultimately unsuccessful) suicide attempt.

The journeying aspect of these three poems connects them with the earlier reading of the travel detachment theme. In the same way, a consideration of speaker points of view which concentrates specifically on the role of windows could easily have considered the flight poems such as Morrissey’s “Returning from Arizona” (which has undeniable parallels with “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” in the idea of disconnection to Northern Ireland) or Bryce’s “+”. However, other poems can illuminate this point but take this reading in new directions. The stasis of “Saturday” from *There was Fire in Vancouver*, for instance, has quite a different impact to the movement of the travel poems. The first person speaker is still looking out through a window, but they are further distanced from the outside action by net curtains which obscure but do not fully block. Looking out to “Watch kids on the street” and see

“Buses pass each way” seems at first commonplace, even mundane, until an ambulance arrives and “forces through” (3, 5, 8). The arrival of the ambulance is like a pulling back of the net curtains of the narrative which previously limited our understanding of the situation, and suddenly the outward look becomes not a voyeuristic one, but the necessary action of a helpless individual at a time of medical emergency.

Bryce’s “Vertical Blinds” from *Self-Portrait in the Dark* presents a similar scenario to Morrissey’s “Saturday”; a speaker stands at the living-room window looking out through the vertical blinds. Thematically, the poem is closer to Morrissey’s car window poems since looking out of the blinds is a metaphorical spur to the imagination:

they are sails	of ships
a fleet	that will lift
carry her	far
from all	of this.(23-26)

However, the key to “Vertical Blinds” is the switching, the opening and closing which admits or refuses light. Like “Driving Alone on a Snowy Evening”, then, there is also a negativity to insularity behind the window:

But they change	tack
bearing	her back
to the masked	gloom
of a living-	room. (26-9)

In quoting extensively from this poem, the aim has been to demonstrate how the format recreates the context and reveals a way to view the poem itself in the manner of concrete poetry wherein the structure belies the content. Spread across two pages, with such glaring gaps within the lines, the poem looks like four vertical blinds, and

this fact is as important to the meaning as the use of rhyme and verbal effects, as the graphical form is a non-verbal communication achieved through looking. If the poem's text is the blinds, then the page itself is the window, and in seeking the meaning of this poem and its form, the act of reading places the reader as the subject of the poem, looking out or blocking in.

The centrality of windows as a metaphorical and literal object in Morrissey's work is becoming increasingly obvious. A crude survey reveals that "window" or "windows" is used twenty-nine times across twenty poems from her five collections, which is compelling evidence of their importance, without even considering the more oblique references (for example "screen" in "Driving Alone on a Snowy Evening", "net curtains" in "Saturday" or "against the glass" in "Shostakovich"). When a window is used in Morrissey's poetry, it is often in this continual revisiting and re-rendering of a detached point of view. This is highlighted in its use in two collection title poems, "There Was Fire in Vancouver" and "Through the Square Window". The use of this theme in these title poems validates its importance not just to understanding the individual poem, but to the collection as a whole.¹⁴

"There was Fire in Vancouver" is one of the poems which makes a more oblique reference to windows. The term is not used, but the voice recalls "we leaned out into the night" to view a city fire, which does certainly imply that there was something to lean out of (2). To further support this, the view point from which the scene is relayed seems elevated for the description is distanced and refers to streets as if seen in a map; they see that the fire has "Set light to the East End. / It had taken

¹⁴ As already mentioned, the title *Parallax* too relates to displacement and view. The title poem "The State of the Prisons" also relates to an internal/external binary, although it uses imprisonment rather than glass. "Between Here and There", another title poem, likewise suggests that the point of view, the position between a here and a there, is the collection's overarching theme.

stand on Commercial Avenue”, and wonder if it would get as far as “the Ginsberg Teahouse in Chinatown” (some 10 kilometres from the East End) (3-4, 8). The poem draws together the themes of Morrissey’s first collection in its movement from seeing to understanding through imagining, and it is only through the detached observation point, the place they can lean out from without fully leaving its safety, that this can be achieved.

The later collection title poem also represents the book’s broader concerns; Batchelor notes that “Through the Square Window” “subtly draws together the book’s motifs – children and the dead, clouds and water, windows and witnesses – while the observing eye remains as precise as ever”. As might be evident from the title itself, the window is the key and most important motif through which these others are realised. The title itself alludes to a section of the BBC children’s television programme *Play School* (1964-1988) which invited viewers to see which shape of window would be chosen to see a film about the outside world through that day. This is a nod to childhood, and an invitation for an outward view. In the poem, “the dead” appear in a dream “to wash the windows of my house” and are unnerving as the sound of their cleaning is a “sluicing and battering and paring back of glass” (1, 2, 12). They are all the more threatening as the speaker’s child is sleeping and she wonders “if it’s my son they’re after” (8). This is quite an unusual moment in Morrissey’s work, not least because she chooses the less thrilling “wonder” over stronger and more evocative choices such as “fear” (7). For the first time in Morrissey’s work there is a feeling that the individual inside is the observed rather than the observing. This is heightened by the statement “There are no blinds to shut them out with”, and the irregularity of the description of the windows as “this shining exterior...” (3, 13) (how, after all, can the interior speaker see this to describe it?). The maternal aspect is heightened by the only dead figure to be singled

out for description; “One blue boy holds a rag in his teeth / between the panes like a conjuror” (14-5). This line conjoins the window theme with childhood and death as there is a linguistic suggestion of “pain” though “panes” emphasised by the (baby) blue, still born, nature of the boy. Here, as in other poems, Morrissey uses positioning behind glass as a metaphor for pregnancy, and passing through glass as a metaphor for birth. The thematic melding continues when the dead leave and the view from the cleaned windows is so overwhelming it causes a “density in the room I find it difficult to breathe in”: the horizon, the clouds, the water, and the land are so overwhelming they wake the speaker from this nightmare (21).

“Window” is used most interestingly in the sestina form in “Telegraph” from *Through the Square Window* where it is one of the repeating six end-words. The poem is a harrowing tale of abuse, and this tragic narrative is played out behind the window. In the first stanza, a boy sees his brothers going to war from the front window. His brothers are killed, and in the displaced fault and anguish, his mother punishes him for wetting the bed by making him “parade” around the house “wrapped in a steaming sheet, to the frame of a backlit window” (10-1). The relationship with war to the first instance of abuse brings the notion of public and private into sharp focus. The boy is accused of other misdemeanours, including “[m]ooning by the window” (15), and when he gets the chance, a window of opportunity, he takes it, runs away and marries in another state. However, his new marital home is so like the home in which he was abused, down to the “[t]wo small windows” (32), that is clearly doesn’t have a liberating effect. The closing envoi ties together all the six end-words (most of which are the same unifying themes as “Through the Square Window”) with a question of culpability for abuse: “Whose fault that for twelve years afterwards in that house / a man slipped into the room of a child, kept by from the tiny window, / and nightly undid what only the hawk moths

witnessed?” (36-9). Ultimately, this poem functions as a window onto two generations of abuse and two generations of abusers, and it is through this perspective that we learn how blame can be complicated by outside factors.

Other poems featuring windows explicitly from Morrissey’s first collection *There was Fire in Vancouver* present windows as a more reassuringly homely interaction, a protective force. “A Week of Rain”, for example, situates an addressee “glued to the window in your room”, taking comfort in the rain outside which recalls winters in “those secluded Big Houses in Ireland” (3, 6). The view of the rain, and the noise of it falling, “by breaking silence, brings it home” (4). “The Fort Maker”, which sits on the adjacent page in the collection, also addresses the window as a key element in creating a notion of homeliness and safety. In this, a man is so in awe of the land that he builds on a hill and is so taken by the view “[h]is house became a circle of windows” (9). The fort is a place of safety from invasion, but strife is “not the reason” for this fort, but love (4). The windows allow the property to be more in harmony with the landscape that invited its building in the first place.

The relationship between windows and creative and poetic detachment is most clearly drawn attention to in *There was Fire in Vancouver* in “To Look Out Once from High Windows”, which invokes Larkin’s life and work. The poem recollects iconic images from Larkin’s work, “railway lines, washing lines, sex on billboards”, and draws on biographical aspects too, noting how he chose to “pass all the marriages, births, and seaside hols by” (1, 8). It is, in fact, a mesh of Larkin’s poetry and biography, since the two are presented as indistinct; Morrissey considers how Larkin’s bachelor status put him on “an express train” (9), drawing on the image in his poem “The Whitsun Weddings” of married couples getting on at each

stop on a train journey. The concluding stanza in particular draws on Larkin's loss of creativity after the publication of his final collection *High Windows* (1974):

To look out once from High Windows was to fly
 Over the walls you saw in life, in life's renunciation
 And beyond, to accept that endlessness might mean resolution.
 All words broke there. You stopped your various desolations colliding
 By just looking up.

By Morrissey's reckoning, then, Larkin's detachment from poetry was also his detachment from depression. In writing this as a biographical poem, she takes the image from his own work and gives his life the resolution he himself offers the disillusioned speaker of "High Windows":

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
 The sun-comprehending glass,
 And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
 Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless. (Larkin, *Collected* 17-20)

By drawing so purposefully on "High Windows", even capitalising the title in her poem to make the allusion amply resonant, this poem demonstrates Morrissey's relative ease in combining the biography and poetry of a key figure in modern literature. Larkin's time working at Queen's University, Belfast also provides a Northern Irish connection.¹⁵ The derivative use of the "high windows" image in this context shows how Morrissey is interested in the possibilities and limitations of windows; even when they offer the same view, she presents it in a different way.

¹⁵ Graham Chesters recalls, Larkin "relished the time he lived in his attic rooms in Elmwood Avenue [...] Belfast gave him the best writing conditions he had ever had" ("Philip Larkin...", *Belfast Telegraph*). It is worth noting that at the time Morrissey's "High Windows" was written, she was not working at Queen's University, Belfast.

This particular derivation and evocation is explored further in “The High Window” from *Parallax* which offers a “spin-off; / a spoof in style, but from the blonde’s perspective” (2-3). The title in this case evokes Morrissey’s prior engagement with Larkin, but it is clear from the opening that it is a spin-off of Raymond Chandler’s 1942 novel of the same name. Barbara Everett argues for Larkin’s link to Chandler: “It is hard to believe that he hadn’t read, at some time between its first British publication in 1943 and the writing of ‘High Windows’ in 1967, a book by the writer regarded by many as the American master of the form: Raymond Chandler’s *The High Window*. Larkin may well have retained not merely the title of this very sophisticated thriller but the form of its action” (13). In this later poem, Morrissey revisits Larkin’s windows by way of his apparent source, and in doing so produces a creative work which goes beyond his own work as a source.

Morrissey’s notion of detachment is not only explored through poems featuring windows. It is also variously considered through the use of other kinds of transparent dividers such as glass screens, filters and lenses. Poems explore the cinematographer’s view, the documentarian’s detachment, the practice of stopping one image in time, which is paralleled with poetry’s imagistic qualities. “A Lie”, “The Mutoscope” and “The Doctors” from *Parallax*, and “Electric Edwardians” from *Through the Square Window*, all indicate a preoccupation with the historical development and stasis of photographic practice. For the “Electric Edwardians”, the fairground bioscope offered a chance to have a futuristic experience while simultaneously being preserved in a historical moment; “*Come and see yourselves on the screen as living history!*” (6). The eyes of these Edwardians come from “across the lens’s promise” (36), but the meaning and accuracy of an image can be sullied by time or the human hand: in “Electric Edwardians” an image perishes when “the cellulose nitrate stock [is] rubbed off” (42); in “The Doctors” an

oppressive state authorised hand “desecrat[es] photographs” (2); and in “A Lie” the arrogance with which each generation regards their technological advancement in comparison with previous generations promotes the view that “the different people who lived in sepia” were somehow dissimilar in their day-to-day lives (2). “The Mutoscope”, an “intimate machine” with its “through-the-keyhole, what-the-butler-saw // perspective” proves otherwise (9, 12-3). The 800 photographs which are frames in a crude short film may be Victorian and their scenes and morality distant, but the impulse to observe “their having-been-written onto light” perseveres (26).

In an earlier poem, “Forty Lengths” from *The State of the Prisons*, a swimmer puts on goggles which change their view from being one of “a catch of beleaguered heads” above the water, to seeing “how solidly we occur underwater” (1, 7). In the use of goggles as the changing filter, the kind of framing which in other poems is seen as a window or a camera lens, is brought into much closer proximity to the eyes and as a result the focus of the poem as a textual view-point is revealed. In this work too, the water itself is a kind of filter, because the goggles mean that above the water “the world’s a blur” whereas below things are clearer (8). Seeing through these two transparent filters, the speaker is able to more accurately describe what swimmers look like, saying “We do not resembles [sic] fishes, so much as frogs / or the diving waterboatman with his fringed hind legs” (11-12). The speaker also shows an awareness of the kind of conventional suggestions commonly made about swimming, consciously and teasingly saying “I find myself back – to the womb, / most obviously”, before offering a more unique take on the scenario by recalling a childhood dream of “wishboning through the stratosphere” (13-4, 18).

While the comparison to swimming and the womb is a most obvious one, Morrissey’s more common metaphor for maternity and birth is much less so. As

noted earlier of “Through the Square Window”, Morrissey often draws on glass in her writing about childbirth; in that poem a “blue boy” is behind the window, evoking the image of a stillborn baby. The “My Grandmother through Glass” sequence from *There was Fire in Vancouver* is the most convincing source for this recurring trope, drawing on this image several times throughout. In the opening section, it is “spirit-children” who her grandmother never had who are still behind the glass “faces pushed against that line for years. / Hoping. Misting the glass. Dying to be born” (2, 3-4). It is this image in particular that Morrissey seems to be evoking again in “Through the Square Window”, although this metaphor is carried through the rest of the poem. In the second part, one of these possible children “mastered the art of negotiating glass” (14) and is called Rosemary “*for remembrance*” of the lost children ([evocative of lines from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*]14, 19). The relation between birth and death as beyond the glass which is first set out in the Hugo Gloor epigraph (“*Birth and death are doors: you go out through one / And come back in through the other.*”) is then restated in the sixth part which considers that death is a going “through the glass and into the arms / Of the children who cried to break into your body” (53-4). The idea of the foetal possibility in “a land of glass” is finally realised in the final section which finds scant comfort in the knowledge that “sometime, way back, // Both of us were moon-eyed children / Who played together in the land of glass” (68-70).

In “Found Architecture” from *Through the Square Window* the unborn child is also behind glass, although in this case it is not metaphorical but the literal glass of the ultrasound machine. “From blood and the body’s / inconsolable hunger I have been my own kaleidoscope -”, the speaker says, when faced with the image “like mug-shot photographs from a machine” (42-3, 36). The ultrasound imaging of the unborn child also provides creative stimulus for Flynn in “Two Ways of Looking at

an Ultrasound Scan” from *Profit and Loss*. In this poem the image is related as if on television; they “adjust the set” and it “appears / live! *Via satellite!*” (7, 10). In the second section the televisual aspect is again drawn upon as the womb becomes part of a map in a weather forecast; there are areas of high pressure and “suddenly, I’m Iceland” (20).¹⁶ The ultrasound scan is another example of seeing birth through glass, and as a window it is unusual as it offers not a way of looking out (as seen in nearly every other window poem), but a way of looking within. In this reversal of the window point of view, it should offer a way, not of detaching the speaker from the experience as seen in the other poems, but instead a way of allowing the speaker to form some attachment to the foetus in the womb. However, in both these ultrasound poems, the speaker seems unable to emotionally engage with the image of their own body projected on the screen. For Morrissey in “Found Architecture”, the image is as emotionless as a “mug-shot”, and as beautiful but unrecognisable as something kaleidoscopic (36, 41). Flynn is even more direct, admitting that as “the dust settles” on the image she can make out “*nothing. / Nothing at all.*” (14-5).

There is often something ethereal in Morrissey’s use of windows, lenses or glass as a distancing mechanism. In considering how it is used in the maternity poems “My Grandmother through Glass”, “Found Architecture” and “Through the Square Window”, we find an example of how Morrissey uses glass as a gateway from and to the other world. In the “My Grandmother through Glass” sequence, Morrissey is setting up a belief system wherein there is a pre- and post-consciousness world, populated at once with both the unborn “spirit-children” and the dead, which is divided from the living by glass. This same division is seen in

¹⁶ Similarly, in Muldoon’s “The Sonogram” from *The Annals of Chile* (1994), the sonogram of his wife’s womb “resembled nothing so much / as a satellite map of Ireland” (3-4).

“Through the Square Window”, when the interior of the building is populated by the living and beyond the windows is the world of the dead. Modern technology allows the living to see the world behind glass through the ultrasound, but the world behind the glass is still kaleidoscopically other.

The division between Morrissey’s conception of a spiritual world and the living, conscious world is just one way in which the window trope is used across this work. In other poems, the window represents the detachment from a notion of national identity or home, as in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” and “Returning from Arizona”. Elsewhere, it allows for a nostalgic memory of home when apart from it, as in “A Week of Rain”, or a view through the lens of past figures captured indefinitely on film as in “Electric Edwardians” and “The Mutoscope”. A window can be a stimulating and creative frame to lean from, as in “There was Fire in Vancouver”, or it can be so overwhelming that it is creatively stifling, as in “To Look Out Once from High Windows”. As a place of detachment, the window can be safe, open and reassuring as in “The Fort Maker”, or it can be cut off enough that abuse goes on unseen for years, as in “Telegraph”, and suicide is merely a matter of fate, as in “Driving Alone on a Snowy Evening”. In situating her voice’s point of view on one side of glass and the objects of the poem on the other, Morrissey shirks direct engagement with the subject. The space between means that there is ample creative distance, situating a lens between the voice and its subject. In some cases, this has the distorting effect of making the subject ethereal, as if through the pane it exists on another plane, for example in the metaphors of “Night Drive in Four Metaphors”. In other ways, the distance allows for an objective, even ambivalent, reportage in the poetry, as in “Telegraph” wherein the abuse tale is emotionally charged, but there is no blame placed.

iv.

What is significant about the detachment here explored in this poetry is not only that it can be found to exist in such varied ways (according to theme, recurring motif or critical theory), but that the divergences overwhelmingly enacted by the poetries are not merely a psychological contest or *agon* with precursory male poets. Thematic divergences have multiple potential meanings, and in the case of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, it is clear that they can indicate detachment from a single precursor, or from a whole school or tradition, or from the geographical landscape or era that they share with that tradition. Of course, a part of the multiplicity inherent in this reading, is the possibility of potential meaning beyond the Northern Irish context, existing on the other side of Morrissey's square window, in Bryce's achieved miracle of a remade self, or in a global notion of Flynn's home. The borders of this thesis mean that the assumptions and conclusions are primarily in the context of Northern Irish writing. This is obviously, to a degree, a reductive approach. However, despite this necessary limitation, the perspective of divergence is a tangent, an exit, through which other readings and influences might be elsewhere discerned in the work. Influence's presence and a desire for absence, as this chapter has shown, are inextricably linked.

While the implications of detachment are bound up with tradition and newness, they also reflect the fracture lines within the new poet's vision, and thus, rather than making them a new God-poet, they highlight their humanity and their distance from 'strong' godliness. The themes of the magical and miraculous in Bryce's poetry, flight and travel in Flynn's, and windows and glass in Morrissey's work together to show how detachment is inherent in the contemporary condition.

For Bryce, this is manifested as an espousal of the fantasy of the miraculous. For Flynn, it is both in the removal of the self from a national notion of homeliness and a denial of globalisation, all rendered through a gender-neutral “we” or “I”: an every(wo)man. Morrissey’s detachment is feminine and maternal, verging on mythic, with the desire to be set apart from the confusing and the threatening aspects of life. The poets may be well travelled and well educated, but the world is still, to borrow MacNeice’s vision of it, “incorrigibly plural” (“Snow” 5).

The nature of the contemporary condition, particularly in the case of such close precursory generations as is the case in Northern Ireland, is ultimately relational. The way each poet approaches literary anxiety, understanding, distancing, and containment, is in the same contemporary moment. This is a key feature of this study’s understanding of influence’s interplay: the Northern Irish poets who precede Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey are not merely precursors, but precursory contemporaries. The precursors are responding, give or take a few years, to the same moment and similar experiences of Northern Ireland, and thus the younger poets are approaching the same instances but with an adjusted vision. Morrissey’s exploration of the parallax in her latest collection explains this view: “difference in the apparent position, of an object, caused by actual change (or difference) of position of the point of observation” (*Parallax* 9).

Northern Ireland is not unique, but at least unusual in the Western world, for the way in which division has shaped the political and social landscape. Each of the competing ideologies relies, at its heart, on separation from one state (Ireland) or another (Great Britain). In turn, this has caused communities to divide down religious and political lines. As much as any poetic lineage, this is Northern Ireland’s distinctive tradition, and while the younger poets may be deemed “post-

ceasefire”, their vision is still shaped by both that divisive past and a desire to detach from that past. It is the tradition and the contemporariness combined that truly beget this kind of newness. And, rather than merely struggling to reveal the flaws in their precursors or their past, Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey leave themselves open to the same flaws in order that they may be overcome. As Morrissey suggests in “Reading the Greats” from *The State of the Prisons*, it is in “failures” that the true value of great writing can be appreciated, for therein is not an authorial god-complex or dominant ideology of poetry, but understanding humanity.

4. Marginal and Mainstream: Women's Poetry Traditions

“Are we depressed, then, about women's status?
Hardly, we're not quite clear who women are.”

Leontia Flynn, “Letter to Friends”

“ And I think of my granny and her *forty-six hours*
of agony, shifting my mother from one world to the next, and how that birth
cut short her happiness.”

Sinéad Morrissey, “A Matter of Life and Death”

“I am trying to get back to my mother.”

Colette Bryce, “Lines”

i.

As the issue of detachment addressed in the previous chapter indicates, the work of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey is not imitative, and their poetry suggests an interest in points of difference. The paratextual inferences, and their interest in thematic divergence, to an extent indicate their self-consciousness that they have a role in a line, but also that the lineage has marginalised female voices in previous generations. This chapter interrogates the ways in which these poets, who are among the first Northern Irish women poets to address themselves from the outset to the wider poetic community beyond Northern Ireland, grapple with their marginality and their tradition compliance. Like McGuckian before them, their work was of such quality that it was fairly rapidly picked up by British presses and magazines, and has won major national accolades and awards. Other women poets who began publishing at the same time as Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, such as Bleakney, Hardie and Moyra Donaldson have arguably remained more provincial, as their work was published with Belfast based presses such as Lagan Press and Lapwing Publications. Their work is not as widely recognised, it is not reviewed as widely in broadsheets and magazines, and the prizes they win tend to be based in Northern Ireland.¹⁷ Yet, despite the wider esteem of Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's poetry, their work can still be shown to engage with the Northern Irish tradition and with contemporary Northern Ireland itself. As shown elsewhere, the context of Northern

¹⁷ There is a notable generational difference between Bryce (b. 1970), Flynn (b. 1974) and Morrissey (b. 1972), and Bleakney (b. 1956), Donaldson (b. 1956) and Hardie (b. 1951). The recent development in the UK of Second Light Network (for women poets aged forty and over who are serious about publication) and Grey Hen Press (a press dedicated exclusively to poetry by "older women") suggests that there are still notable inequalities in the publishing industry.

Ireland remains a popular critical prescription and the “Northern Irish poet” tag continues to stick, even, in the case of Bryce, when the author has lived in Britain for most of her life. A bifocal view of relationships with literary tradition and inheritance is necessary, thereby acknowledging the importance of both recent Northern Irish poetry (and its lack of women’s voices) and the development of women’s poetry in the UK and Ireland more widely. Thus, this chapter proposes that any reading of contemporary Northern Irish women’s poetry must engage with two seemingly opposed critical terms in order to fully survey the poetic cultures the poets are writing in and responding to; aspects of marginality and mainstream acceptance.

Bryce, Flynn, Morrissey and other emerging women poets from Northern Ireland who began publishing post-1995 can be seen to be traversing the line between the marginal space afforded to women writers in recent Northern Irish literary tradition, the newness of their work within the Northern Irish canon and the increasingly stable position of women’s writing in that same area. Beyond the regional consideration, within a broader British and Irish context their work seems to be situated within the mainstream of contemporary women’s poetry, an area of contested marginalism and radicalism itself. At this stage in studies of contemporary poetry, it seems clear that terms such as “marginal” and “mainstream” are shifting spaces and that writers such as Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey move between them within different contexts, even within single poems. While these terms appear to be binary opposites, the distance between them might be closer than it first seems, and even more crucially they may overlap and thus disrupt the implications of the other.

This chapter will consider the poets’ work within these contested spaces, referring to the marginal aspects of Northern Irish women’s writing and the

consequences of the development of a mainstream of wider British and Irish women's poetry contexts with which the poets engage. Both are complex arenas in themselves, and Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's work helps to expose some of the complications inherent in these areas in the post-millennial era. The key debate centres about the overlap between the various contexts in which their work is situated. Is it strictly accurate to see Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey as continuing the esteemed Northern Irish line of poets when their very gender is a vast departure? Until very recently, historical publications such as Hooley's *The Female Line* indicate that their work would have been marginal at best within the same canon they now apparently continue (and that publication opportunities would have been severely limited). Gender consciousness and women-centric approaches and themes are vast departures from the staple characteristics of mainstream Northern Irish poetry in recent years. Yet, subsequently, it seems as important to question whether it is really correct to consider them in a feminist vanguard when their work is relatively mainstream within British and Irish contemporary women's poetry, an area of growing prominence itself - which has in recent years moved away from its earlier radical and marginal status, and begun to be recognised as a genre with precursors and characteristics in its own right. The same approaches and themes that mark Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey out as different in the Northern Irish context are not unusual in wider women's poetry, and they may even be seen to be following prevailing trends and major precursors in the field. These questions invite answers that might go some way to suggesting, not just the effects of tradition or lack of tradition on writers, but also might begin to consider the effect they work on tradition as it continues to be shaped by contemporary poetry.

ii. Marginal

The recent history of women's writing in Northern Ireland, and indeed the rest of Ireland, is a history of marginalisation. Many recent studies have lauded the emergence of women's poetry, such as Patricia Boyle Haberstroh's *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets* (1996), while other studies uncover previously overlooked women's traditions such as Anne Ulry Colman's *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Poets* (1996). In making these studies, the authors state the significance of women's writing in an Irish context, and make reference to the historical impairments. By and large, women writers were not included in anthologies, their work did not find publication in individual collections and on the rare occasions that it did its influence and importance were not stated beyond the lifetime of its author. Katherine Tynan is one such poet, a contemporary of W.B. Yeats and Francis Ledgewise who published nearly 100 books between 1885 and her death in 1931 and yet her work was not lauded nor her involvement in the literary culture of the time much remarked upon beyond her lifetime.

The attitude of the literary establishment to women's contribution to Irish literary and political culture towards the end of the twentieth century has come to be exemplified through the landmark case of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, published in 1991 under the editorship of Deane. In nearly 4500 pages, the three volumes cover a vast chronology of writing from early Ireland to the late twentieth century, and seemed to promise to stand testament to the achievement of the Irish people across a variety of written mediums. Deane claimed in his introduction "[t]here is no attempt here to establish a canon. Instead, what we show is an example of the way in which canons are established", preferring instead to view the project as "an act of definition rather than a definitive action" (xix, xx). What Deane misses is that by defining at such a scale, the work does effectively establish a canon through

its status as a reference work for Irish writing, especially when no other such comprehensive work exists: as he acknowledges from the outset, “quite simply, [...] it has never been done before” (xix). As Deane defines Irish writing through the editorial decisions presented in the anthology, the definition appears to state that Irish writing was written solely by Irish men.

The scale of the achievement of volumes 1-3 of *Field Day* brought about a wave of evaluative and reactionary criticism both north and south of the border. Of particular note when considering the recent chronology of women’s marginalisation in Irish literature was the attention paid to the fact that the otherwise comprehensive anthology overlooked entirely women’s contribution to the history and culture of Ireland. Maria Luddy recalls “a particular outcry against the underrepresentation of women”, and decries a “lack of empathy for women’s place in the construction of Irish culture and society” in the early *Field Day* volumes (379). Haberstroh commented that “the definition of canon” offered by *Field Day* “remains as narrow as it did at the beginning of the twentieth century, restricted pretty much to males, battling over Irish, Anglo-Irish and English identities” (Greene, Haberstroh and Frazier 123). What was clearer than ever from the publication was that women’s writing both historically and in the present day was undervalued, overlooked, unappreciated and ignored. Further, regardless of Deane’s intention not to establish a canon, the supposedly all-encompassing scale of *Field Day 1-3* not only reflected the obvious historical lack, but also reinforced that same less expected lack in the material selected to represent contemporary Ireland. Women’s writing by the early 1990s may have grown considerably in the Republic of Ireland with the work of feminist publishing ventures such as the Attic Press and Arlen House, but *Field Day 1-3* seemed to prove that these endeavours were marginal and would remain so unless action was taken.

Rebecca Pelan rightly reflects that there is “no greater evidence of the connection between feminist politics and women’s writing in Ireland than the justifiable furore which erupted following the publication of volumes I, II and III of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*” (90). In the decade following the first appearance of the anthology, a group of eight feminist scholars came together to compile a parallel or counter anthology, and in 2002 *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*, volumes 4 and 5 was published. Margaret Kelleher noted that “[i]n its scale, ambition and structure *FDA* volumes 4 and 5 is a new kind of anthology” (91). The newness of this later anthology comes down to the clear feminist agenda, the act of definition in this case is “theorized in relation to feminist literary history” (91). For one of the editors, Geraldine Meaney, the selections “do not complete any map of Irish writing” (771). Rather they seek to put existing maps into question and to put them into question from the particular perspective of women and their relation to writing” (771). Just as, from the scale of the first three volumes, it was clear that women’s writing had been marginalised, by the scale of the later two volumes it was clear that women were more aware than ever of their marginal status and were making efforts to write out of that position. The *Field Day* fall out during the 1990s seems to have encouraged a line to be drawn in the sand by feminist cultural scholars. It was not that there were no women engaged in literary activity before the publication of the first three volumes, but the low opinion there expressed provided a test case for that low opinion, and thus invited calls for change.

The broader context of a growth of awareness of women’s marginality in Irish literary tradition was significant, but it is worth noting that the situation for women writers in Northern Ireland was less favourable; Northern Irish women writers were on the margins of the margin. Before the publication of *Field Day 1-3*,

understandably, preoccupations with the ongoing Troubles and the political divide had stunted the growth of the feminist movement, as Eileen Evason recounts in her history of the movement, *Against the Grain: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Northern Ireland* (1991). As a result the activities of feminist presses such as Attic Press and Arlen House had little real effect in Northern Ireland and there were no equivalent presses to bring women's issues to readers. Women poets in Northern Ireland were a minority within a minority. Further, as previously indicated, within Northern Ireland a literary movement was stronger than ever, dominated by the (almost exclusively male) poets who came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s.

From the mid-1990s onwards, even in Northern Ireland, more women poets were able to avail of publication opportunities. The arrival of the Summer Palace Press in 1999 in particular contributed to the changing literary landscape, as it seems a concerted effort was made to bring women poets into print as in the first three years the press published first collections by 8 women writers; Ann McKay, Ruth Carr, Eilish Martin, Pamela Greene, Mary Branley, Kate Newmann, Lisa Steppe and Mary Montague. The existing presses too were making attempts to add new female voices to their lists, including Blackstaff Press who published *Word of Mouth*, an anthology of writing from a women's writing group based in Belfast, in 1996. The presence of Welsh poet Carol Rumens, (editor of Bloodaxe's 1990 *New Women Poets*) as writer-in-residence at Queen's University, Belfast in the mid-1990s must surely have had some effect on the growing confidence of women's voices in the community and academy.

Thus, Morrissey, Flynn and Bryce began publishing into a literary climate that was markedly improving in its approach to women's writing, a literary scene

more aware than ever of the neglect and need for women's voices. A combination of post-*Field Day* analysis, political developments and turn of the century optimism was drawing critics and writers to consider what might be possible and representative for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century of Northern Irish writing. If Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's work is regarded as stemming from a newly vigorous climate for women's writing, a school of women aware of the marginalisation of previous generations, and that this trend can be attributed to the "justifiable furore" post-*Field Day* as Pelan suggests above (90), then their work could be read as part of a new wave of feminist activism. It stands to reason that their work might be politically charged if it is part of an anti-tradition and anti-canon trend more generally taking place in contemporary women's writing culture. These writers are a product of their marginal status and thus by writing *out of* that position their work represents an important resurgence and input *in to* tradition. Indeed, what new vibrancy there was in poetry coming towards the turn of the century was certainly a response to the previous generation's perceived dominance, and for women writers this dominance was patriarchal as much as generational. Guinness gathered some of this writing in *The New Irish Poets* (2004), including poets who published their first collection after 1993; these "new Irish voices who are beginning to animate a poetry scene that has been dominated internationally by the generation that came to fame in the 1960s and 1970s" (31). For some of those included by Guinness, including Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, themes and tropes relating to gender are a key part of the celebrated newness for both men and women writers. Approaching Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's work by first acknowledging the poor esteem of women's writing in the years preceding their first publication invites a consideration that validates any gender-consciousness as a radical departure from a tradition that previously disregarded such themes. Thus, for these poets, the use of

themes and subjects which amplify gender difference, such as birth tropes, women's perspectives on domestic abuse and the portrayal of lesbian sexuality as normative, purposely highlight the deficiency of meaningful representations of women in the influential, even canonical, texts of the preceding generation and bring to the Irish tradition things which, if not intrinsically new, were certainly unrecognised and marginal.

In the combined opuses of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, there are countless poems that explore a self-conscious female centrality which is notably missing from the poems of male predecessors. In exploiting a lack in the poetry of the previous generation the poets are not only drawing on their own experiences and interests in their poetry, they are demonstrating through example the kind of aspects that were missing from acclaimed work from Northern Ireland. Given this lack of literary foremothers, it is poignant that many of their poems deal in different ways with the issues of female inheritance and lineage. Some poems deal in particular with matrilineal family inheritance, in particular taking grandmothers or great aunts as muse figures. As a key preoccupation, what makes this topic even more interesting, given the lack of famous female literary precursors within Northern Ireland, is that for Morrissey and Flynn there is a sustained interest in unknown female ancestors across poems, whole sequences and throughout collections.

Flynn's grandmother and an aunt who died as a child haunts the "A Gothic" sequence of *Profit and Loss* (2011). The interest in family inheritance in "Inside the Cathedral Nueva" and "Colette" is in part due to the birth of her own child, as she recalls:

I remember hearing someone say that when you are pregnant, all the stuff that you heard from your parents or grandparents – which up until that point seemed a little boring and not particularly interesting – suddenly becomes

very real. You can relate to it. You realise that it is all real, all experienced, and that it's not just some abstract thing. (O'Malley)

However, Flynn's relationship with her female relations explored through these poems mirrors aspects of her relationship with precursory women writers too.

"Inside the Catedral Nueva" from *Profit and Loss* compares the paintings of saints "posed in their tortures and their ecstasies" with the experience of her grandmother who for twenty years "was stretched on the rack of her re-product-ions" (5, 10). The poet is drawing a clear parallel between the religious devotion and subsequent torture of the saints (Peter, Catherine, and Sebastian) and the religious devotion and many hard labours of her grandmother who we elsewhere are told had thirteen children. As Flynn honours the real and experienced history of her grandmother's maternities, she imagines her grandmother in church honouring "their pierced flesh and bleeding wounds" (8). The pain of the saints, persecuted for attempting to spread Christianity, allows the grandmother to have faith despite her own trials and these "re-product-ions" (10) brought Flynn herself into being, just as the pioneering work of female poets before Flynn have made it possible for her to present her view through verse.

"Colette", later in the same part of *Profit and Loss*, is another poem which makes use of the tragic grandmother figure that is not so much romanticised or idealised but beautified through her sufferings as a mother. The title is the name of an aunt who died in a road traffic collision as a child in 1940, a name which has forever "dropped like a stone in the women's talk" and is haunting to Flynn (1). The poem suggests the long-ranging effect of the accident which effectively binds together multiple generations of the family. Indeed, Colette has a somewhat morbid connection to Flynn as the "[n]ext year my mother is born. // *Next year to the day*

(10-11). The beautified grandmother is shown to express a religious stoicism in the face of her loss;

Colette, Colette. My grandmother's atonement
for being so provocatively bereaved
is to lay her womb, like a flower, on heaven's altar.
The Virgin smiles and leans to soothe her brow.
After my mother, she begets seven sons. (16-20)

Just as in "Inside the Cathedral Nueva", a clear connection exists between religion and conception. Most striking about this poem, though, is the final image when the poet recalls how "we tuck your little shoes, now yellow with age, / like a breech birth in the soil of granny's grave." (25). This poem tells the story of "a disused room in my family's House of History", yet it also tells of a "sealed-off place" (7, 8). For the family, this is in the unspoken pain of an early loss, which parallels how in Irish literary tradition the lack of women writers brings with it an absence of work which could address such tragedy from a mother's perspective.

Morrissey's poems of matrilineality also explore her grandmother's experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. "My Grandmother Through Glass" from *There was Fire in Vancouver* (1996) was previously discussed as a poem of detachment due to the glassy division. The female experience of childbirth is a central theme in this poem which explores the distance between the poet, her grandmother and her virgin great aunt, Sarah, who assisted with the births. The poem is surreal, describing her grandmother's womb-bound possibilities as "spirit-children" with "faces pushed against that line for years. / Hoping. Misting the glass. Dying to be born" (2, 3-4). The poet's view of her subject is necessarily distorted as by resurrecting her in the poem she views her life through glass. The link between the generations, as in Flynn's "Colette", is through her mother, the one who

“mastered the knack of negotiating glass” (14). Whereas Flynn’s poems seem to express horror at the pain of childbirth, and link it quite clearly with death through martyred saints and a dead child, Morrissey finds comfort as the spirit of her virgin aunt “helped with the delivery / From the other side” (40-1) by sending her mother to sleep in labour and sending the speaker into the world “with a message of love” (50) to pass on.

The message that needs to be passed on retrospectively in this poem is due to jealousy and lust. The aunt was in love with her sister’s husband (after her death relatives even found love poems to him), and as such could never give much kindness to her sister in her lifetime for jealousy “had closed her throat” (52). The poem too passes on a message from Morrissey’s female line to the wider world and presents both a surreal version of childbirth and a vision of sisterhood compromised by passion. The relationships between women, their mothers, sisters and grandmothers are shown to be complex. For Muldoon in “Ned Skinner” from *Mules* (1977), “Aunt Sarah” (a namesake to Morrissey’s figure) is shown to be a maternal figure who takes the young speaker on her knee to keep him from viewing the slaughter of the pigs (Muldoon, *Poems* 7-12). Sarah is shown to have a romantic, or at least lustful, history with Ned, but “the door [is] on the snib” and she “put[s] on a fresh apron”: a denial of her female sexuality and of Ned’s leering propositions. Similarly, in Heaney’s “Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication”, the aunt is “in a floury apron / by the window”, and while he finds the view of her baking and waiting for the scones to rise a sublime sight (prompting an observation on the nature of family love), the aunt is merely a domestic figure defined by the action of baking (Heaney, *Opened Ground* 15-6).

Morrissey's complex notion of matrilineality is analogously presented in "A Matter of Life and Death" from *Parallax*, paralleled in this case by the myth of male heroism and romantic fantasy. Similarly autobiographical and surreal as "My Grandmother Through the Glass", the poem recounts the early stages of Morrissey's own labour during the 1946 WWII film *A Matter of Life and Death* which is being aired on television. The heroism and survival of the fictional airman portrayed by David Niven is contrasted with Morrissey's contractions, and her grandmother's labour, "*forty-six hours // of agony*" which "cut short her happiness at the Raleigh bicycle factory in Nottingham / where her youth was spent in *secret war work*, typing up invoices" (39-40, 41-2). The courting of "an American radio operator" who remotely witnesses Niven's heroic leap from a burning plane echoes a "young, glamorous, childless, free" grandmother asking Niven to sign a ledger in heaven (46, 67). The reality of childbirth, however, the "gas and air, pethidine, / a needle in the spine", shows romantic fantasy to be false (20-1). The semi-mythic grandmother should be a heroine of the same measure as Niven's airman; not only did she sacrifice her career for a child, but she sagely predicts that "*when a new life comes into a family, an old life goes out*", and, at the appropriate time (three weeks before Morrissey's labour) takes her leave "on a hospital ward in Chesterfield" (57, 65). Matrilineality is shown to be both a matter of life and of death as the previous generations "*mak[e] room*" (65).

Bryce's "Lines" from *The Heel of Bernadette* also offers a comparably surrealist maternity scenario. The speaker has given birth to "a see-through child" with skin that is "vague like frosted glass" (1, 4). Fearful, the speaker admits "I don't know what to do with it" and wants "to get back to my mother" but in the process of returning to her drops the child to the kerb (9-10). A convincing metaphor conflating the anxieties of creating see-through yet vague poems, participating in

poetic “Lines” which are “a web of a million arteries” and family lines, it is “my sister”, a contemporary in the female line, who “fits it all back together” at the close of the poem (7, 14, 16).

As opposed to Bloom’s patrilineal vision of poetic overcoming, these poems offer a metaphor for poetic lineage through their exploration of matrilineal connections. However, it is apparent that the main focus is their relationship with their family history and what that may reveal about their own identities, particularly when prompted by their own real or symbolic pregnancies and motherhood. Through these poems, the writers are giving a literary presence to women for whom it would have been virtually inconceivable to make a living as a poet. There is an underlying awareness of the importance of relating even half-imagined scenarios featuring their female ancestors, for the themes of childbirth, marriage, grief and sisterhood were not explored in poetry by women from their background at the time their grandmothers were living. The themes presented are in many ways troubling: these poems are haunting and express fears about the loss and pain of being a mother felt by women whose socially sanctioned role was first and foremost to be mothers. For Northern Irish poetry, these issues are challenging and parallel the male canon with its concerns quite firmly addressing patrilineal comparisons.

The importance of the male line to Northern Irish poetry has been critically examined by Longley who draws comparisons between father/son relationships and precursor/poet relationships, claiming that fathers in Northern Irish literature “calibrate tradition and transition” (E Longley, *Living* 154). In making this connection she draws attention to the links between Heaney’s “Digging” where the physical labour connects previous generations but the author finds “I’ve no spade to follow men like them” and Muldoon’s “Gathering Mushrooms” where the father is

also in touch with the land, “one of those ancient warriors” in a “peaked cap”, setting to his rural task (Heaney, *Opened* 28; Muldoon, *Poems* 34, 36). The female poets are addressing a quite different kind of physical labour, childbirth, in the poems discussed above, and if we follow from Longley’s criticism this too can be a statement on literary inheritance. However, since female literary inheritance is more marginal, they do not express direct anxiety about an inability to continue the kind of work their mothers and grandmothers did before them. The birth image in the marginal Northern Irish female tradition emphasises creation and the similarities between women of various generations.

Another reason for the poets’ interest in creating a line of female family inheritance could be that there is little literary lineage that they can engage with as Northern Irish women. There are few writers who share their background, few writers of the same generation as their mothers and grandmothers. Perhaps, thus, they turn to their mothers and grandmothers to address that need. However, comparing the gender-consciousness clear from Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s poems with some lesser known female precursors might offer some insight into the feminist political markers of marginalised women’s writing from Northern Ireland.

Colman notes the poor esteem of Irish women’s poetry (which her own work on nineteenth-century writers did much to rectify). She notes that other than “A.A. Kelly’s pioneering volume, *Pillars of the House*[: *An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the present*, 1987], the only anthology of poetry by Irish women was edited by Elizabeth Sharp, *Women’s Voices: An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems in English, Scotch and Irish Women*, published in 1887” (Colman 15). Kelly’s anthology was undeniably a very important intervention into Irish literary tradition on behalf of women’s writing; the selections are

comprehensive and in their historical span put volumes one to three of *Field Day* to shame. However, Colman's praise relies on an inaccuracy because the first anthology of Irish women's writing since 1887 was actually Ruth Hooley's *The Female Line: Northern Irish Women Writers* (1985), which pips *Pillars of the House* to the dubious honour by two years.

The Female Line may have unwittingly achieved this feat, but the anthology itself is an informed feminist endeavour as the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement published it to mark an anniversary and as a continuation of their work through poetry. To the opuses of mid-1980s Northern Irish poetry it was a radical input, highlighting the lack of women's writing published by the mainstream presses as well as featuring poems and prose by women which dealt in many cases with the harsh realities of women's lives not widely considered appropriate literary subjects. *The Female Line*, as the first anthology of Irish women's writing in nearly a century, offers a starting point for understanding an alternative contemporary poetic tradition against which Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's concerns might be understood. In reading poems from this anthology alongside Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's later work, this study argues not just for the importance of *The Female Line*, excavating this work from the recent literary past, but to bring the same concerns forward as a way of understanding Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey. In tracing the female line between the two generations, the relational achievements of their work can be better understood.

As a largely unknown feminist publication, *The Female Line* represents a radical input on behalf of a marginal section of contemporary Northern Irish writers. Paradoxically, the fate of the anthology (forgotten, out of print and overlooked) reinforces the point that the publication of the collection was making in the first

place, that there was little evidence of “any such evolution” of women’s writing in Northern Ireland (Hooley 1). In an interview conducted for this research (5 January 2013), Hooley (now writing as Ruth Carr) reflected on the genesis of the anthology. Initially, “it was meant to be just a publication of Medbh McGuckian and Eavan Boland”, who were already established, “but we thought an anthology would be better to represent more women’s writing” (Carr). An open call for submissions was distributed to writer’s groups, and from around 300 submissions, the deliberately “mixed quality” publication was put together: the first print run “sold out within one month” and so it was subsequently reprinted (Carr). In the long view, the anthology has perhaps failed in another of its aims, “to highlight what is being written”, and there is no way to quantify, at least in the scope of this study, to what extent it succeeded in “encourag[ing] more women towards publication” (Hooley 2). The multiplicities inherent in Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s work does not lend itself to any reading of separatist traditions (as this chapter will later show), however a comparative reading with the women of *The Female Line* will interrogate thematic concerns which are important to two generations of women poets working within (and without) a Northern Irish tradition. The overlooked work will, as it did on publication, uncover the remaining limitations of a purely patriarchal retrospective view of tradition and influence on both generations.

Hooley introduces some of the themes addressed by the writers in *The Female Line* as “childhood, adolescence, growing awareness, personal relationships at various stages, marriage, motherhood, disillusionment, independence and old age [...] Themes of escape, of the imagination, and more particularly the birth of a self as an independent, political being” (2). These themes can be found in different degrees in literature written by men and women throughout history, but their treatment by women writers from Northern Ireland is a unique intervention in that

context. What is new about the approaches suggested by Hooley in this writing is that the view is non-normative in this context as it is put forward by a woman author whose viewpoint is accordingly marginal. The characteristic subtlety inherent in this shifted viewpoint is recognisable in Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's work.

In addressing domestic violence, for example, the women poets from *The Female Line* explore a topic which later provides inspiration for Morrissey. Kate Madden's "When It Comes" is a lyric which recounts the fear of a woman awaiting the return of her drunk and potentially violent partner. The poem gains its power from the simplicity of the rhyme scheme in contrast with the aggression of the act:

If I move from this corner
 I know I'll be dead
 I feel one more kick to the side of my head –
 He's kicked me so hard I cannot see –
 There isn't an ounce of fight left in me. (Hooley 18-22)

The rhyme scheme also reinforces the repetition of the act; as horrifying as the attack described is, it is just one such event in a cycle of violence. The speaker is "Bruised and in pain / But at least it's all over / 'Til it happens again" (24-6). The poem is not an example of lyric mastery for the rhyme scheme drops in and out of couplets and the line length varies wildly for no real effect (as in "Maybe tonight he'll leave me alone. /It's now 12 o'clock/ And he's banging at the door" [9-11]). There are some notable variations in register which weaken the effect by drawing the attention away from the subject matter, most notably in the lines, "I can't take it", "I cannot see" and "'Til it happens again" (13, 21, 26). However, these issues aside, the poem is an exploration of a theme which has been key to the feminist movement and which has not been widely addressed by other writers from Northern Ireland from the victim's point of view.

Two male writers who do address domestic violence approach it from a quite different angle from Madden. James Simmons' "After Eden" presents an estranged husband attempting to remove belongings from their previously shared home. Found by his former lover he lashes out at her, an assault he describes in a sexual manner, "they are sharing / intimate touch – her nose, his knuckles, sore" (Ormsby, *Poets* 19-20). Strangely, the wife seems to appreciate his attack as it makes her feel loved, "drinking his anger, / shameless and righteous, fronting / her husband, embracing his futile blows" (23). This poem acknowledges the complexity of emotional breakdown, although suggesting a masochistic desire for assault is certainly a questionable poetic metaphor. W.R. Rodgers' "Stormy Night" is less explicit about the violence, although it seems as dark in terms of forcefulness. A man arrives at the house of a lover during the night, and although she doesn't want him there "the foot's within the door" (Ormsby, *Poets*, 13). The woman rails against him and he pushes her off, dismissing her rage, "Fist and foist me off with a cloud of cries, / What do I care for all your footling rampage?" (21-22). Female resistance is futile, and the man seems to appreciate her all the more for her anger, stating "On your light-in-gale blows my larking caresses will rise" (23). He further appreciates her weakness, for when she cries he too submits and throws himself at her feet. These two poems idealise the domination of the man and even seem to suggest violence is a kind of romance, which is quite far from the resignation of repeated battering recounted in Kate Madden's poem.

Maura Johnston addresses domestic violence in less explicit terms than any of these works. "Daddies' Girls" in *The Female Line* is a poem which does not make it entirely clear what kind of duress the woman is under but does link it as a concern shared by different generations of women. One reason that the poem doesn't detail

the violence being suffered is that it is composed from the conversations it is socially acceptable to have about relationships in public,

““What a lovely
House! So big! Above
The usual run. He must
Make a regular fuss
Of you.”” (Hooley 11-5)

The measures of marital success, the number of “Mod. cons” (literally cons and not conveniences), and the sheer size of their home, are pitted against the underlying fears of the speaker whose “smile/ Is pasted permanently” and who feels trapped as the “circle tightens” (18, 19-20, 27). The comparison between what was said about the speaker as a child at the beginning of the poem and what is said about her own child links the father and husband figures in the circle of male influence, and the speaker hopes at the end of the poem that together “[w]e can break out” (28).

And so, the concept of a generational connection might link the woman speaker in Johnston’s poem with the speaker of Morrissey’s poems. The historical is a concern in her poem “Flight” from *The State of the Prisons* that takes a long view of violence against women by taking an epigraph from *England’s Grievance Discovered* (1655), recounting the incident of Anne Bridlestone, paraded through the streets in an iron gag as punishment for chiding her husband. The iron brank is an instrument of oppression applied by husbands and magistrates to women, which in itself is shocking enough. However, as the “bridled” speaker compares her suffering with that of the beheaded King Charles I and with the escape of his son, it is clear that Morrissey is giving the speaker a political viewpoint which is the reason for her repression, a view so strongly held “It is my love of Him bleeds when I speak out loud” (7, 16). The woman suffers for her anti-Cromwellian views, “There

is too much law / To live by, and I have torn my face / In two by swallowing silence” (27-9). Morrissey not only gives voice to the silenced woman, but while her husband makes a negative example of her, leading her through the market that “the village women [might] gape”, the poet makes her into a positive example of political steadfastness in the face of repression (31). It is implied that modern women should remember the violence visited upon their predecessors, be thankful that they are not persecuted for speaking in this way, and not allow their political views to be led by popular opinion. Both the speakers of Johnston’s “Daddies’ Girls” and Morrissey’s “Flight” are women prepared to break that which restricts them.

“Sea Stones” is another Morrissey poem that reflects on an incidence of violence, this time in the modern world, but with much more complexity than the examples in *The Female Line*. The poem begins as startlingly as a slap; “It is exactly a year today since you slapped me in public” (1). The poem itself is striking too, for it meditates on the after effects of the action, from the “cup of my hurt / flowing over and over” in the days following to the apologetic gifts, “butterflies caged in palms” (10-1, 13). The public nature of the action too provides another layer of density to the meaning; the whole street was shocked because domestic violence is usually played out in a private space as in the home of “Daddies’ Girls”, “When It Comes”, “After Eden” and “Stormy Night”. The trauma of the action itself is repeated again and again, for every action in the poem stems from the slap and towards the end it is clear there is a complex need to revisit that moment, “to keep the fire of your anger lit, / I bit my lip” (20-1). Hauntingly, the poem does not refer to any background to the event, only to the action itself, “the sting of your ring finger / as it caught on my mouth and brought my skin with it”; making the violence all the more unjustified (5-6). By the third stanza, Morrissey is suggesting how the

act of violence constructs an identity, a new way of knowing a lover, “you never were so vivid / or so huge”, and a way to know herself (16-7).

As a topic, domestic violence reveals a flaw in patriarchal power hierarchies and a potential weakness in men (not, of course, that the perpetrators are always male nor the victim always female). Within the Northern Irish context, the issue of violence within the home had been overshadowed in most discourses by the very public violence of the Troubles. In fact, domestic violence might be seen as the darker twin of political violence; it is largely unreported in contrast with the national news coverage for civil unrest, and it happens within the family unit as opposed to occurring across the religious and political divide. The Troubles were the defining topic for the Northern Irish men poets of recent years; Longley claimed the poet “would be inhuman if he did not respond to tragic events in his own community” (note that the poet is gendered male) (M Longley qtd. in Ormsby, *Rage* xvii). But as women from Madden and Johnston’s generation to Morrissey in the present moment choose to address the private violence even in the face of wider public violence, they participate in a feminist counter-discourse and suggest that the private violence may be as significant a part of women’s experience as the Troubles.

Reading general anthologies of Troubles poetry, it appears that women were not writing about the atrocities going on around them. Fiacca’s *The Wearing Of The Black: An Anthology of Contemporary Ulster Poetry* (1974) contains only 5 women among the 73 contributors. Rather than improving on this, Ormsby’s later anthology *A Rage for Order: Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (1992) contains 6 women among 68 contributors, although the figures for actual poems included are yet more troubling as there are actually 253 poems by men and merely 6 by women. Hooley notes that “[w]oven through [*The Female Line*] is another common theme,

‘The Troubles’ (these never being very far from the door)” (2). Marginalised by the supposedly representative anthologies of Troubles poetry, it is clear that the poets of *The Female Line* are making testament of their experiences of living in Northern Ireland during the unrest.

However, few of the poems take the Troubles as their only subject; Hooley is correct in saying that the theme is “woven through” (2). There are a few poems, however, which do not shy away from a direct treatment of the sectarian strife. “The Bonfire” by Geraldine Reid is one such reminiscence. It recounts in lines of not more than four words a scene by a bonfire, a loyalist tradition observed in many communities on the night before the Orange Order marches in July. The political division that these beacons illuminate is suggested through the observation that the flames are set against a “[b]loody sky” and that those gathered around it “[s]tand in the heat / Of hate” (Hooley 4, 9-10). Reid proposes that the people at the bonfire are attempting to burn away memories, indicating a human dimension to the sectarian act. The 12 line poem lacks the substance of a longer work, and much of the imagery is unoriginal as in the clichéd opening lines “Flames cascade / Crushing the night” (1-2). It is a vignette from the chaotic disturbances of the often-tense summer marching season, although it is so one-dimensional and clichéd, it is not surprising that this short poem wasn’t chosen by Ormsby for the *A Rage for Order* anthology.

Francine Cunningham is another poet who centralises the Troubles theme in a poem, and she too seems to struggle for a response that stretches beyond a few short lines. Her work “Inner City” is only 10 lines long, although in originality and depth it is a stronger poem than Reid’s “The Bonfire”. The limited length of these two poems betrays some inadequacies that might be a characteristic of women’s writing of the Troubles. Heaney struggled to find “images and symbols adequate to

our predicament” (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 56), and the stunted responses in these poems suggest that the women poets struggled to find appropriate modes of expression. For the women, the violence was all the more difficult to fathom as it seemed to occur (mainly) between the men of the paramilitary groups, the police, the army and the politicians. It is telling, then, that Cunningham’s Troubles poem approaches the issue indirectly through sensual empathy with a male victim. The man has been involved in some kind of atrocity in “Inner City”, presumably to do with fire arms or explosives as the damage is so severe that “a man is gaping, / his walnut brain / cracked open” (Hooley 3-5). The speaker empathises, and faced with such horror, the images and symbols Cunningham uses become both unreal and highly visceral; she “felt the need for the surreal” before biting into the “easy / flesh of an over-ripe strawberry” (6, 8-9), both sharing the fleshy mess of the man’s mutilated head and implicating herself in the act by carrying on as normal. The political insinuation is that something is clearly rotten and decaying in the state.

Like these women, Bryce writes of her experiences of the Troubles, particularly drawing on memories of her childhood in Derry, and drawing attention to how the unrest encroached on her youth. “1981” from *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, for example, is set in Londonderry during the year of the Republican hunger strikes. As the British government refused to intervene and grant those prisoners convicted of illegal activities relating to terrorism the right to Special Category Status privileges, the local community gathered around a “makeshift notice” which “says it with numbers, each day higher” (1, 2). While in the prison, “a man cowers, says it with hunger”, the people in Derry stop “in twos and threes in the town centre, / talk it over, say with anger, / *What’s the news? It’s no better*” (4, 8-10). Reaching a political fever pitch, the final stanza notes that graves and funeral cars “say it / with flowers”, while others will “say it with stones, say it with fire” (14-5, 18). However,

while the poem does record the discontent and anger of a community rallying around an emotive political issue, the title reveals another element. The year 1981 not only indicates the poem's place in the chronology of the Troubles as the year that 10 hunger strikers died in protest and nationalist politics became more radical than ever before, it also sets the poem within the chronology of the poet's own life. In 1981, Bryce would have been 11, very young to be exposed to images of such visible suffering, outpourings of public grief, and reactionary violence. Acknowledging the poet's youth and immaturity at this time suggests that to an extent witnessing the hunger strikes had a corrupting influence on young people, and perhaps that those young people might be the ones "say[ing] it" with fire and stones (18).

Bryce's "1981" provides a useful point for comparison with Reid's earlier poem "The Bonfire". Reid's poem is a vignette of a community divided by hate, the bonfire is the loyalist community's rallying point, which simultaneously becomes a beacon of all consuming destruction, representing the loss that the division creates. Bryce's "1981" is also a vignette of a community coming together in the face of division, the display of the number of dead hunger strikers and the ostentatious funerals are a rallying point for the nationalist community, yet these displays also represent a human loss. "The Bonfire" is more generic, presenting a scene that could be happening in many communities across the country each summer, while "1981" is specifically relating to a pivotal moment in the narrative of the Troubles. "1981"'s strength lies in the realisation of the retrospective significance of the chronological moment it describes both in the history of the Troubles and in the life of its author. From a practical level, too, it contains many more dimensions; a complexity of tone intrinsically involved with the complexity of the political issue and verbal cues (particularly the "say it" refrain) which bind together the arc of activism and the lack

of political dialogue which defined the period before the Northern Irish peace process.

“Device” follows “1981” in Bryce’s *The Full Indian Rope Trick* and the two poems complement each other quite clearly. With a clear link to the various ways people “say it” in “1981”, “Device” opens “Some express themselves like this” (1), using the poetic convention of a list to reflect the various elements of a bomb;

circuit kit; 4 double-A batteries, 1 9-volt,
 1 SPDT mini-relay, 1 M-80
 rocket engine, a solar ignitor,
 a part of contacts, 1 connector; wired,
 coiled and crafted together, care
 taken over positives and negatives. (2-7)

The exacting detail of this list and the specialist nature of the elements required almost succeed in romanticising the craft. The artistry continues in the second stanza when in the early morning “the artist’s hour”, the bomb is placed “delicately as a gift” (8, 9) under a car. However, despite the tone appearing to idealise the act of violence, the reality intrudes for the reader and the poet as this is an act of violence, the “street will flare” and be “spotlit for eternity” (10, 12). Bryce’s poem as a work of self-conscious art is the opposite of the bomb, wishing to create the scene rather than destroy it. What this work explodes through poetic devices is the myth of a bomb being anything more than an inventory of electronics and the work of one person. However, in harking back to “1981” in the opening line, Bryce simultaneously hints at some of the reason for such radical actions. And, in the following poem “Last Night’s Fires” she also acknowledges the effects on the landscape of the community of the riots and bombs, observing a “guttled bus”, windscreen fragments “like jewels, / diamonds, amethysts, on the school / walk” and

“busted swings bound tight around the bars” (1, 4-6, 7-8). With each act of violent protest having a clear effect on the communities, families and young people, it is little wonder that she later chooses to describe the fuel truck driver as a “skinny / truant”, emaciated by the violence and truant from the innocence of youth (14-5).

Bryce, Cunningham and Reid’s poems are meditations on aspects of the unrest that defined the political climate in Northern Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century. It is, of course, unsurprising that these poets have chosen to write about these issues given their centrality to their life experiences, and as indicated above, this theme is central to poetry by male poets from the same background. What is arguably different about these three women poets is that their poems are strikingly short, none of the poems discussed here exceed eighteen lines, as if they struggle to address fully the aggression of the acts. Further, even in their apparent directness in dealing with the violence of the terrorist acts, none of these poets include the exact details of the atrocities themselves. Compared with Heaney’s elegy for his friend, “A Postcard from North Antrim” which arrestingly recounts “your candid forehead stopped / A pointblank teatime bullet. // Get up from your blood on the floor” (Heaney, *Field* 27-9), or Carson’s “Belfast Confetti” which makes language a metaphor for a riot still reinforcing the immediate chaos “it was raining exclamation marks, / Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys” (Carson 1-2), Bryce’s “Device” which precedes a bomb blast and “Last Night’s Fires” which follows rioting, are poems of the cycle of the violence, not of the violence itself. Even Cunningham’s “Inner City” which acknowledges a man who has suffered a severe head wound self-consciously departs into a surreal image of biting a strawberry, unable to cope with any further details of the incident it reports. A reason for this may be that the women writers were positioned in many cases just beyond the actual violence, and their poems reflect their self-conscious marginalisation from the acts.

Bryce's Troubles poems are short and take prospective and retrospective views of the violence; this is one marker of her marginal position, however paradoxically the shortness of these poems can be seen as a key strength. In their almost fleeting sense, they linger on into the reading of the poem which follows making the links between the poems placed together in the collection more forceful. In this way, "1981" charts the rising tide of radical nationalism in the wake of the hunger strikers' martyrdom, "Device" reflects an example of the kind of activities prompted by this nationalism, while "Last Night's Fires" reflects on the material devastation which followed rioting (itself, often, a response to an atrocity). This is a poetic triptych effect, wherein each poem stands alone and as part of a broader artistic project. This is made possible because Bryce publishes in individually authored collections, an effect not possible for Reid and Cunningham who appear as individuals in an anthology and are collected with other women poets in a way that aims to cover as much thematic ground as possible. The short length of their poems is a marker of their marginalisation, but as in the case of Bryce, it might not necessarily be a sign of an inability to process the violence.

The Female Line came out of the women's rights movement and was published at a time when women were staying in education for longer and arguing for greater independence in many parts of their lives. Given this context, it is unsurprising that many of poems in the anthology are about the acquisition of knowledge, and gaining or exploring cognitive or corporeal independence. One such poem exploring this theme is "The Girls in the Big Picture" by Sandra Marshall which is a roaring girl type tale of two Belfast women who join the Royal Air Force, perform poorly, cause all sorts of mayhem among the junior ranks, argue with the officers and come home after a week having learnt that the military life is not for them. The poem makes distinctive use of Ulster dialect combined with humour;

We were sent to the commanding officer
 To explain why we wanted out.
 Thon oul' doll, I'll never forget her,
 She made Hitler luk like a Boy Scout." (Hooley 52-6)

Flynn's heavily allusive, educated humour and measured language is certainly too academically precocious to be compared to this kind of narrative romp, but her kind of concern with knowledge acquisition does share some traits with other poems in *The Female Line*. Cunningham's "Indefinite Article" describes how education challenges a blind acceptance of religion through a symbolic change of text;

a dictionary
 replaces
 The Word
 on my bookshelf (Hooley 8-11)

In acknowledging, as Longley does, that Protestantism and Catholicism are of "masculine and authoritarian character" in Irish culture (E Longley, *Living Stream* 153), we see that Cunningham's desire for alternative viewpoints, words beyond the religiously ordained "Word", is a feminist action, education against religious or secular patriarchy. For Flynn, too, logophilia is a symbol of growing consciousness of the world around her. Pointedly, the first poem of her first collection, *These Days*, celebrates this through its excessively precocious language, "[t]o think the gloomiest most baffled / misadventures might lead so suddenly / to a clearing" while still acknowledging that "it is good to be discovered as a marauding child" (4-6, 2-3). While Cunningham's poem merely marks the poet's view of herself as enlightened, what Flynn might term "preachy / with booklearning" Flynn takes this one step further in presenting the process as ongoing (1-2). In "Naming It", the speaker is brought to a fridge and must face her own inadequacies to make the most of the opportunity for knowledge acquisition; albeit in a somewhat ridiculous situation. In

order to make such an observation, the poet must declare that it took someone else to point out “look / this is an avocado and *this* / is an aubergine” (8-10).

Another of Cunningham’s poems suggests a rift between the old womanhood of her mother’s generation and the educated new womanhood of her own, reinforcing that the women of *The Female Line* may be seen as an anchor point for the poets of the twenty-first century. “An Invitation to Dinner” suggests an impasse between a mother and daughter that is caused by their differing educational backgrounds. The children “have graduated / to the piano top”, a description which evokes a domestic scene with graduation photographs on display in testament to the achievements of the younger generation (Hooley 8-9). The speaker claims she can only write “for those / who speak / my tongue” (16-8), and in the final stanza compares the divide as like being a chef preparing meals for those who aren’t hungry. Education, in this case, starves the generations of common ground. Flynn does not write off her mother’s self-awareness so easily, attributing to her in “Drive” from *Drives* curiosity and the ability to think critically. Her mother wonders as she drives along “how does it work, she thinks, this little motor? / Where are its cogs, and parts and curly oiled springs” (29-30). As if to reinforce the advanced natures of her mother’s cognitive functions, “Drive” is a sestina, the complex poetic form which Flynn reserves exclusively for poems about her parents lives and histories.¹⁸ Within the limits of this form too, the poet experiments creatively with the limits of the repeated line endings, making the end words’ relationships mirror the wandering of her mother’s thoughts, for example in the meandering connection between the end word variants: “motor”, “mother”, “another”, “together” and “daughters” (6, 7, 14, 22, 33). The mother figure is not limited in the way Cunningham’s is, she is not

¹⁸ In depth consideration of the sestina form follows in the final chapter of this study.

resistant but actually waiting for opportunities, “though she tells this offspring she’s nearing the end of the road / a clock ticks softly ... the low pulse of some *drive* ... ? / My mother watches. She’s waiting for a sign ...” (37-9).

In reading Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey alongside the poems compiled in *The Female Line*, there are limitations which must be acknowledged. For one, many of the poems from *The Female Line* show a number of weaknesses, particularly in terms of quality, consistency and a poor understanding of poetics. A reviewer at the time noted that “the quality of the work is so uneven as to be jarring, with elegant, polished writing juxtaposed against the raw and the cliché-ridden” (Reddy 10). Elsewhere they might not have been published let alone had as much significance attached to them as has been done here in using them to exemplify marginal and radical aspects in later work by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey. However, these flaws should not belittle the achievement of the anthology for its time; the poems betray a deficiency of opportunities for women writers in the period rather highlighting any intrinsic weakness in women’s writing as a whole. As Reddy argues the “brief biographical notes about the contributors appended to *The Female Line* are more intriguing than is most of the book proper” (10). Nearly all the writers had either never published before, or only appeared in a few magazines, including all of the writers covered here (Hooley 185-90). As demonstrated above, despite their imperfections, the subjects and world view of *The Female Line* poets do align in some ways with Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s more fully realised poems about women’s lives. As such, Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey continue the marginal female line it is clear Hooley’s anthology intended to create, and in doing so reject the all pervading masculinity of the male line which is the prevalent conception of Northern Irish poetry. Their work proves Hooley’s vision that “*The Female Line* is

both handed down and self-written”; that there is a marginal female inheritance made up of many individual and often isolated contributions (2).

However, in reading female generational influence in the Northern Irish context, it is also significant to point out that marginalisation is not necessarily an empowering political standpoint. There are important practical limitations to the marginal space which severely restrict female precursory links. *The Female Line* anthology went out of print very quickly, and since it was not on the list of a publishing house, it was never re-issued. The unavailability of the text makes its impact on later writers negligible. Gilbert and Gubar suggest in their study of the place of the woman writer in the twentieth century that “there is a knowable history and [...] that texts are authored by people whose lives and minds affected by the material conditions of that history” (Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s* xiii). Yet, in the case of Northern Ireland little effort has been made to understand even the most recent history now. That it is possible for an anthology such as *The Female Line* to be forgotten almost entirely in less than thirty years merely underlines that female absence is both a historical and a contemporary issue.

Thus, so *unknowable* is women’s literary history within the Northern Irish context that Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey cannot be said to suffer from Gilbert and Gubar’s “female affiliation complex”, which they claim is an integral part of twentieth-century women’s writing, “mak[ing] women writers reject their mothers, deploying ‘the masculinity complex’” and fostering “male mimicry” to reclaim the mother-muse for themselves (184). The lack of awareness of an isolated female literary tradition means there is no immediate foremother for the recent generation to reject, and so the parallels explored above as not so much mimicry as replication by the women poets of *The Female Line* and Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey; a

repetition of the same desires to be a kind of literary foremother themselves, rather than an affiliate complex which seeks to overcome the foremother before. The main difference between the poets of *The Female Line* and Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey is that the later poets are able to interrogate their themes rather than just represent, report or describe them. Comparing their work, however, does reveal three characteristics. First, the different generations share a desire to address themes not adequately explored by the male poets (whether precursor or contemporary). By and large, these themes are woman-centric although not women-specific, and represent experiences marginalised in Irish poetry such as childbirth, matrilineal ancestry and experiences of abuse, rape and domestic violence. Secondly, the women poets express a desire to deal with the issues explored by men poets from their own perspective and informed by their own experiences. In the discussion above, the focus has been on narratives of the Troubles since that topic in many ways defines the male generation, but this shared ground also includes, for example, relationships with fathers or lovers. In these cases, the topic is ostensibly the same but the approaches are subtly different, and it is the women's approach which is marginal in the Northern Irish tradition. Finally, the women poets share a wish to represent some of the changing aspects of women's lives, through developments in women's lives and social standing, and do this by reflecting a new confidence in their poetic voice.

Reading these themes as unconscious replication rather than mimicry suggests that a tradition of lack can have as great an effect on contemporary poets as a thriving literary history. Thus, within the Northern Irish context, the marginal status of unknowable women's writing from the 1960s to 1990s can be said to be as influential in the development of recent writing by poets such as Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey as the vigour and high regard of known poetry by Northern Irish men in the same period. Just as poems themselves are made up of what is said (the text) and

what is not said (both what is implied by the text and the “negative space” on the page which surrounds the text), so poetic tradition and history can be said to be made up of the margins and the written word. Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s verse, in its attempts to represent their lives as women, highlights both the known and the unknown aspects of Northern Irish writing.

McGuckian, the only woman to have achieved literary success in Northern Ireland before the emergence of the three younger poets, could be said to challenge the proposed notion of female replication over mimicry and affiliate complexes. McGuckian is of course notable for her success, her poetry is award winning and critically acclaimed, but she is all the more notable because she has become an integral part of the Northern Irish contemporary canon despite being an otherwise marginal writer. In the face of unknown literary histories, it is unsurprising that Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey look to McGuckian as a woman within their immediate literary tradition. Her existence clearly fascinates the poets, none more so than Flynn in her 2004 thesis “Reading Medbh McGuckian”, in which she seeks to identify the “urgent necessity of Medbh McGuckian’s feminist subversions” within the Northern Irish tradition (Flynn, “Reading” 11). Bryce too displays an interest in her work and position within Northern Irish poetry, choosing to feature McGuckian in an article for Poetry International Web in 2007 which describes the appeal of characteristics of her work (Bryce, “Medbh McGuckian”).

However, as just as one poet does not make a school, so one female poet does not make a tradition. As Flynn notes “McGuckian’s poetry is continually marked by an awareness of her anomalous position as a woman in a poetic tradition [...] Within her generation of Northern Irish poets [...] McGuckian’s status is often seen to be that of ‘the only girl’” (Flynn, “Reading” 170). Bryce reinforces this

view, saying “until the late 1990s, McGuckian’s was the only female voice to be heard in the poetry of Northern Ireland”, continuing, “an unenviable position for a writer so ill-suited to any representative role” (Bryce, “Medbh McGuckian”). Bryce does not mean this as a criticism, as anyone familiar with McGuckian’s work will appreciate. The characteristics of McGuckian’s work are a dense and not easily discernable meaning, confounding syntax, complex and striking imagery, and an ethereal and subversive tone; meaning that her work is radically different. However, because of these elements, her poetry has also been accused of difficulty and obtuseness, meaning that in many ways it is unknowable within its own tradition, or at the very least has the audacity to be subversive and atypical within the canon. This might be exemplified by the fact that McGuckian contributed four poems to both *The Female Line* and the “Contemporary Irish Poetry” section of third volume of the first (controversial) edition of *Field Day* (Hooley 71, 76-7, 150; Deane 1410-1). However, if Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey sought McGuckian as a precursor to help them write their way out of marginalisation, they might be disappointed, for as her own poem from *The Female Line*, “The Charm School” notes “No, she is not there, for all our elaborate / Eavesdropping” (1-2).

iii. Mainstream

To jump from one extreme to another is provocative, but it is necessary in this case because to view Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey purely as poets from a marginal female line within Northern Irish poetry is to ignore the other contexts that in part make a study such as this possible. The three poets are notable contributors to the developing canon of British and Irish women’s poetry, and to a continuing flourishing in Northern Irish poetry which is entering its sixth decade. As

unappealing as canons are to many feminist studies, based as they are on an inclusion/exclusion binary value system, to reflect the status of Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's poetry within the twenty-first century it is fair to describe them as mainstream in their engagement with the centralised poetry of a contemporary canon. Unlike the women of *The Female Line* anthology, Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey have been included in recent representative anthologies of Northern Irish poetry such as Guinness' *The New Irish Poets* and Brown's *Magnetic North: The Emerging Poets* (2004). It would be difficult to claim that three poets, who, between them, have appeared on the prestigious T.S. Eliot Prize Shortlist no less than six times in the past 10 years, are marginal to the prevailing trends of the contemporary poetry scene.

Further, their poetry can be said to be mainstream in that it does not display the markers of radical poetry either in theme or form as it has developed in the period. Given the multiplicities of contemporary radical poetics, comprising of various formal and textual innovations, Carrie Etter suggests one possible catch all criteria for that which is "other" to the mainstream; "poetries not readily found in the pages of Britain's broadsheets or larger-circulation literary journals" (9). Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey do not meet that criteria; their forms are not experimental, their narratives are easily accessible and their work is highly acclaimed by the established literary culture, appearing in broadsheets and the larger literary journals (and, in fact, Bryce formerly edited one such journal, *Poetry London*). McGuckian recognises this difference between the generations when she claims that in contrast with the "humour and style" of Flynn, "her own ruminative style 'has gone out with the Titanic'" (Acharya). While Flynn acknowledges McGuckian's work as "sublime and inspirational", it is not a style she conspicuously replicates or an inspiration readily alluded to.

Further, the recent poetry does not express any vastly radical political views; while the study does argue for the centrality of feminism to their work, it must be said that this feminism is not a radical statement in the way it was at the time *The Female Line* was published, due in part to the progress that second wave feminism can be seen to have made since the 1980s both within and beyond Northern Ireland. These twenty-first-century writers are not marginal in the way in which women writers in previous centuries were. They have not only had the chance to publish their work, but also to work and live as published authors and work within higher education institutions. There is no denying that women's poetry is informed by its previously marginal status, but in truth it might be better described as "post-marginal" to recognise the fading radicalism and growing mainstream appeal. As this appeal grows and the work is centralised, vigilant criticism must acknowledge and chart these changes and their effects.

The themes which are marginal within Northern Irish poetry and which the previous section indicated that they share with the non-canonical Northern Irish women's poetry tradition, are also characteristics they share with women's poetry more widely in the period. As women's poetry continues to flourish in the British and Irish poetry community, concerns with sexuality, motherhood and inter-female relationships reinforce rather than produce the phenomenon of women's writing, suggesting that newness within one tradition is replication within another. Critics Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle introduce some of the distinct interests characteristic of women's poetry in *A History of Twentieth Century British Women's Poetry* (2005), and their study reinforces that women are increasingly an integral part of the mainstream of literary culture, noting that "[b]y the year 2000, we see women penetrate the glass ceiling of literary authority" (169). Further, in writing a history Dowson and Entwistle's work intends to consolidate, or at the very least

reflect on, a “British Women’s Poetry” with “a distinct literary terminology, tradition and role models” – without which women’s poetry might continue to be marginal, “to have uncertain status and fade from literary memory”, as most of *The Female Line* poets have done (ix). Tellingly, Dowson and Entwistle even suggest Irish women poets were exemplary, “[t]owards the end of the century, the example of the Irish poets (Northern and Southern) who negotiate confidently with their complex literary history particularly infiltrates the British literature consciousness” (4), suggesting that perhaps the Northern Irish women are leading the way in post-marginal literature which can engage productively with a male line and a female line.

While Northern Irish poetry might be characterised by a lack of known female precursors, there are women precursors in the broader British and Irish poetry tradition and there are two in particular, Carol Ann Duffy and Eavan Boland, which Dowson and Entwistle set out as the major poets of twentieth-century women’s poetry. These two poets offer a useful framework for a reading of Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s poetry; Duffy representing the British context as the incumbent poet laureate (and whose first collection was published in the same year as *The Female Line*), and Boland representing the Irish context as one of the poets most critically engaged with the status of women’s writing in Ireland in the contemporary period. Comparing the younger poets with these precursors in the mainstream women’s tradition indicates how their work continues in this tradition.

More than Flynn and Morrissey, Bryce has a material debt to, and apprentice-like relationship with Duffy, that might suggest that in her success and continued engagement with Duffy’s ascent, she has been welcomed into the establishment of contemporary British poetry. Duffy in many ways brought Bryce to

poetry, for it was hearing her read by chance while an undergraduate that brought her to think about the practice. She recalls “her poems seemed relevant to our lives. But for me, who secretly wanted to write, the knowledge that a young woman could work as a poet ... was a revelation, and a door very quietly opened in my mind” (Bryce, “An Education” 37). It was to Duffy that Bryce turned later when attending a residential writing course, “tutored by the only living poet I had ever met – the very same Carol Ann Duffy”, and Bryce’s first publication was in the second of the *Anvil New Poets* anthologies; edited by Duffy and containing poets she herself wished “to commend to the reader” (Bryce, “An Education” 37; Duffy, *Anvil* 9). Duffy subsequently included Bryce’s work in the anthologies *Hand in Hand: An Anthology of Love Poems* (2001), *Out of Fashion: An Anthology of Poems* (2004), *Answering Back: Living Poets Reply to the Poetry of the Past* (2007). Bryce’s poem in the latter anthology responds to a MacNeice poem, and so the link between women’s poetic lineage is linked to Northern Irish lineage. More recently, Duffy included Bryce in a broadsheet feature of her thirteen favourite women poets to celebrate her laureateship in 2009, even commissioning her to write a poem inspired by sport for a broadsheet feature in 2010 (Duffy, “New Work”; Duffy, “Play Up!”).

Many recently emerged women poets are said to write in a similar way to Duffy, what Peter Forbes described with some disdain as “poets who write in Duffyesque” (it is worth noting here too that in the same article Forbes describes Bryce as an “original”). Entwistle and Dowson use “Duffyesque” as a more flattering adjective when they introduce Linda France, U.A. Fanthorpe and Elizabeth Bartlett as “poets [that] are Duffyesque in traversing the line between postmodern defamiliarisation and poetry’s expressive function to give verse to Britain’s socially deprived, foreigners and women” (215). As the major poet of contemporary women’s writing, that which is Duffyesque is the prevailing trend of the period, and

as such is in the mainstream of women's writing. Thus, where there are debts and parallels in the poetry of Duffy and Bryce, these are an interplay of mainstream characteristics. This study addresses a theme that might be presumed to be highly radical, but which is a characteristic of Duffy's mode which Bryce shares: lesbian love poetry.

There is a clear debt to the oft-anthologised Duffy poem "Warming Her Pearls" in a Bryce poem titled "The Wearer" commissioned by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2002. Both poems centre on an item of jewellery and propose a narrative of sexual desire around the wearing of expensive necklaces. Duffy's poem, from *Selling Manhattan* (1987), is a monologue in the voice of a maid who is tasked with warming a set of pearls for her mistress to wear in the evening. The "milky stones" carry with them the desire the maid feels for the mistress, "my slow heart entering / each pearl", and they provoke the speaker to "picture her dancing / with tall men" (12, 7-8, 10-11). Bryce's "The Wearer" is a poetic response to an item from the museum, and the 1901 silver and gold necklace with striking peacock pendant provides an excuse for a coquettish speaker to muse on her own beauty, vanity and the desires of those around her:

A peacock tail
can stop a clock, can shock
a room to silence.
Oh I played that game,
observed the trembling
hands of men pause
above my breasts. Exquisite,
they would murmur then. (12-19)

"The Wearer" is not as original or as fully achieved as "Warming Her Pearls", which might perhaps be a reason why it had not been included in any of Bryce's collections to date. Or, perhaps, the similarities with Duffy's "Warming Her Pearls" in the pivotal object, the theme of desirable and distant ladies, the monologue form

itself, and the syntactical flow which relies on mid-line caesuras, make Duffy's influence ring uncomfortably clear for the poet.

In fact, the only real difference between Bryce's "The Wearer" and Duffy's "Warming Her Pearls" is the lack of homosexual desire in Bryce's poem. Of course, adding such an aspect explicitly to "The Wearer" would make it a very clear imitation and would undermine any other positive original elements. Yet, the similarities already identified might support a reading wherein the "The Wearer" might in fact be in the voice of the mistress from "Wearing Her Pearls", affluent and vain enough to bid her servant warm her pearls and conscious of the male attention she attracts. Further, as the poet imagines the scene wherein the necklace and wearer move about the fashionable soirees, the later work pictures her through her own composition and in doing so becomes Duffy's servant beguiled enough to relate the beauty, "her every movement in my head" (18).

Both poets explore the theme of separation and distance and how these aspects impact romantic devotion in conventional ways. Eleanor Parker goes so far as to claim "Duffy's love poems are obsessed with distances [and] space. Their landscapes are often solitary ones where the speaker yearns for the absent lover" (80). Bryce's engagement with lonely desire in poems such as "Wish You Were" from *The Heel of Bernadette* and "Present Perfect" from *The Full Indian Rope Trick* could find parallels in Duffy's early poems such as "Miles Away" and "Correspondents", however a more obvious comparison can be found in poems which utilise distance in a more unconventional way; specifically by celebrating it, expressing disdain at the thought of getting to know an object of desire and a wish to maintain distance from them. In "To the Unknown Lover" from Duffy's *New Selected Poems* (2004), she tells the addressee "Be handsome, beautiful, drop-dead /

gorgeous, keep away” (4-5) while Bryce’s 2008 poem “Negotiating the Muse” from *Self-Portrait in the Dark* takes pre-emptive action, “Clocking you across a room / I leave immediately” (1-2). A non-idealised approach to desire and a rejection of the love before it even takes place is a common theme but the similarities in these two poems are even verbal. For Duffy, it is “Horrrifying, the very thought of you” (1) while for Bryce “Meeting you / would horrify” (17-18). There are important differences and a key strength of Bryce’s poem is that it sets out to create an anti-love poem from an anti-muse, “negotiating” their flaws and influence on the poem by exploiting them. However, the key flaw of the poem itself is that Bryce has been unable to negotiate the influence of Duffy.

However, debt and influence can be complicated, as in many of the relationships addressed in this thesis, by the chronological closeness of the poets. For both Bryce and Duffy, technological innovations such as mobile phones are used as key symbols in recent love poetry as the instrument through which contemporary passion and the language in which it is communicated is often filtered. Similarities in their choice and treatment of the mobile phone in love poetry are nearly as illuminating as the necklace poems “Warming Her Pearls” and “The Wearer” discussed above. Bryce’s poem “The Seal” from *The Full Indian Rope Trick* is one such example, wherein the speaker finds herself at the end of a garbled phone call from a lover as the handset “in the breast pocket [...] took it upon itself to phone” (5-7). The speaker finds listening to the unintended communication amplifies the distance between them as

I might have been a concerned doctor
 sitting there on our living-room floor,
 head inclined to a stethoscope, alert
 to the hint of the odd or irregular (22-26)

Bryce returns to a mobile phone call with a distant lover in a later poem from *Self-Portrait in the Dark*, “Where Are You?”, which offers a clear continuation of the themes of “The Seal”. In this later verse, the speaker talks with their lover as they do the shopping, listens not to clothes muffling the microphone but to “the backing track of barcode bleeps / and the jerk-squeaky wheel / of a trolley” (3-4). The trials of relationships are reflected in the closing lines “I’m losing you. / There’s not the reach on the line” (24-25), and it becomes clear that no matter how convenient relationships which rely on speed dial are, there is no substitute to intimacy that doesn’t rely on cell phone coverage.

Bryce’s poems might have been a companion piece to Duffy’s poem “Text” from *Rapture* in which the speaker also seeks emotional assurance from the mobile phone. The speaker

tend[s] the mobile now
like an injured bird.

We text, text, text
our significant words (1-4)

In “Quickdraw”, another poem from the same Duffy collection, the speaker waits for the phone to ring with a similar eagerness, “I wear the two, the mobile and the landline phones / like guns slung from the pockets on my hips” (1-2). The adrenalin and strength of feeling prompted when the lover calls is so intense it is compared to a Wild West gun fight, “[y]ou ring, quickdraw, your voice a pellet” (3) and the speaker is eventually gunned down by texts and the “kisses” (which might bring to mind the coded lesbian innuendo of Anne Lister’s diaries) they contain “Take this .../ and this... and this...” (16).

In all these works, the mobile is the mechanism by which the feelings of distance are amplified and paradoxically through which the two speakers seek reassurance or gratification from the loved one. Bryce is listening to the muffled sounds of her lover's clothing and the background interference of everyday life, while Duffy is on the lookout of "your small *xx*, / feeling absurd" ("Text" 7-8). However, if the symbiotic relationship between these poems is indeed a question of influence, it is certainly more complex than precursory influence in the traditional sense of the master poet (Duffy) and the student (Bryce). Bryce's "The Seal" was published in *The Full Indian Rope Trick* in October 2004.¹⁹ Her later poem "Where Are You?" was published in her 2008 collection *Self-Portrait in the Dark*. Intervening, Duffy's "Text" and "Quickdraw" form part of *Rapture*, published in 2005. Who is the precursor to whom in each instance? It seems clear that as Bryce matures, her earlier debts to Duffy are less important and perhaps they could be seen to be moving forward together in the development of a new lyrical and female poetics which reflects their experiences as lovers in the twenty-first century. Thus, Bryce is not only continuing in the mainstream in the shadow of Duffy, but she is creating it herself and Duffy may be following her. Ironically, this proves one of Duffy's own prophecies about Bryce (and the other poets from the *Anvil New Poets* anthology): "There are clearly aware [...] of the varied, warm and bustling life of contemporary poetry and they are assured enough to become a part of it and to add to it" (Duffy, *Anvil* 11).

A notable characteristic of the poetic mode they share is that they make little reference to the gender of the muse they address, normalising any lesbian subtext or queering the form by not making it explicit. As Monique Wittig theorises, "personal

¹⁹ The flyleaf erroneously claims publication was in 2005.

pronouns somehow engineer gender all through language”, they “designate the locutors in discourse and their difference and successive situations in relationship to that discourse”, and they are “the pathways and the means of entrance into language” (Wittig 78). Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body* (1992) is an extended example of lesbian literature’s refusal to enter into a gendered referential discourse, but in the shorter form of poetry, where each word attains heightened significance, the effect is much more subtle. The only teasing hint of lesbian sexuality in Bryce’s “The Seal” is that the phone is calling from a “breast pocket” (5). In another poem from *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, “Tense”, Bryce similarly teases as she recalls the moment of a first kiss, “where one of us / will risk everything” before “uncovering shoulders, breasts” (9-10). Duffy too makes little reference to any gender throughout the whole of her *tour-de-force* of passion, *Rapture*. The indication that the lover might be female comes only the once, in “Venus” which not only links the lover to the Roman goddess of love and female beauty, but envisages “the dark fruit of your nipple / ripe on your breast”: which playfully, the speaker cannot actually see (4-5). This is simultaneously a subversive and normalising effect; at once it is both irrefutably lesbian but at the same time presents a universalising view of love and sex. For Duffy and Bryce, passion, sex and love are experiences for individuals regardless of gender, about “I”, “you”, “we” and “us”, and as such need no gendered pronouns to make them either a heterosexual or homosexual narrative.

For Bryce, too, this more subtle and elegant lesbian love poetry is a move away from the more explicit and politically charged marginal lesbian verse of Irish poet and lesbian activist Mary Dorsey whose 1991 poem “Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear” recalls lesbian passion unapologetically if furtively; making love with the television on to spare the embarrassment of

the joy undisguised
of two people;
especially women
(imagine the uproar!)
coming together? (6-10)

Duffy's influence is not so clearly discernable in the case of Flynn and Morrissey.²⁰ Some material considerations including a heterosexual focus on relationships and the fact that they have both lived in Ireland for nearly the entirety of their lives (while Bryce has lived in England since 1988), might suggest that a presiding woman poet of the same stature as Duffy could be Boland. Boland is certainly not the only woman poet of note in Ireland, just as Duffy is not the only woman poet of note in the UK, but her work was among the strongest of the early wave of women's writing to come out of the Republic of Ireland in the 1960s and has become the most enduring. Further, she has been critically engaged with her own status within that tradition.

Boland's prose essays about her struggles as a woman poet competing with a patriarchal tradition in many ways seem to celebrate the passing of more difficult times by their very existence. The essays trace how she came to an understanding of how her own poems could maintain a central focus on her experiences as a young suburban wife and mother and in doing so embed these in the poetic tradition which seemed to limit her. She uses the past tense in *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* as if by 1995 many of the limitations had been

²⁰ Flynn does acknowledge Duffy: "At any rate, the fact is that after falling for Larkin (not magisterial), then avidly reading Armitage, Duffy and Paterson (not magisterial either – or not initially), a sense of authenticity or sincerity was entirely absent from the poetry which, formatively, I thought was good and worth emulating." (Flynn, "What do I know?"). Further, Morrissey's "Home Birth" was included in *Jubilee Lines: 60 Poets for 60 Years* (2012), edited by Duffy.

overcome; “In the old situation [...] it was possible to be a poet, permissible to be a woman and difficult to be both without flouting the damaged and incomplete permissions on which Irish poetry had been constructed” (xii). The elements of her poetry which she initially found so incompatible with Irish poetic tradition included “themes of history, of exile, of women, of the subtle corruptions of memory and the clear, startling visions of dailyness” (Boland, in Randolph xvi). Thus when Flynn and Morrissey scrutinise aspects of domestic life or incorporate the fears and joys of motherhood in their poetry (as discussions throughout this study consider) it is with a longer and broader view of recent Irish literary tradition which must make a nod toward Boland’s pioneering work. As demonstrated through my exploration of *The Female Line* anthology, the Northern Irish tradition had little work at all for women poets to follow. Turning to the more rapidly developing poetry scene in the Republic of Ireland, Boland must surely have offered a model.

Indeed, there are striking similarities in the structure of Boland’s first full length collection, *New Territory* (1967) and aspects of Flynn’s earlier collections *These Days* and *Drives*, despite their different provenances. Boland’s attempts to make clear her intention to participate in an Irish poetic tradition regardless of her gender are made very explicit in a number of poems which create a dialogue through dedication to some of her esteemed male peers. Many of the poems are dedicated; “Migration” for Michael Longley, “The Pilgrim” for Eamon Grennan and “The Flight of the Earls” for Kennelly (12, 9, 23). As discussed in the first chapter, this is a mode Flynn uses too in her early work to offer something up to her precursors, for example in “Sky Boats” from *Drives* which is after McGuckian or in “The Peace Lily” from *Profit and Loss* which is “for Michael Longley” and borrows some of Longley’s calm and measured tonality (13, 14). Flynn and Boland are both using their dedications to take something away from the dedicatee at the same time. In

Flynn's case, it is through her less than solemn "(sort of)" after the dedication in "Sky Boats" or in her ability to emulate Longley's gravitas. As a much earlier practitioner of this method, Boland was engaging with her peers in order to force them to take notice of her position on the margins of their tradition. In a similar way, Boland borrows titles to engage with her peers and precursors and moulds them for her own use, for example in "Belfast vs Dublin" in *New Territory* which is for Mahon and takes as its example and source text a Mahon poem (one which in 1967 still had its first of three titles, "Poem in Belfast") (Mahon, *Twelve Poems*). Flynn takes Mahon's same title in "Belfast" from *Drives* (2), and Morrissey too has her own "In Belfast" in *Between Here and There* (13). Finally, a poem from Boland's *New Territory* takes a precursor poet as the subject itself as in the fictional account of "Yeats in Civil War" (a title which evokes Yeats' "Meditations in Time of Civil War", which presents Yeats on a spiritual and poetic retreat during the working day while his country is ravaged. Boland's effect is to humanise her precursor who attempts to escape through poetry, "on that ship your mind was stowaway" (11), although in doing so she might be criticised for romanticising his work. Regardless, forcing the strongest poetic voice into the position of muse is a technique Flynn too uses in "When I Was Sixteen I Met Seamus Heaney" from *These Days*, although her dismissive approach, asking "who was Seamus Heaney?" (9), certainly doesn't directly romanticise Heaney or his writing in the way Boland romanticises Yeats.

However, Boland's female centric poetics and feminist criticism of Irish literary tradition is not necessarily a model either Flynn or Morrissey associate themselves closely with. There is no clear line of allusion we can trace from their work back to Boland; no epigraphs, no copied titles and no thematic acknowledgement of her work in the way they acknowledge Northern Irish precursors. In Flynn's poetry in particular, there are quite clear links to these

Northern Irish precursors, but her interest in toying with poetic tradition seems to stop at the border with the Republic of Ireland. In a review of Matthew Campbell's *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry* (2003), Flynn finds fault with the indiscriminate range, in particular with Boland's inclusion in the critical discussion, stingingly commenting; "it will take more than that before I'm persuaded that Eavan Boland's later work should be included in even such a self-professed liberal and open discussion of Irish poetry" (Flynn, "Companions" 111). It does not take a literary critic to work out that this is no positive endorsement of either Campbell's collection or Boland's "later" poetry.

It seems that there is little reverence for Boland, no element of feminist sisterhood in Flynn's criticism. Yet, perhaps there is something implicit in Flynn's brash disparagement of Boland's *later* poetry; as a trailblazing younger woman, Boland's early work was radical and politically charged. It was published by the burgeoning Dublin based feminist Attic Press and can already be identified as having a transformative effect on the literary agenda in Ireland in contemporary readings of the Irish tradition such as the Matthew Campbell text reviewed by Flynn. Campbell hails Boland as "a major critical as well as poetic figure in [the] turn of Irish poetry towards a critique of its traditionally-gendered forms" (16). However, arguably her later work has become popularised and assimilated into the Irish literary tradition it initially intended to disrupt, which of course has its merits, but somewhat diminishes Boland's radical standing. Further, and most damagingly, Boland attracted criticism for her own role in orchestrating this via American scholarship, most notably from Longley. She claims "American critics have done Boland no service in so readily allowing her to set the terms of her own reception. These terms include insertion of "the woman poet' into 'the national tradition'" (E Longley, "Irish Bards and American Audiences" 243). Further, Longley goes on to

criticise Boland for “signal[ing] her debts to Dickinson, Plath and Rich [...] That, surely, is for the critic to establish with reference to specific effects in the poems” (244). As a female poet-precursor she might well be important, but as a female poet-peer, it seems she is considerably less influential for Flynn and Morrissey.

One reason that Boland is less than a major figure for these poets is that as an Irish precursor she is inevitably competing with many other voices, and in particular with the Northern Irish poets including Heaney, Longley, Mahon, Muldoon and Carson. Just because these poets are male does not mean they are not influential precursors and the mainstream Northern Irish tradition supersedes other national voices. As such, it is these poets whom this study returns to again and again in this thesis as the source texts against which the later poets’ work must be viewed.

iv.

A key strength of the Northern Irish line in the second half of the twentieth century has been its ability to reinforce its considerable power and influence with new poetic groupings or “publishing generations”, to borrow Agee’s term (xxv). This line, for all the points of difference between the poets within it, is almost unique within contemporary literature for in it we witness and participate in the remaking of a canon and the remaking of the marginal. Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey have been appended to this mainstream Northern Irish tradition, the latest children of an illustrious poetic dynasty. As this thesis shows in other areas, this tradition is inspirational for Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey in that it provides ample material to engage with in troubling and selective ways. One notable side-effect for three women poets who are often cited as being the latest in an illustrious poetic tradition is that the need to preserve the esteem of the Northern Irish line seems to

overshadow the feminist politics which set their work apart from it. To acknowledge their gender as a crucial departure from the norms of the recent literary tradition would be to simultaneously draw attention to a flaw in that tradition and acknowledge the unknowable women of the same period of poetic flowering. The emphasis on patrilineal relationships in Northern Irish poetry, and the interest in tradition and transition, results in only “small shifts in the land” (E Longley, *Living* 154). These small shifts are in part due to the near chronological proximity of the different publishing generations, where the influence is so close that the tradition remains fairly conservative so as to continue rather than disrupt the line.

Further, being the latest in the generational matrix of the Northern Irish tradition does not in itself mean that Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey should be considered marginal writers. Newness and relative youth does not qualify as marginal, merely as emerging. Despite strategic positions with cultures and subcultures, ultimately it is time that dictates who will be marginal and who will be mainstream. While calling Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey mainstream might seem premature given the length of their publishing careers, it is against the example of the marginal *The Female Line* that in fact makes such a reading possible. In terms of writing *careers*, there are vast differences in how Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey are able to write compared to the women of the 1985 anthology. There could easily be centuries between those writers whose biographies almost sound like epitaphs; Mary Beckett, “[n]ow out of print”; Mary McGowan, “never considered trying to get anything published before”; Madden, “[n]ever dreamed of publishing anything”; Mary Twomey, “[n]ever previously published” (Hooley 185, 188, 190). Ironically, then, it is the anthology that has been used to prove their relationship to radicalist inversions into a mainstream tradition which also shows them to be irrefutably in the mainstream of the moment.

This study takes its cue from an accusation Bryce makes of literary criticism.

She claims that

Gender seems to matter far more in how poetry is criticised. Publishing has opened up, thankfully, but criticism seems to find change harder. Male poets are usually criticised in relation to the canon whereas women poets are often discussed as working in a vacuum. (Brown 319)

Thus, reading Bryce and her two peers in relation to the mainstream canon *and* the marginal vacuum understandably offers new insights. Such a reading participates in a crucial process in contemporary writing, an area in which the ground has not been clearly fenced off as in studies of older writing, by producing two parallel readings that shadow the ways in which criticism creates the canon. The process of reading with two binary cultural backdrops to poetry in mind (whether these are described as marginal/mainstream or vacuum/canon) represents a key critical paradigm, giving an example of how patriarchal value judgments may interfere with the reading process.

This work also demonstrates how a feminist approach might simultaneously produce two different readings. For example, uncovering the marginal tradition and stating its importance to women's writing is one feminist project which produces some insights, yet reading the same work alongside the mainstream women's canon is also fruitful – revealing the changing centralisation of themes, and the thin line between precursory influence and contemporary parallels. This study advocates a vari-focal approach to how influence and tradition are prescribed in studies of writing, one that acknowledges both the major and minor literary cultures. Further, this study shows that it is possible for these writers to be read as both marginal and mainstream; these two key contexts can overlap. Further, within the marginal/mainstream binary, attention must also be paid to the subsections of that opposition. To read Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey as Northern Irish women poets from a marginal vacuum and as Northern Irish poets within a mainstream national

canon would be to overlook entirely the importance of the wider context of contemporary women's poetry as it has come to prominence in recent years.

Acknowledging the variety of contexts is to also demonstrate that there are limits to each of these contexts whether they are major or minor. The terms "influence" and "tradition" are often bandied about in criticism as if they are singly defined terms in any given reading, but it is clear from this gender-conscious study that they are not clear-cut. As women poets and Northern Irish poets, Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey negotiate multiple contexts, and this means that their work is not single-minded, it contains many different facets which are characteristics of the various backgrounds that the writers consolidate within the metaphorical possibilities of poetry.

Finally, this chapter suggests how far women's writing has come in Northern Ireland. It is clear that *The Female Line* anthology cannot be read as mainstream in any way, but Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey can be. Yet, it would be damaging to view marginal concerns as simply being assimilated into the tradition isolated writers sought to problematise, since that would mean those concerns would ultimately lose their political gravitas. Instead, this study proposes, to consider Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey as bringing marginal concerns to the mainstream: at once constructing and deconstructing the tradition. Poetry, with all the varied meanings and readings it may produce, is the ideal form to consider this interplay happening within.

5. Poetics and Selectivity

“I found I was gifted, good.
And full of my vocation, sat or stood
at the mirror just watching my work
take shape, conform to my critical eye.”

Colette Bryce, “Form”

i.

This chapter will consider how contemporary poetry selectively participates in a Northern Irish lineage not through the paratextual, political or thematic practices discussed in the preceding chapters, but through its form. Form, in this context, relates to the poem's status as a self-consciously artificial linguistic construction and means that the poem is a highly styled utterance. Successful contemporary poems can appear, in many cases, unstyled and free in their narrative progression or irregular rhyme or rhythmic patterns. However, close attention to such textual elements in the poems can reveal the selective nature of composition and thus be another level at which a comparative reading is possible. As suggested in lines from Bryce's poem "Form" (which preface this chapter), poetry is reflectively "shaped" in the way it is presented as text and how this is presented is related to the "critical eye" of the *former*, the person who precedes the poem, the poet. Within a close literary culture of precursors, as in Northern Ireland, the relationship between the form, the poet, and the formal techniques of previous generations, is an area that invites close reading.

The relation of the form to a poem is various, and requires some consideration here. All poems, by virtue of *being* a poem, have a form in the sense that they exist in an, albeit sometimes difficult to quantify, physical manner when they appear for example in the published collections, anthologies or literary magazines considered in this study. Poetry is an "art-form", a taxonomic sub-category of art. In most of this discussion, the use of "form" refers to taxonomic sub-categories of the poetic art-form such as the sonnet, the sestina and the long poem. Formal aspects are also, more widely within poetry but also more distinctly in

the case of each aspect of the poem, the stylised physical and linguistic rendering of the poetic message such as the rhyme or the metre. Given these loaded applications, the multi-dimensional nature of form and its relation in turn with the poetic utterance creates diverse and strongly held opinions. Robert Pinsky claims that “[t]o talk about formal verse is meaningless – poetry *is* form” (Sylge 29), while C.D. Wright claims that “Poetry without form is a fiction” (Wright 8). What these comments indicate is that form, in whatever guise it is meant, is somehow integral to the poem itself as a structural or categorical element that is non-linguistic in its effect and yet proceeds from the linguistic being of the poem.

Genre is a term that is not totally interchangeable with form, but Derrida’s notion of it in “The Law of Genre” (1980) is useful when considering the categorical implications of form and how they relate to meaning. Just as with form, “as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity” (Derrida 97). The “common law” of genre and poetic form is “*repetition* [...] by citation or recitation” (58). As with poetic forms, genre is “essentially classificatory and genealogic-taxonomic” (61). It is form which makes a poem; just as “a text cannot belong to no genre”, a poem cannot have no form (65). “Every text participates in one or several genres [...] yet such participation never amounts to belonging [...] because of the *trait* of participation itself” (65). For example, the classification of a novel does not have a part in the “corpus whose denomination it nevertheless imparts” (65), or the classification of a sonnet does not directly effect the sonnet-poem itself, yet its status is somehow absolute. Stanford Friedman summates; Derrida is claiming that while genre appears to be “*description* [...] it] always implies *prescription*” (9). And, she argues, “the implicit power and authority of genre is such that we can scarcely read a literary text without some conscious or

subliminal set of expectations based on the genre to which the text signals its membership” (10). The same is true of verse forms such as the sonnet, the sestina, Japanese poetic forms, and the long poem in contemporary poetry.

Of the terms used to describe “closed” or “fixed verse” poetic forms such as the sonnet or the sestina, “received form” therefore is perhaps the most appropriate. Closed, meant in opposition to the lawlessness of free and open writing, suggests that poems in such closed forms are objects that are contained, set apart and not in dialogue with their surroundings. As Muldoon suggests of the sonnet:

The description of the sonnet as a “closed” form is itself a bit closed. It fails to take into account that the sonnet is no more closed than an arena is closed and that, for better or worse, the funeral games there are played for fun and that, to borrow Frost’s phrase, all games might have “mortal stakes”.
(Howarth, 11)

Fixed verse, in a similar vein, suggests that the rules of the forms are in some way repaired, corrective, unmovable or even neutered. This is, as many studies of formal variance across literary history prove, not true of successful poems in fixed verse forms. Received, on the other hand, evokes the process through which any set of rules pertaining to rhyme, rhythm and length have come to exist in contemporary writing. These forms are properly received from precursory poets; it is only through the process of close study of examples that they can be demonstrated in their effect. Attempts to explain formal characteristics through technical prose deaden the achievement of the form they attempt to describe. However, what is crucial to this study is that form is a choice. In deploying such received forms poets “signify”: they can “evoke an alliance, desired or ironised”, “flaunt” a poet’s skill and “recall” precursory writing (R Greene 498). As Michael D. Hurley and Michael O’Neill state, “[i]n choosing form, poets bring into play associations and expectations which they may satisfy, modify or subvert” (3).

Goodby notes that “the paradoxical effect of the Troubles on [Northern Irish poets] was to confirm the aesthetic of the well-made, of craft” (Goodby, *Irish Poetry* 176). This aesthetic proceeds from Yeats’ declaration on the role of form in poetry in “Under Ben Bulbin”:

Irish poets, learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds. (Yeats, *The Major* 69-74)

Despite the years that have passed, the notion of received form as a “well made” and remembering mode in opposition to “out of shape” and “base” composition is crucial to Irish poetry in the contemporary period (70, 72, 74). Indeed, Michael Smith suggested in 1995 that “Irish poets have had, and continue to have, a stereotypic notion of what a poem is ... and their efforts are directed exclusively to producing that *object*” (10). As such, considering how emerging poets within a Northern Irish tradition with clear recent associations, expectations, even stereotypes, engage with the received mechanics of poetry is an appropriate and necessary aspect of criticising their work in relation to literary lineage.

This chapter will consider several poetic forms notable in recent Northern Irish poetry, focussing in particular on the relationship between the forms as utilised by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey in comparison to their appearance in the work of other “formal” male Northern Irish poets including Heaney, Mahon, Longley, Muldoon and Carson. The chapter will highlight in particular Heaney, demonstrably an accomplished (if conservative) formalist, and Muldoon, a poet for whom form is experimental and unconventional, represent the ways in which recent poetry engages with poetics. Thus, in closely reading the later poets, the chapter will explore formal conventions and compliance, and formal experimentation and detachment.

Ultimately, it will reveal that an understanding of form and the effects of its characteristics in the poetry of previous generations of Northern Irish poets is inherent in the formal techniques used by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey. Poetic form is about control, and power, of and in language. How it is used by these women poets within a contested lineage is due consideration.

ii. “for those who measure, look, think twice”

The sonnet, in variants, has been utilised as the frame upon which countless poems have been composed. Examples appear in every English-language poetry, and beyond. The sonnet, a piece of verse, usually in fourteen decasyllabic lines and according to one of two definite rhyme schemes, is ubiquitous. The issue in contemporary poetry is not only one of ubiquity, but of diversity as the sonnet has, in its many incarnations, subverted each of these characteristics. As Stephen Burt suggests, many contemporary sonnets “would not, a hundred years ago, have been called sonnets at all” (Burt, “The Contemporary Sonnet” 245). As a fourteen (give-or-take-a-few) line form, whether in the Petrarchan rhymed octet and sestet, the Shakespearean rhymed quatrains and closing couplet, or any combination or modification of these, the sonnet has become the “most enduring, the most widely used and the most immediately recognisable” of all received forms (Hurley and O’Neill 76). Or, to put it another way, it is “one of the copingstones of poetic form” (Strand and Boland 59).

The relation between a form known to be so historic and literary traditions which recall that which is historic is not especially complex. As Burt suggests, “the sonnet is what each poet makes it: each inventive writer of sonnets finds new potentialities in the old form and each influential writer (though not all inventive

writers become influential) leaves the same form altered for others to use” (Burt, “The Contemporary Sonnet”, 263). This is, broadly speaking, a fair overview of how the form has developed; how Thomas Wyatt “used the Petrarchan octave but introduced a rhyming couplet”, how his contemporary the Earl of Surrey “introduced more rhymes” and by Shakespeare’s time the “couplet was often the loudest and most powerful part” (Strand and Boland 57). Crucially, as Burt suggests, these inter-sonnetary developments effect not only the sonnet “in general” but the form “within national and stylistic traditions” (Burt, “The Contemporary Sonnet” 263).

Within the national tradition, Yeats looms large as the primary inventive and influential sonneteer. While the sonnet was by no means his only formal mode, Helen Vendler suggests that “What the sonnet meant to Yeats, historically speaking, was verse consciously aware of itself as written [...] verse knowing itself to be artifice [...] associated with the essential English lyric tradition” (147). This aesthetic could not fail to be appealing to later poets both politically and artistically, and further, Yeats used the sonnet form in many of his most influential poems such as “At the Abbey Theatre” from *Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), an imitation and free translation of a sonnet in French by Pierre de Ronsard, and “Leda and the Swan” from *The Tower* (1928) which ruminates on the tale from Greek mythology (Yeats, *The Major* 166-68). In these poems, as in much else, Yeats “took it [the form] up”, “modernized it” and “although he was writing in English – he made it Irish” (Vendler 147). Patrick Kavanagh’s sonnets similarly stretch the sonnet’s national boundaries, most notably in the ironically titled “Epic” which suggests that “the local row”, the farm and its people, can be as “important” as the global political situation (14, 11). This is a statement of purpose for poetry, and a

claim made that the sonnet form is adequate for Irish poetry in its need to reflect Irish people like “the Duffys” and “old McCabe” (5, 6).

As a form not only aesthetically attractive, but with an English pedigree - that throughout the Troubles and post-ceasefire era remains problematic - and an Irish lineage, the sonnet moves from the work of Yeats and Kavanagh into Irish tradition. As Gillis notes, the Irish sonnet was changed by Yeats’s use, and “[r]ecent Irish poetry is saturated with sonnets [...] the sonnet’s modishness in contemporary Irish poetry is particularly striking, because relatively new”, and, “by the 2010s, it might be easier to count the Irish poets who do not write them with regularity” (Gillis, “The Modern Irish Sonnet” 568). Goodby claims that “Irish poetry before Muldoon displays little interest in the sonnet”, referring to Heaney’s “Glanmore Sonnets” as an example of a rare outing for the form (Goodby, “Hermeneutic Hermeticism” 158). However, even within these parameters, it is not true to say that there was little interest. Hewitt’s “Sonnets for Roberta” and later sequence “October Sonnets” demonstrate Hewitt’s sustained interest. MacNeice’s “Sunday Morning” is an example of mid-century sonnetary engagement. Post-1960s poets like Heaney and Longley were publishing sonnets before, or simultaneous to, the first Muldoon sonnet “Seanchas” in 1973; Heaney’s fourteen-liners include “Requiem for the Croppies” and “The Forge” from *Door into the Dark* (1969) and “Fireside” and “Oracle” from *Wintering Out* (1972) while Longley’s *An Exploded View* (1973) includes “Nightmare” and a fourteen line first part to “Readings” (Muldoon, *Poems*; Heaney, *Opened*; M Longley, *Collected*).

While the sonnet does have a reasonable history in Northern Irish poetry, it is indeed Muldoon who is the most extensive and inventive practitioner of the past century. As Gillis suggests, “the recent bloom and flourish of the form in Ireland at

least regarding poets emerging since the mid-1990s has taken place within a kind of poetic ecosphere dominated by the challenging and changing sonnetary accomplishments of Muldoon” (Gillis, “The Modern Irish Sonnet” 569). These accomplishments, however dazzling, do not completely overshadow the accomplishments of Heaney. He has, as Thomas O’Grady suggests, “shown throughout his career a pronounced preference for, and a remarkable command of, the sonnet form” (352). Heaney’s sonnets are in many ways the antithesis to Muldoon’s experimentalism, engaging more conventionally with the English and Irish literary tradition through pastoral references deploying little extreme formal experiment, even where the political sentiment is disruptive. These differences, sub-divisions of sub-divisions of sub-divisions, are proof that no sonnet is independent. Rather, as Gillis suggests, the sonnet “bespeaks a desire for continuity, for a community of tradition [...] the sonnet’s inherent complicity with tradition can, in fact, make it most apt for an ideologically and metaphysically searching form of poesis” (581). In selecting a community of tradition, each contemporary Northern Irish sonneteer positions themselves along from the diverging lines of Heaney and Muldoon, lines which intersect in turn with other communities and their connecting continuities. It is the form, thus, “for those who measure, look, think twice” before taking the leap (Bryce, “Footings”, *The Heel* 12).

Yet, beyond the national implications, there is a simultaneous issue in reading sonnets by women poets. The sonnet is, historically, regarded as a masculine, even patriarchal form. The history not only relates to the composition, rhyme scheme and rhythm, but to the expression of love, conventionally, for a haughty lady. As Natasha Distiller suggests in *Desire and Gender in the Sonnet Tradition*, the female sonneteer is in an oxymoronic relationship between authorship and subjectivity (163). Thus, in this risky position, the notion of consideration and

leap-taking in the use of the sonnet takes on a secondary significance (one no less primary than the national one). The notion of such leap-taking comes from Bryce's "Footings", the opening poem in her debut collection *The Heel of Bernadette*. This position is highly significant: no sonnet has meaning alone. In using the form Bryce suggests that this poem and those that follow should be considered as new engagements with other writing: writing by men, and writing by Northern Irish poets.

A retrospective, the octave in "Footings" positions two young people on top of a wall and sets the competing demands of descending slowly "to slide from the belly, swing there (caught / by the arm, by the palms, by the fingertips) drop" against leaping (3-4). In this disagreement, the rhyme scheme is confused until the finite resolution of "even pushed myself to prediction, scared you; / as it stood, before you leapt, I dared you" (7-8). The aftermath of the sestet rhymes in a more conventional manner (although it borrows from the Petrarchan pattern) as "tracks", "light", "life", and "twice" recall ABBA, and "home" and "bone" create a closing couplet (9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). This scheme reinforces the inevitability of the outcome (the "hard-won knowledge" of an injury [14]) and the triumph of a more calculated approach to life, of which composing a poem in a received form is one example. The title, "Footings" evokes the metrical feet of the poetic mode and in the sestet, the poem's comment on how "we found our feet in the lengthened light" immediately precedes the two lines "for those with the leap approach to life, / for those who measure, look, think twice" (10, 11-12) which most clearly indicate the competing feet at the heart of the poem; the overall rational voice of the iambic feet and the more daring anapaestic "with the leap" (11). Launching a debut collection on such a binary is wholly suitable for the enterprise of craft and calculation meeting risk.

“Footings” set out from the outset that Bryce understood how to stretch the sonnet’s conventions to convey a multifarious message. Thus, it is curious that, on the surface, she expresses little further interest in the fourteen-line poem despite the shorter lyric being a preferred mode. There are no other sonnets in her collections to date, although there are many twelve or thirteen-liners which have a sonnet-like impact amidst the whiteness of the page. Further, some other poems in *The Heel of Bernadette* demonstrate characteristics which suggest that the form has been in mind. “Line,” (sic) for example immediately follows “Footings” and is another retrospective on childhood city-roaming, presented as three quintains and a rhymed closing couplet evocative of the English sonnet of three quatrains and a couplet; ‘lines for the glory, lines for the pity’ (16-17). Similarly, the septet and quintain of “Stars” are proportionally reminiscent of the octave and sestet of the Petrarchan sonnet and the final lines are epiphanic as a half-rhyming couplet; “Here, the skies have taken cloud cover. / For us, one helicopter star.” (11-12).

Later, in a themed pamphlet, *The Observations of Aleksandr Svetlov* (2007), Bryce often utilises the sonnet-effect to best relay the pithy observations of the imagined twenty-first-century octogenarian Russian widower. Aleksandr is clearly a man not keen to pose ambitious questions in a long poetic exposition; he is keenly aware of how time is running out and feels that if his clock had a step, after each funeral, “there’d be a spring in it” (“The Clock II”, 4). The nine-line/four-line stanza split in “The Eyes of an Ass” and “So Much” proportionally and structurally recall the sonnet stanzas. Each, although very different, poses a question or argument relating to sadness and loneliness, and finishes the defence in the second stanza. Each also appears to make some concessions to the rhyme stipulations of the sonnet, for example in the closing couplet of “So Much” – “the slightest look or gesture is as good, / so much is already understood” (12-13). “The Eyes of an Ass” has a

weaving and persistent A rhyme in the end-word “me”, “empathy”, “family”, “technology”, “memory”, “cemetery”, and “history” (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9). These almost-sonnets seem, in their construction and the way their arguments are relayed, to be drawing on the sonnet history while at the same time side-stepping it somewhat through their inadequacies as sonnets.

The effort to compose these semi-sonnets is abandoned in *The Full Indian Rope Trick*; although the preferred mode is still the shorter poem, the stanza forms are generally consistently the same number of lines. Quatrains, for example, are used throughout “Blind Man’s Buff”, “Early Version”, “Words and Music”, and “+”. However, the sonnet effect returns in parts of *Self-Portrait in the Dark*, almost in opposition to generally longer poems elsewhere in that collection. “Next Year’s Luck” is Bryce’s only other fourteen-line poem and although it is divided into couplets the thought still changes direction in the ninth line on “We have walked three seasons to be here”, and ends with a rhymed couplet “uncatchable; then sticking to our boots / and decomposing, nourishing the roots” (9, 13-14). The luck is as elusive as the form of the poem, which is effectively a sonnet in disguise.

Bryce’s sonnets(?), especially the early ones, are in many ways unsteady on their (poetic) feet and oblique in their formal choices. Likewise, the points of formal reference in Flynn’s debut *These Days* and Morrissey’s debut *There was Fire in Vancouver* are indirect. The first half of *These Days* is made up of poems of ten lines (occasionally elongated in their effect by longer lines, or splitting lines using indentation). The fourteen-liners in this collection seem to shirk the baggage of the sonnet form; “Holland” and “Boys” for example use two septets divided into numbered sections that seem unnecessarily heavy-handed in such short lyrics. The two un-divided septets of “The Myth of Tea Boy” might be a sonnet of balanced

stanzas, but the poem does not really deploy a pivot as the whole mythical significance lies in the stagnation, that none of the staff know quite why Tea Boy comes to the café “[e]very evening, at the same time ... and orders his regular, please” (1-2). “The Magician” seems to be the closest Flynn is willing to get to the sonnet form. The opening two quatrains recall the two popular quatrain rhyme patterns, the interlocking ABAB and the enclosed ABBA, although they are irregular in their construction with a dominant A rhyme the feminine-ending of “gravity”, “Aphrodite”, and “money”, a B rhyme on “fall” and “skulls”, and a less clear D rhyme on the ending of “hair” and “sure”, resulting in the pattern ABCB DAAD. (1, 6, 7, 2, 4, 5, 8). In the first tercet the rhyme interlocks and switches the order of ds and gs from “moved” to “fugged” and “dog” (9, 10, 11). Thus, it seems unusual that end-rhyme is abandoned in the closing tercet with “Creda”, “sleeve”, and “handkerchiefs” (12, 13, 14). Thus, the formal volta of this poem is that the sonnet’s conventions do not deliver just as the magic of “The Magician”, everyday and clumsy, will certainly not deliver the “row of brightly coloured handkerchiefs” the speaker claims to expect (14).

Some of Morrissey’s early work suffers from similar issues. “Losing a Diary” is a fourteen-liner, divided as Flynn’s “Holland” is, somewhat cack-handedly, into two parts. A ten-line reflection on a rusted boat “[s]emi-ship-wrecked” in Howth harbour is followed by a quatrain on how the loss of a diary is like losing the connection to the “fixed honesty” of immediate impressions (1, 14). The sonnet, the vehicle for short diary-like impressions and resolution, might have been appropriate here but the divide slices and refuses it. Elsewhere in *There was Fire in Vancouver*, “Belfast Storm” and “In the Valley of Lazarus” are proportionally reminiscent in their respective four/three and eight/seven-line

construction, but they seem almost to miss the opportunity of engagement with the sonnet's characteristics and history.

The issue with these sonnet-variations is that it is possible to argue in every case against them being read as sonnetary at all. They do not adequately display the markers, bowdlerising in length, lyricism, rhyme patterns and more. Yet, they each contain some aspect of the sonnet characteristic in their shape, compactness and highly polished formal rendering. Michael R.G. Spiller sets out to answer "when is a sonnet not a sonnet?":

The short answer is that there is by custom a basic or simple sonnet, of which others are variations: it has proportion, being eight and six, and extension, being in ten- or eleven- syllable lines, and duration, having fourteen of them. Any poem which infringes one will remind us of a sonnet quite closely; a poem which infringes two will be more difficult to accommodate, but we will probably try to establish some procedure to account for the deformation (3)

Thus, each of the poems discussed is either proportionally, syllabically and/or durationally reminiscent of the sonnet form. Accounting for such deformations or irregularities is one issue, but if every basic or simple sonnet is to be regarded as a formal selection which sets in motion a backwards comparative cycle (no sonnet having total implication alone), what comparison are these in-eligible and often incredible poems seeking (if any)? The true purpose and identity of these poems is obscure, but, if one does argue for their sonnetary comparison, the formal shrugging of an opportunity for illustrious canonical, national and artistic engagement is telling.

Paradoxically, *Drives*, Flynn's second collection, includes twenty-three sonnets and thus it is the form which defines the collection. Many of these form part of a sonnet sequence which addresses the lives, addictions, chronic illnesses, mental health issues, sexual dysfunction and deaths of cultural figures from the twentieth-

century. The sonnet is used in these poems as a formal frame that links the poems while allowing for variants. These variants are in shape, through the inclusion of constructions such as sestets, octaves, quatrains, and couplets, which can change the impact of narrative progression. Further, variation is used in the rhyme schemes: some follow relatively traditional patterns, some barely do and some are blank verse. In a Freudian vein, mother figures appear frequently, for example in three consecutive lines of “Samuel Beckett”, when Beckett’s psychoanalyst adds that “a finger is pointed at Beckett’s mother. / Though perhaps, of course, it was *nothing* to do with his mother. // ‘*It is inconceivable this is not to do with my mother*’” (7-9). “Howard Hughes” raves down the phone “this is nothing to do with my mother!” (4). Charles Baudelaire writes of his mother, “*I think that one of us will kill the other.*” (14). Sex and the body that is both desirable and repugnant is another binding trope; “Elizabeth Bishop” has “bronchitis / And asthma. And eczema” (3-4), and is an “orphan, depressive, drinker, lesbian” (8). The figures in these poems, Virginia Woolf, Hughes, Olive Schreiner, Marcel Proust, Baudelaire, Dorothy Parker, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Alfred Hitchcock, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, George Orwell, Sylvia Plath, Tennessee Williams, and Ingmar Bergman are troubled geniuses, but they represent, in their celebrity, a literary culture. Similarly, the sonnet represents another literary and poetic culture, with all the troubled and troubling examples that precede it in literary history. They are aptly deconstructed through the mechanism that reflects their resulting cultural authority, a form which on the surface seems to offer control but in fact can be twisted to present only the control of their neuroses over them.

Flynn has somewhat dismissively described these poems as “Wikipedia poems” – “Everything you can fit into a sonnet about somebody’s life” (Flynn, “Leontia Flynn Reads From Her Poems”). This description suggests that they are

factual (although their reliability is probably doubtful) and that they are merely “stubs”, essential but often poorly composed biographies. This is aided by the way the poems are scattered throughout the collection as if in a procrastinatory Internet browsing history. However, there is a more complex pattern in this sonnet sequence. There are twelve fourteen-line sonnets with the name of a cultural figure either as the title, as part of the title, and on two occasions referenced in an epigraph. In addition, there are a further two poems (“Virginia Woolf” and “Howard Hughes”), which, despite being only ten-lines each, seem compellingly like they should be included in consideration of this as a sequence, as they maintain an octave/sestet proportion in their sestet/quatrains format, they are thematically similar, and their titling convention tallies with the other poems. It is worth noting, too, that “Robert Lowell” is made up of two separate parts, both of which is an individual sonnet in its own right. Thus, there are twelve sonnets, one of which is a double sonnet, and two almost-sonnets. The sequence, therefore, is made up of fifteen sonnets, and just as a fourteen-line poem recalls a sonnet, so fifteen sonnets recall a heroic crown of sonnets.

A heroic crown is, Marilyn Hacker states, “fifteen sonnets in which the last (or first) poem is made up of the first lines of the fourteen others” (302). This is not precisely the case in *Drives*, but rather, to treat the matter more thematically, the final sonnet of Flynn’s sequence, “Winter Light”, brings together many of the issues addressed in the preceding poems. “Winter Light” features a paranoid Jonas Persson who fears for nuclear war, he finds no comfort (religious or sexual) from a pastor. The pastor, Tomas, wavers in his faith as he considers that “[m]an’s existence / one long round of suffering” (5). He finds no solace in his mistress Märta, and she in turn has bodily afflictions including eczema and “suffers with her periods” (12). Paranoia, sexual disinterest, loss of faith, chronic health problems and depression

are the themes of the preceding poems. If thematic binding and numerical coincidence is insufficient grounds to argue for the literary biography poems to be a heroic crown, the reference to “the crown of her head” in “Winter Light” (10) and the cryptic and almost derisive line “What you call ‘personality’ / seems something heroic” (10-11) in “Personality”, Flynn’s *ars poetica* sonnet (which is returned to below), provide subtle signposts as to a frame hidden in plain sight.

There are aspects of “Winter Light” that set it apart from the others in the sequence. It is the only poem to include fictional characters not based on real authors; Jonas, Tomas and Märta are characters in Ingmar Bergman’s 1963 film. It is the only poem to take the title of a work as its title (“We Use Brilliantine...” uses a quotation). As a concluding crown sonnet it sums up the purpose of Flynn’s efforts; to indicate that the life of the author is inextricably linked to the work. This is reinforced by the prefatory note that Ingmar Bergman “*was ‘depressed’ by his own films*”. It is a psychoanalytic reading of how neuroses are rendered and in the almost frustrating immortality of these neuroses in creative work, it is a denial of Barthesian notions of the death of the author; goaded, almost, in the reference made to the deaths of Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell and George Orwell in their respective poems.

The two esteemed sequence sonneteers from the recent Northern Irish tradition are Heaney and Muldoon. Flynn’s tragi-heroic crown of sonnets is strongly reminiscent of Muldoon’s work, while as any kind of elegy, certainly, these poems are in no way comparable to the earnestness of Heaney’s famed “Clearances” sequence (*Opened*). The literary/pop cultural references, the emotional focus, the American bias (half of the figures presented are American), and the postmodern irony of the tone recall Muldoon. So much so, in fact, that Muldoon’s sonnet “Cesar

Vallejo: *Testimony*” from *The Annals of Chile* (1994) could sit comfortably in Flynn’s sequence; “Cesar Vallejo is dead: everyone used to knock him about ... by loneliness, by heavy rain, by the aforementioned roads.” (*Poems*, 9-14).

Furthermore, the cryptic patterning of Flynn’s heroic crown as scattered sonnets with subtle variants disguising the fifteen true sonnets is, like Muldoon’s formal style infuriatingly impressive. Charles McGrath describes Muldoon’s poems as “so formally complicated that they can seem like stunts or else like the obsessive handiwork of someone with a freakish gift for pattern and rhyming”. Like Flynn, this is disguised with a lack of pretentiousness and a lightness of touch and tone; even when the tone is bleak.

While the sequence is the backbone of *Drives*, there is a parallel use of the sonnet form in eleven additional sonnets which compliment the psychoanalytic and biographical themes in their autobiographical and often self-reflective themes. “Pastoral”, for example, reflects on a family weekend break, evoking the pastoral tradition, yet querying the relevance of the pastoral and thus the sonnet with some exclamatory irony, “For this is my leisured weekend in the country!” (5). “A Head for Figures” is critical of information overload: “61 ingredients in my chicken sandwich (8). “Poem for Christmas” is critical of the excessive consumption and drunkenness of the party season that comes to town “like cholera” (1). Behind each of these sonnets is the notion of time passing, and of her father’s increasing poor health; the “rustling facts” have “fallen from his head like crements” (“A Head for Figures” 11, 12). The notion of leaving is further explored in two related sonnets, “Casablanca, Backwards” and “Leaving Belfast” which use the octave/sestet formation of the sonnet to indicate the “turn” away. In the first line of the sestet in “Leaving Belfast”, the move from the general to the immediate signals the separation from past and future; “There are good times and bad times, yes, but you

are / burning your bridges” (9-10). On the other hand, “Casablanca, Backwards” inverts the octave/sestet order to reflect that the separation of the *Casablanca* storyline can become a reunion in reverse; a backwards volta and sestet to octave shift: “There are things turning over in my mind // as the plane starts banking down” (6-7).

Of these broadly first person observations, “Personality” and “Boxes” speak most metaphorically and reflectively about Flynn’s attitude to the form she has chosen to foreground in *Drives*. “Boxes”, discussed in a previous chapter as a poem about identity and flux in a globalised society, can also be considered a poesis commentary. The border official produces “reams of white, official forms” (6), and the pun on form is that the poem is of course a sonnet, which the traveller (poet) must fill the fields out adequately to prove the validity of their entrance request to the country (of literature). The identity papers thus parallel the process of using the box-line stanza forms and the link between order and form completion is highlighted in the iambic pattern of “A sudden light comes on in his eagle eye. / He hauls out reams of white, official forms” in contrast to the more free-flowing and irregular rhythm of lines such as “bends on your passport like a feeding bird” (5-6, 3). The half-rhyming end-word pattern (ABABCC) deployed in the sestet represents the creeping compliance as the form is filled out, but it is half-hearted as “destination”, “instep!”, “declare”, “indignant”, and two closing “N.I.”s only just meet the requirements with a “de” D rhyme and an “in” E rhyme followed by the repeated F (9, 10, 11, 12, 13-14). The productive creative resistance to form and to a Northern Irish tradition that the inventive poet deploys is demonstrated in the ironic final lines; “You write ‘Yes Please’ for sex?; and ‘Northern Irish’ – ‘N.I.’ / Which also, privately, stands for ‘N[ot] I[n]terested!’” (13-14). The F rhyme is both “Northern Irish” and “Not Interested”.

While “Boxes” could be read as a metaphorical exploration of form and authority, “Personality” is much more candid and critical. It begins, “‘Poetry’, you are saying, ‘is nothing but personality...’” (1), and thus seems to draw on the 2002 critical study *Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill* by Northern Irish poet-critic Peter McDonald. This text was reviewed by Flynn for *The Irish Review* in 2003, and she surmised that “McDonald argues, mediagenic poets are celebrated, the work of whom, in turn, is little more than a projection of an agreeable or no-nonsense personality ... Personality and tone, then, are set against ‘form’ which is a real poem’s final authority” (Flynn, “Taking Poetry Seriously” 149). By composing an ironic response to the thesis of McDonald’s study in the sonnet form, Flynn demonstrates that she, too, is a serious poetry critic. In “Personality” she suggests that she is disappointed that poetry is part of the “bullshit” and “racket” of the “weird cheerful meanness of people to each other” about status and responsibility (9, 10, 5). Against this, personality “seems something heroic”, something different from the iambic efforts students make to demonstrate their understanding by working on “practice corpse[s]” (11-12). All these formal experiments suggest is “love me, love me, love me, love me, love me...”; with the iambic stress on the self, “me” (14). Flynn’s own tone and personality is set in opposition to the selfish aspects of form and authority, and that she chooses to do so in a sonnet which (at least in the closing sestet) displays a virtuoso, even, serious, engagement with the iambic feet and end-rhymes of the sonnet form. Flynn’s sonnets, considered as a selective enterprise in relation to Northern Irish tradition, are certainly conscious, critical and quite unlike the corpses of form created by creative writing students as practice.

One of the issues relating to authority and crucial to the sonnet’s contemporary relevance in Northern Irish poetry was the use of it as the form for

engagement with the dominant English tradition in decades of turbulent political discourse. As Meg Tyler suggests, “[s]ome ambitious young writers compose sonnets in order to act out against tradition – I think of the younger Heaney who when he sat down to compose the *Glanmore Sonnets* composed them as a sequence that in essence talked back to the English sonnet” (Howarth 6). This postcolonial tendency, following from Yeats, proves problematic for the contemporary sonnet. As Gillis suggests, “the protean reality of the English-language sonnet gives the lie to simplistic ideas of homogenised English sonnet tradition, against which the Irish sonnet must do battle” (Gillis, *Oxford Handbook* 570). However, the protean reality of the Northern Irish sonnet does allow for continuities. Morrissey’s sonnets take up the interest in tradition, and in juxtaposing that tradition with contemporary concerns, is in a way more reminiscent of Heaney than of Muldoon.

Morrissey does not frequently use the sonnet form but when it does appear it is clear that the choice of form has been made to emphasise the subject. In “& Forgive Us Our Trespasses” from *Between Here and There*, the long quatorzain stanza (a form not used by either Bryce or Flynn) is deployed to resonate with the great history of love poetry in the sonnet form. The link back to this tradition is recalled in the somewhat archaic and formal language which leads to an almost confessional (in a liturgical sense) tone to the whole meditation. The poem is to “Father” on behalf of a congregation for whom unsanctioned loves “do not die”, pleading in the final lines “Accept from us the inappropriate / by which our dreams and daily scenes stay separate” (4, 5, 13-14). Similarly, in “Love, the nightwatch...” from *Through the Square Window*, the almost sacrosanct register, sonnet form and prosaic clause structures seem almost idealised for the subject in hand. Rather than praying in confession of inappropriate love, the later poem from *Through the Square Window* recalls with paradoxical elegance the “thunder of blood” and “flood-pain of

intimate stains” of labour; “Love, the nightwatch, gloved and gowned, attended” (14, 1). While for Flynn the relevance of the sonnet form lies in the experimental combination of formal patterning and the tension between authority, form and personality, for Morrissey, the attraction of the form is how it can be used to date the modern to produce a love poem with an almost timeless and universal feel.

However, the backwards-look of Morrissey’s sonnets does not always suggest idealisation. The restriction of the form represents the arbitrariness of rules in “Grammar” from *Through the Square Window* which opens with the first person speaker looking up from time studying William Strunk’s 1918 instructional text *The Elements of Style*. As the engrossed reader makes their way home their view is tainted with restrictions “faces on the train are real / as taxation and the sea-locked causeway is holding” (8). Reading again the authoritative statements such as “do not join independent clauses / with a comma; the possessive of witness is witness’s.” (10-11) the speaker struggles to consolidate this dry work with home life; “How do you punctuate a soul in two places? / I leave half of it here, take half home to my son” (12-13). The poem is a consideration of a prescriptive guide to language in a received poetic form, one with the impeccable grammar it preaches, yet with a malaise about the anachronism of such rules in modern life. Rather than studying, again, the elements of style (either in language or in received form), the suggestion is that the poet’s efforts might be more gainfully employed experiencing a more free and engaging mode, one which does not punctuate or limit expression to required elements.

The vast scale of the sonnet’s history and the variants possible mean that the responses of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, as demonstrated, are quite different. In some of their work, particularly the early collections and for Bryce especially across

her later work also, the form is tactfully avoided or presented in non-normative ways to evade the heavy baggage of literary tradition. Flynn is adept at manipulating the form, playfully engaging with “serious” critical issues, and constructing elaborate sonnetary sequences and using the commonality to weave together themes such as biography and neuroses. In doing so her process recalls the similar strategies and accomplishments of Muldoon so it is a tradition of especially inventive sonnets that she positions herself among. Morrissey is more conventional, but she understands well how to use the form in particular scenarios; to give sonnets about love some historical precedence and universality, and to display how the mind can be contained by arbitrary rules if style and form are made to be the primary work of poetry. In each of these differing engagements with the sonnet, the selective writer is measuring their technique and achievement, looking at their precursors’ and thinking twice about the shape of their poem as a stand-alone work, and a work in the stand-out formal tradition.

iii. “What will be handed down?”

The sestina form, like the sonnet, is a received historical form which resounds with the echoes of its previous incarnations. Attributed to Arnaut Daniel in the twelfth century and cultivated by Italian and Portuguese Troubadour poets, the form is a particularly complex repetitive rhyme using six end-words, *sesta rima*, appearing in fixed-position formation over six stanzas and in a three line envoi (R Greene 1296-7). This intricacy alone does not make the sestina remarkable, but its relative popularity in the contemporary period does. As Burt bluntly notes, “[t]here seem to be a lot of sestinas lately”: the form has “enjoyed a growing popularity”, especially notable in American poetry, but also in other English-language poetries, and, of

course for the purpose of this discussion, in Northern Irish poetry (Burt, "Sestina!" 218; R Greene 1297).

The question that dominates discussion of the sestina is why it is so enduring despite its age and the somewhat archaic arbitrariness of its defining features. For Strand and Boland, the contemporary appeal lies in "how easily it accommodates itself to conversation or plain style discourse" and how it "provides the formal groundwork for a circular narrative" (24). For David Caplan, the demands are so harshly capricious that "they ask to be used metaphorically", while for Burt the best examples of the form "meditate on the limits and frustrations of any model of poetry based in technique or entertainment and they complain that no other model fits" (Caplan 23; Burt, "Sestina!" 220). Margaret Spanos claims that "the poetic tension (form) transmits an intuition of the emotional tension (content) it describes" (549), making it "the perfect emblematic poem" (551). Beyond the philosophical poetics, ruminating on what the form's rules may offer artistically are more practical and literal explanations. Just as the first Troubadour poets used the sestina as an example of their verbal dexterity, so now it is an ostentatious exercise. For Joseph M. Conte, the transformation occurred as a result of (post)modernism, when the sestina became "an exercise or parlor [sic] game" (169). As Guinness suggests of emerging Irish poetry, the new formalism has been "accelerated by academe [...] The presence of several accomplished sestinas [...] is indicative of the awareness among younger poets of the need to learn the trade as Yeats commanded it" (30). The link made to Yeats here is telling: the sestina can be a form through which younger poets engage with the craft which has been fetishised in Irish poetry since Yeats' lines in "Under Ben Bulbin" that commanded that Irish poets should sing the "well made forms" (Yeats, *Major* 70).

This apprentice piece status stemming from Yeats' declaration, and reiterated by the rise of academic creative writing, can in fact stand against the form. "Writing a sestina, Ashbery once remarked, is like riding downhill on a bicycle while the pedals push your feet. The analogy makes the whole procedure sound exhilarating, risky, and somewhat foolhardy, making it irresistible", suggests the American poet David Lehmann (48). Yet, he continues, "Paradoxically, the very ubiquity of the sestina – it's a favorite [sic] in creative writing workshops – has recently begun to argue against it. The logic of Yogi Berra's: 'Nobody eats at that restaurant anymore – it's too crowded'" (Lehmann 48). It is this ubiquity that Brearton draws on, claiming that "the sestina can be a sometimes unfortunate rite of passage", especially in the work of younger or emerging poets, but, thankfully, "there are exceptions that prove the rule. One such is Leontia Flynn's '26'" (Brearton, "The Nothing-Could-Be-Simpler-Line" 631).

It is clear that the trademark of the sestina form is complexity, thus it follows that the sestina is a difficult form to compose. While a sonnet, due to its brevity and flexibility, might just manage to suggest it has been accidentally composed, the sestina insists on its author's involvement by highlighting the conscious selectiveness of formal composition. It is, as Jade Craddock summarises, "a pervasive myth [...] that free and experimental verse was the only choice for a progressive female poetics" (289). The sestinas by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey are informed not only by the complexity of their chosen form, but by complex relationships between the sexes and the generations. As this section will go on to show, Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, in their own ways, grapple with their subjects – family lines – and simultaneously demonstrate through their formalist poetics how this form can enhance the poem's meaning while situating themselves within recent literary tradition in Northern Ireland.

Within that recent Northern Irish context, Heaney's oft-anthologised "Two Lorries" from *The Spirit Level* (1996) is often cited as a contemporary example of the sestina form. This poem complies with the expected pattern of end-word repetitions in each stanza and the envoi, except for the largely phonetically compliant vowel variations on "load", "lode", and "lead" (Heaney, *Opened* 6, 7, 14). It seems to verify Strand and Boland's contention that the sestina suits conversation and narrative as over the thirty-nine lines the speaker relays the discourse between a flirtatious coalman and his young mother, and, further, conflates this narrative with a lorry primed with explosives pulling into Magherafelt during the Troubles. As Naomi Marklew points out, Spanos' connection between the content and the form also holds in "Two Lorries" (49). The repetition of the two lorries (albeit ones with different cargo), the locale of Magherafelt, the repeated coal deliveries, and the repeated acts of violence during the Troubles are all reinforced by the form. Thus, making it simultaneously emblematic of the peaceful repetitiveness of 1940s country life, and the cycles of violence and retaliation of the Troubles.

While "Two Lorries" is certainly a popular example of the sestina, it is Heaney's only engagement with the form. The poet who engages most extensively and creatively with the sestina is Muldoon, and in his trademark patterning, he is particularly adept at subverting it. "The Turn" from *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002), for example, appears to be formally compliant, but the Troubadourian dexterity is further demonstrated, as the whole thirty-nine-line sestina is in fact one sentence. "Cauliflowers" from *Madoc* (1991) likewise plays with the constraints, pushing the end-word rhyme scheme to extremes which would be abhorrent to formal purists: "market", "make out", "mudguard", "marked", "Magritte's", and "Margaret" (Muldoon, *Poems* 6, 7, 14, 22, 29, 33). His notable formal experiment is "twelve intercut sestinas, which he says he has 'exploded'" wherein the explosion is not the

subject of the sestina as in Heaney's "Two Lorries" (and Muldoon's "Cauliflowers") but the very fabric of the form itself (Coppelstone 34). The twelve rhyme-sounds of "Yarrow" from *The Annals of Chile* (1994) cycle in a similar way to the sestina form but are sustained over 1212 lines rather than the usual thirty-nine. "Incantata", from the same collection, uses these rhyme-sounds again, repeated in the exact same order, except that this time they are used within an eight-line stanza form rather than a six-line stanza form, over 360 lines (exactly ten times the usual number of lines in a sestina without an envoi) (Muldoon, *Poems*). It is this excessiveness that led Lucy Collins and Stephen Matterson to call Muldoon a writer of the "aberrational sestina" (13-14).

Given Muldoon's commitment to the form and its limitations, it is not surprising to find that other, and particularly recent, Northern Irish poets have also engaged with the form in intriguing ways. Laird, for example, in the thirty-seven part *Progress* from *Go Giants* (2013) "ambitiously attempts to rework Muldoon's signature 'exploded sestina' long form (reusing a set of rhyme sounds in a particular order) and [in] his splicing together of narrative strands" (McAuliffe 13). Rather than expanding outwards, Gillis' "To Belfast" from *Somebody, Somewhere* (2004) likewise takes the sestina form, but "fails to finish it", stopping short (Gamble 673). Morrissey and Bryce include one sestina in each of their most recent collections ("Telegraph" from *Through the Square Window* and "The Harm" from *Self-Portrait in the Dark* respectively), while Flynn includes one in each of her first two collections ("26" in *These Days*, and "Drive" in *Drives*). While Muldoon, Gillis and Laird seem to suggest that the Northern Irish sestina is deconstructed, exploded or unfinished, the poems by Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey seem, at least in a mechanical sense, to hold the form together. However, as this chapter will go on to demonstrate,

their engagements with the form are still complex, appropriate for their subject, and in no way merely replicatory or imitative of the poetry of Heaney or Muldoon.

For Flynn, the sestina is dance-like: it is seemingly effortless and yet the apparent abandon of the length conceals the rehearsed movements of repetition. “26”, her first sestina from *These Days*, features dance as a pivotal interest but it is not, as might be expected, one of the repeated end-words. Her parents “met at a dancehall in the city”, her father “crosses the dance floor”, asks her mother to “get up a dance with him”, she “agrees to dance one dance” and at that pivotal moment “lights in the dancehall shift in intensity” (13, 19, 20, 24, 28). In a form where the execution hinges on the effect of repetition, to include another layer mid-line and pass it off as a complement to the structural end-line repetition is clearly an attempt to add in trick steps to this dance. Rather than exploding the sestina outwards, Flynn almost causes it to implode by doubling the defining feature, repetition, throughout.

The complexity of the form is carried into the complexity of the poem. Brearton suggests that “Flynn tells the story of her parents’ meeting and marriage, and the ‘turning point’ where ‘they give up / the multiple things of life round 26’” (Brearton, Review of *Profit and Loss*). This is true, but it suggests that the poem is a straightforward and forward-moving narrative piece. The poem in fact shifts more fluidly from the imagined into the historical and out again. It begins with “Last night I dreamt I was 26” an immediate reminiscence (1). It then suggests that at twenty-six her mother married her father and “shunted” from the city to the country (3). Her father, still at what he considered “the adolescent age of 26” still lived in a County Down village. In the dancehall, her father is “no longer 26” and her mother is “not yet 26” (8, 16, 23). While “[t]his is the turning point”, it is an imagined one; in the history of her parents’ meeting, Flynn could never be an omniscient narrator (25).

Having relayed this narrative convincingly through the conversational lines, the narrator then tacitly acknowledges the constructed nature of it; it has “come to me in fragments, handed down / like a solvable puzzle” (33-34). The final stanza reflects a coming-to, as the original end-words which had been permitted to vary somewhat liberally in the tangent (“Down”, “done”, and “meltdown” [7, 6, 29]; “father” and “lever” [4, 11]; “city”, “simplicity”, and “intensity” [3, 12, 28]; “married”, “unmarried”, and “unhurried” [2, 17, 21]) return as if the confines of the form are the confines of the real moment. The final twist we come to was in fact in the inward (self-facing) turn of the first line. The dream, as we were told from the start, was not in fact about her parents’ meeting at all as the envoi summates; “Last night I dreamt that *I* was 26 and married / to the city. Under a fog, the voice of my father: / What will you give up? What will be handed down?” (37-39, emphasis added).

Muldoon argues that “the form is determined by the poem itself”, claiming that while “one certainly would not be writing a sestina without some sense of what a sestina is [...] I rarely, rarely, rarely set out to write a sestina” (Tusa). What is unconvincing about this statement is that it appears to lack any postmodern scepticism or reflect in any way on the relationship between the poem and the history of the received form it takes. Conte comments of the sestina that to select such a form “is to reject the romantic notion of an organic form and the Coleridgean preference for ‘form as proceeding’” (Conte 174). The thematic links between Flynn’s second sestina “Drive” from *Drives* and “26” seem to suggest that the formal continuity is a preceding concern in the latter poem. In “Drive”, Flynn’s mother “thinks for a moment” of “early marriage – love! – under the sign / of youth”, and if this in itself were not reminiscent of “26”, the form reinforces the matter (19, 20-1).

The narrative scope of “Drive” is also highly comparable to “26” as it shifts temporally from the general view of non-specific journeys and their common characteristics to the present tense of a single drive as “They drive along the old road and the new road” (11). From that present moment, the narrative ranges from “glancing at the clock” to “turning back to the clock” to early marriage, then to the future destination of this marriage (inevitable widowhood), and the distant present lives of her children (18, 19). To aid this ranging mindfulness, liberties are taken with the end-word repetition, repeating in half-rhymes or in eye-rhymes. The most variant of these is “motor” which appears in the scheme as “mother”, “another”, “together” and “daughters” (6, 7, 14, 22, 33).

Yet, while the sestina’s trickery is in many ways continued it is wholly changed in its seriousness. The frivolity of dreams, dances and serendipitous meetings is quite expunged by the reference to her father’s deteriorating mental faculties. While “26” has some of the showy dance of an apprentice piece, “Drive” is more emotionally serious. This complexity is reflected in the use of the title and the end-word “drive”. Each appearance of this word hints at some characteristic of her mother. It begins on the “gravel drive” of the marital home (the home she was shunted to in “26”), on leaving that she embarks on the drive of her “morning’s work”, and, while working she must deal with her husband’s forgotten signs and half-remembered songs “(my father’s going to drive / my mother to distraction)” (1, 8, 16-17). On reflection it was her characteristic “indefatigable drive” which made her marriage work, and while she finds her own children’s drives “bewildering” in her later years, Flynn reflects that there is still some pulse of “some drive” to keep going (23, 36, 38).

“Drive” is a poem which celebrates the enduring relationship between Flynn’s parents, and particularly lauds her mother’s efforts in marriage by exploring her thoughts through her daily experience. At the end of “26”, the voice of Flynn’s father asks “What will be handed down?”, and “Drive” suggests that her mother’s stoicism has not been unappreciated by her daughter (39). The sestina is, for Flynn, the form for the family poem in the way it cycles yet endures, in how certain words have been handed down through the stanzas to the envoi. Despite the infamous complexity of the form, Flynn’s sestinas generally suggest a positive, even romanticised generational link through the folklore-like account of her parent’s relationship. Even if there are emotional troubles, there is a continuing drive to carry on and hand down. On the other hand, Morrissey’s and Bryce’s sestinas, in different ways, are much less affirmative about the role of family and continuation in the lives they explore.

Morrissey’s “Telegraph” recounts the tale of damaged generations. A boy, “the youngest, loneliest child / in a family of five”, sees his brothers go to war and not return (1-2). His mother blames the only child she has left and is “meticulous in punishment”. These punishments are extreme (“confiscated meals, the bleeding feet”), and in some cases public; after wetting the bed he must stand “wrapped in a steaming sheet, to the frame of a backlit window” (7, 14, 11). The boy runs away and is soon married to a young woman who is pregnant, and in the envoi it is revealed that his own abuse has been carried through to his daughter: “Whose fault that for twelve years afterwards in that house / a man slipped into the room of a child, kept back from the tiny window / and nightly undid what only the hawk moths witnessed?” (37-39). This is a narrative different in every way from Flynn’s sestinas. As Batchelor notes, “the repeated end words tell much of the story: child, house, witness, window, night, fault. The poem cannot escape these end-words any

more than the child can outrun his circumstances”. The repetition reinforces the cycle of abuse from mother, to son, to daughter. There is also a sub-narrative of the abusive nature of the loveless shotgun wedding and an unfulfilling marriage. No kind of family relationship in this poem is idealised.

Bryce’s sestina “The Harm” seems at first to quite break with the familial theme. A child is walking to school – slowly – and stops at “one significant lamppost” which is “softly ticking” on a corner (2, 6). The child is convinced that the lamppost is a bomb from which “harm / in a wild cacophony of colour” will blow (13-14). The link between harm, explosions, and an otherwise inconsequential object is reminiscent of Heaney’s sestina “Two Lorries”. However, rather than coming from the lamppost, it is a near miss with a car as the girl crosses the road that creates the unexpected blast in this poem. A stranger earnestly intercedes, “haven’t you been told how to cross a road? This corner / has already seen the death of my daughter” (22-23). Thus, the family aspect of the sestina re-enters but in this guise it is not about passing on in the cycle, but marks instead the end of a mother/daughter relationship:

the woman’s words still ticking
in your head, her notion of harm
and the thought of her daughter, unable to stop

missing school. (34-37)

The end words, (stop, sure, harm, print, ticking and corner) are less striking than Morrissey’s but they instead switch in the middle of the third stanza from being the innocent musings of a dallying schoolgirl to being symbolic of the repetition of certain kinds of accidents on certain parts of the road and the ways in which their traumas repeat upon those involved.

“Telegraph” and “The Harm” demonstrate that what is cyclical is not necessarily positive. Both poems demonstrate to some extent a traumatic repetition compulsion. Freud suggests that this is when “the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, he *acts* it out, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud qtd. in Malcolm 28). “Telegraph” is a textbook example of this, as the abused becomes the abuser in each case. “The Harm” similarly explores a repeated trauma; the child in some way attuned to the potential danger of the corner but attributes this to the ticking lamppost rather than the road, and thus without knowing acts out the trauma of the onlooker mother who is inexplicably near to the site of her own loss. The use of the sestina form for these trauma poems complements the thematic trauma cycle, however it is in itself a repetition, albeit one from literary lineage.

Genealogy and trauma notably appear elsewhere in Northern Irish sestinas as a key concern. While Flynn’s “26” celebrates a romantic meeting, her “Drive” marks the loss of one party’s mental faculties to the point that road signs are empty to him. Heaney’s “Two Lorries”, discussed previously, is, like “26” and parts of “Drive”, about the previous life of the poet’s mother tied in with the Magherafelt bombing.²¹ Muldoon’s formal experiment “Yarrow” is an elegy for his mother and at one point “da”, short for father, becomes the “tornada” (a final short stanza, a term often used synonymously with envoi) of the poem (Muldoon, *Poems* 1162).²² Thus, if the recurrence of the sestina form is about what is received and what is

²¹ Marklew suggests this: “the sestina is a fitting form with which to write poetry about generational inheritance, and this is seen in the poem by the mention of Heaney’s biological mother, and also by the debt that Heaney owes to Elizabeth Bishop as an exemplary writer of the sestina.” (Marklew 49)

²² The genealogical impetus in recent sestinas is also evident in Irish poetry. David Wheatley’s ‘Chronicle’ from *Thirst* (1997) is one such example.

passed on, it cannot simply be viewed as an entirely easy negotiation. In selecting an infamously complex form, Bryce's, Flynn's, and Morrissey's sestinas suggest that family history, and the literary history of genealogical sestinas in Northern Irish poetry, is a conscious decision as to what you give up and what is handed down.

iv. "Two worlds split open to each other"

Perhaps the more unexpected of the forms prevalent in Northern Irish poetry which are discussed in this chapter is the relative popularity of received Japanese verse forms such as the haiku or the tanka. While, as mentioned, the sonnet has been notably enduring for centuries and can have a politically subversive relation to "English" poetry when utilised by Irish poets, and the recent popularity of the sestina is often attributed to its use in creative writing teaching, the link between Japanese forms and Northern Irish poetry is less easily established. Anatoly Kudryavitsky notes that "the history of haiku on this island [Ireland] goes back only a few decades, so the development of the genre started relatively late" (5). Kudryavitsky suggests that "[t]he first Irish poet to write haiku as we know them was Juanita Casey [...] She started composing haiku in the late 1960s" (5). This means that the development of the form in Irish poetry closely correlates to the chronology of the poetry renaissance centred in Northern Ireland. Recent publications including Kudryavitsky's *Bamboo Dreams: An Anthology of Haiku Poetry from Ireland* (2012) and Irene De Angelis and Joseph Woods' *Our Shared Japan: An Anthology of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (2007) indicate the growing acknowledgement of what Heaney terms "the generally Japanese effect" in contemporary Irish poetry (De Angelis and Woods 216). The effect refers not only to form, but to an aesthetic. However, as this study will demonstrate, for the older

generation, the two are linked. While “effect” implies something upon Irish poetry, rather than a willed or selective choice, Morrissey’s engagement with such an effect highlights the fashioned nature of an Irish/Japanese poetic by demonstrating a different style which reacts to the shortcomings and limitations she perceives.

Various explanations have been proffered to explain the prevalence of these Japanese-style short syllabic verses which offer very concise images and observations. De Angelis and Woods suggest that the 1973 publication of Mahon’s “A Snow Party” was “a decisive point”, noting that “[f]rom the mid-1970s on [...] forms like the haiku are adopted and, increasingly, adapted to an Irish medium” (xvi). Kudryavitsky argues we should speak of “an Irish haiku tradition” since “the Irish haiku movement is much closer to the Celtic stream than to the English one” (9). Nathan Suhr-Systma suggests there is “particular tradition”, one founded a century ago by Yeats and his contemporaries and “professed affinities between “Celts” and “the Orient,” reinforced by perceived parallels between Old Irish poetry and haiku, maintained by strong Japanese interest in Irish literature, and ... renovated as a result of the country’s success at attracting ... language teachers” (246). Heaney links the historical haiku and its reinvigoration of English-language poetry with the short imagist verse forms, for example Ezra Pound’s “faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough” (“In a Station of the Metro” 1-2), noting that:

What the haiku/imagist form can do is to reach down into that noiseless, strong, obscure, deep central stream and give both poet and reader a sense of epiphany [...] In the years since these early developments, the haiku form and the generally Japanese effect have been a constant feature of poetry in English. The names of Bashō and Issa and Buson have found their way into our discourse to the extent that we in Ireland have learnt to recognise something Japanese in the earliest lyrics of the native tradition. (De Angelis and Woods 216)

He also suggests that the “hermit poets who wrote in Old Irish in the little monasteries were also masters of the precise and suggestive”, before drawing on a

particular fragment of syllabic verse which has been notably championed in Northern Irish writing in recent years (216).²³ “*Int én bec*”, a 9th century verse translated from Irish by Heaney as:

The small bird
chirp-chirruped:
yellow neb,
a note-spurt.

Blackbird over
Lagan water.
Clumps of yellow
whin-burst! (“Blackbird Poems”)

Carson’s version re-orders the statements slightly to emphasise the yellow colour:

*the little bird
that whistled shrill
from the nib of
its yellow bill:*

*a note let go
o’er Belfast Lough -
a blackbird from
a yellow whin* (“Blackbird Poems”)

These are just two of the many prose and poetry translations of “*Int én bec*” from the twentieth-century.²⁴ John Wilson Foster claims that the poem has such an alluring quality that translating it “seems almost a kind of obligatory exercise” (11).

Just as, perhaps, for Japanese poets the seventeen-mora (syllable) verse form the *hokku* from which the modern haiku form comes “became important as a means for teachers to instruct their disciples and for established poets to hone their skills” (R Greene 593). The poem, initially monasterial marginalia, has become an emblem. A woodblock print of a blackbird, a typically Eastern technique, is the logo for the

²³ The reference here to “little monasteries” is suggestive of Frank O’Connor’s *The Little Monasteries: Translations from Irish Poetry Mainly of the Seventh to the Twelfth Centuries* (1976).

²⁴ Other contemporary versions also exist by Montague, Hewitt and Kinsella, along with translations in prose by Gerard Murphy, David Greene and Frank O’Connor.

Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University, Belfast. The anthology of poetry associated with the university (edited by Ormsby) is entitled *The Blackbird's Nest: An Anthology of Poetry from Queen's University Belfast* (2010). A poetry journal, *The Yellow Nib*, first edited by Carson, and later by Flynn and Ormsby, takes its title from the same source. Ian Sansom, curator of an exhibition on the original verse and its translations, suggests that "the poem's recent appeal has something to do with the character of the plucky little bird singing out over Belfast – the site of so much tragedy during the past three decades. [...] That, at least, is one way of looking at it".

Another way of looking at it is to identify the blackbird as a kind of family crest for the relatively recently constructed Northern Irish poetic lineage. While it may indicate that poets are conscious of both recent developments in modern poetry (the imagist connection) and the relative exoticism of a Celtic history which is aesthetically as distant as the Japanese effect, the poem in its fragment, and in its translations, is usually titled "The Blackbird of Belfast Lough". As Wilson Foster points out, "[a]nyone who knows Belfast and poetry" knows it (3). David Burleigh suggests, "it has almost become the signature tune of the Ulster poet, and is now nearly as well-known as Bashō's frog". Thus, while Heaney has implied a pan-Irish haiku effect, geographically and regionally, the blackbird's haiku effect is resolutely a show of poetic dominance that is uniquely Northern Irish, and, as Wilson Foster suggests, "the joy of the blackbird's song is in its continuity" (6). The imagist/haiku effect, then, is a formal mode that can be said to characterise certain aspects of continuity in Northern Irish poetry. The Japanese effect in its concise aesthetic and form is an effect not *about* Japan, but Belfast. This aspect almost ironically mirrors some of the historical discourse surrounding the haiku itself. "By the mid-19th c., haiku was trapped in a cultural discourse that saw the genre as something more than

lit.; indeed some schools of traditional haiku argued that haiku was not lit. at all but a unique expression of the Japanese spirit” (R Greene 751). The blackbird, commentators suggest, expresses something unique about the Belfast spirit.

Beyond the blackbird industry, the haiku form and its associated Japanese aesthetics noticeably recur in poetry by Carson, Mahon, Muldoon and Longley. Suhr-Sytsma suggests that “throughout the twentieth-century established Irish poets have persisted in associating Japan with a particular aesthetic derived from woodblock prints and translations of haiku” (246). This established generation “have tended to visit Japan, if at all, as cultural diplomats – their encounters ... strongly mediated by prior exposure to Japanese aesthetic forms” (246). Thus, the way in which their poetry relates to the haiku and tanka traditions is highly influenced by Western thinking about the forms, received through key texts such as Harold G. Henderson’s *An Introduction to Haiku: An Anthology of Poems and Poets from Bashō to Shik* (1958) which Carson described as “a little bible to me” (Ohno 19). Henderson’s translations, influential as they were, rendered every poem as a rhymed a-b-a tercet, whereas the Japanese originals never used rhyme. This demonstrates just one way in which the encounters in the West with the Japanese forms were imperfect.

While understanding of the haiku and “Japanese aesthetics” as rendered in English-language poetry can often be unclear, muddled or plain misleading, the rendering of the Japanese effect is most commonly found through formal repetitions of a norm. This norm is, usually, a five-seven-five syllabic tercet, “a rendition of the Japanese syllabic pattern of the five, seven and five moras, although in Japanese, these often appear in a single line”, is the most commonly accepted version of the haiku-form in English-language poetry (lent credence by Henderson’s translations,

and much of Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite's *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse* [1964], R Greene 594). This form is typically combined with a richness of imagery, "often juxtaposed in startling combinations" (R Greene 594).

These characteristics are employed by Heaney in *Seeing Things* (1991), complemented by other Japanese features such as a *kigo* (seasonal reference) and a *kireji* (cutting word): "Dangerous pavements. / But this year I face the ice / with my father's stick" (Heaney, *Opened* 1-3). Muldoon, too, the great formal illusionist has remained somewhat rigidly within the confines of the syllabic construction from the first ("The door of the shed / open-shuts with the clangor / of red against red.") to the last ("The maple's great cask / that once held so much in store / now yields a hip flask.") of the ninety "Hopewell Haiku" from *Hay* (1998) (Muldoon, *Poems* 1-3, 268-70). While critics often describe these poems as haiku (as indeed Muldoon does in titling the "Hopewell Haiku"), as Heaney points out they are more accurately "the folk form known as *senryū*, more humorous and robust than the *haiku*, more down to earth and insinuating" (De Angelis and Woods 218). Later "haiku" experiment in some cases, typographically denying the tidiness and order of the form as in "Brillo pads? Steel wool? / The regurrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrgitations, what, / of a long-eared owl?" from "News Headlines from the Homer Noble Farm" in *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002) or repeating the lines so as to render the form debilitated in communicating, as in "Completely at odds. / We're now completely at odds. / Completely at odds." from "90 Instant Messages to Tom Moore" in *Horse Latitudes* (2006) (Muldoon, *Moy* 49-51; Muldoon, *Horse* 268-70).

Longley, who Heaney described as a "Hiberno-Japanese master", takes the sparseness of the form even further (De Angelis and Woods 218). Many of his poems show the trademark sparseness taken from the haiku form, what one critic

describes as “import[ing] the exquisite formalities of oriental culture into an Irish setting” (Kinsella, “Poetry and Ceremony” 93). “The Freemartin” from *No Continuing City* (1969) features four three-line stanzas (five-six-three, five-six-three, five-four-six and seven-four-five respectively), which resound with formal echoes. Similarly, “Wind-Farmer” from *The Ghost Orchid* (1995) ruminates on the new eco-friendly landscape in two lines which fall only just short of seventeen syllables each, “The wind-farmer’s smallholding reaches as far as the horizon. / Between fields of hailstones and raindrops his frost-flowers grow” (M Longley, *Collected* 1-3). “A Pair of Shoes” from the same collection makes reference to the Japanese landscapes of “Tokyo”, “Nagoya”, “Takayama”, and the “Garden of Ryoan-ji”, but acknowledges that we “make up the landscape / We borrow, faraway places in a gravelly sea” (M Longley, *Collected* 2, 3, 1, 3-4). These poems exemplify the ways in which form can be a borrowed landscape.

Similarly, the title poem of Longley’s 2000 collection *The Weather in Japan* breaks yet preserves the three-line structure by allowing the title to enjamb into the first line of a two line verse, creating a five-seven-seven verse.

The Weather in Japan

Makes bead curtains of the rain,

Or the mist a paper screen. (M Longley, *Collected* 1-2)

Longley described this poem as exemplifying “a new form I’ve invented and am trying to impose on the world in the belief that the haiku is garrulous and overweight. Should I call it the low-ku? The title runs into the first line, and the couplet has to be as short as possible, and it has to rhyme ... And in naming the book after such a brevity I might be making a point about scale and importance.” (McDonald, “Au Revoir”). Longley’s “new form” might, for a scholar of Japanese

poetry forms, recall the *katauta*, the (admittedly unrhymed) five-seven-seven syllabic form which often forms part of a dialogue and “suggests incompleteness when alone” (Browner and Miner 507).

Morrissey suggests that her relation to the Japanese formal modes came first through her reading of just such Northern Irish poetry which exhibited such Japanese effects. However, her experience of living and working in Japan before the publication of her second collection *Between Here and There* was formative in developing a more complex effect than her precursors achieve in the examples discussed above. Morrissey acknowledged that when she went to Japan, Longley’s poems “were so resonant in my mind, everything I saw was connecting back ... But Longley’s voice was a false beginning for me because it wasn’t my voice and ... because my experience was so different to the haiku aesthetic” (Suhr-Systema 267). In identifying the falsity of this aesthetic through personal experience of Japanese culture, Morrissey exposes that the Northern Irish Japanese effect is a representation rather than a truth. To draw on Edward Said’s view of the West’s engagement with the otherness of the East in literature, it is “not ... a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence — in which I do not for a moment believe”, but an aesthetic that “operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting” (273). Representation to this degree refers not just to an Oriental essence, but to the linked Celtic essence informed by the early Irish-language texts, or, as Heaney puts it the “certain resemblance between vernacular Irish and traditional Japanese ways of looking at things” (De Angelis and Woods 218). Morrissey’s own writing aims to move away from “that staid, spare model, which is often the way Western poets write about Japan”, and in the poems from *Between Here and There* which engage explicitly with Japan, and in later poems, her formal choices reflect a desire to create a

Japanese/Northern Irish aesthetic that is more grounded in its authenticity and more striking for it (Suhr-Systma 268).

“Before and After” from *Between Here and There* is Morrissey’s denial of an affective resonance, the tendency to experience the same effect in response to common stimuli, on which the Japanese effect in Northern Irish poetry relies. The first part is enclosed in quotation marks that, subtly, indicate that it is a received account, heard or read about notions that serve a purpose. The implication is that the disciplinary ill-prophecies, that Agricultural High Schools are “the worst high schools in Japan”, are set out by an unnamed speaker before the fact (1). The second part is not a quotation, it is based on personal experience, so “the persimmons in your garden by Yoro Hill” are a Japanese effect, individually experienced, and thus are more complex than the received collective effect (23). The received knowledge is shown to be prejudiced to one view, and that view is inaccurate.

Thus, received forms, too, might be prey to inaccuracies or inadequacies. As Suhr-Systma suggests, instead of “paring back to haiku-like brevity or understatement, [Morrissey’s] poetry written in Japan became more expansive” (267). If the Western stereotype of Japanese poetry is brevity and clarity, then Morrissey certainly explodes this. Many of the poems in the “Japan” section of *Between Here and There* are formally more excessive than any rendering of the culture seen before in Northern Irish poetry. The lines are longer, and the clauses drag so as to almost act against succinctness. Paradoxically, yet perhaps naturally given the sparseness she is writing against, the excess is characterised by a lack. “Goldfish”, the opening poem of the section makes this abundantly clear by dispensing with the niceties of punctuation, allowing for a legato flow as the lines brim into each other.

The black fish under the bridge was so long I mistook it
 for a goldfish in a Japanese garden the kind the philosophers
 wanted about them so much gold underwater to tell them what waited
 in another element like breathing water they wanted to go
 to the place where closing eyes is to see (1-5)

This could not be further from the calculated, epigrammatic, weighty vocabulary
 and considered punctuation in, for example, this autographic epigraph to Longley's
Man Lying On A Wall (1976):

No insulation –
 A house full of draughts,
 Visitors, friends:

Its warmth escaping –
 The snow on our roof
 The first to melt. (M Longley, *Collected* 1-6)

The link between Longley's autographic epigraphing practice, the similarities
 between his poems and the Western ideas of Japanese poetry in three-line stanzas,
 and the expression of overcoming the block which Morrissey experienced in Japan
 in her autographic epigraph to *Between Here and There*, indicates that the epigraph
 celebrates an overcoming of preconceived expectations for expressing Japan.²⁵ The
 voice that returned in Morrissey's epigraph was "*burdened with presents from being
 away / and bringing me everything under the sun*" (11-2). The poems about Japan
 are these presents, burdened with the experience and thus brim full.

²⁵ See pages 55-6 in this thesis for the reference to Morrissey's autographic epigraph which appears
 in *Between Here and There*.

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews describes “Goldfish” as a poem in which Morrissey “gives the impression of going beyond herself” (262). However, in her stanza formation in “Goldfish” and in other expansive poems including the title poem “Between Here and There” and longer pieces “To Imagine an Alphabet” and “Pearl”, it seems that she is going beyond the haiku form, and beyond the brevity of her predecessors. “Between Here and There” reveals the sterility of Buddhist rituals, discussing “stone babies” dressed in aprons to warm their journey to heaven, a “graveyard for miscarriages”, a massive wooden building for a statue, and an atheist monk who “can chant any you-name-it soul” to paradise (2, 8, 27). If Longley’s *The Weather in Japan* makes a comment on scale in the brevity of the title poem, so too does Morrissey in *Between Here and There*: the vastness of belief and man’s reflections of it can still echo with emptiness.

What is notable about Morrissey’s Japan poems is that while they do not make use of the brevity of the seventeen-syllable *hokku* (later haiku) characteristic, they are in some senses linked-verse like the *haikai* (comic) mode as they are grouped as a sequence in “Part II: Japan”, and as a sequence within a sequence in the Festival poems (discussed later). They are comparable because this mode permitted “‘vulgar’ (*zoku*) topics and situations that were not allowed in courtly verse” (R Greene 592). This included “references to the everyday lives of commoners”, such as the young people of the Agricultural High School in which Morrissey taught (R Greene 592). The students in “Before and After” are unremarkable; “sons of farmers come to learn the trade”, “children who fall through the sieve of the system”, and ones “not retarded // severely enough to merit a home for the disabled” (7, 9, 3-4). Furthermore, “haikai-linked verse was expected to be humorous: this ranged from subtle, intellectual allusiveness to outrageous puns and coarse ribaldry” (R Greene 592). For Morrissey, the ribaldry is in the students who,

purportedly, will “masturbate in class” and “want to know the English for sexual positions” (3, 17). Likewise, the jocular and shocking “What do you think when you see a mâché vagina / being rammed with a penis as broad as a battering ram / so that children disguised as elements shriek with joy?” of “Summer Festival” is followed by the climatic pun “*The moon came to watch us and we all fell down*” (1-3, 6). The scenes presented at the Japanese festivals are obviously not vulgar, but an expression of their cultural mores. However, within Northern Irish poetry, it is an unusually graphic representation of sexual relationships.

The arresting “Summer Festival” rightly cannot be considered alone. Within the Japan section, the five “Festival” poems are clearly intended to be read as an autonomous grouping in their titles (“Ogaki Festival”, “Spring Festival”, “Summer Festival”, “Autumn Festival” and “Winter Festival”), their chronological ordering in the collection, and in their common two three-line stanza composition. They do, more than the other Japan poems, recall the Western haiku aesthetic in their seasonal reflection, their brevity, their juxtaposition of images and their cutting from the exterior scene to the interior reflection. These poems, through their chronological progression, explore the ritualistic and cyclical nature of the culture. However, just as in “Between Here and There”, there is a hint that these forms of marking time’s passing are not always satisfactory.

Morrissey reflects that she was “fascinated by the way so much was connected to form ... it seemed to me that form was prioritised over content, in lots of different aspects of life, which is the opposite of the West” (De Angelis 146). In these poems the repetition of these kinds of cultural celebration are prioritised over the individual’s experience of them as alien. The order of the Ogaki Festival’s “lap[s] round the street” are in contrast to the confusion of the drunk speaker (2). As

an observer to “Spring Festival”, the speaker feels “hauled into life’s procession”, and watches the repetition in “Autumn Festival” as women dance “in rings”, the same steps “[a]gain and again” (“Spring Festival” 5; “Autumn Festival” 4,5). These events demonstrate how confusing and excessive aspects of Japanese culture are for a Westerner to experience, rather than suggesting any one moment of pure clarity or understanding of the self, nature, or cultural empathy. Rather than a body in communion with nature, as is often implied by the clarity of the haiku moment, the “Summer Festival” “*disembod[ies]*”, the “Spring Festival” “reduce[s] me” with “vaginas on shrines”, in “Ogaki Festival” beer is pushed “into my hands” until “three of them, laughing, [are] hold[ing] my head” (“Summer Festival” 4; “Spring Festival” 2; “Ogaki Festival” 1, 6). Rather than the almost simplistic and easily controlled Japanese effect of the formal and aesthetic choices of her precursors, Morrissey demonstrates that the experience of an “Other” culture is not something that can be easily consolidated.

This element of estrangement is also explored in poems which explore language. As clearly defined in their thematic commonalities as the festival sequence, “Night Drive in Four Metaphors”, “To Encourage the Study of Kanji”, and “To Imagine an Alphabet”, address the complexities of communication. Morrissey described the Japanese language and Chinese character system as offering “a visual understanding of language [...] meaning comes in flashes, rather than being linear. It is so much more intricate and multidimensional than English” (De Angelis 146). “Night Drive in Four Metaphors” could be read as an attempt to render this linguistic system into English using the poetic form as the means not available in other aspects of language. The visual understanding is offered typographically through the last line of each of the four stanzas being printed in italics. It becomes clear through reading that these statements, the metaphors of the

title, offer flashes of meaning quite distinct from the linear progression of the night drive's narrative. This textual dimension is reinforced by the way the landscape the drive is passing through is reminiscent of the shapes of the kanji system. A narrow road is "straight as the line through the kanji for 'centre'", a moon is "on its back under the shadow of its circle", and clothing on balconies are "lines across and lines down" (3, 6, 11).

The theme of frustrated communication in Morrissey's experience of Japanese life noticeably does not take its formal definitions from the Westernised Japanese poetic forms which imply an equivalent aesthetic between the East and West. It instead seems to suggest that the form of Japanese language is in fact untranslatable. "To Encourage the Study of Kanji" ominously recalls "I've been inside these letters it seems for years", nonetheless, they remain "as dead as the names of untraceable constellations" (1, 5). This seems an unusual angle for a poem that seeks to encourage the study of kanji, yet, it is in their very obtuseness that their appeal lies. Kanji shows a knowledge structure, a communication form, made by "some other mind" that offers a shocking newness (even if it is ancient in origin) (7). This in turn reveals the capacity for a new poetic form which Morrissey's poem creates. Similarly, "To Imagine an Alphabet" is visually remarkable as six six-line stanzas have the shortness of their lines juxtaposed against six, much longer, intervening lines. An imagined narrative of the development of a Chinese alphabet, it charts a history from the mythic to the modern. In translating the characters, the poem suggests a visual and symbolic *aide mémoire* system, "I draw windows leaking / on the kanji for Rain" (33-34). The system is engrossing, and yet simultaneously so pre-linguistic that it seems infantile, lacking the complexity of what it represents: "I make my moon round my forest has branches my people are walking with arms and a head" (35). The lack, even, of punctuation marks recalls

the excessiveness of expression of “Goldfish”. The need to understand and be understood prompts the language to go back to basics, but the form is calculated to relay this.

Through their engagement with language structures, lived experience and understanding, Morrissey’s Japan poems demonstrate how aspects of poetic form and the knowledge heritage it acknowledges are culturally specific. “Received forms”, for example, in the way that they are received are often artificial. The *haiku*, *renga*, *tanka*, *haikai*, and *senryu* are all the terms translated from one culture and transposed in a new form into another culture. The Northern Irish adoption of these forms and their apparent characteristics is an effect claimed as Japanese, but as Morrissey shows, it is inassimilable. It cannot be integrated because it is, to draw on psychoanalytic rather than postcolonial theory, Other. Paraphrasing Jacques Lacan, Dylan Evans explains that “The big Other designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification ... the big Other *is* the symbolic insofar as it is particularized for each subject” (Evans 133). It takes a return to the symbolic order of the big Other, an acknowledgement of the limitations between the self and that subject, *Between Here and There*, to address Japan and to give it form in poetry.

v. “[I] would greet you in fifteen different languages”

The received forms previously discussed in this chapter are forms which aim to reflect an original thought within a framework with preconceived conventions whether these are in terms of language mechanics or effects. Translation, while it seems an unrelated linguistic aspect of poetic composition, can demonstrate the ways in which a reading of formal aspects of poetry can also reveal new ways of

considering the relation of the poem to its surrounding contexts. Translation is a way of giving new form to something that has been received, but it is the opposite of the received forms discussed thus far as it is the content which is received (albeit in a different language) and the linguistic, and thus textual, form which is new.

Ultimately, poetry translation is the enterprise in which poetry from one language, history and tradition is represented as poetry in another language, history and tradition. Like much else in poetry, it appears to be merely a matter of linguistics, but the true effects and insinuations rely on much else. As Eugene Nida suggests, what the translator aims for is what the poet also strives for “an effective blend of matter and manner” (134). This is also what the poet strives for in creating a poem which has both matter (subject) and manner (form).

Carson, himself a poet-translator, comments that “poetry is itself a translation, carrying a burden of meaning from one place to another, feeling it change in shape and weight as it travels. Words are a shifty business” (Carson, “The Other” 235). The issue interrogated here is that poetry and translation are both engaged with exchange and change, gain and loss. Just as a sonnet is not only a poem of fourteen lines with certain end-rhyme patterns, translations always (but perhaps most particularly in the case of poetry) do more than relay the message. As Jackson Matthews suggested in 1969:

To translate a poem whole is to compose another poem. A whole translation will be faithful to the *matter*, and it will ‘approximate the form’ of the original; and it will have a life of its own, which is the voice of the translator (Matthews qtd. in Nida 131)

The section title of this diversion from form to language is taken from Bryce’s “Plot Summary, Scene Four” in which the speaker suggests that in this mock-drama they “would greet you in fifteen different languages” (2). The greetings would all ultimately perform the same function in their matter but their manner will be more

complex as the speaker assumes the different tongues. As in the previous readings of the approximations of received formal modes in the work of Northern Irish poets, attention paid to the equivalences and differences in translation practice by Bryce and Flynn can be illuminating.

Justin Quinn suggests that “[t]ranslation from languages other than Irish is of marginal interest for the understanding of contemporary Irish poetry written in English” (Quinn, “Incoming” 341). It is clear that in many cases and for most critics the minor/major linguistic dualism of Irish culture is an important consideration. Yet, for Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey the couriering of poetry between Gaelic and English has not yet been a major concern and their linguistic exchanges have been in languages from much further afield including Japanese, Russian and Latin. Quinn argues that “[e]ven those poets who know no Irish at all, and have not inherited a sense of responsibility towards the language, still evince a concern for it” (344). This, however, is a political angle, and one that seems difficult to prove in the work here discussed. As with the English sonnet tradition, such debates and tensions do not seem as crucial in later works. Thus, rather than focusing on the national linguistic politics, it seems prudent to consider instead the effects of other languages in recent poetry.

Translation, in fact, is not really the appropriate term to use when approaching the work of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey. Most obviously, none of their full-length works purport to be translations. Instead, each produces, in their own way, versions of foreign texts. Morrissey’s “Japan” poems from *Between Here and There*, for example, do not claim to be linguistic guides but are rather an English-language representation of aspects of Japanese culture as experienced by the poet. “‘Ladies in Spring’ by Eudora Welty” from *Parallax*, is prefaced by the note “a

translation”, but it is a translation from one literature, Welty’s short story, to another, Morrissey’s poem (54).²⁶ Bryce’s engagement with Russian texts (a language she does not speak and a culture in which she has not lived) and Flynn’s engagement with Latin (an extinct language which can only really be experienced as textual) are revealing in relation to the purposes of translation for this discussion.

Nida suggests that the translator attempts either formal equivalence, “attention on the message itself, in both form and content”, or on dynamic equivalence which is “not so concerned with matching the receptor-language message ... but with the dynamic relationship” (129). Such a dynamic translation will be “the closest natural equivalent to the source language message” (136), which in poetry could be understood to be a translation which seeks to emulate the poem’s effect; in practice from a poem which is successful in one language to a poem which succeeds equally in a new language. It is this dynamism which Bryce sought to translate in her 2005 translations of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova published in the magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation*, but not in her full-length collections. Bryce’s notes on her translation practice claim that producing “successful versions” depends upon “achieving the tension and the music anew, as these are the untranslatable elements” (Bryce, “Anna Akhmatova” 15). For the composition process, Bryce “received basic literals and was more concerned with being true to the essence of the poem than in creating a strict word-for-word translation” (15).

Many of the descriptions of translation, including Nida’s above, overlook the complexity of the poet-translator’s relationship to the subject, and how their own opinions and outlook impact on the translated text through the process. Bryce

²⁶ See page 38 for the discussion of this prefatory note in the context of this study’s argument for paratextual engagement.

commented that she “related to these poems”, allowing her to “inhabit them during the writing process” (15). The translation process is thus a co-habitation between the source author’s intentions and the translator’s intentions. Bryce’s six Akhmatova translations obviously intend to represent Akhmatova’s original poems in English, and as such, they attempt to bear the contradictory characteristics of the original work by a poet described as “the poet of female love”, “the courageous documentalist of the Terror of the 1930s”, “the patriot whose verses inspired Soviet troops” and a writer “hostile to the aims of Soviet society” (Wells 1). However, when considered alongside Bryce’s contemporaneous 2005 original collection, *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, synergies in the way that the poetry treats comparable themes or subjects indicate that the artistic exchange process is not limited only to the translation exercise.

Bryce’s translation “He was young, anxious, jealous...”, for example, uses a symbolic and imagistic style which is not otherwise common in Bryce’s work. The young, anxious, jealous figure kills the “white bird” as he “could not hear her singing of the past” (3, 4). In response, the traumatised speaker finds “my heart set to stone” and that “everywhere / I turn, I hear the sweet song” (10, 11-12). While the translation process suggests that much of this figurative language comes from the Russian source text, elements from it recur also in Bryce’s “Song for a Stone” from *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, which is in turn an interpretation of Iain Crichton Smith’s “You Are at the Bottom of My Mind”, which Crichton Smith takes “from the Gaelic” (Duffy, *Hand in Hand* 14). The expressions of depression and blame in “Song for a Stone” — “you have put a sadness in the blue-/green waters of my mind”, the connection between time and colour, “your time is not of the colour of mine”, and the comparisons between singing and a stone heart, makes this poem as

much a response to Akhmatova's Russian poem as to Crichton Smith's English poem, and his Scottish Gaelic source (11-12, 14).

Similarly, Bryce's Akhmatova translation "Dante" shares thematic and stylistic links with another 2005 Bryce poem, "The Full Indian Rope Trick". Akhmatova's poem, Bryce's "personal favourite" of the translation process, tells the tale of Dante after his banishment from Florence in the Middle Ages (15). Dante stoically left without a backward glance and in exile refused to return under a humiliating forfeit. Bryce's translation from the Russian notably constructs the narrative detail in triplets as in "Nightfall: flames, a last embrace; / outside, the siren wail of fate", "neither would he stoop to walk, / in a hair shirt, with lighted candle, barefoot", and finally, of the Florence streets, "base, perfidious, yearned for..." (5, 9-10, 12). This narrative technique is expanded more rhythmically in Bryce's original tale of exile as "walls, bells, passers-by; / then a rope, thrown, caught by the sky / and me, young, up and away" (Bryce, *The Full Indian Rope Trick* 9-10). The original poem is, like the Akhmatova source text, a "song in praise of one / who left without a backward glance", but rather than making a (politically necessary) veiled reference to the exiled poet Osip Mandelstam, as in Akhmatova's original poem, Bryce's poem is in praise of her own departure from Northern Ireland, the "one-off trick", (Bryce, "Anna Akhmatova" "Dante" 3-4; Bryce, *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, "The Full Indian..." 23). The engagement with exile as a theme has clearly attracted both authors, but their views have been shaped by their own political and personal contexts.

The exploration of the end of Akhmatova's tumultuous relationship with art historian Nikoli Punin in Bryce's translations "I hid my heart from you..." and "Splitting Up" display tonal chimes with Bryce's own relationship poems. Both the

Akhmatova translations are inversions of the conventional love narrative; “I hid my heart from you...” through the declaration not of openness but of defensiveness and “Splitting Up” as a celebration of freedom through loneliness rather than through sexual consummation. “I hid my heart from you...” is cryptic like Bryce’s “Riddle”: Akhmatova’s “strange sounds [...] under darkness” are “murmurs” and “soft black whisper[s] of disaster” while Bryce’s riddlic speaker tells of wearing “intentions clear as a coat, but a coat / of secrets to be kept – small betrayals, pleas / of the heart” (Bryce, “Anna Akhmatova”, “I hid my heart... 5-6, 12, 9; Bryce, *The Full Indian Rope Trick*, “Riddle” 7-9). Akhmatova’s “Splitting Up” is in praise of a relationship’s end and the “raw freedom” (3) and “the first grey hairs” (4), just as Bryce’s “Negotiating the Muse” from the later collection *Self Portrait in the Dark* celebrates the creative benefits of avoidance through the limitations of proximity: “Awareness / can be a dreadful thing” (Bryce, “Anna Akhmatova”, “Splitting Up” 3, 4; Bryce, *Self-Portrait*, “Negotiating the Muse” 9-10).

Rightly, perhaps, Bryce’s Akhmatova poems should be considered *as* translations with received subjects and not as translations intended to demonstrate a linguistic interplay similar to the formal interplay of received poetic forms. However, what the thematic intersections with Akhmatova’s Russian poems indicate is that just as in the consideration of form earlier in this chapter showed, the process of receiving is very much about the recipient’s understanding of, or wilful (mis)translation of, the initial source, its intentional characteristics, and the effects required to reproduce it. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Bryce’s second Russian poetic venture, *The Observations of Aleksandr Svetlov* (2007), the chapbook sequence of nineteen poems considered briefly above for their sonnet-variances. These poems are original works, yet they rely on an otherness of perspective in terms of gender, age, and nationality, and thus depend on the imagined or falsely

implied translation from the elderly, widowed and Russian voice of Aleksandr. A large part of this implied linguistic process is deployed in the purposely stilted language: Svetlov speaks, through Bryce, clearly and with little embellishment or colloquialism, as in the tragically morose “Konstantin’s Exhibition”; “In my opinion, she’s probably dead. / But the point of it is – it does not matter” (23-24). In sustaining an imagined translated voice across a sequence, Bryce proves that the role of the poet-translator is, as in the use of received form, to allow the voice of the source to somehow still resonate after it, despite the necessary muffling any new text must perform.

Many considerations of translation in contemporary Irish writing share Quinn’s assertion that the approach most worthy of study is to read the translation process in terms of the political narratives evident within the linguistic metamorphoses. In this context, it is the Gaelic language that is pre-eminent, but this is closely followed by translations of Classical texts from the ancient languages. The most critically considered aspects to date are, perhaps not surprising given the interest in Classical performance in the contemporary period, dramatic works. As Des O’Rawe states, “Given the range of ‘translators’ (chiefly, Tom Paulin, Seamus Heaney, Brendan Kennelly, Desmond Egan and Derek Mahon) and texts (*Antigone*, *Prometheus*, *Philoktetes*, *Medeia*, *Trojan Women* and *Bakkhai*) one might be forgiven for thinking that no (male) Irish poet’s *œuvre* can any longer be considered complete without at least one published version of a Greek play”. Greek sources also find expression in various places throughout the poetry of Paulin, Heaney and Mahon, and since the Classical writers who the contemporary poets emulate in their translations were respected for their wisdom and were the influential orators and reporters of their age, their appeal for later poets in an era of political instability in Northern Ireland, with corresponding pride and suffering, is easy to propose.

Against the grandness that is the intention of these achievements comes Flynn's "Five Obvious Catullus Versions" from *Profit and Loss* which was described on publication as "most arbitrary" (Feay). This review seems to mark the appearance of these five short verses (and the whole of the closing pages of the collection, including five other short and almost whimsical poems) as a negative, yet the arbitrariness of these versions seems contrarily deliberate and effective. The source is Catullus who turned away from the epic baggage of precursory poets such as Homer and Sophocles in his subjects. The arbitrariness is accentuated by the position of these poems immediately following the long poem "Letter to Friends" (discussed below). The sequence title "Five Obvious Catullus Versions" aims to depreciate their seriousness and to somehow undermine their originality; the implication being that Classical source texts can be stimulating but that their appearance can be capricious and even woefully conventional. The texts themselves are nonsense-love poems, begging for innumerable kisses and suggestive "philosophical relief" (3: 10). Love and nonsense of this kind lacks the moral authority of great Classical tragedy, and so, as a (sort of) translation, the greatness of purpose evidenced in precursory Northern Irish poets is dismantled.

These are versions, rather than translations (although every translation is a version to a point): Flynn's versions, however, do not indicate the specific source text so any comparison is speculative and clearly not desired by the author. Thus, it is Flynn's concerns which resonate rather than Catullus'. The theme of monetary value, risk and reward, overshadowed by the contemporary financial recession, runs through the whole collection and, despite an ancient Roman source text, they recur. The displeasure of "the olds" in the first version are worth "approximately 1p", prudes in version two attempt to "cheapen with their wagging tongues" and in the fourth version's diatribe against a potential lover, the speaker would rather he

received “the City’s wealth” (the capitalisation here evoking the banking sector) than be loved by him (I, 2-3; II, 12; IV, 4). As the speaker keeps reminding the girl, “*He hasn’t any salary or savings*” (IV, 10). The issue of value, in its many variants both ancient and modern, is clearly still central, but for a poet writing in a period of recession, when existing structures show much to be worthless, it is a changing relationship to worth and respect, that these poems aim to celebrate. Their arbitrary relationship to source texts, to the propriety of Irish and Classical literatures, is a key feature of this changed worth.

vi. “OK. I’ve said enough. It’s not polite / to babble on at such prosaic length”

The effect of received forms such as the sestina or the sonnet is based primarily on convention and thus their use reflects the limitations of poetic form, its lineage and tradition, and how it has come to be written. The long poem or sequence, freed from recognised constraints, seems to represent a contrary mode: a blank canvas in terms of precursory literary achievement. It seems, Stanford Friedman suggests, “neutral, un-weighted, un-over determined, as if it had achieved a value-free, scientific objectivity” (9). This, however, is an illusory attraction, as the long poem by its nature must be capable to sustaining its purpose over an extended number of lines. Furthermore, while the term “long poem” is used “almost exclusively for mod. poetry, usually in Eng.”, the long poem’s public purpose is older and thus received just as other more dense patterns are (R. Greene 813).²⁷ Long poetic forms such as the epic had an important socio-historical role in ancient oral traditions, and the achievement of Classical verse such as Homer’s *Odyssey*, or Old English tales such

²⁷ *Long Poem* magazine defines the modern long poem as anything of 60 lines or more.

as *Beowulf*, remains undiminished. Thus, long poems represent a form of cultural authority which reflects not only their history, but their impact sustained verse. Stanford Friedman suggests that “A “long poem” is a “big poem”, that is, a poem that situates itself with a long tradition of poems that ask very big questions in a very long way – historical, metaphysical, religious, and aesthetic questions” (9).

In the Northern Irish context, poets in the contemporary period have been put under pressure to ask big questions about the political and social unrest. Longley suggested that there were “improper expectations” of Northern Irish poets to subscribe to particular political causes, while Brearton suggested that Heaney was “caught in the crossfire of an argument about the function of poetry in the present, troubled times” (qtd. in Buttel 69; Brearton, *The Great War* 220). Such public responses to the “big” issues would, according to literary convention, find best exploration in long poems. And, while Northern Irish poets were understandably uneasy about the role of the poet in such times, a number of “big” poems were written; Heaney’s *North*, published at the height of the Troubles, contains two discursive reflections on the poet’s role as advocate; *Whatever You Say Say Nothing* opens “I’m writing this just after an encounter / With an English journalist in search of ‘views / On the Irish thing’” and *Singing School* addresses fellow poet Seamus Deane and suggests “we have lived / In important places”, drawing on Kavanagh’s sonnet “Epic” (Heaney, *Opened Ground* I 1-3, I 1-2). Longley’s 228-line *Letters* addressed to fellow poets Simmons, Mahon and Heaney are another lengthy reflection on the role of the poet in the early 1970s, suggesting that “Ulster Poet [is] our Union Title”, and that elegy is the predominant public role in such violent sectarian conflict, “Continually, therefore, we rehearse / Goodbyes to all our characters” (M Longley, *Collected*, “To Seamus Heaney” 45, 35-36).

Flynn suggested in 2008, “I would like to be able to write a properly long poem – not *Paradise Lost* long – but a good sized public-minded poem: MacNeice’s “Autumn Journal” or Auden’s “Letter to Lord Byron” (“My Cultural Life”). This desire was apparently acted upon, and at the centre of 2011’s *Profit and Loss* is a long poem made up of thirty-two ten-line stanzas. “Letter to Friends” takes its title from Auden’s “Letter to Lord Byron”, and takes a similarly self-deprecating and conversational tone throughout. However, as Brearton notes, “The poem’s title is as much a nod to a brave new virtual world as to Auden, in which ‘friends’ proliferate on social networking sites and the private can be unnervingly public” (Rev. of *Profit and Loss*). Of course, Flynn has written sequential poems prior to this, but as in the case of the sonnet sequence indicated in this chapter, these have not even been presented as a unified whole, but rather scattered across the collection as if their relationship was merely coincidental. The “properly long” poem represents the fruition of an ambition to create a “good-sized public-minded”, or to borrow Stanford Friedman’s term, a “big” poem (Flynn, “My Cultural Life”).

“Letter to Friends” is certainly big in the topics it tackles, in fact, it is so ambitious that it seems the work of a “ironicist” author, one of Stanford Friedman’s self-authorising strategies through which she claims women poets can participate in the long poem tradition (21). While ostensibly a stream-of-consciousness narrative through the “old junk” and “stuff” from a life so far, from the second stanza it poses questions about the nature of contemporary life post-millennium (23, 24). It does this while self-consciously making a reference to the title of her debut collection, *These Days*, and this latest collection, *Profit and Loss*: “Were we, perhaps, surprised / - and are we still? What happened in between / those and these days? What has been gained or lost?” (18-20). It continues to cover a myriad of contemporary concerns from technological advances that mean “history’s incessant forward

schlep” has been “picking up speed of late” and that communication has become so ubiquitous that “texts and tweets and emails” “operate like bat-squeaks in a cave / to steer us in the dark” (35, 36, 144, 146-7). In the post-millennial world there is mention made to the changed international situation post-9-11 in a reflection on a photograph taken at the top of the Empire State Building “(Why are we happy? Why are we not in tears / bowed by foreknowledge?)” (82-83). The post-ceasefire state of Belfast is also considered, as the Troubles have come to “an end / or several ends”, and capitalism has at last flourished with shopping seemingly like a “civic obligation” (192-3, 204). In the midst of this are the financial crises of the individual (student loans in arrears) and the world (“debt spread like ripples on a ripple tank”), and the fear that poetry and Art have no cultural value for the public (254). Faith, too, is in decline, but the new eco-guilt supersedes religious guilt: “for ‘carbon footprint’ try replacing ‘sin’” (230). Women’s status is much more contradictory than feminism could have predicted: “they’re both oppressed and set free by The Veil”, for example (237). In this outwardly documentarian and philosophical leaning, “Letter to Friends” is certainly “public-minded” and in its 320 lines it is certainly “good-sized” (Flynn, *My Cultural Life*).

The models for this long poem are, as suggested in Flynn’s pre-poem musing, Auden and MacNeice. Auden is evoked not only in the title’s similarity to “Letter to Lord Byron” from Auden and MacNeice’s collaborative work *Letters from Iceland* (1937), but in the reference to Belfast’s new shopping centres; “The upshot: ‘on the whole we’re better dressed’ / as Auden wrote” (205). The notion of friendship is a trope in this source poem, in the sense that artists have “peculiar friends” and “A publisher’s an author’s greatest friend” (Auden and MacNeice III 145, I 168). The reference in “Letter to Friends” to Iceland’s role in the contemporary financial collapse also makes direct reference to Auden and MacNeice

“out on their rambles / round Iceland” in an earlier time (255). In so obviously setting out her 1930s influence in her themes and her formal choice, Flynn not only indicates the repetition of 1930s concerns (technological advance, economic depression, the threat of war), but indicates that while the Great War may have been a poetic touchstone for the 1960s/1970s poetry from Northern Ireland, it is the 1930s concerns that are the big influence in post-millennial Northern Irish poetry.²⁸

Stanford Friedman suggests that the long poem’s tradition is, by virtue of the epic, “thoroughly over-determined as a masculine discourse” (21). Poems by women, thus, sit uneasily in relationship and are “self-conscious”, deploying “self-authorizing strategies” which include “the ironicist, historicist, revisionist and experimentalist” approaches in order to situate themselves in the grid of poetic discourse (21). Parts of Flynn’s long poem seem to demonstrate such self-consciousness, for example in these lines:

OK. I’ve said enough. It’s not polite
to babble on at such prosaic length
without referring back to check you’re right
behind me. (Though, conversely, that’s the strength
of writing in a mostly-private mode:
it leaves you very free to bang your drum,
and preach – to empty classrooms – daring lessons.)
Forgive me. I’m surprised how fast it flowed,
or that it flowed at all. How far we’ve come,
or feel we’ve come, since our long adolescence. (241-50)

²⁸ The argument for WWI as an influence for contemporary Northern Irish poetry is put forward in Brearton’s *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W.B. Yeats to Michael Longley* (2003).

She is, clearly, an ironicist in these lines – especially since she continues at prosaic length for a further 70 lines hereafter. However, in the depreciating apologies for her work and her apparent surprise at even getting this far, it is clear that some self-consciousness about her first long poem, one of the first ever in Northern Irish poetry by a woman, is to be assumed. The reference to “our long adolescence” in the final line of the extract seems an obtuse reference, but when considered *in situ* it adds a further dimension to a feminist reading of this aspect of the poem (25). This diversion follows immediately after the stanza in which the role of women, their choices and debates in the contemporary (post)feminist era are summarised. The long adolescence, then, could refer to the slow rise of the women’s rights movement, and the self-authorising irony in the latter stanza relates to the authorial role of the women poet.

Like Flynn, in interview Morrissey discusses the long poem form, although in this case after writing one. She recalls: “It was a challenge to try something completely different. I’d never written a poem that long. I wanted to do it in rhyme ... It was an attempt to try and push myself forward.” (Meade). This comment reiterates not only that the longer form is renowned for the compositional challenge, but also that this challenge is somehow an aspirational labour. The poem she is describing is the 216-line “The State of the Prisons”, the title poem of her third collection, which in turn takes its title from John Howard’s 1777 text on prison reform. It is Howard’s life and work on which the poem is based, with reference to prose biographies and Howard’s own studies. It is his voice, “a lone voice in the wilderness? Perhaps.”, which relates and shapes the narrative (145). The historical context is linked to the form, which is six sections of six rhymed stanzas, each containing six lines. This is similar to a narrative ballad characteristic of eighteenth century poetry, when the long ballad form was popularly produced on cheaply

printed sheets and widely distributed (R Greene 116). Morrissey claims that in such a long form, there is “the advantage of the monologue, which gives the reader instant access to the mind of the speaking “I”, and you have the sheer drama of poetry to carry it” (Meade). There is drama in the first person narration, and John Howard’s voice sounds authentically of its time, as the poem recounts first hand the horrors of Newgate, “I see it as I first entered it: putrid with grime” (95). In creating a biographical work, however, Morrissey noted that “you need a dramatic life ... The form is too heightened for anything else, over any kind of sustained length” (Thwaite). The challenge, then, is to keep biography as close to poetry as is possible without sacrificing the heightened nature of the poetic. There are also intertextual elements, markers to the contemporary nature of the composition, such as the inclusion of quotations from Howard’s will in the closing section; “*Five hundred pounds to a new society / For alleviating the miseries of public prisons / After my time is done.*” (205-6). These words, the last official words of Howard, emphasise the tension between lives as they continue to be negotiated in text, idea and reality.

Stanford Friedman’s reading of long poems by twentieth-century women poets does propose the “historicist” mode as a strategy, but it is in the sense of a “reclamation of the public domain from which women have been largely excluded through a discourse of history – a (her)story in which the inside is the outside and the outside is the inside” (12). “The State of the Prisons” does address the notion of inside and outside in the inherent and inescapable trope of imprisonment and freedom. Howard is the outsider or “stranger and pilgrim” who goes inside and brings the reality of the inside to those outside (1). The duality is continued in the exploration of the public and private lives of Howard; Morrissey’s narrator recalls putting his son in a cold outhouse in winter and not locking the door “to see if he would stay / Despite the cold. (He stayed)” (81-82). A cynical irony is posited in

Flynn's "Letter to Friends", but it is the "terrible irony" of two parts of Howard's life this is Morrissey's subject; that "while he worked to get people out of dungeons and torture chambers and into the clear light of personal redemption, his son, whom he had neglected, contracted syphilis and went mad" (Thwaite). Thus, Morrissey's historicist poem is engaged with the foregrounding of the private in relation to the public, inside/outside, but not in a feminist or even woman-oriented way. "The State of the Prisons" is about a man and his son; the patri-lineal obsession in Howard's understanding of his self is clear from the opening stanza when he claims death will bring him not only to the "Lord my maker" but to where "all my fathers' fathers stand assembled" (5, 6). The reform Howard desires is pre-feminist, and while there is a recognition of the sexes and reference made to women being unsegregated, the concern is for felons and prisoners as a whole.

The humanist concern, the historical, and the exploration of human rights is not new for Irish poetry. However, the model for "The State of the Prisons" was a long poem by the English poet Elaine Feinstein, as she recounts:

I'd read 'Gold' by Elaine Feinstein ... It's in the voice of [Mozart's librettist] Lorenzo da Ponte ... She went into the character of a man from the eighteenth century ... She did it so well and it was obviously completely outside of her experience as a woman in the twenty-first century, (though there are Jewish connections). I was fascinated by that transition and I wanted to do something similar. (Meade)

The post-millennial long or big poem by women, should strive not to reclaim the outside or public discourse for women but to go outside the woman's experience, or even their time. In Howard's pursuit of prison reform, he ventured widely outside of England, as the poem recounts he was "travelling obsessively" and visiting prisons and palaces in his quest (116). In its originality, Morrissey's long poem seems to bypass many of the concerns of contemporary Northern Irish poetry tradition completely and suggest that "big" concerns are outside of that experience too. The

big poem may be about Stanford Friedman's masculine "quest-ions", but Morrissey is able to ask them un-self-consciously.

vi.

Form, as stated from the beginning of this chapter and elucidated throughout, relies on a received understanding of what a poem is and purports to be in taking the form of "a sonnet", "a sestina", "a Japanese poem", "a long poem" or even "a translation". These are not only ideas and conventions which suggest what characteristics a poem should display, but designations which evoke a certain relational prestige, effect or gravitas. The sonnet's history within the Irish tradition and beyond dominates its present use, and thus each new poem, particularly by emerging poets, and female poets with a need to negotiate and validate their position within a tradition, engages in a dialogue through compliance and experimentation. In the use of the sestina, ubiquity in contemporary poetry is no doubt important, but beyond this modishness, it is the complexity of the pattern which is most critical in considering how (and why) it has been used. Poems which recall Japanese modes indicate how knowledge can be received, but how that knowledge can be insubstantial, and formal aesthetics received which are not fit for purpose. Translation elucidates, through inversion, the relation between formal receipt and the authorial role. The long poem, indicates above all, that all poetic form is about a quest to achieve something substantial from language, and that poetic forms are still aspirational, bowed with the weight of history, and a creative challenge poets consciously seek to undertake.

Identification of form is only the beginning of a dialogue the poetry enters into with knowledge structures because while form is a representative for poetic

tradition, the use of it in poems is a demonstration of the mechanics of selectivity which aim to finish that tradition but in doing so continue it. As Derrida suggests, as form or genre is “carrying and miscarrying” its titles, it is never an “example of a general or generic whole”, because the whole “begins by finishing and never finishes beginning apart from itself” (81). Formal poetics relies on understanding of craft through (often unarticulated) referencing through the line of receipt, and on achievement of craft which justifies their position within that lineage. While the mechanics of formal selectivity may not be as directly linguistic in their purpose as the theme or subject of a poem, their existence suggests that a craft-focused dialogue with precursory writers is no more or less important than the paratextual, political or thematic dialogues.

6. Conclusion: Technique and Tradition

Heaney suggests that poetry is a process composed of craft and technique. “Craft is what you learn from other verse. Craft is the skill of making” (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 47). Technique, on the other hand, is more complex, and only comes into play when a writer stops “miming the real thing” and produces a true poem (47). “Technique ... involves not only a poet's way with words, his management of metre, rhythm and verbal texture; it involves also a definition of his stance towards life, a definition of his own reality.” (47). The link between the “skill of making” and the “stance towards life” is suggested most strongly in the preceding chapter, but it applies also to the whole of this study (47). The management of stance that proper technique entails is what this thesis proposes is a selective approach. This approach is informed by literary tradition, political and social contexts such as literary “generations” and feminism, and the individual poet’s definition of their relation to these as demonstrated by their work. Just as technique is ultimately about power over language and the poem’s reality, so selectivity, ultimately a process of hybridity, is about power and control over language, metre, rhythm, verbal texture, but also the very poetic contexts (traditions) in which the poetry is likely to be situated within. Longley’s view of the “protean nature” and “collective aesthetic” of Northern Irish poetry is caused by the continuing selectivity within that poetry (E Longley, “Altering the Past” 16-17). Selectivity is the very “beget[ting]” of newness in Connor’s assertion that “Only tradition can beget newness” (Connor 3). This thesis has proposed that each act of writing is, due to the ever-pervasive presence of other literatures, an act of re-writing which gains its significance from a tension between selected similarities and difference.

This thesis has set out to consider the implications of immediate literary tradition on later writers in the contemporary period. As we approach a half-century since the publication of Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist*, and in the wake of his recent death, Northern Irish poetry presents an unusually intimate arena for such a consideration. This study has shown that ideas of tradition, influence, generations, transmission, inheritance, and inter-textuality, are bound up in Northern Irish literature with the "new" writing considered here: paratextually in networks suggested by poets and reviewers which indicate a kind of capitalist value in poetic branding; in poetic techniques of craft through the receipt of form; and in the shifting subjects and definitions of reality in this poetry. Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey actively engage, through engagement disengage, and thus ironically subvert characteristics of the Northern Irish tradition's overarching technique. In arguing that they participate at all, it is also necessary to suggest that they participate selectively.

This thesis has also intended to reflect on the importance of gender and feminism in the context of the emergence of these writers in the context of Northern Irish writing. It is clear that gender is a key point of difference for Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, and it is a departure that facilitates, to some extent, the uniqueness necessary for a successful poetic technique in a crowded literary scene. However, crucially, this "definition of [her] own reality" is not a radical divergence incompatible with the relative conservatism, exclusivity, and paradoxical irony of recent Northern Irish poetry (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 47). The recent success of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey makes a substantial consideration of Northern Irish poetry by women possible, and indicates that McGuckian need not be viewed as a lone voice or a representative voice. That Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey are simultaneously a part of a broader women's writing tradition indicates that there

have already been important (and so far under-studied) shifts in opportunities for women writers within and beyond Northern Ireland since the publication of *The Female Line*.

The issue with literary critical feminism in studies of poetry is that it is often backward looking, uncovering the unknown achievements of women writers or arguing for the ways in which women writers are excluded from a patriarchal order.²⁹ As Bryce suggests, male poets “are usually criticised in relation to the canon”, thereby being critically studied in their engagement with the canon, and thus continue within it (Brown 319). Further, as Bryce continues, “women poets are often discussed as working in a vacuum”, and thereby literary studies continue to engage, with the best of intentions, in what can be damagingly separatist visions of the ways in which writers engage with canonicity (Brown 319). The intention of this study has not been to view recent women’s writing in such terms: these writers represent how the feminist movement and feminist writing has shifted in the post-millennial period. While feminism still has far to go, it is clear that women’s rights and writing are more centralised, and it is the questions this raises that should shape the critical landscape. As Flynn suggests in “Letter to Friends” from *Profit and Loss*, “were I a student of their [women’s] subjecthood / I’d find them elusive, all, as particles.” (238-9). The answer as to the role of feminism in this poetry, is elusive, but the discussion is worth having, rather than arguing only for the significance of marginalisation and exclusion in the face of contemporary poetry’s progress in these matters.

²⁹ Such as Jan Montefiore’s study *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women’s Writing* which suggests that “[w]omen have a paradoxical relationship to tradition. As readers and writers we belong to it, but as women we are excluded” (25).

It is hoped that this thesis makes a contribution to knowledge about what strategies twenty-first century poetry by women from Northern Ireland deploys in relation to a remarkably concrete modern canon. It anticipates future critical studies in this thriving area, as the publication of poetry and critical consideration of this poetry shows no signs of abating. By framing Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey in the context of the “generation” game prevalent in understanding of Northern Irish poetry, it invites future studies to engage with the view here suggested as to how poets can relate intertextually and paratextually between generations and through different strategies. It also anticipates future interest in the significance of Bryce’s, Flynn’s, and Morrissey’s work; as the close readings included in this thesis indicate they are writers of substantial and varied approaches to the poetic form, poets who have not only “craft” but “technique”, and thus have much to add.

While this study does anticipate such future interest, it is important to note here that this study, due to the not insignificant temporal confines, considers only the work published to date. In fact, during the course of this research (2010-13), new collections by Flynn (*Profit and Loss*) and Morrissey (*Parallax*) appeared which, on occasion, supported the arguments proposed, but also prompted new perspectives and directions. As the work of these writers develops, the necessity of considering any of these individual writers in relation to other Northern Irish writing may increase or decrease. To make any claim otherwise would be speculative in the extreme, but despite this limitation, this thesis hopes to open an ongoing debate about the value of that tradition and the value of the work of these writers, rather than to draw finite but clumsy conclusions. Further, in proposing that Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey each have a selective approach to tradition within the Northern Irish context, and thereby suggest the fluctuating value of it to their work, this research has achieved its aims. However, the delimitations of the thesis form mean that

related avenues of discussion were not explored as they might have been. For example, the issues discussed in terms of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey might also have been carried into considerations of the work of older women poets who emerged coterminously (such as Bleakney, Donaldson and Hardie), or contemporary men poets (such as Gillis and Laird), or indeed younger emerging writers (such as Gamble or Maddern). At the expense of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, it might have delved deeper into the relationships between the first and second generation poets. The arguments in this study, varying as they do even between the three main poets, should indicate that a consideration of these approaches would have prompted new and different conclusions, but this has not been the place to draw them.

Goodby suggested that the millennium may have marked the “end of an era” for Northern Irish poetry (Goodby, *Irish Poetry* 317). It is hoped that this study has proved that this has not been the case, as Northern Ireland continues to produce credible poets, and that these credible poets are keenly aware of, and engaged with, Northern Irish writing and their inevitable relationship with it. The Northern Irish literary renaissance is ongoing, and its effects are being explored in recent poetry, which in turn takes the renaissance in new directions. The implications of this study are that, in the “generation game”, Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey can play. Heaney, Longley, and Mahon remain significant, and Muldoon, Carson, and McGuckian (the subsequent second generation) have become a part of the line with whom the later poets react against.

Further, this (post-)millennial study diversifies debates about Northern Irish writing. It acknowledges the increasingly global nature of the poet’s experience: travel, postmodernity, and the ease of access to cultural debate and source materials made possible by the Internet has had an impact on poetries’ aesthetics. Tradition,

too, has been diversified by the inclusion in the “generations” of women writers: writers who are wives, graduates, mothers, creative professionals, editors, lesbians, poet laureates, as well as women born in Northern Ireland. These variants, although not inherently new for Northern Irish writing (as the study of women’s writing in this thesis indicated), nonetheless raise the question as to what value a regional tradition continues to have in the twenty-first century.

Future research may engage with the notion of selectivity through readings of other (precursory or contemporary) Northern Irish poets. It may also tackle more fully the individual topics here explored in each of the preceding chapters. What, for example, might be the impact of a female line in its continuation or a further retrospective? Why have the paratextual strategies noted in recent work become a norm, and how does this relate to the necessity for “tagging” information in the digital age, amidst the decline of print publication and the increase of intertextual Internet searching algorithms for information retrieval. It is also hoped that this thesis’ arguments might be revisited in future considerations of Northern Irish poetry beyond 2013. This year, due to the death of Heaney, must surely prove significant in the future of Heaney’s renaissance, just as 1939 was significant for Yeats’ literary movement.

Ultimately, the view here presented of a selective and hybrid notion of tradition is unique to the contemporary period, despite apparent parallels with other critical theories of anxiety which explore the historical rather than the contemporary. This is because in the contemporary period, value judgements are in flux, the “strong” poets are still reachable as the generations are so close. The relation might be best described as familial – immediate and in living memory, rather than ancestral – ancient, close, but also unknowable. The value judgements which are so

crucial will remain in flux not only during the careers of Bryce, Flynn, and Morrissey, but also for their many precursor contemporaries including Heaney, Longley, Mahon, Muldoon, Carson, McGuckian and their many peers. It seems fitting to return again to Yeats' comment which opened this thesis: "None of us can say who will succeed, or even who has or has not talent. The only thing certain about us is that we are too many" ("The Trembling of the Veil" 151). It is impossible in the contemporary moment to indicate lasting literary value or success, regardless of how confident poets and their critics may be in their assertions. However, this thesis has indicated that issues of value and continuation are constantly being negotiated in contemporary poetry from Northern Ireland through paratexts, subjects, and poetics. This is, this thesis proposes, a selective tradition: "technique" in practice.

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