Irish Cultural Politics, Thomas McGreevy and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1941

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford

This thesis is affectionately dedicated to my parents

Abstract

This thesis analyses the responses of Irish writers and painters to a phase of national self-assertion that had arguably lost its liberating potential. It shows how the exhaustion of revolutionary pressures in Ireland after independence complicates the ties between creative activity and political activism. Drawing on a wide range of scholarship within political theory, literary criticism and art history, I chart an emerging network of literary and artistic techniques that confronts the representational aesthetics of the nation with strategies of paradox, reversal and renewal. My readings of the work of Denis Devlin, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, Mainie Jellett, Jack Butler Yeats and, in particular, Thomas McGreevy, provide a means by which to distinguish other cultural possibilities that were imagined and pursued from 1922 to 1941, including McGreevy's own aspiration to remould 'A Cultural Irish Republic'. The thesis argues that Ireland's political and artistic avant-garde were forcibly divided during this period: two factions that had been split apart by the effects of civil war and censorship. As such it will be preoccupied with a central question: how to sustain cultural strategies of revolutionary significance when the frontier between creative activity and political activism can no longer be straightforwardly crossed.

Contents

Acknowledgements

The friendship and guidance of a number of people have helped to develop and inspire this work. I am indebted to Tara Stubbs who supervised my doctoral thesis. Her kindness and attention was crucial to its completion. To my viva examiners – Laura Marcus and Finn Fordham – I owe a number of lasting impressions about how pleasurable and rewarding scholarship can be. My thanks go also to Michael Whitworth for his questions and advice when examining the thesis orally at its probationary and confirmation stages. Nicky Grene and Gerry Dawe, co-directors of the Oscar Wilde Centre, have supported this work from its beginnings in Dublin, and I owe a great debt to them both. Further thanks are due to John Kelly, who first introduced me to Oxford after the Keough-Naughton Irish Seminar Series in 2011. David Lloyd kept me alive to much bigger questions about the relations between national and aesthetic practices than anything I have been able to express here.

I am deeply appreciative to Exeter College, Oxford, for the award of the Amelia Jackson Senior Studentship from 2012-14. I have been lucky to obtain grants that have assisted me with this project since 2011 from the Exeter College Academic Fund, the Maxwell and Meyerstein Fund, the Trinity Association and Trust and the Trinity Trust Travel Award. I am also grateful to the Board of Directors of Trinity College, Dublin, for the award of the A.J. Leventhal Scholarship from 2011-12, which allowed me to carry out research in Paris and Madrid. 'Con' Leventhal was a tireless advocate of literary experiment who started up a number of little magazines that provided a crucial, albeit short-lived platform for avant-garde writing in Ireland. He took over from Samuel Beckett at Trinity College, Dublin, when the latter gave up his French lectureship and moved to Paris to become a full-time writer.

For the permission to reproduce Thomas McGreevy's unpublished material, I hereby acknowledge the executors of his estate – Robert Ryan and Margaret Farrington – and the holding manuscript archive at Trinity College, Dublin. Aisling Jane Mary O'Brien and Sharon Sutton helped me with the conversion of a selection of sources into digital format. The licensing agency DACS has agreed to UK copyright law exception of 'fair dealing for research and private study' and on this basis has allowed the reproduction of paintings that belong to the estate of Jack Yeats to be exempt from copyright permissions and fees. For their assistance in tracking down letters, reports, sketchbooks and other secondary reading, I would like to thank staff at the National Library of Ireland, the National Gallery of Ireland, the Archives Nationales and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. I am further indebted to Sheila Pratschke, Director of the Centre Culturel Irlandais, for facilitating access to the libraries of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure; to Cathryn Setz for her generosity in sharing the digital content of *transition*; and to Ian Rawes for directing my listening sessions at the British Library. Susan Schreibman has created the excellent online resource on McGreevy, and I would like to reserve special mention for her. Parts of this thesis rest on materials that she has made available, and which she was kind enough to share with me in person and over many Skype conversations. I am especially grateful for her editorial guidance during the project with Bloomsbury Academic and for her advice on where to expand my sources.

A number of seminar settings have helped me indirectly to structure this work, including the Oxford English Faculty's Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Seminar Series and the Staff-Postgraduate Seminars at Trinity College, Dublin. Some of the classes and lectures organised by the Edgar Wind Society provided me with a friendly setting and a fantastic introduction to a subject in which I have no formal training. For the humour, variety and perspective they brought to the doctorate experience, I want to thank Challenger Mishra, Pete Schwarzstein, Anne Maduzia, April Pierce, Alex Bubb, Will Crouch, Nicola and Andreas Mogensen, Mike Collins and Bex Geddes, Charlie Romito, Masud Ally, Max Edwards, Charlotte Fox, Henry Fraser, Andreas Harris and Mike Essman. The warmth of these and many other friendships never failed to outweigh the challenges that I encountered during the course of this research and kept me positive during heavy bouts of writing or chiselling. A big shout out to Sophie Epstein (aka 'Shazza' '#mashupshahofsephora') for her love and support, which always opens up something infinite inside me. To my parents, Christopher and Fay Hutton-Williams, I owe absolutely everything else.

Clarification of Sources

Thomas McGreevy's papers were presented to Trinity College, Dublin, by Margaret Farrington and Elizabeth Ryan in 1976 and 1978. At present, the great-nephew, Robert Ryan, confers with the niece over these papers. The main resource for McGreevy's writings is the *Thomas MacGreevy Archive* (last accessed August 2014). As well as providing online versions of McGreevy's monographs, articles and essays, the project website includes all the correspondence with George Yeats that is referred to in this thesis.

On his return to Ireland in 1941, McGreevy changed his surname to 'MacGreevy', inserting the Gaelic prefix 'Mac' before his anglicised surname (as Ernie O'Malley had added the 'O' in front of 'Malley'). This thesis, which focuses on the period 1922-1941 and his Directorship of the NGI, prefers to adopt the earlier spelling of his name. 'McGreevy' is the name used officially for purposes of registration, the name under which *Poems* (1934) was published, and the name of address that was used by European contemporaries.

When there is a copy of an article or book in McGreevy's papers at TCD (in manuscript, typescript or published form), it is noted by Trinity's document reference number (four digits) and a document number (one or two digits) preceded by the notation TCD MS. Any unsigned articles from the papers at Trinity College Dublin which are recognisable as McGreevy's hand have also been ascribed to him. In cases where a copy of a poem was sent to McGreevy in its entirety, I have chosen to read this version over revised editions of the text.

When an article has been reprinted, priority has been given to referencing the original. All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise stated. All biblical quotations are taken from the King James Bible. Where personal names ending in 's' have required an apostrophe, I have written them consistently with a double 's' agreement. This is intended to prevent confusion with single speech marks or quotations. Ellipses that exist in the original citation have been left to stand independently without editorial marks. Those that have been added to the quoted text for reasons of punctuation or omission are placed in square brackets.

Abbreviations

Manuscript and typescript sources are abbreviated MS. An additional designation MF accompanies these abbreviations where either of these sources has been accessed via microfilm.

(annot.)	Annotated draft
n.d.	No date of publication provided
n.imp.	No publisher's imprint provided
n.p.	Not published (only typescript)
D	*Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983)
CPDD	*Collected Poems of Denis Devlin* ed., J.C.C. Mays (Dublin: Dedalus, 1989)
CPTM	*Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy: An Annotated Edition*, ed. Susan Schreibman (Dublin: Anna Livia, 1991)
CPSB	*The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Sean Lawlor and John Pilling (London: Faber & Faber, 2012)
HLMD	Huntington Library Manuscripts Department, San Marino, California
JBY	*Jack B. Yeats: An Appreciation and an Interpretation* (Dublin: Victor Waddington, 1945)
NGI	National Gallery of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TLSB	*The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Vol 1, 1929-1940*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
TMCR	*The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy: A Critical Reappraisal*, ed. Susan Schreibman (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)
URCW	University of Reading, Chatto & Windus archives
WUL	Washington University Libraries, St. Louis, Missouri

List of Illustrations (in order of appearance)

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   [*Leabhar Cheanannais*]
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   Illuminated Manuscript
   Initial letters S and U
   © Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS A. I. (58)

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   Mainie Jellett (1897-1944)
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   NGI 2007.75
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4) Photograph: The opening of the Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Mainie Jellett at the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, July-October 1962. McGreevy is pictured here (far right) with Mainie Jellett's sister, Bay Jellett; the Chief of Justice and future President, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh; and with President Éamon De Valera. © The Estate of Thomas McGreevy.

5) Photograph: Second Day of the Queen's State Visit to Ireland in May 2011. (From left to right): President Enda Kenny; Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore; Queen Elizabeth II; Gilmore's wife. © Rex Features

6) ***Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother*** **(1871)**
   James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)
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7) ***Dinner Hour at the Docks*** **(1928)**
   Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
   Oil on panel
   23.5 x 36.5 cm
   Presented by Mrs Smyllie, in memory of the late Mr R. Smyllie (1966)
   NGI 1791
   © Estate of Jack B Yeats
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8) Left: ***Judith mit dem Haupt des Holofernes*** **(c.1530)**
Lucas Cranach (1472-1553)
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75 x 56 cm
© Jagdschloss Grunewald

Right: ***Judith*** **(c.1504)**
Giorgione Barbarelli (c.1477-1510)
Oil on canvas transferred from panel
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9) ***Going to Wolfe Tone's Grave*** **(1929)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on canvas
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10) ***Seek No Further II*** **(1947)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on board
23 x 36 cm
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11) ***Bachelor's Walk – In Memory*** **(1915)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on canvas
45.7 x 61 cm
On loan to the NGI from a private collection
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12) ***Humanity's Alibi*** **(1947)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on canvas
60 x 92.5 cm
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
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Chapter Backgrounds

Earlier versions of parts of this thesis have appeared as follows: an abridged version of the first chapter was presented at the British Association of Modernist Studies international conference 'Modernism Now!' at Senate House, University of London, on 26 June 2014; an early draft of the second part of chapter two was published in a volume of essays titled *The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy: A Critical Reappraisal* (London: Bloomsbury Academic) in June 2013; an early draft of the third part of chapter three was delivered as a conference paper held at University College Cork, titled 'Innovations in Irish Poetry', in 2011, and also at the University of Oxford's 2012 English graduate conference; an early draft of chapter four was delivered as a conference paper held at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, titled 'Relational Forms I: an International Conference on Literature and the Arts', in 2010.

Introduction

While Irish writing in the run up to national revolution has generated a vast body of academic literature written by critics concerned with its styles, contexts and publics, less attention has been given to stylistic innovation within literature and the arts in the first two decades after Irish independence. This thesis will analyse the responses of Irish writers and painters to the new political regime that followed British rule. Through the use of 'Ireland' and 'Irish', it will refer to conditions in the South of Ireland and to the transitional (dominion) status of the twenty-six county Free State (1922-1937) before this territory was declared a Republic in 1949. It will make no attempt to pronounce on both the cultural situation of Northern Ireland *and* the Republic, nor to treat modern Ireland as an integrated whole.[1] The question as to how the governance of the South might be characterised in national terms is an extremely complex one that lies well beyond the scope of this analysis. Much debate continues to surround the use of the terms 'State' and 'nation' in reference to the Free State, which I leave as a matter for historians.[2] Rather the overall analysis here is confined to questions of literary and artistic invention that arise from a fading imperialism. In considering the (often fraught) relationship between literature and politics during the 1920s and 30s, the thesis will address the ongoing impact of military insurrection on the Free State's cultural conditioning from 1922 onwards and its attempt to project a new mythical edge over history.

The return to the native materials of a purely Gaelic and Catholic civilisation during the opening decades of independence marked a period of extreme constraint in Ireland.

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[1] See David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[2] J.J. Lee has argued that 'The creation for the first time in history of a united independent Ireland would indeed have meant the creation of a new nation. Nation-building would have occurred only had the state embraced all Ireland. That problem did not arise at the time. It has baffled all Irish politicians who have since contemplated it. […] No new nation had to be created in 1922, only a new state'. See J.J. Lee, Chapter 2, 'Consolidation: 1922-32', *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; reprinted 2004), pp.56-174 (p.93).

Examples of this constraint include the official overprinting of King George VI postage stamps with 'Saorstát Éiréann', the passing of the Censorship of Publications Act (in July 1929), and the Thirty-First International Eucharistic Congress held in Dublin (in June 1932). Irish writers had to confront intense scrutiny during this period from religious and political authorities (around 618 books and 11 periodicals had been listed as banned by the Free State Register as of September 30, 1935).[3] For centuries Irish writers had dreamed of independence in defiance of imperial rule, yet two divergent forms of cultural nationalism soon emerged under the Free State's jurisdiction: the one based on romantic-liberal standards of freedom and the other on collective-authoritarian control.[4]

In an anthropology essay titled 'After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States', Clifford Geertz points to a tension between 'essentialism' and 'epochalism' as two strategies of self-definition that divide nations in pursuit of an original conception of freedom.[5] For Geertz, 'essentialism' involves new nations answering the question 'Who are we?' with expressive practices that react against what are thought to be alien influences.[6] 'Epochalism', by contrast, stimulates the new nation to discover the overall direction and significance of its history by moving along with the tide of the present.[7] This thesis extends

[3] These figures are taken from Samuel Beckett's unpublished essay 'Censorship in the Saorstat' [*D* 84-88], which was commissioned by *The Bookman* in 1934. The author notes his own registration number as 465.
[4] In her introduction to *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993), Liah Greenefeld distinguishes between two versions of cultural nationalism that are basically irreconcilable with one another. Greenefeld argues that the 'observable' version of cultural nationalism refers to a community of purpose, to a principle of collective solidarity that is exercised *by* the people in their everyday lives. By virtue of exercising that sovereignty, the people are able to establish themselves as members *of* a given nation. By contrast, the 'theoretical' version of cultural nationalism refers to a community of origin, to a principle of collective solidarity that is exercised *for* the people after being rationalised by the authority of the church and state (or any other institution in which the people happen to have invested their sovereign power). While the 'observable' component of cultural nationalism cannot determine the character of the elements by which a nation is composed, the 'theoretical' component can – even though it is not identical with citizenship. In other words, the principle of collective solidarity that it rationalises is no longer open or voluntary and cannot be acquired or transformed by individual means.
[5] Clifford Geertz, 'After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States', *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973; reprinted London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp.234-254 (pp.242-249).
[6] 'Nationalist ideologies built out of symbolic forms drawn from local traditions – which are, that is, essentialist – tend, like vernaculars, to be psychologically immediate but socially isolating' (Geertz, pp.242-243).
[7] '[B]uilt out of forms implicated in the general movement of contemporary history – that is, epochalist – [nationalist ideologies] tend, like lingua francas, to be socially deprovincialising but psychologically forced' (Geertz, p.243).

that cultural interplay as part of the social and psychological dimensions of an avant-garde circle. It employs the French military term 'avant-garde' to refer to literary and artistic work that is engaged with Parisian experiment, self-consciously opposed to the pressures of censorship and directed against traditional ways of conceiving art. One of the aims of the thesis is to understand how avant-garde reactions to the dominant culture imply a change in the way that the national landscape is rooted – to 'Set free, set free without fear' as McGreevy translates from Jorge Guillén's poem, 'La salida' [*CPTM* 80]. It is in response to these conditions that I outline an 'epochalist' sense of the need to apply experimental tensions to the growth of the arts in Ireland in spite of the censorious pressures then current.

Some of Ireland's most daring and experimental creative activity would emerge during the aftermath of national revolution from writers and painters who refused to accept the Free State government's imposition of cultural standards, who chose to set their work apart from what most Irish men and women had come to expect from their contemporaries, and who sought to bring Irish writing and painting forward into a new age of politics, thought and feeling. My readings of the work of Denis Devlin, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, Mainie Jellett, Jack Butler Yeats and, in particular, Thomas McGreevy, will demonstrate other cultural possibilities that were imagined and pursued under Ireland's new political regime, including McGreevy's own aspiration to remould 'A Cultural Irish Republic'. The thesis will argue that Ireland's political and artistic avant-garde were forcibly divided during the 1920s and 30s – two factions that had been split apart by the effects of civil war and censorship. As such it will be preoccupied with a central question: how to sustain cultural strategies of revolutionary significance when the frontier between creative activity and political activism can no longer be straightforwardly crossed.

Reframing a literary-critical approach to the period from the perspective of an avant-garde circle will have two added benefits: it will confront the wider problem of cultural

representation and consider Ireland and Europe together. A key aim of this historicising is to avoid the modernism / nationalism binary that has affected so much critical discourse about the 1920s and 30s. This thesis will avoid the term 'modernism' altogether in relation to Ireland because of the confusions and inaccuracies it can present when taking an empirical approach to the period: a concern that I explore in greater detail in the first chapter. In recent years, however, the ways in which nationalism and modernism have been held apart as separate discourses has prompted a wave of revisionist accounts within the fields of Modernist and Irish Studies. Some critics have interrogated the distancing strategies of modernist writers from national contexts; others have highlighted a shared concern with translation, symbol and myth; still others have challenged the temporal and geographical parameters within which modernism is understood to be situated.[8] While the attack on either / or thinking may still be ongoing, I will turn that debate on its head by arguing that the continuation of a national spirit during the early years of state formation prompted a much wider range of cultural development – from primitivism to the avant-garde.

Alex Davis is the only scholar to date to have used the term 'avant-garde' in a book-length study of Irish literary criticism. In *A Broken Line: Denis Devlin and Irish Poetic Modernism*, Davis distinguishes between the 'historical' and 'artistic avant-garde' to indicate a tangential relationship between 1930s Irish poets and various avant-garde movements

[8] See Séan Kennedy ed., *Beckett and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Gregory Castle's *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Alex Davis's 'Reactions from their burg: Irish modernist poets of the 1930s', in Lee Jenkins and Alex Davis (eds.), *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.135-156. For a description of the relationship between the Irish Revival and the modernist aesthetic, see Richard Kearney, *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1987), which is one of the first studies to employ the phrase 'revivalist modernism'. John Wilson Foster uses the same phrase in an essay titled 'Irish Modernism' collected in a volume titled *Colonial Consequences: Essays in Irish Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1991), pp.44-59. Notably, Emer Nolan chooses to keep the terms separate when discussing the conceptual parallels between the two movements. See her 'Modernism and the Irish Revival', *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, eds. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.157–172. For recent discussions of 'colonial modernity', see David Lloyd's *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity, 1800-2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). This thesis owes much to the connections between political and aesthetic representation that David Lloyd has explored in essays such as 'Adulteration and the Nation', *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham: Duke University, 1993, pp.88-124), though it does not follow his indebtedness to post-colonial theory.

across Europe.[9] While Davis's study discusses many of the same poets who are featured here, this thesis will establish a larger sense of the local networks and intellectual history of the avant-garde in Ireland by focusing on the 'little magazine' as an organ of distribution. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker have connected the invention of this literary subgenre with 'serious economic and cultural plight, often haunted by the threat of censorship, at loggerheads with more conventional publications, and at war with the philistinism of a prevailing business culture'.[10] As a purpose-built intervention against collective power, I will view this form of journal publication and the dynamics of its material distribution as crucial to avant-garde cultural politics. The formative role of these small editions was to service new writing and to introduce the specialist reader to movements of which the wider public may have been largely indifferent or unaware. By challenging, and mediating, conventional forms of modern identity (such as that put forward by the government and military), the little magazine helps to redefine the space of Irish culture as an energising force for writers and artists dissatisfied with already established political conditions (Right and Left).

With its French derivation and future-oriented temporality the avant-garde framework that I have adopted will counter a notable tendency within Irish Studies since the conflict in Northern Ireland to approach literature through questions of territorial belonging and pedigree. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai argues that the area-studies tradition of literary criticism insists upon a synthesis between territorial space and cultural expression that ought to have been undermined over the past three decades, particularly if we still have in mind something like a consistent structure or a

[9] Alex Davis, *A Broken Line: Denis Devlin and Irish Poetic Modernism* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), *passim.*
[10] Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 'General Introduction', *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, *Vol 1*, *Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.1-26 (p.1).

dialectical unity.[11] Representations of 'Irishness' have collapsed all too often into 'men doomed to be themselves' (as Hugh Kenner so memorably puts it) on the one hand, and into a performative ritual on the other (one that Tom Paulin has caricatured in his realisation of Belfast as the 'deep navel of ethnic chutzpah').[12] This thesis will deflect these pressures with different weights and points of emphasis.

Its approach is multi-levelled: drawing on archival sources, returning to the print culture of the little magazines, deploying close readings of both poetry and the visual arts, and engaging with recent historiographical work on the status of the Free State government in its first two decades. By harnessing the formal detail of close readings alongside the social context of production, I will free parts of the analysis from such cultural studies mainstays as 'modernism', 'transnationalism', 'diaspora', 'migration' and 'hybridisation' and replace this tired and blunted terminology with a deeper understanding of the lyric, art criticism and the cosmopolitan, and with other terms that are different and newer – namely, the 'epochalist' (a term that Geertz uses to describe the socially deprovincialising and psychologically alien), and 'autosotorisation' (a portmanteau invention in *Finnegans Wake* that castigates the desire to substitute the living self for an impossible ideal of immunity and protection: 'soter' in Greek mythology refers to a spirit of salvation and deliverance from harm).

Why McGreevy?

It may be asked at this point why so much attention is given in the title to a relatively little-known figure called Thomas McGreevy (1893-1967), and how this biographical attention enables the conceptual structure that I have so far outlined. 'McGreevy' first attracts attention as a node around which a number of major literary figures cluster: W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot,

[11] See Arjun Appardurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1996), p.46.
[12] Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971; reprinted Faber & Faber, London, 1972, p.498); Tom Paulin, 'The Crack', *Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays 1980-1996* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996, pp.96-97).

Paul Valéry and Wallace Stevens among them. He introduced Samuel Beckett to James Joyce; James Joyce to George Reavey; George Reavey to Samuel Beckett; Samuel Beckett to Jack Yeats; Denis Devlin to Samuel Beckett; and George Reavey to Denis Devlin. As the thesis will show, McGreevy's proximity to these established figures makes him one of the most suitable prisms through which to view Irish cultural life in the twentieth century.

When starting out his career as a civil servant, McGreevy had been based near Clapham Common with about twenty other recruits.[13] Upon the outbreak of the Great War, he was assigned to the Department of Intelligence, probably as a Second Division Clerk. McGreevy was later wounded twice in Flanders as a gunner in the artillery regiment before he was forced to return to England after his second injury for medical treatment.[14] Having served the British government for seven years until his demobilisation from the Royal Field Artillery in 1919, McGreevy entered Trinity College Dublin on a scholarship programme for former officers where he participated fully in the university's social, intellectual and artistic life, acting, translating and directing plays, reviewing stage productions and art exhibitions, and writing poetry. Later in his life, after side-lining his ambitions to be a poet, McGreevy was appointed Director of the National Gallery of Ireland, Officier de la Légion d'honneur by the French Ministry of Culture, and Cavaliere Ufficiale al Merito della Repubblica by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This thesis traces his movement away from the private world of the lyric towards the public discourse of paintings and exhibitions. It is through an analysis of the particular difficulties and generic conventions that he faced as a poet and as a critic that I isolate some of the key cultural tensions of the period.

The thesis is more concerned with the questions that *arise* from McGreevy's interactions with Ireland rather than just with those he asked when he happened to write about the nation. How might we explain a skilled experimental poet overlooked by canonised

[13] See McGreevy, 'Autobiographical Fragments', TCD MS 8054: 24.
[14] See TCD MS 8140-3 for a summary of McGreevy's army experience.

literary histories? A British officer of World War I who was also an anti-Treaty supporter? An existential outsider who later became head of Ireland's most famous cultural institution? Many of McGreevy's supposed 'inconsistencies' test our deepest notions about Ireland in the aftermath of the Easter Rising and its place in a Europe between the world wars. As a case study for these concerns, I consider McGreevy's work as a poet and critic; his background in the military; and his participation in different aspects of civil society as an art historian and public intellectual. In so doing, the thesis makes urgent the rediscovery and restitution of McGreevy as a central figure of Irish intellectual life in the early twentieth century. The timeline that I have established for the thesis begins with the foundation of the Free State in 1922 and extends to the date of McGreevy's eventual return to Ireland in 1941.

The advantages of reading McGreevy as a minor figure lie in the problems that he presents for canonised histories. Whereas major figures in major urban centres have been located relatively easily by literary critics – as in Richard Ellmann's 1987 series of lectures titled *Four Dubliners* – they have also led to some odd disjunctions between major writers themselves.[15] This is evidently the case between W.B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett, two writers often seen as hostile to one another on account of the critical discourses (Romanticist, deconstructionist, and so on) that they are supposed to embody. W.J. McCormack has remarked upon the domination of Beckett criticism by what he calls 'rival campaigns', which link him to 'French existentialism, the British theatre, and Anglo-Irish tradition'.[16] It is in the context of these competing institutional claims that Beckett's letters, as edited by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940*, have emerged as an especially valuable historiographical resource. These letters, the majority of which are addressed to McGreevy, provide us with a much more precise indication of influences through the exchange of typescripts, the references that they make to painting and

[15] See Richard Ellmann, *Four Dubliners* (New York: George Braziller, 1987).
[16] W.J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), pp.385-386.

literature, and the attitudes that they sustain in relation to Ireland as a cultural-ideological territory. The thesis will draw on this resource to develop a number of comparative readings in relation to these two writers – readings that compare and contrast their aesthetic ambitions.

So far the introduction has been frontloaded with methodological debates, charted a position in relation to current research, stated the ruling engagement with ideas and defined the timeline of analysis. I now want to outline the breakdown of individual chapters and to explain the connections between them. The opening chapter, titled 'Against Irish Modernism', provides an empirical account of the 1920s and 30s and an overall view of Ireland's cultural climate. By surveying the negative impact of religion, provincialism and censorship on Irish culture at this time, I challenge the idea of Ireland as a place of widespread modernist assertion. Alternatively, I argue that the triumph of a political nationalism based on militant forms of expression had restricted the availability of new forms in the Irish context. The chapter develops the concept of an 'avant-garde' in reaction to these conditions, considering how poetic experiments of the 1930s challenge the lyric as a versifying form after Irish independence. Surveying patterns of dissent in little magazines, especially the pseudonymous publication of 'Recent Irish Poetry', I define a break away from fashionable examples of neo-Revivalist verse, the consecration of which had achieved a ceremonial status in the public mind. I highlight instances of this cultural divide with a selection of examples taken from Devlin's *Intercessions* (1937) and Beckett's *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935).

The second chapter, titled 'Provincial-Minded Mentor', continues the proposition that the connection between the disappointing actuality of Irish independence and the emergence of a cautious introspective art is most usefully considered from the perspective of lyric owing to its connections with a prior tradition of revolutionary song. Drawing on published and archival material, I argue that McGreevy's *Poems* is structured in opposition to provincial interests, restricted utterance and the kitsch imitation of romantic legacies. Addressing the

cultural dynamics of his return to London in the second part of the chapter, I scrutinise McGreevy's dual position between two newly-separated cultural climates – Ireland and England – asking what creative space was available for the ex-British officer during the mid-1920s. The chapter suggests an altogether different affiliation with Irish nationalism based on McGreevy's unpublished poem 'Appearances' and 1926 poem 'The Other Dublin': one that voices nationality as a future-oriented philosophy rather than as a premise out of which he should write.

The third chapter, titled 'Young Irishmen in Paris', highlights the conception of 'pure poetry' against a background of Irish political constraints by analysing a selection of aesthetic debates as they move back and forth between the *Irish Statesman* and the Parisian journal *transition* – the largest avant-garde journal in Europe. The chapter draws on these debates to define the creative activity of an expatriate Irish circle and its group dynamics in the melting pot of Paris. In the second section, I examine Beckett and McGreevy's articles on James Joyce's *Work in Progress* – both of which were published in *transition* alongside serialised excerpts from Joyce's (at the time) unnamed composition as the first critical attempts to shape its reception. Both Beckett and McGreevy portray Joyce's characters as vacillating, broken up bits of people that stem from random agglomerations of past and present cultures – an observation that extends to their own incorporation in the Taff & Butt sketches as a pair of identical contraries or 'swapstick quackchancers'.[17] Exploring the conflicting impulses of divided selves, the confusion of the inside with the outside dream world and the use of portmanteau inventions, I question how their analyses of the *Work in Progress* serve in the context of post-revolutionary disillusionment. By contrast, the third section of the chapter addresses Irish engagements in Paris from a utopian perspective. It draws on letters of exchange between Paul Valéry and McGreevy that refer to the International Committee on

[17] James Joyce, 'Fragment from *Work in Progress*' (Part II, Section 3), *transition 27*: 57-78 (63-64).

Intellectual Cooperation: a pioneering body that had been founded by the League of Nations to foster intellectual and cultural exchange across national boundaries. Through the correspondence between Valéry and McGreevy, I ask how 'poetry' is conceived in terms of a better future and as a force through which the past can be reactivated with new sharpness and definition.

Where the first three chapters focus on strategies of cultural opposition in the context of poetry the fourth, fifth and sixth focus on strategies of cultural renewal in the context of painting. The fourth chapter moves the discussion closer towards this reformist impulse by reading France and Ireland together. It studies the impact of Post Impressionism on Irish culture after the Civil War had ended (in May 1923), arguing that the formal and social direction of modern art in 1920s Paris acted in powerful ways on a peripheral cultural environment that was still in the process of achieving its cultural self-definition. The chapter addresses the late development of the Cubist style by Albert Gleizes; the public outrage that followed Mainie Jellett's first Dublin exhibition; McGreevy's inflammatory defence of her work; and the later installation of Evie Hone's *My Four Green Fields* (1939) in the entrance hall of the Government Buildings in the office of the Taoiseach. In the second half of the chapter, I examine the incorporation of visual effects in McGreevy's *Poems* (1934), asking why he should have extracted lyrical utterance from his observation of painting. Drawing on archival sources, I offer a rationale for his dialogue with the visual arts, before analysing, in greater detail, the relationship between Post Impressionism and his poetic technique. Especially interesting are the rhetorical antagonisms on which his poems shift: between three and two-dimensional surfaces, figuration and pattern, counterpoint and harmony, and immobile and mobile forms ('still life' and 'quick life').

The fifth chapter, titled 'A Genealogy of the Irish Painter', proceeds from McGreevy's recruitment of the visual as a source for lyrical utterance to a reading of

individual artists and paintings. By reflecting on what painting could do with national politics that the lyric could not, I scrutinise the ambition of the former poet to find a new national art of painting. The chapter interrogates McGreevy's 1938 monograph on Jack Yeats, the first to be completed on the artist, much of which was written in London but published with a postscript in Dublin in 1945. It also examines numerous essays and newspaper articles that he wrote during the 1930s and 40s at home and abroad. Through an inspection of the language and assumptions of his art criticism, I highlight McGreevy's efforts to find a cultural alternative an official state-driven nationalism. It is in this sense that I outline a 'genealogy' of the Irish painter: one that proceeds directly from the false starts, paradoxes and reversals in the nation's cultural identity to redeem certain lines of development from the perspective of a revolutionary people (or 'petit peuple'). The chapter focuses on McGreevy's reconstruction of Jack Yeats as a painter of national significance and Beckett's resistance to this, though it also reads the paintings of the artist independently from that reconstruction.

The coda, titled 'The National Gallery Revisited', examines McGreevy's turn to direct forms of civic engagement in the National Gallery of Ireland. In contrast to the early pressures of censorship in Ireland's print culture, I argue that the gallery provided a space in which he could reposition the motives of the public, the memories of past and future, and the cultural priorities of the nation outside its doors. The first part of the coda theorises the gallery as the space for a more inclusive ideal. The second part considers McGreevy's attempts to establish the National Gallery as a place not only of exhibitions but also of living art, teaching, research and conservation. In so doing, I address McGreevy's transformation, after the Second World War, into an educator of the public about nationality through contemporary art.

The progression of the six chapters deliberately avoids chronological structure or biography in order to pursue analytical debates on the interplay between culture and

nationalism. The six chapters (five plus a coda) cover the two main areas of McGreevy's output: lyric poetry (chapters one to three) and art criticism (chapters four to six). Where the first three chapters observe a major shift in assumptions about the lyric – one that minimises the effects of performance, ritual and ceremony in favour of interiority, solitude and self-reflexivity – the fifth and sixth chapters, by contrast, interrogate McGreevy's attempts to restore the collective solidarity that had disappeared from the lyric once the avant-garde had become detached from the popular writings of street balladeers. I argue that McGreevy's desire to find an embodied or discursive meaning strives towards a more inclusive ideal than that of his contemporaries, one that refuses the inner division of Devlin and Beckett's collections of the late 1930s (*Intercessions* and *Echo's Bones*). The final part of the thesis considers his efforts to overcome the retreat into private worlds with a move towards the public discourse of paintings and exhibitions, stressing the importance of his later work as Director of the National Gallery to bring the 'wider essentials of living' to Ireland's leading cultural institution.

This thesis is one of the first to consider Irish writers and painters together.[18] The two standpoints – poetic and visual – from which I analyse creative responses to the Free State will contribute to a growing body of scholarship on Irish literature and art history, as well as to studies of censorship and the avant-garde in the twentieth century. Equally this work may be seen as a response to the 'visual turn' in literary criticism, though what unites my dual concern with poetry and painting is the urgent cause of national liberation.[19] The focus of the

[18] Karen Brown's *The Yeats Circle: Verbal and Visual Relations in Ireland, 1880-1939* (London: Ashgate, 2010) is the only other study that offers an analysis of both Irish writers and painters. Brown places McGreevy in the middle of a family obsession with the interaction of word and image, arguing that the Yeatsian brotherhood helped to foster the development of verbal-visual partnerships in his poetry. See Brown, 'The Pictorialist Poetics of Thomas McGreevy', *The Yeats Circle*, pp.89-128, which takes its title from David Scott's *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988). While Brown's placement of McGreevy in this context helps to establish the importance of his correspondence with both brothers (William and Jack), this thesis is more concerned with his position within an avant-garde circle.

[19] The 'visual turn' to which I allude, which dates back to the end of poststructuralist theory and of the so-called linguistic turn, has led to new theorisations of the relationship between text and image and to increased scholarly

project is on Irish nationalism and on the ways in which two forces in particular – the one based on romantic-liberal standards of freedom and the other on collective-authoritarian control – shape impulses towards avant-garde experiment. Its major coverage can therefore be summarised more broadly as cultural nationalism in both its radical and conservative forms, which has re-emerged over the past decade as one of the most important fields in the humanities, especially in light of the major electoral changes and debates that continue to proliferate around the possibility of Scottish Independence and the breakup of the United Kingdom.

This research does not contribute to post-colonial readings of Irish culture. The accuracy of post-colonial theory in relation to Ireland's multiple phases of unionisation within the United Kingdom has been much disputed by leading critics.[20] Terence Brown has argued that the political and colonial paradigm in Irish Studies is 'so dominant' that 'any attempt to interrogate it or to complicate it unduly is likely to be dismissed as itself complicit in some way with regressive forces'.[21] Brown's invocation of a political unconscious within the discipline, in which many of the presuppositions of post-colonial theory are held to be normative, or even self-evident, takes issue with two biases in particular. These include a reluctance to take extra-Irish dimensions into account, and a refusal to confront individual expression on its own terms. Brown attributes both of these biases to readings that derive the priority of 'subject' nations from a false constant, as if the experiences of the coloniser, any

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interest in the Greek concept of *ekphrasis* (ἔκφρασις from *ex- +phrazein* 'out / speak'). See the 'Introduction: The engaging eye: Ekphrasis in twentieth-century poetry' to Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux's *Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University, 2008), pp.1-28.

[20] For a discussion of the inconsistencies of Ireland's modernisation over a wider period, and a clarification of its prior position within the Act of Union, see Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, Vol. II: *1890-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006). Unlike other British colonies, Ireland had direct representation at Westminster, and acted as a participant in spreading its colonising motives elsewhere.

[21] See Terence Brown, 'The Literary Revival: historical perspectives', *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.14-26 (p.18). A level of ideological complicity does arise, however, from Brown's decision to voice the term 'post-imperial' in opposition to the 'post-colonial', which risks redirecting the discussion towards a unionist historiography. I have adopted more neutral expressions like simply 'after Irish independence' in order to distance myself from Brown on this issue, whose scepticism about the use of Ireland as a case study for post-colonial states and societies I otherwise share.

more than those of the colonised, can be fixed from a set of subject-object positions and insisted upon axiomatically.

In order to circumvent the lack of internal consistency that Brown discerns from heavy-handed uses of the post-colonial model, this thesis reads modern Ireland in a triangular axis that includes Dublin, London and Paris. The first two chapters round out the context of Ireland and England; the third and fourth introduce the French context for analysis; and the fifth and six return to the Irish context. Rather than posit a mantra of self-definition either side of the power spectrum, the project will show how avant-garde activity interacts with processes of collective control and emancipation that serve as a heuristic within the framework of the nation. It approaches avant-garde 'work' (including such associated media as poetry and painting) as the site in which living cultural moments, however complicated and indirect, are most powerfully embedded. I intend that this attention to formal and cultural detail will enable me to make a fruitful contribution to ongoing discussions about Ireland after 1922.

1

Against Irish Modernism

While no one technique or style defines a work as modernist, a number of social and formal developments can be associated with modernism as a literary-historical movement. As a movement of international influence across all of the creative arts during the early twentieth century, modernism indicates a close exploration of the workings of individual consciousness, a distrust of transcendental values and essences and the abandonment of ornamental features. The influence of this movement is evident in work that questions the unity of the individual subject; that uses montage, juxtaposition and simultaneity; and that places a renewed emphasis on language as a constructed rather than transparent force. Inspecting the term 'Irish modernism', however, which has been increasingly deployed by literature departments and academies as part of the wider phenomenon of international modernism and postmodernity over the past two decades, raises a number of problems. The first of these arises from the reception of modernism by native, continental and Anglo-American critics who have noted a general apathy to its forces; the second from the practice of modernism as a literary movement in Ireland.

The city of Dublin is rarely mentioned in James MacFarlane and Malcolm Bradbury's classic 1978 study *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*.[1] The city attracts little coverage in Michael Levenson's *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* which, revised in 2011, is a standard introduction to the field.[2] Nor is it discussed as part of the various aesthetic and cultural fields that Christopher Butler explores in *Modernism: A*

[1] See James MacFarlane and Malcolm Bradbury's *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1978).
[2] See Michael Levenson's *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011).

Very Short Introduction.[3] Terence Brown, a critic with whom I engage frequently here, has been especially critical of the subject in a 1995 essay titled 'Ireland, Modernism and the 1930s', which features as one part of a number of essays compiled in *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism*.[4] In that essay, Brown cites Thomas McGreevy's 1931 monograph on T.S. Eliot (the first to be published on the American poet) as 'the most persuasive evidence that Ireland and modernism, were, at this time, antithetical congeries of feeling'.[5]

Especially provocative is the manner in which Brown engenders McGreevy's reading of *The Waste Land* (1922) as a protective stance against modernist activity. Brown finds in this study an example of 'that endemic Dublin state of feeling [in which] the dangerous implications for the Christian world-view of the major modernist texts can be rendered anodyne in an oddly Olympian conception of tradition which may be the symptom of a certain self-protective provincialism of mind before the arresting challenge of true and threatening originality'.[6] Brown refers to a confessional environment in Dublin in which modernist texts are filtered through a separate cast of religious affiliation rather than evaluated for their aesthetic quality. Central to Brown's critique of this Christian climate is 'an oddly Olympian conception of tradition' in which Irish cultural participants must pass the baton on with frantic speed in order to earn canonical approval. Brown attributes this cultural anxiety to the absorption of modernist energies and to the failure of Irish writers at the time to apprehend any real disturbing originality of form.[7]

The emphasis that Terence Brown places on confessional ritual as part of Ireland's

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[3] See Christopher Butler's *Modernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[4] See Terence Brown's 'Ireland, Modernism and the 1930s' in *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.88-103.
[5] Brown, ibid., p.91.
[6] Brown, ibid., p.93.
[7] McGreevy was in fact critical of the devotional turn that T.S. Eliot's later work had taken after *The Waste Land* (1922) and disliked 'The Hollow Men' (1925) because of its over-literal use of prayer. See McGreevy, *T.S. Eliot: A Study* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), p.59. Yet his failure to respond to the stylistic innovations and theological transgressions of *The Waste Land* is understood by Brown to be more widely indicative of the imperviousness of Irish culture to modernist influences.

cultural inheritance advances the view that dissent from religion was necessary to modernism's development. Seamus Deane has developed this view in a series of four lectures titled 'Religion, Liberalism and Modernism in Europe and Ireland, 1830-1970' during which he advocates that 'Modernism's ruptures with tradition were predominantly ruptures with religious beliefs, claims, and practices'.[8] 'It is largely ignored', Deane argues, 'how important religious issues and confrontation between church and state were in the development of liberalism and in the new idolatries of the state which mark the first appearance of modernism as an ideology'.[9] Widening the field of reference from Dublin to mainland Europe, Deane proposes that the history of the Vatican, the Syllabus of Errors (1864), the Declaration of Infallibility (1870) and the reactions against these ecclesiastical forces are critical moments in the first phase of modernist assertion. For both of these literary critics – Brown and Deane – the strengthening of Ireland's religious authority explains the general reluctance of Irish writers to engage with modernist ideas.[10]

Perhaps the strongest evidence of what the cultural mainstream in Ireland had come to represent during the 1930s is to be found in the indigenous dramaturgy of the Abbey Theatre.[11] After receiving its first official subsidy from the Free State in 1925, the venue became the first state-subsidised playhouse in Europe, otherwise known as the National Theatre of Ireland (*Amharclann Náisiúnta na hÉireann*). This was an arena in which the previous concerns of the Irish Revival continued to express themselves in romance, folklore, heroic narrative and in highly-politicised renditions of rural life. Thomas Cornelius Murray's

[8] Seamus Deane charted this proposition in a series of four lectures titled 'Religion, Liberalism and Modernism in Europe and Ireland, 1830-1970', which were given at the Notre-Dame Institute (O'Connell House) during June-July 2011.
[9] Deane, ibid.
[10] Examples of growing religious orthodoxy within the Free State include the Thirty-First International Eucharistic Congress held in Dublin in June 1932, which resulted in an unprecedented display of partnership between Rome and the new nation; and the Academy of Christian art, which was spearheaded by Count Plunkett, a former director of the National Museum and an ex-Minister for the Fine Arts. See S. Bhreathneach-Lynch, 'The Academy of Christian Art (1929-1946): An Aspect of Catholic Cultural Life in Newly Independent Ireland', *Éire-Ireland* (Autumn-Winter 1996): 3-4.
[11] See Nicholas Grene, 'Reactions to Revolution', *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), pp.136-169.

theatrical studies of the peasant class in *Birthright* (1910), *Maurice Harte* (1912) and *Autumn Fire* (1924) had made this an attractive subject for the national drama, the recurrent success of which would become known 'the peasant treadmill'.[12] By highlighting the influence of primitivism as opposed to modernism, I do not mean to ignore the production of more innovative drama during this period. George Bernard Shaw was the most frequently produced Abbey dramatist from 1916 to 1935. An Irish translation of Leo Tolstoy's *Falsely True* [*Fíoraon le Fiarán*] was staged at the Abbey Theatre in 1925. As the years progressed, however, the overall predominance of peasant themes on the national stage began to reflect the hardening of ideological positions. On 5 October 1930, Samuel Beckett wrote to Thomas McGreevy comparing Eileen Crowe's performance as Dervorgilla in Lady Gregory's play of that name to 'Frau Lot petrified into a symbolic condemnation of free trade'.[13]

The vested political interests that now attached themselves to the national drama were by no means representative of the original force with which the Irish Revival had been conceived by Irish poets, the seeds of which lie, as Roy Foster has shown, in 'the literary societies of the mid 1880s, when the Young Ireland ethos was revived […]'.[14] While the Irish Revival had provided an important framework for radical politics within the oral tradition of song, the movement appears to have lost its force once it moved away from nationalist

[12] Gabriel Fallon, 'The New Drama League Says "Yes"', *The Irish Monthly,* 70, 824 (February 1942). Despite the Abbey Theatre's preoccupation with peasant themes, genuine exceptions to the national drama were developed on rival stages. The Dublin Drama League (1919-29), directed by Lennox Robinson and chaired by W.B. Yeats, remained very much a place apart from the official taste of Irish culture during this period, promoting a number of European plays that exhibited surrealist, expressionist and modernist influences. Though its activities stopped after the 1929 season, the Dublin Drama League was temporarily revived by Robinson, George Yeats and Olive Craig during the 1930s to produce 'uncommercial' plays on Sundays. So unsuited, however, did the organisation prove to Dublin's reactionary climate that its creators found themselves actively opposing plays that they had, in effect, promoted: first in the case of Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* (1928) and then four months later with Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says No!* (1928). See W.B. Yeats's letter of rejection to O'Casey: 20/04/1928; *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Electronic edition, Unpublished Letters (1905-1939)* http://www.nlx.com/collections/130; and Johnston's second (and finally rejected) typescript draft of *Shadowdance*, later called *The Old Lady Says No!*, with holograph corrections by W.B. Yeats and others, in the Denis Johnston archive at the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections.

[13] Beckett to McGreevy: 05/10/1930; *TLSB* 50.

[14] A 'Great Irish Revival Number' had been featured in the January 1886 edition of the *Irish Fireside*, a popular Irish weekly edited by Rose Kavanagh. See R.F. Foster, *Words Alone: Yeats and his Inheritances* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.143.

ballads towards stage melodramas.[15] What I want to emphasise, here, is the transformation of an earlier oral tradition onto the stage during the 1920s and 1930s, which exerted a strong sense of nostalgia in a country where the existence of the Anglo-Irish gentry had been superseded by the Catholic bourgeoisie; where the imaginative closeness of revolution had been replaced by the Free State; and where the impact of new technologies had been weakened by the new regime's idealisation of peasant and rural life. The state of affairs for Irish writers at this time seems back to front when compared to the socialist politics of their English contemporaries. As James Mays states in his introduction to Denis Devlin's *Collected Poems*:

> The choice for writers like Beckett and Coffey was […] not between Yeats and Marx but between Yeats and Joyce, not whether to join the Communist Party but whether or not to leave the country, not between art and life but between two different kinds of art, each of which contains implications about the way to live. The dilemma of the Irish writer seems at face value more literary and arcane than the choices insisted upon by Christopher Caldwell and Anthony Blunt in the pages of *Left Review*, or explored by Lionel Trilling in *The Middle of the Journey*, but it is not at all.[16]

Though we may object to the exclusionary intensity of the 'choices' that Mays outlines, the description of these loyalties from an Anglophone perspective is useful for charting the very different balance of culture and politics in the Irish context. If a utopian spirit remained imperative for a don turned Soviet spy of the *Left Review*, the issues of the 1930s appeared for Irish writers in a rear-view mirror, largely unchanged by national liberation, and positively oppressed by the constraints that had accompanied popular revolution. A tendency to drift into satire became all too common among Irish writers compelled to react against the demands of an increasingly regimented civilisation.

Division and constraint in the public sphere only stiffened following the passing of

[15] For further exposition of the same argument, see Emer Nolan, 'Modernism and the Irish Revival', *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.157-172.
[16] J.C.C. Mays, 'Introduction', *Collected Poems by Denis Devlin* (Dublin: Dedalus Press, 1989), p.24.

the Censorship of Publications Act in 1929, which effectively split apart the artistic intelligentsia from the state's 'protection' of the people. The acceptance of this bill by the Free State government and the lack of dissent surrounding its imposition is perhaps the most important event concerning Ireland's cultural production at this time. Even before the attempt to broaden the interpretation of obscenity in existing legislature had been brought before the Oireachtas (the Free State's legislative body) in the summer of 1928, a level of unofficial assent to censorship from the publishing industry meant that the leaders of literary periodicals had to twice face down strikes from printers who refused to work on the contents of modernist texts. Seumas O'Sullivan decided to reject an essay by 'Con' Leventhal on James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) after the Dollard Printinghouse had threatened strike action, while the editors of *To-Morrow* had to turn to a printing house in Manchester after Irish printers had refused to work on Lennox Robinson's 'The Madonna of Slieve Dun': an episode to which I return in the second chapter of this thesis in connection with McGreevy's own departure from Dublin to London.[17]

While the authoritarian behaviour of the new government was a major factor in the passing of the Censorship of Publications Act, the implementation of the bill also gradually evolved from a reification of attitudes that were already there. Vivid examples of the ways in which the bill was popularly and imaginatively reinforced are contained in Brendan Behan's 'Letters from Ireland', originally addressed to Sindbad Vail, but later included in the Parisian magazine *Points 15*. Referring to the outlook of one prudish bookseller, Behan acknowledges to the Parisian editor that

[17] For further discussion on 'the unofficial variety of censorship enforced by prudish printers', see Frank Shovlin's 'From Revolution to Republic: Magazines, Modernism and Modernity in Ireland' in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, *Vol 1*, *Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.735-758 (p.746). For an account of the episode involving Lennox Robinson, see Anthony Olden's 'A Storm in a Chalice', *Library Review* 25, 7 (Autumn 1976): 265-269.

> I got a Penguin *Plato's Symposium.* With difficulty: The Censorship can hardly get after him at this time of day, but as one bookman (saving your presence) said to me: 'We saw a slight run on it, and the same sort of people looking for it, so we just took it out of circulation ourselves. After all, we don't have to be made decent minded by Act of the Dáil. We have our own way of detecting smut, no matter how ancient'.[18]

Looking back on the Free State's rule from the 1970s, the civil servant and writer Mervyn Wall perceived that the state coordination of the 'masses' had been deep and effective and that its censorious legislature had been imposed 'with the will of the entire people' – an observation that is corroborated by other writers who lived through the 1930s.[19] What is most disturbing about these testimonial accounts of the period is the disappearance of a middle audience between the Free State and the general public. Even the Oireachtas festival (an event that now found an unfortunate namesake in the Free State's legislative body), which had been operating since 1897 as Ireland's first annual festival for the literary and performing arts, was cancelled from 1924 to 1939 due to a lack of public interest.

A more complex example of the impact of censorship on literary development can be discerned from within organisations that sought to capitalise on the restrictive nature of the new government. As Lauren Arrington has shown from financial records, government correspondence and minutes from Directors meetings, even the Abbey Theatre, which is usually exempt from accounts of restrictive control during this period, was engaged in strategies of self-constraint that manipulated attempts by government officials to interfere directly in its programme.[20] Though the impact of censorship in this instance evidently

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[18] Brendan Behan to Sindbad Vail, *Points 15* (Autumn 1952): 71.

[19] See 'Michael Smith Asks Mervyn Wall Some Questions About the Thirties', *The Lace Curtain*, 4 (Summer 1971): 77-86 for a personal account of Irish public opinion and discourse at this time. For book-length studies on the topic, see Michael Adams, *Censorship: The Irish Experience* (Dublin: Scepter Books, 1968), and Julia Carlson, ed. *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish writer* (London: Routledge, 1990). For a revisionist account that inverts rather than reassesses dominant stereotypes about Ireland's cultural isolationism, see Brian Fallon's *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998). Though Fallon does not dispute the existence of restricting forces, he argues that other cultural factors, such as the failure to revive the Irish language, exceeded the negative impact of censorship.

[20] See Lauren Arrington, '"We have no gift to set a statesman right": Representation, Reform, Subsidy, and Censorship', *W.B. Yeats, the Abbey Theatre, Censorship, and the Irish State: Adding the Half-pence to the Pence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.1-14.

supersedes in its complexity the ruling of the censors themselves, my purpose here is simply to illustrate the drastic change that it effected on the cultural situation in the South of Ireland. Francis Hackett, whose *The Green Lion* (1936) was banned on grounds of indecency, had maintained prior to the revolution that national independence would not equate to a transfer to papal authority – a situation that had been predicted by unionist counterparts in the north. 'Under [the] guise of hunting out obscenity and indecency', he argues in a final parting shot before leaving for Denmark, 'the Catholic Church is giving the lie to every nationalist who, like myself, insisted day in and day out that Home Rule would not mean Rome Rule. Home Rule, through the action of the Censorship, does mean Rome Rule'.[21]

Though the collusion of ecclesiastical and temporal authorities was often challenged by writers and artists, it appears to have been largely uninhibited by the kind of critical reflection that was necessary for a phase of widespread modernist assertion. 'Irish artists', S.B. Kennedy remarks unequivocally in a reference book designed to accompany a Dublin exhibition titled *Irish Art and Modernism: 1880-1950*, 'merely reacted to Modernism; they did not help to shape its development'.[22] The difficulty that Kennedy encounters when attempting to find evidence of a ruling engagement with modernist ideas reveals much about the incomplete reception of the movement in Ireland. Kennedy's awareness of painters reacting to rather than directly shaping modernism can be extended to a number of short-story writers who were able to place their work in modernist journals without engaging fully with its concerns. Both Seán Ó Faoláin and Frank O'Connor had their work published in modernist magazines such as *The Dial* even though their extensive treatment of the short-

[21] Francis Hackett, 'A Muzzle Made in Ireland', *Dublin Magazine* (new series), 11, 4 (October-December 1936): 16. The experiences that Hackett's Danish wife recounts in her *Irish Diaries* reveal much about the extent of Vatican control over Irish affairs. Her journal was published posthumously in Dublin in 1994. See Signe Toksvig's *Irish Diaries* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1994).
[22] S.B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism: 1880-1950* (Belfast: Queens University, 1991), p.209.

story genre reveals no consistent adoption of modernist ideas.[23]

Terence Brown has argued in reference to the short-story genre in Ireland after Joyce's 1914 collection *Dubliners* that 'a debilitating air of anachronism' hangs over the predominance of the short story during the 1920s and 30s.[24] Yet it is debatable whether the Irish literary scene in the 1930s was any *less* modernist than that of Britain or even the USA, both of which saw, from the perspective of formal experiment, a resurgence of traditional styles (Auden after Eliot, David Jones after Cubism, J.B. Priestley in drama, Graham Greene in the novel, and so on). The emerging noir of the late 1930s was formally conservative: a case in point being John Ford's 1935 adaptation of Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* (1925). Furthermore the implementation of Irish censorship seems less draconian in the wider context of the beginning of the era of the Motion Picture Production Code in Hollywood. The overall propensity towards naturalism might point to Ireland being seen less as an outlier detached from global movements than as part of an international reaction against modernism. So there is something altogether more complicated about Irish culture post-1922 than an account of the restrictive forces of religion, provincialism and censorship will allow.

I do not wish to pose too summary a relationship between the official cultural climate in Ireland and the work of Irish writers. A writer can of course use a city and landscape in multiple imaginative ways. My aim is simply to present an empirical argument that identifies the dominant cultural trends within the nation. As I have shown, Ireland lacked the social conditions of modernity (technological and anti-clerical) that accompanied artistic advancements in other more developed nations (like Germany). Rather the formal and social direction of its cultural mainstream, which favoured heroic mythology and conservative treatments of rural life, remained generally impervious to modernist influences. Yet a number of key experimental writers still emerged during the 1930s despite the intensity of censorship

[23] See the August and March 1929 editions of *The Dial* (79, 2, and 86, 3), which feature Ó Faoláin's 'The Wild Goat's Kid' (pp.137-143) and O'Connor's 'The Song of Liadain' (pp.189-190).
[24] Brown, 'Ireland, Modernism and the 1930s', p.99.

(Kate O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen and Samuel Beckett among them).

In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger prefers to distinguish between modernist and avant-garde movements. Bürger's distinction may be usefully employed to reflect upon the separate existence of an avant-garde circle in Ireland after 1922 where modernism did not emerge as a result of the absence of technology and mass culture. In 'Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde', which introduces the 1984 edition of Bürger's text, Jochen Schulte-Sasse argues that the subversive intent of avant-garde work is socially as well as technically oppositional, which suits my emphasis here. 'Modernism', Schulte-Sasse disputes, 'may be understandable as an attack on traditional writing techniques, but the avant-garde can only be understood as an attack meant to alter the institutionalised commerce with art'.[25] Having demonstrated the negative impact of religion, provincialism and censorship on literary development within the Irish Free State, this thesis now turns to the creative vision of an avant-garde circle. In *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, Terence Brown argues that

> Apart from Beckett, their literary work, that of the poets Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey, and the slightly older Thomas McGreevy, has received limited critical attention in Ireland or elsewhere. Its intellectual, often theological concerns, its unselfconsciously urban pre-occupations, […] its assured familiarity with European civilisation, set their work apart from what most Irish men and women had come to expect from their contemporary writers. For these writers Ireland could be most herself not through a self-absorbed antiquarianism but through acceptance of her position as a European nation with links to the intellectual and artistic concerns of the Continent.[26]

Beckett's collection of short stories had been banned in Ireland less than half a year before his collection of poems was published in Paris. That same year, he wrote a coruscating attack on the passing of the Censorship of Publications Act, titled 'Censorship in the Saorstát' (the Irish name for the Free State government), though the article was not published in Ireland

[25] See Jochen Schulte-Sasse, 'Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde' in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984; first published 1974), pp.vii-lv (p.xv).

[26] Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 1981), p.156. The same study predicts how subsequent neo-liberal discourse has attempted less to re-imagine the ties of nationalism and modernism than to favour the subjective impulse in modernity.

until 1983 – almost fifty years after it had been originally commissioned by *The Bookman*.[27] In the sections that follow, I examine how the work of Beckett, Devlin and McGreevy is set against an ongoing desire for representational aesthetics during the opening decades of independence. Subsequent readings of their poetry will provide a means by which to distinguish other cultural possibilities, including McGreevy's own aspiration to remould 'A Cultural Irish Republic'.

[27] Beckett mentions the commission in a letter to McGreevy dated 7 August 1934 [*TLSB* 217-18] and its completion in another letter sent to him on 27 August [TCD MS 10402/62]. However, *The Bookman*, to which Beckett had recently contributed 'Recent Irish Poetry', went under owing to continuous financial difficulties (despite the change in ownership). Beckett later sent a copy of the typescript to *transition* via his Parisian agent George Reavey. The typescript is in the Baker Memorial Library at Dartmouth College.

1.1: The separation of the political and the artistic avant-garde

By applying the concept of the 'avant-garde' to the work of Devlin, Beckett and McGreevy, I am referring to a formula and concept that is clearly Parisian.[1] The history of the concept is useful in two senses: first, for considering the national culture from which these poets had become alienated; and second, for explaining the centrality of Paris to their work. An excessive dependence on Irish cultural stereotypes that were irredeemably *passéist* by the standards of a new generation of writers in dialogue with Parisian experiment appears to have unleashed a powerful desire to jettison their reappearance. Heroic images and symbols that had previously incited creative activity and political activism in the lead up to 1916 had become mere icons of received wisdom after a period of almost seven years of paramilitary fighting.

In his introduction to the second edition of *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (1923), Ernest Boyd surveys a new climate of thought and feeling. While the original 1916 edition of the book had concentrated on the great strides that Irish literature had made during the first quarter of the century, the revised preface to the second edition expects far less from the immediate future:

[1] A similar distinction to that being made here has been used by Alex Davis in *A Broken Line: Denis Devlin and Irish Poetic Modernism* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), *passim*, to indicate a tangential relationship between 1930s Irish poets and various avant-garde movements across continental Europe. Tim Armstrong also employs the concept of an 'avant-garde', specifically in relation to Thomas McGreevy, but also with regards to Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey, in 'Muting the Klaxon: Poetry, History and Irish Modernism', in Alex Davis and Patricia Coughlan (eds.) *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp.43-74. Earlier divisions between the artistic and the political avant-garde are theorised in Renato Poggioli's 1968 study, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1968), which describes the splitting of the two after the first of the modern little magazines in France (*La Revue Indépendante*) ended its circulation. Thereafter, Poggioli argues, the term 'avant-garde' had to justify its post-revolutionary existence with such qualifiers as the 'artistic' or 'literary', which were intended to dissociate subsequent work from the violence of an earlier political counterpart. According to Poggioli, 'These expressions took on the common inheritance of French language and culture, and passed over the frontiers as "exchange currency" into the international market of ideas. Thus, what had up to then been a secondary, figurative meaning became instead the primary, in fact the only, meaning: the isolated image and the abbreviated term "avant-garde" became, without qualification, another synonym for the artistic avant-garde, while the political notion functioned almost solely as rhetoric and was no longer used exclusively by those faithful to the revolutionary and subversive ideal' (p.11). No social or technical connection is being suggested here between the 1930s poets and the existing Irish avant-garde – which includes David Lloyd, Maurice Scully, Randolph Healy and Catherine Walsh – though their importance to contemporary Irish poetry has often been discussed retrospectively in such terms. See Michael Smith and Trevor Joyce's efforts to find an 'avant-garde' moment in Irish poetry in the early numbers of *The Lace Curtain*, 1-6 (1970-78).

> Now that political preoccupations are supreme, literature in Ireland has been relegated to the second plane. The energies of a new generation are once more absorbed in the material struggle for national existence […] In times like the present these tendencies have grown more pronounced, and it seems as if a great deal of the ground were lost which had been gained by the generation of W.B. Yeats.[2]

The impression that one derives from the revised preface to *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* is that cultural and artistic needs under the Free State had lost out to 'the material struggle' that follows self-determination. The triumph of a political nationalism based on militant forms of expression had absorbed and displaced other cultural alternatives, relegating the importance of literature in Ireland to 'the second plane'. If the achievement of political independence had meant the beginning of national liberation, then it had provided no such beginning in cultural-artistic terms; indeed, for Boyd, the material struggle for national existence appears to have lost much of the cultural territory won by the previous generation. These judgements belong to no dyed-in-the-wool unionist. They are in fact written two years after Boyd's resignation from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on account of his sympathies with the Irish cause.

While the effects of political preoccupation ran supreme in Ireland, a group of Irish émigrés was earning caustic mention in Edward Titus's 'Criticism à l'Irlandaise'.[3] One of these expatriated Irishmen, though slightly older than the rest of his compatriots, wrote two monographs in Paris for the Chatto & Windus Dolphin monograph series, the first of which, titled *Richard Aldington: an Englishman* (1931), contains important reflections on a fellow veteran of war trying to come to terms with a violent political inheritance:

> A student of history and of civilisation as well as of the arts, he knew that, even in the hundred-odd years since the French Revolution, the tradition, though it had fallen into the hands of the bourgeoisie, had still been alive, that the bourgeoisie had had to master it before it could reject it. And he knew too that that mastery had been achieved and that that rejection had taken place; that already in Henri de Regnier and Anatole France the tradition was threadbare, that revolutionary ideals had, at long last, taken possession of aesthetic, had impregnated it and made it fruitful, and

[2] Ernest Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, Second Edition (London: Grant Richards, 1923), p.7.
[3] See Edward Titus, 'Editorially: Criticism à l'Irlandaise', *This Quarter* (April-May-June 1931), 3.4: 569-584.

> that the greatest art of the future, much more than the art of the nineteenth century, would be the expression of revolutionary humanity, stopping now to reflect on itself, expressing itself fully and completely. And he knew that much of that expression would inevitably be discordant.[4]

Without reflecting any further on the basis of this 'tradition', which is said to have become 'threadbare' by the time of Anatole France and Henri de Regnier's election to the Académie Française (to seats 38 and 39 respectively), McGreevy argues that the dual process of learning and abandoning a tradition is necessary if the impact of revolutionary ideals are finally to provide their *own* aesthetic values. If we take the 'hundred-odd years since the French Revolution' to the Third Republic to be roughly indicative of the time lag that McGreevy envisages before these ideals are seen to have 'impregnated' the artistic realm and made it 'fruitful', then it is possible to see why the arrival of political independence in Ireland barely a decade after the revolutionary war had so far failed to produce a new aesthetic counterpart.

The disengagement of the avant-garde from nationalist politics can be attributed directly to *l'année terrible* of 1922-23. Only after the national and social crisis of the Irish Civil War, and the subsequent consolidation of the Free State's power through the execution of republican prisoners, did the image of the avant-garde gradually become detached from the writings of poet revolutionaries such as Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Plunkett (and with it the precarious alliance of blood-sacrifice and martyrdom) and replaced by the more introspective demands of the lyric. In a paper delivered in 1934 to the Irish Society at Oxford titled 'A Cultural Irish Republic', McGreevy argues that 'Our first need in Ireland, if we had realised it, was not a political republic but a cultural republic. We made a mistake. We have to rectify it'.[5] The statement that emerges here during his lecture to a British audience underlines how Ireland's avant-garde remains subordinate to a radicalism that is political rather than cultural. Throughout his speech, McGreevy reminds his audience

[4] McGreevy, *Richard Aldington: an Englishman* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), p.12.
[5] McGreevy, 'A Cultural Irish Republic' (November 1934), TCD MS 8003-9, p.3.

of the priority of cultural self-determination and of the difficulty of sustaining political independence without a live artistic counterpart. 'Culturally', he concedes, 'Ireland is provincial. There is no Irish cultural republic, no republic of the Irish mind. And yet that is precisely the republic that matters most'.[6]

It is the cultural – and not the political – ideal of the nation that McGreevy emphasises first in his Oxford lecture. He notes ironically how a desire to impress Britain on narrowly-tactical grounds has failed to provide an affirmative basis for the nation's self-expression: '[t]he change of regime in Ireland has given us licensing laws modelled on those of England and a non-sectarian censorship, the Griffith-Collins-O'Higgins plaster memorial in Leinster Lawn, new banknotes, a new coinage and new postage stamps'.[7] The official overprinting at independence of King George VI postage stamps with 'Saorstát Éiréann' as a revenue strategy serves as a piquant emblem of the cultural situation, which had succeeded only in narrowing the expression of past imperial standards.[8] Without an independent basis on which to define the culture of the new nation, future artistic movements were fated to become the latter-day saints to earlier styles and subjects that had official sanction and approval. As the Irish Free State began to consolidate its rule, literary-artistic movements of the period were destined to take up reactionary offshoots within what McGreevy fears in the conclusion of his speech may be no more than an 'Anglo-Irish-cum-London-Irish cultural province'.[9]

In another public lecture delivered to the Munster Fine Arts Club in Cork, Mainie Jellett forecasts the likely outcome of this regression. 'If we keep our heads like ostriches buried in the sand', she argues, 'and imagine by so doing we are guarding our own nationality

[6] McGreevy, ibid., TCD MS 8003-9, p.4.
[7] McGreevy, ibid., p.2.
[8] In discussion with Patricia Coughlan, Piaras Mac Éinri has mentioned the overprinting of the stamps, which is reported to have continued in the case of high-value denominations into the 1930s. See Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis (eds.), *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p.205.
[9] McGreevy, 'A Cultural Irish Republic', TCD MS 8003-14/5. Four years later to members of the NUI Club in London, McGreevy would once again outline the risks of cultural provincialism in a lecture titled 'The Cultural Dilemma for Irishmen: Nationalism or Provincialism' (December 1938); TCD MS8003-8/9a.

and racial characteristics from profanation by outsiders, we will find ourselves continuing to live, or more truly, die, under the influence of a so-called tradition adopted by us from England, a tradition which England herself is now trying to cast off'.[10] Even those who would go on to promote a very different vision of Irish culture to that favoured by McGreevy and Jellett's pro-European stance could support this emphasis. James Devane urged his readers to understand in a 1936 article for *Ireland To-Day* that '[u]ntil we create within that English medium a native periodic and cultural press, native readers, we shall be a Yorkshire, a Lancashire, a few isolated counties within a British culture'.[11]

The demand for cultural experiment that Beckett, Devlin and McGreevy were to impose upon themselves as poets constitutes an important break from a political climate that had yet to establish itself culturally as free from British rule. Beckett's review of Devlin's *Intercessions*, which was published in the Parisian journal *transition* six months after McGreevy's review of the same collection, provides insight into the kind of artistic freedom demanded by the avant-garde:

> Art has always been this – pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric – whatever else it may have been obliged by the 'social reality' to appear, but never more freely so than now, when social reality (*pace* ex-comrade Radek) has severed the connexion.[12]

Beckett refers to the international Communist leader, Karl Radek, who at the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress had dismissed James Joyce's *Ulysses* on account of its 'private language'.[13]

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[10] Mainie Jellett, 'A Word on Irish Art', *The Artists Vision: Lectures and Essays on Art, with an introduction by Albert Gleizes*, ed. Eileen MacCarvill (Dundalk: Dundulgan Press, 1958), p.105.
[11] James Devane, 'Nationality and Culture', *Ireland To-Day*, 1, 7 (December 1936): 16. See also Devane's 'Is an Irish Culture Possible?', *Ireland To-Day*, 1, 5 (October 1936): 21-31.
[12] Beckett, 'Commentaries: Denis Devlin', *transition 27* (April-May 1938): 289-294 (289). Denis Devlin had originally asked Beckett to review his collection of poems for *Ireland To-Day*, but it was McGreevy who wrote the review. See Beckett to McGreevy (04/09/1937): 'I would much rather you did the Intercessions for Ireland To-day than that I did' [*TLSB* 530]. McGreevy had previously commented on the typescript of *Intercessions*, which Devlin had presented to him for advice on revisions. See Devlin to McGreevy (22/01/1937 TCD MS 8112/11 and 15/02/1937 TCD MS 8112/2).
[13] See Karl Radek, 'James Joyce or Socialist Realism?' (August 1934), delivered to the Soviet Writers Congress, *Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art*, pp.151-154. Together with the Bolshevik, Dmitriy Manuilsky, Radek had attempted to stage a second German revolution in October 1923 before Lenin died.

The traditional Marxist explanation for the 'decadence' of *Ulysses* was that the truth of social life had become irreconcilable with the aesthetic quality of individual expression. Beckett's contention, by contrast, of art's diminishing obligation to appear as something by the 'social reality' in quotation marks foregrounds the very impossibilities of allegiance to such external standards. The freedom to present material irrespective of the demands of a particular public, tradition or social structure is deeply bound up with his understanding of art's capacity to inquire, remake, and even emancipate the expressive act from ideological pressures ('whatever else it may have been obliged by the "social reality" to appear'). Furthermore, in the context of Irish censorship, Beckett's defence of a pure interrogative art bears comparison with Erich Heller's thesis in *The Disinherited Mind* that the modern artist had been left outside of reality due to a peculiar contraction in the circumference of the real.[14] The effects of this 'contraction' are important for considering the availability of new forms in the Irish context when the triumph of a political nationalism based on militant forms of expression had absorbed and displaced other cultural possibilities.

[14] Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952).

1.2: The little magazine

A reflex antagonism to subjects that diverted from standardised versions of peasant pastoral had unduly circumscribed artistic production in Ireland in a manner analogous to the imposition of communist-realist standards in art. To a great extent, this ideological contraction is reflected by the national press coverage of the arts during the 1930s. The *Irish Independent* had a circulation of 152,000 at this time and was the country's largest selling newspaper – an audience that Éamon de Valera attempted to overthrow by establishing the *Irish Press* in 1931 as the *Irish Independent*'s main competitor. Both of these newspapers were competing for an audience that was largely sympathetic to the trajectory I have outlined from military republicanism to cultural conservatism. While de Valera's new regime had sealed off radical politics from the cultural mainstream, the circulation of a number of little magazines helps to bring into view smaller currents of dissent that were sustained during this period. Close analysis of the essays and poems that were first published in this arena can reveal particular aspects of cultural development that prompted different literary and artistic techniques.

Seumas O'Sullivan's *Dublin Magazine* (1923-58) and 'Æ' Russell's *Irish Statesman* (1923-30) provided reliable platforms for young writers to publish their work.[1] Both editors were pragmatic operators who ensured the survival of their respective magazines by avoiding controversial disputes and the worst excesses of censorship. Other less durable platforms for the distribution of new writing included *The Klaxon: An Irish International Quarterly* (which made only one appearance in the winter of 1923), *To-Morrow* (1924; *To-Morrow*'s third issue never arrived), and the later *Ireland To-Day* (1936-38; eventually boycotted by Irish newsagents). It is no accident that the future and the everyday feature in each of the titles of

[1] 'Con' Leventhal's 'Surrealism or Literary Psycho-Therapy' was featured in the October-December 1936 edition of the *Dublin Magazine*, 11.4: 66-73 alongside Samuel Beckett's translation of Paul Éluard's 'Lady Love' from *Thorns of Thunder*.

these short-lived journals. Their attempt to break with past traditions, and to advance a pro-European agenda, was more than offset by the dominance of right-wing religious periodicals such as *The Rosary*, *The Messenger* and *The Leader*. Nonetheless, their fleeting capacity to elaborate doctrines and to present contemporary written work to an often hostile public was essential to the refinement of wider cultural possibilities.

In *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture*, Richard Kearney argues that 'some of [Ireland's] most inventive thinking and writing over the last one hundred and fifty years was produced in cultural journals such as *The Nation, The United Irishman, Irish Statesman, An Claidheamh Soluis, The Bell* and others – journals which refused the polarisation of literature and politics into opposed discourses and believed that the struggle for a new national identity was best served by combining imaginative creativity with a keen sense of social commitment'.[2] The ability of the journal medium to resist the 'polarisation' that Kearney describes is important given the imposition of censorship six years after the Free State's establishment. Seen from this perspective, the fugitive lifespans of *The Klaxon*, *To-Morrow* and *Ireland To-Day* serve as live documentation of artistic and political needs that could only be gathered temporarily within their pages. The sparse, non-commercial and selective distribution of these periodicals reveals a unique synergy between forms of political and artistic newness that had no outlet, or possibility of expression, elsewhere – a no less obvious reason for the failure of each of them, or at least for their short lives. To the editors of these journals, innovation in art and writing was profoundly allied to innovation in the national body politic, forging an aesthetico-political union that, as Frank Shovlin has argued in his study of Irish journals from the 1920s to the 1950s, diverges sharply from the periodical culture in Britain:

[2] Richard Kearney, *Transitions: Narrative in Modern Irish Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.250.

1.2: The little magazine

> While British magazines emerging from the 1920s and 1930s like *The Criterion*, *The Adelphi*, *Scrutiny*, and *The London Mercury* were chiefly concerned with debating issues of an aesthetic nature, Irish magazines in the same period had the task of questioning issues of identity, of attempting not just to uncover new talent or to set the artistic tone. And while British editors such as Eliot and Middleton Murray were wrangling over the merits of Classicism and Romanticism, their Irish counterparts were trying to heal the trauma of revolution and to define the culture of a new nation.[3]

It is surprising to discover in retrospect just how many established contemporaries, including Francis Stuart, Cecil Salkeld, 'Æ' Russell and W.B. Yeats, used the little magazine to respond to the existing political climate with changes in aesthetic practice.[4] As one of the few places in which aesthetic and political considerations could be productively fused together, nearly every writer of significance would publish in this arena with the purpose of reshaping the nation after military conflict with Britain.[5] Seán Ó'Faoláin's 'Commentary on the 'Foregoing', which was published in the fifth number of *Ireland To-Day*, reveals a decisive break from the pervasive rhetoric of idealisation and myth-making predominant in right-wing periodicals. Ó'Faoláin's second novel *Bird Alone* (1936) would later be banned by the Free State government. Here Ó'Faoláin directs his critique at the exponents of a 'hidden Ireland' – namely, Michael Tierney (a member of the Evil Literature Committee), James Devane, and Daniel Corkery – who continue to brandish an ideal of 'Irishness' at the expense of living writers:

> Dr. Devane, like Prof. Tierney, Prof. Corkery and many others who share his inferiority complex with regard to the actuality of the Ireland in which we live – fearing to *see* what is before their eyes to see, wishful to cover it over and gild it over – are misled by one simple act of non-recognition. They will not recognise the court. And the court which will, in time, judge them is Ireland as it is – Ireland as the novelists and dramatists and poets have a dozen times revealed to them. O'Casey, Yeats, Joyce, O'Flaherty, O'Connor, McNamara, Somerville and Ross, Colum, Synge – not any one alone, but all together, have presented a picture of Ireland to the world. These men and women have no axe to grind. They look at Irish life and they present it, recreated with integrity in its essential truth. Dr. Devane and the rest of the yearners say: 'No,

[3] Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical, 1923-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.11-12.
[4] See Francis Stuart and Cecil Salkeld's 'To All Artists and Writers', *To-Morrow*, 1, 1 (August 1924): 4; Æ Russell's 'Notes and Comments', *Irish Statesman*, 6, 4 (03/04/1926): 89; and W.B. Yeats's 'The Need for Audacity of Thought', which was turned down by the *Irish Statesman* and published later in *The Dial* (February 1926), under Marianne Moore's editorship.
[5] One of the earliest examples in this connection is an article by F.R. Higgins and Austin Clarke titled 'Art and Energy', which was featured in the *Irish Statesman*, 3, 8 (11/01/1924).

> Ireland is not like that'. They are exactly like the audiences who hissed Synge and attacked O'Casey. They hate the truth because they have not enough personal courage to be what we all are – the descendants, English-speaking, in European dress, affected by European thought, part of the European economy, of the rags and tatters who rose with O'Connell to win under Mick Collins – in a word, this modern Anglo-Ireland.
>
> One myth after another these yearners invent to cover up the fact of Anglo-Ireland – to cover up the simple historical fact that we are what history made us. The Gaelic Revival, the new Puritanism, the yarn of the 'Hidden' Ireland, the Censorship, the howls about a 'National' literature, the menial tariff on Joyce and Yeats, the attempt to prevent the Abbey from playing Synge in America – they are all the opiates to drug the seeing eyes; dream-clothes to cover those who cannot simply be Irishmen, thinking, living, behaving, as free individuals in their own right, on their own feet, in their own time. It is not possible to argue with such people. They live in a fog of fear – utterly confused by their efforts to find a 'noble' ancestry. They are simply ashamed of the cabins and the lanes, out of which we have all come.[6]

In this audacious attack on the censorious mindset, Ó'Faoláin lists the shame of sexual birthright alongside other tropes of origin – the 'inferiority complex', the 'menial tariff', the 'fog of fear', the 'dream-clothes' – that have rendered the present status of the nation inert after a phase of heroic revolutionary resistance. While authors like Ó'Faoláin argued that a fiercely realist approach was necessary for confronting the trauma of military violence, others, like Walter Starkie, strived for aesthetic moulds that might recapture past glories. 'We are living in an age of crude realism', Starkie argued, 'and it is only on rare occasions that the poet hears the goblins piping in dusky glen or watches the fairy fires on the mountain'.[7] From diatribes condemning the spread of psychological delusion to laments for a bygone heroism, the cultural debate that was conducted in little magazines appears to have been deeply conflicted about the truthfulness of Ireland's hidden core. No plan of intervention, however, was more emphatic in its response to current historical pressures than that of Samuel Beckett's August 1934 review, which was printed in *The Bookman* just before it stopped publication.[8]

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[6] Seán O'Faoláin, 'Commentary on the Foregoing', *Ireland To-Day*, 1, 5 (October 1936): 32.
[7] Walter Starkie, 'Literature and Life: The Fantastic in Literature', *Irish Statesman* (28/01/1928): 21.
[8] *The Bookman*'s final issue was that of December 1934.

1.3: Recent Irish Poetry (RIP)

Though broadly polemical in emphasis, Beckett's 'Recent Irish Poetry' casts important reflection on the lyric and its possible use in a new age of politics, thought and feeling. Much of the review is given over to fashionable examples of neo-Revivalist verse that reflect the author's impatience with literary forms whose validity continued to be sanctioned by their previous use. The challenge that the article presented to current members of Dublin's literary society, many of whom viewed themselves as custodians of the Revival tradition, was provocative enough to merit the use of a pseudonym on publication. The pseudonym that Beckett chose ('Andrew Belis') provides insight into the avant-garde network that surrounds this published text. Both Beckett and McGreevy are likely to have been introduced to 'Andrey Bely' (Boris Nikolayevich Bugayev) by their Russian-born friend and literary agent, George Reavey, who operated the publishing house *Europa Press* from Paris. At the end of August, Denis Devlin wrote to Thomas McGreevy characterising the reception of the review as a *succès de scandale*: 'It appears [that W.B.] Yeats was furious, it appears that Austin Clarke is vindictive by nature and will pursue Sam to his grave; it appears Seamas [*sic*] O'Sullivan thought he might have been mentioned at least; and my domestic bull [F.R.] Higgins voyez-moi ce type amazed me by being glad he got off lightly'.[1]

Both McGreevy and Devlin are included in the review as examples of 'new work' by Irish poets. The attention that Beckett gives to their poetry in this context provides an important background for assessing the innovative aspects of their work, though it is worth bearing in mind the divergences that exist between Beckett's interests and those of the poets that he enlists. From the outset, the aggravated intensities of Beckett's critical prose are evident in his division of the poetic field into 'antiquarians and others', though he in fact prepares this initial distinction by affirming that 'the issue between the conventional and the

[1] Devlin to McGreevy: 31/08/1934; TCD MS 8112/5.

actual never lapses' and 'is not peculiar to Ireland or anywhere else' [*D* 71; *D* 70]. If it is, as Beckett concedes, 'especially acute' in Ireland, it is only so because of acolytes of the Irish Revival tradition. While neither of these parties, then, can lay claim to a single conceptual authority, the 'younger antiquarian' [*D* 74] to whom Beckett draws attention refers to a specific type of conservatism: one that has replaced a Protestant, post-Arnoldian Celticism with the Catholic, bourgeois, newly-governing spirit of 'Irish Ireland'. Beckett places James Stephens's 'Theme and Variation' (1930) and 'Strict Joy' (1931) in the annexe of a tradition 'where the poet appears as beauty expert' [*D* 72], identifying further examples of overly-crafted or fetishized sentiment where an elicited feeling is idealised without any thought given to its actual application. In one particularly acerbic passage, the 'blackthorn stick' that features in F.R. Higgins's *Arable Holdings* (1933) is declared as 'the prop of song' [*D* 73]: the support mechanism, no less, for a lyric that is dead on its feet.

The 'others', by contrast, who are bracketed in Beckett's review refer to a small group of Irish poets – Denis Devlin, Thomas McGreevy, Brian Coffey, Lyle Donaghy, Percy Usher and George Reavey – who had worked extensively in Paris, and whose background extends only so far as the modern French line of poetry: from Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue and the *surréalistes* to T.S. Eliot. Their 'otherness', therefore, is united chiefly in opposition to the derivative literary credentials that Beckett identifies in the verse of James Stephens, F.R. Higgins and the early Austin Clarke. Opposition of this sort appears to have required no uniformity in poetic approach, or in political and ideological standards. Nonetheless, their break with latter-day practitioners of the Irish Revival is judged sufficient to constitute 'the nucleus of a *living* poetic' [*D* 76; italics added]. Beckett is aware that the distinction on which he is drawing between past and present is neither definitive nor wholly accurate, in spite of the provocation that is contained in the review's acronym (read 'RIP' for 'Recent Irish Poetry').

1.3: Recent Irish Poetry (RIP)

'RIP' has a double meaning, since it refers both to the work of neo-Revivalists that is quite literally *passéist* and to the 'gasping' of new poets struggling to move under W.B. Yeats's burdensome shadow. Beckett's taciturn note of respect while searching for a living poetic beyond the self-inventing genius of his precursor has been often overlooked by critics. If he associates himself with the rest of 'the fish that lie gasping on the shore', it is because Yeats, whose poetry was published by the press and embroidery workshop of his sisters, 'wove the best embroideries, so he is more alive than any of his contemporaries or scholars to the superannuation of these […]' [*D* 71-72]. Beckett's unusual description of Yeats's craft proceeds from two earlier passages that point to the false impression of 'poetry' as one of the decorative arts:

> The device common to the poets of the Revival and after, in the use of which even beyond the jewels of language they are at one, is that of flight from self-awareness, and as such might perhaps be described as a convenience. At the centre there is no theme. Why not? Because the centre is simply not that kind of girl, and no more about it. [*D* 71]

> What further interest can attach to such assumptions as those on which the convention has for so long taken its ease, namely, that the first condition of any poem is an accredited theme, and that in self-perception there is no theme, but at best sufficient *vis à tergo* to land the practitioner into the correct scenery, where the self is either most happily obliterated or else so improved and enlarged that it can be mistaken for part of the *décor*? [*D* 71]

A lack of 'self-perception' is held to be common in neo-Revivalist poetry. Beckett criticises a style in which attention is lavished solely upon the poet's capacity to situate the self in a pre-arranged landscape without interrogating the self that utters its object or speaks it into existence. Central to this strategy of instant arrival 'into the correct scenery' is 'an accredited theme' that precludes a sense of historical relevance or self-awareness. For Beckett, the immediate insertion of the practitioner into a familiar locale means that the poet is encouraged to act out his lines without going through the actual efforts of writing. One can see how the performative loop that is attached to this convention might have fallen oppressively short of the poet who wanted to imagine creatively within a culture and to

address its live social and historical pressures. Accordingly, much of Beckett's critique is preoccupied with the deconstruction of the Revival's ahistorical tropes and figures and with the insertion of the self at the centre of the creative act.

The demand for the speaker to excavate the centre of the lyric poem is essential to the pure interrogative art that Beckett envisages. Beckett presents examples of a 'deeper need' (often implicitly sexual) being screened or disavowed in Austin Clarke's early poetry, the avoidance of which is connected to an Icarian 'flight from self-awareness' that melts the self away into the décor of an 'accredited theme' or 'correct setting' [*D* 71-73]. Though Beckett is vague in this particular review about what, exactly, the admission of a 'deeper need' entails, his public support of Denis Devlin three years on from this 1934 essay helps to clarify what roles might be assigned instead to the creative act. Beckett would later defend his compatriot in the 'Commentaries' section of *transition* from a negative review by the *Times Literary Supplement*, which had described Devlin's new collection of poems as 'a gulf of tangid [*sic*] incoherence'.[2] When defending *Intercessions* from this negative review, Beckett highlights the integrity with which the poet has allowed his consciousness of the image to emerge ('a mind aware of its own luminaries'), quoting from 'Communication from the Eiffel Tower', 'Bacchanal' and the final stanza of 'The Statue & Perturbed Burghers'.[3] An untranslated and unpublished article written by Beckett in the same year as his defence of Devlin is titled 'Les Deux Besoins' ('The Two Needs').[4] It is clear from the existence of both of these documents that Beckett was still working out his plea 'for an irrational interrogative art' in relation to Devlin's new collection of poetry, for which the French language serves his critical purpose with a number of self-reflexive verbs: '[…] les [besoins] entre lesquelles l'artiste se met à la

[2] See Beckett, 'Commentaries', *transition 27* (April-May 1938): 289-294; and the *Times Literary Supplement*, 'Review: Intercessions' (23/10/1937).
[3] Beckett, ibid. In 'Recent Irish Poetry', Beckett quotes from the third stanza of Devlin's 'Est Prodest' (lines 51-57).
[4] The essay, which is now in the Baker Memorial Library at Dartmouth College, remained unpublished until 1983.

question, se met en question, se résout en questions, en questions rhétoriques sans function oratoire'.[5]

For Beckett, then, the excavation of the self must lie at the heart of the lyric poem. This has several implications for the lyric: firstly, for the possibility of sharing individual utterance; and secondly, for the 'uninjurable', 'incorruptible' 'stuff of song' [*D* 70] as an unimpeded form of verbal expression. Essential to the delivery of these self-reflexive statements is the 'breakdown of the object' in reference to which Beckett begins his *Bookman* essay [*D* 70]. David Lloyd has defined this 'breakdown' in post-Kantian terms that imply a crisis of two fundamental categories of aesthetics:

> it entails at once the abolition of the subject of *expression*, a term that assumes an *a priori* interiority that issues in utterances that are consubstantial with it, and the erasure of the object in whose *representation* by or for the subject, that subject is established in its formal anteriority. The object that is *for* the subject, as opposed to being for itself, is, indissociably from the subject that posits it, no less the object *of* the subject, object of an act of possession that forms, for Beckett, the counterpart of the act of expression.[6]

In the opening statements of 'Recent Irish Poetry', Beckett questions not just the unity of the self but the restorative power of the imagination to discover meaning afterwards in a fragmented universe. The article exposes the assumptions on which latter-day practitioners of the Irish Revival continue to work for their aspirations to bridge, suppress or ignore this rupture between the perceiving subject and the object world in an act of false sentiment or sympathetic intuition. Opposing any such 'convenience', Beckett calls for the 'cold comforts of apperception' where the act of perception counts for more than the object perceived [*D* 70]. Because of its focus on the perceiving subject, the structure of lyric that Beckett

[5] '[T]he needs between which the artist puts himself into the question, puts himself in question, resolves himself in questions, in rhetorical questions without oratorical purpose' [*D* 56; translation mine].
[6] David Lloyd, 'Beckett's Thing: Bram van Velde and the Gaze', *Modernist Cultures* 6.2 (2011): 269-295 (270). Critics frequently omit from citation the fact that the 'breakdown, whether current, historical, mythical or spook' is announced in 'Recent Irish Poetry' as 'the new thing that has happened, *or the old thing that has happened again*' [D 70; italics added]. Beckett's subclauses are carefully crafted to ensure that while this 'breakdown' is intended as a synchronic break with the past, it is also plotted along a diachronic axis of succession that counters a narrative of progressive development by situating this antagonistic moment within a Vichian conception of history (as *ricorso* or 'eternal return').

advances is better suited to moments of inner rather than outer vision.

The impossibility of uniting the subject with the object world in an act of possession or retrieval explains the special value that Beckett attaches in his review to the concepts of being and time. One of the qualities of McGreevy's verse that attracts Beckett's praise is his ability to 'know how to wait for the thing to happen' [*D* 74]. Although nothing happens in a lyric poem, in the sense that lyric is not a narrative mode, Beckett implies that the speaker of a poem should at least attempt to address its non-existent object or voiceless second person insofar as it is capable of bringing that object or person to life. In a letter addressed to the American poet Wallace Stevens during the late 1940s, McGreevy argues that 'one has to wait upon reality, wait and wait and wait, like a doctor waiting for the moment when nature and himself can best work together for the delivery of a baby with the maximum of benefit to the mother and child concerned […]'[7] In the absence of natural deliverance, McGreevy's verse in Beckett's account is said to perform an impotent revelation that is not of the object itself but an 'inevitable unveiling' of the speaker's predicament ('the vision without the dip') [*D* 74]. It is in relation to this condition that Beckett describes McGreevy as 'an existentialist in verse, the Titchener of the modern lyric' [*D* 74]: a verdict that reflects more accurately his recent reading of Edwin Boring's *A History of Experimental Psychology* (1929), which is dedicated to Edward Titchener's account of introspective psychology.[8]

In his analysis of McGreevy's *Poems* (1934), titled 'Humanistic Quietism', Beckett leaves aside the relationship between the poet and the public in order to establish a permanent contrast between the self and the social world that is part of this strategy of self-awareness. In Beckett's reading, the distance between the perceiving subject and the perceived object is preserved as a mutually exclusive set of entities until the speaking subject ascends to the 'equable radiance' of aesthetic mysticism: 'For a moment, now, I may suppose / The light of

[7] McGreevy to Wallace Stevens: 23/03/1949; *HLMD WAS* 152.
[8] For the section on Edward Titchener, see Edwin G. Boring's *A History of Experimental Psychology,* second edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957), p.417.

the world'.[9] While Beckett was right to centre his review on the importance of this speculative moment, the manner in which he did so has slanted the reception of *Poems* towards recessional accounts of subjectivity.[10] His selective treatment of McGreevy's asceticism denies the social and political force of his poetry and the very real conceptual obstacles with which it grapples. Beckett makes no attempt to select from a broad range of poetic material, but extracts textual samples from four of the most personal religious passages in McGreevy's writing (the quotations from 'Gloria de Carlos V' and 'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost' being particularly apposite for his purposes [*D* 68-69]). He omits from the citation where the 'ascension' in the former poem begins: 'Those without gas masks were lost' [*CPTM* 36]. We may wonder, at this point who, exactly, is 'obliterating the squalid elements of civil war' [*D* 69]. The readings in the following section will disengage McGreevy's poetry from some of the more tenuous points of Beckett's comparison.

There is little evidence to support the view that other writers fell in line with the scope of Beckett's analysis, or even proceeded from the same assumptions. Beckett's attempt to detach newly experimental verse from the legacy of the Irish Revival is far more securely grounded in matters of poetic technique than in the fields of introspective psychology or existential philosophy. In 'Recent Irish Poetry', Beckett queries the role of rhyme and metre in relation to several 'antiquarian' poets, castigating the early poems of Austin Clarke for metrical operations that 'remove […] the clapper from the bell of rhyme' [*D* 72]. As W.J. McCormack has shown, Beckett's description of Clarke's verse (which is written in English, but based on the adoption of Gaelic verse forms) is taken directly from the technical annotations that Clarke himself had provided for *Pilgrimage and Other Poems* in 1929.[11]

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[9] McGreevy, 'Gloria de Carlos V' [*CPTM* 36; *D* 68].
[10] See Stan Smith, 'From A Great Distance: Thomas McGreevy's Frames of Reference', *The Lace Curtain*, 6 (Autumn 1978): 47-55.
[11] 'Assonance, more elaborate in Gaelic than in Spanish poetry, takes the clapper from the bell of rhyme'. Austin Clarke, *Pilgrimage and Other Poems* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929), p.43. For more on the connection

Apparently undeterred by Beckett's reference to his verse, Clarke remained convinced of the need to look for metrical forms of equivalent intricacy and reliability in the Irish vernacular tradition. In an article distributed in the *Dublin Magazine* shortly after the publication of 'Recent Irish Poetry', Clarke persists with his efforts to restyle Gaelic versification, arguing that 'In some forms of classical Gaelic metre only one part of a double syllable word is used in assonance, a system also found in the Spanish ballad metres, and this can be a guide to experiment in partial rhyming or assonance'.[12] Beckett would once again confront Austin 'Ticklepenny' (a name sufficiently fictitious to cover the accusation of libel) in his 1938 novel *Murphy*, during which he sends up the poet-cum-patient with a comic aside. Here, we have a context for Beckett's objection to 'the tics of mere form', which pare away 'segment after segment of cut-and-dried sanctity and loveliness' from 'an iridescence of themes' [*D* 71]:

> This view of the matter will not seem strange to anyone familiar with the class of pentameter that Ticklepenny felt it his duty to Erin to compose, as free as a canary in the fifth foot (a cruel sacrifice, for Ticklepenny hiccupped [*sic*] in end rimes) and at the caesura as hard and fast as his own divine flatus and otherwise bulging with as many minor beauties from the gaelic prosodoturfy as could be sucked out of a mug of Beamish's porter.[13]

Murphy's cartoon sketch of Clarke and of the organising principles that he had developed for the patterning of Irish verse is worth comparing with McGreevy's humanist defence of Richard Aldington, which is equally inclined to treat prosodic inquiry as a method of self-evasion. In contrast to Clarke's persistent efforts to restylise Gaelic versification, McGreevy is wary of the manner in which an obsessive concern with metre might prevent the poet from finding 'his own personal way':

> […] though he [Aldington] writes lyrically he makes no attempt to recapture the cheap virtuosity

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between Beckett and Clarke, see W.J. McCormack's 'Austin Clarke: 'The Poet as Scapegoat of Modernism', in Coughlan and Davis (ed.), pp.75-102 (p.80, pp.87-88).

[12] Austin Clarke, 'Irish Poetry To-Day', *Dublin Magazine* (new series), 10, 1 (January-March 1935): 26.

[13] Beckett, *Murphy*, (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1938), p.89.

> of the more recent past. Rhymed poetry is part of that past. And he makes no attempt to rhyme. Simplicity of expression and sincerity are the most important things, and rhyme – already as long ago as Tennyson's and Swinburne's time – had become a serious danger to both, had become mere mechanism. The camera abolished mere representation, abolished Winterhalterism in painting […] For the future the musician or the poet had to make his own personal, unmechanical music, his own rhythm, in his own personal way, and stand or fall by it. Rhyme was a mere adventitious aid in hypnotising the insensitive reader into continuing. If you wanted to say what you had to say personally and with the perfect economy which is style, you had to shed every borrowed trick.[14]

Though one reading is parodic and the other sincere, the parallels between these two critical judgements are significant. Both Beckett and McGreevy reject any ambition to establish a rule in advance for distinguishing the play of verse. In the modern age, rhymed poetry is seen to produce only intoxication and trickery ('hiccupped [*sic*] in end rimes'). For McGreevy, the alignment of metrical structures with personal feeling bears none of the 'revolutionary humanity' that he cites in his monograph on Aldington, the expression of which must be 'discordant' rather than 'harmonious'. It is no accident that the Irish Revival provides the backdrop for McGreevy's reading of Aldington's early poems. When reading 'Au Vieux Jardin' (1912), McGreevy points to the 'Hellenic transformation of the so-called 'Celtic' twilight, which Mr. Yeats, in a moment of aberration, under the influence of the Scottish Fiona Macleod and his Antrim disciple A.E., […] first introduced into good Irish poetry'.[15] Though the actual dates of the movement over which W.B. Yeats presided have been disputed since William Patrick Ryan's first book on the subject in 1894, McGreevy remains adamant in his refusal to associate 'twilight poetry' with 'Celtic' identity. In the same passage on Aldington, he adds in parenthesis that '(It is nonsense incidentally to talk of twilight poetry being specifically "Celtic" […])'.[16] McGreevy is sceptical about whether a line of influence can be drawn between 'twilight poetry' and Yeats's own peculiar version of the Celtic, which the poet had developed out of his occult interests two or three decades

[14] McGreevy, *Richard Aldington: An Englishman*, p.13.
[15] McGreevy, ibid., p.15.
[16] McGreevy, ibid.

earlier.[17] Whether motivated by the experience of war or simply out of radical aesthetic opposition to previous literary movements, the 'cheap virtuosity of the recent past' unites Beckett and McGreevy's approach to the lyric and underpins their desire to challenge many of its controlling assumptions.

[17] Terence Brown notes that 'It was not in fact until June 1898 that Yeats published his essay in *Cosmopolis* on "The Celtic Element in Literature" towards the end of a decade when the poet had been trooping frequently with "things discovered in the deep"' – an engagement that Brown argues was motivated more by the examples of Swedenborg and Blake than by a 'Celticism' of the Arnoldian type. See Brown, 'The Literary Revival: historical perspectives', pp.14-26 (p.19-20).

1.4: The lyric

Along with Thomas McGreevy's *Collected Poems* (1934), Samuel Beckett's *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935) and Denis Devlin's *Intercessions* (1937) represent some of the most innovative attempts by Irish poets of the 1930s to dismantle existing mythological archetypes and to divest them of their idealist accretions. A reading of poems from these collections will highlight their different approaches to lyric. As Devlin writes in 'Now':

> Hail to the Holy Adjective!
> *Three-score and ten.*
> What's beauty, truth, life, love, what's me?
> *Can we get there?*
> Don't know, don't know, don't know. *By candle-light?*
> Pull down that gilded rubbish. We
> *Candle-Light.*
> In metaphysic, apotheo –
> *How many miles is it?*
> – sise Adjective. Hail Sitwell. We
> *How many?*
> Feed on our own decrease. [*CPDD* 104]

Here, the spatio-temporal coordinates of the 'I' no longer suffice as markers of a centralising or utopian force. Even the stability of the subject that would give voice to the lyric is questioned: 'what's me?' In the Romantic period, the lyric had answered to the conception of the national landscape as fulfilment, the idea of the world as an extension of the self's desires, and the location of the 'I' / 'eye' as the demonstrative source of origin. For the poet operating comfortably within this tradition, the outer world is recovered by a contemplative attitude that sustains both the position of the speaking subject and its desires, mirroring them perfectly as the absolute locus of visionary experience. In 'Now', the demands of national revolution have irrevocably altered the landscape of lyric poetry. The association of national fulfilment with song clearly belongs to an outstripped poetic tradition.

For a new generation looking back at the recent literary past, Devlin, Beckett and McGreevy's approaches to the lyric bear all the hallmarks usually associated with the avant-

garde: the problem of disintegrating subjectivity in modernity; the absence of unity between the self and the social world; and a self-conscious pastiche of literary form. However, the manner in which they introduce political pressures to the lyric is complex and is not simply motivated by an impulse towards satire. The inclusion of self-interrogative fragments as a central feature of their verse raises more basic questions about a political relationship that is no longer available. As Devlin writes in 'Bacchanal' – a poem originally titled 'News of Revolution' that took him six years to complete – 'Let us be Anarchists by all means / *How many miles is it* / Dethrone the Verb and the Substantive / *To Babylon*'.[1] Especially interesting in this regard is Devlin's decision not to publish the poem 'Transition: To a Violent Communist'. Written in Dublin during 1934, it could have easily been addressed to his college contemporary, Charles Donnelly, who died two years later in the Spanish Civil War, aged just 22.

Devlin was often conflicted about whether or not to publish his poems because of the position he held within the Department of External Affairs.[2] As he writes to McGreevy after he had sent him 'Bacchanal' on 22 January 1937: 'I'm not risking my job lightly especially as I have other responsibilities besides myself, but I must publish it'.[3] The powerlessness of poetry to effect political change emerges as its own theme in a number of Devlin's poems. In 'The Statue and the Perturbed Burghers', the metaphor of embroidery (which we saw used in Beckett's 'Recent Irish Poetry' to characterise Yeats's influence on the Revivalist movement) voices a public and declarative utterance that the speaker is no longer able to fulfil: 'Spinet playing / With barely escaping voice / With arched fastidious wrists to be so gentle' [*CPDD* 54]. But the most sublime example of failed agitprop in *Intercessions* is that of 'Daphne Stillorgan': a poem very much written from the perspective of a diplomat. Here the speaker anticipates the disturbance of an ur-pastoral scene, voicing the expectation that the inert

[1] Alex Davis, *A Broken Line: Denis Devlin and Irish Poetic Modernism*, p.26.
[2] Devlin acted as a foreign diplomat in Paris before he was made the Irish Ambassador to Italy.
[3] Devlin to McGreevy: 15/02/1937; TCD MS 8112/12.

locale of a Dublin suburb (Stillorgan) will soon be blast apart by the mobilisation of international forces, for which the approaching train in the poem provides an allegory of 'Emergency' Ireland amid the advance of Nazi Germany. The far-off trampling and humid pounding of the train in the lyric antagonises the complacent harmonies of the pastoral mode. Heard along the rails (and here Devlin emphasises the spatial dynamics of the poem as a verbal icon), the sound of the train's approach is likened to the

> thud
> Of thousand pink-soled apes, no humorous family god
> Southward a storm
> Smashes the flimsy sky. [*CPDD* 62]

The poem weaves in and out of mythic and futurist modes of recognition, playing on the slow confusion of the passengers on the platform to comprehend the deafening apocalypse that is heralded by the train's oncoming:

> Scared faces lifted up,
> Is the menace bestial or a brusque pleiad
> Of gods of fire vagabond?
> Quick, just in time, quick, just in time, ah!
> Trees in light dryad dresses. [*CPDD* 62]

The punctual arrival of the train is marked by its rapid assimilation back into the woodland place spirit of the nymph and faun. The train is distinguished not by its shock tactics but by its failure to unsettle the station's sleepy indolence. Without alarming the scene of the modest country station, the sound of the train's arrival signals ('ah!') a return to the anthropomorphosis of the parish pump. The questionable return of the Arcadian imagination ('Trees in light dryad dresses') for which the nymph Daphne serves as an obviously eroticised counterpart is undercut by the final stanza, and the image of the station suddenly evaporates – 'Birds (O unreal whitewashed station!) / Compose no more that invisible

architecture' – which brings the poem to a sharp ending on that impulse to de-create.[4]

In a more complicated anti-climax, Devlin's 'Bacchanal' inverts the linear dynamic of successive clauses to a point of total non-direction. Undergoing substantial revisions over the course of six years, the poem, originally titled 'News of Revolution', anticipates the march of future citizens through a series of jumbling and discordant registers:

> Forerunners run naked as sharks through water,
> nose to their prey, have message by heart
> Only envy learnt in feeding the shutfist pistoned
> right machines
> Canaille, canaille, what red horizons of anger
> for humbled lives lie
> Tumbled up in the old times, the long-ferment-
> ing now, canaille! [*CPDD* 65]

'Bacchanal' refuses to develop any single image as a declarative utterance might fulfil: there is no 'I'. It proceeds instead through indented lines of deferral that lend a sense of incremental repetition to the word 'canaille' – a French word for 'riff-raff' or 'rabble' (from the Italian *canaglia* 'pack of dogs') – which echoes the diphthong of the first-person pronoun in English. As the future unwinds, the passive constructions and dangling modifiers undermine any prospect of resolution: 'Tumbled up in the old times, the long-ferment-/ing now'. The loss of spatio-temporal coordinates in this timeless present allows for a mixture of post and pre-revolutionary perspectives that the poem refuses to distil from the appetites of the multitudinous throng for ongoing military conflict.

In 'Death and Her Beasts, Ignoble Beasts', however, the 'I' of the speaker does take centre stage, expressing further discord with the ideas of predatory sacrifice and ritual that galvanise a mob mentality. On this occasion, the speaker struggles to renounce Kybelē, the

[4] Like the oncoming train in 'Daphne Stillorgan', the deconstruction of pastoral is vital to the homecoming of Beckett's 'Sanies I', where the poet-cyclist loops about the coastal towns and villages north of Dublin leaving a trail of mud in its wake: 'a Wild Woodbine / cinched to death in a filthy slicker' [*CPSB* 13]. Once again, the disturbance of an ur-pastoral scene fails to remove these animal spirits from the lyric, and is quickly turned into that of a brusque pleiad: 'distraught half-crooked courting the sneers of these fauns these / smart nymphs / clipped like a pederast as to one trouser-end' [*CPSB* 13].

mother goddess of Hellenic origins, who is juxtaposed with the nationalist mythology of Ireland. Her intoxicating presence lures the speaker with false sentiment: 'You would enchant with physical dances me / That cannot afford to believe your vultures peacocks' [*CPDD* 49]. The competing animal avatars that feature as part of this 'I-you' address provide an acute example of the division that is being sustained between private and public utterance, which enters the birds of prey and the birds of song into an accretive juxtaposition. The first poem of Beckett's 1935 collection of verse (though the last to be written), is much more resolute in its departure from the airs of Irish melody and is provocatively titled 'The Vulture'. As is evident from Beckett's annotated copy of the collection, 'The Vulture' is based on the first five lines of Goethe's *Harzreise im Winter* (1777):

> Dem Geier gleich,
> Der auf schweren Morgenwolken
> Mit sanftem Fittich ruhend
> Nach Beute schaut,
> Schwebe mein Leid.
>
> As a vulture would,
> That on heavy clouds of morning
> With gentle wings reposing
> Seeks for his prey –
> Hover, my song.[5]

Beckett's poem counters the restorative utterance of the original source by employing death as a metaphor for artistic creation. A 'skull shell of sky and earth' offsets the transcendent subject of the lyric [*CPSB* 5]. Hovering above in the title, 'The Vulture' is desperate to insert itself into the main textual body, but is denied by a transitive verb on three separate occasions 'dragging… // stooping… // mocked…' [*CPSB* 5]. The predator waits in spite of these deferrals for the 'tissue' to break down before it can finally enter the carcass, just as the reader waits impatiently for a main verb that is indefinitely withheld, and eventually replaced,

[5] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Poems of Goethe*, trans. Edwin H. Zeydel (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), p.33. For Beckett's engagement with Goethe, especially his transcriptions from Goethe's autobiography and *Faust*, see Mark Nixon, *The German Diaries, 1936-37* (London: Continuum, 2011): 65-74. In correspondence with Maria Jolas (14/04/1958), Beckett once again refers to these 'Five lines, for ever in my head'.

by the noun 'offal', meaning rubbish [*CPSB* 5].[6] 'The Vulture' approaches alone in the accusative, unable to enter into the poem until the very last word.

Where the speaker in *Intercessions* vacillates unpredictably and is continuously invested in the outward phenomena it experiences (McGreevy even compares Devlin to St. Francis in his review of the collection), in *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935) the lyric is much more sharply divided between perceiving subjects and perceived objects.[7] A sense of repressed utterance, sexual impotence and failed interpersonal exchange is registered with extreme irony in Beckett's early experiment with the lyric. In 'Alba', the pronominal address is suspended indefinitely to frustrate a sense of impending arrival ('before morning you shall be here' [*CPSB* 10]). The failure of the speaker to unite in this poem with the second person denudes the erotic desires of the self, bringing them back to the point of origin: 'only I and then the sheet / and bulk dead' [*CPSB* 10]. Beckett uses the lyric to characterise an empty awakening across the embroidered patterns of an absent lover's nightdress. Like the trajectory of the vulture, these patterns 'stoop' across a tempest of emblems in the 'black firmament of areca' [*CPSB* 10].

'Alba' first appeared in 1931 in the October-December edition of Seumas O'Sullivan's *Dublin Magazine*. The poem 'Da Tagte Es' ('The Dawn Comes') was also submitted to O'Sullivan's magazine, but was not included in any edition.[8] Here, 'the sheet astream in your hand' is transposed from an autoerotic wipe into a handkerchief being waved from a death ship [*CPSB* 22]. The title of the poem is adapted from the early medieval German poet Walther von der Vogelweide's 'Nemt, frowe, disen kranz' (c.893) ('Take, lady, this wreath') and more specifically from a moment of disillusionment towards the end of that poem where the poet's awakening from the raptures of love suddenly transforms the

[6] 'Offal' may be a pun on Offaly, a county located in the very centre of Ireland.
[7] McGreevy, 'New Dublin Poetry', *Ireland To-Day* (October 1937): 81-82 (81).
[8] Beckett to Thomas McGreevy: 26/04/1935; TCD MS 10402: 'the *Dublin Magazine* is out, but my poem not in'.

meditation: '*dô taget ez* und nuos ich wachen'.[9] 'Da Tagte Es' shifts der Vogelweide's words into the present continuous. This brief four-line poem recasts the manner of awakening latent in the original source as a prophetic sign or symbol for the enforced separation through death of a father and son ('the glass unmisted above your eyes').

Throughout *Echo's Bones*, Beckett undermines any strategy of personal deliverance between the speaker and the natural world. At the beginning of 'Serena II' a number of Irish locations (the Pins, Clew Bay and Croagh Patrick) are recast in a twilight setting that resembles the convulsions of an ageing female dog.[10] In another evening song that Beckett sent to McGreevy, titled 'Serena III', the division of the speaker from the natural world falls back upon a landscape of sexual insistence free from mythological archetypes: a 'brand-new carnation' of 'mammae', 'Butt Bridge' and 'cock up thy moon' [*CPSB* 20].[11] In 'Sanies II', a poem in which a voluptuous Barfrau enchants her local audience, the lyrical act of apostrophe is again reversed as a form of sexual pleading or broken supplication: 'I break down quite in a titter of despite / hark' [*CPSB* 14]. Even the line-breaks of this poem are characterised as extorted utterance, the deliverance of which is synchronised with the flagellant strikes of Madame de la Motte's 'cavaletto supplejacks' [*CPSB* 15]. In 'Dortmunder', a poem that is set in a brothel, the 'long night phrase' culminates only in paralysis [*CPSB* 11]. Once again, the speaker decomposes the pronominal address – 'I null she royal hulk' – refusing to sustain the 'you' as a musical sound to be overheard ('the bawd / puts her lute away)' [*CPSB* 11].[12]

Alongside the recurrent use of dawn and evening settings, the prospect of sexual fulfilment allows Beckett to widen the discrepancy between pre- and post-lapsarian phases of

[9] '*then dawn came* and I had to waken' [translation mine; italics added].
[10] 'Serena II' Enc. Beckett to McGreevy: 03/11/1932; TCD MS 10402/35.
[11] 'Serena III' Enc. Beckett to McGreevy: 09/10/1933; TCD MS 10402/55.
[12] The June 1936 number of *transition* opens with a section titled 'Vertigral' that places three of the poems that had featured earlier in *Echo's Bones* – 'Dortmunder','Malacoda' and 'Enueg II' – after James Agee's 'Lyric' and 'A Song'. See *transition 24: a quarterly review* (June 1936): 7-38. All of the poems that feature in this section experiment with dawn and evening settings. Especially provocative in this context is Eugene Jolas's macaronic poem, 'Grunewald', which denaturalises the sound qualities of rustic description by aping the French and German: 'die grenze war eine wunde / it waited for starmusic and frieden / it did not listen to the son des cloches'. See Jolas, 'Grunewald', *transition 24*: 21.

vision. As Dónal Moriarty notes, '[m]any of the poems in *Echo's Bones* subvert the tradition of lyric poetry by employing the forms of Provençal genres like the *serena* and the *aubade* [evening and dawn song] only to deny the culminating visions they once featured'.[13] While Beckett bases his experiment with the lyric primarily on these Provençal genres, the threshold conditions of this strategy are also tied to a condition after Irish independence – notably, the 'islands of glory' in 'Serena II' – in which the old is dying and the new cannot be born. Throughout *Echo's Bones*, the speaker highlights the estrangement of the subject from the object of utterance ('dragging… // stooping… // mocked…' [*CPSB* 5]), the placement of the self at the centre of the poem, and the inward pursuit of a deeper (often sexual) need.

[13] Dónal Moriarty, *The Art of Brian Coffey* (Dublin: University College, 2000), p.6.

2

Provincial-minded Mentor

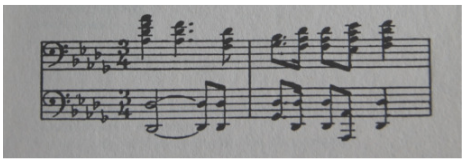
McGreevy would find himself addressed in the lyric on two separate occasions: firstly in Wallace Stevens's 'Our Stars Come From Ireland' (1948); and secondly in Brian Coffey's *Missouri Sequence* (1962), which even employs the 'you' of song to capture the lost public arena between the first-person speaker and the older Irish poet: 'Dear Tom, in Ireland / you have known / the pain between / its fruiting and the early dream / And you will hear me out'.[1] Alex Davis has taken his passage as 'a salutary lesson that the "dream" of an Irish avant-garde poetry could not withstand the realities of 1930s Ireland'.[2] With reference to McGreevy's *Poems* (1934), this chapter will continue the proposition that the connection between the disappointing actuality of Irish independence and the emergence of a cautious introspective art is most usefully considered from the perspective of lyric owing to its connection with a prior tradition of revolutionary song. Drawing on published and archival material, I argue that McGreevy's *Poems* is structured in opposition to provincial interests, restricted utterance and the kitsch imitation of romantic legacies.

[1] McGreevy first saw the manuscript for 'Our Stars Come From Ireland' two years before it appeared in *The Auroras of Autumn* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950). See McGreevy to Stevens: 29/12/1948; *HLMD WAS* 152. See also Brian Coffey, 'Nightfall, Midwinter, Missouri', *Poems and Versions 1929-1990* (Dublin: Dedalus, 1991), p.70.

[2] See Alex Davis, '"Poetry is Ontology": Brian Coffey's Poetics', in Coughlan and Davis (ed.), pp.150-172 (p.157).

2.1: Dark time: McGreevy's *Poems*

McGreevy's 'Crón Tráth na nDéithe' is one of the few poems to have been written about the Irish Civil War (1922-23). The Irish title of the poem is an approximation of 'Gotterdämmerung' ['Twilight of the Gods']. Susan Schreibman has pointed out that 'Cróntráth' ('dark time'), which is usually one word, may have been separated by McGreevy in order to emphasise the 'dark' element:

> When the Custom House took fire[1]
> Hope slipped off her green petticoat
> The Four Courts went up in a spasm
> Moses felt for hope
>
> *Folge mir Frau*
> Come up to Valhalla
> To *Gile na gile*
> The brightness of brightness
> Towering in the sky over Dublin
>
> 
>
> The dark sloblands below in their glory
> Wet glory
> Dark night has come down on us, mother
> And we
> Do not look for a star
> Or Valhalla
>
> Our Siegfried was doped by the Gibichungs [*CPTM* 19-20]

Surveying the wreckage from which a new nation has arisen, the speaker questions what has survived and what has perished. *Folge mir Frau* (literally, 'follow me wife') is taken from the final scene of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, where Wotan invites Fricka to 'Come up to Valhalla' (the home of the gods). As we follow this ambition to the Irish '*gile na gile*' ('Brightness of brightness') that Beckett celebrates in his 1934 review in terms of a moment of 'pure perception', the reader is interrupted by what is really 'towering in the sky', which is the

[1] The Custom House was burnt down by the IRA on 25 May 1921 during the Anglo-Irish War of Independence.

smoke rising from the Four Courts, a building that had been occupied by republicans opposed to the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty.[2] With the visual citation of Wotan's motif, the poem extends Wotan's invitation to mark the event that started the Irish Civil War.

Rhyme and melody are kept outside the lyric the better to prise apart the association of national fulfilment with song, which is essential to the conceit that is set up between Wotan's fortress and the newly-founded Irish Free State. 'Wet glory' is a surprising, orgiastic image. The passage is strangely disconcerting in the manner in which it deploys the standard images of female virtue to undercut the idea of an heroic struggle, with the apostrophes to wives, goddesses and the vacant appeal to 'mother' forestalled until the end of the following line. What is generated, here, is an idea of political fulfilment that is predicated on Ireland's ability to rise out of mythological identification and her simultaneous inability to rise out of it. The reiteration of 'glory' as 'wet glory' on this 'Dark night' continues the image of the fertility goddess that inhibits the historicity of self and world, echoing an earlier, more devious allusion to Robert Browning's 'Love Among The Ruins' (1855).[3] Though the passage subverts the idea of a romantic national heritage, the speaker is still determined to ask questions about where the people might be found and how to restore them to their usurped nationhood: 'our Siegfried was doped by the Gibichungs'.

'Crón Tráth na nDéithe' was completed shortly after McGreevy's arrival in London in 1925 – yet he chose to set it seven years on from the day that the leaders of the Easter Rising had surrendered. The dating of the poem is postmarked *Easter Saturday, 1923*. Preserving a radical continuity between the past and future ('How long? / How long since? / Long till? –' [*CPTM* 29]), the final lines of this poem redirect the stumbling wheels of the lurching cab that carry the speaker through Dublin into an undecided ellipsis ('Long / Trot / Tr…'). The ambivalent note on which the poem ends juxtaposes the speaker's personal estrangement

[2] Beckett, 'Humanistic Quietism', *Dublin Magazine* (July-September 1934): 79-80.
[3] See McGreevy, 'Crón Tráth na nDéithe', *CPTM* 17.

from the existing nation with the desire to transform it once more. The difficulty the speaker has in issuing a more resolute and declarative utterance is evident in the final section of the poem, which addresses the new home of the Free State parliament.

On 12 August 1923, a cenotaph commemorating the Free State's two founding fathers (Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith) was erected on Leinster Lawn directly in front of the statue of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria.[4] Leinster House acted as the parliament's home while the Dáil Éireann was surrounded by sandbags. As Susan Schreibman notes, '[t]he Cenotaph was a plaster and timber construction with a stylised Celtic cross flanked by walls with medallions (one on each side of the cross) for the two founders of the state; an Irish inscription translated, "to the glory of God and the honour of Ireland", was on the cross shaft'.[5] After the assassination of Michael Collins, wreaths were laid outside the cenotaph. While passing by Leinster Lawn on the final stage of the cab journey, the speaker edits out the inscription, highlighting the futility of the public tribute: 'This plaster riddle-me-riddle-me-rie / Backfiring on Albrecht der Jude, / Rotting rain-soaked wreaths against it' [*CPTM* 23]. The transitive verb – 'Backfiring' – emphasises the cenotaph's moulding as simply a moment of military reprisal rather than a commemorative gesture. Here the construction of the 'Griffith-Collins-O'Higgins plaster memorial' in front of the British regal statues finds its place among the 'new banknotes', 'coinage' and 'postage stamps' as the empty insignia of what McGreevy had feared in 'A Cultural Irish Republic' might turn out to be no more than an 'Anglo-Irish-cum-London-Irish cultural province'.

While Beckett turns to dawn and evening settings based on Provençal genres, McGreevy admits live historical pressures into his verse as *fait social* of Ireland's political turmoil. These pressures are often appended to his poems with an exact date and location. 'The Six Who Were Hanged' – formerly titled 'Dublin Dawn I' in McGreevy's 'Paris Notes

[4] The statue of Queen Victoria was placed in front of Leinster House in 1903. It was removed in 1947 and handed over forty years later to Sydney, Australia.
[5] Susan Schreibman, 'Notes' [*CPTM* 122].

– walking to Mountjoy' – is set outside Mountjoy Jail where six republican prisoners were sentenced to death by hanging on 14 March 1921: four on account of high treason; two in connection with the murders of British officers.[6] According to Dorothy Macardle's interpretation of this episode in *The Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland* (a book that has 'official' status in republican accounts of the period), the bells tolled at each hour from 6 o'clock in the morning, marking three pairs of executions.[7] In 'The Six Who Were Hanged', McGreevy aligns the breaks of the stanzas with the sounding of the chimes at each hour, so that the timing of this historical event coincides directly with the dawn song.

> And still, I too say,
> *Pray for us.*
>
> *Mountjoy, March, 1921* [*CPTM* 9]

Surrounded by hundreds of women and girls holding up crosses ('There are very few men. / Why am I here?' [*CPTM* 8], the speaker merges its voice with the public through the condition of prayer. The speaker's method in this scene of a papal mass refuses disaffiliation from the appalling spectacle by insisting on the reader's active participation, so that the mirroring assent of an imagined audience marks the lyric's real 'epilogue' [*CPTM* 9]. The 'I too' highlights the need for an (implicitly Catholic) community at precisely the moment that the personal and the public have reached a point of crisis: '*Morning Star, Pray for us!* // What, these seven hundred years, / Has Ireland had to do / With the morning star?' [*CPTM* 9] The altercation that is set up in this poem between the inner transcendence of lyric and the satire of reported speech is held together in counterpoint as the audience is invited to

[6] The previous title is included as part of McGreevy's 'Paris Notes – walking to Mountjoy'. See TCD MS 7989/1/21.
[7] See Dorothy MacCardle's interpretation of this episode in *The Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, With a Detailed Account of the Period 1916-23 with a Preface by Éamon de Valéra* (London: Gollancz, 1937; Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1999), pp.424-425, which uses the language of 'martyrs' and 'assassins'.

reassemble these fragments into a more coherent whole.

In 'Giorgionismo', the speaker falters once again in a manner that recasts its alienation from reality as at root a shared experience. The poem is set in the cinema, which was the original title ('Cinema') for the manuscript draft before it was published in the 1931 May-June-July edition of *The New Review*.[8] Though the experience of a violently-uprooted object world is this time mediated by the film screen, the speaker is faced with a comparable dilemma about whether or not to witness the appalling spectacle. Unable to resolve this impasse, the speaker proceeds with eyes wide shut:

> In the darkness
> I close my eyes
> To the German sadism on the screen
> And the recessionalist lovers
> Around me.
>
> I recede too,
> Alone. [*CPTM* 49]

Here secluded utterance is connected to the 'recessionalist lovers / Around me', who are referred to for their human capacity to distance themselves from the spectacle. Just as lovers act alone together, oblivious to the film and the wider public, so the speaker retreats from the screen-image into the darkness. As one of many 'I's / 'eyes' that recoil simultaneously from the screen, the final 'I' is at once 'Alone' and implicated ('too') in the space from which the spectacle is being observed. Without lessening the experience of individual alienation in the face of violence, or implying a false collective identity that denies the separate feeling of each audience member, the poem applies the intensity of personal feeling to events that are collectively experienced, readmitting the speaker to the silence of the audience that surrounds him.

Whether faced with the hanging of male revolutionaries or with a malevolent display

[8] McGreevy, 'Cinema', TCD MS 7989/2/102; McGreevy, 'Giorgionismo', *The New Review*, 1, 2, ed. Samuel Putnam (May-June-July 1931): 119.

of German sadism, the function of 'too', here, in relation to the 'I' of the lyric, prevents politics and the lyric from drifting apart. Reviewing the 1934 Heinemann edition of *Poems* for the *New York Herald Tribune*, Eda Lou Walton found McGreevy 'interesting because in thought he manages somehow – and it is difficult to understand this – to combine a revolutionary and a religious intensity'.[9] Stan Smith picks up on only half of this dynamic when he complains that the self is simply 'played-out', 'diminished', 'finished', and 'dwindl[es] into stasis' in McGreevy's *Poems*.[10] Smith confuses the remoteness of the recording subject with 'antiseptic aestheticism'.[11] According to Smith, the 'I' of the poet labours under the recessional features of 'exhausted indifference'.[12] Smith takes issue with the way in which the reader is compelled to observe the scene 'in purely aesthetic terms, as a spectacle, an event in nature, without human consequence'.[13]

But this is not the way the poems record the violent realities by which they are encumbered. In 'The Six Who Were Hanged', it is precisely the human consequence of the 'epilogue pair' of republican prisoners that reverses the ascensionalist movement:

> The sun will have risen
> And two will be hanging
> In green, white and gold,
> In a premature Easter. [*CPTM* 8]

The 'purely aesthetic terms' that Smith cites are in fact the most heavily historically

[9] Eda Lou Walton, 'Review: *Poems* by Thomas McGreevy', *The New York Herald Tribune* (09/12/1934). It ought to be made clear, however, that McGreevy's use of the lyric has little in common with that of *actual* Catholic revolutionaries (like Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett) in spite of Eda Lou Walton's convictions about what he manages to 'unite' in thought, and in spite of the brevity of the historical epoch that separates them.
[10] Stan Smith, 'Living to Tell the Tale: Fallon, Clarke, McGreevy, Coffey', *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity: Ireland Between Fantasy and History* (Dublin: Irish Academic, 2005), p.45. An earlier version of Smith's essay was published in Michael Smith's and Trevor Joyce's journal, *The Lace Curtain*, 6 (Autumn 1978): 47-55, titled 'From a Great Distance: Thomas McGreevy's Frames of Reference'. The phrase 'from a great distance' is taken from the final line of 'Our Stars Come From Ireland', which Stevens had sent to McGreevy as a celebration of their proximity in the life of the imagination, even though they had never met. Smith's reading overlooks this dimension.
[11] Smith, ibid.
[12] Smith, ibid.
[13] Smith, ibid.

mediated. Much like Beckett's treatment of the dawn song, an untimely occurrence ('a premature Easter') is used to ironise the perception of beauty or awakening. Political advantage is assigned to linguistic irony as opposed to any Brechtian message, which deepens in the faltering voice of the lyric. The connection that the poems seek to advance here between aesthetics and ethics is commented upon in 'Fragments'. There, the speaker finds 'freezing comfort' in the thought that pity has to be dead for piety to live [Qui vive la pietà quando è ben morta] [*CPTM* 38]. That thought is derived from the following passage in Dante Aligheri's Inferno XX: 28-30:

> […] reader, now consider for yourself
> How I was able to keep my face dry
> When right before me I saw the human image
> So twisted, that tears coming from the eyes
> Streamed down to wet their buttocks at the cleft.[14]

It is the impersonal condition of bystanding – whether in relation to an airman spiralling to his death (in 'De Civitate Hominum'), or to the execution of republican prisoners (in 'The Six Who Were Hanged') – that allows their realities to be all the more forcefully felt. This is no ambiguous dialectic. The formalist imperative of 'making strange' [*priem ostranenie*] – of mimesis through the hardened and alienated – extends in McGreevy's poetry in a manner surprisingly consistent with his Catholic convictions. Wallace Stevens, whom Smith cites as the starting point for his essay on McGreevy, had observed this mobility with great sensitivity when corresponding with the Irish poet during the late 1940s. Stevens was quick to recognise the mimetic charge that McGreevy had left intact while exploring the theme of self-perception. In a letter to McGreevy dated May 6 1948, he traces how the 'unearthly' has been reordered to fall back upon and re-examine the 'real':

> High above the Bank of Ireland

[14] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* XX, *The Divine Comedy* (1321), translated by C.H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University,1993), p.128.

> Unearthly music sounded,
> Passing westwards [From 'Homage to Hieronymus Bosch'; *CPTM* 11]
>
> I thought about these lines of yours. Arranged as they are with the reality in the first line one's attention is focused on the reality. Had the order been reversed and had the lines read:
>
> Unearthly music sounded,
> Passing westwards
> High above the Bank of Ireland
>
> The attention would have been focused on what was unreal. You pass in and out of things in your poems just as quickly as the meaning changes in the illustration that I have just used.[15]

Stevens shows how the poem allows the movement from the 'real' to the 'unearthly' to infiltrate the mimetic mode of expression. In this instance, its metaphysical vision is neither escapist nor purely aesthetic but intended to heighten a sense of passionate contrast between the ideal and the actual.[16] Although Stevens does not pursue the circumstances that gave rise to the poem, and is more interested in the role that is played by the imagination, the delicate balance that he discerns between its 'real' and 'unearthly' dimensions has an important political context. 'Homage to Hieronymus Bosch' was in fact written in response to a failed appeal for the reprieve of Kevin Barry. The eighteen-year-old boy had been captured by the Black and Tans and sentenced by court martial after an abortive ambush on a British army truck by republican militants had led to the death of three British soldiers. McGreevy later wrote in reply to the secretary of the Society of Authors that he was trying to capture the feeling of being an inhabitant in a nursery after the provost of Trinity College Dublin had turned down the appeal, instructing him not to intervene: '[…] our appeal was that he should be reprieved only long enough for it to be verified that he had British justice and not torture. Only two or three of the signatories were nationalists'.[17]

As an ex-British officer of the First World War, McGreevy must have felt paralysed by

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[15] Wallace Stevens to McGreevy: 06/05/1948; *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), no. 650, p.596. In an article titled 'How Does She Stand' (1949), *The Father Mathew Record* (September 1949): 3-4 (3), McGreevy quotes the same three lines as Stevens to explain his poetic interests.
[16] Stevens had long been attempting to ascribe some positive content to metaphysics. See the essays Stevens had been compiling since 1942 for *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951).
[17] McGreevy to M.E. Barber: 16/04/1947; TCD MS 8097/59.

the decision. The poem opens with a surrealist fantasy of the 'boy' and the 'lipless' spirit of the nation that he holds dear:

> A woman with no face walked into the light
> A boy, in a brown-tree Norfolk suit,
> Holding on
> Without hands
> To her seeming skirt. [*CPTM* 12]

In a rough allusion to the central panel of Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c.1500), the boy and the woman in the poem are accompanied by a 'nursery governor' who flies out of the well of St. Patrick before filming back again via his effigy into the underworld:

> […] his head bent,
> Staring out over this spectacles,
> And scratching the gravel furiously,
> Hissed –
> The words went *pingg!* like bullets,
> Upwards past his spectacles –
> *Say nothing, I say, say nothing, say nothing!* [*CPTM* 12]

A grotesque vocal performance dramatises the imperative to stay silent. Words are given a life of their own, ricocheting 'Like bullets' in allusion to their suppressed subject matter – the formal resolution of British justice in response to republican violence. While following the flight of the words '[u]pwards' past the governor's spectacles, the speaker is shocked by their patrician glare: '*Say nothing, I say, say nothing, say nothing!*' On descent, they fall away from the speaker's intentions as soon as they are uttered: 'I might have tittered / But my teeth chattered / And I saw that the words, as they fell / Lay, wriggling, on the ground' [*CPTM* 11]. The effects of banned utterance quickly spread and multiply in contagion. 'Bowed obsequiously', the words turn and join in an irregular 'stomach dance' with 'brothers and sisters' [*CPTM* 12].

It is important to reflect at this stage on the division of private and public utterance in the poetry of Devlin, Beckett and McGreevy. The consequences of the new political regime

for individual expression can be traced from the ways in which these three poets suspend the 'I-you' address of the lyric to highlight an absent relationship between the speaker and the object world. In all three collections, an impassable tension is maintained between the need for detachment and the need for fulfilment. In *Intercessions*, the speaking subject vacillates unpredictably between a sense of resistance and an allure to the object world that it cannot easily overcome. Strict abstinence and baroque opulence figure as two accretive registers of this linguistic protest. In *Echo's Bones*, by contrast, the 'I' is split off entirely from the world in which it exists in order to produce a poetic persona. If the speaker in McGreevy's *Poems* is divided from the object world, it is a more fertile scission than is the case in either Devlin or Beckett.

So far I have been concerned with the difficulty of staging an authentic voice in the public sphere. As I have attempted to read from specific moments at which the lyrical voice falters, a psychological conflict between the self as subject and the self as object persists throughout *Intercessions*, *Echo's Bones* and *Poems*. For Beckett, the self as object is resisted by falling back on an interior landscape of subjectivity that is anterior to it. An active principle frames what the 'I' perceives as extraneous to the perceiver and attempts to expunge it in an act of self-interrogation. By contrast, McGreevy grounds the speaking subject on a reactive principle ('I too') where the self attempts embodiment in the much larger realm of what is perceived. We have noted how the theme of self-perception does not necessarily preclude the speaker in McGreevy's verse from occupying a larger symbolic repertory. More often, the pressures exerted by recent historical forces return as a supplement in the lyric to the truths of the devotional mode. As McGreevy writes in a jotted notebook fragment:

> Platonism, Christian or Pagan, Florentine or English, is Puritanism, spiritual cowardice and inimical to healthy art while Thomism on the contrary encourages the individual to face everything and is bound to make for production for the objectifying of all that may be objectified.[18]

[18] McGreevy, TCD MS MF 8067.

In this revealing excerpt, McGreevy asserts that Thomism has not only a fundamental and necessary relationship with civic life, but that it is essential to the 'healthy' positioning of art within that context. The statement corroborates with the poetic efforts we have seen that counter a 'Puritanical' sense of isolation with a 'Thomistic' sense of the indivisibility of one 'I' from another. Beckett was aware that McGreevy's fascination with disintegrating subjectivity in modernity, while bearing certain similarities with his own aesthetic objectives, was by no means prototypical of the concerns that he had expressed in 'Recent Irish Poetry'. As a veteran of war, McGreevy could not share Beckett's enthusiasm to state the intervening space between subject and object as 'no-man's land, Hellespont or vacuum' [*D* 70] – a consideration that he saw used more often by his contemporaries to justify attitudes of social and intellectual retrenchment. Alternatively, I have chosen to describe the widening of the speaker's voice in the lyric ('I too') in terms of a Catholic collective that engenders the source of utterance differently from that of either Beckett or Devlin – one that provides the perceiving subject with all the 'Thomistic' imperative to face the world head on.

An early draft of McGreevy's poem 'Sour Swan', titled 'Sweet Swann of Bayswater', is likely to have been completed about the same time that Beckett was finishing his monograph on Proust's *Du Côté de chez Swann* for the Chatto & Windus Dolphin series.[19] The poles of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:13 act out a playful allegory in this poem for the relations between private and public selves. The addressee of 'Sour Swan', it is implied, ought to moderate his sense of contradiction just where it manifests itself as absolute rupture or exile. In the poem that choice is presented as either one of 'Go[ing] to God' – that is to say, of locating subjectivity within Catholicism's larger symbolic repertory – or of holding onto an autonomous subject that must maintain itself through internal aporias, here characterised as the Beckettian violence against 'self-deluding self' [*CPTM* 54]. 'Sour Swan'

[19] See McGreevy TCD MS 789(1) f.118.

plays on the deployment of self and other as mutually exclusive categories, preferring to expose the underlying inconsistencies over which such rigid demarcations have laid a veneer:

> Three turns of time now
> The child of aspiration
> Has been victim to terrestrial hallucination
> Then to violence against self-deluding self
>
> Go to God. [*CPTM* 54]

The speaker collectivises the distrusting individual after Jesus's arrest in Gethsemane, highlighting Peter's multiple attempts to renounce the bonds of discipleship in successive acts of self-delusion. By allegorising the puritanical leanings of his younger contemporary with overtones of the disciple, Peter, McGreevy shows how the hardened sceptic might be more fanatical in his scepticism than a moderate Catholic holding his faith in proportion. The poem challenges Beckett's intellectual sense of isolation or 'Pharisaic' disdain, mimicking his movements in an allusive hall of mirrors that seek to remove the hardened contrasts that accompany a sense of privation. We have seen this process at work in the reactive principle ('I too') that returns the isolated individual to collective spaces in a number of McGreevy's poems.

That the poem landed with its intended recipient is evident from the fact that the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:13 features as the subtext to Beckett's July-September 1934 review of McGreevy's *Poems*.[20] In his subsequent letters to McGreevy through early 1935, Beckett toys with his compatriot in 'imitative pentimenti' – less than genuine acts of contrition that are carried over from his reading of Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* (1441).[21] Reacting against the Jesuitical tendencies of Mallarmé's famous 'Swan' poem, 'Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui', Beckett remarks to McGreevy that

[20] 'For prayer may be "good" in Dante's sense on any note between and inclusive of the publican's whinge and the pharisee's taratantara'. See Beckett, 'Humanistic Quietism', *Dublin Magazine* (July-September 1934): 79-80 (79).
[21] Beckett to McGreevy: 10/03/1935; *TLSB* 259.

> I suppose I'm a dirty low-church P. even in poetry, concerned with integrity in a surplice. I'm in mourning for the integrity of a pendu's emission of semen, what I find in Homer & Dante & Racine & sometimes Rimbaud, the integrity of the eyelids coming down before the brain knows of grit in the wind.[22]

These sentiments, which turn the death-drive into a reflex of pure mechanism rather than consciousness, show a rueful sense of the ineradicable nature of confessional origins, at least in the eyes of its Catholic recipient. What is interesting about the exchange is its celebration of a childlike derangement of the senses, à la Rimbaud, whose 'Les Poetes de septs ans' depicts the image of a child who grinds his fists so hard into his eyes that he can see spots ('Et pour des visions ecrasant son oeil darne').[23] Artistic integrity, in this instance, is linked to the poet's capacity to start *ex nihilo* – to take no account of what already exists. The avant-garde trajectory to which Beckett confirms his allegiance is represented according to an enclosed or suicidal space because it can recognise nothing outside of it; rather, it is borne out of a constant defiance of the world and its fateful pressures, though in this it is doomed to failure nonetheless.

Yet McGreevy's 'Thomistic' imperative to face the world head on stresses the authenticity of personal experience as a plural rather than singular value – for the 'I' that cannot join with others in the plural cannot know the meaning of 'I' in the singular. The contradiction that his published collection admits between the alienating effects of first-person utterance and the priority of the object world can seem less like trying to have it both ways if we break out of traditional realist and anti-realist schooling to consider instead the possibilities of defamiliarisation. Interestingly, the lyrical voice is much more direct in McGreevy's unpublished poems. As Susan Schreibman has shown in 'The Unpublished Poems of Thomas McGreevy: An Exploration', McGreevy deliberately impersonalised the 'I'

[22] Beckett to McGreevy: 18/10/1932; *TLSB* 134-135.
[23] 'Squeezing his dazzled eyes to make visions come' [translated from the French by George Craig; *TLSB* 75]. Arthur Rimbaud, 'Les Poètes de sept ans', *Oeuvres completes*, ed. Antoine Adam, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp.43-44.

during subsequent revisions.[24] An early typescript draft of a poem titled 'Appearances' provides evidence of just how direct this voice can be. Here the 'I' does not fall into silence, or realign itself within a Catholic collective, but addresses the reader directly through the security of its own achievements:

> It appears to you
> As a provincial-minded mentor
> That I have not kept faith.
>
> I understand
> And though cynics explain
> That one never explains
> I, not being a cynic,
> Shall explain
> Thus much:
>
> The concessions I have made
> Have been due, for the most part,
> To immaturity.
>
> Those I may make will be imposed
> But patently
> By material necessity.
>
> And – envoi –
> Though I may appear to have defaulted,
> I still hope –
> More – let me not be dishonest, I believe –
> That, in time,
> My name will serve as a rampart
> To the integrity of an Ireland
> Which appearances are always against.[25]

What we are confronted with in this instance is not the singular spectacle of a self-fashioning subject but a comparatively unified 'I' responding to the external pressures that lay siege to it. The speaker voices itself apart from an *arrière public* – as is apparent from the association of the apostrophised 'you' with 'a provincial-minded mentor'. Continuing the pronominal address to the second person, the speaker reverses the accusations of disloyalty with which it is presented, throwing in six concessive clauses ('And […] / I still hope […] / That […] / My name will serve as a rampart') that play on the idea of 'default[ing]' before finishing the

[24] See Susan Schreibman, 'The Unpublished Poems of Thomas McGreevy: An Exploration', in Coughlan and Davis (ed.), pp.129-149.
[25] McGreevy, 'Appearances', TCD MS MF 637, 2.

original sentence impulse, which ends on the preposition 'against'. By distancing the self entirely from the accusative tense, the 'I' counters the nationalist demand to be 'once again' with the 'yet to be'. The 'concessions' that the speaker includes in the verse are not apologetic but aspirational, allowing the distance to pass – 'in time' – between the act of self-perception and the reformed or mediated concept of the nation that it intends to serve. Through this prolonged antagonistic loyalty to 'an Ireland / Which appearances are always against', the speaker can insert the autobiographical self at the heart of the lyric poem. In its bare, unpublished, stripped-down form, the lyric registers the complexities of this dynamic as a sign of personal intent aimed at the Free State's jurisdiction. It is out of this refusal to accede to the demands of the existing culture that I navigate McGreevy's return to London in the following section.

2.2: 'The Other Dublin': London Revisited, 1925-27

The Free State in Ireland had not turned out to be as McGreevy had expected. Five years before the Censorship of Publications Act was passed, his position in Ireland had been complicated by the controversy that had broken out following the publication of 'The Madonna of Slieve Dun' in August 1924.[1] The short story, written by his friend Lennox Robinson, had drawn outrage from the clergy when it was printed alongside other subversive pieces in Cecil Salkeld and Francis Stuart's short-lived journal *To-Morrow*.[2] The Irish Advisory Committee of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, for which McGreevy worked at the time as Assistant Secretary, became embroiled in the dispute when one of its members resigned stating that they could no longer work with Robinson. Robinson, the Trust's secretary, was soon dismissed, and the activities of the Trust, which provided books for free public library services, suspended. When the administration of the Irish office of the Carnegie scheme was redirected through Scotland under the direct control of Dunfermline, McGreevy was offered a new post at an increased salary of £400.[3] Without accepting the offer or confronting the priests, he decided to leave for London.

This section addresses the cultural dynamics of his return to the British capital. It scrutinises McGreevy's dual position between two newly-separated cultural climates – Ireland and England – asking what creative space was available for the ex-British officer during the mid-1920s. The affluent setting of 15 Cheyne Gardens is clearly evident in the poem, 'The Other Dublin' (previously titled 'Living with Hester').[4] While living with the medium Hester Dowden and her daughter Dolly Travers Smith, McGreevy occupied an

[1] The short story features a farmer's daughter named Mary Creedon, who imagines herself as the Madonna after she is sexually assaulted. Unable to come to terms with the event, she recasts her pregnancy in the form of an Immaculate Conception, yet dies upon conceiving a girl (on Christmas Eve).
[2] Other adulterous contributions to the publication included W.B. Yeats's 'Leda and the Swan', Liam O'Flaherty's 'A Red Petticoat' and Margaret Barrington's imperial sex drama, 'Colour', though it was the focus of Lennox Robinson's short story on the Immaculate Conception that upset the clergy.
[3] Anthony Olden, 'A Storm in a Chalice', *Library Review*, 25, 7 (Autumn 1976): 265-269 (269).
[4] McGreevy, 'Living with Hester', TCD MS 7989/1: 50.

intermediate position in the household somewhere between the status of a boarder and a family member. The allusion in this poem to Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* – or 'Kindred by Choice' – is especially revealing of the poetic persona:

> To her daughter and me
> She read the *Wahlverwandtschaften*
> And I told her that story
> Of Goethe bowing low before the Duke
> When Beethoven stalked on.
> 'Of course, Goethe' she observed – quite calmly,
> As though it were understood –
> 'Was a much greater man'.
> ('Twas a shock to Catholic youth). [*CPTM* 26]

In 'The Other Dublin', the superfluous airs of exotic entertainment patronise Sinn Féin loyalties and the Irish folk song *Una Bhán* as a form of comical role play. Supporting Vanessa's pretentiousness, a 'gentle gentleman' remains 'infinitely thoughtful' in distributing the afternoon refreshments, despite resembling Conrad Veidt in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) [*CPTM* 27]. The poetic persona reinforces the sense of exclusion that is felt from Vanessa's opinions '('Twas a shock to Catholic youth)' by associating the murderous gaze of Conrad Veidt in Robert Wiene's silent horror movie with the hypnotics of her tea-time parlour. Especially interesting in this context is the way Vanessa's whimsical prejudice turns the ex-British officer's style of reported speech into an immediate voice of Catholic nationalist opinion. The voice of the poetic persona fashions the transferral of political motives after McGreevy's own demobilisation, retreating from the world '[o]f the English eighteen 'nineties' [*CPTM* 26] in light of Ireland's new political landscape.

Though he supported the anti-Treaty side of Sinn Féin during the party's split over the oath of allegiance to the British monarchy, McGreevy was at no point a member of the fighting forces in the Anglo-Irish conflict. Some of the dialogues, however, in the 'Autobiographical Fragments' at Trinity College Dublin between the narrator and other personas reveal the tension of these loyalties: 'Was the [First World] war your reality? // No,

it wasn't. But it became, it has become, the only reality in my existence. It has put me on the wrong track and I've got to stay on it. […] The war has given me a sense of identity with Englishmen that I have not got at all with the men who are fighting for Sinn Féin'.[5] Letters to George Yeats from this period reveal a writer so accepting of his cultural displacement that he could joke that her husband, Senator W.B. Yeats, should replace James McNeill as the High Commissioner to London for the Irish Free State in the expectation that he would try to resuscitate the old union.[6]

McGreevy settled quickly into the London borough of Chelsea after the reorganisation that had been forced upon the Irish Office of the United Kingdom Carnegie Trust. His poem 'Dysert' (later retitled 'Homage to Jack B. Yeats') was published in *The Criterion* in January 1926.[7] Marianne Moore wrote to McGreevy in March confirming her inclusion of his work in *The Dial*: 'We particularly admire the "Nocturne of the Self-Evident Presence" and, as we said to T.S. Eliot, are most tempted to disregard the fact that we must not, at present, accept additional verse'.[8] 'Did Tosti Raise His Bowler Hat' is also marked 'London 1926' and coincides with drafts of 'Recessional' and 'Gloria de Carlos V' from the same period.[9] We note that none of the titles referred to here are ostensibly about Ireland. McGreevy's most successful nationalist poem, titled 'Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill', was written not in Dublin but in Chelsea.[10] To George Yeats, who provided a dependable readership for his poems, McGreevy jokes after encountering Sean O'Casey on the King's Road that 'I think, quite seriously, that he is lost. He said Ireland was this and that'.[11] The implication is that it was important to escape Ireland as a monotonous thematic preoccupation

[5] McGreevy, 'Autobiographical Fragments', TCD MS 8040A/53.
[6] See McGreevy to George Yeats: 19/10/1926; NLI MS 30.859.
[7] McGreevy, 'Dysert', *The Criterion*, 4, 1 (January 1926): 94.
[8] Marianne Moore to McGreevy: 26/03/1926; TCD MS 8121/1.
[9] See TCD MS 7989/1: 84 and TCD MS 7989/1: 73 respectively.
[10] The poem was published in the *Irish Statesman* on 1 May after McGreevy sent it to 'Æ' Russell.
[11] McGreevy to George Yeats: 20/05/1926; NLI MS 30.859. George Yeats provided a dependable readership for McGreevy's poems, which he was reluctant to hand out to the residents of Cheyne Gardens or to the Lisheen-born poet and archaeologist, Geoffrey Phibbs, who had recently married the painter Norah McGuinness.

for his own work.

So far I have considered McGreevy's poetic output during this period in London and the attitudes that they reveal towards British culture. I now wish to explore McGreevy's interaction with T.S. Eliot in greater detail. The freelance engagements that Eliot offered McGreevy gave him an additional foothold in London and allowed him to make his living at the heart of the city's galleries, theatres, museums, concert halls and opera houses. In what follows, however, I wish to establish the importance of an imaginative dimension between them.

In *T.S. Eliot: A Study* (1931), the first full-length monograph to be written on the American poet, McGreevy notes that 'Mr. Eliot's mansion is one from which, to use his own words, the poet "sees in images"'.[12] 'These images', he adds, 'when associated, may need to be interpreted for those who like to see essentials linked up by explanatory reasoning'. The distinguishing feature, however, of *The Waste Land*, is its 'purely poetic action' that '[…] cuts out practically all the cackle and gives us only the 'osses': an effect that is perhaps best imputed to Ezra Pound's editorial hand.[13] It is the imagined community embodied in 'this Old, almost Jacobean, if not Elizabethan, English (and above all, London) shorthand

[12] McGreevy, *T.S. Eliot: A Study*, pp.56-57.
[12] McGreevy to T.S. Eliot: 30/05/1925; TCD MS 8113/4.
[13] McGreevy, *T.S. Eliot: A Study*, p.57. One of the aims of the Imagists was to bring modern speech into poetry in contrast to the perceived ostentatiousness of the late Victorian style. It is the fractured basis of the Imagist group that directs McGreevy's impression of Eliot's craft. McGreevy's understanding of the Imagist movement was influenced by his acquaintance with Richard Aldington, in relation to whom he also published a monograph as part of the Chatto and Windus Dolphin series. In that monograph, he describes Aldington as 'the youngest member of a group of English-speaking poets (and poetasters) who, to the slight extent that such a thing is possible in London, constituted a "movement". They called themselves "Imagists", though Mr. Yeats, who had a greater capacity for producing the striking image than any of them, was no more than an officially recognised chief'. McGreevy, *Richard Aldington*, p.9. Though these comments are critical about the positioning of W.B. Yeats within the group, they are confident enough about extending the group's collective identity to include the work of T.S. Eliot. Susan Schreibman has suggested that McGreevy's later, more hostile views of Eliot were also influenced by his association with Richard Aldington in Paris, who, having acted briefly as an assistant for *The Criterion*, was attempting to arrange a 'break away from Eliotismus'. Schreibman, 'Richard Aldington, an Englishman, Thomas MacGreevy: an Irishman', *Richard Aldington: Essays in Honour of the Centenary of his Birth* (Montpellier, 1994), pp.113-127 (p.118). Eliot, indeed, appears to have been resigned at this stage in the awareness that other writers were after his own heart (TCD MS 8113/55). Richard Aldington passed drafts of McGreevy's monograph on T.S. Eliot to H.D (Hilda Doolittle) while Aldington and McGreevy's mutual publisher, Charles Prentice, egged the Irish writer on in his efforts: 'the possum in the bar should be given a peerage' (TCD MS 8092/1); 'I read Eliot bang off […] You may have been a bit too generous to him' (TCD MS 8092/3).

masterpiece' that directs the encounter between these two poets.[14] McGreevy admired *The Waste Land*'s remobilisation of apparently arbitrary associations – particularly the typist of present-day London with Queen Elizabeth – and was moved to pass his most Eliot-inspired piece, 'Crón Tráth na nDéithe', by the editor of *The Criterion* (though in his notes to the poem it is James Joyce whom McGreevy credits openly).[15] One of the most notable features of Eliot's 1922 masterpiece is, indeed, its growing attachment to 'Old' establishment roots, which had regressed in the case of Eliot from the New England state of North America to the Royalist England in the fallout of the Reformation, before halting at the poet's eventual conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. This last of Eliot's allegiances – that of his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism – acted on McGreevy's religious imagination in provocative ways, 'the bastard, schismatic and provincial if genteel kind of Catholicism that, for the time being, he has, somewhat New Englishly, stopped at', coming to a standstill at the very possibility of adopting the Catholic faith in full allegiance to Rome.[16]

I refer to the Chatto and Windus monograph because it is revealing of McGreevy's imaginative drift towards Eliot: the 'Eliot', that is, who inhabits the 'almost Jacobean' London of the 1922 composition. As McGreevy writes to George Yeats in relation to a poet whom he must cosset and tease if he is to draw him out: 'I hear spasmodically from Eliot always the pet in his complicated way. He was back for a few days and rang me up about something and now I think is back again. I never *see* him. He writes a solemn letter but giggles a little on the phone and is very intriguing and mysterious'.[17] The implication is of an 'Eliot' who acts as a Catholic recusant within the Jacobean purview. Throughout the Chatto and Windus monograph, McGreevy contrasts Prufrock's creator with the extreme self-deprecation of the poetry of Jules Laforgue, who '[…] on the contrary, only ceased, when he

[14] McGreevy, ibid., p.58.
[15] McGreevy to T.S. Eliot: 30/05/1925; TCD MS 8113/4.
[16] McGreevy, *T.S. Eliot: A Study*, p.16.
[17] McGreevy to George Yeats: 30/07/1926; NLI MS 30.859.

was dying, to dream of the day that the imagined *bien-aimée* would appear out of nowhere'.[18] Where Prufrock must always come back to his self-centred reflections, in Laforgue's poetry, McGreevy emphasises, it is the girl who restores the poet imaginatively with her presence: 'Pense-t-elle au Bonheur / Au bonheur a tout prix / Disant: tout plutôt que mon coeur reste ainsi incompris?'[19] The relationship that transpired between Eliot and McGreevy was quickly condensed into this imaginative poetic realism, with the younger poet looking for ways around the 'hidden' presence that drew a mystery behind Eliot's character in London.

Although anxieties remain in his attitude towards parts of British culture, McGreevy's return to the capital in 1925 generally superseded any hesitations he might have had about staying there. As I have argued in this chapter, his published output actually increased after leaving Ireland and his most successful nationalist poem, titled 'Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill', was written not in Dublin but in Chelsea. The concessional mode of his unpublished poem 'Appearances' and 1926 poem 'The Other Dublin' suggests an altogether different affiliation with Irish nationalism: one that voices nationality as a future-oriented philosophy rather than as a premise out of which he should write.

[18] McGreevy, *T.S. Eliot: A Study*, p.30.
[19] McGreevy, ibid., p.31.

3

Young Irishmen in Paris

> So you have got to your Hy Brazil, Paris. I imagine you will find distant mountains are not so blue as they appear to the traveller who sets out to walk them. Perhaps Ireland may appear quite blue so far away as Paris is.[1]
>
> I am genuinely pleased to have changed from London to Paris. I regard it as a step on the way home. I gave myself three years to work my passage round the grand tour so to speak and back.[2]

Though the tone is one of good-natured mockery, 'Æ' Russell's assumption that McGreevy has merely substituted the pressures of his native homeland for a lifestyle of exotic estrangement is clearly brushed off by his compatriot's reply, which articulates a backward projection of experimental tensions from a vantage point beyond the nation's borders. The dialogue between Russell and McGreevy offers a provocative angle into the structure of political and experimental allegiances that are interrogated in this chapter. The first section presents a view of aesthetic debates as they move back and forth between Russell's *Irish Statesman* and the Parisian journal *transition* – the largest avant-garde journal in Europe, each volume of which stretches to around three-hundred pages. In so doing, I define the creative activity of an expatriate Irish circle and its group dynamics in Paris. The section also examines Irish contributions to an ambitious anthology project that George Reavey, founder of the Europa Press and literary agent to Beckett and Devlin, co-edited with Samuel Putnam, titled *The European Caravan: an anthology of the new spirit in European Literature: France, Spain, England and Ireland.*

[1] George 'Æ' Russell to McGreevy: 08/03/1927; TCD MS 8117/23.
[2] McGreevy to 'Æ' Russell: 10/03/1927; TCD MS 8117/24.

3.1: Writing in *transition* and *The European Caravan*

Lasting for eleven years under the editorship of Eugene Jolas, *transition: An International Quarterly for Creative Experiment* (1927-1938) acted as the major outlet in Paris for poetic experimentalists, painters and critics. Unlike the short life-spans of *The Klaxon: An Irish International Quarterly* (which made only one appearance in the winter of 1923), *To-Morrow* (1924; *To-Morrow*'s third issue never arrived), and the later *Ireland To-Day* (1936-38; eventually boycotted by Irish newsagents), the diversity of *transition*'s form and content served as a reliable platform for avant-garde work and helped to create a synergy in international debates about politics, metaphysics and language innovation. McGreevy's arrival in Paris in February 1927 coincides with the publication of the journal's first issue.[1] More of his poems feature in this international quarterly than in any other context. McGreevy and Beckett are among nine poets – along with Eugene Jolas, Ronald Symond, Georges Pelorson, James Johnson Sweeney, Carl Einstein and Jean Arp – to have attached their signatures to the 'Poetry is Vertical' March 1932 manifesto: the only declaration to which either writer ever put their name.[2]

The decision of Irish writers to publish with *transition* was not always borne out of a positive engagement with like-minded experimentalists. McGreevy was ambivalent about his own relationship with the writers who contributed to the journal. As his 'Autobiographical Fragments' indicate, he had no desire to dedicate himself entirely to Montparnasse's

[1] McGreevy had arrived in Paris just before Beckett, taking over the post of *lecteur d'anglais* at the Ecole Normale Supérieure to cover for William MacCausland Stewart, who had decided to take the offer of a post in Scotland. Impressed by the quality of his work, Gustave Lanson had promised McGreevy that he could stay on as lecturer for the following academic year (that of 1927-28); however, Trinity College Dublin had already proposed another lecturer for the forthcoming semester. A compromise soon appears to have been reached. Under these circumstances, Beckett and McGreevy soon found themselves working together as *lecteurs d'anglais* at the same college. See Archives Nationales 61 AJ 202: IRLANDE: échange de lecteurs avec le Trinity College Dublin: Affaire Beckett et McGreevy (1927-29). According to the exchange between Msr. Vessiot, Director of the ENS, and E.J. Gwynn, the Trinity Provost: 'C'est pour donner satisfaction au désir manifeste par Trinity College relativement à M. Beckett que nous avons eu à l'Ecole, au 1928-29, deux lecteurs anglais au lieu d'un' (2).

[2] Eugene Jolas, 'Poetry is Vertical', *transition 21*: 148-49.

expatriate community. There the notion of 'living' in Paris 'for the best part of six years' is qualified as 'Living not in Montparnasse or among the kind of people who write for Transition [*sic*], but amongst French people, ordinary French people not necessarily writers […]'.[3] McGreevy's tendency to distance himself from the journal's other essayists was reciprocated. In turn, some of *transition*'s chief contributors found his civic nationalism hard to take.[4]

Often the placement of Irish work in the journal appears to have been generated by a lack of alternative. In a letter sent to McGreevy during the summer of 1929, Beckett reports trying to get the manuscript of 'Assumption' published in Ireland, which had been turned down by Russell's *Irish Statesman*: 'I would like to get rid of the damn thing anyhow, anywhere (with the notable exception of "transition"), but I have no acquaintance with the less squeamish literary garbage buckets'.[5] Beckett is ironising the available options here in full knowledge of the blasphemous nature of his work. In the end, the prose fragment was published in *transition 16/17* in 'The Revolution of the Word' edition.[6] Still more revealing, given his opposition to 'squeamish literary garbage buckets', is the author's decision to offer *transition* his 'cul de réserve' – the unpublished 'Censorship in the Saorstat' – which Beckett updated along with the new censorship registry number that he had received for his short-story collection, *More Pricks Than Kicks*.[7] By 9 April 1936, Beckett had granted permission (via his literary agent George Reavey) for *transition* to publish any of the poems it wanted from his 1935 collection, *Echo's Bones*.[8]

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[3] McGreevy, 'Autobiographical Fragments', TCD MS MF 719, 8004/4.
[4] See Edward Titus, 'Editorially: Criticism à l'Irlandaise', *This Quarter* (April-May-June 1931), 3, 4: 569-584.
[5] Beckett to McGreevy: c. Summer 1929; *TLSB* 10-11.
[6] Beckett, 'Assumption', *transition 16/17* (June 1929): 268-271.
[7] Beckett to George Reavey: 06/05/1936; *TLSB* 332. *The Bookman* had originally commissioned the article in August 1934 before its circulation ceased (after December). Owing to a mistiming of responses between Maria Jolas, Reavey and Beckett, Reavey failed to secure publication for the article in *transition*.
[8] See Beckett to McGreevy: TCD MS 10402/93.

Perceptions of the 'pure' or 'sincere creator' surface with particular rigidity in the Irish context, and it is here that I wish to analyse a selection of aesthetic debates as they move back and forth between *transition* and the *Irish Statesman*. As a case study for these concerns, I will turn to Seán Ó'Faoláin's debate with Eugene Jolas. The controversy between these writers helps to uncover some of the parameters of Parisian experiment in relation to 'realist' demands of social and national commitment. It also raises more general problems regarding the status of creative language within a specific linguistic and cultural purview. Ó'Faoláin had written a letter to 'Æ' Russell about 'Anna Livia' on 5 January 1929, decrying the absence of natural and recognisable appearances in Joyce's latest composition.[9] In a slightly earlier essay titled 'Style and the Limitations of Speech', Ó'Faoláin had concluded in dismissal of *Work in Progress*: 'Here lies the condemnation of a language such as Joyce's. It is not merely ahistoric – not merely the shadow of an animal that never was, the outline of a tree that never grew, for even then we might trace it to some basic reality distorted and confused – but it comes from nowhere, goes nowhere, is not part of life at all'.[10] Ó'Faoláin even suggests at the close of the essay that Joyce is reinforcing the Arnoldian view of the Celt in revolt against the despotism of fact by refusing to accept the 'limitations of speech'.[11]

In the 'Combat' section to *transition 15*, Jolas published a response to Ó'Faoláin daringly titled 'The New Vocabulary':

> Basing his contentions on a high respect for historicism, [Ó'Faoláin] regards Mr Joyce's new speech as 'a-historic', as failing to be 'part of life', and chides him for running counter to the eternal laws of nature.
>
> The most cursory glance at the evolution of English, or other languages, shows that speech is not static. It is in a constant state of becoming. Whether the organic evolution of speech is due to external conditions the people themselves bring about, or whether it is due to the forward-straining vision of a single mind, will always remain a moot question […][12]

[9] Seán Ó'Faoláin, 'Correspondence: Anna Livia Plurabelle', *Irish Statesman*, 9 (05/01/1929): 354-355. Ó'Faoláin renamed the article 'Almost Music' for *Hound and Horn*, 1 (January-March 1929): 178-180.
[10] Seán Ó'Faoláin, 'Style and the Limitations of Speech', *Criterion*, 8, 30 (September 1928): 67-87.
[11] Ó'Faoláin, ibid., 87.
[12] Jolas, 'The New Vocabulary', *transition 15* (February 1929): 171-174.

The critical combativeness of the *transition* editor resists the conservative foreclosure of art's formal and cognitive possibilities, defending the right of the writer to invent in line with whatever evolutionary developments she or he happens to choose. Jolas casts doubt on Ó'Faoláin's insistence upon 'reality' and 'nature' as fully externalised and immutable 'laws'. While Jolas is right to expose Ó'Faoláin's backward refusal to explore these terms in further detail, and justified in directing attention to their self-divided and aporetic condition, his Irish opponent is on surer ground when pointing to the title of Jolas's reply. 'The people do not create a vocabulary', he retorts. 'They accept it from the ages. Had he asked leave to adopt one word of Mr. Joyce's invention there would be a great to-do about it, but to ask leave to introduce a vocabulary!'[13] With this provocation, Ó'Faoláin highlights some of the curious double-standards at work in the experimentalism (and plain egocentrism) that Jolas defends.

In its simplest outline, the debate between Jolas and Ó'Faoláin is useful for demonstrating the irreconcilability of two positions: the one more generally representative of a fidelity to inner experience, and the other of a fidelity to an external object. The controversy that develops between these two standpoints allows us to appreciate the exaggerated reference points of inheritance and discovery, commitment and detachment then shaping debates about Irish life (for Ó'Faoláin, we recall, the *Work in Progress* 'is not part of life at all'). Here the classical antimonies between realism and poetic invention are firmly reinstated – a dynamic that as we have seen resurfaces nearly a decade later in Beckett's dismissal of Karl Radek during his article on Denis Devlin.[14] It is interesting to note, therefore, how in his provisionally titled 'A Note on Work in Progress', published in *transition 14*, McGreevy

[13] Seán Ó'Faoláin, 'Letter to the Editor', *Irish Statesman* (02/03/1929): 513-514. Ó'Faoláin also rebukes the notion of 'transition' in this article as a necessary ideal for Eugene Jolas's avant-garde journal, arguing that 'the major point' of his previous letter was not to question the evolutionary life of speech, but to establish 'that the artist must seek for a point of suspension between the eternal coming-on and going-off of meaning'. 'Will not Mr Jolas tell us', Ó'Faoláin continues, 'whether Mr Joyce really desires no more than a medley of sensuous images to be the mind's response to speech? As I said in my former letter, if that be his desire he has amply succeeded, but, as I also suggested there, he has in that case raised the whole problem of the purposes of art and must break on Pascal's gibe at those artists who add nothing to nature and reality' (514).

[14] See pp.40-41 of this thesis for a discussion of Beckett's reference to Radek.

begins the essay by defining Joyce's technique as 'noteworthy' because it signals 'not a reaction from realism but the carrying on of realism to the point where it breaks of its own volition into fantasy, into the verbal materialism of which realism, unknown to the realists, partly consisted'.[15]

McGreevy would later write his own response to Ó'Faoláin's letter for the *Irish Statesman* which (inaccurately) repeats the arguments that he had originally outlined in his *transition* article.[16] Rather than maintain the opposition between realism and poetic invention, his *transition* essay advances a supplementary relationship between the two that softens Jolas and Ó'Faoláin's intense engagement with the question of literary difference. As McGreevy appears to have been aware from his diagnosis of realism's alter ego, the tensions between authority and consciousness will continue to resonate so long as 'realism' is either denounced or elevated as an ideal (aesthetic or otherwise). Even more so than *Ulysses*, the *Work in Progress* transposes historical events as psychological variations of a single fantasy. The 'falls' that the work composes along a vertical line of construction are at once physical, parricidal and political. Judged by the standards of socialist realism, which tends to regard interior states as an inadequate vehicle for the expression of outer historical processes, Karl Radek was undoubtedly correct to insist during the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers that 'trying to present a picture of revolution by the Joyce method would be like trying to catch a dreadnought with a shrimping net'.[17]

However, Radek's defence of socialist realism as evidenced by the mutually exclusive framework of his title – 'James Joyce or Socialist Realism?' – is scarcely consistent with the

[15] McGreevy, 'A Note on Work in Progress', *transition 14* (Fall 1928): 216-219 (216).
[16] See McGreevy, 'To the Editor of the Irish Statesman: Anna Livia Plurabelle', *Irish Statesman* (16/02/1929): 475-476. Terence Killeen argues that the letter is likely to have been prompted by Joyce, who took seriously Ó'Faoláin's criticism about his new work in the previous issue. See Terence Killeen's '"Our Shem": McGreevy and Joyce' [*TMCR* 173-188 (187)].
[17] See Karl Radek, 'James Joyce or Socialist Realism?' (August 1934), delivered to the Soviet Writers Congress, *Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art*, pp.151-154; reprinted in Robert H. Demming ed., *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, Vol. 2, 1928-1941 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p.625.

after-effects of revolutionary pressures that had led to Irish censorship, which frustrate any attempt to restructure the social order along progressive lines of succession, and serve instead as a more complex instance of the need to avoid ideological pressures in order to engender creative experiment. In Ireland, there had been a revolution but no 'Revolution of the Word' edition. Indeed, the wider context of publication in the international quarterly *transition* brings contrasting experiences of the revolutionary process into unexpected juxtaposition. At the end of the Fall 1929 edition, Louis Lozowick's article on 'El Lissitsky' features a reproduction of Lissitsky's 'Project for Public Rostrum', which the artist had made for Lenin in 1920, complete with elevators, platforms, balconies, megaphones and screen displays.[18] In Russia, the new state had been quick to sponsor avant-garde artists, hoping to inspire and control new forms of artistic expression. The difference of official endorsement throws the cultural situation in Ireland, which remained torn between pre- and post-revolutionary standards, into sharp relief.

I wish to extend the Russian point of comparison to an understanding of the group dynamics of Devlin, Beckett, McGreevy and George Reavey in Paris. A fluent Russian speaker (his own childhood was spent in Nizhninovgorod), Reavey produced, under his Europa Press imprint, Beckett's *Echo's Bones* (1935), a selection of Paul Éluard's poems titled *Thorns of Thunder* (1936) – which included translations by Beckett and Devlin – and Devlin's *Intercessions* (1937).[19] As well as occupying a central role in the publication of their work, Reavey also published his own collections of poetry: most notably, *Quixotic Perquisitions* (1939), the very title of which echoes Beckett's plea for an inward, interrogative art. There is, then, a Russian angle to the publication of avant-garde Irish work. During his time in Paris, Reavey continued to translate *fin-de-siècle* Russian and early Soviet

[18] Louis Lozowick, 'El Lissitsky', *transition 18*: 284-286 (285).
[19] For further discussion on the context of these original publications and their printed format, see Thomas Dillon Redshaw, '"Unificator": George Reavey and the Europa Poets of the 1930s', in Coughlan and Davis (ed.), pp.249-275.

writing, including prose translations of Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev and Boris Ivanovich Nicolaevsky, some of which would later appear in his *Soviet Literature* (1933). Reavey's example as a publisher reveals an interplay of resources and influences not usually accounted for as pertinent to 'Irish' literary history. It is here that I wish to turn to the conception of *The European Caravan: an anthology of the new spirit in European Literature: France, Spain, England and Ireland*, on which McGreevy, Beckett and Reavey worked during the 1930s.

The eclectic range of this anthology project – which compiled recent criticism, poetry and prose fragments from several different nations – was nevertheless viewed by Samuel Putnam as 'an anthology with direction'.[20] Reavey used one of his contacts from the Cambridge journal *Experiment*, the polymath Jacob Bronowski, to edit the 'England and Ireland' section. Addressing these newly-separated territories in his introduction to the chapter, Bronowski remarks that

> In Ireland the interest in criticism is very recent, yet some of the best criticism I have seen is by the Irish contributors to the examination of Joyce's *Work in Progress* published two years ago. Its doctrinaire use by Ramon Fernandez, to some extent by Herbert Read and [T.S.] Eliot, may discredit it: the influence of [I.A.] Richards, of his view of criticism as a process of extending the availability of reactions […] encourages that use: and Richard's influence also encourages two suspect pre-occupations, the psychological and the textual. The function of criticism is to appraise and to categorise; often we may not like the categorising intelligence but it remains nevertheless the critical intelligence and criticism is the application of that intelligence. Today even when the categorising function is understood it is treated dubiously because criticism is without objective categories and (it is the psychological influence) is afraid to establish them, for fear that they may turn out to be not perfectly 'accurate' in their divisions. But a category is designed not as law but as practical convenience: the categories of Matthew Arnold –
>
> that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his *powerful and beautiful* application of ideas to life –
>
> were definite without being final or even precise; they saved unnecessary elaboration, both of points in the text and of critical comment.[21]

Bronowski criticises the mechanical shaping of the classifying intelligence, which he attributes to two new methods of analysis ('the psychological and the textual') that hook

[20] Samuel Putnam, 'Introduction', *The European Caravan: An Anthology of the New Spirit in European Literature in France, Spain, England and Ireland* (New York: Warren & Putnam, 1931), p.v.
[21] Jacob Bronowski, 'England and Ireland', in Putnam (ed.), *The European Caravan*, p.437.

readers up to wires and study their susceptible responses. After I.A. Richards's experiments with readers' comments or 'protocols' during the 1920s, reader-response theorists and psychologists had begun to draw on the so-called 'stock' of 'organised responses', 'doctrinal adhesions' and 'mnemonic irrelevances' demonstrated by student readerships in order to cleanse the social inhibitions, personal distortions and critical preconceptions that had led to epistemic regressions in their understandings of short passages from literary texts.[22] It is in this context that the creator and founder of the Cambridge journal *Experiment* perceives the recent commentary by 'Irish contributors' (McGreevy and Beckett) on Joyce's *Work in Progress* to be 'some of the best criticism' that he has encountered, despite the fact that 'interest' in criticism from the Irish standpoint is understood to be still in its early infancy. In order to reflect further on the significance of Bronowski's remarks and to comprehend the very different standards of criticism that he invokes between Ireland and England, I want to turn to Beckett's analysis of *Work in Progress*, which had been published two years prior to *The European Caravan.* Beckett begins the essay by declaring that

> The danger is in the neatness of identifications. The conception of Philosophy and Philology as a pair of nigger minstrels out of the Teatro dei Piccoli is soothing, like the contemplation of a carefully folded ham-sandwich. Giambattista Vico himself could not resist the attractiveness of such coincidence of gesture. He insisted on complete identification between the philosophical abstraction and the empirical illustration, thereby annulling the absolutism of each conception – hoisting the real unjustifiable clear of its dimensional limits, temporalizing that which is extratemporal. And now here am I, with my handful of abstractions, among which notably: a mountain, the coincidence of contraries, the inevitability of cyclic evolution, a system of Poetics, and the prospect of self-extension in the world of Mr Joyce's *Work in Progress.* There is the temptation to treat every concept like 'a bass dropt neck fust in till a bung crate', and make a really tidy job of it. Unfortunately such an exactitude of application would imply distortion in one of two directions. Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? Literary criticism is not book-keeping.[23]

Beckett is acutely aware of the pitfalls of classification when confronted with the sheer complexity of Joyce's most recent work. He stresses the importance of leaving enough space

[22] See I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929).
[23] Beckett, 'Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce', *transition 16/17*: 242-253 (242).

between philosophy and philology if the 'real unjustifiable' dynamics of creation are not to be simply explained away, or drained and turned upside down like an empty bottle of beer. Acknowledging his interested position as a critic, Beckett is all too happy to give himself away by revealing his concepts like a pack of cards to the reader ('my handful of abstractions'). The implication, here, is that it would be far too easy to say something germane to an activity that has already been conveniently situated and plotted in advance or that has a corresponding clarification structure of its own. The striking manner in which the passage upbraids the characterisation of literature as an inert substance that can be expected to follow this or that logical pattern echoes parts of Bronowski's concern about the value of extending the availability of classifications when they have so little in common with Matthew Arnold's '*powerful and beautiful* application of ideas to life'. Rather than discharge the energising currents of a book into ever-widening pools of information, Beckett wants to render experience fully and prolong the activity of reading. He is concerned with the integrity of literature's position in the mind of the reader and its power to raise questions about the very processes that define and perpetuate it. Beckett would give up academic discourse entirely by 1932.

I want to move on from Bronowski's admiration of Beckett's essay to assess his placement of McGreevy in the anthology as someone who has refrained from siding with influences either side of the Irish Sea. Bronowski describes McGreevy as 'one of the few Irish writers who has kept in touch with the work of Eliot' while remaining an acquaintance of both Joyce and Yeats.[24] The presence of Eliot is undoubtedly strong in the poems that McGreevy selects for translation in Putnam's anthology, all of which focus on waste, paralysis, burnt-out landscapes and false angels. McGreevy's *T.S. Eliot: a study* was

[24] Bronowski, 'England and Ireland', in Putnam (ed.), *The European Caravan*, p.493. See chapter 2.2 of this thesis for a discussion of McGreevy's interaction with Eliot. McGreevy's 1931 monograph on Eliot provoked a fierce response from American contemporaries in Paris, many of whom objected to its sectarian judgements about the poet's New England background. See Richard Thoma, 'Island Without Serpents', *New Review*, 3 (1931): 119-120 (119).

published about the same time as *The European Caravan*. His translations of the *Generación del 27*, which reveal the influence of Eliot, are included in a section titled 'The Poets of Today' that features poetic sequences by Rafael Alberti, Jorge Guillén, Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón Jimenéz and Frederico Garcia Lorca.[25]

Guillén's 'La salida' is one of the most forceful examples in the entire anthology of a criticism of life that is intended to extend the availability of reactions. In 'Going Out', the poetic tone is purely expository. Spoken language is connected with the body. The physical experience that the poem articulates is no inanimate reconstruction but a process of creation, rebirth and the deepening of an approach to reality. Unlike with descriptive or narrative writing, the reader is invited to transform his / her consciousness of the outer world ('to slip on the gilded freshness of summer / Thanks!'), to release the tension of primal, physical reactions ('joyful / tact of the muscles / submitted to instinct', and to see which part of the body a new awareness erupts through [*CPTM* 80]. This process of inner investment is vital to a renewed apprehension of life, to a rekindled awareness of the variety and spontaneity of being, and to the realisation of thoughts and sensations that have enjoyed no prior expression: '(runs of virgin spaces / unheard harmonies!)' [*CPTM* 80]. By reconditioning the present through a succession of gerunds and infinitive verbs ('going' / 'waiting' / 'to go out' / 'to slip on' / 'to drown' [*CPTM* 80]), the poem highlights the aesthetic and political effects of regeneration.

In conceiving the anthology for an American audience, Putnam had hoped that the project would define a *zeitgeist* or 'after-War spirit in European literature': a policy that is evident in his selection of writers too young to have experienced the conflict.[26] A number of McGreevy's poems that were reproduced in *The European Caravan* also seek to bring the 'after-War spirit' back to Ireland. 'Aodh Ruadh O Domhnaill' expands upon a staccato

[25] McGreevy, 'The Poets of Today', in Putnam (ed.), *The European Caravan*, pp.407-413.
[26] Putnam, 'Introduction', *The European Caravan*, p.v.

dialogue with a Spanish priest while rubbing at inscriptions in a foreign graveyard, trying to find the resting place of the Irish rebel 'Red' Hugh O'Donnell. '[U]nhurried' during the opening stanzas ('asking where I might find it / And failing'), it is by virtue of this patience in the sixth stanza that the speaker creates through the act of perception the very object he has failed to find: the 'blackening body / Here / To rest' [*CPTM* 34-35]. As James Mays notes, McGreevy creates in a manner akin to W.B. Yeats's 'The Funeral of Harry Boland' (1922) 'the sense of glory he laments and establishes the sense of connection he has described as physically not there'.[27] Underlining this symbolic act of retrieval is a lengthy parenthesis that intercedes with the deaths of Ireland's political prisoners:

> Not as at home
> Where heroes, hanged, are buried
> With non-commissioned officers' bored maledictions
> Quickly in the gaol yard… [*CPTM* 35]

In interview with Susan Schreibman, Máire Mhac an tSaoi argues that this passage refers to the seventy-seven republicans executed by the Free State government during the Irish Civil War.[28] The communion that the speaker imaginatively reconstructs with an assassinated Irish rebel of the seventeenth century is suddenly juxtaposed with the ongoing horrors of the present moment that it cannot transcend.

We recall that a year after *The European Caravan*, on the resumption of *transition* in 1932, McGreevy and Beckett would sign a manifesto titled 'Poetry is Vertical'. McGreevy's 'Treason of Saint Laurence O'Toole', which anticipates the hanging of Kevin Barry, is among several poems featured directly after the manifesto.[29] The poem makes use of surrealist disfiguration when dramatising the failed reprieve of the eighteen-year old boy, who had been captured by the Black and Tans and sentenced by court martial after an

[27] J.C.C. Mays, 'How is McGreevy a Modernist?', in Coughlan and Davis (ed.), pp.103-128 (p.113).
[28] See 'Máire Mhac an tSaoi and Susan Schreibman on Thomas McGreevy', *Poetry Ireland*, 32 (Summer 1991): 73-83.
[29] McGreevy, 'Treason of Saint Laurence O'Toole', *transition 21*: 178-179.

abortive ambush on a British army truck by republican militants had led to the death of three British soldiers.[30] Both 'Treason of Saint Laurence O'Toole' and 'School… of Easter Saturday Night (Free State)' had their titles later revised after their publication in *transition* to ones less obviously political. In McGreevy's *Poems* (1934), they are revised as more innocuous 'homages' to other painters and composers (Hieronymus Bosch and Wagner respectively). The allusions both to Bosch's panel painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c.1500) and to Wotan's fortress became the outright titles of these poems. Studying the original context of publication in *transition* allows us to appreciate how these political pressures are siphoned off and displaced. The future reception of 'Homage to Hieronymus Bosch' also illustrates this. As we saw from Wallace Stevens's reading of the text, which finds a positive role in it for the imagination, this decontextualising continues beyond the life of the published poem.[31]

Here I wish the underline the purely imaginative concept of poetry that the magazine *transition* advances. The change of subtitle on resumption of the journal's publication in March 1932 to 'An International Workshop for Orphic Creation' demonstrates the increasing emphasis on 'poetry' as a medium for trances and dreams. Beckett's 'Dortmunder' and McGreevy's 'Homage to Hieronymus Bosch' are published as part of a wider attempt to define a new form of dream poetry (hypnologue) and magic-realist narrative (paramyth).[32] 'School… of Easter Saturday Night (Free State)' is featured after a section titled 'The Synthetist Universe and the Chthonian Mind'.[33] There are three points of emphasis that I wish to define in relation to *transition*, the very title of which signals a movement away from the rigid application of *a priori* ideas: the awareness of an instinctive condition of being; the

[30] See pp.72-74 of this thesis for a reading of this poem.
[31] See pp.71-72 of this thesis for Stevens's analysis of 'Homage to Hieronymus Bosch'.
[32] Beckett 'Dortmunder', *transition 24* (June 1936): 8; and McGreevy, 'Treason of Saint Laurence O'Toole', *transition 21*: 178-179.
[33] McGreevy, 'School… of Easter Saturday Night (Free State)', *transition 18: From Instinct to New Composition, Word Lore Totality, Magic Synthetism* (November 1929): 114-116.

refusal to crystallise a single viewpoint; and the insistence on the role of language for altering an *état-limite* or world conception. These definitions help to explain the journal's emphasis on 'reality' not as an external standard to be adhered to, explained or dissected, but as a metamorphic space to be shaped by the individual subject. Some of the salient points of *transition*'s June 1929 'Proclamation', which was published in the 'Revolution of the Word' edition, lend deeper insight into the sorts of transformative claims that are being associated with the creative act, and offer a secondary perspective on Beckett's 'Recent Irish Poetry' (published five years later). 'Pure poetry', as it is advanced in the 'Proclamation', reflects concerns at the heart of the lyric:

> Point 3.
> Pure poetry is a lyrical absolute that seeks an a priori reality within ourselves alone. *Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth…* [Blake]
>
> Point 9.
> We are not concerned with the propagation of sociological ideas, except to emancipate the creative elements from the present ideology
>
> Point 11.
> The writer expresses he does not communicate.[34]

The points enumerated above advance an idea of creative expression that cannot be absorbed by rational use or justification. 'Pure poetry' does not necessarily clarify anything, prove anything, render any verdict, or pardon anyone. The idea of 'communication' in this instance (see 'Point 11') is undercut by the writer's refusal to make his or her work immediately accessible to the reader. Furthermore, the attribution of 'an a priori reality within ourselves alone' ('Point 3'), seems to cast doubt on whether the external existence of an object can be communicated, either as a conscious aim of the poet (who may be unaware of what she or he is communicating) or as an explanation for what the lyric might mean once it has been completed. Rather than assuming an object for expression that is always consubstantial with

[34] Jolas, 'Proclamation', *transition 16-17* (June 1929): 13. This proclamation announces twelve points of contention. Eugene Jolas and Stuart Gilbert are among sixteen authors to have undersigned the document.

an *a priori* individual, the points included in the 'Proclamation' stress the integrity of a creative impulse whose extension has no ulterior motive. The fierce enunciation of these subjective positions is intended to detach the expressive act from any pre-established purpose. These (often occult) assertions of individual freedom sit well with Beckett's conception in 'Recent Irish Poetry' of a lyric that acts by suggestion, not by definition; that engages an instinctive condition of being; and that prioritises the intangible over the readily apprehensible. As a way by which to forestall the effects of ideological contraction so evident in the consecration of Irish Revivalist traditions from the 1930s onwards (in the verse of James Stephens, F.R. Higgins and the early Austin Clarke, for example), the June 1929 Proclamation offers a precedent for the 'others' in Beckett's August 1934 review for *The Bookman*.

The privileging of the creative act as an unfathomable though inviolable necessity is central to the rejection in 'Recent Irish Poetry' of 'accredited themes' that are seen to deny the lyrical self the integral force capable of challenging and reconstituting experience [*D* 71]. In his defence of Devlin's *Intercessions*, published in the 'Commentaries' section of *transition 27*, Beckett deploys the same categories that he uses in 'Recent Irish Poetry' to announce 'The relief of poetry free to be derided (or not) on its own terms and not in [*sic*] those of the politicians, antiquaries (Geleerte) and zealots'.[35] The articulation of an internal dimension necessary to genuine poetic discovery is stated in conscious opposition to 'the go-getters', 'the gerimandlers [*sic*]' and 'the great crossword public on all its planes' whose need to traduce the self to a familiar locale and to view culture inertly as a panacea for social problems is parodied by the anecdote that Beckett provides: 'He roasteth roast and is satisfied. Yea, he warmeth himself and saith, Aha, I am warm'.[36]

[35] Beckett, 'Commentaries: Denis Devlin', *transition 27* (April-May 1938): 289-294 (289).
[36] Beckett, ibid., 290.

Stuart Gilbert, an advisory editor to *transition* and amanuensis of Joyce, was one of the June 1929 Proclamation's main signatories. Like Beckett, Gilbert asks for distance between the 'sincere creator' and the dominant view of social reality that is being perpetuated. The idea of 'expression' that Gilbert advances in 'The Creator is not a Public Servant' (in full view of 'Point 11') is by no means opposed to the goal of 'communication' but intended to liberate the writer from constantly deferring the creative impulse to that end during the early stages of composition so that they are 'not playing to a gallery of angelic harpists or canvassing the celestial proletariat'.[37] 'The Creator is not a Public Servant' stresses the value of putting a safe audience out of mind. Continuing to uphold the 'sincere creator' in terms that resist any prior social affiliation, Gilbert argues that ideological pressures should only enter accidentally into the creative medium if they are not to risk serving a propagandistic function.

[37] Gilbert, 'The Creator is Not a Public Servant', *transition 19/20* (June 1930): 147-50 (148).

3.2: Between two revolutions: the *Work in Progress*

Eugene Jolas's preface to the tenth anniversary edition of *transition*, titled 'Frontierless Decade', reaffirms the centrality of Joyce's *Work in Progress* to the journal's history:

> [*Transition*] was founded, in 1927, as a more or less eclectic organ, with the basic aim of opposing to the then prevailing photographic naturalism a more imaginative concept of prose and poetry. It encouraged a new style by postulating the metamorphosis of reality.
>
> Beginning with the first issue, it published seriatim eighteen fragments from James Joyce's *Work in Progress.* A number of *Transition* writers also served as interpreters of this new and difficult work.[1]

McGreevy's 'A Note on Work in Progress' and Beckett's 'Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce' are among two of the nine articles explicitly dedicated to the work that first appeared in the French journal. The very word 'transition' features as an important part of McGreevy's critical vocabulary for discussing Joyce's new work. In response to Ó'Faoláin's letter for the *Irish Statesman*, McGreevy describes the text as 'a transition state to be ultimately abolished', and the figures in the book as 'transitory types […] not rooted in character […] and not rooted even in language'.[2] In an unpublished memoir of his friendship with Joyce, written before his death in the late 1960s, McGreevy once again defines the work as 'an evocation in transitional language of an appropriately transitional purgatorial state of being'.[3] As one of the first efforts to characterise Joyce's linguistic experiment, the repetition of the term 'transition' in the critical discourse enacts a rhetorical strategy through which the

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[1] Eugene Jolas, 'Frontierless Decade', *transition 27* (April-May 1938): 7. Dougald McMillan has argued in *transition 1927-1938: The History of a Literary Era* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1975) that the serial circulation of Joyce's *Work in Progress* 'dominated the magazine in almost every respect except determining what work by other contributors would appear' (p.179).

[2] McGreevy, 'Anna Livia Plurabelle', *Irish Statesman* (16/02/1929): 475-476 (475).

[3] McGreevy, Unpublished fragment, TCD MS 8114/16. The heavily amended typescript appears to have been intended for the collection *The Joyce We Knew*, edited by Ulick O'Connor (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967), though it never appeared in the volume. Hugh J. Dawson has reproduced parts of this document alongside other autobiographical fragments in 'Thomas McGreevy and Joyce', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 25, 3 (Spring 1988): 305-321 (317). Other unpublished extracts concerning McGreevy and Joyce have been reproduced in Richard Ellmann's *The Consciousness of Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.49-50. There are three unpublished typescripts by McGreevy on Joyce catalogued TCD MS 8114/10, TCD MS 8114/16 and TCD MS 8114/17 respectively.

unprecedented effects of the *Work in Progress* and its innovative techniques might be adequately represented. In his *transition* essay, Beckett outlines 'the recurrent predomination of one of two broad qualities' – namely, Vice and Virtue – through which the 'vicious circule [*sic*] of humanity is being achieved'.[4] This section will ask how McGreevy and Beckett's analyses of the *Work in Progress* (all of which were being circulated serially in *transition*) serve in the context of post-revolutionary disillusionment.

Though Beckett and McGreevy both acknowledge Dante's *Purgatorio* (c.1308-1321) as a precursor for the *Work in Progress*, it is difficult to privilege any single line of influence in relation to the (at the time) unfinished composition. A drawing executed by Johnny Friedlaender and Zao-Won-Ki titled 'Roots and Branches' pictures James Joyce at the centre of several arboreal listings of literary antecedents and progeny, none of which provides a definitive account of the author's creations. 'Bruno' and 'Vico' – two of the three literary antecedents that Beckett mentions in his essay – provided Joyce with a structural template onto which he could layer and fuse his narratives; however, neither the work of the sixteenth-century metaphysician nor that of the eighteenth-century political philosopher yield positive blueprints of the work's technique. As if in anticipation of Beckett's future essay, which was published the following summer, McGreevy mentions in his Autumn 1928 article that 'the working out of the parallel between the Vico conception and the reconstruction of it in regarding Dublin's life history in *Work in Progress* must wait till the complete work has appeared'.[5] McGreevy's comments are wise given the general hurry among Joyce's younger disciples to trumpet his newest creation with explanations and examinations in advance.

Beckett's 'Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce', published in *transition*'s 'Revolution of the Word' edition in the summer of 1929, is the first essay to formulate a theory of the

[4] Beckett, 'Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce', *transition 16/17*: 242-253 (253).
[5] McGreevy, 'A Note on Work in Progress', *transition 14*: 216-219 (218). It is worth clarifying that the essay was first published under this provisional title before it was amended by Joyce to 'The Catholic Element in Work in Progress' for a later collection of essays designed to enhance an understanding of the work.

relationship with Giambattista Vico based on the serial circulation of Joyce's new work. The ellipses that Beckett adds to the title imply no direct continuity between these figures but signal rather a gradual sense of diminishment amid permutation. The elliptical dots in the essay's title – of which there are six – incorporate the essay's condensation of the Vichian cycle into six phases of social progression – or retrogression. These phases correspond to necessity, utility, convenience, pleasure, luxury, and the abuse of luxury. I wish to focus here on the recursive dynamic that Beckett isolates in the Vichian cycle, which moves from a state of liberation to one in which humans are once again made submissive to some greater form than themselves.

The recursive dynamic from anarchy to autocracy that Beckett locates in the Vichian cycle has a powerful system of correspondence with a phase of national self-assertion that had arguably lost its liberating potential, and I wish to connect his essay's insistence on one part of Vico's theorem (the 'ricorso') to the failure of the national project in Ireland. The original full title of *The New Science* is *Principi di Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla Comune Natura delle Nazioni* (1725), which may be literally translated as 'Principles of the New Science about the Common Nature of the Nations'. When attributing a 'purgatorial' sense to Joyce's work, Beckett highlights the conflicting impulses of split and divided selves; the confusion of the outside with the inside dream-world; and the problems of an unresolved or 'hidden' agency. Though he does not politicise this metaphysics of time in relation to Ireland's present dispensation as McGreevy does in his earlier essay ('Then there is the politically purgatorial side of it […]'), Beckett does base his arguments on a passage from *Work in Progress* that alludes to the passing of 'our social something':[6]

> as by the providential warring of heartshaker with housebreaker and of dramdrinker against freethinker our social something bowls along bumpily, experiencing a jolting series of

[6] McGreevy, 'A Note on Work in Progress', *transition 14*: 217.

> prearranged disappointments, down the long lane of (it's as semper as oxhousehumper) generations more generations and still more generations[7]

The avant-garde experience of time that Beckett divulges from this citation illustrates how the entirety of past and present is being made subservient to a somnambular or oneiric interval that eliminates all temporal frontiers. Each generative framework takes on different forms depending upon the context of its emergence in a non-teleological, multi-dimensional stream of time (a strategy that Joyce had begun to develop in the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode of *Ulysses*). The predicted time for the radical overthrow of one temporal system and the introduction of another never arrives in *Finnegans Wake*. Both are assimilated. As Louis Gillet notes in an essay titled 'Mr. James Joyce And His New Novel', 'All that which was, "once upon a time", Eve, the Virgin, the child Jesus, Tom Thumb, is mixed up in a yesterday without precise dimensions, which can draw nearer or grow deeper to any extent at will.'[8]

At this point I wish to refer back to the split between Ireland's revolutionary foundations and its conservative artistic direction, reflecting on the value of these 'generational' states for remobilising parts of Ireland's present condition. The somnambular or oneiric time of the *Work in Progress* frustrates the outcome of a public temporality in which the present can be viewed as a separate point in time and as the result of conscious choices. As a mythopoetic device, 'Anna Livia' – whose 'many beauties' ('Plurabelle') are named after the river *amnis Livia* – stages a transcendental neutrality within herself ('unappalled by the recourses') that offsets the effects of post-revolutionary ennui. As 'Jaunty Jaun' (Shaun) affirms to his sister, Issy:

> but it is historically the most glorious mission, secret or profund, through all the annals of our – as you so often term her – efferfreshpainted livy, in beautific repose, upon the silence of the dead, from pharaoh the next first down to rameschecks the last bust thing. The Vico road goes

[7] Beckett, 'Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce': 245-246.
[8] Louis Gillet, 'Mr. James Joyce And His New Novel' (translated from the French by Ronald Symond), *transition 21*: 263-272.

> round and round to meet where terms begin. Still onappealed to by the cycles and unappalled by the recourses we feel all serene, never you fret, as regards our dutiful cask.[9]

There is no historical time, here, at least as we commonly conceptualise it, since experiences of the past and the present simply coincide. The text never discloses an end point necessary to the viewing of historical events. Instead the teleology of 'task' becomes 'cask': a transposition from *zeitgeist* to intoxication. Rather than search for a resting standpoint of knowledge, the passage celebrates an endless structure of variation that demurs from linear conclusions about the ends of history. Indeed, one of the 'purgatorial' conditions that Beckett and McGreevy recognise in their essays on the new work revolves around the concept of personal identity, which is continuously being haunted by other possible permutations:

> I feel called upon to ask did it ever occur to you, *qua* you, prior to this, by a stretch of your iberborealic imagination, when it's quicker than this quacking that you might, bar accidens, be very largely substituted in potential secession from your next life by a complimentary character, voices apart. Upjack! I shudder for your thought! Think! Put from your mind that and take on trust this. The next word depends on your answer.[10]

'Characters' in *Finnegans Wake* are too difficult to classify and keep tabs on: they are simultaneously historical figures, legendary myths, and the composite sums of innumerable ancestors and poetic inventions. One of the many aliases conferred upon 'Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker' is 'Here Comes Everybody'. Both McGreevy and Beckett attribute these polymorphous creations to a textual space in which the notion of the individual self is lost and nothing can be definitively known. A more provocative instance of the disappearance of the self as a fixed, stable or exclusive category can be discerned from the fact that even these critics themselves appear as transitory types in a later instalment of the work's circulation.

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[9] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, ed. Robbert-Jan Henkes, Erik Bindervoet, Finn Fordham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; first published London: Faber & Faber, 1939), p.452.
[10] Joyce, ibid., pp.486-487.

3.2: Between two revolutions: the *Work in Progress*

In order to trace the movement of McGreevy and Beckett from critics of the project to figures in the text, I want to turn to a fragment from *Work in Progress* (Part II Section 3) published in *transition 27*.[11] The fragment is built around a story Joyce's father had originally told him, called 'How Buckley Shot the Russian General', though it is here enacted by what Bernard Benstock has likened to 'a pair of radio comics telling their skit' (Taff & Butt).[12] Five interludes of televised material – or 'verbicovisual presentment' – punctuate the Taff & Butt sketches, serving as diversions from the central tale. All of these interludes are recounted in italicised font and square brackets in the text. In the first interlude, 'Slippery Sam' and 'Tinkler Tim' appear as shady figures placing their bets on a horserace. 'Coppingers' provides a Dickensian twist to the crowd of orphans and penny-pinching urchins from which this duo emerge:

> *A lot of lasses and lads without damas or dads, but fresh and blued with collectingboxes. One aught spare ones triflets, to be shut: it is Coppingers for the children. Slippery Sam hard by them physically present howsomedever morally absent was slooching about in his knavish diamonds asking Gmax, Knox and the Dmuggies (a pinnance for your toughts turffers!) to deck the ace of duds. Tinkler Tim, howbeit, his unremitting retainer, (the seers are the seers of Samael but the heer are the heers of Timoth) is in Boozer's Gloom, soalken steady in his sulken tents.*
> […]
> *This ceridreme has being effered you by Bett and Tipp. Tipp and Bett, our swapstick quackchancers, in* From Topphole to Bottom of the Irish Race and World.[13]

Competing theories of providential order are allegorised here as gambling, with Tinkler Tim's 'unremitting retainer' awaiting the Final Judgement and Slippery Sam seeking advice from bookie to bookie 'to deck the ace of duds'. The surreal tendencies of the passage embody a psychic tension (as announced by 'Bett' and 'Tipp') that speculates on the results of a horserace (a metaphor for predestination). The transmogrification of character (from Taff and Butt to 'Tipp and Bett, our swapstick quackchancers') incorporates the personas of

[11] Joyce, 'Fragment from *Work in Progress*' (Part II, Section 3), *transition 27*: 57-78.
[12] Bernard Benstock, *Joyce-Again's Wake: An Analysis of Finnegans Wake* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1965), p.242.
[13] Joyce, 'Fragment from *Work in Progress*' (Part II, Section 3), ibid., 63-64.

Beckett and McGreevy as a pair of identical contraries. Identity, here, is a purely technical device, in no way tied to the nuclear family or to any moral or ethical evaluations of individual personality. There is no verisimilitude to be found except perhaps in the parenthesis that mimics Slippery Sam's Dublin brogue '(a pinnance for your toughts turffers!)'. Rather the scene takes place in a 'ceridreme': a half-dream or 'hypnologue' as the editor of *transition* might have put it.

The textual embodiment of Beckett and McGreevy extends to their role as assistants transcribing, correcting and proof-reading parts of the still unnamed work. Terence Killeen has compared Beckett and McGreevy's relationship to *Work in Progress* to that of 'Milton's daughters', stressing their devotion to the ongoing project despite the endless demands for transcription and copy-editing that Joyce placed upon them.[14] Joyce writes to Sylvia Beach on 10 May 1928 in relation to the publication by Crosby Gaige of New York of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' that: 'Proof F is to go to Wells [publisher at Crosby Gaige] *after* McGreevy has carefully copied all my revision on to proofs D and E. Proof D is to go to [Padraic] Colum [who wrote a preface to the work] *after* McGreevy has copied your copy of my notes to him…'.[15] Joyce used McGreevy to transfer emendations to subsequent settings of proofs for *transition* numbers 12 and 13.[16] In a letter to McGreevy dated somewhere between 27 April and 11 May 1930 Beckett, who was completing a French version of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' with Alfred Péron (which Joyce later withdrew), mentions Ivan Goll, who was also assisting

[14] See Terence Killeen, '"Our Shem": McGreevy and Joyce' [*TMCR* 173-188 (175)].
[15] *James Joyce's Letters to Sylvia Beach*, ed. Melissa Banta and Oscar Silverman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p.139.
[16] See University of Buffalo Joyce Collection Online Catalogue:
http://library.buffalo.edu/pl/collections/jamesjoyce/catalog/vig5.htm;
http://library.buffalo.edu/pl/collections/jamesjoyce/catalog/vig6.htm;
http://library.buffalo.edu/pl/collections/jamesjoyce/catalog/vi-i27.htm.

with the *Work in Progress*. 'Another slave', he adds succinctly, as if both writers were more than familiar with Joyce's exploitative use of acquaintances.[17]

Despite contributing actively to *Work in Progress* throughout his lectureship at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, McGreevy shows very little textual awareness of the composition in the 'Note' that he writes for *transition.* The radical Christology that he adopts to consider the work is more interested in conceiving of the author as a spiritual creator giving new life and blood to the nation. Recently, John Nash has argued that McGreevy's 'Note' was in fact motivated by Shane Leslie's anonymous review of *Ulysses*, which had been published in the *Dublin Review*.[18] Though Leslie is never referred to by name, Nash has identified a covert presence in McGreevy's essay that connects its exacerbated account of Catholic traditions with the question of Irish censorship.[19] In an earlier article on *Ulysses* for *Quarterly Review*, Leslie had expressed relief in the fact that 'the limited copies and their exaggerated cost will continue to prevent the vast majority of the reading public from sampling even faintly such unpleasant ware'.[20]

Clearly the reprieve that Leslie felt for the reading public had left too much to chance, since by the time of his *Dublin Review* article, which he chose to publish anonymously, he had hardened his position in favour of restrictive controls being placed on the text's circulation, calling for *Ulysses* to be placed on the Index of Prohibited Books. It is in this

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[17] Beckett to McGreevy: c. May 1930; *TLSB* 21. Later extracts from McGreevy's unpublished memoir also confirm this impression. See Hugh Dawson, 'McGreevy and Joyce', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 25, 3 (Spring 1988): 305-321 (311).

[18] See John Nash, 'Thomas McGreevy and "The Catholic Element" in Joyce', *Joyce's Disciples Disciplined: A Re-Exagmination of the Exagmination of 'Work in Progress',* ed. Tim Conley (Dublin: University College, 2010), pp.71-79.

[19] The 'Proteus' passage that Shane Leslie cites in his *Dublin Review* article is reproduced in McGreevy's essay, which certainly points to an energy of correspondence, though this energy is incorrectly attributed to the writings of 'an English Catholic critic' (Leslie was Irish). See McGreevy, 'The Catholic Element in Work in Progress', *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1929), pp.121-127 (p.123).

[20] Shane Leslie, 'Ulysses', *Quarterly Review* (October 1922): 219-234; partially reprinted in James Joyce, *The Critical Heritage, Vol. 1, 1902-1927*, ed. Robert H. Deming, (London: Routledge: Kegan Paul, 1970), pp.206-211 (p.210). Leslie had in fact praised the 'genius' and 'literary ability' of the author of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). When confronted with *Ulysses*, however, Leslie questions 'whether the literary power is a sufficiently extenuating circumstance', as if he were judging the work of a criminal (p.211).

developing context that Nash sees McGreevy's Fall 1928 article as making a public intervention of sorts, though the erudite context of publication – both in *transition* and later in *Our Exagmination* – is likely to have prevented the essay from reaching a wider audience. In 'A Note on Work in Progress', McGreevy refers explicitly to the inception of a censorship committee:

> We are even now founding an Inquisition in Dublin though one may believe that it is not likely to be a very successful obstacle to the self-expression of a people who with fewer pretensions have a sense of a larger tradition than that of the half-educated suburbans who initiated the idea of a new censorship. These latter understand no more than enthusiastic converts who lay down the law to nobler men than themselves that Catholicism in literature has never been merely lady-like and that when a really great Catholic writer sets out to create an inferno it will be an inferno.[21]

The passage temporarily abandons the use of punctuation when discussing the beginnings of restrictive control, downplaying its likely impact on 'the self-expression of a people' in rather convoluted terms, in which the former concept of 'a people' is opposed to the latter concept of 'half-educated suburbans'. McGreevy's spirited defence of Joyce's latest composition makes art a topic of general concern by expanding the genesis of artistic creation in a manner that recasts the heretic as the 'true' Catholic. 'The *Work in Progress*', he implies, is necessarily universal: 'it has to face everything'.[22] Compromised Catholic allegiances resonate throughout his defence of the work's serial publication. McGreevy argues that it is the very qualities of Joyce's writing that have attracted moral condemnation from the wrong Catholics. He therefore attempts to distil a 'pure' idea of Catholicism as one that embraces the very quality of obscenity and does not refrain from voicing 'the unsavoury element' under the 'surface beauties'.[23] As such the article confronts the stifling orthodoxies of censorship that Leslie had anonymously proposed, though the impassioned directness of this confrontation leads in turn to distortion as McGreevy is compelled to differentiate between a

[21] McGreevy, 'A Note on Work in Progress', *transition 14* (1928): 216-219.
[22] McGreevy, 'The Catholic Element in Work in Progress', p.121.
[23] McGreevy, ibid.

'Catholicism' overwrought by the excitement of converted enthusiasts ('temporary Romanizers') and that upheld by the insuperable 'Irish Catholic'.[24]

The 'purgatorial' element that McGreevy associates with Joyce's new work has a more powerful correlative in the rhetorical strategies of displacement and condensation that the author uses to create a multiphonic and multisignifying text, the playful nature of which undercuts any literalist or confessional solemnity. In his 1929 *transition* essay (which was published in the same year as the Censorship of Publications Act), Beckett praises the work's lexical deviance as if the words themselves were fireflies briefly illuminating the nightly half of existence: 'Here words are not the polite contortions of 20th century printer's ink. They are alive. They elbow their way on to the page, and glow and blaze and fade and disappear'.[25] Beckett reads these 'words' as having a surface sense. He describes them as living things, inseparable from their signified content. It is here that I wish to emphasise the significance of Joyce's portmanteau inventions. Preserving the simultaneous presence of two elements through superimposition, the portmanteau exists as a verbal microcosm of Bruno's law of identical contraries (to which Beckett in his *transition* essay only gives passing mention). The superimposition of phonetically similar but semantically dissimilar words in Joyce's text acts as an opposing force to the stalling, de-multiplying and reduction of meaning by censorship. Several passages in the *Work in Progress* cast aspersion on the Irish Free State, parodying its willed ontogenesis:

> Oyes! Oyeses! Oyesesyeses! The primace of the Gaulls, protonotorious, I yam as I yam, mitrogenerand in the free state on the air, is now aboil to blow a Gael warning. Inoperation Eyrlands Eyot, Meganesia, Habitant and the one but thousand insels, Western and Osthern Approaches.[26]

[24] McGreevy, ibid., *passim* (pp.121-127).
[25] Beckett, 'Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce': 249.
[26] Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, p.604.

Here the ardent enthusiasm of self-determination is entered into conceit with the theatrical cartoon short, Popeye the Sailor Man ('I Yam What I Yam'), in which Popeye is shipwrecked on an island populated by unfriendly American Indians. Syntactical structures and Pacific geographies are reversed and turned upside down to frame an impossible ideal of territorial uniqueness ('the one but thousand insels'). 'Inoperation' signals a working within, as well as an impracticable project. '[E]yot' refers to a small island off Howth in Ireland, and, as a more general word, signals the position of Ireland at the eye of an impending storm. The 'free state on the air' refers at once to this maritime jeopardy and to the nature of the propagandistic transmission, whose enthusiastic report consists only of perpetual self-affirmations ('Oyes! Oyeses! Oyesesyeses!'). The passage mocks the monoglot simplicity with which the idea of a pure Gaelic race is being concocted with its own ridiculous portmanteau scrabbling. '[P]rotonotorious' serves as an indicator of the first, foremost, most primitive, original race. At the same time, it is a prefix that is added to a simple root to make a more complex base. Annexed to multiple roots (or *operands*), Joyce's portmanteau creations point to an untenable ideal of pure ancestry ('mitrogenerand in the free state on the air').

It is easy to overstate the 'purgatorial' element based on the initial shaping of the book by contemporary readers and critics and to ignore the comic and redemptive registers of the composition, which are condensed into a single line of discourse.[27] Curse and laughter are inextricably combined throughout much of the *Work in Progress*. In the 'Taff and Butt' sketches, the deliverance of punishment is itself presented comically. The comic suspension while we wait for the Russian general to be shot depends entirely upon the navigation of the awkward space between ribaldry, goodwill and coarseness. At the heart of Joyce's linguistic

[27] As Richard Ellmann notes from Joyce's letter to his patron on May 28 1929, the author planned to include a critical essay on humour in a sequel to *Our Exagmination.* However, no article dealing at length with humour ever appeared under Joyce's direction. See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce New and Revised Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.626. Ellmann refers to Joyce's letter to Harriet Weaver of 28/05/1929 for proof of this intention. See *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p.281. See also Dougald McMillan, *transition 1927-1938: The History of a Literary Era*, p.189. Three topics were chosen for the proposed book: the treatment of night, chemistry, and humour. The fourth was never decided upon.

revolution is a rare ability to combine these distinct emotional registers into a single arc of feeling. In a memorial essay published in *transition* on the writer's fiftieth birthday, McGreevy argues that Joyce has provided

> the eternal Dublin, as Dante's Florence is the eternal Florence, Dublin meditated on, crooned over, laughed at, loved, warned. Dublin with its moments of hope and its almost perpetual despair, its boastfulness and its cravenness, its nationalism, its provincialism, its religion, its profanity, its Sunday mornings, its Saturday nights, its culture, its ignorance, its work, its play, its streets, its lanes, its port, its parks, its statues; its very cobbles, and the feet, shod and unshod, worthy and unworthy – if a charity like Joyce's permits the use of so final a word as 'unworthy' in relation to any human being – that walk them.[28]

The 'eternal Dublin' in this instance is less a transcendent notion hanging over and above human affairs than a celebration of the domestic quotidian, overlaid with 'cobbles' and traversed by bare feet. Real time here is an eternal present, one that echoes the *Work in Progress*'s at the time unfinished state. If the range of the 'true' Catholic artist is necessarily universal and 'has to face everything', then the unbroken emphasis on verbal activities demonstrates how 'Ireland' itself is being reconceived as the object, rather than the subject, of Joyce's work in an act of spiritual repossession.

So far I have examined the fate of Ireland after independence in the context of three writers: Joyce, McGreevy and Beckett. The third section of this chapter, by contrast, will address Irish engagements in Paris from a utopian perspective. It draws on letters of exchange between Paul Valéry and McGreevy that refer to the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation: a pioneering body that had been founded by the League of Nations to foster intellectual and cultural exchange across national boundaries. Through the correspondence between Valéry and McGreevy, I ask how 'poetry' is conceived in terms of a better future and as a force through which the past can be reactivated with new sharpness and definition.

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[28] 'James Joyce at the Half Century' by Padraic Colum, Stuart Gilbert, Eugene Jolas, Thomas McGreevy and Philippe Soupault, *transition 21* (March 1932): 241-255 (254).

3.3: Paul Valéry, Thomas McGreevy and the League of Minds

Early in 1932, Valéry launched a powerful appeal on behalf of the League of Nations with the objective of increasing international cooperation among intellectuals. As a member of the Permanent Committee for Arts and Letters, Valéry had been asked by the organisation to evolve ideas on the subject of an intellectual order that could occupy the contemporary world apart from the interests of class, party and nation. McGreevy responded to Valéry's appeal by translating two responses from those present at the Geneva meeting of the ICIC – that of the Brazilian scientist, Miguel Ozorio de Almeida, and of the Mexican writer (and ambassador to Brazil during this period) Alfonso Reyes Ochoa – before drafting a reply of his own.[1] His response takes the form of a personal letter to Valéry which is headed 'Paris, April 4 1932.'[2] In it, McGreevy recognises 'the very soul of the Pact' under the representation of the League of Nations, the full implications of which he claims to have been one of the first to realise:

> Besides, you were one of the first to think with me that it was precisely this question of the role of the spirit in the modern world which constituted the basis of what, in the jargon of Geneva, is known as Intellectual Co-Operation. There, from the beginnings of the League of Nations, when I was only one of its acolytes, lay, for me, the role of that department, and there, in spite of those who, being politicians, only laughed, I saw *the very soul of the Pact*, the idea which, in two or three centuries, historians would possibly consider to have been the most fertile of those the first World Charter erected into universal laws.[3]

What McGreevy and Valéry *see* in this sponsorship of transcendent order marks not only one of the 'most fertile' achievements of the interwar period, but also a distinctive alliance of poets. The wisdom of unappreciated kinship with the first World Charter sounds alike with Percy Bysshe Shelley's conception of the poet as 'the unacknowledged legislator of the world'.[4] In the posthumously published 'A Defence of Poetry; or, Remarks Suggested by an

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[1] McGreevy, Translated reply by Don Miguel de Almeida: 03/04/1932; TCD MS 7998, 13.
[2] McGreevy to Paul Valéry: 04/04/1932; TCD MS 7998, 94a.
[3] McGreevy to Valéry, ibid; italics added.
[4] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry; or, Remarks Suggested by an Essay Titled "The Four Ages of Poetry"' (1821, though published posthumously in 1840), *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, selected and edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistate, second edition (New York: Norton, 2002), p.535.

Essay Titled "The Four Ages of Poetry"' (1821), Shelley considers how 'Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called in the earlier epochs of the world legislators or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters'.[5] Though ostensibly a reply to Thomas Love Peacock's 'The Four Ages of Poetry' (1820), Shelley's essay is written in response to Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (1595) in which the Roman term for poet (*poēta*) indicated 'a diviner, fore-seer, or Prophet'.

Through the correspondence between these two figures – McGreevy and Valéry – I want to highlight the extreme importance that both writers attach to poetry as a visionary force. McGreevy appears to have been on visiting terms with Paul Valéry, who lived close to the Irish Embassy on the Avenue Foch, from the beginning of his time as a Normalien.[6] His translation of Valéry's *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci* (1929) serves as an important example of the type of appreciative criticism that he would later practice in Ireland.[7] In the revised preface to the book on da Vinci, which was written in 1929 for the purpose of McGreevy's translation of the book into English, Valéry realigns the concept of divinity with the enlightened rather than the mystical intelligence:

> What could be more alluring than a God who repudiates mystery, who does not erect his authority on the troubles of our nature, nor manifest his glories to what is most obscure, sentimental, or sinister in us? Who forces us to agree rather than to submit, whose mystery is self-elucidation, whose depth an admirably calculated perspective. Is there a better sign of authentic and legitimate power than that it does not operate from behind a veil? […] No revelations for Leonardo. No abyss opening on his right. An abyss would make him think of a bridge. An abyss might serve for his trial flights of some great mechanical bird….[8]

Valéry's Catholic imagination, operating under Leonardo's motto of *hostinato rigoro* (obstinate rigour), appears to have exerted a powerful hold over the translator. McGreevy's

[5] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', p.513.
[6] See McGreevy to George Yeats: 20.1.27; NLI MS 30.859: 'I go over tomorrow & shall see the head of the Normale as well as Valéry. Address till Monday c\o W. Stewart, Ecole Normale Supérieure, 45 rue d'Ulm, Paris V'.
[7] McGreevy was by no means the only member of Ireland's expatriate circle to have translated Paul Valéry's work. Devlin translated 'Le Cimitière Marin' and 'Les Pas' into Irish. See 'An Roilig [*sic*] ar Bhruach na Mara' and 'Na coiscémeanna'; NLI Collection No.38: *Literary Papers of Denis Devlin* MS 33,749/14 (1) and (2).
[8] Paul Valéry, *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*, translated from the French of Paul Valéry of the Académie Française by Thomas McGreevy (London: John Rodker, 1929), p.3.

taste in metaphysics was anything but quietist. The angels, too, could be found dead on arrival, as in Raphael Alberti's poem of that name ('Los ángeles muertos'), which McGreevy translated for *The European Caravan*. Neither was it 'humanistic' in any affected sense of the term. 'Yes, my dear Valéry', McGreevy confirms in a letter to the newly-elected academician, 'I know that the word "humanity" is a beautiful abstraction, damp with sentimentalities, and that if one so much as touches it the result is cascades of tears. Meanwhile, I shall continue to employ this one to indicate, without emotion, the whole of mankind, understood as an organic unity in the state in which we are living'.[9] It is out of his own experience of exile, civil war, and cultural dislocation that McGreevy writes in Valéry's confidence in order to reengage an 'organic unity' of humankind, one that might 'rais[e]the human spirit from the beast to the angels'.[10]

'Angels', dead or alive, have the precise value of a symbol in Valéry's poetry. In *The Universal Self: A Study of Paul Valéry*, Agnes Ethel Mackay argues that by '[a]nalysing the scattered differences of things, optimist without hope, idealist with one unlimited ideal, Valéry raised the human mind to the highest possible consciousness and unity; and re-established poetry to the classical status of a formal art, an art of thought, a spiritual construction. By this means he proposed for humanity a new intellectual and universal Self, of whom the Angel remains a symbol for future generations'.[11] That McGreevy was mindful of the classical status of poetry as a force for harmony, synthesis and universality is clear from his reply to Valéry's 1932 letter of appeal on behalf of the ICIC, which voices a not-so-subtle Miltonic allusion: 'Art, no longer subject to any discipline, prowls inconsolable round the paradise of rules which it has lost.'[12] McGreevy's 'Nocturne of the Self-Evident Presence', published earlier in 1926, extends a universal architecture of the self through the

[9] McGreevy to Valéry: 04/04/1932; TCD MS 7998, 94a (p.10).
[10] McGreevy to Valéry, ibid.
[11] Agnes Ethel Mackay, *The Universal Self: A Study of Paul Valéry* (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1961), p.247.
[12] McGreevy to Valéry, p.7.

tabula rasa of post-conflict disillusionment:

> I see no immaculate feet on those pavements
> No winged forms
> Foreshortened,
> As by Rubens or Domenichino,
> Plashing the silvery air,
> Hear no cars,
> Elijah's or Apollo's
> Dashing about
> Up there.
>
> I see alps, ice, stars and white starlight
> In a high, dry silence. [*CPTM* 42-43]

The space that is preserved between the speaker and the heavenly host of which he would write helps to structure the poem's search for an unconditional morality: one that is absolutely binding but ultimately mysterious. Percolating upwards towards the illumination of a collective reality or universe ('white starlight'), the 'Nocturne' culminates with the depiction of a bleak and wintry landscape. The irony that the speaker places on poetic transcendence ('plashing the silvery air') is reinforced by the visual architectonics of a ceiling that features 'no winged forms' but 'a high, dry silence'. Through the symbolism of dead or absent angels, the poem suggests the need for an intuitive order, for a faith based on instinct alone in an age of flux and transition.

In the same letter to Valéry, McGreevy examines the freedom of Christian civilisation in Europe before the nation states began to form themselves around the Thames Valley, the Île-de-France and the Castilian Plateau. Then, he claims, there was little possibility of 'exile' or misconnection: 'In that diaphanous world there were always clerks – since we must call them by their name – coming and going. They moved from Paris to Bologna or Oxford or Salamanca without any particular feeling that they were exiling themselves, no more than if they moved from Aragon to Castile, from Provence to Picardy, from the Milanese into

Venetia'.[13] It was as the emergence of 'three powerful nations' – France, England and Spain – came into being that a wedge was driven, according to McGreevy, between Christianity and the Christian, 'disintegrating the one by opposing their sovereignty to it, crushing the other by opposing their absolutism to him'.[14] Through this idealised image of the medieval Christian citizen, McGreevy's act of intellectual cooperation seeks to widen itself in view of present national commitments. 'As long as our outlook remained partial', he continues, 'our notion of order was also partial and consequently precarious – order this side of the Pyrenees, disorder on the other side! But from the day we define our boundaries – the whole earth – and our group – the whole of mankind – the problem is posed with sufficient probability of a successful solution to draw us into the effort to solve it'.[15]

Vital questions arise from the exchange between McGreevy and Valéry about the role of the nation and what form its civic particularism should take. At a time of cultural division, provincialism and censorship, the 'angel' as a symbol for future generations suggests a kin marriage of poetic insight with utopian political conviction. The question is: can any intellectual order really constitute a presence more solid and compact than certain political formations of the nation state? The concept of 'order' that McGreevy invokes in his letter to Valéry is applied in reference to an institution founded on the hope that if intellectuals could learn to cooperate then nations might follow. In the context of post-revolutionary disillusionment in Ireland and elsewhere, their correspondence seeks to defend the mind from inner partition and conflict. 'Raising the human spirit' at a particularly grave hour in the world's existence above fixed territorial interests had become a matter of elective affinities, for which the 'poet' as a visionary foreseer might assume responsibility.

[13] McGreevy to Valéry, p.3.
[14] McGreevy to Valéry, p.5.
[15] McGreevy to Valéry, p.7.

4

Past Civil War and Post Impressionism

'*Who the blazes is Glazes?*'[1]

Where the first three chapters have focused on strategies of cultural opposition in the context of poetry the fourth, fifth and sixth will focus on strategies of cultural renewal in the context of painting. The fourth chapter moves the discussion closer towards this reformist impulse by reading France and Ireland together. It studies the impact of Post Impressionism on Irish culture after the Civil War had ended (in May 1923), arguing that the formal and social direction of modern art in 1920s Paris acted in powerful ways on a peripheral cultural environment that was still in the process of achieving its cultural self-definition. The chapter addresses the late development of the Cubist style by Albert Gleizes; the public outrage that followed Mainie Jellett's first Dublin exhibition; McGreevy's inflammatory defence of her work; and the later installation of Evie Hone's *My Four Green Fields* (1939) in the entrance hall of the Government Buildings in the office of the Taoiseach. In the second half of the chapter, I examine the incorporation of visual effects in McGreevy's *Poems* (1934), asking why he should have extracted lyrical utterance from his observation of painting. Drawing on archival sources, I offer a rationale for his dialogue with the visual arts, before analysing, in greater detail, the relationship between Post Impressionism and his poetic technique. Especially interesting are the rhetorical antagonisms on which his poems shift: between three and two-dimensional surfaces, figuration and pattern, counterpoint and harmony, and immobile and mobile forms ('still life' and 'quick life').

[1] Jack Yeats was notoriously apathetic with regards to the activities of other painters. See Hilary Pyle, *Jack B. Yeats: A Biography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p.160. Nevertheless, he contributed to the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1910, the International Society in London in 1911, and the New York Armoury Show of 1913. Hilary Pyle has argued that 'the most important event […] after his death was the Post-Impressionism exhibition in the Royal Academy, London, in 1979-1980'. See Hilary Pyle, 'Jack B. Yeats, "A Complete Individualist"', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 9 (1993): 86-101 (86).

4.1: *A fine subject!* It makes one laugh

From the 1840s onwards, French painting had passed through the realism of Gustave Courbet; the Impressionism of Claude Monet; the Pointillism of Georges Seurat; the Fauvism of Henri Matisse; and the Cubism born from the long, lonely researches of Paul Cézanne. In 'Artists of Tomorrow', McGreevy notes as chief art critic for *The Studio* that

> For present-day painters, impressionism must, of necessity, be academic. Art is the most vital expression of the world at any moment of its history. But our world is not Monet's world. Neither is it Cézanne's world. Our point of departure is different, and our art must inevitably be different from theirs.[1]

At the heart of this ambition for cultural reform – and here we refer to McGreevy's conspicuous use of pronouns ('our world / 'our point of departure' / 'our art') – is a decision about how to transform public taste with artistic styles that lie beyond the recent past. Roger Fry had helped to structure the transition away from the impressionist influence with his relentless promotion of 'Post Impressionism': a term that he had coined with the secretary of the exhibition committee, Desmond McCarthy, at the 1910 and 1912 exhibitions in London (to highly sceptical British audiences). In 1912, Fry had mounted a second follow-up exhibition in an attempt to soften some of the mistrust that the British public had shown. André Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (1925), a book innovatively reworked out of his everyday journals in Paris, is useful for summarising some of the hostile reactions that accompanied the Post-Impressionist movement:

> I have often wondered by what miracle painting has gone so far ahead, and how it happens that literature has let itself be outdistanced. In painting today, just see how the '*motif*', as it used to be called, has fallen into discredit. *A fine subject!* It makes one laugh. Painters don't even dare venture on a portrait unless they can be sure of avoiding every trace of resemblance. If we manage our affairs well, and leave me alone for that, I don't ask for more than two years before a future poet will think himself dishonoured if anyone can understand a word of what he says.

[1] McGreevy, 'Artists of Tomorrow: The Annual Exhibition of Student's work at the Westminster School of Art', *The Studio* (August 1938): 110-11.

> Yes, Monsieur le Comte, will you wager? All sense, all meaning, will be considered anti-poetical. Illogicality shall be our guiding star. What a fine title for a review – *The Scavengers*![2]

Through the mouthpiece of Strouvilhou, Gide parodies the attempt to liberate art from any outer meaning or convention. The irony of the passage, which anticipates many of the aims of *transition*, consists in the expectation that poets, too, might try to detach their work from any resemblance of outward appearance. In abandoning the two most basic rules of Renaissance painting, the Post Impressionists had changed the whole face of the arts. Their first ambition was to reject the Renaissance perspective mechanism that was developed during the Florentine Quattrocento as a single 'vanishing' point or unifying source. This meant a return to the two-dimensional plane or canvas, where the subject-centred demands of classical perspective could be transformed by rotating the object of the perceiving gaze across a variety of angles and intersecting planes. Their second ambition, to which the passage above alludes, was to paint, more or less, *without* subject. By 'subject', I mean the figurative representation of things seen, such as landscape, natural objects, and people.[3] This non-representational emphasis altered art's focus to explore the materiality of the medium within which it worked. For the Cubists in particular, who were reacting against the 'formless mists' of Impressionism, this meant the discovery of a solid geometrical foundation upon which all other forms of art could be based: an exploration of the inner principle rather than the

[2] André Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, translated by Dorothy Bussy (first published, 1925; London: Cassell, 1931; reprinted 1975), p.292. Italics in the original. McGreevy reviewed Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs: Roman* and *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* from Paris for *The Criterion* in January 1928 (65-69). After he had left the French capital and returned again to London in early 1934, he claimed that '[*Les*] *Faux-Monnayeurs* may be the most representative book of the nineteen-twenties'. McGreevy, 'André Gide: Sa vie, son oeuvre', *The Criterion* (July 1934): 707-708. For an analysis on the literary relationship of Beckett and Gide while the former was based at the École Normale Supérieure, see John Bolin's 'Preserving the Integrity of Incoherence?: Dostoevsky, Gide and the Novel in Beckett's 1930 Lectures and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*', Prize Essay: *Review of English Studies* (2009) 60 (246): 515-537 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[3] When applied to literature, the term 'figurative representation' is potentially confusing. I use it here in the art-historical sense to refer to an art that is derived from real object sources or human figures and in reference to the modelling of that object or figure in a three-dimensional space. More often in literary criticism we make a distinction the other way round, defining 'figurative' uses of language as those which are *not* literal.

outward appearance.[4]

A similar rejection of classical perspective is apparent from McGreevy's 'Gioconda', where the most famous feature of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (c.1503-1519) becomes the point of her effacement, so that we are left with 'Bluish snakes slid / Into the dissolution of a smile' [*CPTM* 50]. Here the impact of Post Impressionism can be clearly felt. The poem all but removes the young Florentine woman, registering the partial loss of the subject quite literally as disfiguration, or interference, in the composition. Beckett's vague insistence on 'the breakdown of the object' in his 1934 essay 'Recent Irish Poetry' likewise implies an eager awareness of the Cubist revolution on the plastic arts [*D* 70]. The following section will connect this radical aesthetic experiment to an emerging concern with state formation. For a group of Irish writers and painters that had started to base themselves in Paris only three and a half years after the Irish Civil War had ended (in May 1923), an avant-garde interest in Post Impressionism appears to have provided fertile ground for challenging the nation's cultural climate.

Two female compatriots had left Ireland in 1920 to study in Paris, where they managed to persuade a Cubist master to take them on as pupils. Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone had begun working with Albert Gleizes three years prior to McGreevy's arrival in the French capital, though McGreevy had kept a close eye on their painting from the beginning of their time in the city. He was quick to defend Jellett's work when her first exhibition in Dublin became the object of a conservative media reaction. Academicians were dismayed when two of Jellett's paintings were exhibited at the Society of Dublin Painters in October 1923. The

[4] In a 1912 proclamation titled 'Du Cubisme', Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger had declared 'Que le tableau n'imite rien' ('Let the picture imitate nothing') (reprinted in *Modern Artists on Art*, Second Enlarged edition, ed. Robert L. Herbert (New York: Dover, 2000, pp.2-16 (p.6)). However, under the heading of his essay, 'Hommage à Mainie Jellett', ed. Eileen MacCarvill, *The Artist's Vision: Lectures and Essays on Art, with an introduction by Albert Gleizes* (Dundalk: Dundalgan, 1958, pp.25-46 (p.25)), Gleizes includes the following quotation from St. Thomas Aquinas, '*ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*' [art should imitate nature in the manner of her operation]: a citation that John Cage was later to adopt from Ananda Coomaraswamy's use of Aquinas in *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University, 1935). The Cubism to which I allude in this chapter had already been tempered by an understanding of the undesirability of abolishing natural forms.

newspaper reviews following the exhibition were especially hostile to her work. 'Æ' Russell in the *Irish Statesman* claimed that Jellett was 'a late victim to Cubism in some sub-section of this artistic malaria'.[5] The *Irish Times* even asked its readers (superciliously) 'to provide a solution' to 'Two Freak Pictures' by including her 1922 composition *Decoration* in their article:

TWO FREAK PICTURES.

ART—

One of the two Futurist Pictures by Miss Maimie Jellett at the Exhibition at No. 7 St. Stephen's Green. Our Art Critic on Saturday declared that "to me they presented an insoluble puzzle." Perhaps our readers can provide a solution.

—AND NATURE.

Not a Natural History Study, but a Picture of an Onion!

[6]

A fertile disjunction appears to have emerged here between a new artistic voice and the values of a hostile outside public. Though not particularly radical by international standards, the paintings that were exhibited in 1923 were among the first abstract compositions to be seen in Ireland. McGreevy launched an impassioned defence of Jellett's work in *The Klaxon*: a journal founded by A.J. 'Con' Leventhal that aspired 'to kick Ireland into artistic

[5] George 'Æ' Russell (initialled 'Y.O.' for his art criticism), 'Review', *Irish Statesman*: 27/10/1923.
[6] 'Two Freak Pictures' (23/10/1923) © *Irish Times*; reprinted in Bruce Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University, 1991), p.80.

wakefulness' in its first and only editorial.[7] McGreevy's essay – titled 'Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism' – is the longest in the journal. Struggling to comprehend why this form of artistic experiment should have shocked the Dublin audience, he begins by noting that

> It is ten years and more since Mrs. Duncan, the late Curator of the Municipal Art Gallery, organised two representative exhibitions of work by the leading French Post-Impressionists in Dublin, and one would have thought that by this time our young artists would have taken up, and got over, cubism, and our critics be familiar with cubism and every other kind of Post-Impressionist *ism*. But not they. Miss Jellett is the first resident artist to exhibit a cubist picture in Dublin, and our critics are as hopelessly at sea in front of her work as her benighted predecessors were about Picasso and Othon Frieze and Matisse in 1912.
>
> There is less excuse for the critics of to-day, apart from the time they have had to get used to Post-Impressionist idioms, for where Picasso, with his wicked Catalan sense of humour, called his coloured patterns 'Portrait of André Salmon', 'Miss Gertrude Stein Reading', and so on, and drove our humourless great into a gratuitous frenzy thereby, Miss Jellett calls her pictures simply 'Oil Painting' and 'Tempera Painting', so no sense of humour on the part of the critic was called for.[8]

From the outset, the passage employs the earlier timeline of Post Impressionism to measure the belatedness of the Irish media reaction. Especially damaging to national morale is the implication that 'our critics' have unwittingly aped the same standards of British dissent over a decade later. Resisting the narrow and tired provincialism that had grounded itself during the 1923 Dublin exhibition, McGreevy is quick to point out that Jellett's translation and rotation of geometrical shapes into a 'single element' in fact reveals a similarity of ideals between the *Book of Kells* (c.800) and the self-sufficiency of modern abstraction. Jellett had indeed taken inspiration from the colour harmonies in some of the single decorated letters:

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[7] See Lawrence K. Emery (pseudonym for A.J. 'Con' Leventhal), 'Confessional', *The Klaxon: An Irish International Quarterly*, 1, 1 (Winter 1923-24): 1-2 (1).
[8] McGreevy, 'Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism', *The Klaxon*: 23-27 (23); accessed TCD MS 8015/192-4; 8002/8; 10381/205.

4.1: *A fine subject!* It makes one laugh

Detail: ***Book of Kells*** **(c.800)**
[*Leabhar Cheanannais*]
Hand-ink on stretched calfskin (vellum)
Illuminated Manuscript
Initial letters S and U

Single Element **(1927)**
Mainie Jellett (1897-1944)
Oil on canvas
84 x 67.3 cm
NGI 2007.75

By highlighting the abstract patterning of space in ancient Celtic (or what we now call 'Early Christian') art McGreevy dismisses conservative perceptions of Jellett's work as something foreign or outlandishly new. Indeed throughout his essay McGreevy chooses to downplay the formal inventiveness of Jellett's paintings by tracing the aesthetic origins of her work back to the Holy Roman Empire of late antiquity. Interposing himself between the artist and the audience, he points to 'her very pleasant piece of Byzantine decoration' in front of which 'the Dublin world of criticism gasped and asked "what does it mean? What does it symbolise?" And when you told them that it meant nothing, symbolised nothing, they could only say "Why exhibit it then?"'[9] Confronting the present standards of artistic worth that are being upheld by the Irish public, McGreevy declares as if in a final bid to rescue Jellett's art from any further misguided responses:

> You might as well ask the reason why people have Adams ceilings in their houses. They mean nothing. Neither do the Book of Kells illuminations, neither does an Italian Renaissance doorway, or a 'Hicks' chair. There is pattern in all these things, and it is either beautiful pattern or it is not. The pattern in your mantelpiece may be carried out in coloured marble, the colours may be beautifully harmonised or they may not; if you are able to perceive whether they are or not, then you will be able to perceive what Miss Jellett is trying to do.[10]

What unites the examples above is the idea of painting without subject. Rather than attempt to extrapolate meaning from the outward appearance of objects, McGreevy stresses the inner principle of beauty that dictates the abstract pattern of illuminations and furnishings (to which he adds Jellett's resurgent piece of 'Byzantine decoration'). Form and colour do not have to be descriptive, literal or possessed of any other meaning, and it is with this consideration in mind that McGreevy questions the public's need to capture symbolic reality. He notes the

[9] McGreevy, 'Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism': 24. It is worth comparing McGreevy's defence of Jellett's work with W.B. Yeats's turn to Byzantine art during the mid-1920s. In an age that still revered him for the Irish Literary Revival, but was less understanding of the new direction that his work had taken, W.B. Yeats reminisces in his esoteric treatise *A Vision* (privately published in 1925) about architects and illuminators in early Byzantium (from which poets are noticeably exempt) who 'spoke to the multitude and the few alike'. *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: A Vision: The Original 1925 Version*, 13, eds. Catherine Paul and Margaret Mills Harper (New York: Scribner, 2008), pp.279-280.
[10] McGreevy, 'Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism': 24.

manner in which the geometrical foundations of Jellett's art refute the attachment of extraneous meanings: 'She is now beginning to understand what painting means, painting, that is, apart from literature or "message", or any other kind of illustration.[11]

In 'A Word on Irish Art', Jellett explains her reluctance to copy outward appearances: 'We want to delve and search for the inner meaning, the principles and reasons behind it all, particularly now as we find there is an affinity between the present-day artistic needs and the work of the early periods'.[12] I want to turn to her mentor's later development of the Cubist style in order to scrutinise the assumption that an underlying 'affinity' existed between past and present artistic needs. Drawing on recent scholarship dedicated to the early Celtic period (for which Jellett's great aunt was prolific), Gleizes had insisted in 'Le Cubisme et la Tradition' that '[a]ujourd'hui que nos vieilles origines celtiques sont mieux comprises, il nous faut saluer ceux qui ont sauvegardé et transmis, plus précieux à chaque âge, l'héritage de nos pères "les maistres d'oeuvres", et les "imagiers" du Moyen-Age: nous savons combien leur génie fut étouffé sous les importations de la Renaissance'.[13] In *Tradition et Cubisme: vers une conscience plastique*, Gleizes states emphatically that 'Dans l'histoire de notre art la pression la plus désastreuse qui fut commise, à cause de la direction malheureuse qu'elle imprima, fut incontestablement l'invasion officielle appelée la Renaissance du XVI^{e} siècle'.[14] Again, in a letter posted from the Ardèche where he had established the Moly-Sabata group,

[11] McGreevy, ibid.
[12] Mainie Jellett, 'A Word on Irish Art', ed. MacCarvill, pp.103-106 (p.105).
[13] 'Now that our old Celtic origins are better understood, it falls to us to welcome those who have preserved and passed on that which is most valuable to each era, the "masterpieces" of our forefathers, and the "image-makers" of the Middle Ages: we know just how much their genius has been stifled by the imports of the Renaissance'. Gleizes, 'Le Cubisme et la Tradition', *Montjoie!* (10/02/1913): 4. Mainie Jellett was the grand-niece of Margaret Stokes, a leading scholar of medieval and Renaissance art. That Stokes's scholarship was being assimilated in avant-garde circles at this time is evident from a letter that Ezra Pound sent to McGreevy in which he had asked his recipient on account of his connections with Reginald Grundy's fashion and arts magazine, *The Connoisseur*, whether 'the conny : sewer […] wd. be game for Stokes stuff on the Quattrocento'. Ezra Pound to Thomas McGreevy: TCD MS 8118/47. As Brita Lindberg-Seyersted has suggested in her edition of Pound's letters to Ford Madox Ford, Pound probably wrote to McGreevy from Rapallo between June and September 1932 while McGreevy was living in Paris.
[14] 'In the entire history of our art, the most disastrous influence that has befallen us, because of the unfortunate direction in which it has taken us, has been without doubt the official invasion called the Renaissance of the sixteenth century'. See Gleizes, *Tradition et Cubisme: vers une conscience plastique, articles et conférences, 1912-24* (Paris: La Cible, 1927).

Gleizes appeals to Robert Delaunay to 'cette tradition française, qui s'enfonce dans la Celtique, et qui se dénature avec la Renaissance'.[15]

Gleizes strongly resented the impact of the Italian Renaissance on French culture and its invasion of Gallic ways. For Gleizes, France's real partnership had never been with Italy, but with Ireland, and it is his two Irish pupils who most clearly represent this *alliance française* by eliminating the Renaissance perspectival mechanism from their work so that an old Celtic past might pass uninterrupted into current French experiment. Jellett goes so far as to contend in 'A Word on Irish Art' that '[i]f an Irish artist of the eighth or ninth century were to meet a present-day Cubist or non-representational painter, they would understand one another'.[16] In 'The Dual Ideal of Form Through the Ages' (1932), she charts a gyre-like momentum between the forces of 'immobile materialism' and 'mobile immaterialism', each of which is perceived to be an epiphenomenon of the other.[17] Since the Renaissance, Jellett claims, the tendency has been more and more towards realism and figuration (reaching an apex with nineteenth-century history painting and portraiture), but is now being reversed in the twentieth century by an art that strives towards a different ideal of formal expression, one that started with Paul Cézanne and has continued with Post Impressionism back towards the mobile immaterialism of the pre-Renaissance period. Having reached the point of crossover during the early 1930s, the ancient Celtic artist and present-day Cubist are able to exchange mutually comprehending glances.

Jellett combines the Cubist disapproval of the subject-centred legacy of the Renaissance with an Irish precedent of the early Christian period, where the emphasis had been to fill a specified area with interlacing patterns (the 'subject' being of secondary importance). In 'A Word on Irish Art', she connects 'the sense of filling and decorating a

[15] Gleizes to Delaunay (c.1932): 'This French tradition, which roots itself the Celtic, and which misidentifies itself with the Renaissance'. *Correspondance entre Albert Gleizes et Robert et Sonia Delaunay (1926-47)*, par Association des Amis d'Albert Gleizes c/o Mme Dalban (Ampuis, 1993), p.13.
[16] Jellett, 'A Word on Irish Art', ed. MacCarvill, p.105.
[17] Jellett, 'Modern Art and the Dual Ideal of Form Through the Ages', *Motley* 1.5 (October 1932): 7-11.

given space rhythmically and harmoniously' with 'Irish work', and compares the non-realist metalwork of the 1920s to the Celtic High Crosses, a relationship that Jellett, like McGreevy, traces through the non-material elements of Byzantine art and the visual culture of early Catholic Europe.[18] It is in this context that McGreevy praises 'Jellett and Hone' as the 'first' to bring into Irish painting 'the principles and the idiom of the modern French approach to the painter's problems'.[19] That 'modern French approach' – namely, painting without subject – is vital to the perception of consistency between contemporary Cubist abstraction and Ireland's early native culture.

It was not only in the immediate aftermath of the Dublin exhibition that McGreevy wrote in support of Jellett's work. One can still hear the resilience that he had shown in defending her achievement in 'Fifty Years of Irish Painting, 1900-1950'. There McGreevy refers back to the initial reception of her art in 1923, stressing that 'as time went on, it became clear that Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone had accepted the new Parisian canons in art, not at all in order to *épater les bourgeois*, but purely with a view to submitting themselves to a rigorous discipline which, eliminating the merely journalistic element in painting, concentrated on aesthetic essentials'.[20] McGreevy rejects any sportive enthusiasm for the activist moment, drawing attention instead to qualities of refinement and discipline. For the *Irish Times* (the same paper that had featured Jellett's 'Two Freak Pictures'), he observes with pleased irony that 'what Paris had to teach such artists as Nano Reid, Mainie Jellett, Norah McGuinness, Frances Kelly, Grace Henry … and others of the Dublin painters, was to be, the highest degree of consciousness of which they were capable, their Irish selves'.[21] The critical discourse in this instance approaches the Parisian influence as a powerful idiom through which a subject of national appeal *could* be interpreted: not, we note, as a definition

[18] Jellett, 'A Word on Irish Art', ed. MacCarvill, pp.103-106.
[19] McGreevy, 'Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett', TCD MS 8002/4 (c.1942).
[20] McGreevy, 'Fifty Years of Irish Painting, 1900-1950', TCD MS 8002/13 (p.9).
[21] McGreevy, *Irish Times* (06/02/1942).

of 'Irishness' held up in advance for thematic exposition.[22] It is the *act* and not the object of interpreting a subject of importance for them and their countrymen that galvanises the public reputation of these female artists away from a prior or assumed patronage in the direction of 'their Irish selves'.

Again for the *Irish Times*, McGreevy draws attention to the fact that many of the nation's most progressive artists are unofficially housed as women. In 'A Lively Exhibition, Water-Colour Society', he argues that it is female painters who have 'buried the hatchet between experimental talents and academic'.[23] In 'Living Art – A New Departure', written once again for the *Irish Times* after the first Irish Exhibition of Living Art had opened in Dublin in September 1943, McGreevy focuses on Mainie Jellett as the chairman of the IELA, recognising her long battle to promote modern art in Ireland. 'The IELA', he argues, is the 'fulfilment of her most cherished ambition' and 'the most vital and distinguished exhibition of work by Irish artists that has ever been held'.[24] By the time that the Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings was opened at the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in 1962, Jellett had reached levels of public acclaim unrecognisable from that of her initial Dublin reception.

[22] As McGreevy takes care to point out in *The Klaxon*, 'So far as the aesthetic value of [Jellett's] work is concerned, it is of no consequence whether it is done in Paris, in Dublin, or in Ballydehob'. McGreevy, 'Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism': 26.
[23] McGreevy, 'A Lively Exhibition, Water-Colour Society', *Irish Times* (30/03/1943): 3.
[24] McGreevy, 'Living Art – A New Departure', *Irish Times* (16/09/1943): 3.

Photograph: The opening of the Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Mainie Jellett at the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, July-October 1962. McGreevy is pictured here (far right) with Mainie Jellett's sister, Bay Jellett; the Chief of Justice and future President, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh; and with President Éamon De Valera. © The Estate of Thomas McGreevy.

Though Jellett's compositions had initially provoked outrage from her target audience, it soon became recognised after her death that she had realised an underlying consistency between Cubist abstraction and the traditions of Ireland's native culture.[25] As home-staying exiles, both Jellett and Hone continued to acknowledge their roles within the national landscape, even if they abjured the narrowing of its cultural foundations. While McGreevy did not share Jellett's confidence in the innate superiority of the flat surface over three-dimensional modes of presentation, he was aware of the manner in which the core features of Post Impressionism – namely, the dis- or non-figuration of the subject, the abstraction of natural forms into pattern, and the refusal of classical perspective – had allowed her to

[25] Jellett's controversial painting *Decoration* (1923) was bequeathed to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1955 (NGI 1326).

present new infusions of cultural material to a public that still found her Cubist aesthetic bewildering.

McGreevy would later translate an essay by Gleizes on Jellett in August 1948 for a publication honouring the life of the Irish painter.[26] The essay is counter-signed 'Les Majades', the name of the Cubist group to which Gleizes had retired surrounded by his disciples in Saint-Remy-de-Provence. In this brief but perceptive article, the Cubist master reflects on the 'essential principle' of his work since the 1911 exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants. 'The *recall to order*', he states, 'was, no doubt, merely the most obvious feature of the Cubist movement […] when the very principle of classical art was quickly dissolving into formless mists, striking but slapdash, which justified themselves by invoking the individual's right to do what he liked'.[27] Where the tyranny of Renaissance perspective is vividly attributed by Gleizes to the politics of individual caprice, the Cubist aptitude for bestowing harmony and equilibrium serves as the restorative impulse towards social order. We recall that Jellett and Evie Hone had decided to approach Gleizes in Paris during the early 1920s when Ireland was struggling to find its national independence after a bitter civil war. Hone's *My Four Green Fields*, which was commissioned by the Irish Government's Department of Industry and Commerce, now occupies the main window in the entrance hall of the Government Buildings in the office of the Taoiseach.

[26] McGreevy, 'Notes', TCD MS 8002/5. As can be inferred from McGreevy's index to the chapter and from further annotations in his hand, his contribution to Eileen MacCarvill's 1958 edition on Jellett extended beyond his translation of Gleizes. 'After the death of Mainie Jellett [in 1944]', he writes, 'her friends asked me to edit her lectures and articles on contemporary art, for publication as a book.' McGreevy, Preparations for Eileen MacCarvill's volume on Mainie Jellett, TCD MS 8002/6-7. McGreevy turned down an offer from Faber & Faber who, through T.S. Eliot, had invited him to submit a manuscript, preferring the struggle to get MacCarvill's volume published in Ireland.

[27] Albert Gleizes, 'Hommage à Mainie Jellett', ed. MacCarvill, p.25 [McGreevy's translation; italics in the original]. Gleizes spent much of his subsequent career explaining how timid his aspirations had really been, and argued that the aims of the group had been skied by their public reception. Not all of the artists involved in the 1911 exhibition shared this opinion.

4.1: *A fine subject!* It makes one laugh

Photograph: Second Day of the Queen's State Visit to Ireland in May 2011
(From left to right): President Enda Kenny; Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore; Queen Elizabeth II; Gilmore's wife. © Rex Features

Gleizes's late development of the Cubist style appears to have supplied Jellett and Hone with powerful tools for reforming the national culture. If an engagement with Post Impressionism after the violence of military conflict enabled these two artists to reconnect their work with the needs of the state, then it also presented McGreevy (a veteran of war) with new possibilities for lyrical expression. An extensive knowledge of the visual arts appears to have furnished McGreevy with a wider set of initiatives for confronting the recent past before he became an art historian on the international stage. The following section will explore McGreevy's dialogue with painting as a response to the leftovers of political preoccupation that had narrowed the expression of Ireland as a cultural construct. It argues that McGreevy's strongest reason for engaging with the visual arts at all was to revitalise the ties between Ireland and mainland Europe.

4.2: Wild goose of the pen

Daniel Corkery had cemented his position as part of the Free State's educational orthodoxy following his appointment in 1930 as Professor of English at University College Cork. That Corkery's role was a significant one for directing the educational policy of the country is evident from the responses of a number of contemporary writers, including Seán O'Faoláin, who remonstrated that 'all that is behind our system of education in the modern Ireland, much that enthuses and supports all our more fervent politics, has come out of his books and lecturings [*sic*]'.[1] In his 1931 study, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, Corkery singles out McGreevy as 'one of the wild geese of the pen'.[2] The term 'wild geese' refers to a group of Irish soldiers who left Ireland after the Williamite war to serve as mercenaries in continental armies across Europe. Here it is intended spitefully by Corkery to animate popular consent against the poet's British military background and European sympathies.

McGreevy refers to this passage in a lecture to the Irish Society at Oxford, observing that 'Professor Corkery names me as a wild goose with the rest, so I may perhaps – with all the protestations of modesty that the protocol demands after citing such an array of august names – suggest to him that it is not only in Cork, or even in Ireland, that Irishness may be developed; that I did not, of necessity, become less Irish in my mind during the six years I spent eating the not invariably sweet bread and climbing the sometimes quite bitter stairs – those to the fifth floor of a Latin Quarter hotel for instance – on the mainland of Europe'.[3]

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[1] Seán O'Faoláin, 'Daniel Corkery', *Dublin Magazine* (new series), 11, 2 (April-June 1936): 61.
[2] See Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931), p.4.
[3] McGreevy, 'A Cultural Irish Republic' (1934), TCD MS 8003/9, p.13. The *Dublin Magazine* published Patrick O'Hegarty's response to Corkery's *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* in its January-March 1932 edition, which is worth comparing with McGreevy's response to the same book. As an Irish language enthusiast and Gaelic League activist in London at the start of the century, O'Hegarty's nationalist credentials make his extreme distaste for Corkery's work especially interesting. O'Hegarty's objection to the study – which he did not even acknowledge as 'a book of criticism' but 'of propaganda' – provides a clear indication of the ideological fault-line that had developed in Irish republican politics at this stage between liberal-romantic standards of freedom (dating back to Wolfe Tone) and a racially exclusive sectarianism. See O'Hegarty, 'A Review of Daniel Corkery's *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*', 7, 1 (January-March 1932): 51-56.
[3] McGreevy, 'A Cultural Irish Republic' (1934), TCD MS 8003/9, p.13.

The timing of this lecture (November 1934) is significant since the paper was delivered in the same month that McGreevy's inaugural and only collection of *Poems* was published in New York. Though he was sympathetic to parts of Irish-Ireland ideology, McGreevy did not believe that a separatist impulse should be confined to physical and linguistic terrain. While distancing himself from the exaggerated polemic of Corkery's 1931 study, McGreevy reveals an important subtext for his decision to align his poetry with painting: 'That nationality in art does not depend only on language is most evident in the history of painting. For the means of expression, the technique, in painting is practically the same all over Europe'.[4]

McGreevy was a fluent speaker of Irish, French and English, yet he invokes art history as the most powerful corrective for Corkery's short-sightedness on the language question.[5] References to the visual arts abound in his desire to expose the internal inconsistencies in the Irish Gaelic activist's thinking: 'Claude, without even knowing France outside of Lorraine, was so French that he is still an inspiration to all French landscape painters'.[6] Of John Hogan – the sculptor who executed the colossal statue of Daniel O'Connell, which now stands in the Dublin City Hall – McGreevy notes that 'for more than twenty years in Italy he stayed, taking only a very occasional holiday at home and returning for good only in 1848'.[7] Though Corkery and McGreevy are not so different in the spiritual narratives that they ascribe to a revolutionary people, the methods through which they seek to secure popular and national expression actively conflict with one another. McGreevy's avant-garde crossing of media transmutes the adversarial impulse by charting new directions for nationality outside of language.

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[4] McGreevy, ibid.
[5] McGreevy's opposition to Corkery's monocular nationalism bears comparison with James Joyce's convictions expressed a quarter of a century previously when he had suggested in a letter to his brother Stanislaus that 'If the Irish programme did not insist on the Irish language [then] I suppose I could call myself a nationalist'. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce: 06/11/06; *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), p.125.
[6] McGreevy, 'A Cultural Irish Republic', p.13.
[7] McGreevy, 'Some Statues by John Hogan', *The Father Mathew Record* (August 1943): 5-6.

4.2: Wild goose of the pen

While an expertise in painting appears to have given him lasting prominence as a public figure on the international stage, McGreevy's small volume of *Poems* (1934), now out of print, has failed to connect him with any wider literary public. In many circles today, he remains better known as an art historian than a poet. The mention of a slim literary corpus can attract some surprise. The situation in Ireland has altered of late with the recent publication of a dozen articles on his life and work, yet most attempts to engage with his poetry have been written commemoratively without any unified conceptual purpose.[8] The current revival in his reputation has provided little explanation, for example, as to *why* he extracted lyrical utterance from his observation of painting. The rest of this section will therefore consider the relationship between Post Impressionism and McGreevy's poetic technique. One can trace the formal connections between Jellett's work and McGreevy's own in the following poem, titled 'Promenade à Trois':

> I was much watched by the afternoon.
> His eyes are black
> Hers blue –
> The afternoon's elementals.
>
> Now I am black and blue all over. [*CPTM* 47]

As is evident from the opening line, nothing is permitted to remain outside the field of observation; rather, the 'I' is rotated like an object under the colour of competing gazes. At no point is the speaker the viewing subject. Rather the speaker is 'bruised' by the lovers's stare. The sight invades the seer and the seer relinquishes command, entailing a critical reversal of perspectives. The final line exerts no unifying force at which '[t]he afternoon's elementals' may converge, but remains within a flat two-dimensional plane: 'Now I am black and blue all over'. The interaction of the speaker with the surface of the canvas registers the living movement of colour as felt life, seen through the 'eyes' of lovers rather than as a scene

[8] See *The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy: A Critical Reappraisal*, ed. Susan Schreibman (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

distanced and formalised by the imposition of perspective. It is this sense of participation, of fully implicated posture, that allows the poem to play on the suggestion of a *ménage à trois.* The speaker of this poem is punning on a style of painting whose spatial correlative is the representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional canvas.

As well as questioning the physical reality of an opaque exterior, it is worth observing how McGreevy's poetry challenges the presentation of a stable, unified subject. James Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother* (1871) was a classic portrait type that was extremely popular among the symbolists, the success of which lies in its combination of intimate realism, sombre colouring, and powerful use of profile:

***Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother* (1871)**
James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)
Oil on Canvas
144.3 cm × 162.4 cm
© Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The poem is unique in McGreevy's 1934 collection of poems in that it actually responds to a single painting. However, the poem 'Arrangement in Gray and Black' possesses none of the features that we might expect from Whistler's portrait:

> *To the memory of a student of*
> *François de Sales*
>
> The delicate form is shrinking.
> She has not much longer to wait.
>
> Love failed her.[9]
> Life always fails.
>
> Her faith?
>
> A hope
> Of unfailing life
> In unfailing love. [*CPTM* 53]

The speaker deliberately omits the subject from the title, drawing attention instead to the arrangement of tonal harmonies. The subject – a dying nun in prayer – is drawn into the consecutive full stops that follow each of the first four lines. The turn of the fifth line – 'Her faith?' – contrasts this formal attenuation of the nun's body with her preparation for the life to come. A gradual affirmation of religious experience arises out of this interplay of death and waiting. It is here that I wish to contrast McGreevy's response to abstract developments in painting with that of his contemporary, Louis MacNeice. In MacNeice's 'Eclogue for Christmas' (1933), Speaker A identifies himself with Picasso's Harlequin:

> And so it has gone on; I have not been allowed to be
> Myself in flesh or face, but abstracting and dissecting me
> They have made of me pure form, a symbol or a pastiche
> Stylised profile, anything but soul and flesh.[10]

[9] The poem is dedicated to a follower of the Catholic saint who established the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary.
[10] Louis MacNeice, 'Eclogue to Christmas' (December 1933), *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter McDonald (Faber & Faber: London, 2007): 3-4.

That McGreevy was familiar with this objection is evident from his translation of Gleizes's essay on Mainie Jellett, which reformulates, and anticipates, a general version of this protest: 'Does the suppression of figurative representation not take the human value out of painting? Is the sensibility of the painter not running to its own destruction?'[11] Earlier, in his defence of Jellett's 1924 Dublin Exhibition from a conservative media reaction, McGreevy had pointed out in his own words that 'Picasso is painting women's portraits with superb confidence in the artistic quality of his work. And they are finer portraits than those he painted before he schooled himself in Cubism. The Picasso intellect does not obtrude itself. He has readjusted the balance between it and his visual sense.'[12] MacNeice's didactic complaint runs counter to McGreevy's observation of the later Picasso portraits in which the artist's engagement with Cubist experiment is seen to have refined the human balance of his work. McGreevy adds that 'only the aesthetically thick-skinned see in [Picasso's] return to figure painting a confession of the error of his recent ways.'[13] Unlike MacNeice, McGreevy chooses neither to oppose the sensibility of the painter nor to maintain a singular view of the artist's development. While MacNeice and McGreevy may both have harnessed reservations about the desirability of a purely significant form, the latter's engagements with art history in Paris from 1927 to 1933 arguably gave him deeper insight into the human complexity of contemporary figurative and non-figurative work.[14]

McGreevy's 'Did Tosti Raise His Bowler Hat?' plays on the idea of a purely significant form:

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[11] 'Est-ce que la suppression des represéntations figurées habituelles n'enlèverait pas à la peinture sa valeur humaine? Est-ce que la sensibilité du peintre ne courrait pas à sa perte?' Gleizes, 'Hommage à Mainie Jellett', ed. MacCarvill, p.27.
[12] McGreevy, 'Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism', p.25.
[13] McGreevy, ibid.
[14] This is not to depreciate MacNeice's understanding of Post Impressionism, which was mediated by his friendship with Anthony Blunt during the 1930s. See Tom Walker, '"Even A Still Life is Alive": Visual Art and Bloomsbury Aesthetics in the Early Poetry of Louis MacNeice', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 38, 3 (2009): 196-213.

What to say when they ask you
White to black
Black to white

White as lime white
(A trap)
Ireland
Slate blue and white
(Saved)

It is now goodbye, goodbye,
Goodbye to goo-oo-oodbye
Goodbye to black [*CPTM* 37]

'White' and 'black' are substituted here for Francesco Paolo Tosti's song, 'Bid Me Good-bye!' (c.1888).[15] A reactive principle ('What to say when they ask you') omits the 'I' completely from the poem so that the expected dialogue can occur only between tonal harmonies. In order to understand McGreevy's peculiar insistence on colour, I want to turn to Wassily Kandinsky's writings on the spiritual in abstract art. That Kandinsky's aesthetic theory was a topic of conversation within Ireland's avant-garde circle is evident from letters of exchange between McGreevy, Reavey and Beckett.[16] According to Kandinsky, 'white' and 'black' are the governing poles of birth and death between which all the primary colours can be rotated in correspondence.[17] A vital part of Kandinsky's theorem is the need to establish an inner harmony according to the antithetical movement of colours. In 'Did Tosti Raise His Bowler Hat?', the speaker reacts against a sense of loss and disappearance ('Goodbye to black') by tying the correspondence of colours back to the representational aesthetics of the nation: 'Ireland / Slate blue and white / (Saved)'. 'Blue' and 'white' are associated

[15] Along with salon music of the *belle époque*, the poem's alternating colour scheme resonates darkly with the saying 'Good-bye to all that': the title of Robert Graves's 1929 autobiography of the First World War.
[16] See chapter three (section one) of this thesis for more information about this avant-garde trio and their group dynamics in Paris. Beckett wrote to McGreevy on 21/02/1938 after the latter had attended the Kandinsky Exhibition at the Guggenheim Jeune, requesting details on the exhibition [*TLSB* 608]. Beckett would later meet Kandinsky in person two months after the start of the Second World War, describing him as a 'Sympathetic old Siberian' to George and Gwynedd Reavey [06/12/1939; *TLSB* 670]. Beckett's engagement with the Russian artist extends to an essay commissioned by The Galerie Maeght in Paris, in which he questions whether the painter can ever be set free from the demands of representation (an objective that Kandinsky had sought to fulfil by placing a special emphasis on the abstract values of colours). See Beckett, 'Peintres de l'empêchement', *Derrière le Miroir*, 11-12 Juin 1948 (Paris: Galerie Maeght / Editions Pierre à Feu): 3-7 [*D* 133-137].
[17] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, translated by Michael T.H. Sadler (Munich 1912; London: Tate Modern, 2006), p.82. See Figure III.

traditionally with the colours of the Virgin Mary.

Overall, McGreevy's *Poems* tend to focus obsessively on the recessional aspects of a 'deep', 'winter', 'gleaming' or 'slate' blue [*CPTM* 39; *CPTM* 2; *CPTM* 36; *CPTM* 37], which Kandinsky notes for its concentric movement away from the spectator.[18] It is worth noting, too, that 'white' was not necessarily considered by Post Impressionists as a non-colour. Rather, it was more often regarded as the symbol of a world from which all colour as a definite attribute had been drained, or rendered mute. Alive to that sense of contradiction, McGreevy uses colour in tandem with the violent reality by which it is mediated. While the pauses in Beethoven's Seventh Symphony appear to have attracted Beckett's aural imagination with their pregnant possibility, McGreevy is drawn to a 'white' that has the appeal of the nothingness before birth – an ice-age world full of 'Freezing comfort' as it is variously described in 'Fragments' and 'Nocturne of the Self-Evident Presence'. In 'Gloria de Carlos V', a *transition* poem named after the Titian masterpiece that McGreevy had seen in Madrid, even the purest moment of transfiguration is produced out of 'starch white streaked with cadaver black', reflecting the deaths of those without gas masks and the grotesques of Matthias Grünewald [*CPTM* 36].[19] As such, McGreevy's aesthetics can be heard as the 'white noise' of a shell-shocked background. The death of an airman is depicted in a manner dissonantly picturesque in 'De Civitate Hominum':

> *To A.S.F.R.* [20]
>
> The morning sky glitters
> Winter blue
> The earth is snow-white,
> With the gleam snow-white answers to sunlight,

[18] Kandinsky, ibid., p.72. See Figure I.
[19] McGreevy, 'Transcript of TCD Tape 106' (recording of his poetry reading in the Widener Library at Harvard), TCD MS 10082/15: 'I am a little proud of the fact that when I associated the names of Picasso and Grünewald in order to contrast their effective nightmares, with Titian's realisation of ideal beauty, I did not know that Picasso had studied Grünewald's great Crucifixion at Colmar, and that it inspired him to a remarkable series of drawings directly related to the picture'.
[20] The poem is dedicated to Alexander Stewart Frère Reeves, who served in the Royal Flying Corps during WW1. He was the managing director of Heinemann when McGreevy's *Poems* was first published in May 1934.

Save where shell-holes are new,
Black spots in the whiteness –

A Matisse ensemble.

The shadows of whitened tree stumps
Are another white.

And there are white bones.

Zillebeke Lake and Hooge,
Ice gray, gleam differently,

Like the silver shoes of the model.

The model is our world.
Our bitch of a world.
Those who live between wars may not know
But we who die between peaces
Whether we die or not.

It is very cold
And, what with my sensations
And my spick and span subaltern's uniform,
I might be the famous brass monkey,
The *nature morte* accessory.

Morte . . .!
'Tis still life that lives,
Not quick life –

There are fleece-white flowers of death
That unfold themselves prettily
About an airman
Who, high over Gheluvelt,
Is taking a morning look round,
All silk and silver
Up in the blue.

I hear the drone of an engine
And soft pounding puffs in the air
As the fleece-white flowers unfold.

I cannot tell which flower he has accepted
But suddenly there is a tremor,
A zigzag of lines against the blue
And he streams down
Into the white,
A delicate flame,
A stroke of orange in the morning's dress.

My sergeant says, very low, 'Holy God!
'Tis a fearful death'.

Holy God makes no reply
Yet. [*CPTM* 2-3]

The poem is less about the airman than the set of images that his death brings to mind. An antithetical correspondence is arranged between colours in view of the flickering poles of life

and death that are described in the first stanza ('With the gleam snow-white answers to sunlight / Save where shell-holes are new, / Black spots in the whiteness –'). The 'orange' burning aircraft is also traced in counterpoint, zigzagging its fall '*against* the blue' and '*into* the white'. The 'stroke of orange in the morning's dress' recalls the association of 'blue' with the Virgin Mary and as a background or ceiling for the deliverance of Christian prayer. The slippage of 'white' across various symbolic registers ('whiteness', 'whitened') gives the poem an uncanny coherence when pitched against the recessional qualities of 'blue', from the merging of snow, bones, burnt-out tree stumps, clouds and engine-smoke to the graphological disjunction in the gaps of the page between the line-breaks. Pausing on the final 'Yet', the reader is asked to balance this scheme of death and continuing life.

Unlike W.B. Yeats's 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' (1919) where the speaker's voice is that of the airman, the chance of the airman's heavenly deliverance is witnessed from below in a manner that casts further reflection on the awkward condition of bystanding.[21] Stevens's famous meditation on 'white' in 'The Snow Man' (1923) provides a comparable instance of emotion recollected in freezing comfort. McGreevy wrote to Wallace Stevens during the 1950s recalling one line of 'The Snow Man' in particular: 'for "not to think of any misery in the sound of the wind" had been meaning things to me for a little while back and I thought of the Prophets as I went back again and again [to] the last words of "The Novel", "as if to know became the fatality of seeing things too well".'[22] McGreevy was stationed near Geluveld, a town in the Ypres Salient northeast of Zillebeke Lake, with the Thirteenth Division Artillery when he witnessed the fatal bombardment of the British pilot by German forces, and it is noticeable that the 'I' of 'De Civitate Hominum' remains within the

[21] See W.B. Yeats 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' (1919), *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: Everyman's Library, 1992; Variorum edition first published, 1957), pp.184-185.
[22] McGreevy to Stevens: 21/09/1950; *HLMD WAS* 152. Wallace Stevens was well acquainted with Post-Impressionist painting on account of his Harvard acquaintance, Walter Arensburg, who knew Albert Gleizes personally. See Bonnie Costello, 'Stevens and Painting', *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, ed. John N. Serio (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), pp.164-179 (p.166). During the 1940s, Stevens and McGreevy exchanged copies of exhibition catalogues to one another from across the Atlantic.

dress code of a junior officer of the Royal Field Artillery ('my spick and span subaltern uniform').[23] Yet it is the distance of the speaker from the spectacle that is continually stressed in the poem. An explosion of colour marks the actual bombardment. Bomb-clouds are described as 'fleece-white flowers of death'. Stan Smith is right to expand the conceit of the silver-shoed model with 'our bitch of a world' to the manner in which the invisible airman is forced to accept 'the flowers of flak as an actress might accept a bouquet'.[24] Zillebeke Lake and the Hooge crater (which blasted the lake that once existed there into the landscape), are compared with the disembodied gleam of a model's footwear.

The incorporation of visual effects alters the reader's present conception of reality so as to unsettle his or her human instinct, driving a wedge between the reader's active engagement and the pre-rehearsed emotional response. The confusion arises from the way in which the poet employs colour decoratively, for purely illustrative effect, as well as symbolically, with human suggestion: as in 'fleece-white', 'ice gray', and 'winter blue'. The speaker calls this opening arrangement 'A Matisse ensemble' after one of the most gifted colourists of the Post-Impressionist period. Yet the bones and stumps of a war zone sit with deliberate unease beside *les fauves* or 'wild beasts' of modern art. The reference to '*nature morte*' is similarly ambivalent, and plays on the softened translation of the English, 'still life': a translation that, unable to match the French *double entendre*, resonates with particular irony in the context of war. As the '*nature morte* accessory', the speaker's observation of the event forfeits the immediacy of personal shock in order to furnish a distant background of death.

It is at this point that we might view the poem as, in effect, a deliberately failed still life, the very meaning of which changes over the course of the poem from the ending of death

[23] McGreevy, drafts of 'Memoirs', pp.342-345. The Irish portrait painter William Orpen was also stationed there. Orpen's painting *Zonnebeke* (1918) and poem 'The Church, Zillebeke' (October 1918) offer instructive contrasts with McGreevy's treatment of the landscape. See Gerald Dawe, *Earth Voices Whispering: An Anthology of Irish War Poetry, 1914-1945*, (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2008), p.46.
[24] Stan Smith, 'Living to Tell the Tale: Fallon, Clarke, McGreevy, Coffey', *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity: Ireland Between Fantasy and History* (Dublin: Irish Academic, 2005), p.45.

to an extended temporality. The final 'Yet' stresses the horrible callowness of the occasion and the total inadequacy of the sergeant's response. As Stan Smith comments, 'Human reaction is itself framed, made redundant, by a movement which situates the subject as a function of the landscape'.[25] By highlighting the condition of transfer between verbal and visual mediums, the speaker attempts to reconcile a sense of Judaeo-Christian order, which concerns the light and birth of the world, with the realities of disappearance and loss.

In a 1925 letter to George Yeats, McGreevy refers to the Cubist scenography of *The Three Cornered Hat* for which Picasso had designed the sets and costumes. Enclosed in the same letter is the following extract from a poem later titled 'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost':

> And this –
> Light
> On a towering wall,
> Villages in the vast, high, light-beaten plain
> And you and I
> Thinking of poetry – [26]

What this mental projection of a Picasso décor onto a white-washed wall reveals is another process of delay or forestalment. The effect of the preposition – 'of' – distances the speaker from the condition of verse that is stated as an objective: a separation that implies the failure of poetry itself. Many of the poems in this 1934 collection anticipate a sense of miscarriage by foregrounding precisely what is lost in transference between the canvas and the page. As we have seen from readings of 'Promenade à Trois', 'Arrangement in Gray and Black', 'Did Tosti Raise His Bowler Hat' and 'De Civitate Hominum', McGreevy is concerned less with replicating visual sources than with highlighting the sorts of aesthetic ambiguities upon which his poems are founded. A sense of belatedness, or 'grayness', underlines his use of colour from the final 'Yet' in 'De Civitate Hominum' to the conviction in 'Epithalamium' that '(All

[25] Stan Smith, 'Living to Tell the Tale: Fallon, Clarke, McGreevy, Coffey', p.44.
[26] 'The enclosed [recto] suggested by the Picasso & a white-washed wall in a little restaurant about a fortnight ago'. McGreevy to George Yeats: 03/12/1925; NLI MS 30.859.

discovery thus far / Had been such cold, unsignifying prelude)'[27] For an ex-junior officer who had grown out of his 'spick and span subaltern uniform', poetry was perhaps, indeed, 'the *nature morte* accessory'.

[27] McGreevy, 'Epithalamium', TCD MS MF 7989/2, 3.

5

A Genealogy of the Irish Painter

After the publication of his collected poems in 1934, McGreevy would not write any further verse until the 1960s. Though he continued to correspond about poetry, he began to turn his eye exclusively to the visual arts.[1] In this chapter, I proceed from McGreevy's recruitment of the visual as a source for lyrical utterance to a reading of individual artists and paintings. By reflecting on what painting could do with national politics that the lyric could not, I scrutinise the ambition of the former poet to find a new national art of painting. The chapter interrogates McGreevy's 1938 monograph on Jack Yeats, the first to be completed on the artist, much of which was written in London but published with a postscript in Dublin in 1945. It also examines numerous essays and newspaper articles that he wrote during the 1930s and 40s at home and abroad. Through an inspection of the language and assumptions of his art criticism, I highlight McGreevy's efforts to find a cultural alternative to an official state-driven nationalism. It is in this sense that I outline a 'genealogy' of the Irish painter: one that proceeds directly from the false starts, paradoxes and reversals in the nation's cultural identity to redeem certain lines of development from the perspective of a revolutionary people (or 'petit peuple'). The chapter focuses on McGreevy's reconstruction of Jack Yeats as a painter of national significance and Beckett's resistance to this, though it also reads the paintings of the artist independently from that reconstruction.

[1] As Tara Stubbs has shown in '"So kind you are, to bring me this gift": Thomas McGreevy, American Modernists and the "Gift" of Irishness', McGreevy sought to 'keep up nearer to the margin' of poetry through his correspondence with American modernist poets [*TMCR* 227-241]. See McGreevy to Babette Deutsch: 05/11/1946; *WUL* MS 034 (Box 1, Folder 3). McGreevy also sent copies of his artistic monographs to American poets (including Marianne Moore, to whom he sent his study on Nicolas Poussin). See TCD MS 8121/9.

5.1: How to escape a language

As we have seen from the manner in which the lyric voice falters in the poetry of Devlin, Beckett and McGreevy, a sense of disaffiliation from the new nation had ruptured the lyrical subject in internal division.[1] The implied failure of poetry is evident from McGreevy's experiment with the lyric, which absorbs the reaction of the speaking subject and highlights the inadequacy of the spoken word as opposed to purely visual imagery.[2] McGreevy's monograph on Jack Yeats, which was written four years after the publication of his *Poems*, was extremely unusual in Ireland. It was financed independently by Jack Yeats's London agent, Victor Waddington, who had begun representing the artist's work during the early 1940s. In the early stages of the monograph, McGreevy refers to a symbiosis of poetry and national identity that once existed, but which is no longer apparent. 'In the life of Ireland', he argues, 'fact and poetry have parted company' [*JBY* 27]. What is striking, here, is less the opposition of the two than the imbalance that McGreevy perceives after an earlier *esprit de corps*.[3] The passage suggests the filing down of Irish reality to the fact of external existence on the one hand and inner personal meaning on the other. Where the realm of fact is dim, inert and lifeless, poetry serves as a medium of illumination, demanding that past incidents become available to a supervening, light-giving consciousness. 'Jack Yeats's work', McGreevy continues, 'became a passionate recall to poetry – to the splendour of essential truth' [*JBY* 27].

Throughout his critical discourse on Jack Yeats, McGreevy depends on such notions as the 'essential' and 'true': ideals that are consistently reinforced in terms of 'poetry'. There are two points that I want to clarify in this connection. The first concerns McGreevy's desire

[1] See chapter 1.4 of this thesis.
[2] See chapter 4.2 of this thesis.
[3] In 'How Does She Stand?' – a title that refers to the uncertainty of Ireland's cultural position – McGreevy argues that 'the tide of great poetry receded precisely as the great national stir of the early years of the century subsided and the unified movement that was the outward manifestation of it disintegrated'. See *The Father Mathew Record* (September 1949): 3.

to express a common humanity in an age during which authority and consciousness have been forcibly divided by censorship. The second point of relevance concerns his ambition to find an embodied or discursive meaning – one that refuses the inner division of Devlin and Beckett's collections of the late 1930s, *Intercessions* and *Echo's Bones*.[4] Both of these considerations provide the background for an attempt to recover the collective solidarity that had disappeared from the lyric once the avant-garde had become detached from the popular writings of street balladeers, like William McBurney's *The Croppy Boy, A Ballad of '98* (1845).

In the same year that the Irish Free State was founded, Jack Yeats had argued in a speech delivered to the Celtic Race Congress in Paris that 'the roots of True Art are in the affections; no true artist can stand aloof'.[5] McGreevy cites this lecture in his 1938 monograph on Jack Yeats, affirming that 'At the Celtic Race Congress in Paris in 1923, he read a paper in which he gave it as his opinion that the most stirring sights in the world are a man ploughing and a ship on the sea. He still paints the people, and with an even more passionate directness in recent years than in his earlier days' [*JBY* 26]. In 1928 alone, Jack Yeats had completed three pictures of Dublin workmen: *Quaysiders, The Readers* and *Dinner Hour at the Docks*. The perceived decline of the lyric as a repository of public feeling contrasts with the capacity of 'True Art' to remove the perception of distance between the self and society. In these artworks, which are all focused on workers in the midst of daily activities (*Dinner Hour at the Docks* features a docker carefully peeling a banana while sheltering from the rain), it is possible to see how the 'passionate directness' that McGreevy ascribes to Jack Yeats and his painted subjects might be used to consecrate a wider community.

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[5] Jack Yeats, 'The Future of Painting in Ireland', NLI: Jack B. Yeats Archive / Yeats Museum Y17-1 (four-page typescript).

***Dinner Hour at the Docks* (1928)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on panel
23.5 x 36.5 cm
Presented by Mrs Smyllie, in memory of the late Mr R. Smyllie (1966)
NGI 1791

In an essay titled 'The Rise of a National School of Painting' (1922), McGreevy argues that Jack Yeats is 'the first truly Irish painter' to have emerged from the country.[6] It is worth pausing over the force of this emphasis, and its relationship with forms of national identity that are perceived *not* to be representative. In an earlier article, titled 'Art and Nationality: The Example of Holland' (1921), McGreevy compares the prospect of separating Ireland's national scene from the United Kingdom with the independence of the United Provinces (where a Dutch school of painting later found maturity). 'So long as she was incorporated with Flanders', he argues, 'the latter did her thinking, her inventing, her painting for her'.[7]

[6] McGreevy, 'The Rise of a National School of Painting' (1922), TCD MS 8002/19.
[7] McGreevy, 'Art and Nationality: The Example of Holland' (1921), *Old Ireland* (08/10/1921): 487-488. This article is a paraphrased extract from Eugene Fromentin's account of the origins of Dutch art in *Les maîtres d'autrefois* (1877). For more on the Holland-Ireland comparison, see McGreevy's 'Pictures in the National

McGreevy maintains that another twenty-three years would pass after political independence before Holland could escape the cultural dynamics of this false exchange and develop its own style of painting.[8] The timing of the earlier article provides an important framework for approaching the 1938 monograph on Jack Yeats which, written some fifteen years on from the establishment of the new regime, views the Free State in Ireland as 'no more than a province of English art' [*JBY* 9].

The 'truth', then, of the artist, and of 'True Art' in particular, is vital for reaffirming the existence of a new political entity. While providing a background for Jack Yeats's artistic development, McGreevy repeatedly employs the term 'petit peuple' as a means of projecting a principle of non-domination beyond the official moment of independence [*JBY* 9; *JBY* 10; *JBY* 13].[9] In a passage that condemns the Free State forces that had succeeded imperial rule, McGreevy stresses that 'genuineness, truth, however peaceable, is always revolutionary – it is usually the counter-revolutionaries who make revolution bloody' [*JBY* 23]. The painter who is able to depict this 'genuineness' or 'truth' between himself and the 'petit peuple' will be able to carry on the spirit of the nation in spite of the present counter-revolutionary stasis. 'In resurgent Ireland', McGreevy writes, 'the pioneer and first representative man in the art of painting was Jack B. Yeats' [*JBY* 32].

Though the artist never set out to serve any political project, the type of national commitment that McGreevy envisages from Jack Yeats's example strikes at the heart of the logic of cultural representation currently being borne out by the Free State government.[10] In a

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Gallery', *The Capuchin Annual*, 22 (1943): 386-443 (428).

[8] McGreevy, 'Art and Nationality: The Example of Holland' (1921), TCD MS 8006/6.

[9] The term 'petit peuple' relates to a particular conception of freedom which, as Philip Pettit has argued, has been articulated in republican political thought since the French Revolution. See Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[10] Critics have disagreed over the extent to which national politics affected Jack Yeats's style. Bruce Arnold argues that politics, and national politics in particular, had little effect on the artist's development. He claims that the artist's 'experience built up an understanding of many different strands of human motive' and that 'it is a mistake to make politics the starting point'. See Bruce Arnold, *Jack B. Yeats*, p.205. For a different line of approach, see David Lloyd's 'Republics of Difference: Yeats, MacGreevy, Beckett', *Field Day Review*, 1 (2005): 43-70, which focuses on the aesthetic and political problems of 'representation'.

passage that reflects his ongoing disillusionment with the existing political regime, McGreevy claims that 'actually the peoples [*sic*] are represented only by disinterested men, and more particularly by artists' [*JBY* 32]. The monograph supports this emphasis by including an extract of a poem from King Charles IX of France that was addressed to the leader of the Pléiade, Pierre du Ronsard. Beckett had forwarded a hand-recorded version of this poem to McGreevy (titled 'Epître à Ronsard') from his temporary lodgings at the Hôtel Libéria in Paris, which differs marginally from known versions of the published text.[11] Only the ninth and tenth lines of the poem are quoted by McGreevy in his study on Jack Yeats: 'Ta lyre, qui ravit par de si doux accords, / Te soumet les esprits, dont je n'ai que les corps' [*JBY* 32].[12] The citation of this passage is significant for two reasons in particular: firstly, because it provokes the recognition that the nation's spiritual power lies outside the grasp of its official representatives; and secondly, because it acknowledges the *poet* as the truest arbiter of the national spirit.

As the subject of royal homage, King Charles's tribute to Ronsard contrasts with the division of fact and poetry that McGreevy announces at the monograph's beginning, and more specifically with the events of 1916, during which several poets (turned revolutionary rebels) were executed by the British government for *lèse-majesté*. In light of the British government's decision to carry out deadly reprisals for treason, McGreevy suggests that the imperial aggression of policy-makers has created an 'exaggerated' nationalism out of an otherwise impartial public:[13]

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[11] Beckett to McGreevy: 05/01/1938; *TLSB* 579. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois Overbeck point out the differences between the version that Beckett sent to McGreevy and that published in *Parnasse Royal: Poèmes choisis des monarques François et autres personnages royaux*, ed. Gauthier Ferrières (Paris: Chez Sansot, Libraire, 1909), pp.105-106. See *TLSB* 581-582.

[12] 'Your lyre, which delights by such sweet chords, / Makes subjects of men's minds; I have only their bodies' [translated from the French by George Craig; *TLSB* 581].

[13] With little documentation currently available on the reaction of the general public, it remains a point of contention as to what popular attitudes were in response to the Easter Rising. Susan Schreibman is working on a crowd-sourced humanities project titled *The Letters of 1916: Creating History* [http://dh.tcd.ie/letters1916/] to recover more information about the impact of the event on people's daily lives.

> Scepticism as to the disinterestedness of politicians began to spread and gained ground to such an extent as to provide some justification for a still widely held belief that had the leaders of the 1916 Rising not been executed (in order to satisfy the self-conceit of the representatives of that aggressive imperialism which is the only true begetter of exaggerated nationalism), the people of Ireland would probably have remained dispassionate and gone about the varied business of living as people do in all countries and as they had themselves been doing for a quarter of a century, quietly and common-sensibly, taking such interest as their private affairs allowed in the life immediately about them, considering its problems, and amongst others the problem of its self-expression in art. [*JBY* 18-19]

The contradictions that the passage outlines between political motives, the public interest and the imperial birth of the nation are enough to distance McGreevy's preface to Jack Yeats's art from the straightforward demands of representational aesthetics. The passage advances a pacifist account of cultural development that thrives on a constitutive paradox between the official claims of 'representation' that are forced upon the people and those which the artist is expected to supplant and supersede. The ultimate desire of 'representation', in this instance, is not for the Free State itself, but for what the Free State in turn is held to have usurped – namely, the common humanity of the people (a task that had previously been entrusted to literature in the absence of autonomous national institutions). As McGreevy reiterates, representing the 'national character' does not require 'strict adherence to the observed fact' [*JBY* 28]; rather, he argues, it is the purpose of *poetry* – in paint as in words – to reveal an 'essential truth'.

It is at this point that I wish to turn to McGreevy's 'Homage to Jack Yeats', a poem that was republished in 1931 in Samuel Putnam's *The European Caravan*.[14] An earlier version of the poem, titled 'Dysert', had been printed in T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion* in January 1926.[15] The date of the previous publication is important since it coincides with the time at which Jack Yeats had decided to stop hand-colouring reprints from *A Broadside*.[16] Each issue

[14] McGreevy, 'Homage to Jack Yeats', *The European Caravan: an anthology of the new spirit in European literature: France, Spain, England and Ireland*, compiled and edited by Samuel Putnam, Maida Castelhun Darton, George Reavey and Jacob Bronowski (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1931).
[15] McGreevy, 'Dysert', *The Criterion*, 4, 1 (January 1926): 94.
[16] See Hilary Pyle, *Yeats: Portrait of an Artistic Family* (NGI in association with London: Merrell Holberton, 1997), pp.184-188. According to Jack Yeats's nephew, Michael Yeats, at this stage his uncle only 'produced

of the broadsheet publication, which was run by Elizabeth Yeats, had been accompanied by three illustrations, many of which were sold separately in the form of calendars, bookplates or greeting cards. The artist's decision to move away from his work as an illustrator is arguably the subject of homage in McGreevy's poem. In 'Homage to Jack Yeats', the inner sensuality of an otherwise desolate landscape is now savoured by the artist, who imbues it with personal feelings and remembrances:

> Grayer than the tide below, the tower;
> The day is gray above;
> About the walls
> A curlew flies, calls;
> Rain threatens, west;
> This hour,
> Driving,
> I thought how this land, so desolate,
> Long, long ago, was rich in living,
> More reckless, consciously, in strife,
> More conscious daring-delicate
> In love.[17] [*CPTM* 28]

As an act of homage to the great painter, the poet seeks to unbalance classical effects of distancing. The complication of focus and memory is signalled by the predominance of 'gray' and by the directional framing devices ('below', 'above', 'about') that surround the tower in the first four lines. The curlew's orbit is rotated 'about the walls' by the basic rhyme of 'walls' / 'calls'. Space, movement, light and colour are the elements with which the poet works to break out of the confines of perspectival depth (in the second stanza, indeed, it is the tower that veers into movement). A sense of motionless discord is produced out of the shift from the comparative adjective, 'grayer', to the adverb, 'grayly', which minimises the distinction between the 'tower' as landscape and the 'tower' as figure for the poet's human reaction [*CPTM* 28-29].

[illustrations] at his sister's urgent requests'. See Liam Miller, *The Dun Emer Press, later the Cuala Press* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1973), p.7.

[17] The poem refers to the feudal loyalty of Limerick when it was part of the medieval earldom of Desmond. Years of resistance to the constitutional demands of the British monarchy had come to an end in 1583 when Gerald the fifteenth Earl of Desmond was beheaded.

In his 1938 monograph on Jack Yeats, McGreevy lays particular emphasis on the increase of subjective freedom in the artist's later works. He states that 'the [subjective] tendency would seem to coincide with a modification of technique which dates from about 1924' [*JBY* 27]. Hilary Pyle, Bruce Arnold and David Lloyd have all acknowledged a significant change in Jack Yeats's style during this period, though there is no exact agreement over its timing or evolution.[18] Nevertheless, it is possible to recall the important aspects of this change, which involve a departure from his early draughtsmanship in favour of the immediate application of paint, a dramatic focus on movement and gesture, and a strengthening of colour based on personal mood and feeling. The following section will highlight the importance of this subjective dimension for shaping a sense of self-assurance after Irish independence.

[18] See Hilary Pyle, 'Jack B. Yeats, "A Complete Individualist"', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 9 (1993): 86-101; Bruce Arnold, *Jack B. Yeats* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and David Lloyd's 'Republics of Difference: Yeats, MacGreevy, Beckett', *Field Day Review*, 1 (2005): 43-70. For a survey of Jack Yeats's overall stylistic development, see Pyle, *Jack B. Yeats: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings* (in three volumes) (London: Andre Deutsch, 1992).

5.2: Anti-portraiture

When defending Mainie Jellett's use of Post-Impressionist techniques during the Society of Dublin Painters exhibition in October 1923, McGreevy states unequivocally that 'we are not interested in dead Dutch boors and dead English gentlemen. […] We have had quite enough representations of lower middle-class Dutch and upper middle-class English interiors to go on with'.[1] A tension is clearly evident here between a patronage system of the arts on the one hand and a national one on the other. Usually, the portrait genre demands that considerable attention be given to the visual likeness of a powerful class or individual (though it is also part of the artist's agency to choose his / her patron). In *Pictures in the Irish National Gallery* (1945), McGreevy connects the dominance of portraiture in eighteenth-century England to the frustration of Irish artistic talent:

> Barry dreamed of being a great 'historical' artist like Mantegna or Poussin. He despised professional portrait-painting [*sic*] as an inferior branch of art. But English society only wanted pictures of itself and its surroundings, so Barry's career, except for a few rare passages, such as the achievement of the impressive series of wall paintings at the Royal Society of Art, was rather one of unrealised ambitions.[2]

Whether 'English society' was as responsible as McGreevy suggests for determining James Barry's artistic production is open to dispute. The perception of social imbalance is tied much more broadly to the problem of securing commissions that determine who the artist is painting for. Nonetheless, McGreevy attempts to contrast Barry's cultural predicament with the privilege enjoyed by 'historical' artists like Mantegna, whose *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (c.1495) he reads in the same monograph as an imperial resistance theme for the republican imagination.

When turning to Mantegna's version of the beheading, McGreevy is at pains to

[1] McGreevy, 'Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett, and Dublin Art Criticism' (Winter 1923): 23-27 (27). See chapter 4.1 of this thesis for an account of the conservative media reaction that followed this exhibition.
[2] McGreevy, *Pictures in the Irish National Gallery* (Cork: The Mercer Press, 1945; reprinted London: B.T. Batsford, 1946), p.45.

emphasise the seriousness of the heroine's purpose: 'this Judith is grave with the gravity of a woman condemned to be an assassin for the honour and salvation of her countrymen'.[3] Again, in a later lecture given at the Italian Institute in Dublin, McGreevy acknowledges the 'sad fate that has forced her to become an assassin'.[4] McGreevy never supported military activity in Ireland, where he remained a pacifist, though he was friends with Ernie O'Malley whose memoir on the violence of the Anglo-Irish conflict he quotes in his study on Jack Yeats [*JBY* 17].[5] What concerns us here, then, is the development of a style and technique that is capable of liberating the Irish visual imagination. The patriotic appeal of the Judith story would appear to reside in the inviolability of the widow, whose beheading of the Assyrian general leads to the deliverance of Israel. Mantegna paints the heroine in the blue robe of the Virgin Mary, looking on in resignation as she is about to hide the head from view.

It is possible to clarify the opposition that McGreevy sets up between historical art and portrait painting from other versions of the *Judith* that he had seen. The revolutionary content of Mantegna's arrangement is nowhere to be found in Lucas Cranach's version of the same painting. Though well executed, the figurative detail of Cranach's composition has none of the subversive narrated meaning that Mantegna renders so forcefully. In *Pictures in the Irish National Gallery*, McGreevy notes that

> The *Judith* is a study of one of the artist's favourite models dressed in the luxurious costume of the time. As such, it is a fine picture. There is excellent drawing and modelling and the materials of the dress, even to the embroidered gloves, are well rendered. As a realisation of the drama it sets out to present on the other hand, the picture hardly holds its own with our Mantegna.[6]

What is absent from Cranach's concentration on the figure is the dramatic significance of the event: an area in which the 'gravity' of Mantegna's composition easily outweighs the appeal of a luxurious costume piece. The lavish figurative detail that Cranach adds to the heroine,

[3] McGreevy, ibid., p.9.
[4] McGreevy, *Italian Pictures in the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: Italian Institute, 1963), p.12.
[5] See pp.80-81 for an account of McGreevy's divided loyalties in this connection.
[6] McGreevy, *Pictures in the Irish National Gallery*, p.47.

who is based on one of the artist's favourite models, brings the composition closer to a professional portrait painting. As McGreevy identifies, the Judith who is represented here provides little narrative impetus for a story in which a woman takes her own initiative to show how the arrantly strong are defeated by the weak. In short, the technical figuration of the Cranach *Judith* lacks the poetic licence necessary for unlocking the story's radical and discursive potential.

(Left) ***Judith mit dem Haupt des Holofernes*** **(c.1530)**
Lucas Cranach (1472-1553)
Oil on linden wood
75 x 56 cm
© Jagdschloss Grunewald

(Right) ***Judith*** **(c.1504)**
Giorgione Barbarelli (c.1477-1510)
Oil on canvas transferred from panel
144 x 68 cm
© Hermitage Museum

In another rendition of the *Judith* story, completed by McGreevy's favourite artist Giorgione Barbarelli, the Venetian painter has the female protagonist step on the severed head of her victim with her bare foot.[7] What is important about Giorgione's composition in contrast to Cranach's rendition of the same story is the allegorical invention, which abandons the use of customary iconographical elements in order to show an intensely physical heroine revelling after her deed. As Terisio Pignatti notes, 'Giorgione inserts a completely new motif into the garments which reveals the left leg of the woman'.[8] In a moment of daring sensuality, the heroine lays bare her female thigh while crushing the enemy tyrant.

What McGreevy identifies in the Judith paintings, and extends in his reflections on contemporary Irish art, is the need to relinquish strict adherence to a pre-existing subject. In a review of 'Local Museums and Galleries' written in London he praises Grace Henry's *Stephen Gwynn, or The Orange Man* (1918-19) as 'a means to an end of the artist's own, that end being the improvisation of beautiful linear and colour patterns for which the sitter served chiefly as a point of departure'.[9] Henry's portrait treats the slanted figure with thick daubs of colour, admitting a degree of artistic freedom apart from the standard sitter: an Irish unionist peeling an orange. It is no accident that McGreevy should have spent much of his 1938 monograph on Jack Yeats justifying the more difficult aspects of the artist's later work in which colour and movement are allowed to interfere with traditional aspects of figuration. McGreevy maintains that 'the national note is struck as powerfully as ever' in Jack Yeats's

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[7] McGreevy had visited Castelfranco, the hometown of Giorgione, before his return to Paris in 1930. See Charles Prentice to McGreevy: 11/11/1930; *URCW* MS 2444, 130/541. While McGreevy's fixation with the Venetian painter attracts satirical mention in numerous letters of correspondence, his engagement with the artist was perfectly serious as mediated by the scholarship of Bernard Berenson, Lionello Venturi and others, and remained a source of lifelong inspiration to him. McGreevy talks of 'Jawrgione' to George Yeats as if he is only too fully aware of his propensity to be verbose on the topic: 28/11/1926 [NLI MS 30.859]; Verso, p.2.

[8] Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Giorgione* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), pp.120-122. Some of the few works that have been attributed entirely to Giorgione include *Judith* (c.1504), *Castelfranco Madonna* (c.1503-4) and *The Tempest* (c.1508).

[9] McGreevy, 'Local Museums and Galleries', TCD MS 8003/7a. Grace Henry had a romantic liaison with Stephen Gwynn while she was working to establish the Society of Dublin Painters, of which Jack Yeats was a founding member.

Going to Wolfe Tone's Grave (1929): a composition set in the entrance to Kingsbridge Station where the figures are drawn into a background of light and shade [*JBY* 37]. A 'quiveringly [*sic*] intensive vitality of effect', achieved by strokes of the brush and palette knife, threatens to dissolve the figures in this ostensibly nationalist picture [*JBY* 38]. What is held to be important in this instance is the artist's capacity to make the act of representation *less* decisive. Like W.B. Yeats's use of 'still' as a conceit between rest and movement in 'The Wild Swans at Coole' (1919), the use of the present continuous in the painting's title – 'Going' – sits oddly beside an allegedly static moment on the canvas:[10]

***Going to Wolfe Tone's Grave* (1929)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on canvas
61 x 91.4 cm
Private collection

[10] 'Attend upon them still. // But now they drift on the still water', W.B. Yeats, 'The Wild Swans at Coole' (1919), *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright, pp.180-181 (l.24-25).

***Seek No Further II* (1947)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on board
23 x 36 cm
Private collection

In *Seek No Further II* (1947), the unstable relationship between the figure and the medium is carved directly out of the thickness of the impasto. The sculpted dimensions of the medium suspend the 'represented' figure in order to stress its elusive recalcitrance: its 'yet-ness'. The figure is neither immediately represented nor immediately representable; rather, the thickness of the impasto and the bare patches of the canvas have become part of the process of figuration. An effect of mystery is achieved by this definitive and conscious elimination of three-dimensional form, which disrupts the processes of figuration and abstraction so that neither is able to state the other completely. The process of viewing the image dismantles any immediate correspondence between the individual subject and the polity by drawing attention to the mediated nature of the representation from which the viewer is standing back and

trying to find a critical point of departure. McGreevy ties the development of this later style to a principle of non-domination that breaks with the restrictions imposed on an earlier generation of Irish artists, such as James Barry, who had to adapt his paintings to an imperial gaze that 'only wanted pictures of itself and its surroundings'.

As is evident from a number of letters and essay drafts that were sent between them, which include parts of the 1938 monograph, the artist's personal views of his achievement do not differ widely from McGreevy's own, but attach an extreme importance to the liberation of the visual imagination. At the Exposition d'Art Irlandais in Paris, Jack Yeats affirms that

> This nation, though some of its people are sometimes, for a little while, led to accept what is forced upon them at the giver's valuation, always turns again with a bitter and assaying eye. In the end it looks every gift-horse in the mouth. And so this country has only staggered, not fallen, under the enervating waves of false ideas as to the meaning and end of painting.[11]

Once again, we are confronted with a paradox between the claims of 'representation' that are forced upon the people and those which the artist is expected to supplant and supersede: a situation not helped by the passage's mixed metaphors. In contrast to the lens of official scrutiny, it is the 'bitter and assaying eye' – indeed, the gaze that turns *away* – that fulfils the artist's concept of representation. Jack Yeats rejects the expression of false ideas 'at the giver's valuation' in favour of a continuous political struggle that is directed towards the people, whom he trusts will eventually overcome such unrepresentative forms.

[11] Jack Yeats, 'The Future of Painting in Ireland', p.1.

5.3: The embryo of an Irish 'historical' art

The futility of academic methods of painting that merely copy works from the past and ask whether they are representative of Ireland's present condition led McGreevy to reject the linear chronology and periodisation of the Academy. As we shall see, the 'historical' art that he advances in relation to Jack Yeats establishes a circular or revolutionary temporality based on a sequence of perceptions and memories. Artistic fidelity is judged not in relation to the event but according to the artist's apprehension of the event: a distinction that reflects back on the separation of 'fact' and 'poetry' that McGreevy announces at the beginning of his monograph on Jack Yeats. Even in pieces of short conversational writing, McGreevy remains anxious about applying conventional narratives of artistic development to Jack Yeats's painting. Early on in his monograph, McGreevy praises Jack Yeats's style for its independence from formal training:

> The outside influences to which Jack Yeats may have submitted himself in the process of his formation as a painter are hard to discern. His painted work seems to have been extremely personal from the beginning. We may allow ourselves to believe that he would readily acknowledge the qualities of a Constable, a Daumier, a Millet. Yet it is to be doubted whether he has ever got anything more than encouragement to go his own way from them or from any painter. There is no trace of even remotely approximate imitation of other painters in his work. He has obviously found his own way to artistic maturity. [*JBY* 10]

The most significant passages in McGreevy's critical discourse attempt to expand on the creative personality of the artist and the genesis of artistic creation. In a particularly emphatic sentence, four successive qualifiers ('trace of' / 'even' / 'remotely' / 'approximate') are used to separate the artist from other possible predecessors, highlighting the unusual independence of the artist's passage to 'artistic maturity'. The passionate pronouncements of this adjectival critical style refuse to locate the artist within an established narrative, preferring to foreground the very terms of the 'giver's valuation' ('we may allow ourselves to believe'). Furthermore, the odd word choice – 'extremely personal from the beginning' – maps the

subjective tendency of the artist onto the style of the critic. A language of self-assurance, upheld by both artist and critic, heralds a new kind of painting, one which rejects the Academy (and implicitly of academic discourse) as either a goal or explanation for the artist's achievement.[1]

It is worth questioning why 'outside influences' are jettisoned from this particular conception of art and art criticism. A distrust of the canonising practices in Irish institutions prevents McGreevy from establishing any direct relationship between modern art and art history. In an article titled 'Fifty Years of Irish Painting, 1900-1950', he refers to a joint exhibition of Nathaniel Hone and John Butler Yeats held in 1901 as the 'point of departure of the modern Irish School of Painting'.[2] There is potent irony in the fact that the exhibition to which he refers had been organised in the rooms of the Royal Society of Antiquaries in reaction to the Royal Hibernian Academy's persistent neglect of two of its most able members. Further ironies arise in relation to the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art: an institution at which McGreevy had sought the head post in 1921.[3] Following the substantial delay in the gallery's establishment, the Dublin Corporation had pursued an extremely cautious administrative policy that had refused to accept Georges Roualt's *Christ and the Soldier* (1930) on loan. Apart from Jack Yeats, many members of Ireland's avant-garde had continued to work abroad. In an article titled 'The Dublin Municipal Gallery' (1946) McGreevy explains, with regards to an institution that has strayed well outside Hugh Lane's original vision, that

[1] Jack Yeats did make some positive attempts to rationalise what he was doing in his new style. Hilary Pyle has explored his use of the CIE system of colour metrics in his 1927-1939 notebooks. See Pyle, 'Jack B. Yeats, "A Complete Individualist"': 86-101 (99).
[2] McGreevy, 'Fifty Years of Irish Painting, 1900-1950', *The Capuchin Annual* (1949): 497. The exhibition, which was largely conceived by Sarah Purser, was held from 21 October to 3 November 1901. See S.B. Kennedy's *Irish Art and Modernism: 1880-1950* (Belfast: Queens University, 1991) for a more detailed account of the conservatism of the Royal Hibernian Academy.
[3] See McGreevy's application for the Curatorship of the Municipal Gallery, TCD MS 8142/1, which was backed by Lennox Robinson, Lady Gregory, Dermod O'Brien and Seán Keating.

> Every institution tends to grow conservative in its policy and administration and it is to be regretted that in certain directions, where Lane and Lane's helpers would have taken an encouraging and even enthusiastic line, the Gallery collection is inadequately or wholly unrepresentative. Thus, in the Ireland of to-day, there are artists of distinctly vital impulse who, like the artists of France any time this fifty, sixty or seventy years, tend to be experimental rather than conventional. Traces of this experimental movement are not quite as imperceptible at the Gallery, as, say, at the annual exhibition of the Royal Hibernian Academy, but they are scarce enough. More surprising, however, is the fact that another movement, an internationally recognised movement, in modern Irish art is wholly unrepresented. […] To name only the dead, we had Michael Healy, the pioneer artist of the movement and his younger contemporary, Harry Clarke, both of whom, though in very different ways, achieved supreme rank in this department of art. And the movement is still vital. There are distinguished Irish stained glass artists producing noble work both here at home and overseas at the present time. Yet there is not, I think, a single stained glass cartoon at Charlemont House.[4]

For a gallery that was founded to provide a home for living art, 'to name only the dead' is damning with faint praise. Again, we note the paradox that 'in certain directions', the Gallery collection is 'inadequately or wholly unrepresentative' and key artists 'wholly unrepresented'. The critical discourse enacts a false identity between the artist and the nation through the very adjectives and adverbs that precede these descriptions. The question remains open, however, in spite of these modal qualifiers: 'unrepresentative' of what, or whom? Though the discussion remains confined in this instance to Ireland's stained glass movement, the passage clearly upholds an ideal of living art that might speak to a wider audience.

A better indication of what a true or ideal representation entails for McGreevy can be discerned from the monograph on Jack Yeats where he distinguishes the 'national painter' as 'not merely a *genre* painter like the painters of the *petit peuple* in other countries, and not merely a nation's painter in the sense that Pol de Limbourg, Louis Le Nain, Bassano, Ostade or Jan Steen were national painters, but *the* national painter in the sense that Rembrandt and Velazquez and Watteau were national painters, the painter who in his work was the consummate expression of the spirit of his own nation at one of the supreme points in its evolution' [*JBY* 10]. It is this need to transform the spiritual life of the nation after the early years of revolutionary resistance had passed away that leads McGreevy to separate the

[4] McGreevy, 'The Dublin Municipal Gallery', *Father Matthew Record* (January 1946): 4. Though Hugh Lane had wanted a central site for the gallery on Liffey Bridge, the Municipal Gallery had finally opened its permanent quarters on June 1933 in Charlemont House.

national painter in Ireland from any generic or institutionalised equivalent. Here the national painter is celebrated as an ever-active phenomenon outside history, who may consciously manipulate the past, present and future.

A later passage in the monograph that directly compares Jean-Antoine Watteau with Jack Yeats supports this emphasis. What is interesting about the passage is its desire to connect two artists who have no prior social or technical affiliation.[5] The attention that McGreevy gives to the 'question of time and place' when interpreting these two very different painters reveals much about his conception of the 'national painter' in the supra-historical sense:

> Humanly speaking, it may be said that Watteau's lords and ladies and Jack Yeats's peasants differ only in externals, as Jack Yeats's clowns differ from Gilles and Mezzetin only to the degree that the human (as distinct from the animal) element in the circus and music-hall differs from the *commedia dell' arte*, which is to say that it is but a question of time and place. Juan Ramón Jiménez used to tell a story of a Spanish tramp who said to a grandee, 'You are above the law and I am below the law so we are equals'. [*JBY* 14-15]

By stressing the accidence of time and place, the passage reaches towards a degree zero of historicity that levels out class differences through a process of mythic repetition and humour. 'Humanly speaking' is a strange qualification that confines McGreevy's reading of Watteau and Jack Yeats to matters of personal sensibility. McGreevy had started his correspondence with Juan Ramón Jiménez while translating his verse for the *European Caravan*, the same anthology in which the poem 'Homage to Jack Yeats' is featured. The three poems by Jiménez that McGreevy translates for that volume celebrate an open Epicureanism in the face of stoical realities – 'The dazzling whiteness of my first love' [*¡Biancura desulumbrante de mi primer cariño!*], 'Remorse' [*Remordimíento*] and 'Dream Nocturne' [*Nocturno soñado*] – and it is this *forma poetica dello spirito* that McGreevy applies to the figures depicted by

[5] Beckett had written to McGreevy during the summer of 1937 naming Watteau as part of Jack Yeats's evolutionary psychological mechanism. McGreevy admits that he was 'startled by the comparison, for superficially, nothing could be more different than the work of the two artists, Watteau's figures being in the first instance all linear draughtsmanship of the most exquisitely pencilled quality, whereas with Jack Yeats's figures the drawing is a matter of swift and summary, though extraordinarily telling, brushwork' [*JBY* 14].

Watteau and Jack Yeats, in which lords, ladies, peasants and clowns can exchange their improvised identities as if they are merely players in a *commedia dell' arte* ('they differ only in externals').[6]

McGreevy continues his emphasis on a classless society in an essay titled 'Three Historical Paintings by Jack B. Yeats', which argues for the need to state human feelings directly as they stand without the support of prior conventions. In this short but insightful article, McGreevy contrasts Jack Yeats's incorporation of 'popular, political sentiment' with the technique of the seventeenth-century landscape allegorist Nicolas Poussin, who was forced to translate the 1640-42 Rivalries of Paris into a language of classical antiquity:

> Many people in Dublin still recall the stir that was created in the early years of the century by a picture called *The Green Above the Red* in which the young artist integrated popular, political sentiment into serious painting. It was the first time such a thing had happened in Ireland. Here, as in other similar pictures [that Jack Yeats] painted during those years, was the embryo of an Irish 'historical' or heroic art which might come to maturity if and when the occasion demanded.[7]

Temporality is defined here not in reference to time past but in terms that suggest a powerful re-birth of the nation. The metaphor of an 'embryo' transfigures time as an attribute of the perceiving subject. As the outward manifestation of an inward spirit, the 'young artist' is seen to have redeemed the damaged life of the nation and returned it to its essential self (we note the grammar of 'maturity'). A good example of this hidden or personal geography coming to the forefront of a recent public event is Jack Yeats's *Bachelor's Walk – In Memory* (1915), which McGreevy mentions both in his 1942 article for *The Capuchin Annual* and in his 1938 monograph:

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[6] These poems are taken from Jiménez's *Elíegas lamentables* (1908), *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (1917) and *Piedra y cielo* (1919) respectively.
[7] McGreevy, 'Three Historical Paintings by Jack B. Yeats', *The Capuchin Annual* (Dublin 1942): 238-251 (240).

***Bachelor's Walk – In Memory* (1915)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on canvas
45.7 x 61 cm
On loan to the NGI from a private collection
L 2009.1

On the previous Sunday, when the artist had not been present, a patrol of the King's Own Scottish Borderers had opened fire at a large crowd on the pavement, killing three civilians and injuring thirty-two more near the spot where the flower girl stands.[8] One further civilian died later of bayonet wounds. The patrol had been heckled for hours by protestors on their return to the Royal barracks after intercepting a supply of arms that had been collected at Howth by Irish Volunteers. A crowd on Bachelor's Walk had showered the patrol with bricks, stones and rotten fruit. The conclusion of the Royal Commissioners was that 'Promiscuous firing by 21 soldiers of the Scottish Borderers took place without orders, but

[8] The event took place on Sunday July 26, 1914.

the commissioners think the troops were under the impression that the order had been given'.[9] What interests McGreevy about this painting is both its timing after the event and the accidental nature of the flower girl's actions, which strike up a unique correspondence with the past:

> The flower-girl may or may not have known the dead, but impelled by the instinctive yet mysterious poetry of her own nature, unheeded by her own world, a world of street-urchins, of loungers leaning against the river parapet, of men on carts driving spirited horses along the quays, of people crossing the Metal Bridge to the other side of the Liffey – with the life of the city going on around her, and unaware that an artist who had eyes to see and hands to immortalise her gesture was looking on, she offered her sacrifice.[10]

In marked contrast to Jack Yeats's illustrative work as an artistic reporter, *Bachelor's Walk – In Memory* focuses on the gestation period between the timing of the event and a later moment of unconscious resonance. Crucially, the flower girl's decision to discard two carnations from her basket has no necessary connection with the violence that occurred there earlier. Her actual intentions remain ambiguous and, most importantly, 'unheeded'. As such, *Bachelor's Walk – In Memory* creates a suspension between the artist and the future audience. The realignment of two separate temporalities – the one belonging to the horror of the past event and the other to continuing daily life – suggests a potential resurrection in such acts of giving.

'Chance light' is just one of the descriptions that McGreevy uses in reference to Jack Yeats's *In Memory of Boucicault and Bianconi* (1937): one of the artist's largest memory paintings, where the shadowy forms of the strolling players appear in the glimmering lamps of a mail car service [*JBY* 30]. The rediscovery of a past event is dramatised powerfully in yet another large canvas, *Helen* (also 1937), which shows the Queen of Sparta preparing to re-launch ships on the voyage home to Greece while a ragged figure chalks the word *Ilium* on

[9] See 'Notes and Comments, Bloodshed at Dublin', *New Zealand Herald*, 60, Issue 15772, 21 (November 1914): 6.
[10] McGreevy, 'Three Historical Paintings by Jack B. Yeats': 249.

the pavement. Though the event itself has been disastrous, like *Bachelor's Walk – In Memory*, its dramatic content acquires poetic form due to an unobserved gesture which has determined the concept of Troy that others will remember. In 'No Second Troy' (1908), W.B. Yeats anticipates Maud Gonne's insurrectionary politics in reference to 'beauty like a tightened bow', which makes Dublin the backdrop for an anachronistic Helen.[11] But perhaps the most famous expansion of linear time in relation to a public event is that of 'Easter, 1916', a poem that begins and ends with two different dates (the 24 April and the 25 September).

What is being sought here, after the event, is the expansion of linear time into a revolutionary cycle. For the composition of *Bachelor's Walk – in Memory* (1915), Jack Yeats had walked the very next day to where the tragedy had taken place, though he postponed sketching the scene until later the following week. In his sketchbook, Jack Yeats jots down that '[w]here the people were shot on Sunday a few paces further towards O'Connell Bridge flower girls had thrown flowers I suppose one of those killed fell there'.[12] David Lloyd notes that this is 'a remarkable transition for an artist whose early work was, often perforce, based on the rapid notation of daily events'.[13] By lengthening the forces of retrospection – as is openly acknowledged in the painting's subtitle ('*in Memory*') – Jack Yeats strikes at a paradox implicit in McGreevy's conception of an 'Irish "historical" or heroic art', which ripens to 'maturity' as the occasion demands, though it is not started on straight away.

[11] See W.B. Yeats, 'No Second Troy', *The Poems*, p.140 (line 8).
[12] Sketchbook no.189 of 204, NGI-Y1 Jack Butler Yeats Archive. A selection of these sketchbooks, which form part of the 1996 Anne Yeats gift to the National Gallery, were exhibited in the Beit Wing (Room 13) from 2 February to 3 June 2013.
[13] David Lloyd, 'Republics of Difference: Yeats, MacGreevy, Beckett', *Field Day Review*, 1 (2005): 64-65.

5.4: Anti-didacticism

In the 1945 'Postscript' to his monograph on Jack Yeats, McGreevy singles out two of the artist's large-scale mythological paintings, including *Tinker's encampment: the Blood of Abel* (1940), which he saw in the spring of 1941. According to his official biographer, Hilary Pyle, '[Jack] Yeats told the first owner [of this painting, Gerard Shanahan] that though the picture did not take long to paint, it had been taking shape in his mind for over two years; and he kept a sketched note, made in Indian ink, perhaps from memory, among his private records'.[1] Though the subject of the painting is uncertain, its subtitle – *the Blood of Abel* – draws attention to a mythology that is consciously embedded in the reality of warfare. McGreevy quotes from the Roman missal (Matthew 23:35-36) in order to understand the implications of bloodshed in this painting, though Hilary Pyle has argued that the more likely reference of the picture is in fact to *Genesis 4:10*, where Cain is found out by God with the words: 'The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground'.[2]

In a 1948 letter to Wallace Stevens, McGreevy voices his private concerns with Gnostic belief, arguing for a more expansive sense of human feeling:

> I said to a priest in confession a few years ago that I wasn't sure how much reality the phrases at the end of the Creed (from "the resurrection of the body" on) had for me since it could be heaven without waiting for the hereafter at all […]. Is it like your acrobat we need a thesis? Or have we already got it and shelved it?[3]

There is the suggestion, here, that the idea of the human on which the priest bases his morality might need revision if it is to avoid the cheap severity of abstract ethics. McGreevy argues that the phrases at the end of the Apostles's Creed (which include 'the life everlasting') provide no real object for ethical reasoning, since they fail to acknowledge the everyday role of bodily consciousness in creating human identity. Refusing to withhold the

[1] Hilary Pyle, *Jack B. Yeats: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1992), p.475.
[2] Pyle, ibid.
[3] McGreevy to Stevens: 10/05/1948; *HLMD WAS* 152.

immanent role of the material body from the spiritual life in general, McGreevy argues that the artist ought to present to his public the beauty, truth and goodness of what is already there: 'Jack Yeats found no occasion to go outside of the everyday scene for his material' [*JBY* 23]. The force of this revolutionary Christology takes on national significance in the face of societal change in Ireland, where the artist's attention to the daily life of the people is reported to make 'for a more comprehensive grasp of reality, a deeper and wider understanding of essentials in living, and for the expression of that understanding in art' [*JBY* 32]. By engaging with daily life fully and directly, McGreevy argues that the artist ought to resist the apartness of a didactic message:

> Jack Yeats depicted the natural scene as the normal environment of the humanity he is chiefly concerned with. He does not in the slightest degree scamp it. His humanism comprehends the wonder of it but he is no tasteless Wordsworthian pantheist moralising about the meanest flower that blows.[4] [*JBY* 12]

In his discursive reconstruction of the national painter, McGreevy seeks to register the self-expression of a people whose 'normal environment' is threatened by the didactic utterance of a rootless observer. The opposing attitudes of plaintive detachment, which might be disposed to romanticise very real injustices and inequalities, and personal integration, frame an important subtext to his monograph on Jack Yeats, the opening third of which is given over to a history of agrarian unrest. In order to avoid appropriating 'the natural scene' from an outside perspective, McGreevy refers to a basic Epicureanism that gives the artist's figures 'enough character to stand out in relief against each other, apart, as they are apart from the landscape, though not since they are human and the landscape is unhuman [*sic*], to the same degree' [*JBY* 16]. The critical discourse qualifies the artist's figures as independent agents whose humanity cannot be glossed over and subdued.

[4] The passage refers to the final two lines of Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1803-6): 'To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'. *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Vol V: 1806-1815* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008), pp.52-62 (p.62).

5.4: Anti-didacticism

In *The Potato Diggers* (1912), one of the most famous paintings by Ireland's best known artist during the 1920s and 30s, Paul Henry offers a stock realisation of an idealised west with the iconic depiction of two peasant figures. The treatment of these figures relies on a symbolic act of appropriation that makes them subservient to the landscape as a site of labour (a handling that is common to ethnographic projects of the Edwardian period and colonising dynamics of external possession). By contrast, Jack Yeats's concern with 'the natural scene' is seen in McGreevy's account to provide 'an enlargement of one's human experience' [*JBY* 12]. The serious attention that Jack Yeats is able to give to people of every description is enough for McGreevy to constitute 'a new chapter in the history of art': one that differs from partisan or tendency art by drawing on the *whole life* of the nation, even 'an Anglo-Irishman by origin' [*JBY* 8-9].[5] Flower girls, pavement artists, car drivers, ballad singers and barefooted children are ideal carriers of this human sentiment because of their susceptibility to the casual encounter. What empowers these represented figures in contrast to *The Potato Diggers* is their ability to voyage freely through the landscape without attempting to excavate it as a site of moral or social conflict. By remaining incidental to the scene of a given environment, Jack Yeats's travellers, tinkers and strolling players are able to engage a broader range of affection than that of Henry's peasant excavators. Though they are immediately tied to the quotidian, these figures are at the same time capable of revealing aspects of their environment beyond the routine of daily existence. The resistance to the didactic framing of mood is supported by this capacity to vivify a moral concept unexpectedly: a capacity that is powerfully evident in *Tinker's encampment: the Blood of Abel*.

In the McGreevy-Yeats correspondence at Trinity College Dublin, there are two metal dye sketches by Jack Yeats that depict a tramp doffing his hat while departing on a chariot

[5] McGreevy's positioning of Anglo-Irish artists as a vital standard for modern Irish painting puts him at odds with the 'Irish-Ireland' mainstream, which tended to view the Protestant Ascendancy patronage as foreign and therefore extraneous to the pursuit of a native culture.

with wings.[6] These humorous sketches serve to corroborate McGreevy's claim in his monograph on the same painter that 'Ireland was more than adult in experience of unpleasant reality and the opportunity to develop a greater leaven of humanism, of sympathetic imagination, in the make-up of the people, was overdue' [*JBY* 32]. It is worth observing how this claim – 'more than adult' – challenges the didactic mode. McGreevy objects to the manner in which critics have admitted 'all the subjectivism of horror' but none of 'the subjectivism of loveliness', highlighting the manner in which recent political experiences have distorted the human capacity for sympathy [*JBY* 30]. Drawing on the connections between human creation and God that St. Augustine advances in his *Confessions*, McGreevy stresses that 'even troubled artists *imply* a canon of the true, the good and the beautiful', 'just as surely as the artist who emphasises the pleasing aspect of things *affirms* such a canon' [*JBY* 7]. It is this conviction that forms the background for his insistence that Jack Yeats 'has nothing to do with nightmare', and is 'not a Bosch or a Picasso' [*JBY* 8], as if he had long grown tired of being asked such questions about the artist's idiosyncratic proclivities.

In contrast to surrealist or Cubist dismemberment, McGreevy records Jack Yeats's definition of 'beauty' as 'the affection which binds people and things to other people and things'.[7] The centrality that McGreevy accords to 'affection' in this instance is substantiated by Jack Yeats's 1923 lecture at the Celtic Race Congress in Paris, which argues that the 'power of wide affection' is 'the greatest equipment of the artist'.[8] In an interview with Jack Yeats for the BBC Third Programme in 1948, McGreevy cautions that the national significance of a painting can only be seen as one aspect of it *after* its completion. 'Beyond the national point of departure', he states, 'are the essential humanities'.[9] Again, this

[6] Jack Yeats, Metal Dye Sketches, TCD MS 8105/72, 73.
[7] McGreevy, 'Municipal Gallery Dublin: Jack Yeats Exhibition Transferred from the Venice Biennial' (November 1962), TCD MS 7999-5a/3.
[8] Jack Yeats, 'The Future of Painting in Ireland', p.2.
[9] 'A Conversation between Jack Butler Yeats and Thomas McGreevy', broadcast on the BBC Third Programme, 17/05/1948: British Library 11783, 84 + 85 (78rpm).

intriguing phrase – 'the essential humanities' – like the poetic recall to 'an essential truth', refers back to a principle of non-domination in which a common humanity might find a better conceptual sedimentation. For nationalist politics to become a less instinctual preoccupation, and less of a repetitive interchange that is violently and frequently assumed between 'personal' and 'national' forms of expression, the artist must be able to retain enough of his / her own intellectual currency to move outside 'the self-conceit of the representatives of that aggressive imperialism which is the only true begetter of exaggerated nationalism' [*JBY* 18-19]. It is worth comparing McGreevy's temporary disengagement of cultural from political ends with an outspoken passage from *The Dublin Magazine* published three years after the Irish Civil War. In this 1926 'Editorial', O'Sullivan criticises the 'longing for fusion' with a recreated ancestry:

> Our very longing for fusion tends towards making us false to ourselves. For in our eagerness to think of ourselves as belonging to the civilisation that our historians and scholars have created for us, we run the risk of mistaking the outward forms for the inner life. This is the great danger of our conscious preoccupation with tradition. We become obsessed by the external forms of the past. We set them up like Molochs in the present, and stuff them with living victims. Ireland to-day is full of preconceived ideas to which we all either sacrifice or are sacrificed.[10]

In his preface to the new series of *The Dublin Magazine*, O'Sullivan greets the arrival of national identity like a taxidermy exhibition. Having no real connection with 'Ireland to-day', the fossilised remains of 'preconceived ideas' are seen to make only 'living victims' of the present. 'Molochs' are a striking simile for this predicament, which leads only to the death of the new.[11] O'Sullivan compares the sabotaging of contemporary existence to a pagan form of worship that demands propitiatory child sacrifices. As well as questioning the representational aesthetics of the nation, the passage critiques the need to situate the self according to a past tradition.

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[10] Seumas O'Sullivan, 'Editorial', *The Dublin Magazine* (new series), 1, 2 (April-June 1926): 1.

[11] In the Old Testament, the ancient Ammonite god is invoked as an idolatrous form of worship in relation to which the Lord warns Moses: 'Whoever he be of the children of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto *Molech*; he shall surely be put to death' [Leviticus 20:2].

5.4: Anti-didacticism

When recording his observations to McGreevy after the Jack Yeats Exhibition at the National Academy of Design in New York, Wallace Stevens outlines a crucial reversal over preceding claims of cultural origin:

> I had rather expected pictures of smaller size dealing with subjects […] [that] were Irish. They were not like that at all. They were not paintings of reality seen in the spaces of the imagination. But they were largely the spaces of the imagination itself with all sorts of real references, of course, but still essentially unreal.[12]

What both of these poets recognise in Jack Yeats's work is the life of the inner being, which is held over and above the 'external forms of the past'. In a 1938 interview with Shotaro Oshima, Jack Yeats states that 'Things in the external world may seem always the same to some people, but an artist finds them different when a change is brought about inside him. He must not try to go against this inner change'.[13] It is this evolutionary timing that McGreevy stresses in his 1938 monograph, arguing that 'there is a time to withdraw as there is a time to stay, a time for contemplation and a time for action, and it is through a wise alternation of the two processes and a reasonable blending of the two elements in our nature, that fullness of being and a surer understanding of essentials are attained' [*JBY* 31-32]. Following on from this 'reasonable blending' of the active and contemplative sides of human nature, McGreevy contends that the living artist 'has been able to deepen the springs of personal consciousness as he has found necessary, and able also to project the forms he has found at the springs of consciousness with as great mastery as those he perceives objectively' [*JBY* 29]. It is the unavoidable dimensions of this inner life that enrich the representation of 'Irish subjects' with varying psychological and personal content: an imaginative space that informs Jack Yeats's later compositions to an increasingly intensive degree. As has been shown in terms of the

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[12] Stevens to McGreevy: 26/06/1952; *HLMD WAS* 152. After the Second World War, Jack Yeats had helped to visualise the transatlantic correspondence between these two poets, completing a portrait of McGreevy so that he could send it to Stevens as an enlarged photograph. See McGreevy to Stevens: 26/05/1946; *HLMD WAS* 152.
[13] Shotaro Oshima, 'An Interview with Jack Butler Yeats' (07/07/1938), *A Centenary Gathering* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971), pp.52-53.

imperial structures that beget an 'exaggerated nationalism', and the artist's decision to paint from memory, the retention and projection of forms in the artist's consciousness allows the 'truly' national painter to develop 'a greater leaven of humanism' after the early years of military conflict have subsided.

***Humanity's Alibi* (1947)**
Jack Yeats (1871-1957)
Oil on canvas
60 x 92.5 cm
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
© Estate of Jack B Yeats
Photo © DACS

Drawing on the importance of memory in Jack Yeats's paintings even as a critic, McGreevy mentions in a speech for an exhibition transferred from the Venice Biennial that 'I remember a painting called *Humanity's Alibi* which was of the man who appears out of a barrel and acts as a cockshy and target for things thrown at him as one of the side shows at a circus'.[14] The

[14] McGreevy, 'Municipal Gallery Dublin: Jack Yeats Exhibition Transferred from the Venice Biennial' (November 1962), TCD MS 7999-5a/3.

incongruity of this 'side show' serves both as a distraction from and an inextricable part of daily life. The balancing of the satirical element with the ideal of romantic beauty is especially pronounced in this painting. As is suggested by the title and the cockshy in the composition, the painting dodges and subverts the negative ideal that McGreevy had earlier declared as prominent in critics fascinated only by horror.

In order to gain a clearer understanding about how the ideal and the beautiful figure in McGreevy's genealogy of the Irish painter, I want to draw attention to the 'poetic' qualities that have been associated with Giorgione Barbarelli since the beginning of his critical reception. Pino's *Dialogue on Painting* (1548) was the first to associate Giorgione's work with poetry. Jaynie Anderson has argued that Pino's distinction between one kind of painting as *poesie* and another as *historie* was new to Renaissance art criticism, though the understanding of 'poetry' as a necessary source of invention ('questo necesita la poesia per la invention de la hopere') dates back to Jacapo de Barbari's 1501 appeal to Frederic the Wise.[15] What the rhetorical concept of *poesie* most crucially enables is the freedom to extemporise from existing material – a rhetorical concept that contrasts with the observational techniques of scientific naturalism that were being developed during the same period. As Pino puts it, the subjects of Giorgione's paintings are affirmative visions of what the figures themselves are able to act upon ('accommodando bene li sogetti agli atti delle figure') (such as the Judith who steps on Holofernes's severed head) rather than passive agents operating within a predetermined framework.[16] Similarly, it is the purpose of 'poetry' in Jack Yeats's compositions to build upon the potential significance of the serendipitous and unforeseen. Jack Yeats's paintings lend themselves to chance visions of the people whom the artist

[15] See Jacopo de Barbari's 'De ecelentia de pittura', which was sent to 'Federigo Ducha di Sansonia' in 1501 (in L. Servolini, *Jacopo de Barbari* (Padua 1944, pp.105-106)). For later uses of 'poesie' in the sixteenth century and the related concepts of *divino*, *ingegno*, *fantasia*, *immaginazione* and *invenzione*, see Martin Kemp, 'From "Mimesis" to "Fantasia": The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 8: 347-398.
[16] Jacopo de Barbari, 'De ecelentia de pittura', in L. Servolini, *Jacopo de Barbari* (Padua 1944), pp.105-106.

discovers performing their daily activities in ways that affect both the subject of the composition and the time of its conception, as we have seen in *Dinner Hour at the Docks* and *Bachelor's Walk – In Memory*.

5.5: Beckett – Yeats – McGreevy

So far we have noted how the 'genuineness' or 'truth' that McGreevy ascribes to the 'national painter' defines itself in opposition to portraiture, academic schooling and didactic observation. In this section, I want to consider how Beckett's objections to McGreevy's monograph add to the complexities between Jack Yeats's artistic style and Ireland's national background. In his response to a draft of the monograph that McGreevy had sent him, Beckett disputes that

> You will always, as an historian, give more credit to circumstance than I, with my less than suilline interest in the fable convenue, ever shall be able to. […] I received almost the impression for example, as the essay proceeded, that your interest was passing from the man himself to the forces that formed him – and not only him – and that you returned to him from them with something like reluctance. But perhaps that also is the fault of my mood and of my chronic inability to understand as member of any proposition a phrase like 'the Irish people', or to imagine that it ever gave a fart in its corduroys for any form of art whatsoever, whether before the Union or after, or that it was every capable of any thought or act other than the rudimentary thoughts and acts belted into it by the priests and by the demagogues in service of the priests, or that it will ever care, if it ever knows, any more than the Bog of Allen will ever care or know, that there was once a painter in Ireland called Jack Butler Yeats. This is not a criticism of a criticism that allows as a sentient subject what I can only think of as a nameless and hideous mass, whether in Ireland or in Finland, but only to say that I, as a clot of prejudices, prefer the first half of your work, with its real and radiant individuals, to the second, with our national scene. Et voilà. [*TLSB* 599-600]

Beckett sent this letter to McGreevy from the Grande Chaumière in Paris on January 31 1938, three weeks after he had been stabbed on the Avenue d'Orléans by a pimp. The irreducible singularity that Beckett attributes to the artist, with its kamikaze denial of social and historical forces, sits awkwardly beside McGreevy's desire to re-historicise Jack Yeats's work in the context of the transitional dominion state. Though the letter is written in terms that deliberately indulge his 'clot of prejudices' on such a 'sentient subject' as national identity, Beckett's indifference to any wider collective beyond that of 'real and radiant individuals' contrasts profoundly not only with the 'affection' that McGreevy perceives as the 'greatest equipment of the artist' but with Jack Yeats's own statements of concern about

the natural and human scene.[1] Where McGreevy draws attention to the lives of the flower girls, pavement artists, car drivers, ballad singers and barefooted children that Jack Yeats depicts so vividly in his paintings, Beckett highlights his 'chronic inability to understand as member of any proposition a phrase like "the Irish people"', questioning whether such metonymy is possible in a society so broken and divided.[2]

During his brief postwar visit to Dublin, Beckett wrote a review for the *Irish Times* on McGreevy's monograph, in the subtitles of which he pointedly distinguishes between the aspects of Jack Yeats that McGreevy emphasises as 'The National Painter' and those which he himself promotes as 'The Artist' [*D* 95-97].[3] At the close of the review, Beckett deliberately undermines the social dimension that McGreevy adds to the compositions:

> The being in the street, when it happens in the room, the being in the room when it happens in the street, the turning to gaze from land to sea, from sea to land, the backs to one another and the eyes abandoning, the man alone trudging in sand, the man alone thinking (thinking!) in his box – these are characteristic notations having reference, I imagine, to processes less simple, and less delicious, than those to which the plastic *vis* is commonly reduced, and than a world where Tir-na-nOgue makes no more sense than Bachelor's Walk, nor Helen than the apple-woman, nor asses than men, nor Abel's blood than Useful's, nor morning than night, nor inward than the outward search. [*D* 97]

A number of questions might follow on from this reasoning. According to what arrangement of civic and cultural priorities is an affirmative political dimension, one that labels itself 'Irish', to be understood? From what theory of resistance is its collective identity to be derived? As we have seen, McGreevy attempts to invoke the 'petit peuple' against an official state-driven nationalism to form the basis of an authentic vernacular culture: one that lays a particular emphasis on the figures to whom the artist is drawn (such as the flower-girl that casts her blooms on Bachelor's Walk). A problematic duality, however, persists in these

[1] See Jack Yeats, 'The Future of Painting in Ireland', NLI: Jack B. Yeats Archive / Yeats Museum Y17-1 (four-page typescript). Many of Beckett's forthright opinions about Jack Yeats's work appear to have been formulated beforehand in correspondence with Cissie Sinclair. See Beckett to Sinclair: 14/08/1937; *TLSB* 535-536.
[2] Beckett does not oppose the idea of a common public *per se* but its assimilation under a nationalist framework. In a letter to McGreevy, he switches *noblesse oblige* (nobility carries obligations) for 'roture' (membership of the common people). See Beckett to McGreevy: 10/12/1937; *TLSB* 566.
[3] Beckett, 'McGreevy on [Jack] Yeats', *Irish Times* (04/08/1945).

structures of representation. On the one hand, the 'national painter' is held to transport the 'idea that the people to whom he belongs have of themselves' [*JBY* 37]. On the other hand, the 'national painter' is seen to project the vision of a people not fully formed by or conscious of their national identity, and has therefore created 'the attitude that the world will have to them afterwards' [*JBY* 37]. Beckett refuses to acknowledge either of these public dimensions as an explanation or as a goal for the artist's achievement.

The unresolved tensions of attachment and alienation that direct Beckett and McGreevy's debates about Jack Yeats's work are worth exploring in further detail for the deeper ties that they reveal between private and public selves. Beckett had described Jack Yeats's *Morning* (1936) to McGreevy as 'always morning' in reference to the way the composition aligned the 'inhuman landscape' with 'the inhuman in oneself'.[4] Modifying his humanist conviction carefully in relation to Beckett appears to have allowed McGreevy to complicate the former's insistence on 'pure inorganic juxtapositions' and 'a nature almost as inhumanly inorganic as a stage set'.[5] Admitting the absence of unity between the self and the natural world, yet resisting the demarcation of self and other as mutually exclusive and unimpeachable categories (a dynamic that we have seen in his experiment with the lyric ('I too')), McGreevy subsequently declares in his 1938 monograph that 'Association and apartness, at one and the same time, have never been more clearly stated in terms of art' [*JBY* 14]. He points to changes in Jack Yeats's style that have allowed the artist to develop a surface where neither the foreground nor the background is privileged. 'The landscape is as real as the figures', he remarks; 'it has its own character as they have theirs' [*JBY* 14].

McGreevy's fascination with association *and* apartness as a possible step towards overcoming the alienation of the lyrical subject gradually evolves out of his correspondence with Beckett during the mid-1930s. Especially intriguing is the paradoxical expression

[4] See Beckett to McGreevy: 29/06/1936; TCD MS MF 10402.
[5] Beckett to McGreevy: 14/08/1937; *TLSB* 540.

'metaphysical concrete' that is used in letters of exchange between them. Beckett uses this expression in reference to Picasso's *Figures au bord de la mer* (1931), which both he and McGreevy had seen while they were living together in Paris – '(do you remember the tremendous figure on a shore that I liked so much in the big Paris Exhibition?), metaphysical concrete'.[6] Beckett uses the same expression when recording his observations of Karl Ballmer's *Kopf in Rot / Head in Red* composition (c.1931) into his German diary, during which he is reminded of his earlier experiment with the lyric ('my Vulture'):

> Transparent figures before landscapes… Wonderful red Frauenkopf, skull earth sea & sky. I think of Monadologie & my Vulture. Would not occur to me to call this painting abstract. A metaphysical concrete. Nor Nature convention, but its source, fountain of Erscheinung.[7] Fully a posteriori painting. Object not exploited to illustrate an idea, as in say [Fernand] Léger or [Willi] Baumeister, but primary. The communication exhausted by the optical experience that is its motive & content. Anything further is by the way.[8]

It is surprising how well these brief notations complement McGreevy's reading of Jack Yeats's stylistic development after national independence: where the apparent solidity of human figures is drawn into a background of light and shade (generating a threshold between what can and cannot be represented); the didactic exploitation of a message is refused; and a communicative source is furthered on a principle of non-domination and self-assurance. Like Beckett's 'The Vulture', Ballmer's 'Head in Red' composition of 'skull earth sea & sky' is voiced as nothing 'construit' (deliberately constructed) but as manifestation of a deeper productive, even procreative, tension. What Beckett recognises in Ballmer's painting is a technique not prepared in advance and applied to inert material (as per 'convention') but

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[6] Beckett to McGreevy: 28/11/1936; *TLSB* 387.

[7] Beckett's nominalisation of 'Erscheinung' from 'Schein', in its positive sense and as the basis of art, means phenomena, apparition, becoming visible (and *not* illusion), belonging to a third sphere beyond reality and necessity.

[8] This is Mark Nixon's transcription from the German diaries. See *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Continuum, 2011), Figure 6. For an alternative transcription, see Roswitha Quadflieg, 'Samuel Beckett "Alles kommt auf so viel an". Das Hamburg Kapitel aus seinen "German Diaries"', *Tagebuch Samuel Beckett von 1936* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe Verlag, 2006), pp.168-169. Beckett was on tour of Germany from 29 September 1936 to 2 April 1937, during which he wrote prolifically to McGreevy about his artistic findings (McGreevy was unable to join him).

developed '[f]ully *a posteriori*' out of the material itself so that both the inner experience and the outer form are created anew by a reciprocal process of interaction.

A clearer indication of what this process entails as the outcome or upshot of the anthroposophist's work can be obtained from Beckett's famous description of Joyce's *Work in Progress* as a circulation of language 'not *about* something; *it is that something itself* – Here form *is* content, content *is* form' [*D* 27]. Crucial to Beckett's argument in each of these instances, whether applied to the medium of paint or words, is a refusal to separate the technique from the image or content that is being represented. Where Beckett and McGreevy differ strongly from one another, then, is not over the imbrication of form and content that they observe, and praise, in Jack Yeats's later work, but over how this reciprocal process of interaction at the level of the artistic medium might itself become a point of national significance. As can be inferred from the evolutionary account that McGreevy adopts to consider Jack Yeats's paintings, the fusion of technique and image as an indivisible whole or unity challenges the dualistic structure of the nation's representational aesthetics in which it is the function of the artist to be both created by the nation and to create it by virtue of representing it. Throughout his monograph on Jack Yeats, McGreevy stresses the *non-representational* values of the artwork as a necessary preliminary to the political struggle in any form: a critical capacity that 'fulfils the perennial need to check up on authority's liability to abuse its privileges' [*JBY* 29]. By contrast, Beckett's analysis of Jack Yeats's art remains uncomplicated by the need to find in Ireland a cultural alternative to that which the Free State occupies politically. Where McGreevy finds a resurgent spirit in Jack Yeats's work that shines through the outward disintegration of the nation, Beckett aestheticises the artist's self-assurance in purely existential terms, citing his ability to bring light 'to the issueless predicament of existence' [*D* 97]. That Jack Yeats's art should have prompted such divergent responses from two of his closest contemporaries as to its possible (or impossible) political

implications reflects back on the split between Ireland's earlier revolutionary aspirations and its conservative artistic direction.

In his third memoir, *Between Two Revolutions* (1934), Boris Nikolaevich Bugayev draws on Russian formalist theory to suggest that the subjective tendencies of artworks continue to unveil the actual transformation of objective reality as a foundation for revolutionary change.[9] Both Beckett and McGreevy are likely to have been introduced to 'Andrey Bely' in Paris by their Russian-born friend and literary agent George Reavey, whose *nom de plume* Beckett had appropriated as a pseudonym ('Andrew Belis') for his 1934 essay, 'Recent Irish Poetry'. We have seen examples of this subjective tendency in McGreevy's formulation of an 'Irish "historical" or heroic art', which attempts to recapture a recalcitrant spirit or essence through acts of giving and prayer. The subversive dynamics of the artist's temporal overlay between the time of the event and the composition suggest a secondary occurrence or re-birth of the nation. By complicating the structures of narrative, Jack Yeats produces a subjective mood in the creator and the perceiver alike that maps out a past incident in the continuous present, as we have seen in *Going to Wolfe Tone's Grave*, *Seek No Further II* and *Bachelor's Walk – In Memory*. *Something Happening in the Street* (1944) is a further example of this revolutionary temporality in which a maid gazes out through the panes of an upstairs window while the scene in the street unravels in the space of the room behind her. Beckett seems to refer to this painting in his 1945 review of McGreevy's monograph, though it remains within the confines of his existential reading: 'The being in the street, when it happens in the room, the being in the room when it happens in the street […]' [*D* 97].

It is no accident that Jack Yeats's work became critically important to McGreevy during the second quarter of the twentieth century. The 'Irish "historical" or heroic art' that

[9] Boris Nikolaevich Bugayev, *Mezdu dvux revoljucij* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelej, 1934), pp.377-378.

he envisages after national independence aspires to elevate public action to the art of painting which had become inaccessible to the lyric after the 'great national stir' of the revolution had been superseded by the imposition of Free State forces. During this counter-revolutionary stasis, McGreevy articulates an affirmative vision for the Irish painter based on a revolutionary Christology that, unlike didactic utterance, enlarges the potential for human experience with a celebration of itinerant life: the tinkers, players and entertainers whose very livelihood is to go about giving pleasure. That this underlying affinity with a classless group is expressed independently and imaginatively by the artist – and *not* through the official nationalism of the Free State – is crucial to his conception of a 'truly' national painter: a painter, that is, who is able to deepen the creative possibilities of the existing nation by consolidating such liberties of personal expression as had already been attained.

What unites the poet and the painter in this connection is that they both are, in some sense, creators *of* the people. During the 1930s and 40s, McGreevy would become the painter's foremost commentator and critic, a reassuring presence at public events, and a tireless advocate for his work abroad. It was not until 1962, however, that he would represent Jack Yeats in an official capacity for Ireland at the Venice Biennial, some forty years after his first publication on the artist. Through his criticism and commentary, McGreevy came into a powerful position by which to shape the reception of Irish art and the contemporary art world. The coda of this thesis turns its attention to the National Gallery where, I argue, a public space was constructed in which Ireland's civic and cultural priorities could find an affirmative political dimension.

6

The National Gallery Revisited

Marie Bourke has contended that the Irish Free State did not recognise the formative role of cultural institutions in the drive for national independence: a point of considerable irony given that 'the collections, in particular the antiquities of the National Museum of Ireland, supplied most of the imagery of the Celtic Revival, which in itself formed a bridge between the [Protestant] Ascendancy and the key figures of the new Free State'.[1] Staff shortages and underinvestment were two major problems that directors of cultural institutions would have to confront during this period, though it remains unclear what the social (rather than financial) causes were behind this inattention. That the National Gallery continued to rank low on the Irish Department of Education's list of priorities is evident from McGreevy's numerous conflicts with the administration once he had taken over as Director of Ireland's leading cultural institution. During the second year of McGreevy's Directorship, the Taoiseach admitted that 'Our National Gallery has been crippled and hampered for want of money'.[2]

In the previous chapter, I concentrated on the peculiarities of McGreevy's art-historical discourse, asking how his informal critical style makes art a topic of general concern. In this chapter, I will show how his later policies as Director of the National Gallery are geared towards revitalising the public sphere as a whole. What critics have imputed in this respect to 'the condition of Irish poets in a (post) colonial world', or attributed to a narrative of flawed Irish achievement, can be read more profitably in terms of McGreevy's evolving

[1] See Marie Bourke, *The Story of Irish Museums, 1790-2000: Culture, Identity and Education* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011; reprinted 2013), p.427.
[2] *Dáil Debates*: Arts Bill 1951 – Second Stage, The Taoiseach, Vol. 125 (24/04/1951). The National Gallery of Ireland had been placed under the control of the Irish Department of Education (1924) soon after its relationship with the British Treasury was terminated. Thereafter, investment in Ireland's public galleries slowed.

reputation as a public intellectual and the creation of a modern audience in Dublin.[3] In contrast to the early pressures of censorship in Ireland's print culture, this coda argues that the gallery provided a space in which McGreevy could reposition the motives of the public, the memories of past and future, and the cultural priorities of the nation outside its doors. The first part of the coda theorises the gallery as the space for a more inclusive ideal. The second part considers McGreevy's attempts to establish the National Gallery as a place not only of exhibitions but also of living art, teaching, research and conservation.

As we have seen from his monograph on Jack Yeats, McGreevy advances a form of opposition to government control by trusting the role of personal instincts without the need for external or didactic authority. In the previous chapter, it was shown how the stylistic features of his critical discourse refuse to permit any external source of political authority between the artist and the people. Like the 'I' in his lyric 'Appearances', McGreevy aims to reconstruct a canon of Irish art historiography from a central subjectivist position. Rather than enact a false identity between the artist and the nation, his critical discourse appropriates the artist to an aesthetic that affirms the continuity of the national spirit when confronted with an unrepresentative power. The 'genealogy' that McGreevy develops views the artist's disaffiliation from the present order in terms of the nation that they will come to represent: a strategy that is intended to prevent the work of the 'true' artist from degenerating into complicit forms of ideology.

McGreevy had openly dismissed the 'inquisitorially minded' when attempting to establish the pertinence of a Catholic understanding to the method of James Joyce's *Work in Progress*. As we saw in the third chapter, McGreevy's spirited defence of Joyce's composition from the judgment of 'half-educated suburbans' makes art a topic of general concern by expanding the genesis of artistic creation in a manner that recasts the heretic as

[3] See Susan Schreibman, 'Introduction', *CPTM* xix-xxxviii (xxxvi); and Anthony Cronin, 'Thomas McGreevy: Modernism Not Triumphant', *Heritage Now: Irish Literature in the English Language* (Dingle: Brandon Books, 1982), pp.155-160.

the 'true' Catholic. 'The Work in Progress', he argues, is necessarily universal: 'it has to face everything'.[4] We have observed the force of this revolutionary Christology in McGreevy's monograph on Jack Yeats where the artist's attention to the daily life of the people is described as 'a more comprehensive grasp of reality, a deeper and wider understanding of essentials in living, and the expression of that understanding in art' [*JBY* 32].

It is revealing, therefore, that one of his first initiatives as Director of the National Gallery was to make art a topic of bi-weekly discussion for adults and children of all ages and backgrounds: an ambition quite at odds with the religious orthodoxy that had imposed restrictions on Ireland's print culture. McGreevy invited young artists, such as the sculptor Dónal Murphy, to contribute to a new lecture series, which resulted in group visits on Wednesdays and Sundays. As a result of these lectures and guided tours, the gallery soon became an independent space of teaching and learning.[5] According to art historian James White, who later succeeded him as Director, McGreevy 'produced more publications than any of his predecessors' on the topic of art history, 'and lectured widely to a variety of audiences'.[6] Examples include his concise catalogue of the oil paintings at the National Gallery (the first to have been published since Thomas Bodkin's time), which provided a script for visitors; his public addresses on lesser-known contemporary French artists (such as Paul Pouchol); and his presidential speeches to the International Art Critics Association, which extended the reputation of the gallery abroad.[7]

With few specialist platforms available in Ireland for discussing art criticism, McGreevy also turned to the enterprising Brother Moynihan to ensure the publication of his shorter articles, which *The Capuchin Annual* regularly featured, though this in itself would

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[4] McGreevy, 'The Catholic Element in Work in Progress', *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1929), pp.121-127 (p.121).
[5] See Dónal Murphy to McGreevy: NGIA, McGreevy (enclosing 24 lectures on the history of European painting).
[6] James White, 'Introduction', *National Gallery of Ireland* with 32 colour plates and 191 monochrome plates (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), p.40.
[7] McGreevy was president of the IACA when they met in Dublin in 1953.

constrain the subject and tone of his writings. That McGreevy remained passionate about broadcasting a wider role for artistic creation outside the church is evident from his efforts to raise visiting numbers to the National Gallery. During his Directorship, he oversaw the introduction of turnstiles to monitor viewing figures. This strategy resulted in more accurate records for estimating the size of the viewing public, which according to Marie Bourke grew from 37,547 in 1958 to 53,451 in 1961.[8] The fastest rate of increase appears to have occurred during the second half of McGreevy's tenure, once the effects of his policies started to become apparent.

[8] For clarification of these figures, see Marie Bourke, 'A Director of His Time' [*TMCR* 101].

6.1: Going public

The strange ritual of gallery-going sets it apart from most forms of interaction with history. In the gallery, cultures mix in provocative relation with one another as paintings from different countries hang in neighbouring rooms. Many critics have commented on the phenomenon of experiencing a gallery, including McGreevy's friend Paul Valéry, who in his seminal 1923 essay 'The problem of museums' appears to have regarded the institution as an omnivorous Saturn eating her children: 'The museum exerts a constant pull on everything. It is fed by the creator and the testator. All things end up on the wall or in a glass case… I cannot but think of the bank at a casino, which wins every time'.[1] While Valéry is right to stress the museum's role as preserver of a community's 'official' memory, he overstates its power to collect against the viewing participant. In Ireland, the transfer of private collecting practices into the public domain had many unintended consequences for the old regime and its hegemonic motives. As Marie Bourke has mentioned in reference to the antiquities of the National Museum of Ireland, the capacity of collectors to abstract artworks from their ordinary lives and set them aside for special consideration had inadvertently contributed to a form of cultural self-belief.[2] Seen from this perspective, the expansion of museum culture in Dublin provides an important arena for discussing the continuation of an avant-garde impulse. For a nation liberated from British rule in 1922, the need to frame a wider cultural heritage inside the gallery's doors was vital, imaginative and contemporary.

It is no accident that the gallery should have attracted writers otherwise in pursuit of literary objectives. In a private letter to Dorothy Wellesley, W.B. Yeats quotes directly from one of his senatorial speeches in which he writes that '[…] only by songs, plays, stories, can

[1] Paul Valéry, 'The problem of museums', *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Mathews, Vol. 12 (New York: Pantheon, 1960), pp.204-205. For more on McGreevy's correspondence with Valéry during the mid-1920s, see chapter three (section four) of this thesis.
[2] See Marie Bourke, *The Story of Irish Museums, 1790-2000)*, p.427.

we hold our thirty millions [of Irish] together, keep them one people from New Zealand to California. I have always worked with this principle in my mind'.[3] However, as Yeats wryly acknowledges to Wellesley when undercutting his public persona, that singular cultural ideal is paradoxical insofar that it refers both to mediated descendants in a country called Ireland and to an imagined community of individuals who may exist anywhere in the world.[4] It is in this context that the National Gallery is crucial since it keeps open the possibility of art for the people while raising more vital questions about what that 'public' is. As a dramatic field that takes from private donors, and gives their collections back to a larger audience, the gallery enacts a dialectical transformation in the concept of the nation. The positions and motives of the public who visit it cannot be fixed or predetermined but must work on a principle of engagement that is free and voluntary. Curatorial titles, scripts, plaques and captions may guide the experience of looking, but in a way that remains susceptible to individual response. It is this ability to engage the audience's response through concrete, and intimate, verbal-visual encounters ('hang and look thereon') that is so evident in the final lines of Yeats's 'The Municipal Gallery Re-visited' (1937), which takes the form of a self-elegy:

> You that would judge me do not judge alone
> This book or that, come to this hallowed place
> Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;[5]
> Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
> Think where man's glory most begins and ends
> And say my glory was I had such friends[6]

The final lines of the poem define the act of looking as one of both stillness and movement, for which 'hang' acts as a deliberate pun both on the position of the paintings and on the

[3] W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley: 13/08/1937; *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.142-143.
[4] 'Yet my dear, I am as anarchic as a sparrow'. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, ibid.
[5] It is unknown what paintings were on display at the gallery when W.B. Yeats visited it. For an analysis of the manuscript, see Wayne K. Chapman, '"The Municipal Gallery Re-visited" and Its Writing', *Yeats Annual*, 10, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1993): 159-187.
[6] W.B. Yeats, 'The Municipal Gallery Re-visited' (1937), *The Poems*, pp.366-368 (p.368).

ability of the speaker to command attention. The 'I' yokes the twin forces of past and present in order to reclaim 'Ireland's history' as personal: an ambition that culminates in the final rhyming couplet ('ends / friends'). Beginning and ending is assiduously connected by the speaker to the life of each portrait on display – 'Casement upon trial'; 'Griffith staring in hysterical pride'; 'O'Higgins' countenance' – though these brief descriptions are undercut by a deeper anxiety about what will endure as the audience passes from picture to picture. It is the ability to pause before immediately recognisable figures from the vantage point of posterity that is complicated by Jack Yeats's *Seek No Further II* (1947).[7] *Seek no Further II* suspends the technical processes of figuration so evident in the portraits to which his brother refers in a radical act of self-assurance that forbids any easy realignment of the private with the public. As we saw in the previous chapter, the sculpted dimensions of the medium in this painting suspend the 'represented' figure in order to stress its elusive recalcitrance: its 'yet-ness'. The process of viewing the image dismantles any immediate correspondence between the individual subject and the polity by drawing attention to the mediated nature of the representation from which the viewer is standing back and trying to find a critical point of departure.

[7] See pp.162-163 of this thesis for a discussion of this painting.

6.2: The Director's policies

By starting with a complete rehanging of the gallery's collection, McGreevy caused much consternation among his predecessors. Brinsley MacNamara wrote to one of the previous holders of the Directorship, Thomas Bodkin, stating that 'The collection is being turned upside down and inside out… you may scarcely be able to recognise the Gallery as the same place when you next call'.[1] Peter Somerville-Large recounts in his one hundred and fifty year history of the National Gallery that 'The rehanging was [achieved] at the expense of the Portrait Gallery, in which McGreevy had no interest'.[2] In the previous chapter, it was shown how McGreevy's discursive construction of the 'national painter' turns away from a patronage system of the arts in favour of a subversive narrative meaning. The few portraits that McGreevy did purchase for the National Gallery found a place for major artists who had been neglected by the Royal Hibernian Academy: namely, Nathaniel Hone's *Horace Hone Sketching* (NGI 1297) and John Yeats's portrait of Susan Mitchell (NGI 1298). Two years after McGreevy had stepped down as Director, Henry Mangan, Chairman of the Office of Public Works and a member of the Board of Directors at the National Gallery, wrote an angry memo on the state of the National Portrait Collection which, since 1875, had been relocated on the ground floor of the National Gallery to the rear of the Dargan Wing.[3] Taking his cue from Mangan's memo, Somerville-Large comments that

> In 'Inner Room No 1 the late James McNeill, Governor General of the Irish Free State' was jammed in a corner close to a side door; on the other side was Strongbow [Daniel Maclise's *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* (c.1854)]. The portraits, some in double lines, were huddled together on the walls and sides of several projecting partitions. In a smaller, equally crowded room, Cromwell, King William, Swift, and George Bernard Shaw shared space with [the] bronze busts of Kevin O'Higgins, Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Austin Stack and Cathal Brugha, arranged on windowsills.[4]

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[1] Brinsley MacNamara to Thomas Bodkin: TCD MS 6962/120-269.
[2] Peter Somerville-Large, *1854-2004: The Story of the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2004), p.355.
[3] Henry Mangan, 'Memo on National Portrait Gallery': 14/03/1962; TCD MS 6962/32.
[4] Somerville-Large, *1854-2004: The Story of the National Gallery of Ireland*, p.355.

The relegation of James McNeill to a less prominent position by the side door reveals much about the new spaces for national memory that were opened up by this rehanging. Here, imperial conquerors are required to inhabit the same locale as assassinated revolutionaries. Compressed into the space of 'a smaller, equally crowded room' are two separate traditions – Protestant and Catholic – that together constitute a modern Ireland imaginatively different from the ideological rifts that the Free State government had sought to maintain between 'Anglo' and 'Irish' Ireland. As well as revealing the Director's personal orientation in relation to modern Irish history, McGreevy's rehanging of the gallery prompts wider questions about how and where these figures might meet the public.

Well in advance of his Directorship, McGreevy had sought to introduce living art to the National Gallery's collection. The source of this particular objective reaches back to his earlier dispute with Thomas Bodkin, then Director of the National Gallery, who had argued in an article about Nathaniel Hone that 'No Irish painter, living or dead, has equalled, much less surpassed, the purely aesthetic quality of his art'.[5] McGreevy responded to his art-historical nemesis with modifying clauses that parody these canonical qualifications: 'No Hone that I have ever seen could, I think, equal, much less surpass, the aesthetic quality, the impressive design, the massive movement, the fine colour of *Morning After Rain* in the last Jack Yeats exhibition'.[6] Polemic raged on between the two figures over the enduring canons of aesthetic, with McGreevy refusing to give way to Bodkin's earlier pronouncements on Hone as the latter published his reply to 'the self-constituted and super-sensitive champion of Mr [Jack] Yeats' in the *Irish Statesman*, objecting to the manner in which McGreevy had become the spokesman for this shy and elusive painter.[7]

The pressure that McGreevy exerted in national newspapers on Jack Yeats's behalf was in direct contravention of the Board's policy not to purchase works by living artists,

[5] Thomas Bodkin, 'Hone Exhibition', *Irish Statesman* (27/09/1924): 81.
[6] McGreevy, 'Pictures by Nathaniel Hone', *Irish Statesman* (18/10/1924): 172-173 (172).
[7] Thomas Bodkin, 'Letter to the Editor', *Irish Statesman* (25/10/1924).

which had placed a fifty-year embargo on the artist's death before acquisitions could be made. Despite this ruling, McGreevy attempted to find other avenues for circumventing the Board's jurisdiction. He encouraged bequests and donations to the gallery, which saw the acquisition of five works by Jack Yeats, four of which were obtained while the artist was still alive.[8] Jack Yeats had briefly attended Board meetings at the gallery while McGreevy was in charge, but ceased to do so after July 1953. In 1954, the government notified the National Gallery that it was willing to contribute £2000 of the £2700 required towards the purchase of three paintings by Jack Yeats from the Dawson Gallery, among which was *Bachelor's Walk – In Memory*. After holding an emergency meeting to consider the possibility of these acquisitions, the Board upheld its existing policy and declined the assistant funds. Soon after Yeats's death, in April 1957, McGreevy once again brought up the possibility of buying his paintings. 'If at all possible', he entreated Éamon de Valera, 'Mrs [Randal] Plunkett should be persuaded to surrender private ownership of *Bachelor's Walk – Memory*, which is one of the most moving and beautiful pictures by the artist ever painted'.[9] As we saw in the previous chapter, the painting, completed a year after the Bloody Sunday of 1914, concentrates on the ambiguous intentions of a flower-girl, who discards her remaining carnations where members of the public had been shot.[10] Though we never access the girl's inner life, the space between the girl and the outward manifestations of the unreflective daily life about her discloses a transcendent possibility for commemorating a shot civilian. McGreevy's appeal to the Taoiseach was unsuccessful. After the picture was stolen from Dunsany Castle in 1990, the National Gallery of Ireland finally acquired it on loan following its recovery in London in 2007.

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[8] Richard Best's legacy brought three early works by Jack Yeats to the National Gallery (NGI 1406-1409) and Mrs J. Egan gave the gallery one of its most popular paintings, *Before the Start* (NGI 1549). In the final year of his Directorship, McGreevy was able to purchase *Double Jockey Act* (NGI 1737), though the artist was now dead. See NGIA Minutes: 05/04/1963.

[9] McGreevy, 'Remainder requested by An Taoiseach Mr de Valera of subjects that came up when he received me on 15/04/1957', TCD MS 8148-250.

[10] See pp.168-170 for a discussion of this painting.

Despite the gallery's refusal to purchase work by living artists, the bequests that McGreevy would receive in his capacity as Director were vital for opening up the institution to modern art. Half-way through his Directorship, Evie Hone died, leaving the National Gallery a collection of Post-Impressionist paintings, including collages by Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso (NGI 1313 and 1314). McGreevy also presided over Hugh Lane's complicated legacy, a large part of which had been left to the National Gallery rather than the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art that he had founded. Lane's benefaction consisted of forty-two paintings and the remainder of his estate, which was sold after legalities to provide a fund for the institution.[11] But perhaps the most significant donation that McGreevy received was the collection of nineteenth-century French art that Sir Alfred Chester Beatty bequeathed to the gallery. This bequest included ninety-three French paintings and an especially fine sample from the Barbizon school.[12] Beatty would later offer the gallery twenty-two French Impressionist pictures on loan for a Dublin exhibition and a late Cézanne watercolour of *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire* (1902-1904; NGI 3300) as a gift.[13] Such was McGreevy's skill at reaching out to the naturalised British citizen, who had moved to Dublin in 1950, that the millionaire philanthropist developed a running joke in relation to his Irish correspondent, calling himself and the Director 'M & B' after the pre-penicillin antibiotics.[14]

McGreevy's experiences in Paris, Rome, London and later New York made him alert to deficiencies at the gallery, and he wasted no time in outlining the backward state of the institution, using Thomas Bodkin's *Report on the Arts in Ireland* to justify his argument that 'as a nation we are woefully ill-equipped to judge of the visual arts'.[15] Two years after

[11] See Robert O'Byrne, *Hugh Lane's Legacy to the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2000).
[12] NGIA Minutes: 05/07/1950.
[13] 'I herewith offer the Cézanne watercolour of the Montagne Ste [Sainte-] Victoire as a gift'. NGI Archives, Chester Beatty file: 13/09/1954.
[14] For more on the McGreevy-Beatty correspondence, see TCD MS 8133. My thanks to Susan Schreibman for her lecture at the Chester Beatty Library, titled 'Letters from Nice: Chester Beatty's Friendship with Thomas McGreevy' (21/11/2013).
[15] NGIA: National Gallery of Ireland Director's Report for 1950. Bodkin's report was sent to McGreevy on the

McGreevy's appointment to the Directorship, Bodkin revisited the gallery, expressing in curiously dulcet tones to his nemesis: 'Cher ami et colleague, it was an extreme pleasure to see you the other day and to survey the splendid work you have done in the NGI… Thanks to you its long eclipse has now ended'.[16] Despite the early pressures of censorship in Ireland's print culture and persistent underfunding from the Free State government, McGreevy was able to consolidate the National Gallery as a place in which to educate a wider audience. A letter sent halfway through his tenure to the Irish Department of Education provides clear evidence of the agency behind his decision to discontinue writing: '[…] for five years I have put everything else to one side. I was known as a writer and I am no longer, to all intents and purposes, a writer – and have given all my time, in season and out of season to the National Gallery and its problems'.[17]

Where McGreevy had previously written poems as *faits sociaux* of Ireland's political turmoil, the presence of the gallery in his work as a space of administrative and cultural exchange would help to transform the priorities of the nation. In an article titled 'Muting the Klaxon: Poetry, History and Irish Modernism', Tim Armstrong advances the view that by the mid-1940s, McGreevy had moved away from his earlier avant-garde leanings and 'descended to the position of a pillar of establishment rectitude […]'.[18] Establishment rectitude can lead to increasing public education, whereas avant-gardism may be hostile and indifferent to it. However, as the coda of this thesis has maintained, McGreevy's Directorship of the National Gallery brought with it a new version of the popular and democratic. When McGreevy took

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instruction of the Taoiseach, cementing McGreevy's new role as chief advisor to the government in matters relating to art. Other dignitaries with whom McGreevy worked to secure advice and assistance included Professor Magnani of the University of Rome, Sir Kenneth Clark (ex-Director of the National Gallery in London) and James J. Rorimer (incoming Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

[16] Thomas Bodkin to McGreevy: 19/03/1952; TCD MS 6962/32.

[17] McGreevy to Irish Department of Education: 19/08/1955; NGI Admin Box 24. This letter was sent on the understanding that the Directorship would soon be restored to a full-time position. The post had been reduced to a part-time position by Hugh Lane so that he could continue his business as an art dealer in London.

[18] Tim Armstrong, 'Muting the Klaxon: Poetry, History and Irish Modernism', in Coughlan and Davis (ed.), pp.43-74 (p.47).

over as Director, attendances at the gallery were still falling.[19] His policies as head of Ireland's leading cultural institution helped to reverse the erosion of a viewing public between the State and the Catholic mainstream. Every room was rehung during his thirteen years as Director and plans set in motion for enlarging the gallery's physical dimensions.[20] That the National Gallery of Ireland is an imperial institution founded by an Act of Parliament in 1854 renders it no less vital to an avant-garde impulse. Having previously defended Mainie Jellett's Cubist experiment from conservative media reactions, McGreevy was now able to feed the very concept of a 'people' on foreign pictures. Furthermore, his campaign for the inclusion of living art structures an immediate role for the present: one that refuses to maintain the gallery as a sacralised space in favour of the 'wider essentials of living'.

[19] Peter Somerville-Large claims that 40,664 people visited the gallery in 1950 compared to 43,298 the year before. See Somerville-Large, *1854-2004: The Story of the National Gallery of Ireland*, p.354.
[20] NGI Admin Box 31: Report by McGreevy on National Gallery Premises (1959).

Conclusion

This thesis has documented a lack of popular enthusiasm and even deliberate imperviousness in Ireland to new artistic styles and techniques. Throughout I have been preoccupied with a central question: how to sustain cultural strategies of revolutionary significance when the frontier between creative activity and political activism can no longer be straightforwardly crossed. Several other questions have arisen over the course of the project. Can works of art be expected to continue earlier forms of national resistance? How does avant-garde work oppose society in its past and current forms? To what extent does avant-garde work reimagine its ties with popular culture? While the introduction of censorship in Ireland leads certain writers (such as Samuel Beckett) to abandon the national project as altogether ill-conceived, other poets and painters seek a second way. In 'A Cultural Irish Republic', McGreevy argues that political revolution is less an end in itself than a means towards cultural revolution and a new edifice of the mind. As we have seen from his critical, creative and directorial work, the provocation of aesthetic resistance offers a productive mode of disaffiliation from existing cultural-ideological standards.

There is a lexical challenge in the ways that Irish poets and painters of the 1920s and 30s introduce similar or overlapping terms – 'yet', 'still', 'still-life', 'quick-life', 'going', 'means and ends', even 'meaning' as a pure verbal noun – when bringing stasis and movement into alignment. Hints about the inadequacy of the present are evident from the linguistic distance that these terms sustain. We have noticed how 'stillness' is used to signal both a condition of motionlessness and one of anticipated movement: '*Morte* . . ! / 'Tis still life that lives, Not quick life –'. While an avant-garde spirit must necessarily presuppose present and future creation, a crisis of succession, or *histoire manqué*, is implied by a future that has been constructed on the ruins of time: a strategy that points to larger concerns about

the death of the old and there being no new to replace it.

Once violence had ceased to provide a legitimate end to revolutionary state formation (*à la* Pearse, MacDonagh, Plunkett), the gulf between culture and politics appears only to have widened in avant-garde circles. If the struggle for political liberty had ended in the suppression of cultural liberty, then artistic innovation after Irish independence becomes tied to works that avoid the prospect of ideological saturation. The patterns that I have traced in cultural debates of the 1920s and 30s reveal an increasing concern with self-expression over artificial imitation; with paradox rather than representation; and with the inward pursuit of a deeper (often sexual) need. A reimagining of the past and future is evident in the use of the dawn and evening song, tomb inscriptions and early book illuminations: the influences of which have all been shown in previous chapters. I have also outlined a 'genealogy' of the Irish painter in McGreevy's art-historical writings of the late 1930s and 40s, which extends the problem of canonical practices to the issue of artistic patronage. In each of these cases, creative experiment is poised on the threshold of change without the tools to act upon society at large.

In *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, Matei Calinescu argues that 'etymologically, two conditions are basic to the existence and meaningful activity of any properly named avant-garde (social, political, or cultural): (1) the possibility that its representatives be conceived of, or conceive of themselves, as being in advance of their time; and (2) the idea that there is a bitter struggle to be fought against an enemy symbolising the forces of stagnation […]'.[1] Though some of Calinescu's definitions can be overly schematic, I have taken these two points as central to avant-garde activity. This thesis has referred the antagonistic momentum of avant-garde work back to the neo-revivalist style of W.B. Yeats's followers and disciples; to the recurrence of

[1] See 'Avant-Garde and Aesthetic Extremism', pp.116-120 (pp.121-122), and 'The Idea of the Avant-Garde', pp.95-148, in Matei Calinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003; first published 1977).

peasant themes; and to the academic leanings of social and cultural institutions. Examining the ways in which poets and painters break with tradition has allowed me to consider the wider implications of this shift in attitude and to scrutinise the relations between competing forms of political and cultural self-apprehension.

After the launch of *The Leader* by D. P. Moran at the beginning of the century, the appeal of 'Irish-Ireland' ideology expanded during the 1920s and 30s inspiring a cohort of followers who sought to purify the new nation by reducing the range of its cultural sympathies to the Irish language and the national landscape of the west. In opposition to this narrowing of Ireland as a cultural-ideological territory, I have outlined the contours of an expatriate group, particularly around George Reavey's literary agency the Bureau Littéraire Européen, which he started with the Russian émigré Marc Slonim in 1932. The thesis has extended this social context of publication to the poetry of Beckett, Devlin, McGreevy, and to the work of other Irish writers and painters in order to move towards a closer understanding of their group dynamics in Paris. By orienting discussion within an avant-garde framework, I have attempted to understand the various modes of provocation, resistance and transformation that stimulate post-revolutionary creative activity. On the one hand, I have shown how an avant-garde impulse seeks to divorce itself from society in order to find an absolute in the work of art; on the other hand, I have shown how it seeks to expand the limits of the work of art so as to continue to act upon society at large. Though apparently irreconcilable in their aims, these two different trajectories – between an art that spurns political engagement of any kind and one that seeks to renew that engagement – are caught up in the same historical moment.

In many cases, the split that I have identified between Ireland's revolutionary foundations and its conservative artistic direction can be connected to the registers of comedy and irony: that is, to the acute discrepancy that results between the reality of something and

the projection of that reality. As Finn Fordham has noted in *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake: Unravelling Universals*, it is the 'idiology' of which the listener (Taff) is implicated after hearing 'How Buckley Shot the Russian General' to substitute the living self for an impossible ideal of immunity and protection 'in an effort towards autosotorisation' ('soter' in Greek mythology refers to a spirit of salvation and deliverance from harm).[2] Framing an analysis of stylistic modes constantly as excess of the monologic desire of cultural nationalism might generate future discussions elsewhere, which could proceed from an analysis of carnival and burlesque rather than be generated by a unitary language that seeks to protect singular versions of culture and truth.

[2] See Finn Fordham, *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake: Unravelling Universals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.106-107 for a discussion of this passage in *Finnegans Wake*, ed. Robbert-Jan Henkes, Erik Bindervoet, Finn Fordham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; first published London: Faber & Faber, 1939), p.352 (lines 17-20).

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