

Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Modernism:

State, Self, and Style in Four Authors

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
English in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study examines Irish modernist literature in order to complicate established critical modes which read modernist movements as reflective of distinctly vernacular or cosmopolitan aesthetic and political commitments. I argue that neither recent models of vernacular modernism nor older models of cosmopolitan modernism entirely account for the stylistic innovations and formal experiments of modernist literature. Instead, modernist writers negotiate a field of tension between the poles of cosmopolitan and vernacular, and demonstrate that their works represent forms of identity that accommodate elements of both national belonging and cosmopolitan individualism.

Examining works by four authors – William Butler Yeats, Elizabeth Bowen, Samuel Beckett, and Raymond Queneau – this project argues that modernist literature represents a set of idiosyncratic, dynamic efforts to negotiate the tensions between the limits of the nation-state system and a variety of emerging transnational modes of cultural exchange in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The nature of modernist writers' efforts to negotiate a period of passage between national and global systems of exchange is, I think, especially visible in the case of Irish modernism. Ireland's transition from a part of the United Kingdom to an independent nation-state in the interwar period makes that nation's literature an exemplary case for my argument, as does the critical importance of Irish writing in the modernist canon.

By examining these and other critical and historical perspectives alongside a sampling of plays, novels, short stories, and memoirs, this study makes the case that modernist literary aesthetics spring from writers' efforts to make sense of competing desires for national belonging and cosmopolitan autonomy. Focusing on works that cross categorical boundaries between Irish and cosmopolitan modernism, this study traces the ways in which modernist aesthetics construct dynamic, adaptive relationships between the global and the national, and suggest that we can imagine them as something other than static, exclusive alternatives.

Dedication

To my parents –

From whom I learned to follow my dreams

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I explore several works of Irish modernism, as well as one work that parodies Irish modernism, in order to argue that Irish modernist writing represents a group of idiosyncratic efforts by writers to find a middle path between the competing alternatives of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Nationalism and cosmopolitanism make up two poles between which exists a field of productive tensions that Irish modernist literature attempts to represent and resolve. By considering modernist works written in or about Ireland, I suggest that its particular historical and cultural circumstances make the underlying forces that shape modernism especially visible in Irish modernist writing. Ireland in the early twentieth century shares features of both European metropolitan centers and colonial peripheries, and Irish political life was often imagined as a contest between cosmopolitan and localist visions of the nation's artistic and economic life. These tensions not only result in the political crises that led to Southern Irish independence and Civil War, but also in an especially vibrant corpus of modernist literature. Through readings of selected works including William Butler Yeats's plays, Elizabeth Bowen's prose works, Samuel Beckett's trilogy of post-World War II novels, I make the case that examining Irish modernism will reveal and explain a number of paradoxes and tensions latent in the broader range of European modernism. In order to make that case more fully, I also include a French novel, Raymond Queneau's *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes*, in order to demonstrate both the outside influence of Irish modernism on other literatures and to extend my argument beyond the borders of Ireland itself. In the chapters that follow, I present a case study that that goes

beyond models that treat it as the vernacular expression of collective, nationalist worldviews or as the literary vanguard of an emerging transnational or cosmopolitan individualism.

For a variety of reasons, Irish literature is one of the primary sites of an ongoing argument about whether to understand modernist literature as a cosmopolitan literary movement or as a set of vernacular, often nationally-aligned smaller movements that share certain key features. These two general frames for modernism are often applied to Irish modernist literature in English, because that literature emerges during the decades in which the twenty-six southern counties achieved political independence from Britain. As I argue in this study, the various political movements connected with Irish independence – most prominent among them, perhaps, being Irish republicanism – made claims about the nature, purpose, and function of literature in the emerging nation-state. At the same time, many of the major writers of Anglophone modernism were émigrés, people who adopted transnational identities that crossed national and ethnic borders. Anglo-American modernists like T.S. Eliot became major figures in international modernism. In this regard, many modernists and critics of modernism came to describe themselves not as practitioners within national or vernacular literatures, but rather as literary citizens of the world contributing to the development of a cosmopolitan aesthetic.

This cosmopolitan aesthetic could represent and even advocate for a developing space of global exchange in which the cosmopolis – the city of the world, where travelers and émigrés created a culture ostensibly independent of nationality and region – was the basic unit of both lived and literary space. In general, vernacular modernism tends to be

associated with collective and national forms of identity and belonging, while cosmopolitan modernism is typically linked with individualist models of self-identification and participation in emerging transnational cultures. These broad definitions conceal more complicated, mixed models of identity, belonging, nationality, and globality, and I argue that Irish modernist literature provides a strong case study with which we can see modernism as a literature in transit between elements of both the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, reflective of a world structured by both the nation-state system and by forms of cosmopolitan exchange.

Modernism's National, Transnational, and Cosmopolitan Frames

In 1931, the Anglo-American poet Ezra Pound declared of contemporary English literature that “the Irish took over the business for a few years; Henry James led, or rather, preceded the novelists, and then the Britons resigned *en bloc*; the language is now in the keeping of the Irish (Yeats and Joyce).”¹ In the same year, the Irish author and critic Daniel Corkery wrote that “Provincialism in Ireland is so thick, so omnipresent, that its lineaments are difficult to scan [...] Ireland – the Ireland that counts – is practically sterile in the arts [...] our [Irish] reading matter is overwhelmingly English not only in language, but in thought, feeling, outlook.”² These two responses represent two competing critical approaches that seek to define modernist movements in the name of cosmopolitan or nationalist literary politics, respectively. Pound constructs a literary tradition that incorporates Irish modernist writing into a transnational English literature,

¹ *How To Read* (New York: Haskell House, 1971), 42.

² *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 240-1. Re-issue of 1931 edition.

allowing him to posit what he considers a universal curriculum of literature and language by the end of his essay. In contrast, Corkery demands a “normal literature” which, in his definition, is always also a “national literature” that “welcom[es] the criticism of outsiders [but] neither lives nor dies by such criticism” (3). Pound stresses the essentially transnational character of supposed English literature, arguing that the strength of present-day Anglophone writing is its management and reinvigoration by other national and ethnic groups. For Corkery, however, the Irish are not the possessors and innovators of English, but instead its dominated subjects, alienated from some essential Irishness and rendered incapable of creating an Irish national literature as a consequence of the pervasiveness of this foreign tongue. The two critical responses locate the qualities and strengths of literature in radically different ways, with Pound favoring transnational and potentially cosmopolitan approach while Corkery insists on nativism and national essentialism.

The differences in position do not end there. Pound intends to construct a critical apparatus in which modernist writing is ranked and published according to his model. Pound imagines an audience of like-minded persons, and repeatedly scorns what he terms “the general reader” and the “low-brow reader” at different points in the piece. Corkery engages in a similar operation from the nationalist point of view, and much of the introduction to *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* involves Corkery stating criteria for what “counts” as Irish literature and applying these criteria to qualify or disqualify writers. For example, he argues that the most celebrated Irish modernist writer, James Joyce, “has gone astray” from the moral and cultural center of Ireland by becoming an

expatriate writer who rejects what Corkery considers the moral consciousness of the nation.³ William Butler Yeats is grudgingly accepted into Corkery's Irish literary canon by virtue of the fact that "it is not his habit to spend the whole of any year abroad."⁴ Corkery, unlike Pound, demands a literature whose primary goal is to express what he imagines as the common religious and national consciousness of an Irish people, and the central figure of audience in the introduction is a crowd of 30,000 at Thurles "with a national tradition behind them" (12), Pound imagines an audience of elite, individual minds; Corkery, a nationalist, commonly-minded people.

Pound and Corkery exemplify two competing views of literature that shaped many early 20th century debates about both the future and past of literature. The contrast in position is both distinctly modernist and distinctly Irish. As Declan Kiberd notes, as early as the late 19th century Irish literary and intellectual circles were enmeshed in controversies about whether Irish writing should embrace a modified English or seek a Gaelic revival, and this debate was itself contained within a larger question of "whether [Irish literature] should be national or cosmopolitan" (*Inventing Ireland*, 156). The cosmopolitans in that debate imagined their position as individualist and forward-looking; the nationalists, in turn, tended to valorize collective belonging and the rediscovery or reconstruction of some timeless, native essence in the arts. But as Kiberd points out, these positions were not so distinct as imagined, and it was just as possible to envision a "shallow cosmopolitanism...[that] would homogenize the whole of Europe

³ Ibid., 19-20.

⁴ *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, 4n1.

into dreary cosmopolitanism” as to imagine a form of “national individualism” in which “the nation as a formation” might “enhance the expressive potential of the person” and provide some middle ground between both nationalist and cosmopolitan purisms (157).

So why, then, do the categories and assumptions that Kiberd notes are already merging at the turn of the century still appear as two intractably opposed readings of Irish literature in 1931, readings which take the language question largely for granted? Both Pound and Corkery acknowledge that English has become the language of Irish writing, but both nonetheless offer opposing views about the way English works as literary medium and a political signifier in the Irish context. In answer, I return to the idea that the debate between Pound and Corkery reflects not only an Irish context, but a modernist one as well, at least where Anglophone literatures are concerned. The idea that English was a valuable transnational vernacular for modernist writing has achieved considerable prominence in recent criticism. Rebecca Walkowitz has argued that a central question in modernist culture is what it means “to be a British novelist, or even an English writer” and suggests that modernism makes Anglophone literature central to the practice of a “critical cosmopolitanism” (*Cosmopolitan Style*, 1,3). Similarly, John Marx, Jed Esty, and Michael North have each argued for different accounts of English as the transnational medium in which various forms of post-imperial consciousness are formed beginning in the modernist period. Though the British Empire itself was still quite powerful in the period, all three argue that the development of English as a set of local or regional vernaculars in various bodies of modernist literary practice suggests models of identity quite different from the stereotypes of imperial centers and colonial peripheries. Instead,

transnational English transforms English literature and English culture into a set of practices that negotiate, contain, and deploy hybrid and modified Englishes as media of difference. These “non-English” or “non-British” English literatures are employed for various effects according to different critical models – reconstructing a threatened English identity in Esty’s argument, permitting the expression of otherwise forbidden or repressed anxieties in North’s reading of dialect letters between T.S. Eliot and Pound, or undergirding a new and more advanced network of localities under English hegemony in Marx’s analysis.

As these critics and others have pointed out, then, the seeming oppositions between the poles I have noted above often conceal deeper connections and ignore the practical merging of alternative theories and practices of literature found in Irish and other modernist literatures. The Pound and Corkery essays, for example, reveal such hidden continuities and complications when examined more closely. It is easy and reductive to label Pound a proponent of a cosmopolitan, individualist, and elitist ideal; and it is similarly easy, and equally reductive, to view Corkery as the author of a nationalist, collective, and vernacular one. And indeed, these schisms are frequently reenacted in criticism of modernism in general. Andreas Huyssen, for example, divides early twentieth century writers into “modernists” and their opponents in “the historical avant-garde” whose opposed practices of criticism and writing create a “great divide” between “traditional bourgeois high culture” and “vernacular and popular culture as it

was increasingly transformed into modern commercial mass culture.”⁵ However, models of nationalism, statehood, and, in Ireland, the specific formation of republicanism provide alternative models of mass culture to the “low” commercialism which “high” or elitist modernism stereotypically opposes.

These other notions of collectivity may be based on the idea of tradition, as Huyssen’s argument suggests, but as Pound and Corkey each argue, it is possible to imagine a widely-shared model of culture that is not necessarily materialist. The more mystical tendencies of certain nationalisms mean to achieve wide acceptance but are often resolutely anti-materialist and often anti-commercial, for example, and the symbolism of Irish republicanism frequently derived from mythical, mystical examples affixed to concrete elements of the state apparatus, as if to confer such powers on it. The statue of Cuchulain in the Dublin Post Office could be read as an effort to consecrate the independent Irish government’s institutions by reference to both the plays of Yeats and the Revivalists and to the Easter Rising, itself intended by some of its chief participants – most notably Patrick Pearse – to inspire a somewhat mystical brand of Irish nationalism in the population. This consecrated nationalism also enables the nation-state to wed the immaterial aspirations of nationalists to the material institutions of the government. By capturing the aspirations of nationalists, the nation-state can claim to embody some historical or mystical essence of the people or the nation, and the state can consequently argue for its own historical necessity and a popular sovereignty. Unsurprisingly,

⁵ *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1986), viii-ix.

emerging nation-states and statist nationalisms often employ mystical rhetoric that would consecrate their aims in his manner.

Typically, such essentialist nationalism also makes claims upon literature, interpreting the vernacular culture of the nation as the basis of a national literature that expresses the mystical essence of the nation itself. At the heart of the idea of a national literature is the idea of the text as monument, as the signpost of a national literary space. This idea is not limited to nationalist and statist ideas of literature, however; the text can also be imagined as a counterpart of the cosmopolis, a space of transnational exchange and cultural hybridization inaugurating novel customs and opening up alternative political spaces for both cosmopolitan individuals and international collectivities. These aspirations are visible in both Pound's and Corkery's images of culture, and for both men the present and future of literature and its readership have high political stakes: Pound claims that "the function of literature in a state" is in "maintaining the cleanliness of the tools, the health of the very matter of thought itself," and Corkery argues that "[a] national literature foretells the nation's future" (16). Pound and Corkery seem to agree that literature plays a role in other forms of social organization, and their efforts to define "good" or "national" literature represent efforts to capture literature's functional role for their respective ideologies.

As a result, these ideas of cosmopolitan or transnational culture and national and republican culture are not entirely distinct in method and technique, and they even share in acknowledging globally-dominant languages as the necessary medium of the nation's literature. Both Pound and Corkery regard English as a distinct national language, albeit

one with an international or transnational mobility. Pound cites Irish writers like Yeats and Joyce as well as American-born writers like Henry James (and, implicitly, himself) as the creators and caretakers of modern English literature. He sees modernism as the dislocation or deterritorialization of vernacular literatures. Corkery, for his part, treats the development of English literary tradition as a “natural” one, arguing that Irish literary uses of English must involve a conscious reconstruction or reappropriation of the language if an Irish literary tradition is to be the end result. Both argue that English literary tradition has migrated to Ireland: their difference consists in the fact that Pound imagines English literature as a transnational phenomenon to begin with, while Corkery sees it as a foreign mode of expression that will require conscious reformulation if it is to become the expression of distinctly Irish culture.

Both writers refer to essentialist models of national belonging, albeit not always positively: Pound ironically describes the figure of the “autochthonous Briton,” and Corkery more earnestly employs the image of a culturally unified Irish people. For Corkery the problem is that the native Irish have no literature or literary language of their own, and have been forced to make do with an Anglo-Irish literature and an expatriate Irish literature, both of which must be rewritten as examples of the “national literature” characteristic of the “normal nation.” Pound’s view appears more cosmopolitan, as he advocates a multilingual and multinational literature in which literature is a universal inheritance in which English literature is kept alive by “exotic injections” from other places, including Ireland. Yet both end up supporting the notion of a linguistically and historically hybrid literature – Pound because he understands that as the strength of the

literary tradition, and Corkery because he sees hybrid formations as a solution to the problem of a displaced native Irish language and an absent native literary tradition. The cosmopolitan and transnational model of literary culture turns out to be intertwined with the nationalist and vernacular model due to historical contingency and practical necessity. Both cosmopolitan and vernacular models rely on a shared notion of international space. Corkery demands that Irish literature and, by extension, nationality take on the features of “normal nations” so that Ireland itself can exist as a culturally autonomous “normal nation.” Pound, for his part, imagines that English literature only remains vital in a global literary tradition when English as a literary language has achieved autonomy from the territorial space and provincial mindset of the nation. Paradoxically, Corkery imagines a transnational English literature that produces autochthonous Irishmen, while Pound imagines Irish writers liberating the mental and literary space of “autochthonous Briton[s].” Two opposed political and aesthetic projects turn out to rest on very similar concepts of the relationship between nationality, transnationality, and literature.

Both arguments run into serious trouble when one considers the actual backgrounds, writing, and lives of Irish modernist writers. To begin with, in Ireland there were distinctions made between “native” Irish, usually figured as Catholics who were of the middle and lower classes in cities, or carried out agrarian labor in rural and underindustrialized areas of the country, and the Anglo-Irish, who were in turn often imagined as upper-class, even aristocratic “West Britons” or as the entirety of the urban professional class, but who in practice occupied multiple places in society. As I will argue in the chapters on W.B. Yeats and Elizabeth Bowen, the image of an Anglo-Irish

Ascendancy made up of landlords relegating the Irish to the position of tenant farmers was both profoundly anachronistic and curiously persistent in twentieth-century Ireland. Anglo-Irish often stands in, especially retrospectively, for any deviation from an especially parochial definition of “Irish” as Catholic and working- or, at best, middle-class. Once used to denote the English settlers who intermarried with the Irish, the term “Anglo-Irish” became a label for Protestants many generations removed from English ancestry regardless of class or position. It is telling that Bowen, a genuine descendant of Ascendancy who lived much of her life in England could be called “Anglo-Irish” alongside Samuel Beckett, who was born to a middle-class Protestant family, raised and educated entirely in Ireland, and emigrated to France as an adult. The Anglo-Irish Treaty hardly split the island into a Protestant, loyalist, and resolutely Anglophone component of the United Kingdom and a Catholic, independent nation where Gaelic was intended to oust a usurping English, because the practical situation in both nations was far more complex. Additionally, expatriation had become an established possibility in Ireland well before independence, even long before the mid-nineteenth-century famine accelerated what has sometimes been termed the Irish diaspora. It was a ready option for many of the Irish in either part of the island to leave for elsewhere, whether to abandon some idea of Ireland or to nurture it more strongly because they were beyond the practical realities of living in an actual Ireland.

Nor was the imagination of independent Ireland entirely the province of nativists and republicans: the great Irish national poet in the early twentieth century was, by any estimation, Yeats, who was himself Anglo-Irish. Additionally, many Irish writers

anointed as such as early as 1931 – much to Corkery’s explicit displeasure – wrote as expatriates, like Beckett and Joyce. It could therefore seem questionable just what it meant to class these writers as either Irish modernists or, as Pound suggests, as the inheritors of English modernism. Corkery attempts to make residency a tangible criterion, alongside the more intangible quality of the “Irish consciousness” he claims would inhere to genuinely national literature, but this seems primarily a rhetorical move aimed at letting Corkery include Yeats (begrudgingly) as an Irish writer, an inclusion made practically necessary by Yeats’s general acceptance as the national poet of Ireland and arguably its most internationally famous and successful writer at the time. (In retrospect, of course, Corkery’s banishment of Joyce from the Irish canon might seem questionable given Yeats’s long periods spent outside Ireland, not to mention shortsighted given the formidable literary reputation Joyce would acquire in the intervening decades.) But Pound’s idea that English literature was in the charge of the Irish also raises questions on the Irish side of the sort that Corkery was asking, given that the southern twenty-six counties of Ireland became a free state with its own government since 1922. Since the Free State was effectively independent of England, republicans like Corkery could insist that its literature be similarly independent and distinctively Irish.

Political autonomy and cultural autonomy were often linked by Irish republican rhetoric, and this sort of link is typical of many nineteenth and twentieth century political and nationalist movements. More generally, as Eric Hobsbawm notes, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the rise of the nation-state as the political form which ostensibly “linked both formal and informal, official and unofficial, political and social inventions

of tradition” for various social groups.⁶ Ernst Gellner has likewise described the period as a transition into an “age of nationalism, a period of turbulent readjustment, in which either political boundaries, or cultural ones, or both, were being modified.”⁷ Similarly, Anthony D. Smith has argued that “any attempt to forge a national identity is also a political action with political consequences, like the need to redraw the geopolitical map or alter the composition of political regimes and states” and that “most states aspire to become nation-states.”⁸ In practice, however, everything from the boundaries of any proposed Irish state to its form of government remained the basis of vehement, even violent debate long after independence was ostensibly a formally established political fact. The Irish Civil War made this abundantly clear, as did the long history of constitutional revisions and rewritings stretching into the late 1940s.

What all of these events and reactions suggest is that the fate of literature was not determined by political boundaries, and that nationalism and statehood could not be so easily conjoined. This is quite problematic from the perspective of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century nationalisms described by Hobsbawm, Smith, and others. Like many emerging nation-states in the modernist period, Ireland seemed to its more ardent nationalists and republicans to require mutually supportive cultural and political institutions that would shape and safeguard its status as a formal political entity. A

⁶ “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 300-302.

⁷ *Nations and Nationalism*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 38-40. Gellner stresses the importance of industrialization in the nineteenth century to the emergence of nationalism as he defines it. Gellner’s model of nationalism responds specifically to the features of the emerging nation-state system of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁸ *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991); 15, 99.

distinctly Irish culture and tradition helped make the case that the Irish were still not British, and so should no longer be British subjects; conversely, the delineation of an Irish state and the standardization in law of distinctly Irish mores and an Irish national language would, it was thought, ensure the rise and prominence of a culture and tradition of Irishness. Both Pound's and Corkery's arguments rest on the idea that Irish cultural autonomy and Irish political independence were not necessarily congruent after 1921, least where literary work is concerned. This is also true, however, of the laws, institutions, and practices associated with Irish nationalism and its literature, for which that incongruence was the source of an understandable and unavoidable anxiety.

For this reason, it was still possible for a central figure of modernism like Pound and a cultural nationalist like Corkery to imagine Irish literature as a subset of English literature as late as 1931, nine years after the Anglo-Irish Treaty effectively produced an independent Irish nation-state. The lingering political problem of the Treaty, which retained language about the de jure if not de facto sovereignty of the English monarch, led to Civil War in 1922 and 1923. The legal codification of independence proceeded in fits and starts, and the political rhetoric surrounding it grew to the point of being a body of Irish literature in itself. The language in the Anglo-Irish Treaty that granted sovereignty to the British monarch was abandoned in 1937, when Eamon de Valera's republican government rewrote the constitution entirely. The 1937 constitution also made Gaelic the first language of the land in law, but hardly in everyday life. And it was not until 1949 that Britain formally recognized the independence of the recently-renamed Republic of Ireland, despite Ireland's avowed neutrality in the second World War and

neighboring Britain's status as the primary Western European opponent of the Axis powers early on in the conflict. Somewhat problematically, though, Pound's statement retains the national categories implied by the phrase "English literature." In tracing the history of English literature, Pound emphasizes the foreign location of English literary production while retaining the category of English literature as a stable point of reference. At the same time, he presents the Irish, the English, and others as distinct nationalities.

Similarly, Corkery is troubled by the problem of expatriate Irish writers, whom he imagines "writing for an alien market" and failing to "produce a national literature."⁹ Somewhat unconvincingly, Corkery insists that other nations' expatriates – including American writers based in Paris like Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway – write for and reflect upon the home country in ways constructive of a national literature. Just as Pound admits the possibility that the fate of English literature can be Irish, Corkery allows the possibility that the fate of American or Russian or Norwegian literature (to use his examples) can be decided by literary production abroad. For both Pound and Corkery, the use of vernacular languages like English, French, or Russian has become a transnational, arguably cosmopolitan practice; but the categories into which people and locations fall, and even entire literatures, nonetheless remain distinctly national. For Corkery, the relatively new status of Ireland as an independent nation seems to inflame anxieties about the boundaries of national belonging. For Pound, on the other hand, the transnational practice of writing seems to deterritorialize both contemporary and prior

⁹ *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, 4-5.

“national” literary cultures. Modernist literature seems for both Pound and Corkery to take on a schizophrenic character in which literary practice is both national and cosmopolitan, and literary language can be both vernacular and transnational.

The Irish Case

For both Pound and Corkery, and for others, Irish writing in the modernist period is a point of special focus and contention. The story of Irish modernity and modernism is one in which the various troubled distinctions in the broader story of modernism and modernity are especially clear. This Irish account of modernism is useful in that it is closely intertwined with the once-conventional British account of the same aesthetic category. Additionally, Irish and Anglo-Irish writers produced many of the works most central to the canon of English modernism. Seamus Deane has argued persuasively that modern Irish writing from the nineteenth century responds to a British colonial account of Ireland as historically and culturally backwardness, that is, as a place that has failed to modernize.¹⁰ Deane’s example is the Irish accent and Hiberno-English, which make up Irish vernacular difference from “the King’s English,” a global imperial vernacular that aspires to become the cosmopolitan register of a globally-dominant, homogeneous British empire. In Deane’s account, British colonialism narrates Irish vernacular English – Hiberno-English – as symptomatic of Ireland’s broader difference from modernity, which is an essential feature of (imperial) Britishness. The agrarian character of the Irish economy, the prevalence of enchanted visions of the world and premodern kinship

¹⁰ *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writings Since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 60-62.

relations, and the Irish relationship to the land add up to a British imperial imagination of Ireland as a premodern country and its people as the exotic stereotypes of the dreamy Celt and the denigrating stereotype of the stage-Irishman. And in response to this image and the imperial dispossession affiliated with it, a strain of romantic nationalism and the goal of repossessing the land lost to “modern dispossession” becomes one face of Irish national consciousness and one register of Irish literature.¹¹

Yet at the same time, the nearness of England also meant that late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland took cues regarding modernization from English models of the same. The narrative of modernity that Irish writers responded to was very much drawn from late 19th century British models of modernization. On the one hand, the British colonial project had left Ireland with an increasingly outdated agricultural economy, and delayed industrialization on the island. On the other, the colonial project also accelerated the development of quintessentially modern means of representing both Irishness and Britishness, as well as alternatives or compromises to both identities. R.F. Foster has described the resulting clash between Irish aesthetic modernity and economic development as “the Janus-face of Ireland, whose ambivalence and elusiveness exhausted contemporaries and historians alike” at the turn of the century.¹² For Foster, the issue is not the result of a racialized Irish pre-modernity or closeness to the land, as imperialist and nationalist accounts would respectively have it, but instead is the consequence of the relative informality of English colonization of Ireland by means to of the creation and

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63, 77.

¹² *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 4.

later abandonment of the landholding Protestant Ascendancy. This intermediary class, neither native Irish nor wholly British, stood in place of distinctly modern state institutions and infrastructure until into the 19th century. As a result, the Irish entry into modernity was a troubled one. The unspoken norm for this modernization remains, in Foster's account, British or English; the difference in the British colonization of Ireland essentially is the difference between Anglicization and colonization. Rather than modernizing and assimilating the native, largely Catholic Irish, the English initially employed the Protestant Ascendancy as an intermediary while effacing native Irishness and the Gaelic language in lieu of Anglicizing and modernizing the country.¹³

But what is notable in Foster's account is that he precociously dates Irish modernity to the 17th century, and argues that it begins with English colonization. Colonization produces a modern sense of national solidarity and belonging among the native Irish prior to the issue's settlement in England itself. This precociously modern national consciousness arises and survives in a country where other institutions of modernity social formation were quite "late" in coming when compared to the British narrative of technological and economic modernization. In other words, Foster's account seems similar to Benedict Anderson's account of modern nationality, in which the modern idea of the nation arises in the colonial margin before it arises in the imperial center. The Irish possess modern national consciousness before the question is settled in Britain by Civil War and its aftermath. This formation is in part a compensation for the

¹³ Ibid., 59.

comparatively delayed forms of technological modernization. The economic and population crises in 19th and early 20th century Ireland are often understood as consequences of Ireland's inability to modernize properly, the spur to which Deane attributes much literary production. Terry Eagleton, in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, cites W.E.H. Lecky in order to argue that the absence of powerful institutional and state formations in Ireland correlates to both an unrestrained nationalism opposed to the British state.¹⁴ Both Eagleton and Foster point out that Irish population in the 19th century had grown at a rate comparable to that of other European nations, but in the absence of an expansion of industrial capacity on the same scale as in England and much of the European continent.¹⁵

As a consequence of this curious situation, conceptions of modernity within and outside Ireland understood Ireland's situation as one of difference from the received English account of modernity. (That the English account was itself co-opted by imperial nationalism in order to make a similar distinction perhaps goes without saying.) In effect, the Irish production of modern cultural and aesthetic touchstones that elsewhere proceeded from or in opposition to state and political institutional formations proceeded in Ireland from a situation in which those formations were weak or absent. Where elsewhere one might argue, with Huyssen, that modernism and avant-gardisme arose in response to modern technologies of production and government, in Ireland they developed in response to the lack of those intermediate formations between tradition and

¹⁴ *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 66-7.

¹⁵ *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, 67; Foster, 217-22.

modernity which technology displaces in the normative account. In the absence of infrastructural support from the economy or the political system, maintaining Irishness as a nationality and which motivated Irish literary production were thereby definitive and constitutive of the processes of a late modernism, even if they were not always successful as political projects. In reaction to a profound absence of concrete economic and political structures of modernity to which nationalism could properly ally itself, then, a set of Irish modernisms advanced and centered themselves because they had to. Modernism in literature became a way to compensate for an absence of modernization in the economic system, which remained largely agrarian and unindustrialized, as well as a way of responding to the lack of Home Rule that placed debate over Irish political matters in London. The innovation of Irish modernism is at once the root of a version of modernism in the era of the nation-state and a necessary supplement of nationalism that initially seems to make the disparity between Irish modernism's critical position and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland's underdevelopment so paradoxical.

This disparity gave rise to anxieties analogous to those which English modernism meant to assuage in the aftermath of the breakup of the imperial system and the increasing distance from traditional modes implied by urbanization and industrialization. But because it had to do the job of other forms of modernization, modernist aesthetics arises earlier in Ireland and with an intensity only seen after the first World War in England. Ironically enough, the precocity of Irish modern nationalism fueled Irish independence movements and consequently accelerated Ireland's process of breaking from the British empire. The imperial break-up in turn fueled British modernism, and

British modernism's hybrid aesthetic achievements could then be claimed by Irish and Anglo-Irish modernists. Before independence, Ireland's relationship to other European nations had often been mediated by England. Moreover, the political connection between Ireland and England was itself conducted through the Protestant Ascendancy prior to the Act of Union, which made Ireland a constituency of Great Britain. As a result, Irish involvement in European and global political and cultural affairs was conducted as British and English involvement prior to independence. In becoming an independent nation-state, Ireland had to establish its difference from England and Britain as part of the larger project of consolidating its political independence.

Because Irish political modernity had arrived under the auspice of British political modernity, it was also possible to decouple Irishness from modern state and local institutions. After all, if the political institutions of Ireland had a British history, then Irish independence might mean an opportunity to break with those institutions in the name of breaking with the history of domination they represented. For many republicans, authentic Irishness and real independence could only be achieved by making that historical break. Ardent Irish nationalists like Eamon de Valera were willing to rebel against what they saw as a still-too-British government over Free State constitution's inclusion of an oath of allegiance to Britain, language which could be read as retaining the sovereignty the British monarch, provoking the Civil War in 1922 and 1923. It was, it seemed, possible to insist on Irish nationality in a way that exceeded the political expression of the Irish Free State just as similar nationalist sentiment had required more than either Union or limited Home Rule in earlier times. Additionally, the earliest

generations of the Anglo-Irish had long been labeled with the cliché of being “more Irish than the Irish,” and the twentieth-century Anglo-Irish represented generations of Irish-born people who considered themselves a different sort of Irish national.

Valorizing what they considered British, and more importantly Anglo-Irish contributions to Irish national culture and to such Irish institutions as existed, they also conceived of themselves as an ethnicity expressing distinctly Irish characteristics, albeit characteristics different from those adopted by Catholic and nativist Irish. Even the Irish who emigrated from the nineteenth century onwards due to a combination of dire economic prospects at home, catastrophes like the Great Famine of the mid-1800s, and political frustration in the period surrounding Irish independence proudly bore their heritage and were, in their own way, a people who sometimes behaved “more Irish than the Irish” wherever they were. De Valera, an iconic figure of Irish irredentism who authored the 1937 revised constitution that abolished the dominion clause and instituted Gaelic-language preference, was born in the United States to an Irish immigrant mother and a Cuban-born father under the rather less Gaelic (and rather British) forename “George.” And as the literary canon shows, plenty of Irish émigrés chose to be Irish abroad on a permanent basis, transforming Irish vernacular culture into the features of a cosmopolitan existence with no notion of restoring or redeeming the local Ireland they left behind. Commitment to Irish vernacular culture could arise from quite cosmopolitan sources, and commitment to cosmopolitanism could in turn arise from distinctly Irish sources.

Moreover, the idea of Irish literature in English reflected the practical vernacular circumstances of Irish modernism. Even in the language it chose, the nature of Irish modernism suggests a practical intermixture of transnational and native, of cosmopolitan and vernacular. The question before Irish modernists, their readers, and their critics was not one of choosing between a homegrown literary tradition or a foreign one, but rather of what forms of modernism and modernity the mixed inheritance making up 20th century Irish literary life might produce. In a recently-independent nation-state, such choices retained the sense that they were between national belonging and cosmopolitan mobility, or between individual and collective notions of “being Irish” or merely being. But the truth is that any claims about the national specificity of literary practice or of its transcendence of the national question are both fatally complicated by the inherent compromise that Ireland was written about in an originally foreign language. This compromise cuts both ways: if the bulk of prominent Irish modernists adopted English as the medium of expressing Ireland, those who employed polyglot English, or, like Beckett, abandoned the language entirely never entirely abandoned Ireland. If the Irish could take charge of the English language, there is no reason they might not also take charge of still other foreign vernaculars and similarly make them the medium of native expression. As I shall demonstrate, even Beckett found himself smuggling Ireland into his French, at the same time that he translated these Franco-Irish works back into a Hiberno-English with the capacity for polyglot reference and an awareness of its own translated status.

Literary Space and Modernism

In order to help work out the contradictions that characterize Irish modernist literature, and more generally any sense of national and cosmopolitan literatures in the period, I turn to the critic Pascale Casanova's description of "literary space" as a key concept in understanding the development of world literatures. Casanova argues that the production of "literary space" predates modern ideas of nation and state, and that the nineteenth-century emergence of the nation state is linked to the emergence of what she terms "new literary spaces" that are connected to the cultural and political projects of equally new nationalisms. The emergence of such literary space furthers the broader goals of nationalism as it invents its own traditions in order to imagine the nation-state itself as a natural cultural and political formation.¹⁶ The constructed nature of this literary space also enables authors to imagine and enact the cosmopolitan liberation and autonomization of literary space. Not coincidentally, Casanova's central example of this process of the emergence of a new literary space and its subsequent transformations into cosmopolitan, transnational, and ultimately individual and autonomous literary space is Irish literature, and more specifically Irish modernist literature. Casanova's Irish case history stretches from the Celtic Revivalists of the late nineteenth century, of whom she foregrounds W.B. Yeats to the "high" cosmopolitan modernism of James Joyce and ends

¹⁶ *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 35.

with what she argues is the complete and unique achievement of “total autonomy” for literature itself by Samuel Beckett.¹⁷

Casanova’s model is useful here for two reasons: first, because it clearly traces the genealogy of both vernacular language and vernacular literatures, and second, because it makes clear that in Irish modernism the vernacular tendency and the cosmopolitan tendency are inextricably intertwined. To some extent, however, her reading is conditioned by the particular circumstances of Ireland itself, which Casanova acknowledges by referring to Ireland as “a paradigm, in the Platonic sense” in which the unusually rapid emergence of literary space provides a “compact history” of the larger model she aims to apply to literature in general.¹⁸ She goes on to argue that “Irish literary space has the additional and rare distinction of combining every form of domination [...] it was from the beginning relatively well endowed with resources while at the same time exhibiting all the characteristics of economic and cultural colonization.”¹⁹ Casanova’s aim is to argue for a universal model of modern literary history as the invention and development of “literary space;” to the extent that Ireland is paradigmatic, it is because she reads Ireland as a digested example of that history within the era of nationalism.

¹⁷ Ibid., 303-24. Casanova argues for the Beckettian part of the case in an earlier monograph, 1997’s *Beckett l’abstracteur: Anatomie d’une révolution littéraire*, translated into English by Gregory Elliott as *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2006). Rebecca Walkowitz suggests another model in which cosmopolitanism emerges within literary modernism in *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006). For Walkowitz it is the Irish modernist writer James Joyce who employs what she terms the “triviality” of cosmopolitan and polyglot everyday experience to undermine grand national narratives of culture and tradition.

¹⁸ Ibid., 303.

¹⁹ Ibid., 397.

As a side effect, however, Irish particularity is reduced to what she terms “certain secondary historical differences,” and geographical and cultural difference themselves become a matter of the boundedness of particular instances of “literary space.”²⁰ Casanova’s universal history of literary space proceeds from transnational literary space to competing national literary spaces and finally to cosmopolitan and potentially atomistic literary spaces. Problematically, Casanova seems to ignore literary movements and historical events within any given literary space, and instead presumes that the development of “literariness” is always a project aimed at achieving complete autonomy for literature. In Casanova’s model, every literary space develops in broadly similar ways. While particular literary spaces, like Ireland, seem to develop differently, they nonetheless share most of the features of other literary development. For this reason, Casanova argues that Irish literary space passes through what she treats as the typical historical stages of literary space, but this passage occurs in a compressed timeline in which some stages of development overlap.

Because she insists that the same basic stages of development occur in every literary space, Casanova’s model sometimes runs afoul of more conventional models of periodization. In her account, literary space sometimes emerges in ways that follow conventional periodization, and sometimes the emergence of literary space ignores such periodization. The problem of periodization is readily apparent in her description of Irish literary space, since all of Casanova’s examples are drawn from the late nineteenth and

²⁰ Ibid.

early twentieth centuries. Casanova's history of Irish literary space looks less like a broad historical survey of Irish literature and more like a survey of Irish modernism. She argues that Ireland is the location of a compressed literary history that is paradigmatic of the development of literary space in general, but the entire paradigm seems to play out within the modernist period itself. As a result, larger analysis can be read as a model of the emergence of literary modernism rather than as a general model of the way literary spaces emerge throughout history. Casanova's model consistently relies on divisions between "high" and "low" culture, between "classical" and "modern," and finally between territorial nationalism and deterritorialized cosmopolitanism. In short, her analysis relies on distinctions that have long been understood as the constructions of modernism. Casanova produces less a universal history of literary space than a model of modernist appraisals of literary history. In this respect, the idea that Ireland has a special exemplary quality is not new: Pound says as much in 1931, in the midst of the high modernist period. Additionally, the idea that Irish modernism unveils the history of literary space writ small is problematic in part because the hypercompression of that historical model in the Irish case produces distorting, rather than exemplary effects as far as Casanova's case goes. For example, Casanova seems to read the triumph of English as a transnational literary vernacular over Gaelic as a nationalist literary vernacular as a ratification of what she sees as a larger movement towards a post-national cosmopolitanism and autonomy of literary space.

But as John Marx has remarked, English-language modernism can also be understood as a means of "privileg[ing] marginality for a cosmopolitan readership" by

employing “English vernaculars that [...] can best be understood as not *not* English.”²¹ In a way that echoes Corkery’s concerns about Anglo-Irish literature, in Marx’s analysis this produces less an egalitarian cosmopolitanism than a set of discrete localities which are observed and recorded by a cosmopolitan elite, so that “older geopolitical distinctions” between town and country or home and colony are preserved even in cosmopolitan modernism in forms “mediated by the division of labour so habitually figured in modernist fiction between mobile observers and local subjects whose lot in life it was to have their way of life observed.”²² In other words, local subjects were not liberated or raised up by cosmopolitanism, but rather transformed into the contents and features of a still-regional and national model of literary space organized and mapped out by cosmopolitan elites, namely modernist writers themselves. Like Casanova, Marx uses Joyce as his primary example of a cosmopolitan modernism born of an Irish context, but his version of cosmopolitanism connects English-speaking urban centers while distinguishing them from rural areas. English as a literary vernacular permits cosmopolitan innovations because British imperialism has made English into a transnational vernacular, but more accurately, because “the English language and culture have been so tainted by a long history of lexical cross-pollination that they can no longer be considered national categories.”²³ Marx also argues that cosmopolitan modernists expand the range of English as a privileged medium through their polyglot writing and

²¹ *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-2.

²² *Ibid.*, 199.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

linguistic innovation, and that this expansion of English is one of the means by which twentieth-century globalization manages and incorporates forms of “localization.” Marx thereby complicates accounts of Anglophone modernism as the means by which English(es) undergo deterritorialization and become cosmopolitan vernaculars.²⁴

In support of his argument, Marx cites work by Sheldon Pollock, a cultural anthropologist who in turn argues that all vernaculars are historically the products of transnational contact. As Pollock explains, vernacular culture in general and language in particular are not “[the] primeval ways of autochthons” but rather spring from “earlier practices, which seemed to belong to everywhere in general and nowhere in particular, [and which] affiliated their users to a larger world rather than a smaller place.”²⁵ Far from being rooted in originary and authentic sources of being, “vernacular literary cultures were initiated by the conscious decisions of writers to reshape the boundaries of their cultural universe by renouncing the larger world for the smaller place,” such that aggressive vernacular localism replaced “the older translocalism [and] in Western Europe [...] enabled the production of the nation-state.”²⁶ Casanova, Marx, and Pollock all share the idea that autochthonic conceptions of national, literary, and linguistic boundaries are retrospectively imposed by latter-day nationalists and governments. The concept of the autochthon, which appears in both Pound’s and Corkery’s essays, is therefore inherently problematic, and arguably false.

²⁴ Ibid., 23.

²⁵ “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History,” *Public Culture* Volume 12, Issue 3 (2000), 591. Also see Pollock’s earlier article, “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies* Volume 57, Issue 1 (February, 1998), 6-37

²⁶ Ibid., 592.

At the same time, its appearance in the essays suggests that modernists themselves took the idea quite seriously, and that even a comparatively cosmopolitan literary politics like Pound's could still include the figure of the autochthon as if it were real. Autochthonous culture may or may not be a real possibility, but to the modernists it was a possibility to be argued for or against, and the sense that literary vernaculars had essential, indigenous characteristics is not incompatible with modernist notions of cosmopolitanism. As my examples show, many modernists accepted the essentialism of national character and tradition, but also looked towards the possibility of creating cosmopolitan literary, social, and political spaces. Modernist interventions in literary politics – which, as Casanova reminds us, are always national politics as well – employ innovative methods of textual representation in order to negotiate the difference between these seemingly opposed ideas for a variety of often idiosyncratic or situationally-specific purposes.

In other words, modernist writing can be framed as a series of negotiations between vernacular, national worldviews or visions of literary space and cosmopolitan, transnational models of such space. In the Irish case, the triumph of English over the long-suppressed native Irish language, Gaelic, was more accurately the modification of English into a new Irish vernacular. If cosmopolitan modernists like Joyce further experimented with English in order to make it a polyglot medium of literary expression, their efforts were made possible by the pliable history of English in daily Irish use. Irish vernacular English, which has variously been termed Hiberno-English and Anglo-Irish depending on its use and purpose, became the hybrid vernacular of the native Irish well

before Irish modernist writers invented more exotically hybridized Englishes in their work. In turn, while efforts to revive Gaelic as a vernacular and a literary language have met with occasional and mixed success, it would be difficult to argue that Gaelic was the language of even most explicitly nationalist or nativist Irish writers in the modernist period. Rather than imagining the language itself limning the contours of Irish literary space, I suggest it is better to imagine the approach to language as reflecting a given writer's efforts to balance vernacularism and cosmopolitanism for their own purposes. More broadly, I argue that Irish modernism possesses the somewhat dual quality of being both a vernacular and a cosmopolitan modernism at once, with particular authors working within the tensions produced by this dual character in order to chart their own courses.

Vernacular Modernism and Cosmopolitan Modernism

In order to better express this notion of Irish modernism I use the terms “vernacular modernism” and “cosmopolitan modernism” here to denote these two general tendencies within modernist literature. Additionally, I have adopted these terms in order to suggest another tension within modernism, that between popular and elite concepts of art and its audience. The term vernacular modernism has been applied to works aimed at mass audiences in some criticism, where “vernacular modernism” stands opposed to a model of “high” modernist work targeting an elite or limited intended audience. However, the use of the term “vernacular modernism” in humanities criticism is not stable or entirely consistent. The term can even take on opposed meanings when applied to works in different media by critics in different disciplines. Cinema and architecture, for example, are sometimes considered examples of vernacular modernism when they

aim to become public works or popular spectacles, thus becoming part of vernacular or everyday experience, but the use of the term is quite different when applied to cinema than when applied to architecture. The film scholar Miriam Hansen defines vernacular modernism as the function of a set of popular works that “articulated, multiplied, and globalized a particular historical experience” of modernity for multiple peoples and publics around the world from the interwar period to the 1950s.²⁷ Hansen’s subject is the global dominance of Hollywood film, but similar concepts in the work of Andreas Huyssen and others effectively expand the scope of vernacular modernism to other media and other works. These critics understand all “low” or mass cultural works with modernist aesthetic features as examples of vernacular modernism. In contrast, critical work on architecture define vernacular modernism as a set of styles in which “vernacular” or local cultural elements are incorporated into the otherwise transnational aesthetic of modernist architecture. Finally, some literary critics apply the term “vernacular modernism” to works created for popular consumption in vernacular language, typically local idiom and regional dialect. Applied in this way, vernacular modernism typically denotes works whose aesthetics are connected to and express the lived experiences of particular ethnic or national communities. I use the term here to encompass those elements of modernist works – “high” and “low” – that share a concern with vernacular experience and national culture.

²⁷ “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999), 68.

Modernism frequently seems to invite or create a division between vernacular and cosmopolitan culture: in addition to what Huyssen has called the modernists' creation of a "great divide" between "high," elite culture and "low," critical views of modernism in the 20th and 21st centuries have shifted from the universalist account of the New Critics towards more recent approaches that stress the local cultural, political, and economic circumstances from which various modernist works and schools emerge. In reading these works, one is therefore tempted to declare their allegiance to some cosmopolitan, global, or post-national politics and to argue that they model a world without borders. Such an argument is complicated by the ways in which all of these texts insistently limn a space called Ireland and describe an Irish people. The continued existence of ethnic and territorial boundaries are continually suggested and recalled by these works, even when they otherwise seem to have moved beyond those borders. But they also challenge and revise conventional ways of characterizing and expressing the individual self, and similarly reconsider and trouble conventional ways of defining and locating the modern nation in literature. While Queneau's novel obviously plays with the notion of an Irish literary canon, and Beckett's novels raise the question of where Irish literature ends and world literature begins, even the canonically "Irish" works of Yeats and Bowen reveal the contradictions and fissures in the concept of an "Irish literature." Yeats's and Bowen's textual practices and lived experiences repeatedly blur those distinctions, even when (especially in Yeats's case) they aim to do the opposite, and Beckett's and Queneau's works confound geopolitical and cultural norms.

In response to these issues, this dissertation argues that the paradoxical relationships between modernism and the nation are not merely characteristics of modernism, but in some way constitute modernism. By employing the Irish example, this dissertation will demonstrate a series of cases in which modernist literary technique and the currents of the modernist movement repeatedly redefine political and personal ways of being in the world. The writers explored here attempt to resolve this tension between the alternatives of local and cosmopolitan in practice and in theory by various methods. In the process, they articulate forms of identity and modes of expression in order to navigate and reconstitute the seemingly irreconcilable contradictions of the alternatives for national and post-national forms of Irish identity. In the process, they transform Ireland itself into a critical model within modernism more generally, a sort of mobile metaphor within modernist articulations of political and personal identity.

Cosmopolitan modernism, as I employ the term here, denotes a broadly individualist model in which modernist art is the product of a refined, elite consciousness that intentionally draws upon and synthesizes a global tradition of “high” literature within the formal unity of the modernist text. In contrast, I describe vernacular modernism as a collective aesthetic in which modernist works are intended to codify national or ethnic traditions, often in the service of some model of the nation-state or of national identity. I argue that both models emerge as responses to a series of political and cultural upheavals in the late 19th and early 20th century, one in which the rise of the nation-state as the dominant political form complicated 19th century realist models and imperial geopolitics. The period is wracked by world war, emergent nationalisms, and the break-up of empires.

On this last point, I stress that the break-up of imperial logics arguably occurs even while the political institutions of empire survive: the British Empire remained both powerful and vast until after the second World War, but Marx, Esty, and Casanova all describe a cultural shift within British imperial culture towards increasingly distinct, semi-autonomous regions linked by a shared sense of English as an adaptable set of vernaculars.

In order to focus the discussion that follows, I consider works written about Ireland, that is, works that might be termed part of Irish modernist literature. I do so for several reasons: most obviously, the Republic of Ireland achieves independence in the midst of what is often considered the “high” modernist period of the 1920s, and many Irish literary works written in the period are key texts in various versions of the modernist canon. Additionally, Ireland is uniquely positioned as both a modern European nation and a newly-independent state, and Irish nationalisms frequently must accommodate competing desires to resemble other modern European countries while maintaining cultural and political distance from England, one of the most advanced examples of the modern nation state. My contention in this dissertation is that the especially vibrant manifestation of modernism in Ireland is a direct consequence of the country’s internal debates over how to quare the competing demands of cosmopolitan and vernacular cultural models. In short, Ireland’s particular circumstances make its associated works of modernist literature into ideal examples or case studies from which to mount my larger argument about modernism in general.

As this dissertation will argue, the works of Yeats, Bowen, Beckett, and Queneau demonstrate that modernist literature may be read as a prolonged critical negotiation between the seemingly opposed models of cosmopolitan and national identities and between global and local modes of belonging. Though the literary examples examined here are limited to Irish literature and one French novel which references it, the ambition of this dissertation's argument is to suggest that modernist literature can be understood as a series of negotiations between global and national models for being in the world, and between the expressive modes of vernacular and cosmopolitan culture. The two pairs of terms – “global” and “national,” “cosmopolitan” and “vernacular” – are do not comprise two parallel polarities or oppositions. Instead, they conceal more complex and dynamic concepts and practices of self-representation and belonging. As used here, vernacular modernism suggests modernist ways of expressing ethnic, national, and local forms of belonging; cosmopolitan modernism in turn suggests ways of expressing transnational, global, and mobile forms of identity. As the dissertation will demonstrate, there are no “pure” examples of either vernacular or cosmopolitan literary modernism. Instead, there are overlapping sets of concerns that are in tension with one another. Vernacular and cosmopolitan modernism should be understood as overlapping, if conflicted tendencies within modernism.

Irish Modernism and the Division of Elite and Mass Culture

The relationship between the vernacular and cosmopolitan forms of modernism reflects a condition of heterogeneity that suggest we might revise other critical views, and reconsider modernist writers' own statements, regarding other established polarities

regarding modernist literature. Modernism has often been understood as a movement characterized by practices of division: between national and cosmopolitan cultures, yes, but also between vernacular and polyglot language, between elite and popular art forms and media, and, of course, between traditionalist and avant-gardiste tendencies in “high” art. What I suggest is that the practices of modernist writers, as well as the form and content of most modernist literature, do not reflect the allegiance of particular modernist writers to one or the other side of these various divisions. Instead, I argue that modernist writers employ the model of divisions like these in order to selectively, idiosyncratically chart ways between them. Modernists take advantage of the tension between the poles that constitute these various binary divisions of the role and nature of art in order to obtain greater personal, political, and artistic freedom. In one sense, the New Critics’ observation that modernist literature employed paradox and ambiguity is an oblique acknowledgement of what I would argue is a far more radical tendency within modernist literature: the willingness to abandon abstracted and theoretical models in favor of situational, heterogeneous artistic practices. The modernists only appear to rely on paradox, or less charitably, to contradict themselves, if their critical statements are considered the basis or the standard for their literary art. More accurately, I would argue, modernists’ critical and political arguments amounted to situationally-specific, pragmatic positionings of their literary work. The literary works themselves, however, tend to contain elements of both sides of any given division.

Lawrence Rainey devotes a section of *Institutions of Modernism*, his study of “[t]he strands of patronage, consumption, collecting, and speculation” surrounding the

production and marketing of modernist literature, to the Sunwise Turn, a New York bookstore that purchased eighteen copies of the first, limited edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Rainey contrasts the store's "modernizing professionalism" with its embrace of "primitivist vitalism" by noting that its name derives from an Irish agrarian aphorism while at the same time the firm participated in the development of the international book trade and was eventually sold to the bookstore chain Doubleday in 1927.²⁸ The story of the Sunwise Turn can be considered a specific instance of a general process by which the idea of Irish modernism was exported and popularized abroad. The shop sold and displayed modernist works of art, including books, paintings, and sculpture, all under a business name taken from vernacular Hiberno-English. Irish modernism had arrived, and a superficial model of Irishness was beginning to take on broader connotations of modernism – if not national modernity – in international literary and artistic circles. As Rainey documents, novels like *Ulysses* were sold in major metropolitan centers throughout Europe and America in upscale editions. And as Declan Kiberd notes, Irish writers could sell their short stories "with commercial success in foreign outlets such as *The New Yorker* if they were "willing to play up local colour for an international readership."²⁹

As the sale of the Sunwise Turn to a chain retailer suggests, the connections between the smaller modernist literary markets and the larger mass-publication markets

²⁸ *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 65. Rainey cites a 1923 history of the shop written by one of its co-owners, Madge Jenison, as *The Sunwise Turn: A Human Comedy of Bookselling* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923).

²⁹ *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995), 495.

grew over the during the 1920s and afterwards, particularly after the worldwide depression of the 1930s negatively affected the market for upscale limited editions.³⁰ Joyce's involvement with Sylvia Beach in publishing the 1922 edition of *Ulysses* serves as a reminder that most of the canonical modernist writers were involved at multiple points of the book market, and they sustained a form of international book culture supported by various "little magazines." Rainey reminds readers of modernism that Yeats, Eliot, and other central figures in the modernist movement each published hundreds of essays and articles during their careers, which both supplemented their incomes and maintained their international reputations. While these traditional modernists generally stayed on the side of "high art," preferring small-circulation journals and independent publishing houses, they often relied on either regular employment (as Eliot did) or on grants and informal funding from powerful patrons like Harriet Shaw Weaver.

However, the intersections between "high" and "low" culture continued to affect modernist writers for practical economic reasons. As Timothy Galow points out, the early twentieth century also saw the emergence of a celebrity culture in which some modernist writers participated despite their allegiances to the "high" side of the constructed cultural divide. Galow remarks on the way Gertrude Stein and F. Scott Fitzgerald employed the popular press, including participation in interviews and advertisements in widely-read literary magazines like the *New York Tribune's Review of Books* and the *Saturday Review*

³⁰ *Institutions of Modernism*, 155.

of Literature.³¹ Other modernist writers including Yeats, Bowen, and Joyce undertook lecture tours in America, Japan, and Continental Europe in the same period, sometimes for financial reasons, and helped to increase and encourage a global audience for modernism. As sales also had some impact on these writers' ability to get their work published, many writers of "high" cultural works found themselves considering the financial prospects of their own and other modernists' work. T.S. Eliot, in his position at Faber and Faber, felt compelled to reject one of Joyce's manuscripts on the grounds that its content would leave the company vulnerable to charges of obscenity. Similarly, when the French publisher Gallimard rejected Beckett's attempts to translate and publish his novel *Murphy* on the grounds that such a translation would be impossible, the reader who decided on rejection was the French novelist Raymond Queneau.³² But all in all, mass market success was itself sufficient grounds for disdain by most modernist writers and critics, to the point that a comparison to degraded mass culture operated as a vicious critique. When Wyndham Lewis savaged Stein's writing in his 1927 polemic *Time and Western Man*, he did so by comparing it to that of Anita Loos, the bestselling author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.³³ Galow similarly notes that the interwar modernist writers did not want to be connected with the "so-called 'production line' pulp writers;" there were limits to their willingness to participate in the mass market.³⁴

³¹ "Literary Modernism in the Age of Celebrity," in *Modernism/Modernity* 17:2 (April, 2010), 314-6.

³² Dierdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (Norfolk, UK: Lowe and Brydon, 1978), 286.

³³ (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), 56-7.

³⁴ "Literary Modernism in the Age of Celebrity," 325.

The international markets for literature share a critical feature, however, in that they invariably crossed national borders. Whether one considers high modernist readerships composed of collectors and aesthetes or popular and mass markets, the net effect was that transnational and cosmopolitan readerships were constituted and served by the various book markets. In the case of Irish modernism, the use of vernacular Irish English makes up one way of accommodating these models of international circulation. Yeats's international success was in part predicated upon his use of English, and the model of international success he employed in successfully advocating for the works of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore involved a careful use of translation and marketing aimed at making Tagore's work a sensation in the Anglophone literary community. In the same vein Beckett's translations of his works into and from French, depending on their language of origin, had obvious commercial stakes alongside the cultural and political ones examined in the previous chapter.

As Michael North argues in his study, *The Dialect of Modernism*, popular modes of vernacular culture also provided another means for even stereotypically elite modernists to break with the constraints of traditional culture and national identity.³⁵ As North points out, even within established national vernaculars, there are dialects and differences. As he notes, "dialect was the opposite without which 'pure English' could not exist [...] At the same time, however, dialect served as the 'natural' form of 'pure English,' its unmarked counterpart" (8). North's focus is on the way that "pure English"

³⁵ *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, & Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

became an unstable, untenable ideal in the modernist period, opening the way to literary innovation and identity play by permitting writers to employ “[a]n adulterate mixture, an international polyglot” allowing both poetic innovation and “racial ventriloquism” for various purposes (84). As North notes, popular films like *The Jazz Singer* popularized not only the use of dialect, but also the use of racial ventriloquism by modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

In North’s examples, this ventriloquism is performed ambivalently and sometimes covertly by Pound and Eliot, often in ways that suggest the poets’ ambivalent sense that their discoveries of aesthetic freedom rested partly on racialized and popular modes of language. But polyglot reference could also be employed, as in the poetic and dramatic works of Yeats and Pound, as techniques in the service of “a [modernist] movement obsessed with personae, metamorphoses, doubles, and mythic parallels.” (67) I would like to suggest here, however, that the use of such performances in modernist art reflects the conditions of modernist readership, not just the changing linguistic and political culture that the modernists themselves were reading and producing. The vernacular forms of English in both popular and literary writing, if one accepts that distinction for the moment, were typically identified as aspects of specifically national cultures and communities. Sometimes, as in the model of a “pure English” vernacular, they were identified with nationalist orthodoxies and, by implication, the institutional culture of the modern nation-state; sometimes, as in the uses of African-American dialects that North traces in the letters and works of Pound and Eliot, they could be identified with ethnic minorities or with minor literary cultures. In turn, a writer’s adoption of genuinely

polyglot language could be used to develop a variety of transnational and cosmopolitan alternatives to the model of national literature and national literary space. And, as North points out, such adulterated polyglots could also be used as a way of attacking the vulgarity of popular, vernacular culture by way of juxtaposing it with examples of high culture and “pure” language.

The way vernacular forms suggest national and cosmopolitan affiliations affects the way literatures are read and circulated. Some of the difference occurs because uses of vernacular and “pure” languages helps situate different texts and vernaculars at different, hierarchical levels of literary culture as Casanova has argued regarding the competitive nature of international literary space. But vernacular is also a way of locating or dislocating a text with regard to national models of literary space. Beckett’s use of French, for example, serves among other things to signal his break with contemporary Ireland. The modernists’ use of vernacular and dialect forms can also work within an established literary language, opening up spaces for literary rebellion and innovation, as North argues. Most striking, though, is the way the modernists use vernacular as a way of accommodating mass and vernacular culture in their works while simultaneously disavowing that inclusion. Placing a reference to popular culture alongside an example of high culture may be a means of critiquing or ridiculing vernacular culture, but in practice these juxtapositions create a space in “high” culture for its “low” counterpart. Such uses of dialect and other “impure” forms of established languages permit high literature to engage low culture, rendering permeable the boundaries that ostensibly separate small or elite literary circles from mass readerships.

I would argue that this modernist strategy of including and engaging mass and vernacular cultures under the guise of disavowing and opposing them is structured analogously to the similar way that modernists sometimes seem to embrace nationalism or cosmopolitanism while effectively including aspects of the seemingly opposed principle in their stated views and practices. Where Irish modernism is concerned, the obvious advantage of this strategy of inclusion and disavowal for nationalist and republican writers and critics is the ability to write in English, a globally-distributed language in which their work can circulate widely, while at the same time employing features of distinctly Irish vernaculars of English in opposition to English hegemony. For writers who oppose the nation-state model and favor cosmopolitan and individualist positions, a similar strategy provides ways of writing back to Irish audiences they still wish to engage and about Irish matters in which they retain interest, all while justifying this emphasis on Irish Anglophone audiences by incorporating other languages and other adulterated forms of English that make “Irish” one element of a polyglot text. For both cosmopolitan and vernacular modernists, the use of dialect and vernacular culture not only increases the text’s capacity to engage with various political and cultural segments of an international literary culture, but also makes their works accessible to a potentially cosmopolitan readership. Whatever the stated positions or ultimate political beliefs of Irish modernists, and their counterparts in Anglo-American and other hybrid Anglophone modernisms, in practice modernist writers leave their work open to readers in any of several competing and overlapping models of literary space.

Yeats, Bowen, Beckett, Queneau: Four “Irish” Writers in English and French

The often idiosyncratic compromises Irish modernist writers make between vernacular and cosmopolitan literary consciousness make up the matter of the following chapters, and together they will help suggest a way of reading modernism as a literature of passage in an era when a new model of global space is still emerging. It is this space in which the Republic of Ireland, and Irish modernism, also appear. In the first chapter, I discuss the plays of William Butler Yeats along with some of his political speeches and essays on theatre in order to show Yeats’s efforts to make the theatre into a space that could demonstrate and popularize his model of Anglo-Irishness. For Yeats, the Anglo-Irish represent a link to both vernacular Irish tradition and a cosmopolitan ideal of modernity. By retrospectively constructing a tradition of Ascendancy republicanism, Yeats argues for a genealogy of Irish culture in which the Anglo-Irish always refine and synthesize native and foreign traditions into an Irish high culture. Yeats therefore employs Irish folk culture as the source material of his plays, but also incorporates increasingly abstract and cosmopolitan theatrical models, including Noh theatre. By contrasting “native” narrative contents with “global” formalist drama, Yeats claims that he belongs within the vernacular tradition of Irish national literature and that he participates in what he sees as an elite world culture drawn from the classical works of many nations. In this way, Yeats attempts to be both nationalist and cosmopolitan, local and global. I argue that Yeats positions himself and the Anglo-Irish as an elite social class who are responsible for managing these dual claims: through the Anglo-Irish, Yeats

proposes, Ireland can be both an independent nation with a vibrant culture of its own and a participant in the “high” culture of the world as a whole.

In order to support my argument, I present readings of the plays *On Baile’s Strand* (1904), *The Words upon the Window-Pane* (1934), and *Purgatory* (1939) alongside Yeats’s political and critical essays. By examining works that span Yeats’s 20th-century literary career, I discuss the way Yeats turns toward more abstract aesthetics and more reactionary politics as independent Ireland diverges from his vision of it. In the late play *Purgatory*, Yeats portrays the disappointment of his hopes by means of an unredemptive ritual of violence, a ritual that uncomfortably displaces the refined mythology of *On Baile’s Strand* and the occult parlor drama of *The Words upon the Window-Pane*. The works discussed in the chapter reveal the poet-playwright repeatedly modifying his approach to the theatre as Ireland’s political situation changes. By tracing the ways Yeats’s theatrically project changes in the modernist period, I argue that his work points the way towards a reading of Irish modernism as an effort to negotiate the competing demands of vernacular and cosmopolitan models.

My second chapter examines the works of Elizabeth Bowen, and in it I offer readings of her novel *The Last September* (1929), the memoir *Bowen’s Court* (1942, afterword 1962), and the short story “The Demon Lover.” Bowen employs the conventions of the “Big House” novel of Ascendancy estate life and the Irish Protestant Gothic alongside modernist literary techniques, and her works concern the experience of the Anglo-Irish amid Irish nationalist risings and in emigration. I argue that for Bowen, domestic space has an ambivalent character – the estate roots Anglo-Irish social

imaginary in a material space, but in an era when militant Irish republicans burn down Big Houses and the Anglo-Irish have long since lost their economic and political power, this sense of rootedness also represents a dangerously out-of-date commitment to a bygone social and political model. In the chapter, I show that Bowen responds to this ambivalence in two ways: first, she looks for ways to imagine substitute or overlapping locations of “home,” imagining that a limited emigration between England and Ireland can allow the Anglo-Irish to participate in the life of both nations while being bound to neither. Second, Bowen argues that the Big House must be reimagined as a quasi-public space, one in which, as she puts it in a 1942 essay, “the stranger is the friend.” The Big House and the home more generally become sites for modeling and experimenting with the public representation of the private individual within a set of social rituals and codes of conduct inherited from Protestant Ascendancy tradition. Big Houses can double as personal homes and as sites for a broad-based social circulation that crosses national and ethnic barriers.

However, in her “modernist Gothic” stories of the early 1940s, represented in the chapter by “The Demon Lover,” Bowen also confronts the problems that come with her earlier model. In this later work, set in London during the Blitz, the home and the people in it are threatened by ongoing political violence and by the unmanageable return of personal attachments. While her characters can escape political violence by emigrating to substitute homes – as do Lois Farquar in *The Last September* and Kathleen Drover in “The Demon Lover” – the quasi-public character of domestic space in Bowen’s fiction means that unrepressed personal attachments cannot be directly represented. I argue that

Bowen employs modernist techniques like free indirect discourse to conceal, rather than represent, the attachments her characters repress; instead, these emotional ties reemerge in the form of ordinary material tokens, which consequently take on an uncanny, threatening character that cannot be fully articulated in the text or displayed in the home. These uncanny, threatening images – the old mill in *The Last September*, the Apparition of an ancestor the memoir *Bowen's Court*, and a spectral letter in “The Demon Lover” – suggest the limits of individual subjects to survive repeated dislocations. Bowen's works attempts to contain and express a profound anxiety about the losses suffered when the Anglo-Irish abandon elements of vernacular belonging in favor of a limited transnational freedom.

Having examined the way those who choose to remain in Anglo-Irish territory attempt to negotiate a course between vernacular and cosmopolitan alternatives, I turn in my third and fourth chapters to images of Ireland from beyond the territorial and vernacular boundaries of the nation. In the third chapter, I examine Samuel Beckett's three French novels of the 1950s, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable*. In the chapter, I show that Beckett's celebrated minimalist style nonetheless allows for the insistent reemergence of Irish vernacular culture in his works, even when written in French after Beckett's emigration. By examining a split in Beckett's novels between a cosmopolitan aesthetics of frustrated consciousness and a vernacular aesthetics of thwarted mobility, I explore the way in which Beckett takes on two interrelated problems of language and consciousness. In the trilogy, language either becomes too entrenched in nationalist or provincial clichés to freely represent the individual self, or, when shorn of

such clichés, becomes too poor in external references to represent a self to others. Caught between these poles, Beckett's narrators alternately embrace and discard references to Ireland and to literary tradition, suggesting an ongoing negotiation that "can't go on" but must "go on" all the same.

Additionally, I look at the way Beckett rather literally moves between vernaculars, translating his novels from French into English. In the first of the trilogy, *Molloy*, this translation visibly changes the contents of the novel, so that a story of two figures named A and B in the French edition becomes the story of A and C in English. I argue that Beckett produces an pair of texts that exist in a relationship of perpetual translation, so that only by treating the novel in both languages can it be understood fully. I go on to connect Beckett's choice to write in French to the debate over independent Ireland's national language, and show the ways he explores the benefits and detriments of choosing a third option – French – to escape the politicized choice between English and Gaelic. The ongoing negotiations between cosmopolitan and vernacular frames of reference, and between multiple languages become Beckett's way of showing that "native" languages always bear a hidden, cosmopolitan inheritance, while ostensibly cosmopolitan aesthetics support themselves by means of concealed or insistent vernacular reference. Beckettian "exile and silence" only superficially efface the unfinished project of modernism that drives his works' continual search for a stable form of representation.

Finally, I treat Raymond Queneau's 1947 novel *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* (*We Always Treat Women Too Well*), the French experimental novelist's pseudonymous, farcical tribute to his literary inspiration James Joyce. The novel takes the

form of a violent, erotic thriller in the hardboiled *roman noir* style, but it takes place in Dublin during the Easter Rising, depicting the sexual misadventures of a group of Irish republicans named for minor characters in Joyce's *Ulysses* who have taken over a branch post office only to be serially seduced by their English captive, Gertie Girdle. Queneau writes the novel in response to the internationally popular English pulp novelist James Hadley Chase's sadistic thriller *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, a novel written in imitative American slang that Queneau and George Orwell both argue exemplifies an essentially "fascist" imagination.

Queneau presents the novel using a fictional Irish author, one Sally Mara, and an equally fictional translator, creating a complex intertextuality in which he responds to the "high" cosmopolitan culture of literary modernism and the "low" culture of so-called "fake American" hardboiled novels by English and French authors that had become popular throughout Europe in the 1940s and afterwards. The *roman noir* in France and the hardboiled crime thriller in England typically make paratextual claims to "Americanness" as a condition of their genre. I argue that, in Queneau's novel, the vernacular aesthetic models of particular "national" literatures have become cosmopolitan genres, and that Queneau, in turn, extends the modernist project of negotiating the poles of cosmopolitan and vernacular by constructing a hybrid genre in which he can register his own concerns with both the threat of fascism and the official language politics of the Académie Française. Queneau's insistence on literary language as a mirror of the "living" vernacular practices of the nation suggests that he, too, is interesting in maintaining the interplay of local and global aesthetic models. My analysis

of his novel, in turn, suggests that in some ways the project of modernism can be defined as an ongoing aesthetic project that seeks a path between cosmopolitan and vernacular models of literary space and cultural identity.

In examining the work of these four authors, I consider the intersections of nationalism and cosmopolitanism as ways of being in the world, but also the ways in which vernacular and local institutions and cultural expressions allow people in the first half of the twentieth century to negotiate the demands of political, ethnic, and personal identities. These demands are not exactly competing modes of identity, and not symmetrically aligned identities either. Rather, they represent the efforts of modernist writers to find themselves and their place in history and in the world. The politics of Irish modernist literature, seen herein, are a politics of location. And while this dissertation focuses on the various ways of locating Irishness, by its end it will be clear that this process can be quite different from that of locating or constituting Ireland. Rather, modernist literature's methods of defining and renegotiating the boundaries of Irishness unveil the tangled relationships between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan in the twentieth century. As I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, the modernists construct new relationships between those two modes of expression and belonging to make their nations and their world into places where they can live and matter.

“[A] Small Minority Which Is Content to Remain a Minority:” National Literature as Anglo-Irish Synthesis in Three Plays by William Butler Yeats

Forging a nation-state in the early twentieth century involves a number of compromises between local, vernacular culture and global, cosmopolitan culture. Being a national in the same period requires one to demonstrate belonging in the vernacular culture of the nation, while at the same time participating in the nation’s quest to be recognized as a distinct and valuable community beyond its own borders. The desire for “locally produced yet internationally disseminated values” may be quintessentially imperialist, as Jed Esty argues, but this nationalist desire leads to what Rebecca Walkowitz explains as a growing sense that “inclusion in a culture might depend not on the expression of innate attributes but on the performance of learned codes and habitual gestures.”¹ If locally produced values can be internationally disseminated, after all, this suggests that they are acquired rather than innate; the breakup of empire provokes a reflection on the problems this ambition poses for nationalisms, in which the link between locale and culture that animates national belonging is potentially de-naturalized and dissolved. The boundaries that limit belonging to a national community continually clash with the openness that allows a national community to belong in the world.

Esty and Walkowitz discuss the phenomenon in terms of British imperial nationalism, and both identify a modernist turn to constructed notions of tradition and culture in response to the problem. However, the same process impacts colonies as well, particularly when nationalist movements in colonies become attached to political

¹ *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 60; *Cosmopolitan Style*, 35.

independence movements. Because ethnically-based nationalism animates many independence movements, cosmopolitanism becomes especially problematic for anticolonial movements and for newly-independent nation-states. Ireland is no exception to this problem. The question of how to define and express Irishness is an especially fraught one, particularly since the religious and nativist rhetoric within many Irish independence movements intensified after the fall of the Anglo-Irish nationalist politician Charles Stewart Parnell in 1890-1. After Parnell, the emphasis of Irish independence movements was more often than not Catholic and nativist with the result that the Anglo-Irish population of the country, making up much of the professional classes, was increasingly the target of independence rhetoric. At the same time, the historical prominence of the Anglo-Irish in the traditions of Irish culture and even Irish independence movements made their exclusion especially troublesome for republican definitions of Irish nationality. And the Anglo-Irish were hardly passive in the process; members of the groups encompassed by that ethnic designation frequently responded by asserting their own ideas of Irishness, turning to British or European cultural models in which Irishness was but one component, or embracing forms of cosmopolitanism in which national belonging and ethnic identification were moot. As one might suspect, there was in turn considerable dynamism and overlap between these three broad strategies of Anglo-Irish expression. The politics of Anglo-Irish belonging in the early twentieth century provide a critical example of the ongoing negotiation between vernacular and cosmopolitan models of belonging that constitutes modernism more generally.

This chapter examines William Butler Yeats's literary work and political speeches, which propose and work through multiple notions of belonging. This chapter begins from the position that Yeats's work represents a serious, but ultimately frustrated effort to construct a model of national belonging for Ireland that is distinctly vernacular in character – that is, distinctly Irish – but which would retain the capacity to incorporate values from a more cosmopolitan sources. More specifically, Yeats wishes to construct a set of vernacular symbols and expressions that are specifically and characteristically Irish. However, Yeats also constructs this Irish vernacular symbolic order in such a way as to incorporate non-Irish sources. In part, Yeats does this to include pre-twentieth century examples of what he considers high or elite culture. Like many traditionalist modernists, Yeats makes distinctions between high, elite culture and low, popular or mass culture.² Curiously, for Yeats the vernacular culture of the Irish nation requires an essentially elite rather than a popular character. The paradox of a national culture that was inaccessible to most nationals does not escape him, though. Much of his work can be understood as an extended effort to resolve this paradox by developing ways of communicating an essentially elite concept of culture into a popular form of national belonging. In short, Yeats takes on the colossal task of framing and constructing an elite cultural tradition which can encompass both cosmopolitan and vernacular models of Irish culture.

² As noted in the introduction, this distinction is sometimes framed by critics like Andreas Huyssen as a division between “modernists” and “avant-gardists.” The phrase “traditional modernist” is employed here to describe those modernists like Yeats, Eliot, and other who believed that their work and other cultural products were valued in relation to the idea of elite literary traditions. See *After the Great Divide*, 4.

However, Yeats's project might more properly be called a series of projects. His own political and aesthetic outlook shifted over the course of his life. Yeats is an especially compelling case among modernist writers because his career and his techniques stretch across most of the period usually assigned to modernism. He begins writing in the late nineteenth century, and only stopped writing shortly before his death in 1939. In that span, he responded to and worked to shape the various artistic and political movements he encountered within Ireland and within Anglophone modernism. Additionally, Yeats adapted other cultural traditions in his later work, particularly Japanese Noh theater. He and his work thereby reflect and participate in the dynamic, complex field of modernism in both its artistic and political dimensions. In a sense, then, he is something of an indexical figure within Irish modernism, and Anglophone modernism more generally. By following Yeats's developing artistic techniques and his evolving political sensibilities, one narrative of Irish modernism emerges. In turn, that narrative of Irish modernism suggests the pattern of interaction between national and cosmopolitan concepts of the world expressed throughout the larger corpus of modernist literature.

In this chapter I examine several plays by Yeats – the 1903 version of *On Baile's Strand*, *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, and the late work *Purgatory* – in order to examine the way in which Yeats connects cosmopolitan and vernacular ways of understanding modern Irish culture. This chapter focuses on Yeats's plays because Yeats tends to privilege drama as a politically effective form of art. Political figures and artists both tend to fall under the more general, and somewhat mystical concept of the

“personality” in Yeats’s rhetoric, especially in this early-twentieth century phase. As a result, Yeats politics are built on his ideas about the relationship between nationality and culture; at times, in fact, it seems as if his entire vision of political life is little more than mediation and articulation of this relationship between nation and culture. In *Samhain 1904*, he writes: “In Ireland, where the tide of life is rising, we turn, not to picture-making, but to the imagination of personality – to drama, gesture.”³ Yeats positions the artificiality of the play and its gestures as an expressive mode of “National literature,” which Yeats further defines as the work of “writers who are moulded by influences that are moulding their country, and who write out of so deep a life that are accepted there in the end.”⁴ This “deep feeling” is in turn the authenticity of personality itself, the individual as posed against the depersonalized humanity he sees as the figure of mass culture. For Yeats, the communal belonging figured by the nation relies on the deeper connection to the subterranean commonalities of primordial, cosmopolitan human truths. The artist is the figure who mediates this connection; similarly, Anglo-Irishness mediates between Irishness and Englishness. Of course, this also means that Yeats frequently treats Anglo-Irishness as a special synthesis of multiple traditions, a nexus where specifically local and vernacular culture draws power from generally prior and cosmopolitan sources.

Because Yeats’s notion of elite culture is cosmopolitan in many respects, he draws heavily on the standard canon of classical literature from Roman and Greek sources; additionally, Yeats places great value on English literature prior to the

³ All citations in this chapter are from the version of *Samhain 1904* collected in William Butler Yeats, *Explorations*, ed. Mrs. W.B. Yeats (New York: McMillan, 1962), 163.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

eighteenth century, in a manner not particularly different than the value of traditional British modernists. However, he also attends to native and folkloric Irish culture: the first two of the plays listed above treat Irish legends or major Irish and Anglo-Irish literary figures, and the last is set in Ireland. He frequently turns to the notion of a naturalized “national” Irish artistic consciousness, which he frequently terms “genius” in order to suggest that a spiritual dimension is inherent to art. At the same time he embraces folk culture, however, Yeats retains his commitment to what I would call a “cosmopolitan classicism” in which the antecedents of national genius become less local the farther back they are traced. The resemblance of Yeats’s classical cosmopolitanism to the originally cosmopolitan character of discourse described by Sheldon Pollock is striking; in many senses, Yeats sees himself as a conscious participant in the artificial localization of robust cultural values. For Yeats, resolving the contradictions between vernacular and cosmopolitan cultural models is a synthetic process. By producing an artificial local, vernacular culture for the nation, the higher values stemming from the nation’s primordial connection to universal human truths is extended to all its citizens. At the same time, present-day nations can be culturally superior or inferior to one another given the inherent differences in various nationally-specific manifestations of the primordial, cosmopolitan cultural values Yeats imagines.

Yeats’s Cosmopolitan Tradition of Irish National Literature

Yeats’s self-aware participation in the artistic construction of a “natural” national culture gives his work and his politics an unusual character at times. In a radio address

given in Belfast on September 9, 1931, Yeats proclaims a rather curious genealogy of Irish literary figures:

[Oedipus] becomes to us the representative of human genius. We think perhaps of Jonathan Swift hating himself first of all, and then mankind until suffering has made him half-divine. And then perhaps by a strange freak of imagination we think of our blind Gaelic poet Raftery, wandering with his blessings and curses from road to road. There is an old thorn tree pointed out on a Galway road to this day that Raftery is said to have withered with a curse.⁵

The address, the first in a series for the BBC, suggests a notion of cultural genealogy that crosses national and historical lines in an attempt to recreate a deep classical tradition belonging to all great cultures, but in doing so Yeats invokes the “human genius” of Oedipus, Swift, and Raftery even as his examples become more specifically Irish.

Beginning with an example from classical culture, Yeats lists instances of what he terms genius to an Anglo-Irish writer of the 18th century and a native Gaelic poet of the late 18th and early 19th century, implying a kind of descent or succession in the process. He ends by remarking on a present-day landmark of the last exemplar of human genius in his series, giving his listeners a symbolic remnant of this lineage in the form of a contemporary narration that ties them together. Both the tale of the tree in Yeats’s example and Yeats’s address itself function to narratively unify what would otherwise be disparate examples. The “freak of imagination” that enables the leap from Swift to Raftery becomes normalized by the series’ end with a well-traveled story about a still-existing landmark, the tree. Interestingly, no leap is needed between the figure of Oedipus

⁵ The text of the address is reprinted in *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats V.2: The Plays*, eds. David R. Clark and Rosalind Clark (New York: Scribner, 2001), 891.

and the Anglo-Irish Swift, both of whom Yeats treats as universally recognizable incarnations of “human genius.” Only the “native” Irish figures in Yeats’s idiosyncratic genealogy require the visionary work of “a freak of imagination.” Yeats’s Ireland requires Yeats’s own poetic imagination in order to bestow the imprimatur of “genius” on its vernacular culture.

However, Yeats’s models of classicism and cosmopolitanism are themselves shaped by imperial understandings of both. Both his knowledge of classical texts from other parts of the world and his model of the cosmopolis employ, in altered form, an older model of the cosmopolitan city and the lines of force that connect that center to imperial peripheries. Within a cosmopolitan space, which Yeats imagines Dublin and the Abbey’s stage are or can become, the cultural resources of established classical traditions can be accessed, controlled, and recombined by central figures like himself. Yeats’s attachment to institutions at various points in his life suggests his desire to direct centralized, contained sites of cosmopolitan cultural exchange. Additionally, his preference for classical culture suggests his relationship to models of tradition centered on established centers of cultural power. Yeats opposed British imperial nationalism and Irish republican parochialism because he saw that both would restrict his own ability to achieve such a central position. These political forces threatened to usurp what Yeats saw as the position of art as the power center of the nation-state and its culture. His opposition to democracy, which I will explore in analyzing his plays, may also arise from a similar fear that the cosmopolitan exchange that lends vigor to art might become uncontrolled, debased, and commercialized; the displacement of art by what Yeats reacted against the

threat he imagined mechanical forms of commerce and labor posed to cultural “genius” and high art.

Yeats can thereby be seen as employing a variant of Walkowitz’s “critical cosmopolitanism,” which she identifies with the stylistic methods of modernism by which various writers work to “transform and disable social categories,” most often by reconsidering “what ought to be described” and “the social conditions and political consequences of description.”⁶ Walkowitz focuses primarily on the way in which quotidian social intercourse and experience are unsettled and critiqued in the contexts of nationalism and imperialism; her Irish literary example is James Joyce, whose method of “triviality” opposes the grand narratives and enforced sameness of the nationalist conception (or conceptions) of the nation in favor of a democratic individualism.⁷ It would be difficult, to say the least, to assign to Yeats any abiding adherence to democratic individualism; leaving aside his involvement with the fascist Blueshirts, his investment in overarching narratives of national identity and cultural history point to a unifying, resolving desire more than to an unsettling or deconstructive rhetorical and critical mode. Instead, the way that Yeats typically attempts to negotiate these issues is by constructing an elite cultural class, which he usually identifies with the Anglo-Irish. In turn, this elite class of cultural producers transmits elite cultural values to the rest of the nation by mediating these values in the form of vernacular Irish art. While the sources of these values can be traced back to cosmopolitan classicisms, for Yeats they require

⁶ *Cosmopolitan Styles*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

specifically-tailored expression to serve a unifying function within the modern nation-state. As articulated in his more mystical writings, Yeats also viewed this synthesis as the cultural manifestation of humanity's primordial, transpersonal contact with a deeper truth. The heightened reality of his poems and plays is meant to be the representation of this deeper truth. The problems and changes in Yeats's political outlook stem from the problems he had reconciling his strong sense of Irish nationality, his commitment to his Anglo-Irish ethnicity, and his desire to participate in global culture within his art and his public career.

For a variety of reasons, Yeats treats the theatre as the place where he can realize of his political, spiritual, and cultural ambitions. Yeats treats the theater as the nexus of what he terms the "national literature" in an essay published as the Abbey Theatre under the title *Samhain 1904*.⁸ Yeats's concept of the national literature has a number of idiosyncratic features that reflect his more general method of modernist literary production. He suggests repeatedly in the essay that the difference of these authors from the rest of the nation – the latter implicitly taken up as an undifferentiated mass or group – accounts for the differential effects of "moulding" influences upon great writers and the mass. In the case of Ireland, this difference seems to be rooted in the minority cultural identity of Anglo-Irishness.⁹ Later in his career, Yeats will attempt to make Anglo-Irish

⁸ *Samhain 1904*, 132.

⁹ The concept of Anglo-Irishness as a particularly robust cultural formation because it has a "minority" status resonates with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of a "minor literature." However, the difference seems to be that English was not a minority language in Ireland; Gaelic was. Indeed, David Lloyd has argued that nineteenth-century Irish nationalism's fixation on the representation of Irish identity is fundamentally a British, and therefore covertly imperial model. He contrasts this with the emergence of a

difference the center of Irish politics as well as of Irish arts, again using the terms of minority: in 1925, he argues that the resolution of religious and philosophical questions in the Irish Free State must “depend upon a small minority which is content to remain a minority for a generation to insist upon those questions being discussed.”¹⁰ Yeats’s concept of this minority remains elite whether he positions it as the privileged site of cultural synthesis or as the equally privileged site of political decision.

Despite his often elitist rhetoric, Yeats was also aware of the way Irish republicanism often identified Anglo-Irish with republicanism’s English opponents. Even if he sometimes disavowed his Protestant heritage for strategic purposes, Yeats’s language politics and his adherence to a classicist curriculum always threatened to make his cultural difference from Irish nativism into a serious threat to his ambition for cultural authority. Yeats’s discussion of the national literature in *Samhain 1904* addresses this problem by suggestion that the national literature is sometimes out of sync with the nation itself. As Yeats argues, the authors of the national literature are different from the

modernist, minor literature in the Deleuzian sense inaugurated by James Clarence Mangan. However, Lloyd also argues that “modernists such as Eliot, Pound, and Yeats clearly belong within a major paradigm by right of the claims to transcending division and difference that constantly inform their works.” A “minor literature” is, for Lloyd, only within “the general field of modernism” insofar as minor literatures make up “a negative critical aspect of modernism.” Yeats’s adherence to traditional canon would therefore seem to exclude him from the model of a “minor literature,” though this chapter does argue that Yeats appropriates certain tactics that might otherwise be associated with the formation of minor literatures. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, tr. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: university of Minnesota Press, 1986); and Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 2, 23.

¹⁰ “Divorce: An Undelivered Speech,” in *The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pierce (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1960), 160. Originally published in *The Irish Statesman*, March 14, 1925, 8-10.

masses immersed in vernacular culture because the authors enjoy a stronger connection to elite, cosmopolitan culture. This stronger connection allows the authors of the national literature to express a purer version of what might be termed the soul or personality of the nation, which is implicitly the source of any greatness or significance in the nation itself.

Unfortunately, the authors of Yeats's national literature often produce expressions or images of this deeper self that are not immediately graspable by the existing nation's masses. Because the nation's relationship with the "deeper" origins of its culture is indirect and mediated, its people can fail to recognize the truth of those origins, even though the nation's artists can see and represent those origins. As a result, the national literature is not itself always recognized or treated as such by the people; Yeats argues that a national literature cannot be properly addressed to the nation, at least not in the moment of that literature's production. Because both the nation and its literature are being molded by the same originary forces at the same time, but at different removes from those forces, the nation itself seems in some sense to lag behind its literature and its art. The national literature as described by Yeats instead becomes part of the life of the nation as a whole only at some undisclosed endpoint, one at which the nation can recognize this work as its proper image and its properly mediated relationship to a deeper reality. The location or time of this end is left unspecified in the 1904 essay, but Yeats's emphasis on drama as the proper expressive mode of Irish life suggests that something about the mass audience of the theater and its relationship to the play as a performed work might begin to bridge the gap. Yeats argues that his work and the work of the

Abbey Theatre will not be immediately understood, but that there is a hidden teleology that motivates and justifies the Theatre's project.

In analogy to the way that Yeats leverages the idea that Ireland is critically different from England as justification for his ongoing efforts to adapt the Sophocles material to the Irish stage, he presents his Anglo-Irish differences from Irishness as a quality that grants special insight and privilege that should determine legal, philosophical, and moral questions for the majority of Ireland. As a consequence, he makes Anglo-Irishness into a cultural minority in both an English and an Irish context. In the face of English censorship and prudishness, it is the Irish component of Anglo-Irishness that makes his work valuable. In the face of an Catholic middle-class majority, however, the English or non-Irish component of Anglo-Irish identity distinguishes Anglo-Irishness from the set of conventional Irish identities. Yeats uses his difference from nativist Irishness to claim an inheritance from a cosmopolitan tradition that simple nativism must reject. By arguing that this cosmopolitan inheritance speaks to the vitality of national culture, Yeats can argue that Anglo-Irishness should play a central role in defining Irish national belonging. There is a continuum between the Yeats of the Free State, who asserts the centrality of an Anglo-Irish in the Irish politics of the Free State, and the Yeats of colonial Ireland, who declares the centrality of the Irish stage to the nation-state's culture. Both his political appeals to a tradition of classically republican government and his artistic appeals to a larger classical tradition of art suggest his commitment to the construction of a cosmopolitan heart for the national imagination. Yeats refuses the claim that he is in some way foreign to Ireland by asserting that he belongs to some deeper

tradition from which nations more generally spring; at the same time he asserts a specific national belonging and more generally distinguishes nations or ethnicities on the grounds that more specific and local forms of address are materially important. Yeats repeatedly modifies his model of Anglo-Irishness and reformulates its sister term Irish, the better to include him in whatever political form the Irish nation takes.

The Late Colonial Yeats of *On Baile's Strand*

The 1903 version of Yeats's *On Baile's Strand* presents a stage in the development of the poet-playwright's aestheticized sense of Irish politics that predates both his use of the theatre as a more distinctly ritualized space in his later, Noh-influenced plays and one which is at the same time characteristically concerned with the position of the artist as a mediator between different, rarefied realms.¹¹ The plot of the play is quite simple: having sworn loyalty to Concobar, the eldest king of the Celtic clans making up premodern Ireland, Cuchullain fights and slays a young invader, only to discover belatedly that the invader is Connall, his own son by the foreign queen Aoife. Beset with grief, the hero goes mad and begins attacking the waves of the sea. The classical tragic structure of the play provides Yeats a great deal of room in which to suggest the competing cultural and political forces in the Ireland of 1903, as well as to advance his own theories regarding Irish, Celtic, and colonial traditions.

Additionally, Yeats makes a series of gestures toward his own desired position as a in the construction of shared cultural meanings for the modern Irish nation. In Yeats's

¹¹ All citations of the play are to the version found in *In the Seven Woods: Being Poems Chiefly of the Irish Heroic Age* (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1903), 34-87.

hands, the materials of the Cuchullain myth become a complex allegory for his vision of Irish cultural politics. Cuchullain is a culture-hero of Irish myth, talented in the Irish sports and arts valorized as key components of the modern nation's cultural heritage by nationalist movements like the Gaelic League and the Young Irishmen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the inclusion of Cuchullain's son suggests the broader synthesis towards which Yeats's cultural politics point. Connall is born from a liaison between Cuchullain and a foreign queen, and the play's tragedy occurs when father and son are forced to fight because of a war between their respective nations. In short, an instance of transnational hybridity is destroyed by a narrow allegiance to nationalism on all sides. Cuchullain's grief at the play's end suggests the potential tragedy Yeats foresees should Irish or English nationalism result in a refusal to accept or recognize what he sees as the fact of an underlying cultural commonality and a potential cultural hybridity.

However, the generational conflict that codes this cultural conflict is more than merely an allegory for Yeats's notions of cultural hybridity. The conflict also provides a way for Yeats to take on the issue of his own age, and of the pre-independence politics of Irish nationalism, most notably the nationalist ambition for a free state. Connall makes a relatively late entrance into the play's drama. Most of the early focus is on the characters Cuchullain, Daire, and Concobar. Cuchullain, the mythic hero, represents a younger generation that the older, but more worldly Concobar; Daire occupies a somewhat intermediate position. These three characters are the only named members of the kings of Ireland in the play; the rest are either "Old Kings" or "Young Kings," and tend to stand

with Cuchullain or Concoabar as members of their generations. Cuchullain's relative youthfulness in comparison to Concoabar is emphasized by his entrance, which is built up to by the Young Kings' awed discussion of his stamina and his achievements at sport and in battle. In contrast, Concoabar laments that Cuchullain does not behave as if "[Concoabar's] graver company would better match / Your greatness and your years; but I waste breath / In harping on that tale" (51). Cuchullain, surrounded by these younger kings and by his "swordsmen and harp players and fine dancers," seeks to bridge the gap by remarking that "their youth is the kind wandering wave / That carries me about the world; and if it sank, / My sword would lose its lightness" (51-2).

In these lines, Cuchullain's position as a poet-warrior, consisting in those qualities which make him a figure of Irish heroic myth, are linked explicitly to his age. Older than the child he will battle and slay but younger than the old kings headed by Concoabar, he stands between age and youth as an example of a man in the prime of life. The awe the Young Kings express for his physical capabilities and the resentment that the Old Kings voice regarding his seemingly frivolous displays of physical prowess are both presented as missing the real source of his power and heroism. Cuchullain represents a synthesis of the best traits of old and young, in that his still-youthful physical capacity and vigor are tempered by his experience and age. His contact with the songs and sport of the land is by his own account part of the source of his martial skill, that is, the wellspring of his accomplishments and victories. But Cuchullain also distinguishes himself from the youth of his retinue and his admirers among the younger kings; when he enters for the first time, he is already distancing himself from the Young Kings' breathless awe, his

responding to their admiration of his stamina by asking, “Well, why should I be weary?” (47). Cuchullain also demonstrates that he is in some sense wiser than the younger kings in later passages in which he manages a quick summation of the relationship between the minor characters Fintain and Barach and, more crucially, in his argument for the superiority of a fierce woman as lover in response to the Young Kings’ preference for a gentle one. If Cuchullain has the advantage of vigor and youthfulness over Concobar, he has also the advantage of experience and limited reflection over the Young Kings. The combination of his unbridled physicality and a degree of knowledge and practical experience is the basis of Cuchillain’s unmatched prowess.

In both of these advantages, of course, is also the tragedy of the play; Concobar’s experience and practicality in wielding power and words are greater still than Cuchullain’s, while Connall’s youth translates into a blind loyalty to his bond of silence and a fatal lack of experience when he battles Cuchullain. This further, somewhat paradoxical dimension is already apparent in the dialogue. Yeats presents the deliberate irony employed by Concobar in his critical speech and the unwitting irony of Cuchullain’s response to him. Where Concobar plays in somewhat labored fashion on Cuchullain’s retinue of “harp players” in his own “harping,” Cuchullain quite unreflexively foreshadows the tragedy of the play and his own maddened battle with the sea in describing youth as a wave that carries him and lightens his sword. The distinction of poetic method is a subtle one, but it illuminates the conflict between the more cynical and worldly Concobar and the younger hero. Where Cuchullain inadvertently finds a metaphor which reveals more than he recognizes, Concobar carefully and pointedly turns

Cuchullain's own language against him. At the same time, Cuchullain's poetic turn is genuinely prophetic, while Concobar's language and his sense is comparatively less rich. Cuchullain's inadvertent verbal irony is deeper and quite literally mythic than Concobar's; in contrast the significance of Concobar's deliberate verbal irony is limited to its immediate tactical value.

Concobar's entrance, as he gruffly inquires in prose as to the fate of his ship sent to Africa for gold (50), underlines both the nature of his relationship to the culture and poetics modeled in the play and to the real political concerns to which Yeats is responding in representing the myth in 1903. It is hardly difficult to read colonialism out of Concobar's African interests, which would surely have conjured up the recent career of Cecil Rhodes as well as the Zulu War of 1879 and the Boer Wars (the last of which had ended only a year before), and less difficult to read "Englishness" as colonialism. This is not to say that Yeats ignores Irish participation in England's colonial forays into Africa; rather, he identifies Concobar's idea of a narrowly conceived modern state as the cause of his imperial ambitions. The scene suggests that an Irish state, by virtue of being a state, might just as well justify such imperial projects for its own glory as the hated English did. Concobar stands in for the negative aspects of Irish politics as well as English ones. More to the point, Concobar's imperialistic concern with African gold arises from his need for materials to complete his institutional building project at Emain.

There is also a more immediate point of reference for Yeats's depiction of Concobar: Roger Casement, born in Dublin to a Protestant officer in the light Dragoons, had in 1903 written the Casement Report, a scandalizing account of the brutal colonial

regime in the Congo Free State under the Belgian King Leopold II.¹² Detailing Leopold's exploitation of the people and land, and rife with detailed accounts of killings and other atrocities carried out by Belgian administrators and military, the report was both a shocking indictment of Belgian rule in the Congo and, more troublingly, a reminder of the realities of colonialism. Casement would later be executed by the British after participating in the Easter Rising, and his turn to republicanism has often been traced to a political awakening that began with the report. It should also be recalled that John MacBride, the Irish republican who married Yeats's longtime object of desire, Maud Gonne, had fought with the Boers against the English by organizing the Irish Transvaal Brigade in 1902 during the second Boer War. Like Casement, MacBride participated in the Easter Rising and was executed for treason. The links between British colonialism in Africa and Irish resistance to Britain were politically loaded even in 1903, when Yeats wrote *On Baile's Strand*. By interpolating then-current events in British-controlled Africa into the Cuchullain legend, Yeats could not only vernacularize the mythological narrative for a modern audience, but could also incorporate a message that might be received as anti-imperial, or at least pro-Home Rule, by the nationalist Irish clerks and students who typically attended Abbey productions.

As part of the political allegory of the play, Concobar represents a distinctly different relationship to the culture and the land than Cuchullain. For Concobar, cultural prominence and meaning are things imposed institutionally, constructed with resources

¹² I am grateful to Nicholas Allen for suggesting this correspondence in conversation.

from elsewhere and craftsmen for hire. His intended rebuilding of the great hall Emain is aimed less at providing a cultural site or poetic locus than at generating a monument to himself:

Being the foremost men, [we] should have high chairs
And be much stared at and wondered at, and speak
Out of more laughing overflowing hearts
Than common men. It is the art of kings
To make what's noble nobler in men's eyes
By wide uplifted roofs, where beaten gold,
That's ruddy with desire, marries pale silver
Among the shadowing beams [...] (56-7)

Concobar's desire is assigned to the gold used in the building, rather than to nature and to humanity as in Cuchullain's speech on the passions. Concobar's attitude towards the land and the culture is likewise one of appropriation and imposition. The monument at Emain is meant to be the seat of his power and the emblem of his grandeur. For similar reasons, Concobar sees Cuchullain's pursuit of sport, poetry, and music as frivolities except when he can make practical use of them, as in his punning on "harping." Yeats's emphasis on Concobar's disconnection from the land is emphasized by the style of his dialogue. While the speech of all of the nobles is in verse, Cuchullain is generally reserved the fullest poetic expression, while Concobar is limited to processional speeches and florid decrees. In this way, the play frames Cuchullain's poetry as a naturalistic expression of some national or ethnic essence of the land, and Concobar's decrees as officious impositions upon that essence. Of course, Concobar's official language precipitates the tragedy of the play: the oath of loyalty binding Cuchullain to battle for Concobar forces the hero to slay

his own son, that is, to destroy his natural lineage in order to preserve the artificial continuity of Concoibar's state.

At the same time, it is clear that Concoibar's claims to power and dedication to material power require proxies through whom he can shape and affect the world he wishes to dominate. He requires bronzeworkers to finish the hall at Emain, relies on Cuchullain's skills as a warrior when the latter's son turns up, and can exert no greater force over his wayward fellows than beating his silver rod against a column to call them to attention. He is, in short, a fairly modern, bureaucratic politician, or as near to one as the mythic framing will allow. His tendency is to contain and direct oppositions rather than to play them out martially or passionately. Where Cuchullain lyrically extols the martial and sexual pleasure of "the hot-footed sun, / And the cold sliding slippery-footed moon" (50), Concoibar builds his silver and gold hall in imitation of these images in order to prove his own importance and reinforce his political status. Emain becomes the material site at which these less-solid spiritual metaphors are mobilized in the service of a strict political hierarchy. In contrast, Cuchullain more properly mediates between the natural world that Concoibar seeks to imitate and construct in the form of the great hall, and the culture that monuments like the hall are likewise meant to shape and direct. His consciousness of opposition separates him from the Young Kings for whom chaste virtue and sport are sufficient to make up the world, even as his passionate intensity – to borrow a later Yeatsian phrase – makes him a threat to Concoibar. Cuchullain is not simply a natural man, but has moved beyond this into a phase of oppositional, negative poetics. That is, Cuchullain is a figure of synthetic imagination within a national culture. In turn,

his son Connall extends the process to include the potential synthesis of more than one nation's culture.

The play's tragedy is precipitated by Cuchullain's failure to recognize and fulfill the synthesis he represents. Cuchullain's poetic insight fails him by the play's end, and this failure is connected to the fact that he has accepted the language of Concobar's ambitions. In order to fulfill his vows to Concobar, Cuchullain instead destroys his own stake in the future. In the process, he breaks up the synthetic tradition of which is the bearer. Connall, as the product of Cuchullain's union with Aoife, is the synthesis of two equal forces. Cuchullain commits to this idea of synthesis when he declares that "all deep passion is but a kiss / In the mid battle, and a difficult peace / [...] A brief forgiveness between opposites" (50). Aoife is his perfect opposite – the enemy of his country and a foe he bested in a battle – but Cuchullain fails to recognize that this relationship produces something potentially greater than the sum of its parts. His tragedy is that the political actors around him treat the ethics transmitted by poetic tradition as rhetorical instruments of political strategy. Aoife and Concobar each manipulate the bonds of fealty their respective champions owe them, with the distinction that Aoife does so in full knowledge of the tragedy that will ensue. In both cases, however, the ideal of loyalty becomes a tool used by political leaders to destroy the more immediate, natural and spiritual bonds of kinship and friendship.

Yeats employs the dramatic situation to argue that the poetic tradition is essentially the ethical memory of the nation. Folk culture carries the higher moral and artistic values of classical tradition; in effect, folk culture encodes the nation's memory of

a classical cosmopolitanism's ethical model. But when Cuchullain swears loyalty to Concobar, his capacity to change the world around him becomes driven by Concobar's political ambitions rather than by the ethical tradition conveyed by Yeats's idea of classical culture. When Cuchullain and others embrace Concobar's model of national unity, Ireland transforms from the mythic terrain of warrior-poets into the territory of a nation-state. The spiritual and intangible values represented by Cuchullain and his son end up at the disposal of materialist politicians like Concobar and Aoife. It becomes impossible for any of the heroic characters to realize the ethical and political values communicated by a shared poetic tradition. Cuchullain's friend Daire, for example, remembers the worthies who died in the wars that cemented Concobar's power, but he cannot provoke the high king's conscience to anything more than self-justifying claims of "necessity." When Cuchullain is goaded into fighting the Young Man, Daire remains silent. For Daire, memory is an escape from the present: given the opportunity to apply his memory of the past to a crisis in the present, can only offer to drink to the memory of the dead, and he lapses into memory at every opportunity. The mythic, heroic past that should be a common inheritance of both nations has been subsumed by the narrow self-interest of nationalist partisans and materialist politicians. Cuchullain reaps the consequences of failing to inform action with intuition, memory, and recognition; similarly, Daire's ineffectual rhetoric, in which memory and reflection are not wedded to action, fails to prevent the tragic chain of events.

In turn, both Concobar and Aoife succeed in their aims by replacing the reflective folk memory of poetic tradition with the institutional decrees of political hierarchy. Their

orders to Cuchullain and Connall directly obstruct the possibility of recognition and the reflective use of memory. When Cuchullain attempts to defuse the possible battle by exchanging of life histories with the Young Man, his attempt is frustrated because Aoife has ordered Connall not to reveal his lineage or his name. In this regard, Connall resembles the modern professional soldier, whose actions are not his own name, but in the name of his government; the contrast with mythic heroes who battled in their own names is highlighted by the play's setting in a mythological heroic past.

However, Cuchullain presses on by attempting to exchange tokens of identity with the Young Man, forging a personal bond with his opponent that stands in stark contrast to the idea of an impersonal battle between proxies. Unfortunately, the exchange is quickly interrupted by the Old Kings' cries that "A witch of the air / Can make a leaf confound us with memories" (67). The folk history that the exchange recalls is recast by the Old Kings' cries as a trick of sorcery, and Cuchullain's instinctive recognition of his son becomes suspect because those in power declare it suspect. Only official accounts or claims can be given voice in Concobar's kingdom; the command to battle the Young Man, to ignore the signs of kinship and the bonds of common experience prompts the tragic event. In direct consequence of this displacement of poetic tradition by institutional history, Cuchullain's own poetic faculty becomes deranged. Unable to blame himself, he blames Concobar; unable to strike at Concobar because of his oaths of loyalty, he casts around him for substitutes, first naming a magpie as "Concobar," then a maggot, and finally striking again and again at the waves as a poetic surrogate. Cuchullain's ability to construct metaphors and figures that reflect truth collapses into a delusional inability to

connect figures to real things and people. Instead of a synthesis between memory and power mediated by poetry, the tragedy produces a disjuncture between poetry and reality in which power can only be misdirected.

But Yeats also encodes a series of reflections on national belonging and ethnicity into the play, which are clearest in the final confrontation between Cuchullain and his son. Cuchullain's son is not ostensibly half-native and half-foreign for no reason, after all, and the underlying sense that Aoife's and Cuchullain's own bloodlines and nationalities have some level of unity or common origin is likewise inherent to the myth and important in Yeats's selection of it. The redemptive possibility that the play leaves open is that Yeats, as the playwright, can present and reflect upon Cuchullain's failure, as can the play's audience. The tensions that play out between the generations in the play are the tensions inherent in presenting a classical Irish myth to late colonial Ireland's nationalists and to its established politicians, and more than that, in attempting to recover or refine a classical Ireland from which a modern sense of the nation might emerge. There is an understandably deep suspicion of unreflexive nativism, in no small part because it would exclude Yeats and his identified ethnicity and class. Yeats has the twin advantages of reflection and poetry, the former of which permits a fuller contemplation of the matter and the latter of which offers a means of holding the tension open in language by way of irony and metaphor. Cuchullain ends up having to commit to his unwitting irony; Yeats is allowed to compose the ironic line, to present the tragedy in this verbal and poetic mode while keeping the battle itself offstage. In effect, Yeats can perform the political as the poetic and dramatic, that is, he can displace the site of the dilemma from

the sphere of immediate and concrete action to the different immediacy of poetic composition or dramatic performance.

However, Yeats's opposition to the modern nation-state is also tinged with elitism. Cuchullain is of a kind with young kings and with his own blood, but he and all of the kings – old and young – are carefully kept separate from the two commoners of the play, Fintain and Barach. While it is Fintain's travels and his knowledge that reveal the truth to Cuchullain, the pair are for the most part used as a grotesque parody of the plays of other conflicts and structures. His blindness also allows Yeats a classical motif borrowed from Sophocles and the Oedipus plays, that of the blind soothsayer who serves as an agent of recognition, such as Tiresias in *Oedipus Rex* and the older Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonnus*. Yeats's use of the device underscores his own ambition to present the Cuchullain myth as an Irish classic on a footing in authenticity, importance, and cultural provenance with the well-traveled Greek classics. Fintain's ability to provide this knowledge despite his otherwise vulgar role is a gesture towards the necessity of common folk for a folk culture, but Yeats also emphasizes Fintain's vulgar character traits in order to suggest that the real value of this culture is in what an elite can make of it by refinement. Fintain himself cannot adequately reflect upon or understand the traditions he carries into the present, and he belatedly recognizes the importance of what he has revealed to Cuchullain after the warrior's mounting rage leaves him fearing for his own safety. It is Cuchullain who must piece together the facts; Fintain lacks the immediate access to spiritual truths possessed by the Sophoclean figure of the soothsayer.

Fintain's belated recognition of the real meaning of his knowledge is akin to the nation's belated recognition of the national literature as described in Yeats's *Samhain 1904*. Cuchullain, not Fintain, reveals the essential truth of Fintain's recollections; Yeats implies in this way that the elite artist, not the folk culture the artist draws upon, makes visible that culture's deeper truths. They are not equals of the kings, but their parodic performances of the larger themes and issues and their contact with the world around them often make them better-informed and in some senses more capable than their social superiors. At the same time they are a picture of venality; their response to the final tragedy is not to go out and either dissuade Cuchullain or watch his mythic battle with the waves, but instead to use the distraction to steal food and goods for themselves. Like Concobar, they treat mythic and poetic contents as tools or distractions to cover their own rapacity. As representatives of the common people of the nation, they are a decidedly pessimistic and elitist conception.

Yeats uses Fintain and Barach to make an implicit argument against naïve folk nationalism and, more troublingly, to make an antidemocratic argument against the unreflexive valorization of the *demos* or people of the nation. Fintain and Barach are meant as points of disidentification, as that element of historical sequence and folk culture that must be disavowed or refused in some fashion. Yeats remains on the side of Cuchullain, that is, on the side of "good" elites as opposed to "bad" elites and "bad" masses. Even then, Yeats's "bad" elites seem to have more access to poetic diction than his commoners. While Yeats indicts Concobar's materialism and utilitarianism, Concobar remains capable of poetic diction as part of his political talent and as a mark of his status.

In contrast, Fintain and Barach are far less capable of participating in the poetic language of the play, and are confined to prose sentiments and reciting popular, bawdy songs. This suggests that Yeats does not share in the democratic projects Walkowitz identifies in other modernist writers. Instead, the performance of the play as a tragedy and the visible and vocal decentering of Cuchullain are meant to solicit the audience's sympathy with the fallen warrior-poet and the loss of his political force and cultural prominence.

The response Yeats solicits – perhaps he might term it the deeper solution – is to look beyond the play, toward the moment when it can be recognized as a part of the national literature and Cuchullain's absent alternative can become a historical and political possibility. By staging the tragedy for a twentieth-century Irish audience, Yeats attempts to solicit not only sympathy but to urge an analogue to the moment of recognition that is tragically precluded in the action of the play itself. If the audience can imagine, with Yeats, the nativization of a heroic nationalist mode of belonging which can tolerate an ostensibly foreign intervention or sourcing as part of the condition of its being, so too might the Anglo-Irish artist be recognized as expressing a more authentically Irish nation than the Catholic nativists who directed so much suspicion at Yeats's class and at the Abbey Theatre's predominantly Anglo-Irish directors and writers. If Oedipus and Aoife's son can be imagined as Irish, and more than that, as part of the basis for an Irish national culture whose terms would then inform belonging in an Irish nation, the son of J.B. Yeats and Sarah Pollexfen might also be understood as part of an intellectual genealogy of persons who have produced the national literature in which that national culture is most purely, most clearly expressed. Because art is the privileged mode of this

imagination, and drama is art's public form, the playwright can adopt the position of historical agent and assume his central, rightful role. He can, in a sense, redeem the tragedy of Cuchullain by making with his art the imaginary space that could have permitted the failed recognition to take place, and would comprehend and embrace the stranger's position as heir and the father's position as sire of the nation's aristocracy.

The Changing Ireland and Yeats's Evolving Poetics

Unfortunately for Yeats, the Ireland of 1903, while a place where the Abbey could gain its patent and engage in political provocations of the Castle and the nationalists alike, was not one in which the political theatre Yeats projected could readily occur. For one thing, the removal from the quotidian and the pragmatic on which the status of Yeats's poetics rests foredooms its efficacy in most circumstances; for another, much of the political force of the moment was aimed at reforms in the landlord system that had been the basis of Ascendancy in the first place. R.F. Foster's point that "[t]he radical avant-garde of cultural nationalism were a small minority" in the period is quite true, even if that minority status was part of Yeats's contemporary politics and aesthetics.¹³ As Foster argues, land and labor reform were the real sites of political urgency in the period between Parnell's fall and the more spectacular exertions of committed (but, it must be added, equally minoritarian) nationalists in later years. Certainly land and labor were the areas in which real political advances occurred. While the fall of Parnell in 1891 sapped much of the energy of the Irish Parliamentary Party and

¹³ *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), 431-3.

damaged the Home Rule movement, economic reforms prompted by land agitation made their way through the British Parliament. In the same year Yeats published the first version of *On Baile's Strand*, the Land Act of 1903 became the last important steps in abolishing the landlord system by subsidizing tenant buyouts of rented acreage. The landlord system had long since decayed into irrelevance; now, having become an active impediment to Irish economic growth, they were being dismantled entirely. The elite character of Ascendancy had ceased to have any economic basis by the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

Political change caught up with Yeats in unexpected ways. *On Baile's Strand* was published not long after the poet had blundered into a fresh round of accusations that he was a secret Unionist, and he went on a lecture tour of America in the latter part of 1903, preferring a country where Irish-American groups feted him in a fashion less likely to occur among the nationalists at home.¹⁴ The eventual form of Ireland's independence was, of course, far different than Yeats's version of the national imaginary had framed it in 1903. The continual deferral of Home Rule, despite support for the policy by Gladstone's Liberal government in London, helped radicalize Irish nationalism over the next decade and led to the violent uprising of Easter, 1916, as a cadre led by Padraig Pearse attempted and failed to provoke an Irish revolution. Subsequent English pressure on the nationalist Sinn Fein party furthered this radicalization, of which Gaelic language and an indomitably anti-British spirit were the hallmarks. Yeats's response to the Easter

¹⁴ R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 309-14.

Rising was multifaceted: he expressed horror at what he saw as the English overreaction to the Rising and committed himself to a feverish poetic production aimed at comprehending and incorporating the more Romantic aspects of the Rising while muting and to some extent apologizing for his more recent history of public disapproval of Fenianism and its affiliated nationalisms.¹⁵

Yeats's early political ideas grew considerably more distant from reality over the next decade, and the poet changed with the times. Perhaps unsurprisingly, during this period of radicalization he spent much time outside the country, living in wartime London and making contacts with Ezra Pound and discovering Noh theater, whose formal influence would appear strongly in his later plays. Through Pound, Yeats had become increasingly involved in cosmopolitan modernist movements: with the younger poet as his lieutenant, for example, Yeats championed the work of the Bengal poet Rabindranath Tagore as translated into English beginning in 1911. In keeping with their shared cultural politics, Yeats and Pound treated Tagore's work as a modern reinvention of the classical spirit.¹⁶ Yeats's introduction to the English edition of Tagore's *Gitanjali* makes explicit Yeats's evolving notion of the relationship between literature and society. Again, however, it is worth noting the way that imperial relations shape the way Yeats receives and transmits his idea of a classical poetic tradition. Yeats championed Tagore's poetry in English, much as he supported Anglophone versions of Irish myth, because that was his vernacular. Moreover, much of his access to Tagore's work was more broadly

¹⁵ Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life II: The Arch-Poet 1915-1939*, 50-120.

¹⁶ Foster, *Life I*, 469-72.

dependent on England's colonial rule over India, which made possible the wide circulation of the poet's work in the Empire once it was translated into the imperially-distributed language. Yeats's early model of classicism frequently conceals a somewhat unwitting connection to empire, one that troubles Yeats's efforts to reconstruct Irish classical culture as a tradition best mediated by Anglo-Irish intellectuals like his own.

For Yeats, classical culture could be imagined as transcending the politics of the nation-state and providing the basis to imagine more spiritual, and not coincidentally, more hierarchical models. Terence Brown cites Yeats's remark in the introduction to *Gitanjali* that "poetry and religion are the same thing," and Yeats goes on to compare Tagore to Chaucer, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and to a host of Renaissance poets as a writer who represents "that common mind which – as one divines – runs through all."¹⁷ But as always, this common mind does not belong to "all" despite running through them. Instead, poets like Tagore (and Yeats himself, of course) participate in a tradition which has "carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and the noble."¹⁸ Yeats's cosmopolitan classicism remains an elitist concept, but he increasingly uses the language of the spiritual imagination to characterize the way in which art transmits the classical tradition to the "multitudes" of the nation. The teleological language Yeats draws from Continental philosophy earlier has begun to be replaced by the language inspired by his participation in occultism and Theosophy in the 1910s and 1920s. Georgie

¹⁷ Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 198; Brown cites Yeats, "Gitanjali," in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: MacMillan, 1961), 390.

¹⁸ *Essays and Introductions*, 390.

Yeats was also a keen participant in automatic writing and spiritualist sessions, and she was first introduced to Yeats through mutual friends in occult circles.

The net effect is that, in the time period when Irish nationalism realized many of its political ambitions, Yeats spent more time looking outwards from Ireland or concentrating on his idiosyncratic national imaginary than he did in Ireland itself. The Yeatses generally avoided the Anglo-Irish War, making a brief visit to Ireland in late 1920 to give a speech, but the occasion was interrupted by medical emergency and the visit to Ireland ended early in response to the increasing violence. Yeats, recalling his earlier political blunders, tended to remain guarded with respect to the ongoing violence, blaming equal parts English policy and political fanaticism while emphasizing that “politics and propaganda had been banished from the Abbey.”¹⁹ He also pursued his Japanese interest to the point of taking on a lecture tour in Tokyo, rather accurately predicting that the bitterness of the war and regarding the truce would lead to further turmoil.²⁰ By 1922, the stage had been set for the Anglo-Irish War, whose end saw Ireland become an independent state for all intents and purposes, but with a troublesome (if largely empty) promise of “dominion” to England in its founding document. The dominion status swiftly provoked the Irish Civil War of 1922-23.

The boiling over of republican tensions with Britain, and then within Ireland itself, dovetailed with Yeats’s increasing modification of his model of cosmopolitan classicism and local tradition as the bases of a synthetic national culture. While he

¹⁹ Ibid., 165.

²⁰ Brown, *Critical Biography*, 280.

expressed his interest in the expressive mode in increasingly mystical terms, his interest in Irish cultural nationalism of the sort he had propounded earlier remained a factor in his work. It was not until the ratification of the Anglo-Irish treaty that Yeats would return and finally, with his new and growing family, inhabit Thoor Ballylee.²¹ The end result was that Yeats saw the violence of the Civil War between Eamon de Valera's radical republican faction and the newly-formed Free State government first-hand, as he and his family were effectively confined to Thoor Ballylee for a week during because of nearby fighting. Yeats nonetheless took pleasure with the Treaty and accepted a position in the embattled Second Dáil.²² Despite his vocal objection to matters like the prohibition of divorce and his efforts to establish the place of the Anglo-Irish minority – itself fast shrinking in the wake of emigrations from a nation that seemed overtly hostile to the class – Yeats's Senate career was largely marked by an increasing, often vehement dissatisfaction with an Irish Catholic form of the same Puritanism he had decried in English politics. The end result was an increasingly anti-democratic politics coupled with an increasingly avant-garde, internationally-informed aesthetics.

The movement towards an anti-realist aesthetic, one which emphasized ritual and recitative aspects of the theater, can then be seen as both a reaction against what was most stifling about the new definitions of Irish belonging in the nation-state and as a self-protective flight from what was becoming of modern Ireland. The phrase “anti-modernist” might be applied to this later Yeats, and often is, but for all of his archaizing

²¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

²² Foster, *Life II*, 213-4, 228-31.

and nostalgic turns in the later period of his life, he continued formal innovations and explored increasingly esoteric mystical and historical schemata through which to express his notion of a contemporary Ireland sourced in its ancient kinship with deep feeling and interpreted by the privileged class of the Anglo-Irish. Increasingly, the pronounced artificiality of his plays and the relative derealization of their content becomes an act not of inviting the audience into the realm of an imaginative identification with the poet's or playwright's concerns, but instead aim to force the audience's disidentification from ordinary vernacular culture. The modern nation no longer seems to be the realization of a classical cosmopolitan tradition in national vernacular circumstances. Instead, Yeats criticizes modern values and valorizes the idea of an elite, spiritual continuity between the deep truths of a cosmopolitan classicism and an elite national culture. Vernacular practice is the object of criticism in a more thoroughgoing way than in earlier works like *On Baile's Strand*, and the idea that the multitude can be elevated increasingly falls by the wayside. The later Yeats seeks to substitute a visionary reality for a practical one, and to remake the space of the theater as something closer to an organized mystical experience than an act of political imagination.

Spiritual Traditions and Yeatsian Republicanism in *The Words upon the Window-Pane*

The Words upon the Window-Pane was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in November, 1930, and represents a considerable shift in the way Yeats's cultural politics. Overall, the play reflects Yeats's increasingly anti-democratic leanings as well as the growing mysticism of his conceptions of elite culture. Most strikingly, Yeats

deemphasizes his earlier idea that national culture at its best is a synthesis of cosmopolitan classical tradition and modern vernacular expression. Instead, Yeats now emphasizes the role of the modernist artist as a kind of spiritual guide who grants mediated access to elite culture through his or her artistic works. The play depicts a séance held in a middle-class drawing room, during which a medium, Mrs. Henderson, is unwillingly possessed by the spirits of Jonathan Swift and those of several women who loved him. Unaware that they can be heard by others, these spirits reenact supposed private conversations among themselves, and Swift's spirit also engages in several soliloquies about art, spirituality, and politics. The séance ends with most of the guests unsatisfied because of the intrusion, with the exception of John Corbett, a Swift scholar who considers the evening an accomplished and provocative performance by a fraudulent medium. Finally, after all of the guests have left, the spirit of Swift possesses the medium once more to make a final speech about the decline and fall of Augustan Ireland's classical republican culture. The play's prose is deceptively more conventional than the verse of *On Baile's Strand*, and at first it appears to be a sort of parlor drama.

However, the play employs a number of devices that subvert the everyday character of the play's vernacular setting and dialogue. In the process, Yeats attacks the notion of everyday Irish life and, by extension, the ordinary cultural life of the nation. Despite Swift's central role in the plot, he never actually appears on stage. Swift is channeled, discussed, and interpreted by the characters in the play, but never directly portrayed. Instead, Swift is portrayed only indirectly in the play, and his dialogue is given through Mrs. Henderson's channeling. Despite its indirectness, Henderson's verbal

performance as Swift overshadows the prosy dialogue exchanged by the séance attendees. He is clearly the central character in the drama. Yeats has several reasons for portraying Swift in this indirect yet compelling manner. First, Yeats is parodying the Irish middle class by presenting the guests' fear of Swift, whom they label a "hostile influence" that has disrupted previous séances. Though the appearance of Swift, battling what he considers the madness and the genius of his age, is labeled "thrilling" by one participant, the guests' consensus at the play's end is that it has been "a bad séance," one which fails to provide the unchallenging experience they sought (476-7).²³

The séance attendees in the play are mostly there so that Yeats can mock their failure to respond adequately when confronted with Swift's supernatural presence. Their unimaginative reaction to the appearance of a famous literary figure is to complain about "that horrible spirit" who has previously "monopolized the séance" (473). What the séance attendees desire is to contact spirits who are "people like themselves," as one attendee, Dr. Trench, puts it; given the opportunity of visionary access to what Yeats construes as a manifestation of Irish cultural greatness, they prefer the banalities of their everyday existence. To them, vernacular culture is little more than a mirror in which they hope to find their own images reproduced. Yeats connects the guests' spiritual blindness to what he treats as the dull materialism and cultural apathy of modern Ireland's dominant Catholic middle class; Trench's response to Swift's domination of the séance is to pay the medium on the grounds that she "did her best and nobody can do more than

²³ I quote from the version found in *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats v.2: The Plays*.

that” (472, 477). Another guest, Mrs. Mallet, attempts to comfort Mrs. Henderson by telling her “A bad séance is just as exhausting as a good séance, and you must be paid” (477). The majority of the séance attendees treat the supernatural events as a spoiled evening’s entertainment, and the medium as a hired performer. Yeats also subtly links the guests’ misperception of the séance to what he imagines as the popular reception of modernist art like the play itself. The séance attendees treat a significant mystical event as mere paid entertainment, and are portrayed as foolish for doing so; by analogy, the play’s audience is cautioned against dismissing *The Words upon the Window-Pane* as simple entertainment provided in exchange for their money. Yeats loads his argument by making Swift the channeled spirit; he seems to expect the Irish audiences of 1930 to instantly recognize Swift as a great genius, and thus to recognize instantly the fatuity of the séance attendees’ responses.

Yeats also provides a better model for the play’s audience in the character of John Corbet, a scholar who makes some effort to think through the questions raised by Swift’s spirit. In earlier works, Corbet might have represented a proper understanding of the events of the play. Here, however, he can only partially respond, and remains skeptical of the mystical component of Swift’s manifestation. Corbet considers these questions important because he considers Swift an exemplar of human genius, which the play presents as a property of specially gifted persons. In this respect, Yeats’s understanding of Swift’s genius is strikingly antidemocratic. Corbet describes Swift as an elite of his age who “hated the common run of men” because “[h]is ideal order” was of an age in which “men of intellect reached the height of their power” (468). Irish national greatness

instead belongs to the period in which intellects like Swift's achieved "the greatest position they ever attained in society and the State" (468). Through Corbet, Yeats is complimenting the so-called Augustan Age of the 18th century, when prominent Anglo-Irish figures like Swift were the centers of colonial Irish political and cultural life. The relationship between vernacular culture and cosmopolitan culture becomes complicated here. Through Corbet's dialogue, Yeats argues that "everything great in Ireland and in our character, in what remains of our architecture, comes from that day." However, Corbet adds, "we have kept its [greatness's] seal longer than England." The greatness to which Corbet refers is Irish greatness; that is, it can be found in Irish national culture. In a way that echoes Yeats's arguments in 1903 and 1904, Irish cultural greatness was once identical with an English cultural greatness because they share a common inheritance from cosmopolitan classicism. Ireland has maintained its cultural achievements longer than England; in effect, what was once a cosmopolitan (or at least British imperial) cultural tradition is now a vernacular Irish cultural tradition. The strengths of cosmopolitan cultural tradition can be preserved in the "character" of specific nations like Ireland or national cultural figures like Swift. Alternately, a particular nation – England, in Yeats's example – can fail to maintain these cultural strengths. As in his earlier works, cosmopolitan traditions are general ones which find particular expression as national cultural products.

Through the play, Yeats suggests that the elite values of national culture are no longer as closely linked to present-day, vernacular expressions of Irish culture. Instead of a poetic culture carrying elite cosmopolitan values that requires synthesis with vernacular

culture's more grounded everyday practices, *The Words upon the Window-Pane* depicts an immaterial realm of "human genius" that exists at a critical remove from modern vernacular experience. Irish vernacular culture had come to emphasize the experience of middle-class Catholics, who made up a majority of the population. By way of contrast, the play valorizes Jonathan Swift, a Protestant deacon who was born to an Irish father and an English mother. As is typical of Yeats's positioning of the Anglo-Irish, Swift seems to act as a mediator of the cultural greatness that England has lost and Ireland maintains. In *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, the way this mediation works is more exotic than it was in Yeats's earlier concept of a belatedly recognized body of national literature. The play insists that culture has a mystical component accessible only to a select few, and that these few are generally misunderstood by the participants in everyday life and vernacular culture. Yeats's earlier teleological model in which the national literature belatedly becomes a common inheritance through a synthetic moment of recognition has been replaced by an argument that this synthetic imagination is forever the property of an unrecognized, elite group of the innately gifted. The idea of a commonly-held tradition of national culture is almost entirely absent from the play, which presents an Ascendancy dean as the exemplar of national greatness in place of a folk hero. While the play's Swift seems to be a figure who mediates a connection between cosmopolitan and vernacular cultures, he is much further removed from the immediate action of the plot. Indeed, he is himself a literally mediated presence in the play. Yeats uses this staging method to argue that the distance between modern Ireland and the deep truths of its culture is greater than ever, and now requires a kind of mystical experience to overcome.

Yeats also provides less esoteric examples of the distance between the Ireland of 1930 and his elite cultural model of the national imaginary. For example, the vernacular Swift employs is English, not Gaelic, and the cultural mediation he offers suggests that Irish national greatness originally had a foreign, or at least non-local source. In turn, this means that an Irish nation ruled by a native Irish majority cannot adequately express the imagined nation's elite cultural heritage. In the play, Corbet argues that "Swift was the chief representative of the intellect of his epoch" (478). In Corbet's argument, modern Irish national greatness does not spring from the Irish people or from the English, but is instead best represented by an intermediary ethnicity: the Anglo-Irish. For this reason, Corbet argues that the Anglo-Irish deserve special cultural and privilege, much as Yeats does throughout his public career, but here the idea of a "chief representative" of the nation's spirit or "intellect" makes the argument's political implications rather antidemocratic. Indeed, Corbet pronounces that Swift "foresaw Democracy [and therefore] must have dreaded the future" (478), and praises Swift's "ideal order [...] the Roman Senate" (468). Rather than a democratic republic, the ideal form of representation in Corbet's argument seems to be an aristocratic republic.

The play supports these politics by repeatedly pointing to the idea that some individuals have innate, elite spiritual or intellectual gifts inaccessible to most people. Both Jonathan Swift and Mrs. Henderson, in different ways, have innate powers that allow them to represent or mediate human genius. These powers are not common, nor are they controllable by popular consent. Much of the séance attendees' disappointment stems from Mrs. Henderson's failure to summon the spirits they collectively desire to

speak to. Committed entirely to their own desires, they ignore or reject Mrs. Henderson's explanation early in the play that "we do not call up spirits; we simply make the right conditions and they come" (471). Individual genius and contact with the wellsprings of genius do not belong to the mass of humanity; Yeats argues that "human genius" involves some sort of natural aristocracy. The argument is also made in the 1931 radio address, where the lineage of elite culture that proceeds from Oedipus the king to critic-poets like Swift and bards like Raftery. Oedipus and Swift hold high office and come from outside the common stock, and Raftery, like the medium of the play, is supernaturally gifted and wanders blind and apart from others. Individual genius and contact with the wellsprings of genius do not belong with the mass of humanity; in the independent Ireland of 1930, Yeats is arguing that "human genius" involves some sort of natural aristocracy.

Interestingly, however, Yeats does not seem to think of this natural aristocracy as a matter of direct descent. While its general ethnic character is Anglo-Irish, Yeats downplays the idea that genius is directly heritable and distances his concept of spiritual genius from the notions of blood and soil. Much of the channeled dialogue in the play centers on Swift's celibacy, and Corbet's doctoral thesis also concerns on the reasons that Swift never had children. In the séance, Swift's spirit justifies his celibacy to his would-be lover Vanessa by asking, "Am I to add another to the healthy rascaldom and knavery of the world?" (474). Swift's argument is that the general public, the mass of the people, is little more than a collection of scoundrels and rascals. Interestingly, however, he also argues that any child of his will inherit the general bad character of mankind rather than whatever good characteristics Swift himself has. At another point in the séance, Swift's

spirit pleads that “[I] may leave to posterity nothing but [my] intellect that came to [me] from Heaven” (475). Yeats’s version of Swift seems to view himself a medium of sorts, one who channels a divine intellect rather than any innate genius of his own. Like Mrs. Henderson, Swift simply provides the conditions under which extraordinary and great spiritual and intellectual goods can manifest themselves in the world. He is a mediator, a representative, of a somewhat vague and abstract “intellect.” Unfortunately, Yeats’s mysticism somewhat obscures his argument throughout the play. The links he makes between spirit mediumship, aesthetic mediation, and political representation are more associational and imaginative than they are logical. Much like the “strange freak of the imagination” in the 1931 radio address, the associational links in *The Words upon the Window-Pane* make a degree of poetic sense but not much concrete sense.

The choice is deliberate. Yeats is well aware that the connections he makes are more poetic than logical. In fact, he is arguing that the poetic associations he makes are more meaningful than strict logic. After the séance concludes, Corbet asks, “Was Swift mad? Or was it the intellect [of the epoch] itself that was mad?” (478). Because human genius is not immediately accessible to ordinary people, though, there is a risk that genius will not be properly recognized, or will be perceived as madness. This is also one of the dangers that Yeats perceives regarding democratic populism. The play critiques what Yeats sees as the popular failure or refusal to recognize genius by showing that every character, including the medium herself, fails to recognize that Jonathan Swift’s spirit has been channeled. Mrs. Henderson, for example, responds to Corbet’s inquiries by saying, “Swift? I do not know anybody called Swift” (478). Corbet, who does recognize Swift,

dismisses Mrs. Henderson's supposed supernatural abilities as a medium by insisting that she is "an accomplished actress and scholar" (478) and treating the evening's events as an accomplished and intellectually compelling hoax. However, Henderson unwillingly channels Swift's spirit after the séance guests have left, confirming for the theatrical audience that the events in the play are genuinely supernatural.

In other words, Yeats gives his audience access to the "truth" about the fictional séance that the characters ignore or miss. He does this in part to make it clear that the audience is meant to accept Corbet's arguments. As Corbet explains, "[i]n my essay for my Cambridge doctorate, I examine all the explanations of Swift's celibacy offered by his biographers and prove that the explanation you [Mrs. Henderson] selected was the only plausible one" (478). Since the explanation that Swift feared his own corrupt posterity actually comes from Swift's channeled spirit, Corbet is proven entirely correct. But Yeats is also asking his audience to respond to the play more sincerely and intelligently than the characters in the play respond to the séance. In *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, the theatre becomes a place where people can share an imaginative identification with their cultural traditions. However, this sharing requires mediatory figures: Swift mediates divine intellect and human character, Mrs. Henderson mediates the spiritual and physical worlds, and the Anglo-Irish (as exemplified by Swift) seem to mediate vernacular Ireland's access to cosmopolitan cultural values. Yeats positions himself as a contemporary example of such innately gifted persons. As the writer of the play, he juxtaposes the contemporary setting and characters with the Swift dialogues that intrude on the séance, assembling these seemingly disparate materials into a coherent,

symbolic whole for the audience to interpret. In effect, the performance and successful reception of the play are intended to act as the fulfillment of the misunderstood, abortive ritual depicted in the play itself. Yeats becomes the mediator of this fulfillment, and his role is itself analogous to that of the medium in the play. The difference is that Yeats and his audience recognize the significance of the events the drama depicts.

In order to emphasize his role as a mediator, Yeats foregrounds his mastery of language in the way he presents the play's meaning as a complete art work to the audience. *The Words upon the Window-Pane* consistently draws the audience's focus to the verbal elements of the drama, and deemphasizes the physical performances of the actors in favor of the literary work of the playwright. The title rather obviously signals a focus on written and spoken language, and the play involves little visual action, preferring to move its plot and themes forward through dialogue. The séance is staged as a sitting circle, shifting focus from the play's physical action to Mrs. Henderson's channeled speech from Vanessa, Stella, and Swift. The rather static blocking focuses the audience's attention on the dialogue that Henderson carries out as she switches personae. Additionally, by representing the central character, Jonathan Swift, entirely through Mrs. Henderson's verbal performance, the play reduces the audience's possible points of identification with him to the text of Yeats's dialogue for most of the running time. Only in the final moments of the play, during Swift's last manifestation, is there significant visual action when the possessed Mrs. Henderson wanders the stage and drops a saucer.

In all of these respects, the means by which the audience makes meaning of the play's action involves considerable attention to the play's form, not just to its contents.

Yeats is modeling himself as a distinctly modernist artist here, drawing attention to the way he assembles traditional and contemporary styles and materials, and to the methods of juxtaposition and self-reflexivity by which he constructs the drama and its non-literal meanings. If the play is an argument, it is a distinctly and necessarily modernist one: the attention to the artist as formalist and to the art work – in this case, the play – as a formal construct is a large part of what makes artistic mediation into a necessary way of transmitting cultural ideas. Yeats employs these modernist stylistic devices in order to suggest that late modern Irish culture is only available through mediation. Additionally, he means to suggest that his model of Anglo-Irish intellect is particularly situated so as to provide this mediation. Swift expresses the greatness that Ireland preserves and England squanders, and Yeats's play communicates Swift's greatness – and the composite of vernacular and imperial culture that make it up – to the audience.

Interestingly, this suggests that for Yeats, the Anglo-Irish mind might be a local or national instance of a more general power by which national literatures incorporate cosmopolitan cultural influences. The play's construction of Anglo-Irishness is built upon Yeats's formal inventions, and less on the specific contents or the vernacular practices of the Anglo-Irish in particular. The form Yeats constructs could reasonably contain other contents, and operate in other nations to order the cultural life of the nation-state. Swift represents a conceptual, not an experiential form of Anglo-Irishness, which becomes less an ethnicity than a synthetic figure of Yeats's national imaginary. Yeats's consideration of cosmopolitan classicism and vernacular expressions has become unusually abstracted from the real experiences that one would expect vernacular culture to express. While he

remains committed to a concept of national culture, it is increasingly difficult to find a material location to which Yeats's national imaginary can attach itself. Yeats's turn to mystical ideas seems to reflect this growing disjunction between his national imaginary and the politics of contemporary Ireland.

Purgatory and Yeats's Late-Period Politics

Despite this apparent problem, Yeats seems to have believed that the distinctly modernist mode of argument he employs in *The Words upon the Window-Pane* would have political as well as artistic force. The extended arguments against popular representation made by Swift and Corbet might be written off as the characters' views, but Yeats's commitment to the idea of specially gifted individuals also appears in the radio address of 1931 and in his later plays. To some extent, the antidemocratic argument of the play reflects Yeats's understandable anxiety at the relatively small number of Anglo-Irish in independent Ireland. The Anglo-Irish were certainly not a political majority; in addition, popular nationalist sentiment regarded the Anglo-Irish with suspicion and hostility. In these circumstances, Yeats's positioning of Anglo-Irish figures like Swift (and himself) as privileged mediators of Irish national culture was politically risky, to say the least. Yeats himself was well-regarded in Ireland after independence, however; his earlier support of the pro-Home Rule politician Charles Stuart Parnell and his involvement in the so-called "Celtic Revival" of Irish native culture broadly aligned him with pro-independence political blocs. Additionally, a Nobel laureate with connections to prominent writers and critics around the world, he was an internationally-respected literary personality.

However, by the mid-1920s Yeats found his views increasingly marginalized in the Senate, and within Irish political life more generally. Among his greatest frustrations was his failure to prevent the passage of a bill outlawing divorce, a law clearly written to appeal to middle-class Catholic moral sentiments. When Yeats parodies the middle classes in his portrayal of the séance participants in *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, it is a sign of his growing resentment of the middle-class Catholic consensus that came to dominate Irish politics. Yeats was not alone in sensing that the Protestant minority in the south of Ireland was losing its stake in the new state; Anglo-Irish emigration from the Irish Free State increased dramatically in the years following independence. In 1928, two years before the first performance of *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, Yeats resigned from the Senate due to ill health and went traveling. In place of typical political involvement, after 1928 Yeats began to use the theatre and other media to make his points. He also grew increasingly concerned with the limitations the Free State government began placing on individual cultural expression in the name of satisfying what Yeats considered a stifling Catholic morality. 1929 in Ireland saw the institution of the Censorship Board after some three years of increasing agitation from the staunchly moralistic and Catholic volunteer societies and vigilance associations; Yeats was in Rapallo, Italy, when the bill passed, and in this period he visited the Anglo-American modernist poet Ezra Pound and pursued readings in contemporary Italian political philosophy while refreshing his readings of Swift.²⁴ The staging of *The Words upon the*

²⁴ Foster, *Life II*, 376-7.

Window-Pane soon followed in 1930, and the radio address on Swift was broadcast in 1931. In 1933, Yeats also joined of the Irish Academy of Letters, which he had been instrumental in founding.

But the Academy was resolutely territorial in its definition: save for a tacit exemption for James Joyce, full members had to reside in Ireland or produce distinctly creative and Hibernocentric works. Foster considers Yeats to have been “galvanized” by the creation of what was meant as a cultural institution with strong political influence; taken with his other activities of the time, it can be seen as a general effort to produce an alternate set of institutions and outlets for Yeats’s political aesthetic.²⁵ Additionally, as Jonathan Allison notes, the Academy “cast [Yeats] in the role of defender not only of struggling artists but of Anglo-Irish Protestants [...] against clergy acting supposedly on behalf of the native Irish majority.”²⁶ In practice, it was just as often a predictable lightning rod for denunciations by both the clergy and by nationalists who derided its members for producing work in English rather than Gaelic.²⁷ The Academy was useful for fundraising and publicity purposes, but made little progress against Irish censorship. The election of the staunchly republican Eamon de Valera to the Presidency of the Free State’s Executive Council – making de Valera the Irish head of state – in the previous year, 1932, was a political triumph for those tendencies against which Yeats had fought for much of his own Senate career.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 469.

²⁶ “W.B. Yeats and Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats*, ed. Marjorie Howes and John Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 196.

²⁷ Foster, *Life II*, 469.

Yeats's artistic endeavors in the early 1930s were the means by which he made his case for the central position of the Anglo-Irish in modern Irish cultural life. But in practical political and cultural terms, the Anglo-Irish influence on Irish public life waned considerably in this period. Since much of Yeats's cultural and political program relied on the idea of a robust, if small Anglo-Irish elite who might connect Irish national life with more cosmopolitan modernist culture, the diminishing role of the Anglo-Irish and the continuing dominance of nativist sentiment became increasingly frustrating for the poet. Yeats's occultism and increasing involvement with reactionary and radical politics like those dominant in Italy are understandable against this backdrop, if not quite excusable. It would be charitable to treat the writer's support of the Blueshirts later in the 1930s as motivated by personal desperation at his own political marginality, but such charity would neglect not only the historical record but also the larger tendency of many modernists towards fantasies of a tyranny of the aesthetic. Pound's involvement in Italian fascism is well-documented, of course; and Yeats has often been considered in terms of his own statements regarding both fascism and eugenics. Some of Yeats's turn is attributable to a global sense of crisis in the late 1930s; in many quarters, the first World War had provoked a deep skepticism of democratic and liberal forms of government which was hardly assuaged by worldwide financial crisis and the looming shadow of another global war. Foster points out that both the left and the right were represented in organizations like the Eugenics Society, of which Yeats became a member in 1937, but

the poet's membership is still not to his credit.²⁸ W.J. McCormack cites Yeats's approval of the use of force in his advocacy of the Blueshirt movement in Ireland, which he finds part of a larger pattern of Yeats's expression of and commitment to anti-democratic sentiments.²⁹ Yeats's frustration with the failure of his artistic work to forge the cultural consensus he desired led him to make such troubling political connections.

Yeats's work in the late 1930s proves problematic for critics given the unsavory political forces with which he was aligned. The 1938 play *Purgatory* is emblematic of these problems, and reflects Yeats's frustration at the apparent inefficacy of his efforts to construct an Irish national culture in the image of his idiosyncratic Anglo-Irishness. First staged in 1938 at the Abbey Theatre, *Purgatory* works as a pessimistic, frustrated return to the themes and some of the stylistic methods of *The Words on the Window-Pane*. It is a stark drama, as much poetic dialogue as play, written "virtually at the close of the poet's life."³⁰ *Purgatory* depicts two characters, the Old Man and the Boy, who are the last descendants of an Anglo-Irish family that has declined from wealth to abject poverty. The Old Man is haunted by memories of his father, a drunken carouser, whom the Old Man murdered after the drunken father burned down the family house. Unable to interest his son, the Boy, in the Irish cultural traditions that their family allegedly maintained before the Old Man's father corrupted and destroyed the family line, the Old Man murders the Boy in an attempt to purge the supposed pollution of their bloodline. In the background

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 629.

²⁹ *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork UP, 1994) 369-71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 343.

during these events, ghostly sounds and figures representing the Old Man's mother and father are seen and heard.

Purgatory's first performance at the Abbey Theatre marked Yeats's final appearance in any public venue, as he was called onstage after the curtain; thereafter, illness kept him at home until his death in 1939. For this reason, *Purgatory's* first staging provides a convenient bookend to Yeats's use of the theatre as an alternative political venue. Following the play's staging, Yeats responded to questions about the play's meaning in an issue of the *Irish Independent*, a nationalist newspaper. His explanation reflects both his newfound interest in eugenics and his idea that the Anglo-Irish mediate between the cultural traditions of Ireland and the present life of the nation:

In my play, a spirit suffers because of its share [...] in the destruction of an honoured house; that destruction is taking place all over Ireland to-day. Sometimes it is the result of poverty, but more often because a new individualistic generation has lost interest in the ancient sanctities. [...] In some few cases a house has been destroyed by a mesalliance.³¹

Given Yeats's explanation of the play's eugenicist sentiment, McCormack considers *Purgatory* a cautionary horror story regarding class and racial *mésalliance*.³² However, Yeats's earlier reading of the Anglo-Irish as an elite class that mediates between Irish national culture and more cosmopolitan sources of cultural greatness are also visible in the *Irish Independent* interview. The idea that the Anglo-Irish have an interest in "the ancient sanctities," for example, clearly reflects Yeats's earlier use of the Anglo-Irish

³¹ Interview excerpt reproduced in *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats V.2: The Plays*, eds. David R. Clark and Rosalind Clark (New York: Scribner, 2001), 918. The interview originally appeared in the August 13, 1938, issue of the *Irish Independent*.

³² *Ibid.*, 370.

Jonathan Swift as a mediatory figure through which classical figures of “human genius” like Oedipus can be connected to vernacular Irish figures like Raftery. And the Old Man’s visions of his parents’ ghosts also bears a strong resemblance towards the spirit mediumship portrayed in *The Words upon the Window-Pane*. The Anglo-Irish Old Man in *Purgatory*, however debased, retains some version of the seemingly mystical power of mediating past and present, cosmopolitan and vernacular, that the figure of Swift has in Yeats’s earlier work.

However, the tragedy in *Purgatory* is that the Anglo-Irish no longer fulfill what Yeats sees as their proper role, which renders impossible the proposed models of national modernism suggested by the earlier plays. *Purgatory* is about the failure of the Anglo-Irish aesthetic imagination to forge Yeats’s desired cultural consensus. Where the audience of *The Words upon the Window-Pane* was invited to complete and rectify the ritualized action on the stage, *Purgatory*’s audience is instead subjected to the fruitless repetition of unregenerate violence on the stage. The purgation of the play is meant for the audience, for whom the spareness of the staging and the sterility of the action seem to suggest intellectual or aesthetic disidentification from the suggestion of repeated action without progress. The play’s chief example of fruitless repetition occurs in the Old Man’s speech on the past glory of the Anglo-Irish estate and its subsequent decline:

Great people lived and died in this house;
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,
Captains and governors, and long ago
Men that had fought at Aughrim and the Boyne.
Some that had gone on to government work,
To London or to India came home to die,
Or came from London every spring

To look at the may-blossom in the park [...]
But he [the father] killed the house; to kill a house
Where great men grew up, married, died,
I here declare a capital offense. (538)

The father, a mere “groom in a training stable,” seems to the Old Man to be the pollutant that destroyed the house.

But the listing the Old Man recites is less a roll call of greatness than a history of the heroic Irish past’s decline into “government work” and mere administration made up of very much the sorts and classes of people mocked by *The Words upon the Window-Pane*’s portrayal of the séance attendees. The Old Man’s line seems filled with functionaries and middle-class civil servants. It is worth noting here that Yeats’s family background was essentially middle class; he belongs to the Anglo-Irish, but not to the Ascendancy as usually understood. And in this listing we see that the Anglo-Irish as a class became, by the 20th century, predominantly middle-class. The sense of the passage conveys somewhat ironically the degree to which the vigor of Ascendancy lineage – its cultural and historical inheritances – are sapped away by vulgar politics and middle-class civil servants’ work well before the disastrous marriage which purportedly introduces the corruption the Old Man wishes to purge. Here, the transnational mobility no longer permits Yeats to construct a cosmopolitan classicism, but signifies Anglo-Irish decline. The high cultural exchange Yeats imagined earlier in his career is now revealed as dependent on a transnational professional class of imperial functionaries, and the hidden material basis of Yeats’s high poetics is revealed to be the very middle classes he abhorred.

In this passage lies a hint of the degree of Yeats's frustration at the time of composition. The 1937 Constitution of the Republic of Ireland, which removed the oath of allegiance to Britain, appeared to Yeats as a symbolic exclusion of the Anglo-Irish, as did the introduction of autarchist trade policies and Gaelic language advocacy legislation. While he often disavowed international commerce, it had created the global space in which Yeats had previously circulated as a lecturer and a literary celebrity, allowing him to personally encounter the cosmopolitan sources of his literary model. De Valera's government now seemed determined to embrace policies that threatened that model, at least for writers who chose to live in Ireland. Added to this was the sense that the new policies were overtly hostile to any of the Irish who did not fit into Irish Catholic middle-class life. Yeats was not alone in this perception: as R.F. Foster notes, while the Anglo-Irish still made up much of the professional class of lawyers, bankers, and so forth, as a demographic group they were "a dwindling and infinitesimal proportion," one whose chief reaction to nationalist governance was emigration to London and elsewhere.³³ The target of Yeats's critique here is not only the politically dominant Catholic middle class, but also the Anglo-Irish who ignored or abdicated what he saw as their critical interlocutory role in his ideal of visionary republicanism. As the earlier plays demonstrate, Yeats had always placed himself on the side of an elite model of culture, and was hostile towards what he and other modernists thought of as a spiritually and artistically deadening mass culture. But in earlier periods, Yeats retained a belief that

³³ *Modern Ireland*, 534.

Anglo-Irish cultural formations could be employed to modernize the nation in a more palatable fashion. By retaining what Yeats imagined as the great cultural hierarchy within Ireland while updating that hierarchy's cultural expression, he was able to reconcile his classicist vision of cosmopolitanism with the vernacular culture of the modern Irish nation. Ireland could be both a vibrant folk culture and a participant in international aesthetic movements so long as an Anglo-Irish cultural elite acted as mediators between these two spheres. By the late 1930s, though, Anglo-Irish nonparticipation in Irish public life effectively extinguished Yeats's hope for a Protestant minority that might sensibly legislate or review legislation and culture.

Purgatory reflects Yeats's despair, and it presents an allegory for the failure of mediation and the breakdown of cultural traditions. At the level of the plot, the Old Man fails to give the Boy any working link to their shared family traditions. And when the Boy demonstrates his ignorance of these traditions, the Old Man kills him for it, condemning himself in the process. The concept of misalliance, which Yeats seems to believe in by 1938, seems at odds with the playwright's earlier use of Swift as a privileged mediator of native and foreign cultural traditions. Swift was, as mentioned above, the son of an Irish father and an English mother; the Old Man in *Purgatory* was sired by "a groom in a training stable" (541), implicitly a native Irish servant on his Anglo-Irish mother's estate. While Swift's dual ethnic background seems to qualify him to concentrate the shared "genius" of England and Ireland, the Old Man's parents are portrayed as diluting an implicitly pure Anglo-Irish ethnicity and disqualifying him from transmitting genius in the manner of Swift. Nor does the Old Man have the artistic talents

of a Swift or, implicitly, a Yeats. Early on, the Old Man attempts to explain the symbolic meaning of a tree, but can muster only “It’s like – no matter what it’s like” (538). This failure of both language and cultural memory is a far cry from the withered tree that marks out Raftery’s visionary power as bard and sage in the 1931 radio address. In the radio address, the tree is rich with vernacular cultural significance which Yeats can imaginatively connect to more cosmopolitan cultural touchstones such as Oedipus and Swift. In *Purgatory*, however, even the local significance of the tree is lost. This loss of meaning is reflected in the play’s scenery, which employs a sparse design whose only elements are “[a] ruined house and a bare tree in the background” (537). And even here, the ruined house is represented almost entirely by an occasionally-lit window and the silhouettes that appear within its frame. The window-pane in *Purgatory* contains nothing so rich with signification as words. Instead of imaginative synthesis, symbols and objects become empty or reductive in the character’s interpretations. The Boy, for example, sees in the tree “[a] silly old man,” making a mockery of the Old Man’s inability to verbally express a sense of tragedy and portent (538). Violence takes the place of symbolism in the reductive aesthetics of *Purgatory*.

The Old Man’s ghostly visions of his mother and father seem to make up a sparer version of the séance in the earlier play. In place of Swift’s compelling language and the extended interpretation offered by characters like Corbet, the Old Man sees shadows and hears echoes. His limited power to access visionary imagination also leaves him incapable of filling the role of mediator demonstrated in *The Words upon the Window-Pane*. Mediation requires a self-reflexivity that the Old Man lacks and the Boy seem

incapable of achieving. Despite the Old Man's story of murder, for example, the Boy is unable to realize that his father will repeat that murderous violence in the present. Similarly, the Old Man can only imagine a future for himself that consists of "[going] to a distant place, and there / Tell[ing] my old jokes among new men" (544). He cannot mediate or interpret the violence of the past, only repeat it, crying out that "Mankind can do no more" and realizing that he is "Twice a murderer and all for nothing" when his visions of his parents repeat themselves even after he murders the Boy (543-4). In *Purgatory*, purgation is elusive or impossible. There is less revolutionary or reactionary sentiment here than simple despair that the relationship between the past and present, and between the native Irish and Anglo-Irish, has devolved into reductive violence. Yeats seems to recognize and stage in the play his own disconnection from public life and political efficacy: like the Old Man, he perceives his efforts as increasingly unproductive and inadequate. The extremity of the political solutions he was proposing in his involvement with the Eugenics Society and his flirtations with the Blueshirt movement reflect this desperation and frustration with the failure of a visionary politics to remake art as the preeminent site of public discourse. With *Purgatory*, Yeats plays out his loss of faith in the power of the theatre as a regenerative space of national greatness and the staging ground of Anglo-Irish cultural privilege.

The text of *Purgatory* may also leave some room for questions about the degree of Yeats's commitment to the ideologies he was publicly championing. If it is true that the poet indulged in antidemocratic rhetoric and bore an admiration for classical republicanism and rule by an elite, it is as much true that he had little problem adopting

liberal and democratic rhetoric regarding the protection of Ireland's Protestant minority. The Irish Academy of Letters, as a project, also stands as Foster notes above: as an uneasy confluence of Yeats's imagined model of the conservative, republican politics of the eighteenth century Protestant Ascendancy and the poet-playwright's contemporary free speech advocacy in an increasingly parochial Irish state. The tension between Yeats's desire to construct and communicate an Irish art of cosmopolitan materials and the practical reality of increasingly provincial vernacular Irish audiences seems to put an end to his artistic project. *Purgatory* makes much of the ambivalence that follows the climactic murder. The Old Man's crime, supposedly committed to stop the Boy's "pollution [from being] passed on," is immediately undercut by the declaration by the Old Man that he will clean the knife, take the Boy's money, and go "to a distant place, and there / Tell my old jokes among new men" (544).³⁴ Rather than producing new expressions of universal values, the Old Man's poetic recollections of a glorious past are little more than the empty repetition of "old jokes." As these lines suggest, Yeats is expressing despair at the way his hoped-for revival of Irish and cosmopolitan cultural traditions has devolved into ineffectual repetition.

The dichotomy between poetic diction and prose dialogue that separated Cuchullain and Fintain in the 1903 version of *On Baile's Strand* comes up in *Purgatory* as well, but in this play poetic diction, like tradition, has no power. The Old Man speaks in verse throughout the play, and peppers his speeches with references to his witness of

³⁴ *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats V.2: The Plays*, 544.

the great moments of Irish history. The Boy, however, does not speak in the vernacular prose previously reserved for Yeats's bourgeois and stagnant characters. Like the Old Man, the Boy speaks in verse, but like Concohar in the earlier play, his poetic diction belies his dully materialistic vision of the world. While the Boy speaks in a way that suggests his connection to tradition, he displays marked ignorance of that history and the value of witness. The relationship between form and content has broken down. But the Old Man is ultimately no better than the Boy. Both of them are beggars and, implicitly, thieves; while the Old Man claims that he murders the boy in an attempt to purge his family's corrupted bloodline, the play also suggests a less spiritual motive for his crime by depicting their arguments over a bag of possibly stolen money. To the extent that classical cultural traditions are present, they have been broken and debased by what Yeats sees as the negative aspects of modernity. Even spiritual gifts are not immune: the Old Man's mediumship seems both limited in scope – he hardly channels Swift, after all – and either involuntary or base – aside from murders, he witnesses again and again not the crowning moments of the history of the Big House but instead the night of his own conception as the product of alleged *mésalliance*. All that the past bequeaths to the present is this sordid display, and the Old Man's response is to destroy what has gone before and what may emerge in favor of allowing that present to diminish into the banal repetition of witness.

Yet witness, in the form of the endless ghost-play of murder that the Old Man perceives throughout, is neither culturally generative nor alterable by the final violence that ends the family line. Rather, the murder is at best the limit of human action:

“Mankind can do no more” and the Old Man instead cries out to God to release his mother’s soul from the purgatorial dream of the ghost-play seen through the window that marks the stage’s backdrop (544). In *Purgatory*, purgation is elusive or impossible. It may also be of interest in terms of the repressed sectarian hypothesis offered by McCormack to note that the doctrine purgatory is unique to the Catholic Church; the failure of purgation can be taken as a sort of theological attack, but Yeats’s more general tactics in political speech involved the use of Catholic doctrine (as he understood and framed it) against clerically-minded opponents in the press and the Senate. In that light, the hope of purgatory which fails so spectacularly at the play’s finish seems at another allegorical level to repudiate the violence of the intergenerational conflict. The sense of purgatory and repetition that hangs over the action is heightened by the Old Man’s exile and promise of repetition in his “old jokes.” He does not so much purge the pollution as inaugurate a more hellish mode of purgatory, one in which the limitation of the soul’s term is fundamentally uncertain. The situation bitterly dashes the younger Yeats’s hope that the theater could become the place where the Irish people recognized their national literature. In *Purgatory*, the teleology of the national literature is replaced by an eternal deferral of the final, synthetic moment in which the nation’s people belatedly recognize the deep truths conveyed by an elite aesthetics.

Taken as an allegory of national politics and cultural determination, then, the play seems to abandon the possibility of a synthesis between the disparate segments of Ireland or of the modern world and the subtending layer of the past in favor of an endlessly deferred moment of divine intervention and, if not forgiveness, then appeasement. The

Old Man, after all, cries out not for redemption but merely for God to “Appease / The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead” in some fashion (544). And this call, too, goes apparently unanswered. As a ritual of purgation, the murder is an impotent one. What this may suggest are misgivings about the violence of martially-backed reform or renaissance on Yeats’s part. The Blueshirts were, after all, a short-lived and quite ineffective organization. Their legacy is less a fascist resurgence in Ireland than the foundation of Fine Gael, and it was undone by directed and state-legitimated violence from the IRA as well by de Valera’s expedient measures banning its armed wing. Nor did Yeats’s rather minimal practical contributions to the movement impact much in Irish politics; their primary effect was to spark renewed criticism of Yeats himself, and to cast a pall on his public work. While the violence in *Purgatory* is included in the onstage action and the motions of the ritualistic display, and indeed doubled in the framed murder in the window, it does not carry with it the results of sacrifice in *The Death of Cuchulain* or even the production of a legend as in *On Baile’s Strand*. All that is produced is reproduction.

Conclusion

In the end, then, Yeats’s strategies of archaist cosmopolitanism and stylistic overdetermination have, for Yeats himself, seemingly been exhausted. The idea of the national literature, of the Anglo-Irish elite minority, and even of the minoritarian safeguarding of a modern state and vibrant culture for Ireland give way to anger and vexation in *Purgatory*. Poetic language becomes impossible, and the past at once illegible and ineluctably visible for the present. What is most striking in *Purgatory*’s working out

of the problem of *mésalliance* is that the idea of pollution is itself ironically framed as a result of class mixing taken for racial mixing. Yeats's mobilizations of Anglo-Irish ethnicity and class status usually involve a marshalling of the intermediary position of that category for the purposes of a universally guaranteed belonging, an advanced consciousness of either the naturalist and spiritual gifts of the Irish classical age or a learned talent for distinguishing cultural productions derived from the British literary tradition and the privileged status of Protestants in the Irish colonial past. In short, Anglo-Irishness can function as the truest expression of Irish belonging to both Ireland and the world precisely because it is a mixed status, that is, because it is neither wholly nativist in its Irishness nor wholly unIrish in its claims to connection with Britain and European cosmopolitan existence. Similarly, the theater can achieve what supposedly "literal" politics cannot exactly because it operates performatively in the mediated realm between true, subtending cultural forces and present historical and expressive circumstances.

Despite Yeats's ambitions in the early 1930s, his artistic work did not produce a viable political alternative to the nationalist model that dominated Irish politics over the course of the decade. This was not a singular failing on his part; de Valera's party, Fianna Fáil, remained in power from 1932 to 1948, one of the most entrenched political parties in the world. Yeats does succeed in imagining a mediation between vernacular Irish culture and the broader sources he imagines that modern Ireland preserves and maintains. Yeats's vision of a national Irish culture relies on the mediated expression both national, vernacular cultural traditions and cultural strengths absorbed through the channels of empire. In this way, Yeats provides a method of expressing the cultural traditions that

inform late modernity without valuing either vernacular or cosmopolitan expressions of those traditions over one another. But Yeats's ambition in conceiving this alternative modernism was in no small part political; he was invested in the preservation of what he understood as Anglo-Irish privilege, and considered this goal as part of his artistic projects. Despite being celebrated as a culturally significant artist, then, Yeats considered his artistic projects failures because they did not produce the sorts of political results he demanded of them. Though Yeats supported the Irish Free State and welcomed Irish independence, by the end of his life he was unable to reconcile his vision of the Anglo-Irish with the cultural reality of the new nation-state.

The Anglo-Irish, especially as Yeats imagines them, do draw attention to the possibility of considering similar forms of modernism which can be understood as alternatives to cosmopolitan and vernacular models. Neither the new nationalisms that emerged from the break-up of various empires nor the changing national self-images of onetime imperial centers had much room for distinctly colonial classes like the Anglo-Irish. Nor did such colonial classes always discover easy ways of belonging to some part of the changing world of late modernity. Yeats considered himself and the Anglo-Irish to have as much claim on belonging in Ireland as the native Catholic Irish; at the same time, however, both the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish were aware of the historically-entrenched differences between their respective ethnic groups. The arrival of an independent Irish nation-state allowed the native Irish a form of political expression, but that political expression grew to seem increasingly exclusionary to the Anglo-Irish. In much the same way, colonial classes elsewhere might experience decolonization and

national independence as a curious condition in which they identify themselves with a nation whose native population would exclude them. These colonial classes cannot entirely claim vernacular cultural expressions as their own, yet their own peculiar brand of nationalism prevents them from wholly embracing a cosmopolitan modernism. What Yeats provides in the plays examined here is an experiment in expressing the modernity of displaced colonial classes like the Anglo-Irish, one in which mediation and self-reflexivity might permit imaginative associations with both vernacular and cosmopolitan modernist cultures. While Yeats arguably succeeds artistically, the political fate of such classes is never in doubt. What Yeats can imagine in his literary works and what he can say about the way in which we conceive of modernism are meaningful and valuable, even as his efforts to establish a direct relationship between aesthetics and politics fail to create the nation-state he desires.

In Yeats's earlier works, the relationship between modern vernacular culture and classical cosmopolitan culture suggests the possibility of a synthesis. Yeats envisions the modernist art work as this synthesis, and the theatre as the location of this synthesis. When *Purgatory* replaces the idea of synthesis with the concept of misalliance, however, Yeats abandons the idea that the classical traditions he values can become the vernacular expression of independent Ireland. He becomes a belated opponent of Irish political modernity. Somewhat ironically, Yeats refuses to recognize Ireland in response to what he perceives as Ireland's refusal to recognize him. The circumstances he projected – even insisted upon – as the conditions of his teleological view of historical and cultural cycles of event and expression prove as rigid in their way as the middlebrow mind and the

clerical strictures he spent much time and energy in opposing. The deliberate aesthetic of cyclical crime and annihilation displayed in *Purgatory* does not mean that Yeats closes the window of historical and cultural opportunity, but that he recognizes it as phantasmagoric. While he employed cosmopolitan techniques and philosophies in his politics and his poetics – drawing in Noh theater, Pound's Anglo-American modernism, Italian political thought, and classical Greco-Roman ideas as filtered through an 18th and 19th century British perspective – in the end he sees Ireland itself as the object of contest and the territory of resolution. When he perceives that resolution lost or never coming at all, the despairing poetic of the final plays and the extremist politics of the 1930s become the expression of that lost hope, not any new one. And the theatre, once the promising site of national culture, becomes a place where he can stage his despair and frustration.

“[T]he Aesthetic of Living”: Transnational Identity, Private Space, and National Belonging in the Works of Elizabeth Bowen

In this chapter, I consider Elizabeth Bowen’s use of modernist techniques to renegotiate Anglo-Irish identity by taking on this problem of the frayed boundary between private and public space. In Bowen’s work, the Anglo-Irish estate becomes a complex space in which personal identity and public representation can be performed in multiple, overlapping ways. In Bowen’s work, such spaces become both personal, intimate homes and open, Big Houses. In addition, Bowen reconsiders the options of remaining in Ireland and emigrating from Ireland, seeking out a middle way in which the Anglo-Irish can engage in a limited circulation between appropriate home spaces while they attempt a rapprochement between the traditionalist, antimodern elements of vernacular Ascendancy identity and the modernizing, postnational elements of an emerging set of cosmopolitan identities.

Anglo-Irish emerges as a distinct ethnicity from a colonial model in which the colonizer’s vernacular practices are imposed on a global scale, while anticolonial nationalisms valorize other vernacular traditions to resist and oppose colonial mores and institutions. In this context, not all of the Anglo-Irish imagined themselves as inheritors of a cosmopolitan legacy. The political and cultural reality was that the Anglo-Irish made up a political and cultural minority in both Ireland and England, albeit for different reasons. Nor were spiritual or idealist concepts of nationality and belonging the only ones available to them. That said, the nationalist conceptions of Ireland that became politically dominant following Irish independence generally placed the accent on the English

elements of Anglo-Irish identity. As R.F. Foster argues, the Free State exhibited a “cultural chauvinism and insularity” born of a cultural complex that Foster considers “common with most ex-colonial countries, [where] the concomitant of nationalist polarization was a need to assert a separate identity, by social and cultural engineering if need be.”¹ As part of this engineering, the Protestant minority in Ireland was often excluded from institutional and official models of national belonging. Unsurprisingly, the response was Anglo-Irish emigration, generally to England, which was generally more welcoming to the Anglo-Irish. Even there, however, a general sense of the need for coherence was often a corollary to the decline of empire. No longer capable of presenting English vernacular culture as a global, even aspirationally cosmopolitan model, the English turned towards solidifying the credentials of a distinctive English nation possessing some sort of inherent unity.² In practice, as Brown notes, the practices of everyday life within Ireland remained “markedly similar to that in the United Kingdom,” given the use of English as a primary language and the fact that most people lived what Brown terms “a comfortable, petit-bourgeois life that bore a closer resemblance to the life of similarly placed people in Britain than to any special destiny.”³ In short, the vernacular practices of independent Ireland were still broadly English.

It was the outmoded practices of Ascendancy tradition that suffered the most, belonging to the local practices of neither Ireland nor England, and which had long been

¹ *Modern Ireland*, 535.

² Jed Esty, for example, notes E.M. Forster’s inward turn and celebration of the opportunity for reconsolidating Englishness opened up by the exhaustion of England’s world-historical ambition as an expanding empire. *A Shrinking Island*, 39.

³ *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper, 2003), 124.

divorced from any contemporary economic or political reality. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, a series of bills in London's Parliament had essentially ended whatever material basis Ascendancy tradition possessed. The Church of Ireland had been disestablished in 1869, ending the official sanction of Anglo-Irish Protestantism and diminishing the legacy of the Penal Laws that had established the Ascendancy. But the real blows to Ascendancy living came in the form of economic modernization, as the Land Act of 1881 undermined the basis of the tenant-farmer system presided over by Anglo-Irish landlords by limiting the length of tenancy and, more importantly, making Land Courts the regulators of fair rents. Further laws that instituted systems for tenant farmers to purchase land outright at reduced rates accelerated the breakup of the landholding system, and the Local Government Act of 1898 created a system of regional government that formally displaced the Anglo-Irish from their politically dominant role as the de facto governors of colonial Ireland.

Ascendancy tradition and the landlord's so-called "Big House" went into irreversible decline as a result of these acts, which were as much fueled by the liberalizing intentions of the Gladstone government in London as by British efforts to curtail the growing violence in Ireland represented by the Land Wars of the 1800s and by the Fenian movement in the latter half of the century. The descendants of Ascendancy were left in the peculiar position of participating in the vernacular English-language culture of Ireland that they had helped cement as a cornerstone of England's dominion over Ireland, even as latter-day efforts by recent Liberal governments in London reformed the economic and political system in Ireland in ways that radically diminished

the position of the Anglo-Irish landholding class. Still symbolically an elite caste in Ireland, they were practically in severe decline, left out of both English and Irish modernity in the twentieth century.

As a side effect, the Anglo-Irish in general – even those of middle-class or working-class backgrounds – were frequently lumped in with the declining Ascendancy class, who were for obvious reasons the targets of much republican ire in the period before and after Irish independence. The Ascendancy's critical difference from both modern Ireland and nationalist Ireland coupled with the reality of their marginal position as a disestablished elite minority made them more a symbol of British colonialism than its instrument by the time of Irish independence, and this symbol stood as often for all reminders of British colonial rule, including the Anglo-Irish in general, as for just that minority who were actually descended from Ascendancy rulers. The Anglo-Irish case was not helped by writers like Yeats, whose model of cosmopolitan classicism sometimes seemed to treat Anglo-Irishness in general as an extension of the Ascendancy tradition of aristocracy in particular. The problem was even greater for those descendants of the Ascendancy who now found it increasingly difficult to defend the legacy they had inherited, as well as to locate themselves as individuals in either Ireland or England. Wedded to the imagery of the Big House and the symbolism that came with it, their task of negotiating modernity was especially difficult. The places where these modern heirs of Ascendancy lived and conducted their private lives had become a public symbol of colonialism and antimodern traditionalism.

Bowen's Remaking of the Big House

In a 1944 essay entitled "The Big House" written for *The Bell*, Bowen discusses the character of upper-class Anglo-Irish estates:

Big houses in Ireland are, I am told, very isolated [but] when I visit other big houses I *am* struck by some quality that they all have – not so much isolation as mystery. Each house seems to live under its own spell, and that is the spell that falls on the visitor from the moment he passes in at the gates.⁴

Bowen was of course intimately familiar with the so-called "Big House" of Ascendancy Ireland; the Bowens were the owners of one such estate, Bowen's Court. And although Bowen spent the bulk of her childhood and adolescence in England, her devotion to Bowen's Court was such that she maintained the estate well into the 1960s, long after many other Big Houses had been sold or razed. In her 1942 memoir, *Bowen's Court*, Bowen gives her own life story as one chapter in the house's history. For Bowen, self-representation is closely linked to the image of the family home. However, Bowen traveled between England and Ireland throughout her life; the family estate in County Cork was not often her private residence. As a result, the family home exists more as a literary figure than as a concrete reality in much of Bowen's work. The idea of the house in Bowen's literature is more mobile than the fixed sites of actual estates, and the tension between identifying the self with an actual, existing structure and the imaginary home site animates much of Bowen's writing. Bowen's literary use of this tension is not restricted to the Anglo-Irish estate, and I will show the ways that the tension between real and

⁴ Elizabeth Bowen, "The Big House," in *The Mulberry Tree: Selected Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Hermione Lee (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1986), 25.

imagined homes reemerges in Bowen's short fiction set in London. In those stories, Bowen writes about her experience of dislocation during the bombing of London, during which she was one of many London residents evacuated from the city. I trace Bowen's ambivalent response to this experience of dislocation, and the way she connects it to her larger sense of dislocation from multiple national and vernacular contexts, in the chapter that follows.

Much of Bowen's work proceeds from the idea that spaces that are usually considered intimate, personal spaces are better understood as social spaces. In considering the intermingling of social and personal space, Bowen also reimagines the self that inhabits that space. Houses, Big and otherwise, are often closer to public places than to private places in Bowen's work. The interiors of houses in Bowen's writing are always visible to outsiders in one way or another. The critic Vera Kreilkamp has dubbed Bowen an "Ascendancy modernist," noting Bowen's use of the tropes of the Big House novel of the 19th century to register "a personal and caste history of loss."⁵ When Bowen portrays the circulation of visitors through Anglo-Irish estates, for example, she also portrays the way in which the Big House was open to the views of many people other than its inhabitants. More darkly, because Bowen frequently uses various conflicts of the early 20th century as a backdrop for her fiction, the houses she portrays often end up with quite literal holes in their walls as a result of war and other forms of political violence. In these cases, the interior of the house is displayed in a grossly literal fashion. Both

⁵ "Bowen: Ascendancy Modernist," in *Elizabeth Bowen: Visions and Revisions, Irish Writers in Their Time* v.2, ed. Eibhar Walshe (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 14-15.

political violence and social convention seem to open personal spaces to public view, and similarly put the people who inhabit traditionally private spaces on display. As a consequence, the private self seems to vanish in Bowen's writing; anything that can be represented is inevitably represented to a wide audience. To represent something or someone is to enter it into social or public circulation.

In this respect, Bowen belongs to a long tradition of domestic novelists in English literature for whom the private space of the home locates various literary methods of managing the self's entry into the public realm. Where Bowen differs from this tradition is in her response to the changing situation of the social and the private self during her lifetime. Against the background of political change that characterizes the early twentieth century, managing the public self also requires mobility. Formerly stable concepts of the nation and its location in the world were shaken in fundamental ways. The post-World War I period is characterized by mass emigrations and the formation of new nations. Additionally, the threat of war and the collapse of the imperial system often reshape or violate the boundaries of stable ethnic and national categories in this period.

By treating the house as a social space and reimagining home as a movable location of the self, Bowen responds to the circumstances of political crisis, historical change, and dislocation. Bowen's characters often identify themselves with particular nationalities, but soon discover that these national identities are threatened by external political threats or internal incoherence. When her characters abandon such identities, they survive and can adopt others; when they refuse to abandon them, her characters court destruction and loss. As brief examinations of her nonfiction writing will bear out,

Bowen herself adopted a number of different, sometimes overlapping national identities over the course of her life. Bowen never abandons national identification entirely, but neither does she entirely commit herself to any particular nationality. In effect, then, she employs vernacular modernism – writing in English as Anglo-Irish – in order to inhabit multiple, overlapping national spaces. Even when, in the early 1940s, Bowen worked as an agent of the British government, in her writing she maintained her deep connection to Ireland and Anglo-Irish estate life. Her affiliations with the British nation-state and her vernacular commitments to Anglo-Ireland overlap in this later period, and I argue that the evidence of Bowen’s literary work demonstrates that neither affiliation represents Bowen’s “true” commitments as a private individual. Instead, Bowen inhabits a mixed space of overlapping transnational commitments, and takes advantage of the flexible options for self-representation provided by the ambivalent status of the English as both the language of the British empire, as a cosmopolitan literary medium, and as a regional vernacular recaptured by Irish and Anglo-Irish nationals.

In Bowen’s work, the public persona adopted by an individual is an instrument of the private person, an instrument that is separate from that private self. Cosmopolitanism does not provide Bowen with useful public personae because, for practical purposes, the late modern individual always lives in one or another local, national context. Devout nationalism can provide a temporarily useful public persona, but requires a commitment that may become dangerous should the particular nation fall into political crisis. Given these two unworkable alternatives, Bowen charts a middle way in which national identities are a useful convenience, but an underlying cosmopolitan mobility allows her

to make the best possible use of the vernacular identities she adopts. For Bowen, public self-representation is often a matter of practical utility.

Despite prizing mobility, Bowen retains a strong attachment to the concept of the home; she and her characters are often personally invested in the houses they inhabit and the personal possessions in their dwellings. But this investment must be limited due to the vulnerability of the physical house. In early novels like *The Last September* and later fiction like the short stories collected in *The Demon Lover*, Bowen portrays the dangers of overinvestment in a specific location. The burning estate in *The Last September* is more realistic than the supernatural abduction that ends “The Demon Lover,” but in both works the setting where danger appears is a cherished home located in the midst of war. Irish rebels burn down the estate in *The Last September*, and the Blitz has demolished the London house in “The Demon Lover.” In both works, the protagonists’ attachment to a fixed abode has spectacular and terrifying consequences. And in both works, the home’s fixed location makes it vulnerable in times of violent political crisis. When Bowen’s characters identify their homes with particular locations, they often suffer for this identification. Worse, they often lose the homes to which they are so strongly attached when political circumstances change.⁶ Considering the links between home and self in Bowen’s work, the loss of the home is catastrophic indeed. The destruction of an entire lifestyle or way of being in the world is implicit in both the estate’s burning in the novel and the demonic kidnapping in the short story. The protagonist of “The Demon Lover” is

⁶ Heather Bryant Jordan argues that war and displacement make up the primary experiences represented in Bowen’s fiction in her book-length study, *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1992).

spirited away by the ghost of her dead fiancée, and the Anglo-Irish family in *The Last September* is dispersed by emigration from Ireland. In both cases, the person or group identified with the home vanishes with the home's foreseeable destruction by political violence. Any house can be a home, but ultimately the two cannot be completely identified with one another. Houses are vulnerable; the home, as the location of the private self, cannot be made too vulnerable.

Bowen's personal investment in particular houses or homesites also provides her with a necessary continuity. One reason she does not fully embrace a globally-mobile model of cosmopolitanism is that she values some external continuity. Bowen is not deeply committed to any given national identity, but she sees some value in the formal characteristics of national identity irrespective of any particular national identity's specific contents. In practical terms, however, she emphasizes either Englishness or Irishness depending on her local circumstances. While the Anglo-Irish are something of an émigré class after Irish independence, Bowen treats this emigration as limited in its possible scope. She frequently traveled between England and Ireland during her lifetime, hardly an atypical pattern for many of the Irish whatever their specific class and ethnic origins. But despite her mobility across borders, Bowen also maintained her family's estate for many years and at great expense; she never entirely abandons a traditional, locally-based form Anglo-Irish identity. Her continuing attachment to the family estate sometimes suggests that Bowen imagines emigration and dislocation to be temporary experiences, or at least that she thinks of the estate as a fixed home to which she will always return. Neil Corcoran describes the governing motif of Bowen's work and life in

these terms, suggesting that they share a motif he calls “enforced return” which is expressed by a literary strategy of “return to that already written.”⁷ The “Big House” novel and the actual Big House remain aesthetic touchstones for Bowen even when her writing and her location have changed. Corcoran goes on to argue that Bowen’s aesthetics resist the “entrapment of obsessive return” in which personal history and selfhood cease to advance.⁸ Corcoran describes this “entrapment” as the result of an overly strong personal investment a place or an event, one that comes to dominate an individual’s self-conception. While continuity is necessary for Bowen’s self-conception, she is aware of the ease with which that self-conception can slip into obsession.

Ascendancy Circulation and the Centrality of the Big House in *The Last September*

Bowen’s second novel, *The Last September*, can be read as an exploration of both the benefits and the dangers of the Big House as a signifier for the self.⁹ Published in 1929 and set in late 1920, the novel portrays the last September of an Anglo-Irish estate before its destruction by arson in the first year of the Anglo-Irish War. *The Last September* spends little time depicting revolutionary violence directly; instead, the novel portrays the dissolution of Anglo-Irish estate life in the face of political change.¹⁰ The impending violence of the Anglo-Irish war hangs over the novel, but the impossibility of maintaining Anglo-Irish estate life is clear long before the final scene of violence. The

⁷ *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁹ All page numbers will refer to the 2000 Anchor Books edition.

¹⁰ Indeed, this sense of “dissolution” forms the guidepost of at least one study of Bowen. See Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

novel's plot focuses on the visit of Hugo and Francie Montmorency, old family friends who have come to the estate after several years spent in England and abroad. Despite the growing threat of Irish republican violence, the Anglo-Irish continue to observe their usual social routine. In an early passage, the lady of the estate, Myra Naylor, responds to Francie's momentary concern about the delicate Irish political situation:

[I]t's all very well to talk of disintegration; of course there's a great deal of disintegration in England and on the Continent. But one does wonder sometimes whether there's really much there to disintegrate...I daresay there may have been...And if you talk to the people they'll tell you the whole thing's nonsense; and after all, what is a country if it isn't the people? (31)

Of course, Lady Naylor's mistake is in believing the remnants of the Ascendancy will be included among the "people" once the war for independence is underway. For Bowen and her readers, the speech is bitingly ironic. Lady Naylor's remark that there may be little to disintegrate suggests how fragile the social and political order of twentieth-century Ireland really is. The Naylor's estate contains ruins from an earlier age of genuine Ascendancy, including an old and decaying mill that becomes the scene of violence later in the novel.

By 1920, though, little is left of the Big House or the economic system it represents. Much has already changed. In that sense, the fear of disintegration is "nonsense," as Lady Naylor puts it, primarily because most of the disintegration of older social and political structures has already occurred. Lady Naylor seems to recognize this when she says that "there may have been" something to disintegrate in the past, but in fact she is referring to what she sees as the breakdown of traditional social order in England. As her actions in the novel demonstrate, she believes that the Anglo-Irish like

herself have preserved this traditional social order in Ireland. While English social order undergoes a slow disintegration, Lady Naylor imagines that she and the other descendants of the Protestant Ascendancy will persist in their way of life despite the passage of time and the vanishing of the Ascendancy landlord system. The Anglo-Irish estate, in her imagination, is a permanent institution immune to the historical, economic, and social changes that occur beyond its borders.

The persistence of the Ascendancy lifestyle in the face of a long period of social change makes up a major theme in *The Last September*. As Lady Naylor notes, the violent political divisions in Ireland are a part of the larger context of political change throughout Europe. The forces that threaten the remnants of the Ascendancy are not limited to Ireland. Bowen makes clear that the Anglo-Irish War is only one example of the broader changes symptomatic of an encroaching historical shift affecting all of Europe. What is amazing is that the estate and its people have managed to keep up their obsolete lifestyle and its social rituals for so long; only the direct violence of the Anglo-Irish War finally makes this lifestyle impossible. That violence is foreshadowed throughout the novel by the encroachment of technological modernity on the estate, which over the course of the novel becomes associated with the use of modern weapons of war by the British military and Irish republicans. This association is at first indirect, but nonetheless foreboding. The sound of the Montmorencys' approaching motorcar in the first pages of the novel is described as "collect[ing] out of the wide countryside and narrow[ing] under the trees of the avenue" in the first lines. (3) The same noise recurs later as the noise of a military patrol "beyond the demesne;" the Naylor and

Montmorencys hear “a motor, straining cautiously out of the silence” in “an anguish of sound” (37-8). In both scenes, the Irish countryside seems to generate a sound that indicates the approach of a new and different world. The Montmorencys and the military patrol both come from elsewhere in the British Empire, and both bring with them the noise and technology of English (and global) modernity.¹¹

The estate, in contrast, is a quiet, pastoral locale. Shortly before the patrols are heard, for example, the Naylor’s ward Lois describes the countryside as “a bay of fields, between the plantations, that gave on an ocean of space” (37). The noise of motors emerges from land described as an ocean, or from the trees and fields, at least in the perceptions of people invested in estate life. But as the first line of the novel indicates, these noises are as “collected out of the countryside”; Lois’s expansive view of a “bay of fields” conceals many details that reveal the impact of technological modernity on the estate. In a similar fashion, Lady Naylor’s sweeping reference to “the people” who would dismiss the disintegration of Anglo-Irish political order as “nonsense” overlooks the fact that the people are not homogeneous. Instead, the post-war period is one in which many different concepts of “the people” competed politically in Ireland and elsewhere. With the decay of the nineteenth-century imperial system, the nationalist demand for political recognition grew stronger, energizing various national and anticolonial independence movements throughout the world. Moreover, in Ireland, as in many colonial societies, the colonialist classes tended to envision themselves as the basis of national solidarity, while

¹¹ Bowen’s identification of Englishness and technological modernity is itself characteristic of an Anglo-Irish vision, as suggested by its similarity to W.B. Yeats’s early view that the English side of his Anglo-Irish ethnicity was what connected his Irish nationality to a cosmopolitan cultural inheritance.

their opponents in independence movements tended to emphasize the earlier vernacular traditions displaced or suppressed by colonialism in order to articulate an anticolonial vision. In Ireland, nativist independence movements like the I.R.A. therefore treated the Anglo-Irish as a foreign class of colonial oppressors. For them, the Anglo-Irish were not Irish, and not part of their concept of the Irish people. Lady Naylor's idea that she and her peers are part of a unified people is as false as Lois's vision of a unified countryside. The Anglo-Irish War and the subsequent Irish Civil War violently exposed just how fractious Ireland was. And though the Naylor and Montmorencys perceive that the world has changed around them, they retain considerable faith in the Big House's ability to remain unchanged.

The Anglo-Irish in *The Last September* respond to historical change by stubbornly keeping up the pretense that they and Ireland need not change along with the rest of the world. They maintain this fiction by substituting the concerns of estate life for the visible and audible change in the world around. Despite the arrival of British soldiers, for example, the Naylor worry over the Montmorencys' visit, allowing them to substitute polite concerns for the larger sense of expectation and dread prompted by the militarization of the countryside. To the extent that the Naylor worry about the threat of war, they do so by worrying about the disruption of their social routine. But even more often, the people at the Naylor's estate simply avoid thinking about present realities. Anglo-Irish reserve makes up the primary defense they have against dangerous political realities. Lady Naylor's adolescent ward, Lois Farquar, finds her fears so inexpressible that she is rendered mute by "her reserves, even in her imagination" and worries instead

about the floral arrangements for the Montmorencys' reception (5). Similarly, the appearance of British soldiers is turned into the subject of estate social life. Lady Naylor opposes Lois's relationship with the English soldier Gerald Lesworth because it is socially inappropriate, not because it exposes her ward to possible violence. Similarly, when Irish militants burn down a Royal Irish Constabulary barracks in Danielstown, the Anglo-Irish respond by hosting the soldiers at a party (64). The denizens of the estate do not explicitly deny the very real dangers and changes around them, but instead persistently incorporate the events around them into an increasingly obsolete form of social interaction. When these changes manifest themselves in the form of violence, however, the characters' internal discipline slowly breaks down. Bowen presents more of their private emotions and fantasies as the Irish independence fighters near the estate.

The characters' fantasies often follow somewhat limited patterns. Lois's cousin Laurence, for example, imagines a life in which Hugo Montmorency marries Lois's mother, Laura Naylor, and emigrates to Canada (152-3). His fantasy ends when he realizes that this altered timeline would require "a certain rearrangement of Laurence's [his] character" (154). Laurence's fantasy of emigration lets him briefly escape the "uncomfortable suggestion of normality" he senses in the Big House, but his unwillingness to imagine himself differently causes him to reject it (154). Laurence realizes the need to leave the estate behind, but cannot imagine himself as someone who leaves. Instead, he imagines others making the decision to leave on his behalf; in his fantasy of emigration, Hugo and Laura's choice to marry and leave for Canada frees Laurence from the bubble of Ascendancy life without the need for any action or decision

on his part. The Montmorencys' return to Danielstown after some years abroad reflects a similar pattern of imaginative return; even after emigrating, they remain attracted to the Big House and its forms of social circulation. While they have emigrated from Ireland, they still retain a powerful sense of personal investment in the Big House, and over the course of their visit, Hugo in particular is gradually seduced by fantasies of a more permanent return. He spends much of the visit nostalgically recalling his unfulfilled love for Laura Naylor as "a few cryptic records, walks, some appointments kept, [and] letters received and posted" (176). Eventually, Hugo attempts to embark on an affair with another guest, Marda so that he can reenact this nostalgic fantasy in the present. The affair never comes to fruition, however, and it is clear that the past Hugo desires cannot be recreated.

Hugo's fantasies about Laura Naylor are one example of the way Bowen uses Laura as a symbol of both the nostalgic fixations of the Anglo-Irish characters and as a representation of the limits of Anglo-Irish imagination. Laura appears only in memories and fantasies of the present-day characters, having died some years before the events of *The Last September*. In these fantasies, she is invariably an object of desire in one or another sense, but the desires she figures are never achievable for the characters who fantasize about her. For Hugo, Laura is a symbol of a lost past and a possible life he cannot live; for Laurence, she suggests a possible escape from the stifling confines of Anglo-Irish estate life that was never taken. But as the characters recall Laura, it becomes clear that she, too, failed to find a way to escape the estate as Laurence imagines or to achieve the romantic fulfillment Hugo desires. Instead, as Laura's story emerges it

establishes a pattern of failed escape and failed romanticism that will be reenacted by several characters in the novel. After a series of arguments with Hugo and Richard Naylor, she travels to the north of Ireland, where she marries “the rudest man in Ulster” – a description that signals the importance of class difference within Anglo-Irish life – in order to reject Ascendancy convention (152-3).

Laura’s break with Ascendancy mores is limited and unsatisfactory: while she makes an unsuitable match, she still marries an Ulster man and stays in Ireland. Her rebellious acts keep her within the ethnic and geographical boundaries of Anglo-Ireland. Moreover, her limited escape is effectively undone within a generation, as her daughter becomes a ward of the Naylor after Laura’s death. The characters in *The Last September* carefully code or suppress their memories, feelings, and perceptions in order to maintain the traditions and decorum of the Big House. Both fantasies of escape and open rebellion like Laura’s are still conditioned and limited by the powerful social conventions of the Big House. The sense that Ascendancy convention fatally constricts the characters’ imaginations is also reflected in Bowen’s narrative style, which emphasizes the degree to which the Anglo-Irish characters substitute their traditional social practices for the wider realities of political and social change. Bowen employs free indirect discourse, but while the technique is usually employed to reveal the hidden or unspoken thoughts of characters, Bowen conspicuously uses it in order to portray the way her Anglo-Irish characters strictly limit the feelings and ideas they express. In this and other ways the novel incisively depicts the limits of Anglo-Irish imagination. Further, Bowen’s use of free indirect discourse also demonstrates the novel’s method of incorporating

literary techniques in ways that run counter to their usual effect in other modernist works. The structure and technique of the novel, in which modernist technique fails to represent the twentieth-century modes of thought and life as in other modernist texts, thereby comes to reflect the refusal of the novel's characters to accommodate the changes occurring around them.

The Anglo-Irish are not the only characters who subordinate reality to illusion, however. Gerald Lesworth, a British soldier, becomes romantically involved with Lois over the course of the novel. Unfortunately, their romance is doomed because he proves incapable of navigating either the formalities of Anglo-Irish estate life or the realities of the Anglo-Irish war. When Myra Naylor disapproves of the relationship, he fails to understand her hinting until she bluntly tells him that "we should never consider a marriage [with you] for Lois" (263). The rigid class boundaries she invokes are, ironically enough, the basis of the Ascendancy itself; Gerald, as a soldier, is working-class from Lady Naylor's perspective, and thus beneath her and her family. The outmoded class politics of Ascendancy Ireland are what Gerald will die defending from Irish republicanism, but he can never become a part of that closed and shrinking world. The Ascendancy relationship with England, shown in microcosm by the way Gerald is only tolerated by those he defends, comes to seem parasitic at best in the course of the novel. The Ascendancy insist on their difference and even their superiority to working-class England, but in practice they will not survive without the help and support of the nation and the class they scorn.

For his part, Gerald cannot navigate the rigid formalities of Anglo-Irish upper-class life. When he attempts to tell Lois that their relationship is over, he succeeds only in getting both of them lost on the estate's grounds and stammering the truth: "But it's just that, you see, you never...I suppose things can't come out what one wants...I suppose it would hardly do..." (282). While the Anglo-Irish exhibit a powerful aesthetic imagination, Gerald can neither express himself openly nor artfully avoid expressing himself openly. While the Anglo-Irish are willfully blind, Gerald and by extension the English are unwittingly just as blind. Gerald's loyalty to England never wavers, but in Ireland his loyalty is a weakness rather than a strength. His explicit nationalism is portrayed as something different than the ethnic insularity of the Anglo-Irish. While Lady Naylor talks about "the people" in her dismissal of colonial Irish "disintegration," Gerald defaults to "England," mistaking the state for the people in it. His character has been formed by years of reading the *Spectator* and imagining the "confident English country" which he has never seen first-hand. Gerald never entirely grasps that his deployment in Ireland is the result of English fear of losing Ireland and, by extension, the Empire (125). The "confident English country" becomes quite diffident when confronted by Irish risings.

When Laurence prods him about the likelihood of open war with the IRA, Gerald finds himself unable to explain how he feels about Ireland or his duties there. He wishes to explain to responds to Laurence "that no one could have a sounder respect than himself and his whole country of the principle of nationality," but fails to say anything at all. In Gerald's imagination, which Bowen suggests is typical of the English national

imagination of 1920, the Irish national principle is understandably subordinate to the fortunes of Britain and especially England. Parliament had passed the third Home Rule Bill in 1914, which would have devolved considerable authority onto local Irish government. At the time of its passage, the Bill was an uneasy compromise which angered both Loyalist Ulster Protestants and the minority of radical Irish Republicans. However, the breakout of the First World War led Parliament to delay the implementation of Home Rule for a minimum of twelve months, and perhaps indefinitely. The solidarity of Britain in a World War was deemed more important than the local ambitions of Irish nationalists. Unsurprisingly, except to limited British imaginations of the sort represented by Gerald, the most radical elements among the pro-independence Irish did not take kindly to being asked to fight and die for Britain in exchange for Parliament's indefinite deferral of their political autonomy. This anger led directly to the Easter Rising of 1916. The British government's brutal mishandling of the Rising inflamed further segments of the Irish population, and led to a republican takeover of the Irish political party Sinn Fein, which began as a pro-monarchy party before it was made a scapegoat by the British in the aftermath of the Rising.

In this context, many of Gerald's reactions to the Irish people around him symptomatize the limits of his essentially imperial imagination. When Laurence mocks him, Gerald quickly devolves into stereotyping Laurence as an overeducated, fashionably Socialist supporter of Sinn Fein (133-4). The bitter irony in Gerald accusing the Anglo-Irish Laurence of sympathy with Sinn Fein suggests the confused view of Home Rule on both the English and Anglo-Irish sides. In the argument between Laurence and Gerald,

Bowen seems to place the blame primarily on a failure of English national imagination, again employing free indirect discourse to stress that Gerald has been a “stranger” to curiosity “since the days of *Boys’ Own Paper* spread on the nursery floor” (134).

Notably, Bowen also connects this limited imagination to the literature consumed by Gerald and, by extension, other representatives of an English imperial consensus. In this way, like other modernist writers, Bowen argues for innovation and change in literary representation, and against mass culture as represented by *Boys’ Own* and other popular entertainments.

However, Bowen depicts the Anglo-Irish national imagination as equally stunted in its own way as the English national imagination. As it turns out, the Anglo-Irish have just as confused a view of English life as the English have of theirs. The mutual incomprehension is sharply drawn when Lady Naylor considers the way the English join the usual social intercourse of Danielstown:

A Mrs. Peake, of the Gunners, demanded attention at the hairdresser’s before ten. These unnatural practices were a strain on the town’s normality; the streets had a haggard look, ready for anything. Really, as Lady Naylor said, almost English. She thought of the south of England as a kind of extension of Eastbourne, the north – serrated by factory chimneys, the middle – a blank space occupied by [her onetime friend] Anna Partridge. (284)

In Lady Naylor’s imagination, all of England is reduced in this vision to Eastbourne, a holiday resort for the wealthy, with factory chimneys or blankness making up the rest. There is a pleasant England in which people like herself take vacations, and a working-class industrial England that intrudes upon it; the “disintegration” she mentioned earlier in the novel is linked to what she imagines as the displacement of the nostalgic holiday-

England represented by Eastbourne by modern English industry. The soldiers disturb Lady Naylor because they represent the further encroachment of that other England, industrialized and working-class, on Danielstown. In short, they threaten the unthinkable by bringing “disintegration” to the eternal stability of the Big House. When the threat is made manifest in Gerald’s interest in Lois, lady Naylor can only respond by invoking the notion of class mesalliance and forbidding the romance. For Lady Naylor, England’s industrial economy goes hand in hand with an unnatural vulgarity, against which she imagines the ostensibly pastoral world of the estate and its English corollary, the artifice of the resort community. For her generation, the imperial fantasy of a wholly English Ireland is as threatening as the nativist fantasy of a purely Irish Ireland. Only artificially genteel environments like Eastbourne are suitably like the Anglo-Irish estate.

Bowen’s underlying suggestion is that the estate is also an upper-class retreat from Irish realities, and that Myra Naylor’s world is little more than a genteel artifice. Some of Myra’s distaste appears to come from a feeling that conventional nationalism is itself vulgar and unnatural. In a conversation with Francie Montmorency about Gerald, Lady Naylor observes that “all English people are difficult to trace [...] for no reason at all they will pack up everything and move across six counties” (80). Despite her distaste, Lady Naylor makes some token effort to imagine England, if only as the negative image of industry juxtaposed with the resort-town image of Eastbourne. In contrast, Gerald seems incapable of imagining Ireland as anything other than an extension of England; in his conversation with Laurence, his ability to empathize with “the national principle” in another nation ends as soon as the Irish republicans refuse to let the British government

determine the establishment of Home Rule. The Irish national principle is acceptable to him only insofar as it remains dependent on British sovereignty for its expression.

English nationalism in *The Last September* seems to operate by deadening the imagination. This deadness of imagination emerges during Gerald's final conversation with Lois, when they become lost near the estate. During the scene, Gerald repeatedly attempts to pin down Lois's feelings for him, knowing all the while that Lady Naylor will not allow their romance to proceed. But he is frustrated by Lois's inability to answer his question, "When were you happy?", and finds himself checking his wristwatch to see that "[t]hey had been a short time together, only twenty minutes" (281-2). The repeated use of the images of clock-time in their breakup sequence – Gerald's wristwatch, the six o'clock chimes of the stable bells, and even Lois's "stop[ping] like a clock with foreboding" (278) as they begin their final conversation – suggest a critical difference between their ideas of the world. The clock imagery connected to Lois reflects her subjective experience of "foreboding," while the clock imagery connected with Gerald emphasizes the objective experience of a quantified clock-time. While Lois "stop[s] like a clock" (278) when she hears the estate bells, suggesting that her idea of time involves the estate traditions represented by the bells, Gerald is directly linked to mechanical concepts of time by the wristwatch he wears. While the Anglo-Irish characters retreat into nostalgia when they imagine lost loves, Gerald tries to locate and ground his own and others' emotional states with reference to a mechanical concept of time. His attempts to formalize his romantic relationship with Lois by having her name her feelings for him. Unsure of himself or Lois's feelings, Gerald responds by attempting to label and quantify

their respective positions. But in his desire for exactness, he loses the power to locate himself. This loss is both literal and figurative: Lois and Gerald become briefly lost on the estate grounds, and Gerald cannot name or express his own feelings. His final words to Lois dissolve into ellipses.

While both the English and the Ascendancy attempt to fit reality into a set of rigid and predetermined notions, the Ascendancy figures seem more capable in their artifices. As Heather Bryant Jordan notes, “[j]ust when Bowen seems about to damn the Anglo-Irish for their aloofness and indifference, something stops her, causing her to suggest instead a respect for their unyielding perseverance.”¹² While Bowen describes British wealth in order to diminish the perception of Anglo-Irish wealth in the “Big House” essay of 1929, in *The Last September* she presents British naivete and inartfulness to make Ascendancy artifice seem superior in contrast. Though they are stubborn and threatened, the Anglo-Irish in the novel exhibit a power of imagination that could enable them to adapt. The Ascendancy’s attachment to tradition survives for so long because it is backed by a tremendous will and imagination. The nature of their attachment to the past seems to be the problem. Both the possibility of an Irish republic and the English liberal efforts to transform imperial domination into Irish Home Rule threaten the descendants of the Ascendancy because there is no longer any real role for the Ascendancy in either Ireland or Britain. By identifying the Big House, and, by extension, the outmoded and vanished system it represents as their permanent location, the Ascendancy have rendered

¹² *How Will the Heart Endure*, 56.

themselves unable to survive either Irish republicanism or English liberalism. The estate itself is becoming an unfamiliar place: Lois and Gerald become lost on it, and the ruined mill on the estate grounds becomes a hiding place for the Irish Republicans who threaten the Big House.

The scene in which Lois, Hugo, and Marda, another visitor to the estate, encounter an IRA gunman in the ruined mill suggests the degree to which political change has already altered Ireland. Corcoran points out that this scene is “usually regarded as a crucial episode of the novel” in which “the terrible secret of Anglo-Irish history [is] still articulate on the land.”¹³ But the secret of Anglo-Irish history is also the secret of its fate. For Hugo, “the mill behind affect[s] him like a sense of the future; an unpleasant sensation of being tottered over” (187). As Corcoran argues, the ruined mill is a corpselike symbol of the destructive English economic policy on which the Big Houses were founded, but its ruin also foreshadows the the burning of the Big House and the destructive violence of the Anglo-Irish War. The mill is only the first building on the estate that has been reduced to ruin. The foreshadowed violence arrives for the characters when Lois and Marda decide to examine the mill. Startled, a hidden IRA man emerges and wounds Marda with an accidental gunshot while making his way out of the mill. Interestingly, Bowen carefully keeps the moment of violence itself out of the reader’s view. Instead of describing the gunshot directly, Bowen instead depicts Hugo’s reactions to hearing gunfire from outside the ruined mill. And when Bowen returns to Marda, the

¹³ *The Enforced Return*, 52-3.

victim of the gunshot, the reader discovers that she is in shock and does not immediately perceive her own wound. Even after realizing she has been hurt, Marda worries only that the incident will provide evidence for her English relations' belief that "[Ireland] was dangerous as well as demoralizing," while Lois thinks of the incident as "tattered and irrelevantly startling, like a dream of two nights ago" (187). The characters turn their direct experience of violence into an indirect one, and the formal elements of Bowen's narrative reflect this indirectness. Once again, the characters' refusal to confront realities conflicts not only with their historical circumstance, but with the literary techniques of modernist novels that are, implicitly, capable of representing present-day actualities. In a sense, the characters in *The Last September* resist not only the historical forces around them, but the structure and technique of the novel in which they appear.

However, the encounter in the mill is more disruptive to estate life than the characters wish to believe. Bowen's portrayal of the gunshot evokes the earlier emergence of the sound of motors from the silence surrounding the estate; where the motor noises merely coalesced from the quiet countryside, the sound of the gunshot "mak[es] rings in the silence" (183). More troublingly, the violence in the mill reveals that the various political agents in the novel are increasingly powerless: the Ascendancy, the British, and the Irish have less control than any of them believe. Most obviously, the Ascendancy no longer control their own lands, which can hide enemies and potentially fatal dangers. Similarly, the British garrison at Danielstown cannot manage the Irish rebellion and cannot effectively patrol the countryside. But despite his seeming power and threatening appearance, the IRA gunman in the mill is no more capable of mastering

the situation than his unwitting discoverers. The gunshot that wounds Marda is an accident, the result of his being startled by the mill's falling plaster. The collapse of what is left of Ascendancy order breeds unpredictable, unmanageable violence; at the same time, Ascendancy order is long beyond saving by 1920. The mill's state of ruin makes it a suitable hiding place for the gunman, but its literal collapse provokes his attack on the Big House's residents. The political situation in Ireland is beyond anyone's control, and no one seems to see the larger picture. Hugo misses the entire confrontation at the mill, Lois and Marda do not see the gunman, and he does not initially see them. Each party in the scene is initially invisible to the other. When Bowen keeps the moment of violence invisible to the reader, she does so to reflect the characters' shared blindness with regard to the modern political moment. The English, Anglo-Irish, and Irish can no longer entirely imagine one another; whatever relationship they had, however unjust it was, has been severed.

Of the three groups, however, the Ascendancy are the most immediately threatened in *The Last September*. The reader encounters very little of Ireland beyond the estate, and none of England beyond Lady Naylor's imaginings. By limiting the setting of the novel to the estate, Bowen makes the Big House a microcosm of the larger changes in the world of 1920. The boundaries of the estate are the limits of the Ascendancy imagination, but the estate's borders are also the boundaries of the novel's action. The images of modernity first appear on the edges of the estate, as if its gates were the horizons of history. But by the end, the estate has become a threatening, foreign place in which Lois and Gerald can become lost and IRA gunmen emerge from shadows. The

novel's first image is the Montmorencys' motor car arriving at the gates after its noise "collect[s] out of the trees" (3), and its last image is the "unlit car" bearing the IRA men who burn the estate down, while "the sound of the last car widen[s], [gives] itself to the open and empty country and [is] demolished" (303). The estate places limits on what can be perceived, but by doing so it imposes formal discipline on perception. The Big House determines the conditions of representation in the novel. The architecture and grounds of the estate produce a number of striking images, including the spectacle of Lois "standing affectedly on the Danielstown steps [with] a roomful of mirrors behind her" (294). The Big House is a hall of mirrors, dazzling but ultimately false. The formal imagination of the Ascendancy is less impoverished than the British national imagination, but it is still stifling. Everything is reduced to a romantic fiction, one Lois likens to "a historical novel" (108). Unfortunately, though, they live in a modern period in which romantic, historical fiction is being displaced by modernist representation and the arrival of both cosmopolitan and state-nationalist political and economic structures in which they cannot go on as they have. Even the imaginations of the Anglo-Irish characters in the novel cannot successfully abolish the realities manifested by the coming Anglo-Irish War and represented by the modernist novel.

Though the Ascendancy characters deliberately shut out the world beyond the estate, many of the sources of their strength come from outside the Big House. Most obviously, the British military presence in Danielstown is only an especially visible reminder of the power that historically propped up the Ascendancy. Writing about September 1920 at nine years' remove, Bowen is of course aware that military power

drawn from England will fail to sustain the Anglo-Irish estate. Instead, Bowen suggests that the Anglo-Irish have a potentially useful ability to draw strength from other cultural formations. Indeed, much of the cultural life of the estate is secretly more cosmopolitan than its insular character in 1920 would suggest. When Francie Montmorency recalls her first meeting with Myra Naylor, she thinks that “Myra was ‘interesting,’ cultivated [and] had been to Germany, Italy, everywhere that one visits acquisitively” (14). The borders of the estate have never been as rigid as the inhabitants pretend they are. But because the Anglo-Irish have chosen to turn inwards by the time of the novel’s setting, they have surrendered the ability to negotiate political change and cultural difference. Bowen repeatedly indicates that outside the estate, the Anglo-Irish can make a considerable strength of their aesthetic imagination. Francie Montmorency also remembers that Lois’s mother “Laura was a success in England – she was too Irish altogether for her own country” (21). As with the rest of the Naylor, Laura’s “country” is less Ireland than it is Anglo-Ireland, that is, the illusory territory of the Big House. Her Irishness represents her willingness to look beyond the estate’s borders and see the rest of the Irish nation; similarly, she is willing to travel to England and to the North to secure her independence.

In contrast, Hugo and Francie Montmorency fail to imagine real alternatives to Anglo-Ireland. After spending five years in London for a failed business venture of Hugo’s, they considered emigrating to Canada but never actually did so. As Francie puts it, “when the idea of [going to] Canada had failed, [the Montmorencys] had no home” (13). For them, leaving Anglo-Ireland means dislocation; they cannot imagine anywhere but the Big Houses as a real “home.” Francie unwittingly diagnoses the problem when

she refers to “the idea of Canada” and its failure. For the Montmorencys, and to a greater extent for the elder Naylor, the idea of the country is far more important than the reality. The Ascendancy characters are unwilling to change their ideas when reality contradicts them. They imagine the Big House as a place insulated from change, a place that is always “home.” The Big House becomes the “historical novel” in which the Ascendancy wish to live. But with the forceful approach of Irish independence, the Ascendancy can no longer imagine country life in the same way. The contexts have changed. Rather than becoming a historical novel, *The Last September* becomes a modernist novel in which the contents of both the mind and the house are forced into view, and into contact with the realities of the 1920s, despite the characters’ resistance. When British soldiers visit the estate, the Naylor worry that they will confiscate the hunting rifles hidden on the estate and send Lois to make sure they are concealed (43). In the context of the Irish republican rising, the rifles are not sport equipment but are instead potential weapons. The Ascendancy imagination is so strongly tied to the routines and imagery of the Big House that Bowen terms the estate’s burning an “execution” in the novel’s final scene (303). The light of the house’s burning allows the Naylor to “see too distinctly;” blindness and illusion protect them prior to the destruction of the estate. In the end, the British imperial imagination is stunted and mechanical, the Irish republican imagination is violent and destructive, and the Ascendancy imagination is stifling and unrealistic.

Bowen implies that the Anglo-Irish capacity for imagination could be turned towards negotiating twentieth-century modernity instead of rejecting it. The Ascendancy characters display a considerable talent for incorporating new people into the social life

of the estate; the problem is that their idea of society and nation are fixed in time and place. As a result, they experience political and social change as violent disruption. Laura's departure from the Big House and, to a lesser extent, the Montmorencys' time in London suggest that the Big House need not limit the Anglo-Irish capacity for imagination. The older generation displays a great deal of will and intelligence, and Lady Naylor's "acquisitive" experiences of France and Germany indicate that the Anglo-Irish imagination includes at least a limited capacity to imagine elements of the world beyond the estate. The problem is that they employ this power of synthetic imagination to maintain an essentially premodern social position as quasi-feudal landholders long after both British imperialism and Irish society have outgrown the Ascendancy's methods of domination. The artifice of Anglo-Irish life makes up this paradoxical strength and weakness of imagination. Despite greatly reduced wealth and influence, the Ascendancy maintain the fiction of their prominence in Ireland within the walls of the Big House; they have found a way to live through change by denying it. When neither Ireland nor England are their political or home, they make the private estate into a substitute for the nation. The Ascendancy's great weakness of imagination is their failure to realize that their power is in making this substitution rather than in the obsolete economic and political model of the Big House. The Ascendancy is too rooted to Irish soil and too attached to a romanticized past to allow for modernization or relocation. Instead, Bowen, writing the novel, becomes the implied example of how the descendants of Ascendancy might reorient the upper-class Anglo-Irish imagination in order to represent and engage

with the present. In effect, Bowen uses the novel itself as an example of the modernist artifice that must replace the historical, romantic one that the characters prefer.

Bowen offers a possibility of hope in the ambiguous fate of the younger characters, allowing the formal closure of the novel to accomplish in a limited fashion what the aesthetic and political imaginations of the characters have typically failed to do. In keeping with the premises of the modernist novel, this narrative closure draws upon elements of earlier narratives in order to suggest future possibilities and innovations. Lois and Laurence, within the novel, are by the end poised to similarly achieve what Laura Naylor could not, by drawing upon Laura's methods of escaping the estate's boundaries using new methods for a new situation. Laura was accepted in England because she was "too Irish" for Anglo-Ireland; she was at least willing to break with Ascendancy tradition and leave the estate in order to achieve greater personal freedom. Lois and Laurence gradually become more capable of similarly detaching themselves from the Big House as the novel proceeds. As part of the process that may free them from the limits of Ascendancy imagination, both Laurence and Lois also exhibit a version of Myra Naylor's synthetic imagination. When the Irish republicans burn the estate, Lois and Laurence are traveling abroad for study, much as Myra did in her youth. The difference for them is that they cannot return to the estate now that it has been destroyed. This difference is what offers them the opportunity to break with the past entirely, but the novel leaves the possibility open. Corcoran notes that both representatives of the younger generation of the Anglo-Irish – Laurence and Lois – are orphans, and that "the condition already cuts

them off from their most immediate roots.”¹⁴ This rootlessness, as well as the model of Laura, allows both of them the chance to see the Big House from outside. In a similar fashion, in writing the novel Bowen employs the techniques of the modernist novel, techniques emerging in English and American literature as well as Irish literature, to examine both the Big House and the historical fiction of the Big House novel from outside. The aesthetic innovation of the modernist novel works in analogy to the younger characters’ ability to imagine the possibility of emigrating to places where they can redeploy the strengths of Anglo-Irish imagination to great effect.

Unfortunately, the price of their expanded vision for the characters is the experience of political violence. Lois displays a curious attraction to such violence throughout the novel, the most obvious manifestation of which is her romance with Gerald. She senses the artificiality of the estate, and moreover, she seems to intuit that the Anglo-Irish refusal of modernity will end in violence. When the Naylor send Lois to ensure that their hunting rifles are concealed from British soldiers visiting the estate, Laura is initially exhilarated by the “adventure” until she recalls that that “[a]t a touch from Aunt Myra adventure became literary [and] sterile” (43). She realizes that the aesthetic imagination of her adoptive parents is bent entirely towards suppressing the latent violence in the Irish political situation. Later in the novel, Lois complains explicitly that she has spent her days cutting dress patterns and playing the gramophone “in this country that ought to be filled with violent realness” (66). Initially, Lois remains under

¹⁴ *The Enforced Return*, 47.

the spell of the Big House; her ability to understand the cost of violence is limited by the literary and artificial models upon which her imagination relies. Gerald's death comes as a shocking reminder that political violence claims the lives of individuals. In a striking image, the novel depicts Lois receiving the news while "standing affectedly on the Danielstown steps [...] a room of mirrors behind her" (294). Like the room of mirrors, the Big House mentality only allows its inhabitants to multiply one image again and again; it does not provide a space for self-reinvention or aesthetic innovation. The characters can reflect, but their reflection is unproductive. To engage with the realities beyond the Big House's artifice, Lois must leave behind its insular comforts of affectation and illusion. Laurence is also shocked by the news and its effect on Lois. When he sees her grieving outside the house, he likens the experience to "studying, with an effort of sight and comprehension, some unfamiliar landscape" (299). Gerald's death makes the insular estate into unfamiliar territory, and both Lois and Laurence choose to walk the grounds together in hopes of reorienting themselves. The use to which they will put their experiences of the European continent will have to be different than the use Myra Naylor makes of her acquired foreign cultural knowledge. The aesthetic imagination that Myra employs to turn reality into a stifling fiction can be employed in other ways as well.

Bowen writes elsewhere about the value of knowingly producing fictions of the self, and of the importance of artifice in her own self-representation. In the 1946 essay "Out of a Book," she writes, "I know that I have in my make-up layers of [...] fictitious memory" and that "[t]he aesthetic is nothing but a return to images that will allow nothing to take their place; the aesthetic is nothing but an attempt to disguise and glorify

the enforced return.”¹⁵ Rather than succumbing to the temptations of insularity and self-delusion, though, Bowen instead argues that the “enforced return” should be managed: “When I write, I am re-creating what was created for me. The gladness of vision, in my writing, is my own gladness, but not my own vision” (53). The impersonal material of literature can be made into a safe expression of personal feelings and attachments. By this means, “real-life places, though unknown to the child [...] become ‘real’ through being also in books” (52). The writer can employ the formal imagination of literature to structure and share experience. Real places can achieve a second, equally real existence by being represented in literature. Returning to *The Last September*, Lady Naylor’s “acquisitive” experience of Europe can also be incorporated into the Big House, where it becomes part of her self-representation as a cultured and socially successful lady of the Ascendancy. As Bowen’s novel demonstrates, the Big House is also an unreal place, but one whose residents mistake it for a conventionally real one. Bowen argues that the fictional representations of places can be real in the reader’s or writer’s experience even if they are physically distant. In a limited fashion, Lady Naylor’s experience can be likened to the cosmopolitan range of resources that modernist writing makes available to both global and local literatures. Writing and reading literature can allow lost or distant places to be real enough to make up parts of lived experience, and modernist techniques like those Bowen employs in *The Last September* can help accomplish these tasks of representation.

¹⁵ In *The Mulberry Tree*, 48; 53.

However, the materials that writers make into literature are not freely chosen, as the phrase “enforced return” suggests. Instead, Bowen says that “[t]he apparent choices of art are nothing but addictions [and] pre-dispositions” (53). Personal autonomy and artistic representation are at odds; the real self is always shaped and displayed by impersonal, “fictitious memory” and experience. In describing “fictitious memory,” Bowen seems to describe collage and bricolage, signature techniques in modernism. When using these techniques, the modernist artist assembles fragments and images from other, existing works but puts these fragments and images into novel relationships with one another. Neil Corcoran remarks on Bowen’s openness to “modernist experimentation,” but notes that her experimentation is leavened with skepticism.¹⁶ Her use of the words “addiction” and “pre-disposition” are suggestive of that skepticism; Bowen does not entirely accept the claim that collage produces something entirely new from its materials. The writer’s choice of materials is always preconditioned by earlier aesthetic perceptions. For Bowen, the Big House is an inescapable literary figure, as the ending of *The Last September* suggests: the novel’s formal close occurs precisely when the Big House vanishes from the narrative. For this reason, houses and homes figure in most of her work. But by separating the concept of home from any particular location, Bowen expands the number of pre-existing aesthetic elements the concept can accommodate. *The Last September*’s final passages enact this separation, but in a particularly violent, traumatic fashion representative of the real dangers attendant on

¹⁶ *The Enforced Return*, 4-5.

succumbing wholly to the forces that demand return. If return is always enforced, the best Bowen can do is protect herself from the worst dangers of that return.

The Aesthetic Imagination of Bowen's Court and the Historical Narrative of *Bowen's Court*

Bowen's return to the figure of the Big House as the world and the island of Ireland, then, can be understood as one such "enforced return." The fictions of Ascendancy culture make up the predispositions and addictions that condition her artistic work. It is worth recalling that Bowen's experience of Bowen's Court and of any Big House was as much that of a visitor as of a resident. Many of her novels and stories were written while she lived in England, but she repeatedly returns to the Big House and to Bowen's Court when she represents herself and her ideas. Bowen compensates for her predispositions by making an advantage of Anglo-Irish dislocation. As Jordan argues, "[e]ven though [Bowen] feared that her Anglo-Irishness might underline the perception that her sphere was too narrow, she was proud of that identity, claiming that it gave her a special passport to cross many fictional borders. Her characters travel often and sentiently to real and imagined destinations."¹⁷ She recognizes that the Anglo-Irish do not fit entirely into either English or Irish nationalism, and this allows her to avoid entanglement in either form of nationalism. Instead, Bowen models herself on the visitor or stranger to the estate; the social life of the Ascendancy was made up of polite visits to other estates and to other countries. Bowen's Anglo-Ireland incorporates a limited model of circulation, though the stops on every journey seem to be locations compatible with the

¹⁷ "How Will the Heart Endure, xvi.

imagination of the Big House. The imagination of the Big House is more important than specific locations, though there must be some correspondence between the physical space and social character of the house and the imagined social and spatial parameters of the Big House.

The 1942 “Big House” essay outlines Bowen’s model of mobility. She begins the essay by responding to criticisms that the Big House is removed from various points of public transit and social intercourse – “shopping towns, railway stations, or Ireland’s principal through roads” (25). She responds, “I see this the other way round: everywhere seems to have placed itself a long way from me [...] But one’s own point of departure always seems to one normal” (25). The 1946 essay, along with Bowen’s depictions of Lois and Laurence in *The Last September*, suggest that any place is a point of departure. An individual’s point of departure is always normal to that individual, but by this logic, all points are points of departure so long as they are “normal” to the departing the individual. Bowen’s idea of home is both the insular estate and a point of departure. Bowen’s formula seems to be that any enclosed world, like the Big House, can also be a point of departure for visiting another enclosed world. Her model of interconnected, regionally-dispersed, but nonetheless bounded locales shares features with both the concept of the cosmopolis as a limited site of global exchange, but the specific form Bowen imagines is still limited to the Big House as an institution connected with a particular location in both Irish geography and class hierarchy. However, the Big House provides this model for the Anglo-Irish. Bowen remains constant in her identification as a member of Anglo-Ireland, but she suggests that other spaces can serve the same function

for other ethnic or national groups as the Big House does for the Anglo-Irish. Bowen thereby preserves elements of national or ethnic imagined community, while subtly expanding the range of mobility and the scope of circulation available to individuals belonging to such communities.

The first enclosed world that Bowen knew was, of course, the family estate, Bowen's Court. Bowen's 1942 volume of memoir, titled *Bowen's Court*, might be understood as her extended self-examination and self-representation. In the memoir, Bowen goes through her family's history and history of the estate, and in the process she makes a case for its persistent aesthetic importance to her self-perception. In one early passage, Bowen describes the experience of the estate's enclosure in an early passage: "[S]ometimes for days altogether a family may not happen to leave its own demesne [...]. Each member of each of these isolated households is bound up not only in the sensation and business of living but in the exact sensation of living *here*."¹⁸ Bowen writes the memoir after several years of living in England. She is as much a visitor she is a resident of Bowen's Court. While Bowen seems to experience "the sensation of living *here*," this experience is somewhat false. The realization that the sensation of "*here*" is more fantasy than truth emerges in the language of the passage, which emphasizes sensation, and the fantastical quality of Anglo-Irish estates is made explicit when Bowen writes that "any one of these houses [...] has the startling meaning and clearness of a house in a print, a house in which something important occurred once, and seems, from all evidence, to be

¹⁸ *Bowen's Court* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 19-20.

occurring still.”¹⁹ The key phrase in the passage is “a house in print.” The clearest experience can be an experience of fiction, that is, the reader’s experience of something or someplace by reading about it. Since Bowen argues that writing is a way of re-creating what has already been read in the 1946 essay, *Bowen’s Court* might suggest that Bowen’s family estate can similarly be real in print. The representation of the house can be as real for memory and experience as the house itself.

Bowen goes on to suggest that the landscape surrounding the estate might also be experienced in representation:

Indoors, the rooms with these big windows not only reflect the changes of weather but seem to contain the weather itself [...] When rain moves in vague grey curtains across the country, or stands in a sounding pillar over the roof and trees, grey quivers steadily on the indoor air, giving the rooms, whichever room you go into, the resigned look of being exposed to rain. (20-23)

The house “seems to contain the weather itself,” but this is of course a reflection of the actual weather. In other words, the house is something like a page of print or a painter’s canvas, and can bear representations of things outside or beyond itself. The idea or image of the house is more important than the house. An image can represent many things, and an idea can be represented in many ways. Images and ideas expand the horizons of individual experience. Bowen argues that the Anglo-Irish are bound to their estates by “[l]ack of means, concentration of interests, [and] love of their own sphere of power” (20). Their imagination is not expansive, but enclosed. *Bowen’s Court* is no exception: “[it] is not built on a river; it has no castle and belongs to no neighborhood, being much

¹⁹ Ibid, 21.

lonelier in its situation than any other big house in the country round” (20). Having characterized the surrounding areas as “a country of ruins” (15), Bowen distinguishes Bowen’s Court by emphasizing that it is “as the past has left it – an isolated, partly unfinished house, grandly conceived and plainly and strongly built” (35). The house’s unfinished quality, however, is not a fault but a strength: “Bowen’s Court did not fall short of the great idea, though it stopped short in its realization of it [...] But the imperfections [...] somehow go to make the scale of the first idea more strongly felt” (35). Because the house’s construction falls short of the idea, the residents of Bowen’s Court can avoid the danger of identifying the actual house and its location with the idea of home. Bowen suggests that her ability to imagine an unfixed home has something to do with the incompleteness of Bowen’s Court. Bowen’s Court exists more completely as an image than as a reality. Bowen, as a writer, can employ this image in other contexts; her idea of home can travel with her.

Bowen explicitly connects the house’s incompleteness to her literary practice by noting that “[i]n building, as in writing, something one did not reckon with always waits to add itself to the plan. In fact, if this (sometimes combative) unexpected element be *not* present, the building or book remains academic and without living force” (32). *Bowen’s Court* put this notion into practice, making a literally incomplete house into the central symbolic element in Bowen’s autobiography. Writing is most vivid and forceful when it can incorporate something outside the writer’s original plan. In *Bowen’s Court*, the author attempts to make virtues of Anglo-Irishness and the Big House by treating them as incomplete forms of self-representation. Bowen acknowledges that she is descended from

the Ascendancy, and that many of her ideas are informed by the artificial model of life within the Big House. However, she presents her family's estate as an incomplete building, and portrays the Anglo-Irish as a class that fails to live up to its own ideals.

The Bowens do not come off well in *Bowen's Court*. In Elizabeth Bowen's account, Henry Bowen I leaves his wife and family in Wales to help colonize Ireland after his forebears were themselves colonized in the settlement of Gower by English-aligned Flemings. Corcoran notes that this makes up part of a larger pattern in Bowen's work, one in which the historical experience of "violent acts of dispossession [...]" leads her to identify a paradoxical sharing of feeling between the Anglo-Irish and Irish" which is, nonetheless, more in the realm of Anglo-Irish "imaginative sympathy" than in genuinely parallel historical experience.²⁰ Bowen takes great pains to point out both the parallels between the Fleming settlement of Wales and Colonel Bowen's participation in the Anglo-Irish settlement. However, she makes a major distinction between the Fleming colonization of Wales and the Bowens' establishment in County Cork: the native Welsh retained power and kept "mutual jealousy" with the Fleming settlers (35-7). In contrast, the Bowen line arrives in Ireland as part of an English Protestant vanguard and participates in the oppression of the native Irish. Based on Bowen's account, the Irish perceive the Anglo-Irish as a colonial class with good reason.

Bowen recounts her family's relocation to Ireland by incorporating elements of another literary genre, the Gothic, which was prominently employed Irish Protestant

²⁰ *The Enforced Return*, 35-6.

writers like Maria Edgeworth and Bram Stoker in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bowen's account of the Colonel takes a Gothic turn when she relates an incident involving what she refers to as "the Apparition." Using excerpts of a 17th century book about hauntings and a letter by one of the witnesses to the supposed Apparition, Bowen tells a family ghost story. However, her narrative deliberately violates a number of the conventions of the Gothic; as in *The Last September*, Bowen's real object is to demonstrate the ways that conventional methods of narrating Anglo-Irishness can and must be reconstructed in order to respond to twentieth-century contexts. In contrast to the expected appearance of specters of the dead in Gothic narrative, the apparition in Bowen's account takes the shape of the living Colonel Bowen, and appears not in Ireland but in Wales, where it torments Bowen's third wife and her children. Further, the Colonel is a pronounced, even militant atheist in Elizabeth Bowen's description, while his wife and family in Wales are devoutly Protestant. Additionally, the haunting seems somewhat mutual, as Baxter reports that the Colonel later battles "ghastly ghosts" himself in Ireland. These curious differences from the usual Gothic story allow Bowen sufficient distance to treat the Apparition story as "a likely study for the psychiatrist" (48), attaching the narrative possibilities of a late nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientific discourse to the conventions of the older Gothic narrative mode.

The Apparition story is a strange one in the family history Bowen presents. It is as if Bowen must include a Gothic tale in her family chronicle even though, strictly speaking, its connection to the actual site and persons being chronicled are slim. Bowen plays with genre in the apparition account; because she knows that Gothic hauntings are

often part of stories about Irish Protestant estates, she includes one. However, the segment operates as a sly parody of the near-universal tropes of the Gothic and its origins with Irish Protestant narratives. Bowen's memoir imitates the standard genres of Anglo-Irish literature, which include the Gothic tale of a haunting, only for that genre's to fail to function as usual when Bowen reviews her family history in 1942. Older literary conventions of the Gothic ghost story – the inclusion of letters and other documents, the involvement of a complicated family line, and the elements of irreligiosity and foreignness – all appear in the tale, but not in their standard forms. Rather than ghosts of the dead, the story involves apparitions of the living; instead of the expected ghosts in the ancestral home, Bowen employs another feature of the Gothic genre, the appearance of a doppelganger, a term she uses to characterize the Apparition.

Just as the settlement of Fleming Gower provides a faulty analogy to the settlement Anglo-Ireland, the story of the Apparition reveals that the generic pattern of the Irish Protestant Gothic does not adequately represent the lives of Bowen's Anglo-Irish forebears. Additionally, Bowen shows that her family history is absent of other stereotypical features in narratives of the Protestant Ascendancy's settlement of Ireland. The irreligious and disloyal Colonel Bowen and his son John found Bowen's Court, rather than a devout Protestant like Catherine Price. The family history departs from the narrative conventions of Anglo-Irish literature and history, suggesting that Bowen's memoir, too, represents a generic innovation in the service of a more accurate and meaningful representation of her class. Bowen describes the Apparition as one of "the unhistoric dead" in contrast with the "historic dead" that might feature in a genuine ghost

story (48). In *Bowen's Court*, the Apparition seems to suggest the Bowen line's difference from typically nationalist accounts of Anglo-Irish settlement. Colonel Bowen founds the estate, but he is not Elizabeth Bowen's direct ancestor; some of Bowen's ancestors are plagued by a haunting, but the apparition in Wales seems to haunt the wrong people and place for an Irish ghost story.

Bowen employs the story of the Apparition to separate herself and her family history from typical Ascendancy history. In other words, she uses the standard form of the Gothic story as a point of departure for her own imaginative history. But the departure is not a total departure: the Bowen are still Ascendancy, and they settle into a more familiar pattern when the Colonel's son John, marries Elizabeth Cushin, the dispossessed heiress of landed Catholic gentry (75-7). The marriage fits with the more conventional history of the early Anglo-Irish marrying upper-class native Irish; this allows Bowen to claim a degree of Irishness for her family. Bowen distances herself and her family from the Colonel, the ancestor directly involved in colonization, but embraces John, the ancestor who gives her a claim to ethnic Irishness. Bowen thereby attempts to confuse the typical moral judgments that republican Ireland might levy on her family. Taking advantage of incomplete and partial accounts in her family history, she is able to reinvent Anglo-Irishness and the Big House in ways that might include them in the national life of post-independence Ireland. These calculated divergences also allow Bowen to describe the Colonel as one of the "unhistoric dead" who make up her family. The Bowens are "unhistoric" because they occasionally escape the usual pattern of Anglo-Irish history.

Elizabeth Bowen represents herself as only incompletely inheriting the historical guilt for Irish colonialism born by the Ascendancy.

At the same time, however, *Bowen's Court* equates house with self, and grounds familial belonging in the estate. Bowen's choice to open a family chronicle with the description of a house would seem to identify these elements with one another more closely than ever. But the collapse of the metaphor of home and country indicates what the real work of the book will be: the gradual subversion of such a plan of self-location and identification in favor of Bowen's ability to substitute other forms of character for the Ascendancy type. A belated epilogue to the work, written in 1963, makes many of Bowen's maneuvers clearer. By the 1960s, *Bowen's Court* had been torn down due to Bowen's inability to make payments on the estate. Bowen describes this as necessary, but painful, and finds a note of hope in that "[l]oss has not been entire. When I think of *Bowen's Court*, there it is" (459). The house in print remains real in her experience; more importantly, the book *Bowen's Court* can still serve to represent Bowen to the public. In the 1963 epilogue, Bowen states that she will not change her present tense descriptions of the house, written while it was still standing, into past tense descriptions for this new edition of the memoir. In this way, Bowen emphasizes her version of the relationship between the literary and the real: "*Bowen's Court* never lived to be a ruin" (495).

Bowen also expands the book's defense of her claim to upper-class Anglo-Irish identity in the 1963 epilogue. She argues that the class's "isolation, what might be called its outlandishness, makes Anglo-Irish society microcosmic" (455). Bowen's Anglo-Ireland is a microcosm of a larger social pattern in the twentieth century because Anglo-

Irishness is, after Irish independence, a homeless, incomplete identity. Bowen does not consider this a tragedy, however; instead, the incompleteness of upper-class Anglo-Irish identity means that she can incorporate elements of other identities and places into it. Bowens describes her family as “fairly ordinary Anglo-Irish country gentility” (456) and thus representative of their class, and in turn that class is microcosmic of Bowen’s more general idea that “the outsize will [...] must have its outsize outlet, its big task” in order to avoid a situation in which it will “seize the wrong” (455-6). Bowen’s Court, as an incomplete construction project, guarantees that representing and maintaining the estate as an “outsize outlet” will never cease to be Bowen’s “big task;” she will never risk “seiz[ing] the wrong.”

However, Bowen acknowledges in the epilogue that her family and others like it “drew power from a situation that shows an inherent wrong” (453); especially after Irish independence, imagining the estate as the great task of the Anglo-Irish requires a secondary task, that of accounting for this unjust historical situation. To some extent, the 1963 epilogue to *Bowen’s Court* attempts to make the memoir itself into the accomplishment of this second task. Bowen acknowledges the historical injustices perpetrated by the British and the Ascendancy immediately after her passage on Anglo-Irish microcosmic significance, declaring that “[h]aving obtained their position through and injustice, [the Anglo-Irish] enjoyed that position through privilege” (456). Given that the great task delineated in *Bowen’s Court* is the estate itself, accepting culpability for injustice emerges as an underlying condition of Bowen’s aesthetics in this passage. When she mounts a defense of the Bowens, stating that they “honoured, if they did not justify,

their class, its traditions, its rule of life” and “did not abuse their privilege” (456), the defense is conditioned by her admission that the privilege itself was born of a fundamentally abusive power. In finishing this passage by demanding the adaptation of existing classes, and more specifically the gentry, to changing circumstances, Bowen hints at what her task in writing *Bowen’s Court* has been. She adapts by accepting the injustice of Anglo-Irish history, but positions herself as an Anglo-Irishwoman who can adapt to changing circumstances. She sells the estate and sees it demolished, but does not lose her sense of self or of home. Unlike the Naylor in *The Last September*, Bowen can separate the idea of home from the actual Big House, but she acknowledges that her idea of home will always be informed by the aesthetics of the Big House. What she argues, in the end, is that the aesthetics of the Big House are especially suited in a way to the unstable political realities of late modernity. Because the Big Houses are gone, the Anglo-Irish must discover purely imaginary forms of home. They no longer have the luxury of ordinary nationalism, and in any case the Ascendancy traditionally treated their class status as something that freed them from such vernacular modes of belonging. Instead, they must embrace a consciously symbolic, figural mode of belonging, one that can take on the features of other nationalities for pragmatic purposes. Bowen writes *Bowen’s Court* to achieve the enforced return to Anglo-Ireland in a way that can survive material and political losses.

Bowen confirms this interpretation when she argues that writing *Bowen’s Court* is “my means to approach truth” (454). While she writes the book in order to represent herself in a politically and culturally useful way, Bowen also discovers literary self-

representation is her approach to the truth of lived experience. When Bowen claims that “[t]hese unhistoric figures are made historic by the fact that, as I show, they once lived,” she asserts her own imaginative power to shape history to her own ends (454). On one level, the 1963 epilogue extends and refines the subtler moments in the original book’s argument that Anglo-Irishness is still a viable form of identity after Irish independence. On another level, though, Bowen reconstructs her own sense of Anglo-Irish identity so that she can adapt to new experiences and circumstances. As she explains, “it is part of the character of Bowen’s Court to be, in sometimes its silent way, very much alive” (459). If Ireland is really “a country of ruins,” it is by becoming a ruin that the house really joins the country. Once Bowen’s Court no longer exists as a physical structure, it can become the primary symbol of home for Bowen. Anglo-Irishness as represented by Bowen’s Court can only be narrated in the present tense, and only achieves meaning when formalized as a sort of nostalgia or materially lost existence. Paradoxically, the Big House is most real for Bowen as a purely literary figure.

Bowen sacrifices the private history of the family line to literary mediation, and deliberately reshapes the private materials of family history into the forms of the Gothic tale and the Big House novel. In *Bowen’s Court*, the historical reality of the Ascendancy is represented through the formal elements of these typically Anglo-Irish literary genres. Having gained place and property from a long line of English impositions in Ireland, the Bowens in this account cannot genuinely claim the privacy of their history. Private circumstance belongs too much to public policy in the colonial society of Anglo-Ireland. But by publicizing not only the family’s private documentation of itself, but also the

interweaving of that documentation with what are more properly public documents and impersonal accounts – the Penal laws, Baxter’s book on spirits, the Act of Union, and the histories of the English Civil War and Cromwellian Irish settlement – Bowen attempts to liberate the personal and individual from their subordination to those accounts. The individual writer can simply rearrange the figures of nationality, history, and ethnicity for his or her own practical purposes, even when the material truths that lay behind the representations cannot be altered. Nationalities and ethnicities are useful, however, because they provide the raw materials for public self-representation. Bowen herself is as much a reader as a writer; the family chronicle results from her own somewhat Gothic reading practice as applied to inherited documents and public accounts, to both the internal apparatus of Anglo-Irish culture and to the external colonial apparatus on which that culture relies. Her own self-construction then becomes her own process of reading that combined history much as *Bowen’s Court* demands to be read, as a narrative in which character and theme emerge most meaningfully from what is not said or is said incompletely or peripherally.

In *Bowen’s Court*, two irreconcilable sets of fact are on display: one belonging to external accounts of Anglo-Ireland and the Big House, and the other that calls these places home. The experiential self that might identify Bowen’s Court as a true home, not merely the “holiday home” that Bowen’s English friends call it. Beth Wightman describes Bowen’s various works as “attempts to negate material space in favor of privileged linguistic markers, whose privilege is disavowed and which render space

purely rhetorical and metaphoric.”²¹ For Bowen, the moments of incompleteness or variation in general political and national forms of belonging allow room for individuals to live in vernacular and national social groups without committing entirely to these forms of belonging. As a consequence, the individual self is less visible and more adaptable than the models of either national belonging or complete rootlessness usually allow.

“The Demon Lover” and Bowen’s Gothic Modernism

By the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, Bowen’s aesthetic models had apparently changed, as historical events impelled Bowen towards a “Protestant Gothic” model of self-definition. The Blitz of 1942 dispossessed many within their own country, making internal emigration the consequence of transnational violence and clashes that were as much the result of conflicting geopolitical ideologies or international structures as of traditionally national interests. The cliché of the first World War is that few of the nations involved were directly interested in the local nationalist conflagration that allegedly sparked that conflict; the cliché of the second is that it was a war between ideologies, with the fascism’s anti-liberal and anti-Communist coming into conflict with both the liberal democracies of Western Europe and the Russian Communist state. Still attached to nineteenth-century forms of nationalism, many nation-states in the period refused to acknowledge that their self-representation as autochthonic, natural entities belied the reality of their relationships to international and cosmopolitan spaces. Ireland

²¹ “Geopolitics and the Sight of the Nation: Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September*” in *Literature Interpretation Theory* 18 (1997), 40.

was a prime example, as de Valera's government insisted on a principle of republican autarkism by declaring neutrality and referring to the war that encompassed neighboring Britain as "the Emergency." In this period, Bowen wrote a number of short stories in which supernatural elements repeatedly appear. Unlike the Apparition in *Bowen's Court*, however, these supernatural elements are not subordinated to rational psychological explanations. Bowen's stories in this period are more explicitly examples of what has sometimes been called the Irish Protestant Gothic. These stories represent Bowen's use of different aesthetic methods to reevaluate the political aesthetics of earlier works like *The Last September*, and represent her attempts to understand how experiences of émigré life in England and return to Ireland fit into her complex model of the Big House as a site of public self-representation.

Typically, the genre of the Irish Protestant Gothic is associated with 19th century Anglo-Irish writing, forming, as Terry Eagleton puts it, "the political unconscious of Anglo-Irish society, the place where [...] everyday social practices and relations, with all their implicit violence, longing and anxiety, were all the time weaving a fantastic subtext to themselves in some entirely imaginary place."²² And Bowen's own use of it, in line with many readings of the Gothic, is often characterized as a return of the historically or culturally repressed.²³ As Corcoran points out, Bowen often presents these elements in

²² *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, 187.

²³ The phrase is used more generally for the Irish Protestant Gothic in Eagleton's description, though he includes Bowen in his list of Anglo-Irish writers who "have exhibited fascination with madness and the occult, terror, and the supernatural" (187), and Corcoran also terms the IRA man in *The Last September* an example of the "return of the historically repressed" (53). Eagleton in turn cites the introduction to the *Field Day Anthology's* section on "Irish Gothic and After, 1820-1945" by W.J. McCormack, who also

deliberately incongruous fashion; her ghosts haunt the war-torn urban London of the Blitz or are, like her ancestor's "apparition" and the IRA man in the mill from *The Last September*, not quite ghosts at all.²⁴ W.J. McCormack also notes that in Bowen's writings during the Second World War, "time is seriously jeopardized" by the overlap of historical discontinuity and repetition.²⁵ This discontinuity is already visible in earlier works like *The Last September*, and is no doubt helped along in the specific case of wartime by the very real overlap of the First World War and the Easter Rising. And as Jordan notes, "[t]he belief that the world altered inelectually in one instant [August 14, 1914] obscure[s] the fact that the world as Bowen had known it had been realigning itself all her life."²⁶ Bowen's writings seem to indicate that she perceived the world around her as a palce subject to continual, sometimes radical transitions and shifts between political, economic, and cultural establishments.

Bowen's perception that the world was constantly undergoing radical shifts and transitions is especially understandable given her experience of ther political situation in Ireland. It may seem peculiar, then, that Bowen consistently bases her aesthetic on the figures of enclosed, domestic space like the estate, spaces that often fail to survive radical political shifts. In this respect, Bowen's literary art does not embrace what Tyrus Miller

points out Bowen's "recourse to the conventions of the Victorian ghost story" in which the discontinuity that provokes spectral metonymy is between the child and the adult, one of whose symptoms in Bowen's work is "[r]epressed speech" in his study *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History*, 401; 406.

²⁴ *The Enforced Return*, 53.

²⁵ *From Burke to Beckett*, 402.

²⁶ *How Will the Heart Endure*, 7.

has described as the “modernist myth” that “the artwork and the labor of *making art*” comprise “a value independent of [art’s] actual social functionality.”²⁷ For Bowen, as her memoir and essays demonstrate, narrative is a profoundly social project of self-representation. As a result, Bowen’s use of the Protestant Gothic to consider issues of history and time always returns to the basic problem of the individual’s location in a national and social context. While the fixed locations in her fiction are vulnerable to political violence and historical change, they also provide potentially stable interiors that preserve a sense of continuity. This interiorized continuity, Bowen believes, can enable individuals to negotiate the changing world outside.

However, as Bowen’s writings often indicate, the solution is an imperfect one. Interestingly, her characters are not only endangered by change outside the interior spaces she constructs, but by the reemergence of negative elements of the continuity those domestic and interior spaces mean to preserve. Repressed attachments and ignored injustices make domestic interiors a potentially dangerous space if unexamined and left entirely unchanged. In order to examine the possible dangers concealed by the figure of the house, Bowen’s fiction employs the traditional genres and settings of Irish Protestant literature in combination with modernist literary techniques that reveal the negative as well as the positive aspects of upper-class Anglo-Irish self-representation. One effect of Bowen’s combination of modernist techniques with earlier nineteenth-century genres is that she exposes her characters to the repressed contents of their inner lives, allowing

²⁷ *Late Modernism: Politics Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 125.

those contents to manifest within the domestic spaces she depicts and exploring her characters' abilities to accommodate or escape them. The repressed contents that reemerge in her "Gothic" stories of the early 1940s are generally those experiences and events that threaten the stable physical and social location of the stories' characters. In *The Last September*, the physical destruction of the Big House is the greatest threat to the characters' models of location and self-representation, and emigration becomes a possible solution. But in Bowen's fictions set and written during the Second World War, the characters are typically émigrés or exiles threatened by the haunting return of the past.

For Bowen, the war represented a different and more direct sort of "enforced return" to Ireland, in her (now) well-known activity in reporting back to Britain on Irish attitudes regarding the war. Her reports were written in 1940 and 1942, roughly contemporaneously with the work collected in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*. Much has been made since of whether her mission qualifies as spying for England or not; certainly her charge to present Irish opinion regarding Allied use of Irish ports was, as Corcoran puts it, "politically sensitive" due to Irish neutrality.²⁸ But as both he and McCormack note, her reports sympathize with the official Irish position of neutrality while acknowledging the practical reality that Irish sympathies were with the Allies and that many Irish citizens joined Britain's military specifically to fight in the war.²⁹ Both McCormack and Corcoran agree that Bowen's work would have been interpreted as espionage by many in that period, but that her reports reflect an "identity crisis" brought

²⁸ *Enforced Return*, 184.

²⁹ *Enforced Return*, 189; McCormack, *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats, and Bowen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 212-14.

on by the threat of complicity with either Irish state neutrality or English state policy towards Ireland.³⁰ Corcoran finds in Bowen's work reporting on Ireland a "self critical" attitude deriving from the degree to which the work makes her "different from herself" and "self-mobile," but these arguments perhaps assume that national identification and ethnic identification make up powerful and warring forces for Bowen.³¹

The short stories in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* express Bowen's personal and political anxieties about the practicability of her models of home and identity. The collection's title story, "The Demon Lover," provides the most powerful example of Bowen's turn to the limits of the aesthetics of identity she had earlier outlined in *The Last September*. The story takes the "dead zone" of Blitz-era London for its setting, depicting the Anglo-Irish émigrée Kathleen Drover's brief visit to her London house to retrieve a few sentimental items. Mrs Drover and her family have left London for the country some time before the story begins as some of the many who evacuated their homes in the city in order to escape the threat of German bombardment. Throughout the story, Bowen reminds the reader of the dangers of wartime London by remarking on incidental details like the visible cracks in the Drover house left by nearby explosions. Despite these dangers, Mrs. Drover returns to the "shut-up house" to claim a few personal mementos (661). By retrieving the sentimental tokens of normal home and family life, Mrs. Drover intends to make the abnormal situation of evacuation more comfortable by establishing a connection to the ordinary life the evacuation has suspended. In this

³⁰ *Dissolute Characters*, 215.

³¹ *Enforced Return*, 186.

respect, Mrs. Drover, like earlier Anglo-Irish characters in Bowen's fiction, thinks of domestic space as a material guarantor of personal identity. By establishing some continuity between the interiors of her London home and the country home to which she and her family have evacuated, she can continue the same vernacular practices of self-representation and self-identification despite the violent upheavals of the war. In this way, the initial evacuation in "The Demon Lover" seems as if it might work in the same way as Anglo-Irish circulation: it becomes a limited form of emigration within a broadly-defined vernacular community.

Bowen uses "The Demon Lover" and her other Gothic stories of the early 1940s to critically interrogate her earlier model of limited circulation by suggesting that it is not entirely effective. Upon entering the London house, Mrs. Drover finds herself less comforted than "perplexed [...] by traces of her long former habit of life" (661). These traces are material reminders of the everyday realities of London home life, and include smoke-stains, water rings, and other mundane wear and tear. These traces suggest that the family's history with the house is deeper and richer than the model of internal emigration from Bowen's earlier work might suggest. Wear and tear suggest not only that the space has been lived in, but that it has been lived in over a long period of time. The material traces of domestic life and everyday practices have a long history, and the physical space of the house anchors the personal histories of the people who live in it. While Mrs. Drover thinks that her family "were by now used to their country life," the fact that she puts herself at risk to return for a few keepsakes suggests that she has not entirely left behind this sense of history. But simply transporting some small keepsakes will not make

the country house a lived in space like the London house; vernacular traditions and personal attachments have a material as well as a symbolic history, and the keepsakes can bear only the symbolic elements of that history. Bowen suggests in this way that the house embodies what the keepsakes only represent. In suggesting this, however, Bowen seems to quietly reassert the importance of particular locations for the personal and public practices of individual identity. Mrs. Drover implies as much by thinking of her family's current circumstances as "their country life," as distinct from their city life. The label suggests that she is aware of various differences in their everyday lives, and more subtly that "country life" involves slightly different vernacular practices than "city life." The idea of limited emigration within a closed circle of similar personal spaces is now visibly disrupted by the small, but very real material and practical differences between various locales. Local difference has crept into Bowen's model of broadly defined vernacular continuity.

Her routine, if nostalgic errand is disrupted by the appearance of a letter on the nightstand, one whose supernatural characteristics introduce the Gothic elements of the story. The letter is from a soldier to whom Mrs. Drover was engaged in her youth, and conjures up both dread and nostalgia in her. In her memory of the event, she accepts his engagement while he is on leave from the French front in 1916. Upon returning to the front however, the soldier is listed as missing and presumed dead. Of course, 1916 was also the year of the Easter Rising in Ireland, whose aftermath led to the Anglo-Irish War. The name Kathleen is stereotypically Irish, given that Cathleen O'Houlihan is the national personification of Ireland. The particularities of Kathleen Drover's origins are

primarily suggested or alluded to, however. Bowen carefully avoids mentioning either her maiden name or the location of the garden where Mrs. Drover received his offer of marriage. The indirectness of these references to Kathleen's Irish past suggest that she has managed emigrating from Ireland and evacuating from London by repressing her emotional attachments and personal memories of everyday life in those places, the better to abandon the material sites that embodied them. Instead of particular locations or material traces, the places and things Kathleen remembers become general types or symbols. As in *The Last September*, Bowen employs the subjectivist aesthetic techniques of modernism in an unusual way, formally depicting a character's processes of repression without representing the repressed contents. Through the application of these narrative techniques, Kathleen's memory of the engagement is represented as an extraordinarily vague one. Despite the vividness of the memories conjured by the letter, "*under no conditions* [can] she recall" her former lover's face (664).

What she recalls instead is a mixture of her youthful experience of love and her later efforts to convince herself that his feelings for her were "[n]ot love, not meaning a person well" (665). In other words, she deals with her personal attachments by adopting a general term like "love" and eliminating the qualities of her attachment that do not match the parameters of the general term. More generally, Kathleen's consciousness represents her personal experiences with signs like everyday tokens like the keepsakes in the London house, general terms like "love" and "home," and historical data like the year in which her fiancé left for war. More particular elements like the lover's face or the description of her family are replaced by generically mundane labels like "fiancé" and

“family” or are omitted entirely from the field of representation. Similarly, Bowen adapts the Gothic genre to reflect the way particular, individual commitments are effaced in various ways. “The Demon Lover” primarily depicts mundane reality, to the extent that the story’s supernatural occurrences emerge from everyday objects and actions.

The ghostly manifestation of the lover is not an impossible apparition like the one that haunted Bowen’s ancestors in *Bowen’s Court*, but instead an everyday object like a letter whose uncanny qualities only emerge upon close inspection. Even the central supernatural event in the story, the arrival of the title’s “demon lover,” is outwardly a quite mundane event with quite ordinary signifiers. When Mrs. Drover hurriedly abandons the house and hails the only taxi on the street, the seeming ghost turns up as the driver and “[makes] off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets” (666). The house in London, for example, is not particularly frightening and seems to have no special past other than being Mrs. Drover’s married residence. Bowen suggests that the house embodies what the keepsakes only represent. Nor do the physical traces of her married life trigger any especially vivid memories for Mrs. Drover; only the supernatural letter does that. Bowen portrays Kathleen’s marriage as a relatively passionless one, a marriage that Mrs. Drover enters into mostly because “the approach of her ‘thirties’” makes her anxious of her marital prospects (663). In most respects, Mrs. Drover appears to be emotionally disinvested in the life she has built. The terrifying spectre of her dead fiancé might therefore be read as another example of dangerous personal investment in a particular time and place.

However, the story's connections to similar events depicted in *The Last September* suggest a more complex reading. The parallels between Kathleen's dead fiancée and Lois Farquar's suitor Gerald Lesworth are quite striking, for one thing. Both are soldiers, and both romance a young woman only to perish in an ongoing armed conflict. Kathleen Drover, however, is able to accept her soldier's proposal; in contrast, Gerald's desire to propose to Lois is frustrated by her adoptive parents and by his own inability to express his feelings. But Kathleen and Lois share another trait: both of them respond to the deaths of their lovers with what "The Demon Lover" describes as "a complete dislocation from everything" (664). Additionally, the imagery of clock time that surrounds Gerald's last conversation with Lois makes up a central element in the ghostly fiancé's threat: Kathleen reads his letter at exactly six o'clock in the evening, and is startled by the chimes of nearby bells. In *The Last September*, the chime of the six o'clock bell in Danielstown marks the beginning of Lois's last walk with Gerald, a walk during which he fails to express his true feelings to her. While Bowen never shows the reader what happens to Lois after she leaves the Naylor estate, Kathleen settles into a bland marriage and moves to a Kensington house with her husband. The only indication that her detachment is incomplete prior to the letter's appearance seems to be whatever sentimentality draws her back to the house in the first place.

Kathleen's receipt of the letter complicates the dislocation caused by her fiancé's death. The past and present collide when Kathleen reads the letter and "[r]emember[s] with such dreadful acuteness that the twenty-five years since [the proposal] dissolved like smoke" (665). Returning to the London house is already "a crisis" of memory for

Kathleen Drover; she realizes that “the letter-writer [has] knowledgeably struck” in the midst of this crisis (664). Moreover, she recalls that her original experience of dislocation occurred prior to her fiancé’s death. His proposal was followed by “the complete suspension of *her* existence” for a week (665). The feeling of suspended existence seems to foreshadow the fiancé’s supernatural reappearance, suggesting that something unnatural was occurring in 1916. While Bowen leaves room for the reader to treat Mrs. Drover’s memory of “suspension” as an impressionistic recollection of her youthful affections, the sense of foreboding can just as easily be assigned to the historical reality of the Great War. Because Kathleen’s lover is a soldier, the promise of marriage represented by an engagement would be suspended for the duration of the war. Personal attachments and individual lives can be suspended entirely by the war. For that matter, so can local political concerns: the Third Home Rule Bill of 1914 was suspended for the duration of the First World War, and this suspension, as noted earlier, fueled radical nationalists’ desire for revolution and led to the 1916 Easter Rising. Bowen is subtly drawing a series of connections between the Great War’s destructive effect on Europe, the Easter Rising of 1916, and the suspension and loss that characterize Kathleen Drover’s personal experiences of Ireland in 1916. In choosing the year 1916, Bowen links the dislocation of Londoners by German bombing, the disintegration of European political order during World War I, and the eventual displacement of the Anglo-Irish by Irish nationalists galvanized during the aftermath of the Easter Rising.

The 1943 setting of the story also illustrates the interruption and suspension of personal existences by much larger political and historical events. The obvious link

between 1916 and 1943 is world war, and the Drover family's evacuation from London is also an experience of dislocation. Kathleen Drover's familiarity with the London house suggests her attachment to it, but this attachment seems to be a pale echo of her memories of 1916. For her, "[t]he hollowness of the house this evening cancel[s] years on years of voices, habits, and steps" between her present and August, 1916. The experience of dislocation and the threat of political violence unite the present of 1943 with the past of 1916. It is as if a chasm swallows up the years in between, and Mrs. Drover vanishes into that chasm. However, the horror of war is allied to the disturbing return of repressed or abandoned past attachments throughout the story. Kathleen's lingering attachment to her London home exposes her to the dangers of German bombs, but also to a supernatural threat from her past. And of the two threats, the threat from the past is the one realized. In "The Demon Lover," memories and keepsakes are more threatening than immediate violence. Death is less powerful than personal attachment to things, places, and memories; the fiancé's return from death bears this out. The people most threatened in war are the individuals who are displaced and dislocated by its violence.

As Bowen's other writings indicate, it is possible to survive dislocation by making location into one term of a symbolic relationship between the individual and a larger social context. In that relationship, the private individual can always remain detached from publicly defined features like nationality or ethnicity. In "The Demon Lover," however, many of Kathleen Drover's personal attachments have no direct, particular representations. Her fiancé's face, for example, is a blank spot in her memories. However, the images corresponding to Kathleen's personal attachments are

concealed from the reader more than from her. Kathleen's past attachments eventually become impossible for her to go on repressing, but the narrative still conceals most of their particular contents from the reader. She finally recognizes her onetime fiancé's face when he confronts her in the taxi, but the reader is given no description of his face and is thereby excluded from the moment of recognition. Similarly, "the objects she had come to fetch" from the London house are never named or described to the reader, but are presumably recognized by Kathleen herself. Personal attachments make up the private emotional lives of individuals, and narrative representation is limited to the social or public self. Bowen cannot provide symbols for the deepest and most personal of her attachments or Kathleen's. To represent the keepsakes, Kathleen's husband and children, or the fiancé's face would enter these private images into the social or public realm. In Bowen's aesthetics, images presented publicly must be replaceable; there must be substitutes for them. The keepsakes and the fiancé's face belong to an inexpressible interior life. Lois Farquar's internal muteness is of a kind with Kathleen Drover's inability to recall her fiancé's face. Certain attachments cannot be represented in print, because they are never malleable or transferable.

Regarding Bowen's Gothic stories, Derek Hand argues that in her writing "[g]hosts suggest that the rationalized boundary between past and present is permeable, as characters are forced to confront their own stark condition and predicament in the

present moment.”³² In the passage in which Kathleen reads the letter, Bowen describes the act of intense remembering as a terrifying dissolution of the boundaries between past and present, much as Hand suggests. Curiously, though, Kathleen’s present predicament is almost completely overshadowed by the threat of her past. The fearful secret of “The Demon Lover” is that there are personal losses for which artistic imagination cannot compensate. These losses are literally unspeakable, as suggested by the narrative’s refusal to represent them fully. Bowen explores the limits of her project of self-representation in “The Demon Lover” by treating Kathleen’s personal losses as beyond representation. To reach this limit, however, Bowen represents three major crises of Anglo-Irish late modernity: the two Wars and the Easter Rising. The political crises that destabilize the models of public identity provided by imperialist order, nationalist belonging, and ethnic community make self-representation into an extraordinarily difficult task.

In “The Demon Lover,” Bowen responds to the unrepresentable losses the private self suffers during experiences by making dislocation itself into the narrative’s central figure. Kathleen has been visibly displaced twice by political upheaval: once by the Irish war of independence, and again by the violence of the Blitz. More subtly, she has suffered dislocation a third time in the form of the loss of her fiancé, caused by the First World War. In all three cases, large-scale political crises that mark significant moments in modern history cause small-scale personal losses for the individuals swept up by

³² “Bowen and the Unfinished Business of Living” in *Elizabeth Bowen, Irish Writers in Their Time* v.2, ed. Éibhear Walshe (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 66.

history. However, these smaller losses are forgotten and effaced by narratives of public history. Kathleen suffers personally, to the point that she is quite literally haunted by the things and people she has lost, but her personal suffering does not become part of the public narrative of history. Such losses are emotionally significant for individuals, but they are not narratively signifiable in public discourses except in very indirect or general ways. In a somewhat bitter irony, the psychological and subjective narrative forms that characterize modernism seem, in Bowen's work, to participate in the way the public effaces the private. The subjective turn in modernist narrative promises to make the private and intimate contents of individual psyches into publicly readable materials, but Bowen suggests here that the subjective turn's real effect is to turn modern individuals into representative types or symbols within the larger categories of historical modernity and contemporary public culture.

If the boundaries between her past and present seem to dissolve in Bowen's 1940s work, they do so in part because both the past and present are marked by experiences of dislocation in which boundaries in general are violated. Kathleen's youthful lover in 1916, for example, is swept from the provincial, smaller world of Anglo-Ireland to fight in a continental war by the currents of modern history. Neither Continental politics nor English modernity are supposed to intrude on the estate, but they do, and do so violently. But leaving that site behind does not protect Kathleen from further dislocations and personal losses. The Great War takes her fiancé; the Anglo-Irish War takes many estates; and finally, in 1942, the Second World War takes her London home. The culmination of this series of losses is that she herself is swept away by the combined reminders of what

she has left behind and internally repressed. The keepsakes of her life in London lure her back to war-torn London, the uncanny letter conjures up long-repressed memories of her Irish past, and finally her ghostly fiancé forcibly returns as part of what Kathleen has lost to the global political conflicts of 1916. At every step, Kathleen's indirectly represented personal experiences of loss are linked to widely represented public events. But this connection ultimately overwrites the particulars of her particular attachments and her everyday life, substituting material signs like the wear and tear of the London house or uncannily menacing mundane items like the letter and the taxicab for any direct representation of the experiences or people involved. Both the vernacular practices of this everyday life and the register of world history erase individuals, substituting generic characters and general upheavals for personal experiences and personal losses.

Conclusion

By reimagining various forms of social and political space, Bowen proposes methods by which people who value their attachments to national or ethnic communities might withstand experiences of dislocation. Bowen translates experience into narrative, and employs the representational contents of narrative to mediate between public forms of historical and social self-representation and the intimate contents of particular and individual selves. The house, and especially the Big House, become the staging ground for a specifically Anglo-Irish, post-Ascendancy form of modern self-representation. In this way, Bowen attempts to give herself and others defined by precariously situated classes and nationalities a means of retaining the defining traditions and practices of their social group without fatally sacrificing any ability to connect with and move within the

wider world. In this fashion, she aims at a sort of compromise between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Localist and nationalist models of vernacular practice can become representable and practicable in more open, mobile, ways. What Bowen proposes is a way to wed a quasi-cosmopolitan mobility to a quasi-national set of vernacular practices. In order to do so, she reimagines the space of the home as a site of public self-representation, drawing on the model of the Anglo-Irish estate and gradually extending its characteristics to other substitute locations that share the estate's basic character as a personal residence. By treating the public self as the subject of a domestic narrative, and treating the house as an essentially public (rather than private) space, Bowen enables a limited model of personal circulation within an expansive, potentially transnational sphere of shared vernacular practices.

The compromise comes at a cost, though: the set of narrative elements she can choose among are always conditioned in some way; Bowen's series of representable selves must share some common references to the Big House and Anglo-Irishness. In other words, Bowen's model of identity remains defined by nationality. By disguising and managing these common references, Bowen can suggest a number of different public personae in her writing, all of which remain linked by their shared connection to a broadly-construed model of Anglo-Irish identity. Her aesthetics also allow her to imaginatively identify the Big House – her symbolic home and the traditional location of the Anglo-Irish – with a variety of real settings and places. That identification makes “home” something that can be partially disjoined from particular political or territorial structures. In turn, the ability to substitute new physical spaces for the original location of

the Big House allows the Anglo-Irish to survive the continual experiences of dislocation that a traditionalist, arguably colonial class suffers in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Anglo-Irish can move between England and Ireland in various ways, maintaining a sense of belonging the land of their birth without being entirely vulnerable to the exclusionary elements of Irish nationalism. However, Bowen eventually discovers that personal investments cannot be entirely unfixed from particular places, people, and times. Where the social gives way to the intimate, Bowen's powers of representation end and, implicitly, so does one model of modernist aesthetics.

“Your Region Is Vast:” Cosmopolitan Imagination and Vernacular Form in Three Novels by Samuel Beckett

Hugh Kenner has described the Irish as a people “who go constantly into exile” in various ways, and among his primary examples is Samuel Beckett.¹ Kenner’s choice of examples is quite apt: born into a middle-class Irish Protestant family, Beckett’s literary career began only after he had left Ireland for a lecturer’s position in Paris, where he was introduced to another expatriate, James Joyce, whom he famously assisted in preparing *Finnegans Wake*. Through his association with Joyce, Beckett published both critical essays and a number of prose works, most of them visibly influenced by Joyce. But his distinctive literary voice only developed through a second exile, when he left a position at Trinity College Dublin and traveled to London and Europe, during which time he began writing novels, including the 1938 work *Murphy*. During third, still briefer visit to Dublin in that year, he severed ties with his family that finally led Beckett to spend still more time in France. Shortly before the outbreak of war in 1939, he had decided to settle there permanently; he only returned to Dublin in 1945, after the war’s end, which Beckett later stated had resulted in an epiphany after which he began consciously distancing his writing style and methods from those of Joyce. Over the course of four trips to and from Ireland, Beckett shaped his own identity and his literary career. As Kenner suggests, Beckett’s experience of the first half of the century is not one of emigration from Ireland, but rather an experience of repeatedly reenacting a process of self-imposed exile, of crossing and recrossing the Irish border in transit to and from the Continent.

¹ *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 37.

As an explanation of his decision to settle in Paris permanently, Beckett famously declared that he preferred “France at war to Ireland at peace.”² With this declaration Beckett severed his ties to Ireland in a broader and less personal sense. In Ireland, the de Valera government had declared formal neutrality in the second World War, in part because the nationalists who made up the bulk of de Valera’s government wished to establish Irish autonomy from both England – which was at war with Germany by late 1939 – and from Europe as well. In short, they aimed at solidifying a sense of Irish political and cultural identity with the declaration of neutrality. In truth, Irish neutrality was largely ceremonial, as the Irish tended to intern German troops found in its territory while giving transportation to Allied troops in similar circumstances. But for many, including Beckett, the choice of Irish autarchy in the midst of a European war against fascism was ethically indefensible. Moreover, the suggestion that the Irish were a nation apart from the world also represented the acceptance that Irish identity was fundamentally provincial, and defined by the official positions of a nationalist government. In response to that option, Beckett chose to adopt a posture of exile. But in choosing to settle in wartime France and, later, to work with the French Resistance, he also accepted a serious curtailment of what one might imagine as cosmopolitan mobility. Such mobility was, of course, impracticable, but Beckett was also choosing against the option of personal neutrality in favor of a limited commitment to Free French identity for the duration.

² Quoted in Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 310.

Beckett did not stop writing during or after the war, continuing to develop a unique style and technique for expressing the larger dilemmas he perceived regarding political and personal identity. In 1953, he published *The Unnameable* (*L'Innomable*), the last of three novels that critics have since considered as a trilogy.³ With the other two novels in the trilogy, *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* (*Malone Meurt*), *The Unnameable* explores problems of narrative and consciousness.⁴ The three novels in the trilogy take the form of first-person monologues. Each successive monologue becomes more and more minimalist, and by the beginning of *The Unnameable*, the novel seems to record a voice speaking from an almost entirely empty place, one that is almost a total void. In Beckett's work, it seems, language distorts meaning, in part because language can have meaning in excess of the speaker's or writer's intentions.

The effect of language on meaning becomes clear when one examines the reception of Beckett's novel. Adrienne Janus identifies a split in Beckett criticism between linguistic-philosophical approaches and cultural-political approaches in her essay "In One Ear and Out the Others: Beckett...Mahon. Muldoon." In her words, "Franco-European modernists tend to hear Beckettian silence and babble as products of a breakdown in the subject [while] Irish modernists tend to hear Beckettian silence and babble as products of a breakdown in the objective world."⁵ As this chapter will

³ *L'Innomable* was published in French by Les Editions de Minuit in 1953, and in English by Grove Press in 1958.

⁴ *Molloy*'s French edition was first published in French by Les Editions de Minuit in 1951, and in English by Grove Press in 1955; *Malone Meurt* was published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1951, and in English by Grove Press in 1956.

⁵ *Journal of Modern Literature* volume 30, issue 2 (Winter, 2007), 182.

demonstrate, the split in the critical reception of Beckett reflects an underlying issue in Beckett's work. An émigré writing in a foreign language, Beckett nonetheless makes numerous references to the country and the culture he seems to have left behind. The trilogy seems to sit uneasily on the fault line between a vernacular and a cosmopolitan conception of modernism. On the one hand, Beckett's emigration is quite complete, and he leaves behind not only his native Ireland but also his native language in writing the three novels. On the other hand, he seems compelled to return to the traditions and language he has left behind: Irish references haunt the text of the trilogy, and Beckett translated *Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable* into English after being closely involved in Patrick Bowles's translation of *Molloy*.

Most often, as seen in the work of Bowen and Yeats, modernist writers' efforts to solve this dilemma involve negotiating between two different models of modern culture: a cosmopolitan or global model and a vernacular or local model. In the cosmopolitan model, the individual navigates a new and different objective world, one in which the break-up of empires theoretically opens up post-national ways of belonging in the world. In the vernacular model, the individual's ability to fit into a particular national or social form of belonging is similarly opened up by the crisis and eventual collapse of imperial methods of organizing the world. In both models, an emerging post-imperial politics requires new methods of self-presentation and the performance of identity. However, the vernacular form of modernism generally aims at constructing local traditions with which to ground or essentialize a model of the self. In contrast, the cosmopolitan model of modernism rejects the notion that nationality or ethnicity are essential components of the

self, and employs elements of various national cultures as tools with which individuals negotiate with the wider world. In order to articulate their differing concepts of identity, cosmopolitan and vernacular modernism both employ the strategies of representation that characterize art in the period: formal self-reflexivity, systematic allusion, bricolage, and radical subjectivism, among others. While cosmopolitan modernism employs these methods to critique nationalist modes of belonging and to construct adaptable, mobile identities, vernacular modernism employs them to assemble and distinguish particular local traditions that allow individuals a critically engaged mode of national or ethnic belonging.

In practice, neither alternative is entirely satisfactory in the early twentieth century: cosmopolitan modernism swiftly runs up against the nation-state system and comes into conflict with the essentialist demands of various novel or reinvigorated nationalisms characteristic of vernacular modernisms; vernacular modernisms, on the other hand, soon encounter various limits that nationalist essentialism imposes on self-representation and agency, as well as generating institutional systems that flatten and reduce national belonging to a set of stereotypes or self-parodies. Because both models' limits and weaknesses swiftly become apparent when they are put into practice, I have been arguing that it is more accurate to describe modernism as an effort to imagine ways of living and representing people that borrow elements of both the cosmopolitan and vernacular models. Both cosmopolitan and national politics are quite real in the first half of the twentieth century; the very real perils that confronted stateless persons and ethnic minorities, for example, speak to the power of nationalist modernisms, much as the

presence of expatriate populations and the imperilment of self-created cosmopolitan individuals in the same period suggests the difficulty of practicing cosmopolitan modernism. But modernist art is more often than not a negotiation with these two deceptively monolithic alternatives: as previous chapters have shown, modernist writers imagine alternatives within or to any absolutist position that identity is wholly cosmopolitan or vernacular in nature. While modernists like Yeats tend towards nationalism of various sorts, for example, they freely employ more cosmopolitan strategies of articulation. And while Elizabeth Bowen's pattern of emigration might suggest that she had abandoned the national principle, her writings swiftly make apparent her commitment to a shared Anglo-Irish ethnicity as a defining element of her identity.

Beckett's trilogy presents another, more attenuated version of the conflict between vernacular and cosmopolitan modernisms, and between the problem of the objective world's breakdown as opposed to the subjective world's breakdown. As a result, Beckett's efforts to negotiate these two seemingly contradictory models of modern culture appear in his novels as a series of internal contradictions, retractions, and aporias. As I will demonstrate, for Beckett the problem is that the means of representation themselves tend to impose the most stifling elements of vernacular identity onto expression. Consequently, efforts to express a more cosmopolitan form of identity will at best mix and match the deceptive and stifling clichés of vernacular self-expression, and at worst devolve into impotent silences, that is, into an utter lack of self-representation. These impotent silences are in turn practical failures of self-representation for a cosmopolitan model of identity. The effort to navigate the clichés of vernacular self-

expression and the silences of cosmopolitan self-expression results in increasingly aporetic failures of all expression in Beckett's trilogy. Indeed, the opening lines of *The Unnameable* employ the term "aporia," as if to name one of the methods Beckett employs in attempting to represent the clash of modernisms. However, this naming of the strategy of aporia occurs in the final of the three novels as the culmination of a strategy Beckett carefully develops over the course of the trilogy. For that reason, Beckett's project is best explained by beginning with *Molloy* and proceeding through the other two novels.

The ABCs of *Molloy*'s Vernacular Cosmopolitanism

Of the three novels in the trilogy, *Molloy* is the one that most resembles a conventionally-plotted prose piece. The novel is divided into two distinct parts: in the first, the title character Molloy writes about his misadventures in the course of a failed attempt to visit his mother, which he writes from his mother's apartment. In the second, Jacques Moran is sent by his mysterious employer, Youdi, to find Molloy, a task in which he also fails after various seemingly undirected wanderings. But the various scenes and vignettes that make up the two segments of *Molloy* never coalesce into coherent plots in the ordinary sense. There is little conventional action in the novel, in that there is no sense that each incident builds towards the next to satisfying narrative effect. *Molloy* is formally a novel, but it does not attempt to fulfill the novel's usual function of unifying and representing social or subjective phenomena by means of emplotment. In the trilogy, what the reader encounters are overt failures of emplotment, that is, the failure of

reported incidents to coalesce into a causally or symbolically unified sequence of events or system of meaning.

Beckett critic H. Porter Abbott has described this defining technique of Beckett's novels as "narratricide," arguing that his postwar writing is "littered everywhere with the barest fragments of narrative irrelevancy which lead nowhere" as part of a larger interrogation of the links between narration, subjectivity, and reality.⁶ For example, it is never made clear just how Molloy ends up in his mother's bedroom, though the bulk of his narrative is supposedly meant to portray his search for her and her house. Similarly, Moran's mission to find Molloy is never fully explained, and he is summarily ordered to return to his home without ever coming close to fulfilling that mission. Both Molloy and Moran end up writing at the behest of mysterious others, and the two parts of *Molloy* are ostensibly their retrospective accounts of their adventures. Molloy writes his story for "a man who comes every week [who] gives me money and takes away the pages." (7)⁷ Moran, in turn, is writing a report for the mysterious Youdi, apparently his superior or employer. Both Molloy and Moran embark upon failed quests, and both attempt to reconstruct those quests but fail to do so. In both parts of *Molloy*, the form of the novel suggests to the reader that there is something to reconstruct, that is, that elements of the

⁶ *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 9. In an earlier study, Abbott more provisionally argues that Beckett is experimenting with "imitative form," a concept drawn from the work of Yvor Winters that simply denotes the typically modernist effort to imitate the structure and contents of a consciousness in the form and content of a narrative work. Abbott, *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 1-9 and *passim*.

⁷ All citations of Beckett's trilogy are from the editions collected as *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnameable* (New York: Grove Press, 1991).

narrative will turn out to be clues, hints or pieces which can be assembled into a coherent expressive whole. Instead, though, the novel frustrates this expectation: not only do the threads of the plot fail to converge, but the misadventures of Molloy and Moran introduce further obscurities and questions.

Sometimes, however, the traces and clues can seemingly be reassembled to restore one or another coherent representation to the novel. Most famous, of course, are the repeated suggestions that *Molloy* takes place in Ireland, which have been catalogued by a number of critics.⁸ Molloy refers early on to “this island” (11), uses the Times Literary Supplement as a bedspread (30), complains that “[t]ears and laughter, they are so Gaelic to me” (37), and describes a knife with a handle made of “so-called genuine Irish horn” (45). Further references to “Irish stew” and the island setting occur in the second part, narrated by Moran. These references accumulate to the point that a reader might feel safe in claiming that *Molloy* takes place in Ireland. However, it is an Ireland shorn almost entirely of concrete references; the suggestions of an Irish context in *Molloy* are largely made up of gestures and vague allusions. Moreover, whenever Molloy attempts to detail his location, he proves unable to:

I passed [...] into a district I did not know. And yet I knew the town well, for I was born there and had never succeeded in putting between me and it more than ten or fifteen miles, such was its grasp on me, I don't know why [...] Sir, this *is*

⁸ Chief among these is John P. Harrington, whose book-length study is the definitive work on the topic. See *The Irish Beckett* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 143-4; 155-70. Additionally, J.C.C. Mays provides an exhaustive list of Irish references in his essay “Irish Beckett, a Borderline Instance” in *Beckett in Dublin*, ed. S.E. Wilmer (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1992), 135-7. Other critics who have similarly catalogued the bulk of Beckett’s direct references to Dublin and Ireland in *Molloy* include Jude Meche, in the essay “‘A Country that Called Itself His’: *Molloy* and Beckett’s Estranged Relationship with Ireland,” *Colby Quarterly* 36: 3 (2000), 236.

X, is it not? X being the name of my town. And this name that I sought, I felt sure that it began with a B or with a P, but in spite of this clue, or perhaps because of its falsity, the other letters continued to escape me. (31)

It is as if Ireland and Molloy's birthplace cannot be properly named at all. Molloy goes on to suggest that his experience and perception of the town are severed from any linguistic representation of it, remarking that "I had been living so far from words so long, you understand, that it was enough for me to be able to see my town, since we're talking of my town" (31). Molloy's comment that he has "lived so far from words" may recall *Molloy's* composition in French; the novel is itself rather distant from the languages spoken in Ireland.

Beckett's distance from his original language in part allegorizes another linguistic difference, one found in many conceptions of Irishness. Ireland's relationship to the ostensibly native language, Gaelic, and the ostensibly foreign English tongue is quite complex, and one of the chief symptoms of this complexity is in the duality of Irish geographical nomenclature. During the period of colonial rule, the British embarked upon a project of translation and renaming in which Gaelic place-names were replaced with English equivalents. As a consequence, a number of anticolonial, nationalist groups – most notably Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League – sought to restore or reinvent Gaelic names as a gesture of national solidarity. However, Gaelic-language nationalism was somewhat problematic on a practical level. As Gearóid ó Tuathaigh points out, "English was the dominant language of all Irish nationalist popular political movements from the [...] late

eighteenth century through to the nineteenth century.”⁹ This was despite the anti-English sentiment of much Irish nationalism; it was perfectly coherent, to many nationalists, to oppose England using England’s language. Gaelic had been effectively abandoned by most of the Irish population in the early and middle nineteenth century, Though Gaelic revivalism became a feature of late 19th and early 20th century Irish nationalisms – most notably that of Douglas Hyde, who founded the Gaelic League in 1893 – the decline in the language’s use was not reversed. The independent Irish state treated the revival of Gaelic as a goal of Irish nationhood, and the 1937 constitution declared Gaelic the preferred state language, but in practical terms English was the language of the land.¹⁰

Molloy’s association of a distance from words with geographical distance reminds the reader that in Ireland the relationship between places and names is politically significant, and that the choice of place-names marks out the boundaries of identity in crucial ways. At the same time, the practical distance between Irish nationalists and their supposed “native” language makes any insistence on Gaelic nomenclature something of a politically convenient fiction. Beckett seems to covertly argue that Irish place-names are the markers of one or another political fiction, either a nationalist or an imperial one. The places themselves, however, remain relatively stable in non-linguistic experience. As Molloy puts it, “there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless

⁹ “Language, Ideology, and National Culture” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, eds. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly, 44.

¹⁰ The relevant portions of the 1937 Constitution can be found in Article 8, sections 1 and 2 of the English-language version of the document, which declare that “[t]he Irish language as the national language is the first official language [...] The English language is recognized as a second official language.” *Constitution of Éire, 1937*.

names” (31). Molloy’s metaphor for this phenomenon is “waves and particles,” a reference to the concept that the behavior of light can be mathematically expressed as either a wave or a particle. Despite the two contradictory expressions, however, the underlying physical phenomenon of light – the “nameless thing” – remains constant. A phenomenon can bear two (or potentially more) contradictory names while remaining the same real phenomenon. The subjective effects of these different perceptions and the differing names or expressions they produce, however, have very real consequences. Just as the wave-particle distinction is not a trivial one in any given statement in physics, neither is the choice of a Gaelic or English place name a trivial, inconsequential choice. Naming is often more than mere naming: its political consequences are not to be discounted.

But the strategy of simply refusing to choose, or failing to name, as Molloy does, also proves unsatisfactory. Terry Eagleton remarks that “the art of Samuel Beckett, with its starved landscapes that are at once Ireland and anywhere, shows well enough how to be stripped of your particular culture is to become a citizen of the world.”¹¹ But in Ireland, marked by conflicts between differing notions of the dominant culture, there is some question as to what culture has been stripped away. If anything, there seems to be a surplus of cultural reference in Ireland; yet once all of these cultural frames of reference are stripped away, it becomes impossible to represent Ireland directly. The “starved landscapes” which Eagleton describes are an inversion of the initial problem in which

¹¹ *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, 281-2.

two contradictory cultures compete to name and represent the same land. Beckett presents the reader with a land that can be “Ireland and anywhere” by removing nearly all of the politically-tinged identifying characteristics with which Ireland is usually represented. Its location and culture, once stripped away, reduce it to a cipher. Of course, Beckett can only reduce Ireland to a cipher in this way because he has already treated Ireland as little more than a collection of suggestive names and vague references. By representing Ireland, Beckett can fictionalize it; by fictionalizing it, he can manipulate it as he pleases without regard to the complex political framings that affect the real Ireland.

Arguably, this is one benefit Beckett reaps from his emigration; outside its political authority and away from its stifling local culture, he can construct and represent a version of Ireland on his own terms. In place of multiple, contradictory Irelands, Beckett offers an unnameable no-place that exists in Molloy’s individual experience. Yet Molloy requires external reference points to keep his bearings; his circular wanderings and his estrangement from the town in which he lives almost his entire life cause him no small amount of distress. Molloy’s repeated questions and pleas to his interlocutors – the man who takes away the papers, the police who interrogate him, and the reader – are pleas to be understood in the absence of the cultural context that makes such understanding possible. To be a citizen of the world in Eagleton’s sense – that is, by default – seems to condemn one to a kind of paradoxical exile at home in *Molloy*. Molloy never strays far from his hometown, but his disorientation and the vagueness with which he perceives and represents his surroundings render them foreign and threatening to him. This sense of exile in one’s own home is made quite literal when Beckett couples

Molloy's presence in his mother's home with his utter lack of knowledge as to how he finally returned there. Molloy has been uprooted and transported, but into what should be an intimately familiar personal space. As a result, Molloy is more estranged from his home than ever when he is actually in that home.

The novel's pattern is to establish information and then render it untrustworthy or obscure through contradiction and retraction. In effect, *Molloy* works in the opposite direction of a typical mystery or adventure story. In place of the mystery's plot, which proceeds from a mysterious or socially disruptive situation or incident back towards social and narrative clarity and cohesion, *Molloy's* narrated world and the characters in it become less coherent and less defined the longer the novel goes on. Both Molloy and Moran become less coherent as their segments proceed, and both narratives repeatedly present the reader with apparent statements of fact that are immediately contradicted or retracted. Even the activity of writing is described in contradictory fashion in *Molloy*: "There's this man who comes every week [...] He gives me money and takes away the pages. So many pages, so much money [...] Yet I don't work for money. For what, then? I don't know. The truth is, I don't know much" (7). The motives and content of Molloy's writing are ambiguous and perhaps absent. Nor can Molloy be sure of how his writing is being received: "When he comes for the fresh pages he brings back the previous week's. They are marked with signs I don't understand" (7). Whether these signs are some sort of editorial marks, or whether they are Molloy's own writing, now alien and incomprehensible to him, is not clear. In either case, the accumulation of writing and money seems not only purposeless but endless. Strange symbols pile up on the paper, and

money piles up in Molloy's mother's room. Whatever exchange Molloy is participating in, it seems to be an exchange without meaning or significance, an exchange that does not add or subtract value. Writing, even writing for money, seems mechanical or compulsive for Molloy.

In place of the knowledge he lacks, Molloy instead fictionalizes experience:

"Perhaps I'm inventing a little, perhaps embellishing, but on the whole, that's the way it was" (8). One of the earliest examples of Molloy's storytelling in the novel is the story of A and C, and it is also one of the most critical examples for understanding the problems at the heart of the novel. In order to highlight the anecdote, Beckett assigns it a significant role in *Molloy's* plot as the incident that triggers Molloy's wanderings: "[The] night when [Molloy] saw A and C" is the same night on which Molloy "ma[kes] up [his] mind to go and see [his] mother" (41). In the vignette that introduces A and C, Molloy observes "two wayfaring strangers," A and C, who leave the town and who pass one another on the road outside it. After a brief and inconsequential meeting, "[e]ach went on his way, A back towards the town, C on by-ways he seemed hardly to know, or not at all, for he went with uncertain step and often stopped to look about him, like someone trying to fix landmarks in his mind" (9). A and C represent, in the most abstracted terms, two possibilities for the individual in modernity, the provincial and the cosmopolitan: A returns to his town, and C makes his uncertain path away from it.

As H. Porter Abbott notes, the French version of *Molloy* presents the reader with A and B, not A and C.¹² That is, the middle term “B” is quite literally lost in translation, as if the shift from French to Irish-inflected English produces an insoluble problem of mediation. A simple pairing of A and B in French becomes a broken sequence from A to B to C in English; the English text at once represents more and less than the French text, adding a “C” at the cost of “B,” which becomes an implied but unrepresented term. It is therefore possible to read the shift from A and B to A and C as a comment on the choice between remaining in Ireland or emigrating. However, in Molloy’s narrative neither emigrating nor remaining seem to achieve much: A leaves town only to return in a pointless, circular motion; C, on the other hand, wanders somewhat uncertainly. But C also seems to take in more knowledge of the world, as Molloy imagines “he must have seen it all, the plain, the sea, and then these self-same hills” and even seen invisible features, such as “hidden valleys that the eye divines from sudden shifts of color and then from other signs for which there are no words” (9-10). As Molloy explains, “now he knows these hills [...] he knows them better” (10). But Molloy immediately throws C’s imagined knowledge into doubt: “But all are not divined, even from that height, and often where only one escarpment is divined [...] in reality there are two” (10). Moreover, C’s journeys are not without cost: “He looks old and it is a sorry sight to see him solitary after so many years.” The costs of C’s knowledge are loneliness, rootlessness, and a life beset by “an anxiety that was not necessarily his, but of which he partook.” But here Molloy

¹² *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett*, 10.

interjects with the failures of his own imagination, acknowledging that the anxiety he describes may simply be his own, projected onto C: “Who knows if it wasn’t my own anxiety overtaking him.” From this point on, Molloy’s story of A and C disintegrates, and he soon finds himself unable to recall which of his two ciphers left town and which returned to it. The limits of Molloy’s ability to imagine a larger world are also revealed, as he wonders whether one of the two “had come from afar, from the other end of the island even” (11). Molloy’s definition of “afar” is of course comically provincial. “[T]he other end of the island” is a miniscule distance in global terms, but a considerable one in local terms, especially if the reader assumes that the ends meant are north and south rather than east and west. Beckett suggests that the two registers of vernacular and cosmopolitan are incommensurable by presenting Molloy’s seemingly blindered definition of “afar.”

As with much in Beckett’s trilogy, what is omitted is as important as what is included. The designations A and C invite speculation as to the seemingly missing term, B, the one lost in the novel’s translation. If A represents a commitment to vernacular, local ways of being and C an equal commitment to migration and cosmopolitanism, the excluded term B perhaps suggests some middle way. But B cannot be represented in the version of *Molloy* available to English and Irish readers, just as C cannot be represented in the French version of the novel. At the least, an English B or a French C cannot be imagined by Molloy, who tells the story, any more than a place farther away than “the other end of the island” is within his imaginative capacity. The limits of Molloy’s vernacular imagination severely limit his ability to successfully narrate the story of A and

A's counterpart. In addition to his incapacities of imagination, Molloy fails to register in his own narrative, remaining little more than a passive observer. Molloy serves no function in the worlds of either A or C. As Molloy puts it, C ignores his presence because "a man [...] isn't exactly a landmark because [...] If he were to pass that way again, after a long lapse of time [...] his eyes would search out the rock, not the haphazard in its shadow of that unstable fugitive thing, still living flesh" (11). Worse, as the novel repeatedly demonstrates, Molloy cannot even represent himself to himself, seemingly lacking Beckett's multinational and multilingual resources. The narrative disintegration of his story of A and C sets the pattern of *Molloy* as a novel, a pattern in which there are no narrative landmarks, incidents, or stable elements. Instead, everything is an "unstable fugitive thing," the shadow of a sign or meaning rather than a sign or meaning itself.

The alternative that Molloy presents to A and C in the English version of the novel is a sort of failed compromise between them. Unable to distinguish between staying and leaving, Molloy instead imagines ways of traveling without actually leaving what he terms "his region." In an attempt to bridge the difference between vernacular belonging and cosmopolitan wandering, Molloy imagines that "regions do not suddenly end [...] but gradually merge into one another" (68). With this act of synthetic imagination, Molloy seems able to have it both ways: he has his mobility and freedom, but can imagine that he is always in "his region," that is, in his locale. Molloy essentially reimagines location and origin as matters of individual imagination and self-representation. Beckett also seems to hint at this solution in the repeated descriptions of Molloy's uneven legs, which cause him to wander in circles: in effect, Molloy is a human

compass, plotting his own map of Ireland or the world. The key to the proposed solution is that this notion of geography or “region” is Molloy’s own: he “prefer[s] to abide by [his] simple feeling and its voice that said, Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall” (69). Molloy’s powers of imagination and representation – his ability to produce art, such as the narrative prose of the first part of *Molloy* – seemingly provide the means to resolve the problem of choosing between A or C. Unfortunately, as the A and C passage indicates, Molloy’s ability to produce coherent narrative is quite limited, and he continually fails to properly distinguish fact and fiction or to understand his surrounding sufficiently to narratively master them. For example, Molloy’s narrative has already established that Molloy has never gone more than ten or fifteen miles from his hometown; in this light, he seems less a cosmopolitan traveler than a blinkered provincial. While Molloy can imagine a way to incorporate the wider world into “his region,” he cannot actually do so in the English version of *Molloy*.

But Molloy’s incapacity to encompass the world in an imagined, personal “region” is not entirely due to his own failings. Throughout the novel, Beckett demonstrates that there are real, external obstacles to his freely traveling the world. As Molloy puts it, “the outer world opposed my succeeding, too, with its wiles [...] even if the voice could have hurried me to the very scene of action [...] I might well have succeeded no better, because of the other obstacles barring my way” (87). Among the more obvious examples of these external obstacles are the policemen who arrest Molloy for ambiguous and obscure reasons early in *Molloy*. Initially it seems as if Molloy has been arrested for violating an obscure local ordinance by posing obscenely on his bicycle,

but Beckett suggests other reasons for his arrest in the passages that follow, where Molloy is asked for “papers.” But Molloy “had no papers in the sense this word had a sense for [the policeman], nor any occupation, nor any domicile” (22). The requests for papers and the peculiarity of local ordinances rather explicitly describe the pitfalls waiting for anyone who chooses cosmopolitanism and exile. Even if Molloy has chosen an internally-created identity over an externally-imposed one, legal and political institutions can still demand that he and his means of transport conform to their regulations. And this demand for conformity is backed up by force, as Molloy hints in the same passage when he explains that “I have gone in fear all my life, in fear of blows” (22). Individual aspirations do not count for much in the face of institutional violence.

Of course, the problem of international travel suggested by the request for papers need not imply a genuinely globetrotting scope of setting. The island on which *Molloy* is set seems to be Ireland, itself divided into two nations. Merely to go, in the manner of C, from one end of the island to the other might well involve identification papers. And B, lost in translation, has been entirely prevented from traveling from one language or country to the other. The location of the complete series of A, B, and C is only in some literary space occupied by both the French and English editions of *Molloy*. In effect, Beckett places the novel and its meaning in continual translation, reflecting the condition of people who, like himself, must live in perpetual transition between equally unviable alternatives. *Molloy* occupies a space between the cosmopolis of Paris, where the French edition was published, and the vernacular locale of Ireland, the location referred to in the text’s setting and the source of the idiomatic language employed Bowles and Beckett in

translating *Molloy*. In a clever pun, A, B, and C are rather literal letters of transit in Beckett's novel.

However, the dangers of practicing cosmopolitan mobility in a world still defined by the boundaries of nation-states holds further dangers for writers and for literature than the losses incurred in translation. The obscure obscenity provision which Molloy unwittingly violates in the passage detailing his arrest suggests the sort of censorship laws that independent Ireland tended to pass, beginning with the 1929 act that targeted obscenity in the arts. As a former associate of James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* was considered obscene under such regulations, as was Beckett's collection *More Pricks Than Kicks*. Beckett would have understood well the stifling of individual artistic expression by enforced notions of public decency. Molloy's fear of censure and harm might help explain much of his self-contradictory, retraction-filled discourse, particularly since he writes for some unknown other party. That said, Molloy's incapacity to express himself cannot entirely be blamed on external pressures of this sort; the dilemma of modernism may be enforced by political and legal institutions, but it is also endemic to the narrative and artistic forms with which modernist writers can attempt to resist such institutional sites of power. By way of example, Beckett's problems in publishing his work were not always Irish, and not always the result of censorship: during the period of *Molloy*'s composition in French, Beckett's novel *Murphy* was pronounced untranslatable by a reader at Gallimard, and eventually sold only six copies in its first French edition from

Bordas.¹³ The cultural and linguistic barriers faced by an émigré were as difficult to surmount as the cultural and legal barriers faced by a native Irish writer.

The barriers confronting the émigré make up much of the subtext in *Molloy*. The title character spends a significant portion of his narrative describing his visit to the seaside, but prefaces his description by admitting that his time on the coast was “without incident” (65). As that prefatory comment suggests, Molloy’s visit to the island’s borders does not provoke a decision to emigrate or stay, but instead exacerbates the confusion between them: “[D]on’t imagine that my region ended at the coast, that would be a grave mistake. For it was this sea too, its reefs and hidden depths. And I too once went forth in a sort of oarless skiff, but I paddled with an old bit of driftwood” (69). Throughout the novel, he makes gestures towards leaving the island, but never does so. He also makes gestures towards returning to his hometown, but finds it unfamiliar and unnameable when he arrives there, to the point that a reader might question whether he has found the right town at all. He remains tied to what he calls his “region,” but the idea of “region” is also somewhat amorphous and indistinct. Molloy seems to have internalized the alternatives represented by A and C, but he cannot synthesize them. As he puts it, “[I]n me there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on” (48). The compromise he manages seems to be his circular, regressive wanderings; the result is a quest that leads nowhere and a narrative that circles on itself. As with the escarpment

¹³ Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, 286; 360.

that proves to be two escarpments, the two fools and many of the other seeming doubles in *Molloy* never resolve into one synthetic alternative, but neither do they form two entirely contrary and distinct alternatives.

The structure of *Molloy* employs this frustrated duality to great effect, and in fact much of the second part, narrated by Jacques Moran, seems designed to tease and then withdraw the various synthetic possibilities for meaning suggested by Beckett's motif of duality. For one thing, Moran's name suggests a duality of language that encompasses the French and English versions of the novel: his forename is French and his surname is a common Irish one, an Anglicized derivation from a sect of monks in pre-Norman Ireland, specifically north Mayo. In this way, Moran is a figure who unites the two vernaculars of *Molloy*'s author. At first glance, Moran's narrative seems as if it will supplement or correct the narrative deficiencies of the first part of the novel. Where Molloy moves in circles and speaks elliptically and vaguely, Moran is, if anything, obsessed with direction and detail. Indeed, in the early parts of Moran's section of *Molloy*, every triviality and detail of setting and character is exhaustively narrated. Additionally, Moran's status as some sort of detective or secret agent and his claim that his narrative is a "report" suggest that his section of the novel will account for and properly order the disparate narrative elements, producing a coherent and directed plot. Instead, it soon becomes apparent that Moran's accumulation of details and incidents, however thoroughly he describes each one, does not produce a coherent plot, but rather amounts to an increasing mass of unconnected, particulate bits of narration. If Molloy fails to distinguish objects and persons with sufficient clarity to narrate his world coherently, Moran is so intent on

distinguishing each and every detail that he never bothers to assemble them into any sort of world. Moran is a detective who finds and records an endless number of clues, but never employs them to reconstruct an original incident; alternately, he is a secret agent who pores over bits of code without ever assembling them into a complete message.

Moran's failures are all the more pronounced given his seeming obsession with specificity. Where Molloy frequently forgets or muddles the names of things, and thus loses his power to distinguish one name or thing from another, Moran names the things and people around him exhaustively. His greatest anxieties center on the possible failures of naming: "Vagueness I abhor" (99). But Moran admits early on that his linguistic specifications are, in a word, inventions and fictions, ways of "gild[ing] my impotence" (105) in the face of "the spray of phenomena" (111). He contents himself with the idea that "the falsity of the terms does not imply that of the relation, so far as I know" (111). Moran values form over content, in essence: the contents of an argument may be misleading and false so long as the form is valid and correct. Tasked with chasing down Molloy, whom he does not know, Moran happily spends several pages imagining Molloy's features in order to claim that "I knew then about Molloy, without however knowing much about him" (113). And while Moran claims to "draw attention to the most striking lacunae" in his knowledge of Molloy, what he really does is to conceal his ignorance beneath an excess of invented detail, that is, beneath an excess of language.

But as Moran explains, "[it] seemed to me that all language was an excess of language" (116). While he claims to assemble truths and write reports, Moran actually reenacts Molloy's severance of "thingless names" from "nameless things." The

difference is that Moran initially seems to err on the side of creating names for things that do not exist, as when he considers that the various concepts he, Gaber, and Youdi have of Molloy mean that “in fact there were three, no, four Molloys” (115). In practice, of course, Moran’s strategy works no better than Molloy’s for the purposes of acting in the world. He, too, becomes hopelessly lost on the island and never quite learns if he has reached Molloy’s “region” or not. And like Molloy, Moran also ends up writing endless fictions for a mysterious other, though in keeping with Moran’s obsession with false details, he specifies that his dubious reports are written for Youdi. However, Moran’s preference for names over things does initially introduce certain differences between himself and Molloy. Most obviously, Moran’s peregrinations are directed by outside agencies, mainly his orders from Youdi. While Molloy’s circle of departure and return is the result of Molloy’s peculiar will and the obstructions of the outside world, Moran’s trip away from home and his return are compelled by Youdi’s orders. Moran acknowledges that he does not will his actions early in part II of *Molloy*: “we agents often amused ourselves with [...] giving ourselves the airs of free men” (95). And Moran is more generally willing to bend to custom, ritual, and tradition. Among the first incidents in his narrative is his anxious desire to make up for missing Sunday Mass, for example.

But Moran’s acceptance of the arbitrariness of details and the superfluity of language makes a mockery of these rituals and traditions. The arbitrariness of detail in the Moran segment of *Molloy* plays out in one passage that seems to make a mockery of the politicization of Irish and English identities. Moran, preparing to set out after Molloy with his son, insists that the boy dress up: “Put on your school suit, the green – But it’s

blue, papa, he said. Blue or green, put it on, I said violently” (103). The choice of blue and green might suggest a choice between overtly displaying or quietly ignoring one’s putative “Irishness.” But in either case, a choice must be made; one cannot, it seems, be part-Irish. “Blue” is merely “not green,” that is, non-Irish. Moran insists that one or another identity must be displayed to the world by demanding on threat of violence that his son must wear one or another specific color of uniform, but the choice of uniform colors is arbitrary. The scene recalls Molloy’s encounter with the police, in that the uniform colors loosely correspond to the papers and personal information the police demand in the earlier passage. Whether you have a citizen’s papers or a foreigner’s, you must have papers; and whether you wear Irish colors or foreign colors, you must wear colors. The important element seems to be having papers and personal information, not what the papers or information contain. The principle extends to the way Molloy and Moran are both compelled to produce narratives even though their narratives are ultimately incoherent.

The arbitrariness of detail in Moran’s account, like the lack of detail in Molloy’s, eventually brings about a complete narrative disintegration, including the story’s loss of plot incident and character identity. By the novel’s end, the basic narrative status of Moran – and by extension Molloy – comes into question, as Moran seems to lose track of his own identity:

I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in turn had taught his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understood it, all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters. It told me to write

this report. Does this mean I am freer now than I was? (176)

Both Moran and Molloy are united in the activity of writing for some mysterious third party, in Molloy's case the mysterious man who pays him for writing, and in Moran's by the voice – possibly that of the unseen Youdi or Youdi's agent Gaber – who impels him to write a report. And both follow the directives of a seemingly interior voice that they cannot be sure is theirs. But in Moran's case, the effect of this outside compulsion to write is Moran's estrangement from language, even from his own name. “[T]he words that Moran had been taught when he was little” would presumably include his name; the compelling voice, which uses a different language entirely, seems to throw this naming into question. Moran and his son, and their common language, become an object apart from the narrator for a moment. Since this narrator is ostensibly Moran, the suggestion is that he has succumbed to some form of estrangement from his usual identity. Curiously, though, this estrangement does not remove the compulsion to narrate; instead, it intensifies the compulsion, to the point that Moran suggests he is “freer” after being compelled to write his report even though this also seems to divest him of his ability to identify himself as Moran and even to understand language.

Moran's sense of freedom leads Moran to construct and juxtapose contradictory fictions, and he closes the novel with the following example: “Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining” (176). In the context of the novel's plot, however, Moran seems to be lying in his report to his superior, Youdi. Notably, the first lines of Moran's section of *Molloy* are “It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows” (92). The suggestion is

that the false report Moran is writing has made up the second part of the novel, except that Moran indicates the falsity of the report at the end of that report. Jude Meche has taken this as evidence of a larger strategy of resistance to ideological conformity, arguing that “Moran [...] offers [the false report] almost as a challenge to his intended reader – presumably Youdi – and as a conscious violation of the genre in which he is supposed to be writing.”¹⁴ However, Moran’s writing would seem to include all of the contradictory statements. The text is ambiguous as to whether he writes “It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows.” and then informs the reader that this is not the case, or he writes the entire, self-contradictory sequence “It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining.”

In one sense, of course, Moran must be lying or falsifying; in another, however, he is never lying or falsifying. After all, it is sometimes midnight and sometimes not midnight; and it is sometimes raining and sometimes not raining. By writing down all of these possibilities, Moran perversely ensures that his claims will always be at least partially true. That is, by sacrificing any reference to a particular time or weather condition, he can nonetheless include all possible times and weather conditions. Fiction has the advantage of containing contradictions and pretending to universal representation, but at the cost of specificity and realism. Earlier in the novel, Molloy extols the joys of “[s]imple supposition, committing me to nothing” (82). But fiction is not merely an alternative to intractable realities, it is a strategy of negotiation with an unstable reality.

¹⁴ “‘A Country that Called Itself His’”), 236.

As Molloy explains, “somewhere something had changed, so that I too had to change, in order for nothing to be changed” (88). Similarly, Moran declares that “[t]he color and the weight of the world were changing already” (96). Recalling the color coding of the jackets earlier in Moran’s section of the novel, this statement suggests that Moran has found a way to include the irreconcilable alternatives by making the transition between colors and between worlds into the ambivalent object of writing itself. The individual subject and the external world stand in an unstable relationship to one another in *Molloy*, one characterized by opacity and uncertainty. The compromises of fictional representation allow his narrators to temporarily deal with this relational instability, but at the cost of commitment and consistency. Most frighteningly for Beckett’s narrators, consistent self-representation becomes nearly impossible in circumstances of constant change. Molloy and Moran are compelled to produce fiction by external agents and internal anxiety, but the activity of fiction-making does not produce anything lasting or stable. The moment a stable relationship between the individual and the world is established through the medium of fiction, either the individual or the world changes and the fiction must be retracted and rewritten in consequence. An individual’s powers of self-representation seem crippled and, to use Beckett’s word, “impotent” in such a context.

The anxiety of self-representation connects Beckett’s style to one of the defining stylistic features of modernist literature, namely modernist writing’s various attempts to verbally represent consciousness. Michael Levenson argues that the use of language to represent consciousness in this way is one of the defining features of modernism in

literature. In a discussion of the early modernist writer Joseph Conrad, Levenson argues that the shift from the Victorian novel to the modernist novel was one from a style in which objective events had intrinsic meaning to a style in which events only have subjective meaning. The Victorian novel represents characters' consciousnesses as if they are objects, and attempts to describe psychic interiority from an objective, third-person perspective. The modernist novel, in contrast, describes external objects and incidents using a subjective and interested mode of representation that originates in its characters' consciousnesses.¹⁵ In modernism, Levenson argues, the individual consciousness becomes the arbiter of meaning and selects what can or cannot be represented or made significant. Perceptions make up the features of objects and the characteristics of events, and perceptions are always subjective. The modernist novel allows for no neutral third-person position as in the Victorian novel. Indeed, such a neutral mode of description would be superfluous in the modernist novel:

Once the leap into consciousness is made, no need remains for the painstaking *reconstruction* of subjectivity by means of accumulated detail or evocative metaphor. Psychology, emotion, attitude become immediately accessible. There need be no scruples about the text penetrating a consciousness, because the text has become identical with a consciousness.¹⁶

The subjective narratives that make up the prototypical modernist novel are the formal expression of this identity between the text and a narrated consciousness.

Beckett's trilogy seems at first to conform to the expressive mode of the modernist novel as Levenson defines it, since each novel in it consists of a single

¹⁵ *The Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

character's subjectivity expressed in the form of a monologue. However, the identity of the text with a consciousness is precisely what Beckett's trilogy throws into doubt. The protagonists of the three novels aim to create texts identical with their conscious processes, that is, texts that transparently represent their interior lives. Instead, they find themselves endlessly frustrated by the differences between the writing they produce and the interiority they mean to represent in it. Rather than providing immediate access to consciousness, the texts produced by Beckett's narrators instead constantly remind them and the reader that all such access is mediated because language is a medium.

Accumulated detail and evocative metaphor are inherent characteristics of language in Beckett's trilogy, but they are just as superfluous to his narrative purposes as Levenson's description of an earlier moment of modernist writing suggests. This superfluity and excess then frustrates the modernist project to produce texts that are themselves fictional consciousnesses. Levenson's description of modernist writing suggests that modernist forms of representation subordinate ostensibly external phenomena to the meanings which subjective consciousness assigns them. However, in Beckett's novels, as in the works of Bowen and Yeats, cultural and political forces interfere with the mode of modernist representation that Levenson notes in Conrad's work. In Beckett, language itself – the very medium of representation – arrives already half-formed by such outside forces.

The Disintegration of Nationality in *Malone Dies*

The sense that language is not wholly under the control of the individual self is intensified in the second of the *Three Novels*, *Malone Dies*, whose structure is closer to

the identity of text and narrating consciousness that Levenson describes. Malone is the story's sole narrator, speaking from bedrest; in theory, Malone should be freed from some of the physical and political obstacles encountered by Molloy and Moran. But Malone nonetheless finds himself compelled to create characters and situations that reproduce these obstacles. Much of *Malone Dies* centers on Malone's continuing efforts to tell the story of a character successively named Sapo and Macmann. The passages concerning Sapo and Macmann alternate with passages in which Malone's increasing creative and physical weakness steadily intensify, and towards the novel's end both sorts of passages grow shorter and end abruptly, often mid-sentence. Malone's narrating consciousness gradually fragments and disintegrates as *Malone Dies* proceeds, and with him the novel itself becomes piecemeal and elliptical, ending with a series of fragmentary, incomplete phrases. Despite Malone's ostensibly total control over the form and content of his narrative, the arc of *Malone Dies* slowly unveils his utter lack of any such control.

As in *Molloy*, references to Ireland abound in *Malone Dies*; in the second novel, however, these references come across more explicitly as symptoms of the disintegration of consciousness. Malone's initial foray into fiction-making occurs as a result of an undefineable want, which he interprets as "want of a homunculi," that is, of a miniature of himself (227). Comically, Malone intends to eat his "little one" and then "be alone a long time, unhappy, not knowing what my prayer should be nor to whom" (228). But the double that Malone attempts to create "in [his] image" soon takes on a set of stereotypically Irish characteristics, most visibly in "the colour of his coat [of which] all

that can be said is that green predominates” (227). Shortly thereafter, Malone changes his creation’s name from Sapo to Macmann, narrowing his fiction’s geographical locale to the British Isles. Following this renaming, increasingly explicit references to Ireland creep into *Malone Dies*, with Malone mentioning Dublin’s “Butt Bridge” (250) and finally situating Macmann (and by implication himself) at a Dublin hospital, St. John of God, where Macmann’s daily regimen involves “an imperial half-pint of porter and a plug of tobacco” (256). Eventually, Malone admits that “[i]t is true the Macmanns are legion in the island and pride themselves [...] on having one and all [...] sprung from the same ball” (259). Rather than recreating an original self or devising a new one, Malone instead builds a stage-Irishman.

Moreover, Malone (and through him, Beckett) places Macmann within a long series of Beckettian characters, most of them Irish: “the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans, and Malones,” alongside whom Malone himself admits that his own language is often limited to Irish clichés. For Malone, Macmann’s story is merely

one of the things, that I can say, Up the Republic!, for example, or Sweetheart!, for example, without having to wonder if I should not rather have my tongue cut out [...] I have only to open my mouth for it to testify to the old story, my story, and to the long silence that has silenced me. (236)

The clichés and nationalist cant that Malone finds easiest to generate, and indeed cannot avoid generating, are no better to him than silence. The language of self-expression that Malone seeks is obscured and overwritten by such clichés. Malone repeatedly implies that he has immense, practically divine powers of poesis and creation, suggesting that he can create “in his image” like the Christian God, and renaming his creation Macmann,

alluding to “Son of Man,” a name applied to Jesus. But his creations are invariably influenced and ultimately overwritten by nationalist models, and Malone comes to consider his clichéd verbal production no better than the brutally imposed silence of having his tongue cut out. If Malone produces characters in his own image, he realizes in the process of doing so that his own image – his self – seems to be the creation of a stock of nationalist clichés relating to Ireland, Malone’s place of presumed origin.

Malone’s rebellion against the stifling, inherited forms and contents of stage-Irishness appears in another form in *Malone Dies*, one suggestive of Beckett’s emigration. The English-language version of *Malone Dies* points the English-language reader towards its initial composition in French more often and more explicitly than *Molloy*, and Beckett’s change of languages is continually suggested in the novel. Malone repeatedly makes gestures towards a French context, beginning on the novel’s first page, where he declares his intention to “survive St. John the Baptist’s Day and even the Fourteenth of July,” Bastille Day (179). Similarly, Malone recounts an incident of dubious veracity in which someone “called me the merino, I don’t know, perhaps because of the French expression” (218). The expression in question, “Laisser pisser les merinos,” is a French colloquialism meaning “to bide one’s time;” the expression fits Beckett’s protagonists, including Malone, rather well, but the significance is in Beckett’s English translation gesturing back to the earlier French version.¹⁷ Shortly after this, Malone drops the pencil with which he writes the narrative, only to mention that he has “another pencil,

¹⁷ Definition taken from L.E. Kastner, *A Glossary of Popular and Colloquial French for the Use of English Readers and Travellers* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1929).

made in France, a long cylinder hardly breached” (222). If English is exhausted, Beckett suggests, French might provide a narrative renewal.

But this renewal never occurs in the English-Language version of *Malone Dies*; instead, Malone comes to doubt the very existence of an alternative language: “nothing is mine anymore [...] except my lead, my exercise-book, and the French pencil, assuming it really exists” (255). Beckett’s use of possessive pronouns is important here: the exercise book and the lead belong to Malone; the French pencil, however, is preceded by “the” rather than “my.” Coupled with the reference to an exercise-book, the shift from “my” to “the” suggests an uncertain mastery of French, or at least an unwillingness to declare French as Beckett’s or Malone’s primary language. Though *Malone Dies* is originally a French novel, Beckett and his narrator hedge on that national and linguistic identification. Malone has

two pencils, the one of which nothing remains between my two huge fingers but the lead fallen from the wood and the other, long and round, in the bed somewhere, I was holding it in reserve, I won’t look for it, I know it’s there somewhere, if I have time when I’ve finished I’ll look for it (246)

This second pencil, the one held in reserve, is the “long cylinder, hardly breached,” that Malone soon identifies as the French pencil and whose existence he still later comes to doubt. Malone never makes the switch of pencils; the stage-Irish Macmann’s “stump of an indelible pencil” seems identical to the one with which Malone writes. Indeed, one possibility for reading the fragmentary ending of *Malone Dies* is to treat it as Malone’s lead running out or his irrecoverably losing the remnants of his first pencil. In either case,

such an interpretation speaks to the trilogy's motif regarding the exhaustion of nationally-inflected language.

Indeed, lacking the "French pencil," Malone's rapidly disintegrating narrative assembles the aforementioned Irish clichés in an increasingly haphazard and desperate fashion. A character named Lemuel appears, sharing a first name with the protagonist of the Anglo-Irish writer Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and the reference is completed when Lemuel takes Macmann on a sea voyage (266); a few pages later, Malone's thoughts on mortality also bring him to the example of "the Lord Mayor of Cork" (273) and then the confirming geographical details of St. John of God's asylum and Butt Bridge. These details would seem to firmly place Macmann's story in Dublin, and imply that Malone is himself a present or former inmate of the Irish asylum. Malone admits his own status as one of the list of stage-Irish characters when he pronounces his own epitaph: "Here lies Malone at last, with the dates to give a faint idea of the time he took to be excused and then to distinguish him from his namesakes, numerous in the island and beyond the grave" (271). The echo of "legion in the island" with Malone's description of Macmann renders Malone himself merely another species of stage Irishman. Later, Malone uses a sailor's suit to ensure "no confusion was possible between the Macmanns on the one hand and the Lemuels, Pats, and Jacks on the other" (276). The catalogue of Irish literary types and stereotypical forenames that comprise this list suggest an internal typology of constructed notions of Irishness, but Malone fails repeatedly to escape the limits of this typology in his fictional and autobiographical narratives.

As in *Molloy*, the cultural and linguistic materials employed in *Malone Dies* turn out to be part and parcel of exactly the external influences the narrator hopes to banish or escape. Malone fantasizes means of emigration and escape despite being bedridden, including a sequence in which he imagines himself “wielding [his] stick like a punt-pole, to move [his] bed;” he loses the stick and his chance at mobility, and in the final fragments of the novel briefly confuses the pencil and the stick, having apparently lost both (253; 288). Nor does his somewhat derivative fiction offer any hope of escape: Malone attempts to ship his various characters off the island in what he terms “[t]he last effort,” but finds himself imagining that “[o]ne day nothing will remain of it but two islands, separated by a gulf, narrow at first, then wider and wider as centuries slip by, two islands, two reefs” (286). Yet every time Malone attempts to narrate the travelers’ journey into the open sea, he abruptly breaks off. The sentence “Lemuel watches the mountains rising behind the steeples beyond the harbor, no they are no more” ends without punctuation, for example, and the paragraphs of both the Malone and Macmann narratives become shorter and riddled with gaps, until the final pages of the novel are reduced to a collection of fragments that trail off entirely.

Malone’s earlier confession, “Not a word. I am lost.”, seems to be proven in the disintegrating narrative that follows it (263). The collapse of cultural and national references seem, for Malone, to similarly strip away the narrating consciousness; this is the danger of a text identical with its narrating consciousness. If the transition between languages and the act of emigration are meant to open up new possibilities for narration or self-representation, *Malone Dies* presents the distressing possibility of simply losing

even the exhausted language and culture of the original nation without acquiring an adequate replacement. Malone's efforts at sustained narrative devolve into "[g]urgles of outflow," and with it the tribes of Macmanns and Murphys and, by extension perhaps, of Malones becomes a "tangle of grey bodies [that] lie together in a heap" (287). And with their collapse into an indistinct heap, Malone's possessions – including the pencil and the stick, his instruments of representation and mobility – become similarly unusable and indistinct from one another. The final lines of the novel represent this bleak possibility of the loss of self and the death of narrative and narrator:

never there he will never
never anything
there
anymore (288; line spacing in original)

The interior and exterior world disappear in the same moment. The objects and the persons contained within the narrating consciousness die with it, and disintegrate with the narrated text's disintegration.

The things and names that could not be joined in *Molloy* are all lost in the conclusion of *Malone Dies*. The meanings and names with which Malone can work belong not to him, but to the tribes, races, and nations of indistinguishable persons. Without them, he is little more than an invalid in an asylum; even after divesting himself of these externally-imposed markers of identity, he cannot escape the institutions that determine and enforce those markers. Nor can his imagined doubles and others ever quite sail away from the two islands without simply disappearing from the field of textual

representation. What Beckett's narrators really question, then, is the ability and accuracy of their power, as conscious beings, to assign working meanings to objective phenomena when their means of assigning meaning are seemingly compromised. As a result, Beckett's narrators constantly question their ability to take in external phenomena and make those phenomena part of a coherent system of subjective meaning. Beckett's narrators create fictional characters as if to test the ability of text to become identical with a consciousness despite the external pressures that act on the language that makes up their texts. If their invented characters can become identical with the texts that represent them, then perhaps it will be possible to represent the authentic self in a similarly transparent fashion. On the other hand, if a fictional and an authentic self can both become identical with textual representation, and textual representation always arrives in compromised form, then the distinction between the real self and the fictions imposed by language may disappear. In Beckett's work, characters' ambitions towards either cosmopolitan individualism or vernacular belonging are continually threatened and often frustrated by the impact of rival political and social tendencies upon the media of representation.

If Beckettian language suggests either a breakdown of the individual subject or the external world, as Adrienne Janus's survey of the criticism suggests, Beckett does not decide the issue. The excess reference of language may mean that it will always suggest both contradictory options. Even Beckett's narrators, like Molloy, seem unsure about whether the self or the world has changed. Language can only represent the relationship between the self and the world, and when the medium of representation breaks down that breakdown obscures the location of the problem. Most critics agree that Beckett's writing

helps to define the limits of modernism's styles, regardless of where a given critic places Beckett's later novels on some continuum between modernism and postmodernism. In exploring these limits, Beckett also explores the limits of the modernist attempts to negotiate between seemingly incommensurable alternatives: representation and expression, vernacular and cosmopolitan, consciousness and phenomena. Beckett reveals the contingent nature of most proposed mediations of these dichotomies in modernist art. He continually confronts aesthetics with its difference from the worlds and individuals that aesthetics attempts to connect and make coherent.

In Beckett's prose, the political weight of language and of literary forms distort or obscure full and clear self-expression. Beckett therefore shares with other modernists a tendency to experiment with literary form, and to try new methods of representing his characters. But in Beckett, these experiments aim at reducing expression and representation to their barest, and most authentic levels. In other words, Beckett attempts to solve the problem of inherited, distorting literary and linguistic forms by stripping away as many of the distorting elements as possible. As Declan Kiberd puts it, Beckett's trilogy of novels is "primarily a search for the authentic language of the self [...] Like the Irish, Beckett's characters must constantly shake off the masks proffered by others and invent themselves *ex nihilo*."¹⁸ The context that imposes certain forms of identity on the self must be stripped away before an "authentic language of the self" might be found.

However, in Beckett's trilogy self-invention is often the activity of making masks as

¹⁸ "The War Against the Past" in *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 174. An earlier version of the essay was published in *The Uses of the Past: Essays on Irish Culture*, eds. Audrey S. Eyster and Robert F. Garratt (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 24-53.

much as one of shaking them off. Each of the characters in the trilogy acts as a first-person narrator, and in the act of narrating each character produces masks as well as discarding them. While the final novel of the trilogy is entitled *The Unnameable*, the supposedly “unnameable” narrator prolifically generates names. In a lengthy section of *The Unnameable*, the narrator mentions several of Beckett’s narrator-protagonists from his other prose work:

All these Murphys, Molloys, and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone [...] Let them be gone now, them and all the others, those I have used and those I have not used [...] (304)

Kiberd notes that all of these names are stereotypically Irish; in fact, he says, many of Beckett’s narrators temporarily use “Stage Irish” names in order to discard them.¹⁹ If Beckett’s narrators continually generate and discard stage-Irish names, Kiberd suggests, they do so because the colonial stereotype proves stubbornly difficult to eradicate.

Understood in this light, Beckett repeatedly writes and erases stage-Irish designations as part of a trial-and-error effort to represent an authentic self whose Irishness is circumstantial. In Kiberd’s argument, the stereotype of the stage-Irishman replaces or overwrites the authentic selves of Irish individuals, at least for the purposes of representing the self socially. In order for the authentic self to achieve accurate social representation, the stage-Irish masks must therefore be erased to clear the way for more accurate, authentic forms of Irish self-representation. After erasing externally-imposed conceptions of Irishness, the individual can reinvent Irishness as part of a personal project

¹⁹ “The War Against the Past,” 174.

of self-representation. Cultural and political forms of identity give way to individual and personal forms. The argument assumes that identity is a construction of language, and in particular of the language of self-representation. Language is an instrument, and can be wielded by the individual or by external, institutional agents in order to construct or maintain identities. Identities, in turn, mediate the interactions of individuals in realms that might be called social, cultural, national, or political.

However, Beckett's narrators in the trilogy are usually asocial, or at least socially dysfunctional. Additionally, each novel in the trilogy seems to represent less and less of any external, social sphere. The monologue in *The Unnameable* takes place almost entirely outside any such social realm. There is very little left for language to mediate by the end of the trilogy if mediation is primarily understood as a negotiation between an authentic self and a constructed society. The narrators of two earlier novels in the trilogy, *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, are more involved with social realms by comparison. *Molloy*'s two narrators are the itinerant Molloy and the detective Moran, respectively, and both are part of families and other social networks. Molloy spends his portion of the novel *Molloy* searching for his mother's house, while Moran, who has a son accompanying him, spends his portion of the novel seeking Molloy. While the relationships portrayed either break down or go unfulfilled in the novel – Molloy never finds his mother, Moran never finds Molloy, and Moran and his son do not seem to connect emotionally – the frustrated desires of the characters are in many respects social desires.

The narrator of *Malone Dies* seems to be a more solitary figure, but in his narrative he is compelled to invent fictional friends and acquaintances for the purposes of

reflection. Malone also worries over his possessions, especially those that allow him to write: at one point, he drops the pencil with which he is writing and succumbs to fear and isolation until he finds it again. While his range of interactions with an external world are spare in comparison to those of the characters in *Molloy*, Malone still exists alongside an external reality with certain seemingly objective features. The narrator of *The Unnameable*, however, seems to have neither social nor property relations to anyone or anything; he simply produces language, apparently compulsively, without reference to a specific physical medium for his linguistic production. The external world is, at best, something that can be theorized in relation to the narrator's use of language, a communicative medium and his use of the Irish and French names of the protagonists of Beckett's other prose fiction. Only the most distant echoes of social and political relationships can be detected in *The Unnameable*. Beckett's narrators represent the social world as an increasingly unreal, fictional world in each successive novel of the trilogy, from *Molloy* to *The Unnameable*.

The *Unnameable* and the Ghosts of Origin

In *The Unnameable*, the unsustainability of self-reflexive narrative is evident from the opening lines of the novel: "I, say I. Unbelieving" (291). In this final novel of the trilogy, narrative is little more than a series of "[q]uestions, hypotheses, call them that," an increasingly aimless effort to "[k]eep going, going on, call that going, call that on" (291). While *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* were narrated by characters seeking answers to increasingly abstract questions, the narrator of *The Unnameable* dismisses the very possibility of answers. The title of the novel negates the possibility of naming; the

opening lines seem to negate the possibility of meaningful answers. Neither names nor things figure in *The Unnameable*. Instead, the questions and hypotheses that Molloy and Moran offer about observed persons and objects become empty questions about entirely abstract, unobserved phenomena. Similarly, *The Unnameable* undermines Malone's efforts to imagine greater possibilities for himself through the act of producing fictional narratives by presenting them as unbelievable and inapplicable. The starting point of the third novel seems to be Malone's loss of place and words.

The Unnameable instead presents increasingly bleak parodies of the previous narrators' strategies in the trilogy. As in *Malone Dies*, the protagonists of earlier Beckett novels are apparently the creations of the newest narrating voice, and these earlier protagonists are treated as variations of a stock character type: "[T]here will not be much on the subject of Malone, from whom there is nothing further to be hoped [...] Perhaps it is Molloy, wearing Malone's hat" (292-3). But as the phrase "nothing further to be hoped" might indicate, in *The Unnameable* these characters are never seriously treated as possible means of self-reflection or critique. Instead, *The Unnameable*'s narrator invents a new character, Mahood, and rapidly proceeds from the claim that "I am Mahood" (311) to dismissing Mahood as a "vice-exister" and then a "caricature" (315). In the novel, the creation of characters is always the creation of a false image that replaces the real narrator. As the narrator argues, "[t]hat's one of Mahood's tricks, to produce ostensibly independent testimony in support of my historical existence" (319). The creation of characters for reflective purposes invariably overwrites the creating self.

The problem is that narration and language seem to banish the authentic self, to replace it with an endless series of “vice-existers” ranging from the unbelievable “I” of the first lines to the more complex, but still false images of Mahood, Malone, Molloy and the others in the long list of stage-Irishmen that Kiberd notes.²⁰ The problem is the same as in the earlier novels of the trilogy: the tools for self-representation and self-reflection are fatally compromised by external pressures. Language and figuration are always inflected by larger social structures – nationality, ethnicity, and other institutional affiliations. The problem in the last novel of the trilogy is that its narrator is aware of the problem, indeed, cripplingly aware. The unnameable narrator declares that “It is of me now that I have to speak, even if I have to do it with their language [...] I have no language but theirs, perhaps I’ll say it even with their language” (325). But all such efforts simply “amount in the end to speaking yet again in the way they intend me to speak, that is to say about them, even with execration and disbelief” (326). Later, the narrator acknowledges that he is “[a] parrot, that’s what they’re up against, a parrot” (335).

In response to the pressures that introduce stereotypes Mahood into his imagination, the narrator attempts to strip away the externally-determined features that make Mahood a mere caricature. The result is “Worm” a “solitary” being who is not even a mammal, let alone a recognizably human figure. Worm is intended to be “the anti-

²⁰ I would like to suggest provisionally that the term “vice-exister” may refer to British imperial domination, resembling the concept of a “viceroy” who stands in for the person of the sovereign much as the “vice-existers” in Beckett’s novel stand in for an author whose power is ostensibly absolute in relation to his creations.

Mahood" (346), but the narrator cannot escape Mahood without in some sense ceasing to be and ceasing to speak: "I'm like Worm, without voice or reason, I'm Worm, no, if I were like Worm I wouldn't know it, I wouldn't say anything, I'd be Worm" (347). To speak is to join "the breed and creed" of Mahood, Malone, and the rest (337). Only by parodying clichéd Irishness with Mahoods and Malones does the narrator hope to escape these two unpalatable choices. The narrator argues that "they're wrong" in assuming "it is still they who say that when I have failed to be Worm I'll be Mahood" (347).

Unfortunately, this stratagem is at best uncertain and at worst practically indistinguishable from failure. The novel demonstrates the possibility of such failure when the Irish clichés that dominated previous novels are replaced by equally clichéd French: Beckett's narrator realizes he might easily "forget I am no longer Worm, but [become] a kind of tenth-rate Toussaint L'Overture" (349-50). Whether the narrator parrots or satirizes the identities and figures imposed by socially-determined languages, that language invariably represents those imposed identities and figures. The failure of language then becomes a sort of failure of emigration. The cosmopolitan strategy of self-determination seems practically impossible because of the problem of language in *The Unnameable*, and the narrator's realization of this apparent impossibility provokes an expression of utter horror:

The island, I'm on the island, I've never left the island, God help me. I was under the impression I spent my life in spirals around the earth. Wrong, its on the island I wind my endless ways. The island, that's all the earth I know. I don't know it either, never having had the stomach to look at it. When I come to the coast I turn back inland. (326-7)

The inward turn at the coast is a movement seen in the other novels of the trilogy. It occurs in *Molloy* as a Molloy's physically turning back at the coast in his wanderings, and in *Malone Dies* as Malone's inability to continue his narrative when his characters sail away from Ireland. Here, the unnameable narrator himself seems incapable of determining whether or not he has left the island; this is essentially the same as never having left in reality.

Unfortunately for the narrator, the patently false nature of stage-Irish figures like Mahood and Malone makes them unbelievable identities. As the opening lines of *The Unnameable* suggest, the narrator's dilemma is in being trapped between two options for speaking, writing, and representing the self: one unbelievable, the other unrepresentable. The unbelievable "I" and the undefinable "aporia" of the first page of *The Unnameable* are figured in these later passages as the ridiculous ethno-nationalist caricature of the stage-Irishman on the one hand, and the wordless and inhuman Worm on the other. Emigration and the adoption of a new language also do not solve the problem. Invariably, "they will devise another means [...] of getting me to admit, or pretend to admit, that I am he whose name they call me by, and no other" (351). The suspension between equally undesirable alternatives also has a historical dimension, as suggested by the narrator's question, "Mahood I couldn't die, Worm will I ever get born" (352). In the meantime, the alternative seems to be to continue to try, as the novel's famous final line, "I'll go on," suggests (414).

When *The Unnameable*'s narrator expresses a wish "to speak of me and me alone," he seems to demand the erasure of any social or external world (304). However,

the result of that erasure would be “to stop speaking” entirely. Employing language creates or implies sociality, because language represents and communicates to someone. Admittedly, language can also work as a medium of self-reflection, which seems to be its usefulness for the narrator of *The Unnameable*, but Beckett is presenting these self-reflexive monologues as novels, whose nature as a medium is to represent to others. Moreover, as Benedict Anderson has argued, the development of standardized print languages makes up one of the more powerful means by which ethnic and political communities express unity and belonging in modernity.²¹ A common language and common print media can construct the shared features of a people. One’s native language and one’s ethnicity and culture are inextricably bound together. But Beckett’s trilogy is written in French, not Beckett’s original language, English. David Lloyd argues that Beckett’s later works employ a language that “is adoptive, not natural, and as such implies a provocative refusal of the naturalization and nationalization of language as the ground of a proper subjectivity.”²² However, any language is part of some national, ethnic, or cultural context; a linguistic community is practically limited to speakers of the given language. Terence Brown argues that Beckett is exploring the limits of expression in general in his fiction, and that this project requires “paring language down, relieving it

²¹ While Anderson argues that the link between shared national imagination and shared language is the result of “largely unselfconscious processes resulting from the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology, and human linguistic diversity,” he goes on to remark that “as with so much else in the history of nationalism, once ‘there’ they [national “languages-of-power”] could become formal models to be imitated and, where expedient, consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit.” *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 45.

²² *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 42.

of the weight of centuries of familiar English usage that gave the illusion of expression as knowledgeable achievement.”²³ For this reason, Brown suggests with other critics that Beckett chooses French in order to write, as Beckett himself put it in one interview, “without style.”²⁴

The effort, as indicated by the complex tale of *Molloy*'s A, B, and C across languages and *Murphy*'s troubled publication history, is not entirely successful: nearly every critic of the trilogy notes that Beckett's distinctive humor, references to Irish contexts, and, most visibly references to Beckett's previous works continue to appear even in the most pared-down of the novels. While Beckett's adoption of another language suggests a range of choice, those choices are still between different linguistic communities. The choice of a language is still a choice to belong, but it does not appear that one can ever choose silence. Malone stops speaking or writing, but only because he drops his pencil or because he implicitly dies. The narrator of *The Unnameable* desires “to stop speaking,” but in the famous last lines of the novel admits that he “will go on” despite this desire. Moreover, Beckett himself translated the three novels of the trilogy into English, though he worked alongside Patrick Bowles in translating *Molloy*; that is, Beckett translated the trilogy into his original language. It is as if he cannot even stop speaking a particular language for good; though he writes the trilogy in an adopted language, Beckett re-adopts his original language in translating them. In so doing some of

²³ “Two Post-Modern Novelists: Beckett and O'Brien,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. John Wilson Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 211.

²⁴ Interview in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 357.

the “illusion of expression” sees to return. Brown notes that “in French the Irish names in the Trilogy are curiously defamiliarising, while in the English version they seem merely generic in a landscape that eschews geographic specificity,” so that the Trilogy as whole seems to exist “as if between two languages [...] in the condition of translation as it were.”²⁵ If some terms slip in and out of visibility as a result, like B and C, the suggestion is that neither choice allows full self-expression or complete belonging.

Conclusion

So while Beckett seems to distance himself from Irish national belonging, his work seems to retain echoes of Irish identity. If participation in national culture and tradition masks an authentic self, it also conditions the various languages which can represent the authentic self. Indeed, at some points Beckett appears to reconstruct or return to cultural and national forms – external points of reference – from which his narrators have seemingly disinvested themselves. The key is that Beckett reconstructs national identity from these various, often generic references. In a sense, he is reinventing Irish identity in a vaguer, more accommodating form for his individual purposes. The choice of language, for example, need not be a choice to join one or another cultural community bound by that language; the Irish context makes this especially clear. Most of the works of Irish modernism were written in English, albeit often in an Irish idiomatic variant called Hiberno-English. But in any case, English is as much a vernacular language in independent Ireland as Gaelic, and is arguably more so as a matter of practice.

²⁵ “Two Post-Modern Novelists,” 211.

Second, the vernacular status of Irish English may suggest that Beckett's choice of languages reflects the expansion of a sort of plurality that had always been present in even vernacular notions of "Irishness." The de facto predominance of English in everyday Irish life may reflect the tragedy of earlier British imperialism, in which Gaelic was suppressed and the translation of place-names and other cultural touchstones forced upon Ireland. However, for an Irish writer in the post-independence period, especially one with a middle-class Anglo-Irish background like Beckett, English would not necessarily be a linguistic choice suggestive of cosmopolitan leanings.

As Adrienne Janus puts it, for many of the Irish of Beckett's generation Gaelic was "a 'foreign' national language" and English "an 'alien' mother tongue."²⁶ The confused relationship between ostensibly "foreign" English and ostensibly "native" Gaelic suggests in its way Molloy's confusion of the identities of A and C, the foreign traveler and the native of Ballyba, and motivates the other reversions and retractions in the trilogy. It also helps explain Beckett's switch to French, which becomes a more obviously cosmopolitan gesture. The translation of these three novels into English, though, reenacts the original problem, as does the copious reference to Ireland in the trilogy. Beckett seems to replicate the confusion of foreign and local, cosmopolitan and vernacular, that characterizes the dilemma of independent Irish life, but he does so on a grander scale that may reveal that the problem is less an Irish dilemma than a distinctly modernist one. While foreign and native cultures were never so distinct as they seemed –

²⁶ "From 'Ha he hi ho hu. Mummum' to 'Haw! Hell! Haw!': Listening to Laughter in Joyce and Beckett" in *Journal of Modern Literature* 32: 3 (Spring, 2009), 158.

especially in former colonial lands like Ireland – Beckett’s trilogy extends this condition to all of the languages and locales of European modernity.

By doing this Beckett explores the way in which various forms of national belonging condition and shape self-expression, while at the same time those forms of national belonging conceal their own plural and foreign sources. His writing helps to demonstrate that the question of national belonging always contained a latent paradox. Nationality in Beckett’s writing is already a kind of fiction in which diverse origins are imagined as common ones. Nationalist discourses deliberately mistake hybrid and plural cultural features for longstanding national traditions, the better to present them as unified and natural parts of a specific ethno-national heritage. By paring away specificity and indulging in translation, Beckett reveals that nationality has always been less specific and more transcultural than its ideological and institutional expressions would indicate. At the same time, though, this revelation seems to indicate that post-national or non-nationalist forms of belonging – including cosmopolitanism – are not so different from nationality after all. The border-crossings and hybridizations of a cosmopolitan culture are in some sense reenacting in the open what the formation of national identities enacted in secret: the combination and use of diverse cultural and traditional materials into a relatively coherent form of self-expression. Beckett’s continual return to the specific elements of his background, like the Irish names that recur in the trilogy, suggest that the materials of cosmopolitan self-expression also tend to bear the traces of nationality. As Brown puts it, much of Beckett’s prose work seems to invoke “a phantom Dublin [...] which haunts the

text like the ghost of a lost poetics of place.”²⁷ The effect of these ghosts and echoes is of course intensified by the trilogy’s translation into English, but by including them Beckett seems to invite the reader to reconstruct precisely what has allegedly been pared away in the novels. The modernist methods of bricolage and allusion are still present in Beckett’s work, along with the more obvious use of self-reflexive prose, but they are present in a fashion that allows the reader to assemble the disparate traces and echoes of more specific contexts into a picture of Beckett or perhaps of some attenuated Irishness.

However, Beckett’s émigré status and his use of a foreign language have expanded the tools and methods of the writers covered in this study. While Yeats and Bowen write in English for Anglophone audiences, and primarily Irish Anglophone audiences at that, Beckett’s writing and publication practices open up a larger sphere of circulation, one in which questions seemingly specific to an Irish national context point towards larger questions about modernism as a movement. If, as Terence Brown suggests, Beckett’s French novels allow the reader to reconstruct a “phantom Dublin” and to consider its features and difficulties in a foreign idiom, then perhaps the problematic conflicts between vernacular and cosmopolitan strategies of identification and belonging associated with the literary models of Anglo-Irishness considered so far might also exist in an entirely literary Dublin. The process of reconstructing Ireland from the ghostly traces that Beckett leaves in his novels becomes an invitation to employ lived vernacular experience as the contents of a more cosmopolitan form of identity. In this

²⁷ “Two Post-Modern Novelists,” 215.

way, Beckett critiques the “natural” and essential status of nationality, but does not abandon his own national origin as a basis for self-expression and literary representation.

“[T]he Great Gulf That Separates Literature and Life:” Raymond Queneau’s Irish Modernist Pulp Fiction

In 1947, the novel *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* (*We Always Treat Women Too Well*) was published in France by Editions du Scorpion under the name “Sally Mara.” A violent farce set during the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, the novel is purportedly a translation from Mara’s Gaelic original manuscript by a French tutor, one Michael Presle. The story concerns a hapless group of Irish rebels who take over a branch post office in Dublin – explicitly not the General Post Office where Patrick Pearse and other central figures in the Rising made their stand against the British – who encounter a seemingly virginal young Englishwoman, Gertie Girdle hiding in the women’s lavatory. After the rebels tell Gertie that the King of England, whom she reveres deeply, is “a stupid cunt,” she sets about seducing each of them in turn (69).¹ All the while, a British gunship led by Gertie’s fiancé, Major Cartwright, slowly heads towards and gradually picks off the Irish rebels. Gertie is freed, resumes the persona of a chaste and “proper” young Englishwoman, and the two surviving rebels are summarily executed by Cartwright’s men. As the summary indicates, explicit violence and sex scenes predominate in the novel, whose overall character is sensationalist.

It is unlikely that many readers of a popular thriller, as the novel initially appears to be, would have assigned much importance to the use of names culled from the minor supporting characters in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, nor that they would have spent much

¹ Raymond Queneau (as Sally Mara), *We Always Treat Women Too Well*, trans. Barbara Wright (New York City: New York Review Books, 1983). I will also cite, where appropriate, Queneau’s French text from *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* as printed in *Les Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 191-344.

time reflecting on the unlikelihood of a hardboiled adventure story being written by an Irishwoman in Gaelic. In 1950, a republished edition revealed that “Sally Mara” and “Michael Presle” were both the inventions of French poet, critic, and novelist Raymond Queneau. This understandably brought greater attention to the novel, particularly since Queneau had reused both pseudonyms to produce another work, *Journal intime de Sally Mara* (*Sally Mara’s Intimate Journal*). The *Journal*, supposedly a French-language diary that Sally keeps while Presle tutors her in Ireland, was collected alongside *OETTBALF* in the 1950 edition.² Still, Queneau’s involvement did not greatly change the critical fortunes of either novel for some years; the Mara books have usually been treated as anomalous and minor works among Queneau’s other writings.

Nonetheless, *OETTBALF* possesses a number of features that make it an interesting case study in the transnational reception of the novel. The apparent features of the text suggest that Queneau is engaging, on the one hand, high modernist literature, and, on the other, popular fiction, his method of doing so is quite curious. Hardboiled detective novels in a consciously American style were quite popular in France from the early 20th century onwards, but “[i]n France [...] the models for the new *roman noir* are not Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, but the ‘fake Americans’ Peter Cheyney and James Hadley Chase.”³ Hadley Chase and Cheyney were successful English pulp

² The abbreviation is Queneau’s own, and has been adopted by French critics; this chapter follows in this critical convention. See Jean-Yves Pouilloux’s notes in *Raymond Queneau/Oeuvres Complètes III*; eds. Henri Godard, Jean-Phillippe Coen, Daniel Delbreil, Paul Gayot, Anne Marie Jaton, Emmanuël Souchier, and Jean-Yves Pouilloux (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiades, 2006); 1732.

³ Franz Blaha, “Detective/Mystery/Spy Fiction” in *Handbook of French Popular Culture*, ed. Pierre L. Horn, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 44.

authors whose works were usually set in America, and they thoroughly imitate what they perceive as a specifically American style and genre. Queneau's novel apes the style and content of these "fake American" hardboiled novels but transplants the setting and references to a Joycean, high modernist Ireland. The "high" culture of the modernist novel collides with the "low" culture of the pulps to comic effect.

OETTBALF's multiple references to *Ulysses* also call to mind the way that Joyce's novel frequently juxtaposes "high" literary culture with "low" popular culture. Joyce's novel employs the structure of the Homeric epic, but also frequently depicts the influence of popular mass publications on the characters who inhabit Joyce's fictionalized Dublin, such as Leopold Bloom's bathroom copy of the popular magazine *Titbits* and the fashion magazines that shape Gertie McDowell's perceptions of the world. Queneau's protagonist in *OETTBALF* shares her forename with Gertie, and his pseudonymous author-character Sally Mara is another young Irish woman. "Sally's" novel would seem to reflect the popular fiction a "real" Sally Mara might well have read. *OETTBALF* is a novel in conversation with a number of different textual sources from the interwar period most associated with modernism, and as such constitutes a critical contribution to the discourses surrounding modernism. However, Queneau writes from a critical distance that allows him to reevaluate and ironize the relationships between high and low culture.

Authenticity, Nationality, and Genre

By exploring these features of *On est toujours top bon avec les femmes*, as well as other writings that demonstrate Queneau's broader literary and linguistic concerns, I

argue that the novel is representative of a final stage of the modernist effort to comprehend both vernacular and cosmopolitan models of self-conception and belonging. Queneau's sources for the novel are multinational, but the novel itself parodies a kind of national authenticity claimed by popular genre fiction. Queneau implies that this model of authenticity is little more than a trick of genre conventions mistaken for marks of cultural origin. The novel's Ireland and its invented Irish author are drawn entirely from literary rather than historical or personal sources. Additionally, *OETTBALF*'s plot and style parody American and pseudo-American genre fiction, specifically the hardboiled detective story and the *roman noir*. *OETTBALF* parodies an imagined reader's assumptions that Easter Rising narratives are particularly Irish and that hardboiled detective stories are specifically American, and at least in the latter case, that assumption is shared by the English writers Queneau is parodying. By placing these assumptions in direct conflict with one another, Queneau highlights their absurdity; the resulting novel is comically vulgar given its setting and subject matter.

While Queneau treats the idea of distinctly national culture as a generic convention in the novel, he remains aware that popularly accepted notions about nationality still condition popular discourse and literary reception. While the authentic "nationality" of genre fiction may be obviously constructed and artificial, the popular success of "fake American" novels suggests that there is a considerable public appetite for this superficial and generic model of nationality. Queneau's novel takes advantage of this widespread acceptance to present a satirical examination of nationality, genre, and language. In the process, Queneau also critically examines the idea of a distinctly Irish

modernism, and examines the interwoven vernacular and cosmopolitan elements of modernist texts. He does so by referring to Ireland entirely by way of Irish modernism. As with the “fake American” novels typical of the *roman noir* genre, where settings and vernacular language from a particular literary genre are imagined as the nature or authenticity of America as a nation, Queneau’s “fake Irish” novel treats the settings and literary referents of Irish modernist novels as if they established the “authentic” Irish origins of Sally Mara’s novel. The Ireland depicted in *OETTBALF* is entirely assembled from previous literary efforts at representing Ireland as a distinct nation or as an origin point for cosmopolitan individuals. The Irish republican characters in Queneau’s novel embody these contradictory perceptions of Irish modernism: they are named for characters from the works of Joyce, often considered the quintessentially cosmopolitan Irish writer, but the characters’ politics and dialogue are stereotypically provincial and nationalist.

The central joke of Queneau’s novel is that the constructed, literary Ireland might seem more “authentic” to an outside observer than the real, daily life of Ireland itself. Queneau implicitly argues that the supposed cosmopolitanism of the world literary market conceals and even depends on the perpetuation of narratives of national authenticity, narratives that become absurd when examined more closely and compared to reality. This lesson also applies to French narratives of national authenticity, and Queneau uses the novel to comment on the place of France’s literature and language within global and national literary culture. By engineering the collision of Irish modernist fiction and “fake American” genre fiction in *OETTBALF*, Queneau satirically examines

the relationships between language, national belonging, and cosmopolitanism. The novel's veiled commentary on French literary politics are an example of Queneau's lifelong concern with what he saw as the problematic rigidity of the French literary tradition. Queneau often wrote with the aim of reforming French written language, which he felt had ceased to represent the spoken language of everyday life in France. Instead of the staid formalisms of literary French, Queneau argued for a literary language he called "neo-Française," which employed phonetic spelling, contractions, and foreign loanwords to reflect the vibrant and sometimes polyglot argot of Paris.

Queneau's neo-Française also constituted a challenge to the Académie Française's effective control of national and individual self-representation in French letters. At his most radical, Queneau sometimes claimed that the formal written French prescribed by the Académie was effectively a foreign language in twentieth-century France. In this respect, Queneau fits with Anglophone modernists who similarly employ popular vernacular and dialect forms of established languages to subvert received notions of linguistic and literary practice. Michael North has argued that modernist writers employed dialect and polyglot forms of English in order to question the claims made by institutionally established language. As North explains, such institutionally mandated forms of "proper" English claimed to be "natural" and "authentic;" by employing informal, minority, and polyglot versions of these standardized dialects, modernist writers challenged not only the moribund state of written literature, but also the implicit claims to authenticity made by existing cultural institutions.

North's discussion of a Franco-Swiss writer, the "amateur ethnographer" and poet Blaise Cendrars, is especially relevant here as an example of a writer who challenged Francophone orthodoxy in literature, albeit from outside France itself. Notably, North states that Cendrars' "nearest counterpart in English is perhaps James Joyce," and it is Joyce to whom Queneau turns for literary inspiration in *OETTBALF*.⁴ Queneau's neo-Française is a similar effort at demonstrating that the formal French of the Académie is blatantly artificial, not natural or authentic, and he thereby challenges the Académie's efforts to define French culture by constraining its modes of expression. Like many of the modernist writers cited by North, Queneau does not reject the idea of an authentic, natural language. Rather, he locates the authentic language of French self-expression with a vernacular dialect centered on Parisian idiom in which foreign loanwords, famously anathema to the Académie, could sit alongside phoneticized and compressed renditions of spoken French. For Queneau, Paris was a cosmopolis, but in its cosmopolitanism, it could also center a kind of French authenticity suited to the realities of twentieth-century, postwar life.

In *OETTBALF*, Queneau employs parody and pastiche to demonstrate the way the literary text employs vernacular language to shape and construct the national imaginary by constructing a text in which imitative genre forms confound supposedly "authentic" and distinct national literary and historical traditions. Queneau employs the style of the "American" hardboiled thriller novel to narrate one of the central events of recent Irish

⁴ *Dialect of Modernism*, 30-2.

history, and further complicates matters by evoking Irish modernist writing. The resulting *mélange* of literary genres constitutes an argument that formalized nationality is an artificial construct rather than a natural development. However, the realization that nationality is little more than a mode of representation does not abolish it, since nationality remains a dominant mode of self-representation. Instead, by making it apparent that both orthodox and heterodox forms of national belonging and literary language are purely artificial, Queneau reveals that these forms of belonging may be reformulated as ironic and subversive forms that permit a range of individual or heterodox forms of self-expression. Queneau's neo-Française is one such heterodox mode of representing national belonging; the parodic novel is another. In *OETTBALF*, Queneau suggests that the way to negotiate the distance between vernacular difference and cosmopolitan unity is to treat vernacular difference as an ironic or heterodox performance of nationality.

The *Roman Noir* and the Genesis of Sally Mara

By the late 1940s, Queneau was an established part of the French literary establishment with a long history of involvement in various literary circles, most prominently his association with Andre Breton's Surrealist movement in the 1920s. However, Queneau frequently rebelled against the orthodoxies he felt were imposed by such literary coteries: he broke with the Surrealists in the early 1930s, as Breton grew more controlling of his circle and issued increasingly restrictive revisions of his early Surrealist Manifesto. However, Queneau's efforts to achieve literary independence still partly relied on forms of institutional support, and Queneau made good use throughout

his career of the influence and safety afforded by his employment at the French publisher Gallimard. From his beginnings as an English manuscript reader, he rose to become the press's general secretary in 1941. As a foreign manuscript reader, Queneau was perfectly situated to examine French language and literature in comparative and transnational contexts.

Additionally, Gallimard afforded Queneau an opportunity to establish himself as a serious writer, and in 1947 he published his experimental work *Exercices de Style* with his employer's press to considerable critical acclaim. *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* appeared in the same year from a different publisher, published as the French edition of a supposed Gaelic-language potboiler written by a young Irishwoman named Sally Mara and translated by one Michel Presle. Both works reveal Queneau's characteristic love of self-imposed literary constraints: *Exercices de Style* rewrites a basic plot in a wide range of literary forms, while *OETTBALF*'s retelling of an Irish modernist plot in the style of a *roman noir* potboiler reflects Queneau's fascination with the contours and limits of "high" and "low" generic forms. In both novels, Queneau deliberately imposes blatantly artificial constraints on himself in order to unveil and challenge the tacit constraints placed on literature by cultural institutions like the Académie Française and the literary-critical establishment. In effect, Queneau employs established styles, genres, and literary forms in order to subvert the traditions and establishments those styles, genres, and forms typically express. At the same time, Queneau demonstrates his mastery of the formulae and the traditions of "high,"

established literature by adhering to rigorous formalism and including copious intertextual references.

The particular intertextual references Queneau employs in the construction of *OETTBALF* can be traced to two works by other writers: the French novelist Boris Vian's pseudonymous hardboiled novel, *J'ai cracher sur vos tombes*, and the English writer and critic George Orwell's essay, "Raffles and Miss Blandish." The Vian connection would have been the most readily apparent to a French reader since Vian's novel had been both a public sensation and a literary scandal, with somewhat calculated effects on Vian's part. Vian published *J'ai cracher sur vos tombes* in 1946 under the name Vernon Sullivan, working with the director of Éditions du Scorpion, Jean D'Halluin, to present the novel to the public as a translation of an American work of crime fiction. Upon its release, *J'ai cracher sur vos tombes* was censored in France for graphic sexual and violent content, creating a controversy that drew public attention and considerable sales. When Vian revealed the hoax, he further fueled the novel's popularity by attaching it to the ensuing literary scandal. The novel's success inspired Queneau, a friend of Vian's, to collaborate with D'Halluin in the similar hoax that generated *OETTBALF*. The fact that Vian had written so profitable a book in just fifteen days was doubtless a powerful inducement to Queneau.⁵ However, Queneau was not content to simply repeat Vian's success, and *OETTBALF*'s composition reflects this in several ways. Queneau's novel is more obviously a parody than Vian's, as the incongruities of its Irish setting and the inverted

⁵ Pouilloux, 1724-5.

gender politics mark it clearly as a hoax from the start. Unlike Vian, Queneau did not treat the novel as a short-term project: his journals indicate that he worked on the manuscript on and off from late April 1947 into May of that year, far longer than the two weeks in which Vian had written his novel, and the relatively quick issue of subsequent works by “Sally Mara” indicate that the project was more than a passing fancy for Queneau.⁶

In fact, Queneau seems to have intended more for his novel than simple parody from the start. While both Vian and Queneau imitate the style and vulgarity of the popular thriller novels then popular with the French reading public, a number of paratextual differences distinguish Queneau’s novel from Vian’s. Vian presented himself as “Vernon Sullivan’s” translator, and with D’Halluin he constructed a fictitious backstory in which “Sullivan’s” novel was banned in America for its sordid content. Queneau, in contrast, presents Sally’s work as the discovery of a Frenchman abroad, with Michel Presle discovering her and her novel while working as a French tutor in Ireland. *OETTBALF* is therefore more distant from the American genre of hardboiled thrillers than Vian’s novel, and its paratextual apparatus is more elaborate, employing not only a false author but also a false translator. Queneau also abandons the American setting and claimed authorship of Vian’s novel. His version of the cheap thriller is ostensibly Irish in origin, and its plot and characters refer explicitly to some of the best-known works of Irish modernist fiction; since that fiction is stereotypically avant-garde, the contrast

⁶ Raymond Queneau, *Journaux 1914-1965*, ed. Anne Isabelle Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), *Journaux*, 614, 616.

between his novel's tawdry subject matter and the high cultural context of its literary allusions generates much of the book's humor. Rather than imitating a "low" literary form to parody its popular success, Queneau makes his novel into a compound of high and low literary sources, suggesting that he is interested in multiple models of literary reception.

Queneau does, however, remain close to Vian's project in patterning his novel after a hardboiled thriller that had recently been popular in France. In Queneau's case, the novel in question is James Hadley Chase's wildly successful 1939 thriller *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. Brian Mann cites Queneau's diaries, which show that he read Chase's novel in 1947, the same year he began work on *OETTBALF*.⁷ Queneau's interest in the hardboiled genre, like Vian's, was in part sparked by the genre's contemporary success with the public. A translation of Chase's novel was published in France in 1946 and quickly became a bestseller there, and an English film of the novel was in production while Queneau was writing *OETTBALF*. However, Queneau was not interested in the novel's success with the French public so much as with its status as a transnational literary source, and with the specific cultural phenomenon of foreign imitations of American hardboiled novels. Queneau's personal records of his readings show that he made a point of reading the original English edition of Chase's novel rather than the French translation, and that he was reading English editions of two other hardboiled genre thrillers by Chase and one by Peter Cheney in the summer and early autumn of

⁷ "Soldiers, Stalkers, & Scribes: Invading and Liberating Public Spaces in the Pulp Fiction of Raymond Queneau," *Dalhousie French Studies* 67 (2004), 101.

1945.⁸ In the same period, he does not record reading work by American writers who influenced Chase and Cheyney, namely Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler; his focus was clearly on “fake American” English crime fiction rather than the American novelists like Chase were imitating.

Fascism, Ideology, and Literary Sadism

Queneau also seems to have chosen Chase’s novel because he had already encountered it indirectly through English criticism of the original edition of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. Among the many attacks on the novel by English critics, Queneau’s attention was drawn particularly by George Orwell’s 1944 essay “Raffles and Miss Blandish.”⁹ The reasons for Queneau’s fascination with the Orwell essay are multiple: as an example of an established, respected writer critiquing popular genre fiction, the essay seems to draw Queneau’s attention because of his ongoing interest in the division of literature into “high” and “low” categories; but Queneau was also drawn to respond to Orwell’s argument against the supposed fascist ideological tendencies of Chase’s novel. It is worth examining Orwell’s essay and Queneau’s direct responses to it in order to better understand the background of *OETTBALF*’s composition and intertextual reference.

“Raffles and Miss Blandish” compares Chase’s novel unfavorably to the late 19th century crime fiction of E.W. Hornung, the writer of the *Raffles* series of novels

⁸ Queneau, *Journaux* 639-41.

⁹ Orwell’s essay first appeared in the magazine *Horizon* in October, 1944, and was reprinted the next month in the magazine *Politics* with the added subtitle “The Ethics of the Detective Story.” . The version cited here is “Raffles and Miss Blandish,” in *Dickens, Dali & Others* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1946), 214.

portraying the exploits of a gentleman thief. Hornung's thief "has no real moral code, no religion, certainly no social consciousness. All he has is a set of reflexes – the nervous system, as it were, of a gentleman" (221). The criminals and even the police in Chase's novel are not similarly bound by social convention, where "there are no gentlemen and no taboos." Instead, Chase portrays a world of wanton sadism and violence. "Raffles and Miss Blandish" argues that Chase's novel has abandoned the taboos that are assumed to influence even criminal behavior in Hornung's novels, instead presenting a moral universe in which "being a criminal is only reprehensible in the sense that it does not pay" (214). Having built up this contrast, Orwell describes *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* as part of a general cultural movement that treats "the doctrine that might is right" as an accurate depiction of the world, and Orwell argues that there exists "[an] interconnection between sadism, masochism, success-worship, power-worship, nationalism, and totalitarianism" (217).

Orwell condemns *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* as a novel bearing "the same relationship to Fascism as, say, Trollope's novels have to nineteenth-century capitalism" and calls it "a day dream appropriate to a totalitarian age" in which the public follow the exploits of gangsters while intellectuals make apologies for totalitarian dictators like Stalin (220). While he acknowledges that Hornung's novels were "morally equivocal" in their late 19th century context, Orwell argues that this moral equivocation remained bound by certain precepts regarding civility and public virtue. The success of Chase's novel suggests to Orwell that "snobbishness, like hypocrisy, is check upon behaviour whose value from a social point of view has been underrated" (221). For Orwell, the

reflexive taboos of Hornung's era have been eroded in favor of a "modern political scene" in which strength rather than virtue assigns value to political and personal action. Orwell is particularly disturbed that the book's greatest popularity in England was during the Blitz years of 1939 and 1940; in the midst of a direct struggle with fascist forces, the English public seemed to Orwell to be entertained by fiction reflective of their enemies' brutal political imagination.

Queneau responded to Orwell's essay in his newspaper column "Lectures Pour un Front" ("Readings for a Front"), which was originally published in the December 29, 1944 issue of the Free French periodical *Front National*.¹⁰ In his response, Queneau initially agrees with Orwell that "[t]he practices depicted in this novel [*No Orchids for Miss Blandish*] are clearly 'fascist' in nature (and strongly reminiscent of the events on the Rue Lauriston)", he also notes that these fictional portrayals "bring real pleasure to a democratic public."¹¹ Queneau's reference to the Rue Lauriston is particularly damning: 93 Rue Lauriston was the headquarters of the Parisian arm of the Gestapo. In comparing the plot of Chase's book to the actions of the Gestapo, Queneau emphasizes the connections between fascist brutality and literary sadism that Orwell makes, particularly, since the French Gestapo recruited from the ranks of violent gangsters turned

¹⁰ Despite the coincidence of name, *Front National* bears no connection to the similarly-named nationalist political organization founded decades later.

¹¹ In *Letters, Numbers, Forms: Essays 1928-70*, ed. and trans. Jordan Stump (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 106.

Collaborationists.¹² In many respects, Queneau seems to share Orwell's conviction that the exploitative gangster novel shares certain elements with the fascist imagination.

Queneau was himself quite concerned with the relationship between fascist ideology and literature. At the time of *OETTBALF*'s writing and publication, France was recovering from the Occupation. General Charles de Gaulle, who had assumed power during the transition away from Vichy's collaborationist government, stepped down in late 1946 in order to allow the constitution of the Fourth Republic, which would last until de Gaulle's political resurgence in 1958 and the constitution of the Fifth Republic. In this period, many in France were understandably concerned with identifying and punishing collaborationists of all stripes. Queneau was no exception, and acted as one of the founding members of the Commission d'épuration of the Comité National des Ecrivains (National Writers Committee), a body charged with purging collaborationist writers by means of trial recommendations and blacklists.¹³ Originally a wartime organization of anti-Nazi writers, the C.N.E. doubled as the editorial board of *Les Lettres Françaises*, an anti-Occupation journal that published anonymous work by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Paulhan.

Following the liberation, the C.N.E. issued a statement demanding that French writers refuse to publish in Collaborationist journals. As Herbert R. Lottman points out, the C.N.E. issued no similar statements regarding book publishers, not least because

¹² *Letters, Numbers, Forms*; 215n6.

¹³ A concise description of the C.N.E. and its subordinate bodies can be found in Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 62.

many of the larger firms published or employed many of the C.N.E.'s members.¹⁴ With its new power to blacklist authors, the Comité grew predictably political in short order; most of its members were affiliated, through the author Louis Aragon, with the French Communist Party, and several C.N.E. members who opposed the Party or bridled at its influence resigned. Most prominent among these was Paulhan, who publicly protested the C.N.E.'s work thereafter. Queneau avoided vocal partisanship himself; his most notable action as part of the Comité d'épuration was to defend his employer, Gaston Gallimard, against charges of publishing and otherwise assisting collaborationist authors. Queneau was elected Vice-Chairman of the C.N.E. in February of 1946, suggesting that he remained in Aragon's good graces.¹⁵ By 1947, though he had apparently broken with the partisans dominated the Comité. The best evidence of this break comes in the form of blistering attacks on Queneau's literary work in the Party-affiliated journal *Poésie*, as similar articles in *Poésie* attacking other C.N.E. members coincided with their clashes with Aragon and the French Communist Party and frequently preceded their resignations.¹⁶ Queneau's own resignation from the Comité was made public in the May 9, 1947 issue of another journal, *Les Lettres Françaises*. Queneau biographer Michel Lécureur suggests that Queneau's growing unease with the increasingly closed political

¹⁴ *The People's Anger: Justice and Revenge in Post-Liberation France* (London: Hutchison, 1986), 234-5.

¹⁵ Michel Lécureur, *Raymond Queneau: Biographie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres-Archimbaud, 2002), 265-7.

¹⁶ Nicholas Hewitt, "Poésie 47: From the Resistance to the Cold War," *Modern & Contemporary France* 6.2, 198.

world of the C.N.E. and pressure from Gaston Gallimard together prompted his decision to resign.¹⁷

In this context, Queneau's engagement with Orwell's argument provides larger clues to his ideas about the relationship between fascism and literature. Like Orwell, Queneau is troubled by the pleasure the average reader seems to draw from Chase's "fascist" literary fantasy, particularly when that reader is otherwise ostensibly a participant in a liberal, democratic society. Queneau attempts to address this problem by arguing that literature and life are often separate in the average person's mind. Queneau states that the events Chase portrays "[when] transported into the political sphere [...] only make us recoil in horror," but he complicates this point by arguing that the novel's popularity with British and French public reveals what he terms "the great gulf that separates literature from life."¹⁸ In contrast to Orwell's apparent view, Queneau argues that a reader's ideology does not follow as closely from the ideological tendencies of what he or she reads as Orwell seems to assume.

Queneau points out that literature may depict repellent ideologies without embracing them. In support of this point, he cites Albert Camus's play *Caligula*, which portrays the emperor as a tyrant whose sadism and brutality are quite similar to those of the characters in Chase's novel. As Queneau notes, Camus's participated in the French resistance movement during the war, and Camus's play depicts Caligula's brutality in order to critique it and its ideological underpinnings. *Caligula* is for Queneau an

¹⁷ *Raymond Queneau: Biographie*, 267.

¹⁸ As above, I cite a translation of the column found in in *Letters, Numbers, Forms*.

example of “a literature that poses and considers moral questions” while referring to Chase’s book as “‘escapist’ literature” (106). Queneau argues that Camus “trie[s] to show *something*, which is that the freedom of the tyrant (with his impossible dream: he wants the moon) is a flawed freedom because it is exercised against other men.” That is, Camus’s work represents a serious engagement with morality. By implication, then, Chase’s far less reflective work entertains its readers because it is a flight from any such engagement. Where Camus shows his audience the tyrant’s folly, Chase shows his readers nothing.

Queneau’s response to Orwell contests the notion that Chase’s *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* can be read as meaningfully ideological in any way, and that its effects on the popular conscience are less direct than Orwell suggests. This failure of the ideological tendency in Chase’s novel to coalesce into a developed, influential example of fascist ideology is, in simple terms, a result of what Queneau calls “[the] gulf that separates literature and life.” Literature does not directly represent reality, but instead reflects upon and mediates it. For this reason, a careful control of the medium of prose and an appropriately reflexive attitude towards literary art can produce works that engage morally and intellectually with even the worst real events. Just as Camus can write of “ridiculous poets” submitting to Caligula’s humiliation while in reality he aids the Free French, “so the Anglo-Saxon soldier fights the S.S. while entertaining himself with the exploits of sadistic gangsters” (107). In this way, Queneau rejects Orwell’s contention that a nation’s popular fiction directly represents the political conscience of its populace.

While Queneau's essay may rescue Chase from Orwell's argument that Chase's novel is a symptom of the advance of fascist ideology in democratic societies, it is nonetheless a damning critique insofar as Queneau accepts Orwell's claim that Chase's novel reproduces the unreflexive brutality that animates the fascist political imagination. The novel portrays what Queneau and Orwell agree are essentially fascist acts and events, but in Queneau's critique, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* presents these lurid incidents in a way that is disturbingly unreflexive given that the novel was published during a war characterized by real Fascist atrocities. He develops the point further in relation to fascism with a subsequent column published on November 3, 1945. In that piece, Queneau remarks that German fascism is identifiable as

a certain ideological and practical system that defines the regime's moral cast and philosophical character. And this system is not unconnected to various aspects of the intellectual life of the other Western peoples, most notably black humor and the gangster novel. (130)

With this in mind, Queneau's agreement that the novel is essentially fascist in its imagination suggests a deep critique of fascism as an ideology. If Hadley Chase's novel is a manifestation of the fascist imagination, then that imagination is brutal and unintelligent. If nationality is a fiction of self-representation, then the ultra-nationalism that animates fascism represents a failure to acknowledge the "gulf between life and literature" that Queneau describes. Fascism takes fiction for fact, and then attempts to enforce its mistake with terrifying violence. The English and French readers of Chase's novels, however, do not become fascists themselves because they retain their power to distinguish literature from life.

Interestingly, Queneau's argument assumes that nations have essential ideological characteristics, an assumption that may reflect the general tendency of wartime propaganda to suggest that fascism expressed some essentially German quality. In employing this assumption, though, Queneau complicates it by linking national character to genre by suggesting that "black humour and the gangster novel" are the ways in which the same or a similar tendency is expressed in liberal and democratic nations. This secondary claim about genre complicates the assumptions of nationalist essentialism by substituting the form of expression – in this case, literary genre – for an imagined essence or being of the nature which genres and texts merely express. Queneau's subsequent exploration of the hardboiled genre in *OETTBALF* can be seen as his effort to demonstrate the preeminence of generic literary form over supposed cultural essences.

Queneau's more specific interest in the hardboiled detective genre does not end with his response to Orwell's column, and he later extended his arguments about the particular ways that genre constraints shape the meaning and function of literary representation. He remarks more generally about English hardboiled novels in a later installment of "Readings for a Front" published on September 15, 1945. In the later column, Queneau notes that "[v]iolence and eroticism have replaced astute deductions" in American and American-imitative detective fiction with the result that "it takes not the slightest intellectual effort to follow [the plot]" (124). With the context of the earlier column, Queneau seems to be critiquing the entire genre as inherently unreflexive, flawed in both its aesthetic methods and its moral imagination. He goes on to caution his readers regarding the verisimilitude of such genre fiction:

Let no one see in these books a portrait of American life (of the life of American gangsters), though; these are works of pure imagination. Like Hadley Chase, Peter Cheyney is American, and his novels are set in America because that's a rule of this new Genre, which does indeed have its own conventions and laws, just as arbitrary as those of the old detective novel. (124)

As part of this transformation in the genre, Queneau argues that “the detective novel has ceased to be intellectualist and has become [...] existentialist (in the journalistic sense of that term)” (124) By this Queneau means that the detective novel no longer depicts a world governed by logic and intellectual method and instead presents characters violently struggling against existential threats. The opening of this later column compares the generic formalism of earlier detective novels from the mid-1930s to the similarly formal characteristics of classical tragedy. For Queneau, both genres have a “code, which is as arbitrary (but also necessary) as the laws of the *rondeau*, the *virelai*, or chess” (124). For Queneau, the formal constraints of literature impact literature's role as a medium of reflection. In a time of existential threats, Queneau implies that popular art loses its reflective capacity.

Like Orwell, Queneau locates the peak of the English crime novel in 1935, some years before the publication of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, suggesting that it lacks the reflective qualities ensured by the formal rules that governed earlier examples of crime fiction. In the process, Queneau also highlights the question of nationality present in Orwell's essay by remarking that the American setting is not literal, but is instead part and parcel of the genre of hardboiled novels. The novels employ American slang and settings as genre features, not for the purposes of describing “American life” or even “the life of American gangsters.” While Queneau briefly mentions American writers such as

Hammett and Chandler, he draws the majority of his analysis's examples from their English imitators. By focusing on the "fake American" hardboiled novels, Queneau is able to demonstrate that these novels do not stage their "Americanness" in order to express something meaningful or essential about America. Instead, the novels of Hadley Chase and Cheyney depict America simply to fulfill the generic literary conceits of the hardboiled novel. An American setting is merely a formal requirement of the genre in which Hadley Chase and Cheyney participate. Similarly, in Queneau's analysis Camus's play *Caligula* does not attempt to portray actual ancient Rome so much as it employs familiar literary referents to represent and reflect upon issues of tyranny and freedom. To read any of these novels as a direct or realist representation of the internal life of a nation or a people is, for Queneau, somewhat questionable.

In *OETTBALF*, Queneau highlights the irrationalism of genre conceits by employing techniques that loosely resemble those of Chase's novel in ways that complicate the novel's apparent genre and its ideological or national character. *OETTBALF*'s use of Joycean character names, for example, seems to be inspired by Orwell's remark that the plot of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* "bears a very marked resemblance to William Faulkner's novel, *Sanctuary*."¹⁹ Following the suggestion that Hadley Chase used a high modernist text as a source for his popular novel, Queneau does the same. The more traditionalist modernists frequently criticized "low," mass culture; Joyce's Gertie McDowell is usually understood as an example of such criticism, and Queneau's parody

¹⁹ Orwell, 209.

of the hardboiled novel participates in the same sort of criticism, as will be demonstrated. But Queneau is also aware that the international circulation of both popular and elite works often erodes the distinction between high and low culture, and creates larger pools of reference than those of any particular literary movement or national culture. Queneau's novel synthesizes several Anglophone works that had been received at various levels of French society, comically demonstrating the leveling effects that mass publication and global circulation can have on nationally-identified examples of literary culture.

Genre and Nationality in *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes*

Given Queneau's position on national models of belonging, it is perhaps surprising that *OETTBALF* narrates a specific, politically loaded event in Irish national history. Queneau does not ordinarily employ such specific historical events in his fiction; as Mann notes, only one other novel of Queneau's, the 1939 work *Un Rude Hiver*, is as "clearly historiographical in nature" as *OETTBALF*.²⁰ Nor is the historical event a minor one: the Easter Rising possesses mythic status in the rhetoric of subsequent Irish nationalist movements. In a novel constructed of literary referents, Queneau chooses a real event that has taken on the dimensions of myth as his setting. The Rising represents an event in a nation's life that has crossed the gulf between life and literature, between history and myth.

Queneau had not visited Dublin at the time he wrote *OETTBALF*, yet he accurately portrays numerous geographical details of the city. He achieved this effect by

²⁰ Mann, 104n6.

relying on a hand-drawn map, which his manuscript notes explain as a “plan dressé par les services telecartographiques de Werdre [plan drawn up by Werdre’s tele-cartographic services]”, a humorous way of explaining that Queneau relied on maps and notes from other sources (most notably *Ulysses*) in order to construct his literary Dublin.²¹

Queneau’s use of Dublin mirrors Hadley Chase’s use of America; Orwell remarks in his essay that “the author [James Hadley Chase], an Englishman who (I believe) has never been in the United States, seems to have made a complete mental transference to the American underworld.”²² Of course, Hadley Chase’s “American underworld” more accurately resembles the fictional criminal world of novels by Chandler and Hammett. For satirical purposes, *OETTBALF*’s Ireland is similarly drawn from Irish literature rather than primary experience. Within the novel, this notion is highlighted when a character, Caffrey, remarks, “Anyone can see we’re in the land of James Joyce” (61). As Mann notes, Queneau “seems to have created a remarkably accurate portrayal of the city, perhaps as much from Joyce’s portrayal as from the detailed map he kept with his notes;” only the location of the branch post office is inaccurate, with Queneau having “moved it two blocks south from the intersection of Henry and Sackville streets.”²³ For Queneau, Ireland and the Easter Rising are reference points in fiction rather than in reality; by imitating a literary Ireland rather than attempting to depict a real one, he slyly mocks the purported authenticity of both the realist novel and the popular thriller. In contradiction to

²¹ Queneau’s map and notes are reproduced in Jean-Yves Pouilloux’s notes in *Raymond Queneau/Oeuvres Complètes III*, 1732.

²² “Raffles and Miss Blandish,” 210.

²³ Mann, 104.

models of authenticity based on primary experience, Queneau demonstrates that fictional narrative and secondary experience via the telegraph office, both sites of cosmopolitan circulation, can allow a foreign writer to accurately represent Dublin.

Queneau's satire of nationalist models of authenticity is also evident in the use of a fictional "author" and "translator" as part of the novel's paratextual apparatus. Queneau uses these pseudonymous creations to explore the way putative authorship shapes literary reception in the twentieth century. Models of national authenticity persistently influence literary reception despite the existence of a well-established global publishing market in which international distribution and transnational imitation become common commercial practices. Because Queneau's job at Gallimard required him to oversee French translations of successful Anglophone works, he was aware of the way in which international print circulation had globalized the writing and reading of literature. But he was also aware of the commercial and cultural valuation of literary "foreignness." It was the marketability of supposed "foreignness" that helped drive the demand for "fake American" novels and inspired their authors' similarly deceptive use of paratextual methods to suggest "Americanness."

As a result, pseudonymous authors and translators proliferate in this situation. The name James Hadley Chase is a pseudonym; the English author's birth name is Rene Brabazon Raymond, a name whose origins are French. More famously, "George Orwell" is also a pseudonym, in this case for the Englishman Eric Blair, and it was chosen

because Blair considered it “a good round English name.”²⁴ And of course, Boris Vian’s pseudonymous work as Vernon Sullivan provided the initial inspiration for Queneau’s novel. One might also recall, considering the novel’s use of Irish republicanism as a background, that Eamon de Valera’s birth name was George. Queneau’s pseudonym reflects the network of pseudonymous authorship lurking in his novel’s background. To varying degrees, the authors of the various texts that Queneau references are fictional personae making claims to cultural authority and national authenticity. Queneau satirizes their dubious claims to authenticity by adopting a deceptive pseudonym like Vian’s only to make it obvious that his “Irish” writer is a French hoax. He extends the joke by creating a fictional French translator as well, calling into question the essential status of even his own national identity. Queneau suggest that merely being born in a nation as part of the national majority is not enough to make one “authentically” national; the name and the image must conform to the rigidly established boundaries of institutional models of national identity. Just as Eric Blair was less English a name than George Orwell, or George de Valera less Irish a name than Eamon, so too might Michel Presle be more “authentically” French than Raymond Queneau.

To further his point about the fictive, generic nature of supposedly authentic national belonging, Queneau does not depict any of the real people involved in the Rising in his novel, and instead pulls character names from Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Adding to the effect is the fact that Joyce employed the names of real people for some of the background

²⁴ See D.J. Taylor’s *Orwell: The Life* (London:Chatto & Windus, 2003), 126.

characters in *Ulysses*. In an especially complex example of the way fictionalization confounds models of authenticity, Queneau names the captain of the novel's band of rebels "John MacCormack," recycling Joyce's use of the name of a real Irish tenor in *Ulysses* who appears as an acquaintance of that novel's fictional protagonist, Leopold Bloom. It is as if the real MacCormack's inclusion in *Ulysses* makes "John MacCormack" into a literary reference rather than the name of a real person. Moreover, the MacCormack of *OETTBALF* is little more than a broad caricature of militant Irish Republicanism, and does not qualify as a realistic character, let alone a fictionalized real person. In Queneau's novel, the real people who become or inspire Joycean characters are further transformed into little more than names that refer to a generic brand of Irishness. Their Irishness becomes a matter of literary construction, as though nationality were little more than a matter of choosing an authentic-sounding pseudonym. Similarly, because the intertextual conversation Queneau enters is made up almost entirely of fictional referents and false names, artifice and literary representation come to displace other, more conventional and seemingly natural forms of self-identification.

Appropriately, then, an imaginary Ireland and its imaginary authors become Queneau's starting points for exploring the interactions between life and literature and for exploring the problems of national self-identification in literature.

Artifice and Nationality in Queneau's Novel

Queneau makes the artificial and superficial character of nationalist representation in his novel apparent in its first paragraph:

"God save the King!" cried the doorman, who had been the manservant of a Lord in

Sussex for thirty-six years, but his master had gone down with the *Titanic*, leaving neither heir nor wherewithal to keep up his carssel, as they call it on the other side of St. George's Channel. Back in the country of his Celtic ancestors, the lackey had obtained this modest position in the post office at the corner of Sackville Street and Eden Quay. (3)

As Bernadette Schreurs points out in her essay, "Notes Sur L'Ironie dans *OETTBALF*," "L'exclamation [...] métoniquement lié à toute la mythologie de l'ancienne noblesse anglaise et à ses composantes stereotypes (traditions familiales, richesse et grand pompe hautement conventionnelle, châteaux...). [The doorman's exclamation metonymically links all of the mythology of the old English nobility and its stereotypical components (family traditions, high and refined wealth and pomp, manors).]"²⁵ Additionally, as Scheurs points out, Queneau's phonetic spelling of "kaseul" is a parody of "Oxford standard English" pronunciation.²⁶ Though the first character seen in the novel is loyalist, rather than Republican, he is depicted as a collage of stereotypical traits and literary signifiers rather than as a realistic character. The doorman is a caricature of loyalism: not only is he aligned with British, but he is a former manservant to English nobility, refers to England in indirect and metonymic fashion, and has no dialogue other than his repetition of the phrase "God save the King!", after which he is summarily killed by the Irish rebels who make up most of the novel's major characters.

²⁵ The name of Queneau's novel is abbreviated in the title of Schreuer's article as originally published in *Etudes Sur Les Ouvres Complètes De Raymond Queneau Sally Mara*, ed. Evert van der Starre, C.R.I.N. (Cahiers de recherches des institute neerlandais de langue et litterateur française) no. 10 (Groningue, Pays-Bas: C.R.I.N., 1984), 142.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 143. In Barbara Wright's translation, the exaggerated English accent is represented by phonetically spelling the word as "carssle."

Queneau's novel is populated entirely by such hyperbolically "nationalist" and nationally-identified characters. Interestingly, though, Queneau does not abandon the modernist novel's use of subjective narrative perspective despite the shallow psychology of his novel's characters. The novel's depictions of graphic sex and violence become farcically distant from any experiential reality. When the doorman is shot, the novel rather gruesomely describes him "vomit[ing] his brains through an eight orifice in his head" (3). By contrasting the horrifying brutality of the political violence with the psychological shallowness of the characters that victimize others and are in turn victimized, Queneau makes apparent the distance between vernacular experience and genre stereotypes, and critiques the supposed authenticity of stereotypical portrayals of nationality. More broadly, however, he suggests that there is more to identity than the slogans and symbols of nationality, virtually every character in the novel exists as little more than a set of national and political affiliations, an effect heightened by the modernist techniques with which Queneau's narrator describes them. The postal clerks, for example, are "either real English girls or Ulsterwomen," and the Easter Rising militants are initially described as "Irish Republicans in an insurrectionary mood" (3). Gertie Girdle, the female protagonist, becomes the exception to this representational scheme only after being convinced that the King of England is no longer worth her reverence; from that point on, she becomes interested in little more than voraciously satisfying her impulses and desires, a caricature of liberated consciousness to the same extreme that the Irish rebels and others are caricatures of politically constrained consciousness.

The novel's only French character, Théodore Durand, is the postmaster of the branch office that the rebels take over. Durand is described as a loyalist to Britain, albeit one who retains several stereotypically French characteristics. Durand is said to have "devoted his hearts and souls (for he had several) to the British cause and to the support of the House of Hanover," an affiliation he carries with pride "in spite of the sympathy that had always united the French and the Irish people" (6). To some extent, these sympathies may reflect the politics of the second World War, in which Ireland's avowed neutrality and Britain's staunch support of the Free French as an Allied cause might certainly have shifted French feelings about both nation-states. While this is quite anachronistic in terms of the narrative's setting, Queneau is quite willing to violate conventional narrative logic for the sake of humor or argument.

Whatever the character's reasons, Durand has switched nationalities, and with this switch, he has also exchanged his political and national sympathies entirely. While Durand's multiple "hearts and souls" suggest the possibility of plural or cosmopolitan devotions or commitments, his total devotion to Britain forecloses this possibility. He, too, shouts "God save the King!" and is summarily gunned down. However, Durand's sense of national identity is not represented by much more than his use of English oaths and the narrator's assurance that he has committed himself to England. As a result, he can easily become British rather French and throw off typically French sympathies in the process, just as Gertie can later easily abandon her identity as a chaste and proper "English girl." Both Durand and Gertie seem to consider national identity and its associated behaviors as a matter of superficial rituals and verbal gestures, in which

invoking the name of the King or the House of Hanover makes up the bulk of some pure notion of “Englishness.” But the words and symbols that stand in for a particular case of national belonging are utterly interchangeable for both characters, and can be traded or discarded with ease. By habituating himself to loyalist oaths, Durand has committed not on but several hearts and souls to the British state. National identity is largely a semantic construct for both characters. Despite this and the ease with which some characters seem to adopt or discard new national identities, the characters never seem to of their commitments as superficial. The doorman’s identity seems to be little more than the loyalist oath he reiterates, for example, but he is still willing to die for it; and Durand, despite his status as an assimilated immigrant with multiple options for self-identification, similarly chooses to perish with a loyalist oath on his lips. Of course, the oath cuts both ways, and the Irish Republican characters in the novel also treat the shouting of slogans as a matter of life and death. In addition to killing anyone who shouts “God save the King!,” their own oath is an anachronistic cry of “Finnegans wake!”, so that the rebels of 1916 swear mutual allegiance using the name of a polyglot novel of 1941 written by an Irish expatriate. In order to ensure that the reference to Joyce is unmistakable, Queneau renders it in English (unlike the loyalist oath, which the French original version of his novel presents as “Dieu sauve le roi!”).

By making oaths of national loyalty the means by which the characters define themselves, Queneau is also touching on an element of his novel’s Irish historical context. The Republicans Kelleher and Caffrey kill Smith because he recites an oath of loyalty to the British monarch, and explain that they are thereby following their leader

MacCormack's orders to "be correct." One of the causes for the republican, anti-government side in the Irish Civil War that immediately followed Irish independence was that the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922 maintained that the British monarch was Ireland's true sovereign, albeit constitutionally without much real political power or influence. British loyalty oaths were also part of an earlier political conflict between Ireland and England in 1905 that led to the founding of Sinn Fein, a party that insisted Irish parliamentarians abstain from attending legislative sessions in London because such sessions opened with a recitation of an oath affirming English monarchical sovereignty over the Union was a requirement for sitting members. The English monarch's status as sovereign of pre-independence Ireland and as head of the Church of England were understandably intolerable to Irish republicans. In Queneau's novel, however, loyalty oaths become part of a broader questioning of the links that the nation-state forges between symbolic representation and putative authenticity.

Queneau fills the novel with gestures of stock-character, stage-Irishness that are as superficial and often ill-constructed as the loyalty oaths her characters blurt out unthinkingly, which provides a cover for Queneau to both express his admiration for Joyce and ridicule the conventions of literary representation found in "fake American" pulp novels. The most extended examples of this parody are, of course, the Irish Republican characters, who are initially sketched in broad stereotypes; their first act after taking over the post office branch is to raid a neighboring pub for "a case of uisce beatha [...] and ten cases of Guinness" and their provisions include corned beef and pipe tobacco (23; 111). However, Queneau's Joycean and other literary sources for the rebels

loom the largest in the novel. Including the aforementioned John MacCormack, Queneau also takes the names Mat Dillon, Corny Kelleher and Cissy Caffrey from *Ulysses*, sometimes constructing the characters in particularly absurd ways. Cissy Caffrey is a teenaged female friend of Gertie McDowell in Joyce's novel, but becomes a male Irish Republican in Queneau's. The republican Gallager is also likely a reference to Joyce's Ignatius Gallaher, in that both characters' surnames are variants of "Gallagher" that elide one letter of the diphthong "gh." The remaining two republican characters, Larry O'Rourke and Callinan, have relatively common Irish names, though Callinan's name may be drawn from the Callanan family seen in Joyce's short story "The Dead." The rebels' features vary mostly in terms of which Irish literary stereotype each rebel embodies, as when the text notes that Gallager "had the keen eyesight of all the natives of the Isle of Inniskea" or when Callinan reflects on his plans to marry his fiancée Maud "if [...] an independent and national republic was established in Dublin" (28; 85).²⁷ So nationalist is he that he carries "a big green handkerchief adorned, in its four corners, with golden harps;" his companion Caffrey wears "braces" of "emerald green" for similar reasons (55; 38). All of the rebels are staunchly Catholic and superstitious to a fault, leading to comical misadventures early in the novel as they surreptitiously dispose of their victims' corpses to avoid being haunted. As a result of their prudish moralism, captors suffer serious moral crises when the novel's requisite sex scenes – it is, after all, a sensationalist thriller – involve them. Once Queneau begins his parody of the eroticism of the *roman*

²⁷ The name of the fiancée is likely a reference to Yeats's longtime object of desire, Maud Gonne, who married the Irish Republican and Easter rising participant John MacBride.

noir, the Republican characters display a gamut of perversions. Predictably, nearly all of the rebels succumb to Gertie's sexual charms by the end of the novel, and none of them survive.

The novel's British characters are also stereotyped, and are portrayed as naïve sentimentalists whose sense of national identity results in their similarly confused notion of sexuality. Gertie's fiancé, the British Commodore Cartwright, is the novel's most extensive parody of such stereotypical "Britishness." A sentimentalist and a jingoist, Cartwright's great ambition is to marry Gertie so that he can finally have sex, a process he does not entirely seem to understand:

[T]he post office conjured up in his mind the engaging personality of his fiancée, Miss Gertie Girdle, whom he was to (and wished to) marry in the very near future, in order to consummate with her the act that was just a little intimidating to a chaste young man, the strange act whose occult peripeteia transforms a young bint [*gonzesse*] from the virginal state into the pregnant state. (115)²⁸

Cartwright must fulfill this role in the novel, since Gertie herself abandons both nationality and sentimentality in order to accommodate the novel's pornographic elements. However, Queneau also suggests a link between militarism and statist nationalism, with confused sexuality arising from the combination of both. While Gertie is both knowingly seductive and sexually voracious within moments of her rejection of English national identity, the militant characters in the novel seem to retain their sentimental naivete regarding sex throughout. Cartwright sees sex as a discomforting and somewhat improper subject of thought, and is able to approach the idea only through a

²⁸ Queneau's French, "gonzesse," is a slang term roughly similar in meaning to "bint."

chain of metonymic associations. Tellingly, the first of these is the occupied post office, which is both an official building and a military target. The post office conjures up Gertie, and, as she does for every character in *OETTBALF*, including the homosexual couple, Gertie provides a metonym for sex itself. Even when he is thinking about the topic as directly as he allows himself, Cartwright can only think of sex as an “occult” act that connects the more socially acceptable acts of marriage and reproduction.

The central character of the novel is Gertie Girdle, a worker at the post office whose inadvertent capture by the republicans sets in motion a chain of events that leads to their deaths. When introduced, she is a similar comic type, a caricature of chaste English womanhood. Missing the takeover because she is in the post office lavatory when the rebels arrive, her first thought is of the vulgarity of her situation: “these modern lavatories are still not perfect, this flushing system makes such a noise, goodness gracious!” (10). Like the doorman, she also reverts to loyalty oaths upon realizing that the post office has been commandeered by Irish Republicans, thinking “Goodness gracious! God save the King!” (16). When captured, her strongest condemnation of the rebels is her thought that “they were certainly not well-bred. And most likely none of them had ever sung ‘God Save the King,’ the boors” (51). Her hopes are similarly sentimental in character, and she is initially convinced that she will be safe in the lavatory because the rebels “wouldn’t dare” enter “the LADIES’ lavatory” (16). In the French manuscript, Gertie repeats the phrase “les lavatories DAMES” twice in her interior monologue, making it into an incantatory phrase much like the doorman’s “God save the King!” or

the republicans' salute, "Finnegans wake!"²⁹ For Gertie, the indignity of being in the lavatory is as great a threat as the Republicans. Despite her fatigue after two and a half hours' hiding, she insists that she "will not sit down on that seat, either. How awful" (26). In the original French, Gertie's sense of indignity receives more emphasis than in Wright's translation, as she repeats "Quelle infamie. Quelle humiliation. [What infamy. What humiliation.]" at the thought of sitting on the toilet while she hides.³⁰ Britishness in the novel is composed almost entirely of oaths to the King, concerns about class, and absurd notions of etiquette.

The central event in the novel's plot is Gertie's loss of faith in these slogans and rituals, and consequently she abandons both national identity and propriety. Once she is discovered by the Republicans, they attempt to interrogate her, though their method involves little more than testing her articles of faith against their own. Larry O'Rourke's first question to her is to ask her for her opinion of "the virginity of the mother of God," a key point of difference between their Catholic dogma and Protestant creeds like that of the British-aligned Church of Ireland, but she throws her captors into disarray by responding that she is an agnostic (60-1). Gertie's agnosticism also establishes her as more modern – that is to say, less enchanted – than the Irish rebels. Driving the point home, the Republican character Dillon can supply the correct answer – it is "a mystery" – because he is "fairly well up in the catechism" (60). Where the Republicans are, as Gertie puts it, "papists," Gertie's faith is purely civic in nature. Her admiration of the King has

²⁹ *Ouvres Completes de Sally Mara*, 205.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

no connection to his role as head of the Anglican Church, and her repeated use of “God save the King” is somewhat ironic, since she doubts the very existence of God. It is the king, as the head of State, that is the sole focus of Gertie’s faith.

As a result, once the frustrated Republican leader MacCormack convinces her that “your King is a stupid cunt”, Gertie is left without any loyalty or morality whatsoever: “But [...] if the King of England is a stupid cunt, then we can do whatever we like!” (69). By rejecting the King, Gertie instantly transitions from virginal naïf to voracious seductress. The method of her transformation reveals the flimsiness of the symbolic gestures that make it up. O’Rourke and MacCormack convince her to reject the King with a series of almost entirely superficial attacks on him, beginning with O’Rourke’s mockery of his portrait:

No one could say he looks very bright [...] Nothing in his face radiates either intelligence or energy. And that mediocre personage is the symbol of the oppression of hundreds of millions of human beings by a few tens of millions of Britons, but the oppressed no longer swoon in ecstasy at the sight of that insipid face, and you see here and now, Miss Girdle, the first consequences of this critical judgment. (68-9)

O’Rourke identifies the success of British imperialism with Britain’s ability to convince subject populations of the value and meaning of British national symbols. As the various loyalty oaths in the novel establish, the characters’ connection to their sense of national belonging is largely metonymic. Here, the King is the metonym of Gertie’s Britishness. In the logic of Queneau’s parody, this is how ideological systems operate, including nationalism and imperialism. The power of the symbol proves a useful cover for the reality of oppression that O’Rourke describes.

It also conceals incompetence, as described in MacCormack's subsequent declaration that "[the King] can't beat the Germans [...] Zeppelins are bombarding London [and] millions of English soldiers are getting themselves killed in the Artois just to let the French establish their dominion over Europe" (69). MacCormack's argument here is a somewhat distorted version of the real republican argument during World War I that the English were compounding the historical injustices of their long domination of Ireland by deferring Home Rule indefinitely because of the war even as Irish nationals fought for Britain on the Continent. However, MacCormack's polemic does not contain this rationale, and instead he inadvertently subverts his own cause. The implicit force of MacCormack's argument is that unreflexive loyalty to the nation-state is a dangerous and foolish thing. MacCormack's appeal plays more strongly to the crisis of faith in national governments provoked by the seemingly purposeless carnage of the first World War than to any specifically pro-Irish sentiment. Given that MacCormack is a nationalist Republican, the speech is a curiously direct attack on the notions of nationalism and patriotism on which his imagined revolution is founded. He and his comrades, after all, place their faith in gestures and symbols like their repeated invocations of the Pope or the harps and color of Callinan's gaudy handkerchief.

But Gertie does not take away the nuance of MacCormack's implicit argument, just as MacCormack never reflects on the argument's implications for his own sense of nationalism. Instead, MacCormack's final verbal attack on the King's image fully convinces Gertie to abandon her loyalty to his image and what it represents. Gertie's libertatory exclamation occurs in response to MacCormack's declaration that "all Ireland

knows he [the King] indulges in the solitary vice, and that it makes him so moronic that he's incapable of understanding the slightest connection" (69). This last attack on the King's image proves as effective, or more effective, than comparatively reasonable political and moral arguments against British imperialism. Through depicting Gertie's moment of liberation as a response to such simple tactics, Queneau argues that politics and identity are little more than a matter of cheap, sentimental attachments to mutable and disposable symbols: *OETTBALF*'s characters do not commit themselves to ideology so much as to iconography. As Gertie's rapid conversion from patriotism suggests, iconography is an exceptionally vulnerable basis for one's ideals. Unfortunately, the habit of attaching oneself to symbols is a difficult or impossible one to break. Though she ostensibly has an epiphany regarding her nationalism, the remainder of the novel makes it clear that Gertie continues to think in superficial ways. She still treats the metonymic figure of the English King as the sum of everything it represents rather than as recognizing its functional role as a symbol that mediates her connection to the larger system of ideas for which it stands. When MacCormack tarnishes that symbol and changes its value, Gertie loses her connection to the entire complex of values the symbol mediates. When Gertie loses her attachment to the metonym, she uncritically abandons her commitment to everything associated with it. Gertie does not become a wiser or more reflective character by losing her faith in the king of England, but instead becomes a character with no sense of purpose or morality whatsoever.

However, Gertie's change of mind might also be understood as a switch from one symbolic interpretation to another: if the King of England symbolizes English national

virtue, but turns out to be “a stupid cunt” who masturbates to excess, then sexual licentiousness and incontinence are the real values he represents. Symbolic commitments are inescapable in the moral and political universe of *OETTBALF*, insofar as symbols mediate the characters’ relationships to larger communities and moral sentiments. Gertie’s behavior in the rest of the novel suggests that she has abandoned all communities and all morality, or that she has built a new standard of belonging and behavior on precisely the terms the rebels’ arguments offer her. The Republicans seek to transfer Gertie’s loyalties from England’s symbol – the King – to one of their own – the Irish emblems they flaunt; instead, they inadvertently allow her to substitute the metonymy underlying the symbol of the King without abandoning the surface iconography. In effect, then, they undermine the sentimental logic of national attachment without disturbing the allied logic of symbolic attachment. In this case, Gertie abandons her sentimentalism, but not the symbol which once stood for it.

There is additional evidence for this reading earlier in the novel, when a still-loyalist Gertie briefly contemplates the linguistic nationalism of the Irish Republicans. In that earlier scene, Gertie recalls “[a] chap from Connemara” she once met who “didn’t know much English. And to think that some of them want to go back to speaking Irish. As if Sir Théodore Durand were to go back to speaking French” (20). In this segment, Gertie equates the use of a language with belonging to the national community it represents. For her, Durand is English because he speaks English; were he to revert to French, he would cease to be an Englishman. For Gertie, participation in nationally specific symbolic orders, such as a national language, is the medium of national

belonging. The national language makes up part of a larger symbolic system that mediates national belonging. The point is highlighted when Caffrey accidentally discovers Gertie: barely able to read Gaelic and illiterate in English, he cannot decipher the English word “DAMES” which Gertie is counting on to dissuade male investigators. While Caffrey’s illiteracy is bilingual, in practice it is his distance from English more than his distance from written language in general that causes him to unwittingly violate the social norms protecting Gertie from discovery. Commitment may be relative, in this sense; Caffrey prefers to be illiterate in Irish. Similarly, the earlier suggestion that Theodore Durand has “many” hearts and souls also suggests the possibility of relative commitments. The novel mines a great deal of humor from the absolute commitments the characters make despite the hinted-at, and more practical possibility of limited or plural senses of belonging. Caffrey and Gertie share a sentimental view of women at this point in the novel. It is not his rejection of these sentimental ideas about propriety and gender that expose Gertie, but his lack of participation in any national literature.

Ordinarily, the choice of a national language works as a kind of shorthand for larger and more complex modes of belonging. As Sheldon Pollock and Benedict Anderson have argued, the establishment of a national language becomes the metonym of the nationality which employs it, suggesting by association or extension the various other commitments and customs of the nation.³¹ Similarly, the various oaths and slogans of nationalist parties and groups metonymically represent the various ideological

³¹ See Pollock, “Vernacular and Cosmopolitan;” and Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

commitments shared by a given group's members. Literary work in a given language can extend or enrich the metonymic function of that language; it can even introduce new customs or modes of belonging within the language by producing cultural touchstones like popular phrases. At its most successful, a national literature itself becomes a network of allusions and a shared set of cultural touchstones for the people of a given nation; certainly, this is the ambition of a writer like William Butler Yeats or Douglas Hyde. The Republicans in *OETTBALF* have absorbed a number of Irish literary notions, not just the anachronistic Joyceanism of "Finnegans wake." At one point, Larry O'Rourke practices "the rational method of breathing that had been taught to him by the great poet Yeats [...] to reduce his emotions to zero" (107). O'Rourke perceives himself and his emotional life in relation to his concept of an Irish national literature. Sally Mara, their supposed creator, also seems to imagine that the language and slogans of Ireland make up the entire idea of being Irish, just as she seems to treat Britishness as entirely a matter of reciting loyalist oaths. Her characters are therefore motivated by their slogans and symbols, and change loyalties as those symbols and slogans change. In *OETTBALF*, national languages and nationalist sloganeering do not represent larger complexes of ideas; instead, national belonging is dependent upon, even made up of little more than shared symbols.

Queneau's Use of Paratext and the Macaronic Life of National Languages

Queneau's examination of the symbolic mediation of national belonging extends into the novel's paratextual apparatus. Part of why the characters seem to inhabit a universe composed entirely of signs and symbols is, of course, that they are merely characters in a novel. Since the novel is a parody of badly-written popular fiction, Sally is

a poor novelist, mistaking convenient superficialities for the complexities they represent. Her errors and the novel's oddities are also part of Queneau's implicit argument. For example, Sally occasionally clarifies a Gaelic term in the text, in passages that are not marked as interventions by Presle, the supposed translator. Of course, if the novel were originally written in Gaelic as Queneau's paratextual devices claim, such moments would indicate that Sally does not expect her audience to be fluent in what is supposedly their own national language, the language in which the novel itself is written. Practically, of course, this was true; few Irish people spoke Gaelic fluently, and English remained the primary vernacular language in the Free State and the Republic. On the other side of the issue, the novel's parodies of Oxford English with the doorman's pronunciation of "casseul." Both orthodox English and Gaelic seem to present difficulties and produce deformations in everyday vernacular speech and writing.

Queneau's satire of the idea of "national" languages is allied to his broader interest in French language reform and his use elsewhere of neo-Française as a written form of French that would accurately represent demotic spoken French. As he puts it in his 1948 article "People Are Talking," "all our proletarian authors wrote in the frozen French of Noël and Chaspal," and other centuries-old writers; Queneau himself "prefer[s] giving language a kick in the pants."³² The Académie Française and the increasingly archaic conventions of written French that it enforces are, for Queneau, enemies of art

³² Tr. Jordan Stump, in *Letters, Numbers, Forms*; 155-6. The essay was originally published in the May, 1948 issue of *Les Lettres Françaises*.

and the writer: “French has gone on being spoken since then.”³³ Queneau’s interest in the division between spoken and written language was catalyzed by a 1937 trip to Greece; noting the distinction between classical written Greek and demotic, spoken Greek, he discovered a similar schism in his own language. As he writes in the 1938 essay “The Writer and Language,” “the task of the poet and of the writer is to collaborate toward the establishment, the founding, the development, and the beautification of the language of those who speak the same tongue as they do.”³⁴

The writer’s use of language must involve the living vernacular, where linguistic and signficatory innovations occur. Like the French, the Irish-language fantasy of the Republicans in *OETTBALF* speak a language they do not write and are made to read a language they do not speak. Most notably, Queneau believed that the phonetic elisions and grammatical diversions of spoken French should govern the written form of the language. His most popular novel, *Zazie dans le metro*, famously opens with the hypercompressed expression “Doukipudonktan,” which compresses the phrase “Doù qu’ils puent donc tant? [Why do they stink so much?]” into a phonetic rendition of demotic French.³⁵ In so doing, of course, Queneau violates many of the rules of written French. Queneau argues in a 1939 essay that “classicism fades into sterility because, founding itself on man’s hegemony over nature [...] it tends to stray from the living

³³ Ibid., 84.

³⁴ In *Letters, Numbers, Forms*; 82. Originally published in the July 1939 issue of *Volontés*.

³⁵ Raymond Queneau, *Zazie in the Metro*, tr. Barbara Wright (New York: Penguin, 1982), 3; and Queneau, *Zazie dans le metro* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 1.

fountain of language.”³⁶ Because of statements like these, Roland Barthes has argued that Queneau seeks to abolish metalanguage entirely in favor of depicting spontaneous utterances.³⁷ More generally, neo-Française can be understood as part of what Susan Bernofsky describes as Queneau’s efforts to “undercut the literary language that emphasized social boundaries.”³⁸ The paratextual apparatus of the novel has it being translated from Gaelic, a putative national language few Irish people actually speak, read, or write fluently, into written French, a language Queneau elsewhere criticizes for its distance from the speaking and living habits of the French themselves. Sally Mara’s literary Gaelic and Michel Presle’s literary French are both species of “sterile” language that capture and neutralize the spontaneity of vernacular utterance. Additionally, both of them are ways in which the vernacular has become unmoored from the everyday life of the people, solidified and rendered artificial in order to capture it in the name of a parochial, statist nationalism. Queneau’s argument is that neo-Française and, I would argue, the polyglot mix of high and low national and international cultures seen in Joyce’s and others’ cosmopolitan modernist texts reflect the reality and the desires of everyday people.

Queneau makes his point most teenchantly in *OETTBALF* via a comical chain of translators’ notes that Presle adds to clarify a series of foreign loanwords in the “original” Gaelic text. The loanwords appear in the passage in which Caffrey discovers Gertie’s

³⁶ “The Writer and Language,” 84.

³⁷ Barthes, “Zazie and Literature,” in *Critical Essays*, tr. Richard Howard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 117-9.

³⁸ “Zazie In Wonderland: Queneau’s Reply to the Realist Novel,” *The Romanic Review* 85.1 (Jan., 1994), 116.

hiding place, the same passage in which Caffrey's illiteracy plays such a central role. In that passage, the narration deploys in rapid succession the terms "ankou," "anschauung," and "d'un seul coup d'un seul," treating them as near-synonyms. In response, Presle provides a series of footnotes to each, annotating "ankou" as "Celticisme pour <<intuition>>," "anschauung" as "Germanisme pour <<ankou>>," and "d'un seul coup d'un seul" as "Gallicisme pour <<anschauung>>."³⁹ Presle's circular chain of definitions treats a single French word and a French phrase as identical in meaning and connotation. Both Sally's original text and Presle's footnotes transform series of idiomatic utterances into a chain of equivalent literary expressions; in the process, the qualities of spoken vernacular are transformed into the interchangeable quantities of literary language. Queneau's point is stressed in the last of the three footnotes, where Presle provides a gloss for what he terms a "Gallicism." In other words, Presle does not trust his readers to identify an idiom in their own language. The gap between formal written French and idiomatic spoken French has become so wide that a popular French phrase is practically foreign to French literary language. Queneau underscores this point with the revelation in the second Sally Mara novel, *Journal intime de Sally Mara*, that Presle was Sally's French tutor in Ireland. Presle's translation reflects the weaknesses of a purist model of language, one that abolishes meaning and nuance, and cannot adequately incorporate the foreign words and concepts characteristic of twentieth-century global culture.

³⁹ *Oeuvres Complètes de Sally Mara*, 225.

Pan-Celticism and Queneau's References to Breton Nationalism

Queneau makes specific use of the Breton word “ankou” in order to draw attention to the problems of nationalisms based on minority vernaculars like Gaelic. While Queneau rejects the sterile language of literary French, he also opposes Romantic nationalist arguments for classical regional or minority languages that have ceased to exist as vibrant, living languages. Gaelic is one example, but the word “ankou” introduces another form of nationalist language politics that connects the novel's parody more closely with French history. As Presle notes, “ankou” is a “Celticisme,” but it is a Breton “Celticisme” rather than an Irish one. Douglas Hyde's introduction to the second section of W.Y. Evans-Wentz's *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, for example, describes the ankou as a death-spirit “who simply dominates the folk-lore of Brittany” and notes that he encountered the term in the Breton nationalist writer Anatole Le Braz's *La Légende de la Mort*. As Hyde notes, “though I have been collecting Irish folk-lore all my life, I have never met Death figuring as a personality in more than two or three tales, though the Death Cart (Cóiste Bodhar), belief in which is pretty general, does seem a kind of parallel to the creaking cart in which *Ankou* rides.”⁴⁰ Additionally, Queneau's annotator Jean-Yves Pouilloux identifies “ankou” as “[un] mot Breton” in the Pléiades edition of Queneau's *Oeuvres Complètes*.⁴¹

The interpolation of a Breton word evokes the long history of Breton nationalism and its connections to modern Irish and French senses of national identity. While I cannot

⁴⁰ *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), 30-31.

⁴¹ *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1740.

reproduce the full history of Brittany here, I will endeavor to provide a very brief sketch to help illuminate what I think is its relevance to Queneau's larger points in *OETTBALF*. Most historians trace the origins of Celtic Brittany to the late fourth century Roman garrisoning of British troops in the region, then called Armorica. As a result, the region's language and population became more aligned with "insular Celtic British, not Continental Gaulish."⁴² Historically, Brittany bears a superficial resemblance to Ireland in that it was often the site of local resistance to both Frankish and English kings, and because the inhabitants treated their local form of Catholicism as ethnically definitive; such notions of Breton ethnic difference remained a cornerstone of gradually diminishing local resistance to French rule even after Brittany was conquered by Louis XII in 1488 and subsequently incorporated into the Kingdom of France by an Edict of Union in 1532. However, the Union and the general character of Breton integration into France were only partial, and Brittany retained considerable local autonomy, including the retention of various local feudal legal arrangements.⁴³ Periodically, the local nobility made unsuccessful efforts to restore Brittany's earlier status as an independent duchy, most notably during the War of the Catholic League from 1590-8 and in the Revolt of the Bonnets Rouges in 1675. In general, however, these movements had more to do with feudal and royal politics than with modern nationalism. Breton ethnicity figured in some Celtic nationalist movements in Britain, however, most notably when the Welsh historian David Jones launched a brief period of "Celtic mania" with his 1706 translation of a book

⁴² Gwenno Piette, *Brittany: A Concise History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 19-22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 62

by the Breton abbé Paul-Yves Pezron purporting to demonstrate that the linguistic connection between the Welsh and Breton Celtic vernaculars indicated a glorious, patriarchal Celtic past.⁴⁴

With the emergence of the modern French nation-state with the Revolution of 1789, however, the consolidation of French identity meant that Breton language and ethnicity were gradually marginalized by centralized, modern notions of French identity and French language. French cultural and political institutions shifted as well. As Maryon McDonald has argued, the Académie Française was initially concerned more with shifting the language of high culture from Latin to formal French than with intervening in the vernacular practices of “the mass of the people, the ruled and uncultivated.” Following the Revolution of 1789, though, “a new vision of polity” in Republican France changed the mission of the Académie, which now aimed to regulate common language practice as part of a broader program connecting “linguistic self-consciousness and political centralism.”⁴⁵ As a result, Brittany was subjected to a series of laws aimed at replacing Breton with French as part of the general establishment of “regulated standard

⁴⁴ Breton language and its connections to Welsh Romantic nationalism are discussed briefly by Prys Morgan in his essay “From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 67, 99. For a fuller account, see Morgan, “The Abbé Pezron and the Celts,” *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1965 (Hon. Society of Cymmrodorion, 1965), 286-95. As this note, and those prior and later suggest, much English-language scholarship on Brittany occurs in the Welsh academy even today.

⁴⁵ *We Are Not French!': Language, Culture, and Ethnicity in Brittany* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 5.

language.”⁴⁶ The French state’s political modernization and the Breton vernacular tradition seemed to be opposed to one another.

But as the historian Sharif Gemie notes, the idea of rural Breton nationalism also offered considerable appeal for the purposes of inventing a Romantic French national tradition and by 1795 “the new rulers re-discovered the Celtic heritage as a means by which to define France’s natural frontiers.”⁴⁷ French nationalists in the period could substitute a local, organicist conception of Frenchness for the cosmopolitan inheritance represented by Latin. The idea survived into the First Empire, as Napoleon Bonaparte established the Académie Celtique in 1804 in an effort to make the “old maps of Celtic Europe” into the historical basis for his Empire’s territorial claims.⁴⁸ In this respect, Napoleon was inspired by the recent publication of the Ossian poems in Scotland by James MacPherson, and their galvanizing effect on Scottish nationalism there.⁴⁹ The Académie set out to invent a tradition for Napoleonic nationalism and the First Empire by improbably suggesting that Brittany was the originary site of an essentially French Celtic culture that spread across Europe. However, the Académie Celtique was motivated more by Napoleon’s centralizing, imperial ambitions than by any powerful regional consciousness in Brittany. The centralizing ideology of Napoleonic France was reflected in the historical narrative promoted by the Académie Celtique, which claimed that the original Celts were not native to Brittany or the British Isles, but were rather the Gaulic

⁴⁶ Ibid., 285.

⁴⁷ *Brittany 1750-1950: The Invisible Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 41.

⁴⁸ McDonald, 100; Gemie, 41.

⁴⁹ McDonald, 101; Gemie, 41.

tribes to whom the majority of the modern French could supposedly trace their ancestry. The replacement of the Breton Celts with Gaulish French was intended to serve as a construction of an organic, local French nationality that would eliminate the traces of cosmopolitan inheritance from both Celtic Britain and the Roman Empire from the French lineage, which would, to return to Sheldon Pollock's terms, become a land of vernacular autochthons. This would in turn justify the French imperial aspiration to transform French into the cosmopolitan vernacular of a global French empire. In short, the use of Celtic nationalism to support the invention of a Gaulish tradition makes up a case of the larger interplay of vernacular and cosmopolitan within the invented traditions of modern nationalist politics.

By employing the word "ankou" in this context, Queneau subtly introduces a cultural translation within the supposed literary translation by Presle, so that Breton independence and language movements in France fuse with Irish independence and Gaelic language movements in the British Empire of 1916. In so doing, he points out the geographical slipperiness of terms like "Celtic." Queneau introduces this comical take on Pan-Celticism in the passage just prior to Sally's use of "ankou," when *OETTBALF*'s narrator explains that "[t]he Irish mind, as we know, does not obey the rules of Cartesian logic, any more than it obeys those of experimental method. Neither French nor English, but fairly close to Breton, it proceeds by 'intuition.'" (39) The passage is an unlikely one for an Irish woman to write in a Gaelic-language novel; it smacks of an interpolation by Presle, or simply of Queneau deliberately dropping the personae of his fictional author and translator for a moment so that he can satirize Pan-Celticism's claims about the

supposedly spiritual, intuitive mind of the stereotypical “dreamy Celt.” Within the fictional authorship and translation of the novel, either the Gaelic-language author Sally has once more mocked Irish nationalism, or Presle has interpolated his own mockery of Breton nationalism. However, this parody goes both ways: French linguistic nationalism as institutionalized by the Académie Celtique and the Académie Française does not escape unscathed. The Breton word appears in Queneau’s text as one foreign to the official French language, but within the territorial boundaries of France.

The process of translation is deformed by the influence of such language politics in a later passage where Callinan thinks he hears someone say “le mot lobster, ce qui veut dire en irlandais: homard. [The word ‘lobster,’ or, in Irish, ‘homard.’].” (243) The peculiarity here is in the way the putative translation handles the matter; “homard” is the French word for lobster, not the Irish one. What this suggests is that Sally’s supposed “original” Gaelic text offers a translation of the English word “lobster” into its Gaelic equivalent. (Barbara Wright’s translation of Queneau’s novel suggests the Gaelic word “gliomach.”) However, Presle’s translation omits Sally’s Gaelic entirely, and he writes that the Irish word for lobster is the French word “homard.” In the original text, the English “lobster” is a foreign word included in a Gaelic text, and the Gaelic equivalent is provided to the reader. In Presle’s supposed translation, however, he supplies the French word “homard” where the original text had the Gaelic term, but Presle keeps the modifier “irlandais.” As a result, the passage is incoherent without a translator’s note for “gliomach,” and the Irish language, supposedly the original of the text, is eliminated completely. Having mistaken a Breton word for a Gaelic one earlier, Presle now

inadvertently describes a French word as a Gaelic one. As a consequence, Presle's translation contains no Gaelic whatsoever; the only Celtic language represented is Breton. Neither Presle nor Sally seem to be able to use the orthodox national language in order to write a simple vernacular thriller. In Sally's novel, the Irish characters slip into English, Breton, German, and French for no especially good reason; if she is writing in Gaelic for nationalist reasons, she repeatedly violates that linguistic and political convention in order to express what she means. In Presle's translation, he finds himself eliminating any trace of the novel's Gaelic-language origins and repeatedly including unorthodox dialects and languages into literary French, such as the Breton "ankou."

In passages like the one above, Queneau suggests that living language is inherently somewhat macaronic; that is, a language that is in daily use will inevitably absorb or borrow foreign words and phrases, which contradicts the idea of an internally consistent and entirely sufficient national language. As with Gaelic in Ireland, there is a considerable gap between the official language of a nation-state and the languages used by its people. The notion of foreign and native languages is far more complicated than apparatus of the dictionary or the Academie would have it. Breton, Gaelic, and Francophone linguistic nationalism all produce deforming effects within and on the supposedly translated text. As the history of Breton's inclusion and exclusion from French nationalist narratives shows, the French state was perfectly willing to claim an organic heritage for itself and its chosen language. Additionally, Queneau suggests that living language is inherently cosmopolitan; that is, a language that is in daily use will

inevitably absorb or borrow foreign words and phrases, which contradicts the idea of an internally consistent and entirely sufficient national language.

Polyglot Cosmopolitanism and Vernacular Literature

However, Queneau also examines the limits of a more cosmopolitan, polyglot use of language to make up the deficiencies and constraints of national languages. After all, Sally's use of multiple languages achieves little narrative purpose in the "ankou" passage; the chain of loanwords that causes Presle so many problems in his translation are absurdly out of place in her "original" passage. Sally's use of Joycean character names suggests that Queneau is also satirizing the cosmopolitan references and techniques adopted by some modernist writers. Yeats's use of Japanese theatrical techniques has been explored in an earlier chapter, but Queneau's parody is targeted more at the polyglot jokes and allusions employed by Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and others. High modernist works refer to or quote from sources in multiple languages for a variety of reasons: in order to represent an increasingly interconnected world, for example, or to assemble a canonical set of such references. Matei Calinescu has described this latter process as "the artistic reconstruction of the world attempted by the great modernists," and contrasts the subtle traditionalism of modernists like Eliot and Pound with what he frames as an "antiaesthetic" tendency in Continental avant-gardism.⁵⁰ Citing Calinescu, Andreas Huyssen adds that such "modernists [...] emphasized time and again that it was their

⁵⁰ *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism Avant-Garde Decadence Kitsch Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 140.

mission to salvage the purity of high art from the encroachments of urbanization, massification, technological modernization, in short, of modern mass culture.”⁵¹

The cosmopolitan sources from which modernists like Pound and Eliot quote are therefore usually examples of traditionally revered literature: that is, they are often canonical or “high” literary sources. When they do include popular or vernacular cultural references, as Michael North points out, they do so in ostensibly ironic or critical ways.⁵² They aim to construct new traditions within a European canon. In Yeats’s case, of course, his cosmopolitan sources are meant to ratify a nationally-identified high culture; Eliot, in contrast, was outspoken in his desire to recall or construct a more generally Western canon. For Eliot and Yeats, high culture becomes a set of references that provide them the material to construct their literary visions of the Western tradition or Anglo-Irish nationality, respectively. Just as often, literary modernists juxtapose such high, transnational cultural references with examples drawn from vernacular, popular culture. As North has argued, the use of multiple languages and dialects in works like Eliot’s *The Waste Land* or Pound’s *Cantos* also serve to construct a model of intercultural reference, that is, they create the context in which such polyglot referentiality has textual significance and cultural merit. By making such references fit together despite coming from multiple sources, these works make a case for various methods of constructing meaning from the often fragmentary or divergent models of twentieth century literary culture.

⁵¹ *After the Great Divide*, 163.

⁵² See, for example, North’s chapter in *The Dialect of Modernism* on Eliot’s and Pound’s use of African-American dialect in their poetry and private letters.

But in Queneau's novel, Sally's use of multiple languages does not constitute a virtuous performance. Unlike the modernists who are being parodied, Sally does not quote from established literary sources or construct a tradition. She merely translates one basic idea into multiple languages and clumsily includes the translations in her novel. Certain words and phrases possess incantatory power. For the rebels, a Celtic "ankou" is quite different than an ordinary intuition; for Sally, "ankou," "anschauung," and "un seule coup d'un seule" are identical, but she seems to believe that employing multiple loanwords will add literary merit to what is basically a cheap thriller. Queneau's comparison of the brutality in Hadley Chase's novels and Camus's *Caligula* rested on the idea that Camus is using art to work out a moral idea, while Chase aims merely to provide cheap escapism. Because her own novel is merely an erotic thriller, Sally's use of polyglot utterances in "her" novel seem rather absurd given the "low" subject matter, as do her references to Joyce's novels and Irish history. Indeed, Sally and her characters seem to fetishize words like "ankou" for their ethnic and national provenance. For example, when Caffrey tells them he suspects someone is hiding in the women's lavatory, MacCormack twice demands to know whether it is a mere hunch or "an ankou." (44) As an additional joke, the word "ankou" is introduced by the narrator before it finds its way into the illiterate Caffrey's vocabulary alongside several inexact foreign equivalents. In imitating the modernist's polyglot allusions, Sally has forgotten which level of her text the allusion belongs to. For all of these reasons, the multilingual references that Sally Mara makes in *OETTBALF* are showy rather than meaningful, and shallow rather than erudite.

Like the Americanisms of the hard-boiled detective novel, Sally's "Celticism" is also included to add a thin veneer of authenticity to her novel's basically escapist fantasy of sex and violence. Just as Chase and Cheyney engage in simple apery of the American detective novels that originate the hardboiled genre, Sally employs multiple languages in the "ankou" passage of *OETTBALF* in superficial imitation of high modernist reference, suggesting that the novel's use of Joycean names may also be meant to represent Sally's clumsy imitation of a canonically "Irish" work. In effect, Sally's novel is "fake Irish" much as Chase's novel is "fake American." Sally winds up trapped between two notions of literature, the popular potboiler and the high modernist novel. The irony is that Sally is actually Irish; in imitating a supposedly Irish literary genre in so shallow a fashion, she has discarded the cultural authenticity her authorship would otherwise lend to the novel. Absurdly, an Irishwoman can write a "fake Irish" novel by mistaking the superficial techniques of Irish literary culture for the substance and meaning of that culture.

Queneau's Satire of Universal History

Queneau's parody of authenticity in its literary and nationalist forms also reflects the philosophical viewpoint from which he approaches writing, one in which the pose of a "fake Irish" novelist and a "fake French" translator is one means of working through a more general problem in Western literature and philosophy. Queneau's analysis of the relationships that link history and narrative to concepts of authenticity may be interpreted in light of his involvement with the work of Alexandre Kojève, the scholar whose lectures on Hegel have informed much twentieth-century French theory. Queneau attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel, and it was Queneau who helped compile and edit

those lectures for publication, writing the introduction to the French print edition of Kojève's *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁵³ Indeed, the second edition was published by Gallimard in 1947, the same year that Queneau published *OETTBALF*. In the lectures, Kojève provides a reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that emphasizes the narrative formalism of Hegel's philosophy of history.

In Hegel's work, which I can only incompletely and briefly discuss here, history is described as a lengthy dialectical process by which the Spirit of history, or in Hegel's German, *Geist*, becomes manifest in the order and structure of the world as human consciousness and society repeatedly change as historical forces and incomplete modes of being achieve synthesis with their antitheses. The final vision of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is the universal State. For Hegel, this was Napoleon Bonaparte's French Empire, which seemed poised to conquer all of Europe at the time Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology*. This universal political structure would then serve as a kind of cosmopolitan sphere in which human self-awareness and potential could be fully realized in accord with the Spirit of history itself. In his reading of Hegel, Kojève focuses on Hegel's concept of subjective consciousness who acts as the true subject of historical development, reinterpreting the Hegelian "End of History" as the end of meaningful ideological struggle rather than the birth of a conventional state or universal government. Kojève treats Hegel's history as a kind of master narrative in which Geist or consciousness fills the role of the protagonist.

⁵³ The most commonly available English-language edition, entitled *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by James H. Nichols, is an abridged version edited and introduced by Allan Bloom, though Queneau is still credited as having "assembled" the included texts.

Because Queneau compiled these lectures into their most widely available form, critics have interpreted Queneau's works as literary responses to Kojève's version of the Hegelian "End of History." Chief among these critics is Kojève himself, who remarked in a 1952 article that Queneau had written "Les Romans de la sagesse [novels of wisdom]" that depict "la dimanche de la vie [the Sunday of life]", Kojève's name for a posthistorical period in which humanity is no longer attempting to complete the historical task of Being.⁵⁴ Tellingly, Queneau titled one of his later novels *La Dimanche de la Vie*. Similarly, Shadia Drury has argued that Queneau is "the quintessential Kojèvean" in that that he "did not experience the anguished conflict of the inner and outer worlds [...] nor did he live in revolutionary anticipation of such a reconciliation" because, in the Kojèvean interpretation of history, "whatever reconciliation is possible has already been accomplished."⁵⁵ In Drury's argument, "Queneau's novels are peppered with wildly enthusiastic tourists for whom history is a work of art."⁵⁶ She interprets *OETTBALF* in this light, arguing that Gertie Girdle is able to overcome and destroy the Irish Republicans because she has left behind her devotion to sentimental illusions and their concomitant modes of constrained behavior.⁵⁷ For Drury, Gertie exemplifies Queneau's Kojèvean idea of "a totally disenchanting world" wherein "the naked light of truth" results in "the absence of the sort of sentimentality and refined feelings that are supposedly the

⁵⁴ Kojève, "Les Romans de la sagesse," *Critique* 60 (1952), 387.

⁵⁵ *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 93.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

contrivances of civilization.”⁵⁸ Her activities then amount to the progressive disenchantment of the Irish rebels’ romantic, but ultimately false values, which for Gertie become the materials of play.

However, Drury’s interpretation of the novel ignores Gertie’s initial participation in the illusions of propriety and sentimentality, as well as her apparent willingness at the conclusion to return to the illusory role she has briefly abandoned. Additionally, while the Easter Rising is an event that has been sentimentally and romantically enshrined in various nationalist accounts of Irish history and as a source of inspiration for other independence movements around the world including some of the Breton nationalist groups described earlier, it occurs long after the period Hegel and Kojève designate as the end of history. In keeping with this philosophical view of history, Queneau’s novel portrays the Rising as a non-event taking place after the End of History, not as a historical event with serious and meaningful stakes. As a result, his account of the Rising is not romantic, inspirational, or momentous, but merely farcical.

Charles Egert, another critic who stresses the Kojèvean influence in Queneau’s work, has argued that his novels are more specifically a modernist parody centering on his characters’ utopian “misreadings of reality.”⁵⁹ For Egert, Queneau parody opposes the realist novel by employing modernist techniques to present the subjective imaginations of his characters, suggesting that ideal or projected social and political orders are essentially “daydreams.” By extension, then, the realist novel does not portray the world of its

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵⁹ “Raymond Queneau’s Utopian Dream Worlds,” *Utopian Studies* 16.2 (2005), 173.

author, but rather is a demonstration that “the novelistic form may be created out of mental processes such as daydreaming.”⁶⁰ Ultimately, for Egert, “Queneau’s approach to utopias is mythological [...] time and time again, he makes the text a utopia which repeats an unreal textual theme.”⁶¹ But Queneau always leaves some space between life and literature, that is, between the idea or representation of a utopia and a practical and active commitment to it. In order to make his readers aware of the space between life and literature, his works employ parody and irony to critically evaluate the ideas and symbols of a given imagination.

OETTBALF’s title begins the process of ironic reflection on the intersections of mythic history and everyday life. “On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes” is a paraphrase drawn from a remark by Napoleon Bonaparte, one made as the deposed French ruler dictated his memoirs to his generals during their shared imprisonment at Saint Helena. Many of those generals, including Emmanuel, comte de las Cases, published memoirs of Napoleon’s life drawn from their notes of his dictation; las Cases’s memoir, published as *Memorial de Ste. Hélène*, contains a version of the passage in question. An edition of las Cases’s memoir was published by Gallimard’s Pléiades imprint, which Queneau directed, in several volumes from 1955-1957. In the memoir, Las Cases quotes Napoleon saying that Westerners have erred in giving women equal rights: “nous avions tout gâté en traitant les femmes trop bien [we treat women too well, and in doing so have

⁶⁰ Ibid., 174.

⁶¹ Ibid., 181.

spoiled everything.]”⁶² Queneau’s title for the Sally Mara novel modifies the phrase, but his allusion to one of the less distinguished pronouncements of Hegel’s man of Universal History remains clear. The Irish republicans and Commodore Cartwright seem to believe that the nation-state represents a historical culmination in this sense. Cartwright and the rebels believe that their actions will realize a complete form of geopolitical order, albeit from opposite sides: for the Irish Republicans in the novel, the end of history takes the shape of an independent Irish state to come; for Cartwright, the end of history is a global British empire whose parameters and ideology he must enforce. And in the novel’s historical context, both sides lose: the world war that Cartwright alludes to signals the end of empires like Britain’s, and for the rebels neither the Easter Rising nor subsequent Irish wars will make manifest their vision of a unified and independent island. Gertie, who abandons all such visions by refusing to recognize either the King of England or the Irish rebels as men of destiny, achieves only a parody of such self-recognition in her comical performance of “liberated” consciousness.

What Queneau suggests, in a satire of the Kojèvean narrative of history, is that grand historical narratives are best understood as myths or fictions, and must be treated as such. Like the other memoirs produced by Napoleon’s generals, las Cases’s version of history is of questionable veracity. He incorporates Napoleon’s digressions on women, a digression in which the supposed man of destiny pointedly wishes to exclude women from the community of equal beings envisioned by grand historical narratives, alongside

⁶² *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène I*, ed. Gérard Walter (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), 735.

the weightier material of the memoirs. By citing a relatively trivial moment in Las Cases's memoir, Queneau reminds his readers that the grand sweep of history also contains sordid and trivial details as well: the man of destiny is, after all, a man, complete with drives and prejudices. Queneau similarly invents a sordid and trivial element of the much-mythologized Easter Rising, setting it entirely in a third-hand, fragmentary Dublin culled from various fictional sources. Additionally, the nature of Las Cases's memoir suggests that history may only be narrated in indirect and distorted forms. Napoleon's generals are notorious for manipulating other historical accounts to portray themselves favorably and discredit their political and personal rivals. For this reason, later compilations of Napoleon's private writings and memoirs have omitted many of their additions and alterations. Queneau's title does not quote Napoleon himself, but a sort of half-fictional or mythological Napoleon constructed by assembling the elements of various Napoleonic texts and fragments. But this in turn suggests that access to universal or even national history is always partial in two senses: it is both biased and fragmentary.

While this pessimistic vision of historical narrative is appropriate for a novel whose materials are often assembled from bits and pieces of other novels, the title's reference to Napoleon suggests another form of engagement with Kojèvean and Hegelian views of history. Napoleon occupies a prominent place in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in that Hegel perceives Napoleon as the man who will usher in the universal State that makes up the final situation of humanity. The Napoleonic empire is, for Hegel, the real form of the End of History: it is Hegel's utopia. This greatly simplifies Hegel's thought, of course, but Queneau's reference is not to the whole of Hegel's argument so

much as to the particular figurative role that Napoleon plays in it and to Kojève's interpretation of this final moment in Hegel's phenomenology of history. As Kojève's himself puts it:

Napoleon himself *is* the wholly "satisfied" Man, who, in and by his definitive Satisfaction, completes the course of the historical evolution of humanity. He is the human *Individual* in the proper and full sense of the word; because it is through *him*, through *this* particular man, that the [...] truly universal cause is realized; and because this particular man is recognized, in his very particularity, by all men, universally. The only thing that he lacks is *Self-Consciousness*; he *is* the perfect Man, but he does not yet *know* it [...] Therefore it is Hegel, the author of the *Phenomenology*, who is somehow Napoleon's *Self-Consciousness*.⁶³

In the passage from which the title quotation of *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* is drawn, Napoleon laments that men have given equal status to women, when in fact "nature has made woman our slave;" by making women, an inferior order of being, equal to men, Napoleon states that "we have spoiled everything."⁶⁴ The universal is apparently gendered in the view of Hegel's un-self-conscious "perfect Man," and his world cannot include women in its concept of "the human *Individual*."⁶⁵ In much the same way, the Irish Republicans and the British Commodore view Gertie as less than themselves. For them, she is concurrently an obstacle to their military ends, an object of desire, and an inferior requiring protection. In comparison, while Gertie's "liberation" is hardly a model of Hegelian enlightenment she nonetheless gains from it considerable practical advantages over the men around her.

⁶³ *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 69-70.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Max Kircheisen, *Memoirs of Napoleon I, Compiled from His Own Writings*. Trans. Frederick Collins (London: Hutchison, 1935), 152.

⁶⁵ Kojève, *Lectures*, 69-70.

Ultimately, none of the characters in the novel are agents of historical change: the Irish Republicans do not oust the British, Gertie returns to her role as an ingénue fiancée, and Cartwright and the British Empire remain safely blindered. The moment of self-recognition, the encounter between the Hegelian Man of Destiny and his externalized self-consciousness, never occurs in Queneau's novel. By extension, the politics of the characters are not the basis for a Hegelian universal state, a totalizing and cosmopolitan center of the world. Instead, the play between the vernacular and cosmopolitan in Queneau's novel means that such totalizing forms are essentially impossible, and that an intelligent negotiation of the competing forms and forces that exist in the world is the best that can be achieved.

Instead, world-history and the nation-state are figures of a myth, a species of fictional narrative. As a result he becomes free to play with historical events and details as if they are merely the elements of fiction. This freedom to play with history becomes even greater with respect to historical events that have arguably already been mythologized in public discourse. The Easter Rising is one such event, long since reduced to the matter of political mythmaking and literary invention. *OETTBALF* operates on a level similar to the crime novels of James Hadley Chase and Peter Cheyney, since all of these works mythologize one or another national setting and historical period. The difference is that Queneau repeatedly signals the unreality of his version of the Easter Rising, employing various devices to make it clear that he is presenting a literary version of the event. His criticism of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* is that its escapism is not of the demythologizing sort; its reductive brutality, constitutive

of what he and Orwell both consider a fascist imaginary, is meant to be taken largely at face value by its readers. It is not merely an unrealistic vision of American life, but an ultimately unlivable vision of life in general: the fascist imaginary is a fantasy of destructive, sadistic violence at its core because it cannot differentiate its impossible fantasies of life from real life, and seeks to use force to make up the difference.

Conclusion

For Queneau, parody and irony are counterforces to such models' justifications for violence. Instead of the universal history of a cosmopolitan state, such models either offer partial and incomplete histories aimed only at establishing a provincial state nationalism, or they imagine that such partial and local histories might be transformed into a universal condition by means of force. In both cases, a vernacular narrative field is mistaken for complete picture of world-history. Parody and irony are Queneau's methods of demonstrating the difference between narrative and reality: "the gulf between life and literature" is, for Queneau, one of the proper subjects of literary representation. For Queneau, fiction is not capable of traditional realist representation in any meaningful sense; for him, narrative lacks the capacity to represent reality accurately or to model a possible reality systematically. Narrating is always an act of myth-making or distortion. Filtered through his conception that historical narrative is a form of mythmaking or fiction writing, Queneau's representations of history tend to be parodic and self-consciously literary. Of course, the subject of much history – and of Hegel's *History* – is the nation-state. For this reason, the nation-state and its mythic history make ripe targets for Quenean parody. But so are a number of other codes, even codes of conduct with

which Queneau might agree. In this light, Queneau's novel curiously seems to depict a brief suspension of history for Gertie, in which she is disenchanted while the world around her – including her fiancé – goes on participating in the set of illusions within which the Easter Rising can be understood as a historical event. Ironically, Gertie's liberation from the English vision of propriety and empire – a parody of the idea of some self-contained utopianism – is facilitated by her confrontation with the rival, equally risible utopian fantasy of the Irish revolutionaries.

In convincing Gertie that her faith in a British imperial reality illusory, they inadvertently show her how to pierce all such illusory perceptions of the world, including their own. As a result, she is able to manipulate them for her own pleasure. Once free from the codes of conduct imposed by these myths of sexuality and femininity, Gertie becomes capable of ruthlessly overwhelming and demolishing them with little effort on her part. For all the investment that men like Callinan, Caffrey, or her fiancé Cartwright profess in such ideas and codes, they are all only a few gestures or impulses away from completely abandoning their codes. The constraints of myth prove ephemeral in the face of the realities of desire. This is the danger of placing one's faith in the myths of history: ultimately, they do not actually restrain or civilize sexual and aggressive desires. At best, they can channel these desires into relatively benign fantasies; at worst, they become justifications for brutality and sadism. However, at the novel's end Gertie must at least pay some sort of lip service to the civilized codes and illusory self-perceptions she has abandoned. Not only is her disenchantment only partial, but she also fails to inaugurate any external change. Instead, she can only act by adopting forms of everyday and

vernacular self-representation: in the novel's conclusion, this involves her utterance of the cliché's of chaste English maidenhood. The conclusion of *OETTBALF* leaves little doubt that she will indeed go on to marry Cartwright and will, at least publicly, play the part of a proper "English girl." However, her experiences ensure that this role will be little more than a fiction in which she pretends to participate, one that she knowingly helps construct. In a sense, Gertie becomes a kind of author herself, a conscious participant in literature.

For Queneau, the constructive work of literature is always entirely distant from reality; any effort to close the gap results in monstrous abuses of power and ends in violence that is destructive rather than redemptive. As a result, only a critical distance from the symbolic contents of thought makes possible one's engagement in meaningful reflection. No language can be a complete system for representing the world, because the world changes and history goes on; for this reason, Queneau offers an open-ended vernacular model of living language in neo-Française, one that can serve as the vernacular of bounded cosmopolitan spaces like Paris and open up the nation to the benefits of international and cosmopolitan exchange. In Queneau's novel, neither the nation nor the world make up the realities of individual life so much as they make up particular reflective modes for contextualizing and examining that life. For Queneau, nationalism's criteria of authentic belonging, of authentic nationality, make up the generic features of various modes of political and self-representation. The concept of national belonging remains a useful tool for art, one that mobilizes art's power to allow reflection. If the

enchanted world of the text cannot directly represent reality, it can still permit engagement with reality and necessary reflection upon it.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that Irish modernism attempts to accommodate two seemingly contradictory models of the world: a local or nationalist idea and a global or cosmopolitan one. As I have shown, the apparent choice between nationalist and cosmopolitan ways of being in the world is made amid a web of other choices, other political and aesthetic themes that also define and characterize what I have been calling a field of tension. This field of tension provokes the aesthetic responses offered by Irish modernism, and modernism more generally. When I began, I suggested that this field of tension spanned the distance between two poles, which I labeled as the vernacular and cosmopolitan views of modernist literature. However, these labels were almost immediately complicated, as they concealed multiple tensions with which modernist writing also engages critically. Competing ideas of individualism and collectivism and rival forms of liberty and belonging continually emerge from modernist writers' exploration of a field of tension between the poles of locale and globe, nation and cosmopolis. But just as the modernists work to accommodate elements of both cosmopolitan and national identity, they also suggest that the conflicts between individualist and collectivist models of the nation, the self, and the world might be possible to resolve. This is especially the case in Irish modernist works like those I have been examining. Yeats, Bowen, Beckett, and Queneau all seek to write ways between these alternatives, to transform a choice between irreconcilably opposed worldviews into a literary accommodation of the way these ideas are in fact practically mixed and blended – heterogeneous.

Vernacular and Cosmopolitan in Relation to Literary Space

I began with the idea of vernacular and cosmopolitan models of modernism in order to consider the problems of denoting Irish modernism as part of a national literature. To a great extent, of course, it never was; many Irish writers were distinctly cosmopolitan in their outlook, as my examples have shown, while at the same time making literary use of their lived experiences of Ireland. Irish vernacularism, in developing and embracing so-called Hiberno-English, may be framed as a response to an imperially-dispersed global English, as can the polyglot writing of cosmopolitan modernists like Beckett and Joyce. Irish writing in Gaelic is much less likely to achieve international recognition, or even the international readership that necessarily precedes such recognition. English, conversely, has been spread widely enough that the literature that successfully reinvented it as a distinctly Irish vernacular helped establish Irish modernism as a central body of work within global modernism. Distinguishing Ireland from the world requires imagining the world as well as Ireland; resisting the lasting consequences of linguistic hegemony, in turns, requires the reappropriation and transformation of the hegemonic language. Modernist experimentation becomes one way of reappropriating English, and the polyglot writings of Joyce and Beckett are another such method. Daniel Corkery, despite his essentialism regarding Irish republicanism, argues that a few Irish writers have managed to express what he considers Ireland's national consciousness using the English language. English literature and language may have conditioned the international literary space into which Irish modernist literature emerged, but Irish writers and critics could, to use Pound's phrase "take charge" of

English and, to extend Casanova's metaphor, capture a space for themselves. The same notion can apply to polyglot literatures like Beckett's, where the goal is not to capture an Irish space within a globally-distributed English but rather to construct a site of free exchange within ostensibly "Irish" or "French" literary space from which Beckett could try to escape the boundaries imposed by Irishness, Anglo-Irishness, Englishness, and by national identity in general. For Queneau, of course, the transposition of the Anglo-American crime novel and the Irish modernist novel into a Francophone *mélange* allows him to question and upset the divisions between formal and vernacular French, and the cultural institutions affiliated with both types of French literature. Without the Irish case providing an example of how to vernacularize and then individualize an institutional, global literary language, Queneau's goals might have been far more difficult to achieve.

Both cosmopolitanism and vernacularism in Irish modernism also reflect the inherently critical, political role these two tendencies play in modernism more generally. Casanova and Rebecca Walkowitz have both argued that cosmopolitanism becomes a literary value for modernism precisely because it permits non-nationalist or anti-nationalist forms of literary engagement. Thus Walkowitz is able to speak of critical cosmopolitanism as a method of political engagement for minority artists, and Casanova can describe the cosmopolitan modernisms of Joyce and Beckett as practices of artistic self-liberation from the nation-state's monopoly of literary capital. In practice, Irish modernists critically responded to both sorts of domination – they tended to critique both English hegemony over Ireland and nationalist domination of Irish cultural life. In the cases of Yeats and Bowen, this meant constructing Anglo-Irishness as an identity neither

English nor Irish, capable of selectively opposing the unwanted aspects of both doctrinaire Englishness and orthodox Irishness while retaining the attractive or useful ones. For writers like Joyce and Beckett, cosmopolitan expatriation provided a similar position beyond the spheres of England and Ireland from which to write critically of both. But in every case, Ireland is one audience among many, England another. Irish modernist writers negotiated a path between two models – cosmopolitan and vernacular – in order to address their works to heterogeneous readerships and to opposed cultural and political institutions.

This allows modernist writers to frame their works as an address to specific groups, institutions, and even to international or national literary spaces simply by emphasizing and deemphasizing particular elements of those works. In some cases, simply presenting their works to a particular readership (or, in the case of radio adaptations, a particular audience) is enough to condition the reception of the work appropriately. In other instances, a shift in medium or presentation achieves the same effect: Joyce's publication of *Ulysses* as a limited edition aimed at collectors has been well-documented by Lawrence Rainey, but one might add Yeats's adaptation of *The Words upon the Window-Pane* for BBC radio and Beckett's English translations of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable* to the list. In the case of *Molloy*, as I have shown, the novel itself underwent considerable textual alteration with Beckett's guidance in order to make its larger patterns and methods specifically and critically intelligible to an Anglophone, and especially an Irish readership. Bowen's essays, in which she repositions the Big House as an open, yet private space for the visitor, are also ways of

framing her modernist revisions of the Big House novel and the Irish Protestant Gothic. More broadly, the work the essays do suggests the way Bowen could perform her Anglo-Irish ethnicity in seemingly contradictory ways, such that she could sincerely love her family's Irish estate and her life in Ireland while serving as a faithful agent of the British government in a foreign, questionably neutral country. And Queneau found the modernist idiom, especially the Irish modernist idiom, an especially useful method for expressing his complex relationship with French identity and language politics, as well as a staging ground for his critique of the gulf between popular literature and high art, and that between taste and ideology. He is less interested in satirizing modernism than he is in taking advantage of its capacity to accommodate opposed, heterogeneous artistic and political impulses in order to structure his own ironic, multiple response to national and international contexts after another great war.

In order to provide an example of the way modernists' practices were more heterogeneous than their critical and political statements, I will point towards a specific example of a binary division often imagined as characteristic of literary modernism. Modernists often made statements that divided the elite artist-critic from mass audiences, and even in practice they frequently produced work for small international audiences or for literary coteries. In some cases, coterie modernism was likely a genuine practice. But the Irish modernists I have examined, and, I would argue, the majority of canonically and historically prominent modernist writers tend to present their work to more varied audiences and in more varied media than their doctrinaire statements of elitism would suggest. As I have shown in the preceding chapters, writers like Yeats often seem to bear

a deep suspicion and distrust of populist politics or mass commercialism nonetheless seek ways to engage with the mass (albeit often indirectly). Similarly, both T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound maintained a concern with popular outlets and popular politics, albeit in disastrous ways in Pound's case. But Eliot's later, popular plays and Pound's newspaper columns and ongoing concern with the idea of a "universal curriculum" of literature and the arts suggest that the popular consciousness, not merely the elite mind was their concern.

In Ireland, where radical political change created still greater and more time-sensitive opportunities for political engagement, this concern with the popular political and cultural will is unsurprisingly common to Irish artists, whether they are ostensibly vernacular populists or cosmopolitan expatriates. It should not be surprising, then, that Yeats, for all his antidemocratic rhetoric, frequently took political advantage of his status as the popular face of contemporary Irish literature; nor should his willingness to embrace radio to popularize his plays be a shock. Yeats desired larger audiences and broader methods of transmission for his ideas than the small circulations of modernist coterie and critical elites could have afforded him. Yeats is something of an extreme case among those I discuss here: Bowen and Queneau were much more comfortable working in mass media and writing for broader audiences than the typical image of literary modernists as cultural mandarins suggests.¹

¹ While Queneau is more frequently grouped among the postmodernists, the novel I have selected and the work he does in it, I argue, speaks as much to questions that I have been arguing constitute modernism. Along with Beckett's trilogy, which has also sometimes been claimed as an example of postmodernism rather than a modernism, his novel is at least a legacy of Irish modernism and, I would argue, an active contribution to Irish modernism itself.

The division between the mass audience and the elite literary circle, like the distinctions between vernacular and cosmopolitan forms of expression, is something of a canard, especially in the Irish case. Just as the vernacular may only be defined in opposition to the cosmopolitan, and a national literature with reference to an international literary space, elite artists define themselves by also defining the mass from which they wish to be distinguished. In order to speak to those masses again, this artificial distinction has to be interrogated, modified, sometimes partially or wholly abandoned. While I am not arguing that divisions do not exist in politics or in art, the sharpness and absoluteness of many such distinctions are often constructed by people and institutions. The divisions between local and global, vernacular and cosmopolitan tend to be heightened or imposed by nationalists and states for their own purposes; and it is hardly controversial to suggest of modernism that the distinctions between high and low art, mass audience and elite circle, are similarly constructed by elite circles or individual artists for various purposes as well. What I would add, however, is that modernist art constructs this distinction in order to contradict it and partially dissolve it. Irish modernist writers sometimes repeat the division of locales from the world and from one another, a division carried out by political bodies and institutions, in order to similarly complicate and even contradict the division.

Looking forward, then, I argue that Irish modernism emerges in circumstances that demand it speak in more than one voice or include multiple, incompatible ideas or themes: vernacular and cosmopolitan, national and international. Because the shape and nature of an autonomous Ireland were unsettled matters for much of the period associated

with modernism, I argue that Ireland as a literary terrain was especially suited to playing out these distinctions, particularly when compared to its neighboring island. As I noted in the introduction to this study, John Marx has argued that English modernism tended to expand the frontiers of what “Englishness” could accommodate, as a way of assuaging late imperial anxieties and containing the effects colonial and national difference might have upon the construct of English national identity. Whether or not Marx is correct in reading English modernism as a reconsolidation of state-directed English nationalism, the possibility he discusses is far less plausible for Ireland given its differing historical circumstances. As critics like David Lloyd have argued, Ireland could always imagine itself as a minor nation, complicating if not precluding the task of genuinely consolidating the Irish cultural imaginary in quite the way Marx proposes regarding its English counterpart. It is worth noting that Irish modernist writers generally tended to write against such consolidations, and typically opposed both the political dominion of the British Empire or the parochial censorship of the Irish state. (English modernism, I would argue, opposes nationalist parochialism and rote ideology as well, but the Irish case is, as I have repeatedly noted, a more readily apparent instance of this heterodox and heterogeneous tendency in modernism.) Because of the transnational literary inheritance of an English reinvented as an Irish vernacular, Irish sites could be established as the literary locations from which to speak to multiple audiences and to complicate or confound institutional polarities like those I have discussed above.

Indeed, the modernist text is often specifically located in some way. This sense of particular location is most obvious when a city like Dublin (or, in English modernism,

London) is portrayed as a cosmopolis, but it also occurs on the level of language, as with the Anglo-Irish and Irish use of English as a way-station for Irish, transnational, and cosmopolitan ideas. Location within Irish modernist texts functions like the languages and allusions of the texts. For example, Bowen's use of the Big House as a particular location is mirrored by her reference to the structures and conventions of the Big House novel, the Gothic tale, and the English modernist novel. Much as the domestic living spaces in her novels become the sites of complex performances of national and transnational identity, and are often literal way stations for visitors and émigrés, the novels themselves locate a set of practices that Bowen identifies with Anglo-Irishness as a distinctly transnational form of belonging. Beckett achieves something similar, but in a more radical fashion, as the unnamed space of Molloy's wanderings become, in two languages, an Ireland that is at once a specific, even provincial locale and a cosmopolitan no-place. The Irish modernist novel's use of Ireland as a location which confounds the division between the particular and universal may be a lasting effect of the uncertain political future of Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so that even after the founding of the Free State and the emergence of a codified, somewhat provincial national culture under de Valera, imagining alternative ways to be in or from Ireland remains not only a possibility but a necessity for writers and artists. Because Irish writers framed Ireland as a special locale from which to imagine and depict these alternatives, later writers like Raymond Queneau could further develop Ireland's dual status as a representative of the provincial extremes of a blinkered nationalism and the dissipated end of a caricatured cosmopolitanism to comment on that theme more generally.

By adopting the terms of division that separate Ireland from the rest of the world, or the Anglo-Irish from the “authentic” or “native” Irish, Irish modernist writers can work to modify or subvert these terms. Irish modernist writing is staged as an active intervention into the political and cultural life of the emergent Irish nation-state. More broadly, Irish modernism models forms of modernist intervention into the conflicts between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, an activist impulse Irish modernism shares with global modernisms. This shared impulse can be seen in the works discussed in the preceding chapters, even when they seem wildly divergent otherwise. Yeats’s earnest play of 1904, intended to shape the consciousness of Irish nationals, may seem quite distant from Queneau’s ironic novel of 1947, which aims to amuse or fool a French and perhaps international readership. It is true that Queneau is most often categorized as a postmodern writer, not a modernist; similarly, it has been argued that the Joycean text to which Queneau’s novel refers is as often termed more a cosmopolitan work than a strictly Irish one. (Joyce’s novels also been claimed as central texts by critics of both postmodernism and modernism.) At the outset of this dissertation, I argued that the interplay of those two seemingly opposed poles – the cosmopolitan and the vernacular – in the works discussed here is both distinctly Irish and distinctly modernist in character.

Irish modernist works also share a pair of conflicting desires to speak to both international, elite literary culture and to vernacular, mass culture. These conflicting desires are arguably most visible in the work of Yeats and Queneau. Yeats’s use of radio and the theatre to reach mass audiences, alongside his participation in politics, demonstrate his desire to reach the Irish and English public; at the same time, his

participation in international literary circles and his use of cosmopolitan cultural resources like the dramatic conventions of Noh theatre and the resources of classical Greek tragedy suggests his interest in the emerging canons of cosmopolitan “high” culture. Queneau’s novel was composed with the explicit aim of reaching a popular audience that consumed such “low” culture genres; at the same time, Queneau’s satiric eye impels him to critique the genre he apes, and to incorporate intertextual references to one of the central works of the cosmopolitan, “high” modernist canon. The difference between the two writers is primarily that Yeats earnestly embraces the idea that literatures and even genres have specific characters – national and vernacular, in the case of Irish myths and Irish politics, or cosmopolitan and elite, as in the case of the various “classical” literatures on which he models his art – while for Queneau the idea of national literatures and Hegelian world history both collapse into a kind of post-historical irony – genre replaces the functions of national and ethnic identification, and the elite canons of cosmopolitan literature are subjected to an ironizing process that levels the distinction between high and low culture on which the idea of an “elite” canon is founded. In Beckett’s work, of course, these competing desires are perhaps least visible, and emerge more from Beckett’s own apparent concern with vernacular – his use of French and his use of translation into Irish English – than from the texts themselves, where vernacular reference is usually elliptical and often decays into insignificance. Not all of these writers really aimed at a mass audience in the usual sense. But they remained conscious of the political power of the mass, and of the necessity of eventually presenting some form of their ideas to a wider audience defined by forms of national belonging.

Irish Modernism and Global Modernism

The greatest, most lasting successes of Irish literature in this regard were not among the general population, but rather among the much smaller international audience for high modernist work. Yeats's poetry, Beckett's plays, and some of Queneau's novels have been popularized, but the greater portion of modernist literature – even the majority of Yeats's, Beckett's, and Queneau's work – has a primarily academic readership today. To the extent that they became successful with wider audiences in Ireland or abroad, the Irish modernists did so as reference points for “high literature.” Modernist writers' notions of advocacy also extend to their careful cultivation of their own public images as artists and writers. In some cases, this extended to their cultivation or acceptance of particular forms of popular acclaim, as evidenced by Yeats's widely acknowledged position as the central poet of the Irish republic and the tremendous popular success of Queneau's later novel, *Zazie dans la metro*. For others, like Beckett, international literary celebrity was not necessarily a desirous thing, but nonetheless provided welcome opportunities to subsidize literary art and to achieve a comfortable lifestyle.

The intersections of high and low culture in the texts I have analyzed here also speaks to the heterogeneity of address that I argue characterizes the modernist text more generally. In Irish modernism, this heterogeneity of address arises from both the compound nature of Irish identities and from modernism's concern with the various “great divides” traced by critics like Andreas Huyssen. Of course, as noted at the outset of this study, many of those divisions were expressly noted in the interwar period of the early twentieth century by the modernists and their contemporaries. These divides may be

between elite and mass audiences and their respective cultures, between national literatures and cosmopolitan canons, and more practically between the political loyalties and vernacular practices of different people. Whichever of these divisions one chooses to focus on, though, the construction or recognition of a cultural divide creates an opportunity for plural intention on the part of writers and plural reception on the part of readers. Since the plurality of possible meanings results from a difference figured as a division or an opposition, these intentions and receptions will therefore often have the seeming character of contradiction. The cultural vision of modernism practically demands such contradiction, much as the historical situations of Ireland and Europe in the early twentieth century practically demand similar contradiction and compromise of both ardent nationalists and equally ardent cosmopolitans of Irish origin. Just as it is no use insisting on the purity of a national culture long since made a transnational hybrid, or behaving as if ethnic and political divisions have no physical or legal force with which to impose some of their claims on individuals, it is also impracticable to pretend that the other side of a schism or an opposition exists entirely separate from the other or that such schisms are total. None of the high modernists divorce themselves entirely from mass culture, even if they refer to it in order to deride it; none of the Irish modernists managed to entirely abandon either Ireland or the world beyond Ireland, nor did they succeed in banishing either Hiberno-English or non-English vernaculars. (Indeed, none of the writers mentioned in this dissertation imagined such a thing was possible, not even Daniel Corkery.)

The effects of this perception of schism are therefore tempered by writers' practical knowledge that both elite literary circles and ordinary mass readerships could potentially overlap or interact with one another. Lawrence Rainey convincingly tracks the market practices of modernists seeking to consolidate or expand the financial opportunities provided by both elite and mass audiences; what I have attempted to argue here is that the modernists' literary practices and cultural politics similarly respond to the contemporary impossibility of any totalizing vision of the period in question. The impossibility of such a totality was especially clear to Irish writers, who attempt to deal with that impossibility in their work, to the extent that even non-Irish writers like Queneau come to see Ireland as an especially usefully literary location from which to examine related issues. In every case, Irish modernist writers idiosyncratically thread the practical demands of political and personal life. At the same time, they remain aware that the lives of their readers and critics are similarly beset by contradictory, yet overlapping ideas of the nation, the world, and the self.

Modernism as a Literature of Passage

These ideas do not exist in a vacuum, however, as Casanova, Marx, Rainey, and Walkowitz point out: literary and international politics were shifting in the period, and along with that came economic and technological changes as well. The most critical of these changes enabled the creation of an international book market in which both mass publication and intentionally limited circulation were possible. This distinction between collectors' markets and general markets is ably described by Rainey, and it complicates Casanova's notion of literary space in many ways. Literary space in the early twentieth

century cannot help but be affected by these changes in trade, changes wrought by new modes of transportation, new and vastly enlarged forms of communication, as well as the larger forces exemplified by ongoing processes of industrialization and the emergence of transnational and cosmopolitan groups and classes. Against these processes, which would seem to generate cosmopolitan structures and worldviews, the political model of the nation-state became a virtual default state for any self-defined or traditional ethnic group. This meant that specific audiences with niche, distinctly local tastes also emerged even as did the aforementioned cosmopolitan classes.

During this rising tide of nationalism, the demand for defined, politicized vernaculars and traditions that might lend credence and substance to the claims of particular groups also arose, including the demands for a strictly-defined national literature capable of being compared favorably with extant or competing literatures. Part of what allows the Irish modernist writers to maneuver between the opposed poles of vernacular and cosmopolitan or nationalism and transnationalism is this emergence of multiple audiences and multiple markets for literary work. The old model of national literatures as the guarantors of existing, specific governments or established sovereignties was now giving way to the development of national literatures ahead of the actual achievement of political independence and national sovereignty. In this respect, the Irish were indeed well ahead of nearly every other group; if, as John Marx argues, English literature in the modernist period takes up the task of modeling a new working model of English national belonging, Irish literature had been working at the same task much earlier. The reason for this was simple necessity, given the absence of any recent

independent, distinct Irish political system; even after independence, the Irish government was modeled largely on the English and American systems of democratic republicanism.

But an essential heterogeneity underlies both nationalism and cosmopolitanism even in the documents produced by nationalist politicians. The Irish constitution of 1937 is a striking effort to meet the prevailing international standards for the constitution of a democratic republic while at the same time representing a distinctive “Irishness.” On the one hand, it replicates the American model of articles and enumerated rights including classically liberal guarantees of religious freedom and tolerance and incorporates many certain features of the British parliamentary system, especially the relationship between the branches of government. On the other hand, the 1937 constitution takes pains to establish Irish as a preferred official language over English, and despite the notes of religious tolerance, incorporates Catholic positions on sexuality and blasphemy into the legal foundation of the republic. The very language of the document is a symptom of these conflicting aims: the English and Irish texts differ on several points, with the Irish ostensibly the “preferred” version. In the 1937 constitution, a country that was very much of two minds about whether to embrace nationalism or cosmopolitanism chose a series of sometimes contradictory options between the two poles. It is no wonder that the Irish modernist literary works that were in many ways the vanguard and bellwether of Irish independence display a similarly heterogeneous, sometimes self-contradictory character.

As a result, Irish modernist writing must manage multiple forms of address; it must speak heterogeneously because its concerns are multiple, sometimes contradictory,

and often in flux. In this respect, Irish modernism reflects the status of Ireland and “Irishness” in the early part of the twentieth century. But while the conditions of the emerging Irish nation-state make the conflicts between worldviews and representational styles especially visible, these conditions are more broadly those of modernism in general. The modernist period is one in which a new form of globality emerges. Technological and political change are both symptoms and drivers of this emerging, but incomplete form of globalism. Confronted with a world in passage, a world defined by incomplete, competing economic and political alternatives, modernist writers took advantage of their condition to imagine alternatives and to assert powerful new models of selfhood and belonging. Old certainties and teleologies, now unsettled, became the raw materials for modernists who might work to oppose them in the interest of individual liberty or reconstruct them, proposing new or modified historical ends to solidify institutional support for their political and artistic ambitions. Really, most modernists had to do both: Yeats may have imagined a classical republican state as the ideal future of Ireland, but to articulate that vision he found himself battling censorship in the actual state that emerged; and Beckett may have sought a form of cosmopolitan liberty for himself through emigration, but the realities of world war and the difficulties of transcultural publication required him to reassemble the elements of Irishness and to belong to Ireland and France in some fashion. The heterogeneity of the early twentieth century, in which decaying nineteenth-century empires, an unstable nation-state system, and an emerging model of global economy provided opportunities for the radical reimagining of personal identity and political space. What I have attempted to do here is

chart some of the ways in which modernist writers encountered and subverted the forces influencing those spaces, working to transform Ireland into an alternative, distinctly literary terrain from which to contest, resist, and control those forces.

I would like to close by gesturing towards a broader statement about the nature of modernism as I have described it here, and more specifically towards ways the Irish case of modernism suggests ways of examining other world literatures. As Casanova's argument suggests, Irish modernism has considerable value as the basis for comparative approaches to world literature. Indeed, many critics of Irish literature have made use of comparativist arguments. Casanova's argument that Irish literature works, in microcosm, as a model for the development of new national literatures and literary spaces is one example of this tendency. Similarly, one could point towards David Lloyd's treatment of Irish literature as an exemplary case of a minor literature, or Seamus Deane's description of post-1923 Irish literature as a particularly interesting case of postcolonial literature. All of these models treat Irish literature as a site from which writers imagined alternatives to various paradigms of domination. In these accounts, the development of Irish modernism in particular represents a range of responses to nineteenth-century imperialism, British sovereignty over Ireland, and ideologically parochial forms of Irish nationalism. In each of these arguments, Irish modernism represents a way of engaging with historical forces in the early twentieth century. In the work of these critics and others, the various paradigms of domination are an existing historical condition; in response to this condition, Irish modernist literature imagines possible futures and alternatives.

Even for critics who reject such paradigms of domination as unnecessarily reductive, like John Marx, a central work of Irish modernism like *Ulysses* leads the way for other modernists (in Marx's argument, Virginia Woolf) as they "transmut[e] the Victorian chiasmus of centre and periphery into an infinitely more complex set of transactions, always in need of management, among diverse localities."² Marx may be arguing against the postcolonial critical model, but he still conceives of Irish and British modernism as a critical response to an increasingly outdated, unsustainable paradigm of power and control. Critics who employ paradigms of domination view those forms of control as real, but increasingly unmanageable forms of imperial and nationalist politics which must give way to various imagined alternatives. Critics like Marx argue instead that even the forms of political control and management undergo a radical revision during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. But both schools of thought share a vision of modernism as a means of political and cultural innovation opposed to an unsustainable political model inherited from the early and middle nineteenth century. They also share a vision of the modernist period as one in which nineteenth-century imperialism no longer works because of the emergence of newer, more genuinely globalist systems of cultural and economic exchange. The difference of opinion rests primarily on the question of whether imperialism itself gives way, or whether there simply arise newer forms of imperialism that better fit the emerging age of globalism.

² *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*, 171.

In the end, all of these critical models are still concerned with the idea that a previous stage of history, or standing models of international and national space, are giving way to a newer and more globalized form of the same. Even the rise of the nation-state system, and with it the emergence of statist forms of nationalism, represents a reconfiguration of international and global space as well as a reconfiguration of the nation itself. As Casanova puts it, “the state is a relational entity,” and thus a nationalism aligned with the state is in some sense involved in the larger systems of international relationality that define the state itself. The Irish republic was constituted in stages during a period of transition from the old framework of empire, which divides the world into centres and peripheries, colonies and metropolises, to a newer global system characterized by international blocs of nation-states, non-governmental organizations with international bases, and cosmopolitan individuals for whom expatriation and international circulation might replace national belonging. Older accounts of modernism stress the idea that history in this period was experienced as a series of traumatic ruptures, as world war on the European continent, revolutions like those in Ireland and Russia, and new nationalisms aimed at achieving formal political independence shook and finally dissolved the nineteenth century’s imperial systems. In these accounts, modernists either attempt to reconstruct or redeploy conservatisms and traditions in the face of historical trauma, or seize the opportunity to become avant-garde innovators imaging new political futures. In truth, as I have been arguing, few if any modernists can be consistently placed on one side or the other: both the historical situation and the artistic response are far more complex than the model of modernism-as-rupture suggests.

Once again, the central idea I return to is the essentially mixed character of systems that are ostensibly characterized by distinctive, opposed positions. Here, even the most insistent autarkists are, in fact, responding to the inherent impossibility of creating the nation-state as an utterly detached, autopoietic entity. The fantasy of the autochthonous state and the autochthonous national only emerge in response to the reality that the nation contains and relies upon forms of internationalism and globalism. But these fantasies are also especially useful in consolidating the political form of a new nation-state or an emerging nationalist consensus. Conversely, the sense of a historical rupture or a discontinuity with tradition may provide an opening for more radical, cosmopolitan models of culture and lifestyle. But in the face of nationalist consolidations and political upheaval, the practices of cosmopolitanism become enmeshed in national and international politics. In addition to the concrete obstacles posed by well-policed borders and national legal systems, obstacles I have argued that Beckett discusses in *Molloy*, nationalism also conditions reception, as Corkery's and other critiques of "expatriate writers" as inauthentic would suggest. More pragmatically, the materials and experiences of national life are valuable in constructing both vernacular and cosmopolitan literary artifacts. The situation of recent national independence in the modernist period, as well as the overall historical movements towards new forms of internationalism and globalism from the late nineteenth century onwards can only be represented and critiqued by a heterogeneous art.

What I would suggest, finally, is that the forces that shape Irish modernism are allied with the forces that shape modernism more generally, and that, in turn, the literary

and political work of Irish modernist writers represent particularly effective responses to these forces. This would suggest that the methods and styles of modernism, admittedly broadly defined here, are methods and styles especially suited to other situations in which historical and economic shifts and passages are occurring. In particular, I refer to both the revisions of existing imperial centers and nations as they enter a global age of interconnected nation-states and to the emergence of postcolonial nation-states and anti- or post-national movements. For this reason, I have grouped Raymond Queneau and his “Irish” novel with the Irish-born writers I examine in other chapters. Queneau was writing to both a distinctly modernist-era print market, but also about a country, France, reestablishing itself after the German occupation and a Nazi puppet government had radically disrupted the political continuity of the French nation-state and the cultural continuity of the French nation within Europe. That trauma might have called to mind the earlier trauma of the first World War, but Queneau responds to his historical circumstance by interpolating the Easter Rising, not the previous World War, which is relegated instead to a brief descriptive passage offered as evidence of England’s weakness by one of the novel’s Irish rebel characters.

Similarly, the repetition of moments of historical and personal crisis in Elizabeth Bowen’s work suggests this feature of Irish, and world modernism: in “The Demon Lover,” as in *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes*, the historical relationship between the Easter Rising and the first World War is also used to represent an experience that seems to repeat itself with the bombing of London in the Second World War. And Beckett, of course, was involved in the second World War through his work with the Free

French. Despite expatriation, he, like Bowen and Queneau, found the Irish landscape and Irish literary art to be a useful set of reference points, a literary terrain, from which to construct his own response to the sense of the modern as both break and continuity with the past, and of himself as both an Irish national by birth and a cosmopolitan by choice. Even Yeats continually returns to moments of rupture by recasting them as ambivalently national and transnational experiences of repetition, blending Irish myth and a mythologized Irish Augustan Age with the political and cultural present, as well as incorporating classicisms and politics borrowed from abroad. It is worth noting that the antithetical method Yeats proposes in *A Vision* does not involve any final synthesis, but instead the interplay of unresolved oppositions whose relative positions endlessly fluctuate.

Irish modernists imagine either a self-sustaining Irish culture or a borderless world in which Irishness was but one part of a cosmopolitan identity; similarly, they imagine both involvement in a collective national identity or an individualist autonomy that allows them to define or discard the terms of national origin on their own. What I have attempted to show in this study is that each of the writers I have discussed does all of these things to some extent or another. The reason I suggest for this is that the character of the modernist period is defined by a sense of flux and passage, rather than solidity and stability, and that this character was sensed especially in Ireland owing to its particular political and historical situation. What I will close with, then, is the suggestion that modernism (and especially Irish modernism) might well be imagined as a literature characteristic of such passages. I would argue that there is a reason that Pascale

Casanova, in declaring Irish literary and political history a “compressed” model of the emergence of literary space and individualist literary autonomy elsewhere, begins with Yeats and ends with Beckett. Casanova’s compressed history is not drawn from Irish literary history as a whole, but from what is essentially the complete history of Irish modernist writing in the twentieth century, with Beckett as a final figure who closes the period and, in her argument, inaugurates the next. It is as if modernism in particular compresses and recapitulates the process of emerging literary space, to continue employing Casanova’s terms, in a world where the nation-state system and the literary pedigrees of longstanding national literatures are well-established institutions that make up an essentially global structure.

Irish modernism might then be the template, not for Casanova’s model of the invention of literary space, but more specifically for the emergence of bodies of national literatures in the twentieth century. Moreover, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, “national literature” is in some sense a false concept, embracing contradictions and pluralities that include cosmopolitanism and vernacularism, and grounded in a concept of the nation that is incoherent without some preceding international or cosmopolitan space. This space is the space into which the latter-day nation-states emerge, and within which those nations’ writers respond to the multiple forms of domination and the multiple concepts of liberty conditioned by the international space of the nation-state system of relationality. Without that system in its late-nineteenth and twentieth-century form, the model Casanova projects from the Irish modernist example is somewhat incoherent. The forms of cosmopolitanism and nationalism it relies

on do not exist before that period, and, perhaps more importantly, the technological revolutions and the historical crises that make possible the emergence of such literary spaces belong to the modernist period as well. The invention of national literary traditions, of national literary space as Casanova explains it, relies on an international structure and a technological base that come into existence in the modernist period. Similarly, the political crises that permit the emergence of small nation-states and inspire modernist innovations in art are one and the same; these crises and disruptions to a late-nineteenth-century international system are what condition the emergence of both cosmopolitanisms and minor nationalisms.

As if in recognition of this international, cosmopolitan framework grounding the invented and reconstructed traditions, the Irish modernist writers I have studied here wrote with an eye to both nationalist and vernacular frames and international and cosmopolitan ones. And their work was recognized by later writers like Queneau, who saw the applicability of Irish modernism to their own efforts to reshape or reinvent national literary space for themselves in the twentieth century. What I will close with, then, is the suggestion that the model I have outlined here and in the preceding chapters might fruitfully be applied to other twentieth-century literatures, particular those typically identified with newly emerging nation-states. I am not necessarily arguing that such literatures be labeled “modernist,” a term that I have been employing in reference to a specific period in Western European literature. (It is worth noting, though, that a number of critics have labeled post-1950 art from decolonizing African nations as part of a body of African modernist art.) Rather, I am suggesting that modernism should be understood

in terms of the nation-state system's emergence, crises, and passage towards a global system that has arguably yet to fully emerge. In turn, then, some elements of modernism and modernist criticism should reveal overlooked or ignored dimensions of other twentieth-century literatures more generally. Irish modernism provides an especially useful case of the literary phenomena of modernism and their relationship to larger historical processes, but an investigation of that case can help explain more than simply Irish literature or European modernist literature. It can help critics today map the previous century, and even describe and analyze the literatures emerging in the current one; most of all, it can consider that the nation and the globe, the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, are not opposed models of the world, but rather interwoven, inseparable aspects of a world in the midst of a more fundamental historical and cultural passage.

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Biography

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