

ABSTRACTS

IASIL Japan

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“Revolutions/Resolutions”

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Saturday, 9 October

Papers

‘atrocious labour’: John McGahern and the Creative Process in ‘Bank Holiday’

Brian Fox (Okayama University)

There is a growing critical consensus that Flaubert’s famous remark on the necessity of atrocious labour in order to achieve style (*‘On n’arrive au style qu’avec un labeur atroce’*) is particularly apt in the case of John McGahern, whose rigorous commitment to the work of composition and revision marks him out as scrupulous stylist in the mould of Flaubert or Joyce. However, despite widespread recognition that McGahern was a careful and demanding cultivator of style, this critical realignment away from provincial Irish realist to a writer deeply engaged with modernist aesthetics and forms (including a painstaking dedication to style) has not been accompanied by a substantial body of criticism on the labour of composition itself as revealed in the many drafts that McGahern produced over his career.

This paper aims to address this anomaly. Based on research carried out in the John McGahern Archive at NUI Galway, it will trace the genetic evolution of just one short story, ‘Bank Holiday’ (first published in 1985). The extensive archival records at NUI Galway show ‘Bank Holiday’ to have been one of the most heavily revised stories among McGahern’s short fiction. Indeed, McGahern himself, in a 2003 interview, acknowledged that it ‘went through many drafts, and began as a completely different story’. The archive confirms this, with the drafts revealing evidence of numerous false starts, dead ends, and pages of material that never made the final, published version. The archival records even show that McGahern at one point intended for the story to become a novel. These draft manuscripts thus offer us an invaluable opportunity to study the twists and turns of the creative process as McGahern shaped and reshaped his raw material.

Haunting Past, Lost Future:

Wounded Male Identity and Reparation in Donal Ryan’s *The Spinning Heart*

Wan-tsz Wu (National Taiwan University)

Set in an Irish rural town troubled by the financial collapse, Donal Ryan’s *The Spinning Heart* depicts the ways in which individuals struggle to find a way out and move on in face of economic problems such as unfinished construction, unemployment, and forced emigration. In his novel, Ryan gives the townspeople their own voices to articulate their confusion, loss, helplessness, anxiety, anger, and hatred in the bust era. Through a structure of twenty-one fragmented but linked monologues, Ryan underscores that the economic crash is a collective traumatic event, but it impacts on individuals of the town in different ways. Significantly, one main factor that leads to the difference unveiled by the novel is the dominant gender norm.

In Ryan’s novel, the restraints of gender norms on individuals are explored through the troubled familial relationships. The tropes of the dysfunctional father-son relationship, the anxious mother, the dissatisfied wife, and the depressed son in Ryan’s novel speak to anxieties about Irish masculinity in the post-Tiger period. In the boom era, economic growth enabled Irish men to

reimagine their masculine identity; however, the economic crash struck a blow to male identity and pride. While young men in the boom era were encouraged to envision promising futures, pursue economic success, and realize their ambitions, the economic crash in 2008 shattered the promises of a prosperous future and threatened young generation with the return of poverty and failed life. By attending to familial problems and conflicts that trap individuals in the rural town, this paper investigates the ways in which Ryan's novel questions the gender norms that govern individual life through the gendered impacts of the economic crash, and how the impacts not only wound male pride, but at the same time, open up possibilities of reparation through reconfiguring ideal manhood and redefining male identity.

Symposium 1

Mental, Physical, and Social Illness in Irish Writing: Anna Burns, Louis MacNeice, and Sinead Morrissey

Chair: Beverley Curran

The pandemic continues to impact not only our bodies but our psychic states; our movements and interactions in daily life; our attention as we track infections and variants, wondering how this all started and when (if?) it will ever end. Some might be yearning for a return to 'normal' while others fear what new rough virus is slouching its way towards Bethlehem to be born. Our susceptibility is linked to close connectedness, but our isolation takes its own toll on our well-being. We want to travel or just walk about but need to mask and constrain our movement. At such a time, it is interesting to look at creative literary engagements with physical and mental illnesses, emotional duress, and civil strife; at how these imbalances influence, spread, and mutate across time and space; and how they are remembered. At the same time, we have a chance to explore how writing and reading literature constitute therapeutic practices. This symposium panel explores the prescient ways that illness is represented in Irish writing, specifically in the poetry of Louis MacNeice and Sinead Morrissey, and in *Milkman* by Anna Burns.

Gender Troubles: altered states in Anna Burns's *Milkman*

Beverley Curran (ICU)

In *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic* (2013), David Quammen mentions Ronald Ross's mathematical approach to epidemics and his Nobel Prize-winning work on understanding and preventing malaria, but also draws our attention to Ross's 'theory of happenings' that was more general than his theory of diseases: "By 'happenings' he seems to have meant events of any sort that pass through a population, like gossip, or fear or microbial infections, affecting individuals, sequentially (133). When we read Anna Burns's *Milkman* (2018), during a pandemic with the knowledge that 'virus' is Latin for 'poison', we access another way to explore this novel and its intimate connections between somatic and psychic health and habitat. Although Burns identifies the site of the story as a "distorted version of Belfast in the late 1970s," and her own "growing up in a place of two split, hostile and traumatized communities" coping with surveillance by camouflage,

the city is never named in the novel. Almost all individual names are replaced by relationships or monikers, including significant slippage between the titular ‘Milkman’, ‘the milkman’ mentioned in the opening sentence, and ‘the real milkman’. An encounter with middle sister and Milkman in that “small, white, nondescript, shapeshifting” van (*Milkman* 2-3) is propelled and complicated through its iterations and insinuation into the social insanity via the grapevine of gossip, “that wide-ranging but distorting medium” (*Milkman* 63) that diagnoses and circulates mental aberrations. Middle sister tries to ward off its effects through ‘compulsive exercise addiction’ such as running and reading-while-walking. *Milkman* also pays close attention to other conditioning, namely the maintenance of a gendered hierarchy which prioritizes men and polices everything from names and addresses to preferred sports and professions. This presentation will look closely at the relationships among women, within family, and the sexual alliances that are formed to keep violence at bay in the charged, psycho-political atmosphere. Viewed through our experience of the pandemic and unintended viral spillover, we can see *Milkman* as a prescient representation of how connected we are and why outbreaks continue: they are not simply happening to us; but are the results of things we are doing.

Authority over Writing: Louis MacNeice and Illnesses

Nao Igarashi (Utsunomiya University)

Louis MacNeice scarcely wrote about illness in his poems despite illnesses inflicting his life and the lives of his immediate friends and family. For MacNeice, illness is not so much a fruitful subject or source of imagery in his poetry as an opportunity to reflect on the past. MacNeice’s productive period in America in 1940 occurred after convalescence was needed following an unexpected operation of appendicitis and peritonitis and a subsequent streptococcal infection; the poet was able to concentrate on writing while he and his family stayed in Ireland after the Second World War for his wife, who had a ‘tired heart’. In such times of repose, he wrote powerful poems of recollections such as ‘Autobiography’ and ‘The Strand’.

MacNeice’s poems concerning childhood, however, can also be read in relation to mental illness. They are often gloomy and melancholic, mainly due to memories with his mother, who left him when he was five years old and died two years later. She suffered from uterine fibroid, which she and the child MacNeice thought had been caused by the ‘difficult labour’ of his birth. Her physical disorder subsequently led to a depression which she did not recover from, though tuberculosis caused her sudden death. Although MacNeice never knew the details of her illness, his memory and imagery of her inspired him to seek contact not only with others, but also with his inner self in his poetry. In poems such as ‘Eclogue Between the Motherless’ and ‘Schizophrene’, mental disorder is accompanied and overwhelmed by the loss of bodily freedom. A search for an alternative—an alternative to a lost love or an unintegrated self—is attempted, but at the same time its failure is anticipated. This paper especially focuses on why such attempts are described with a knowledge that suffering is unquenchable. It can be argued that those poems are self-analytical explorations of his seemingly unconscious struggles over living and writing. Although MacNeice remained a ‘self-conscious’ poet, he admits that unconsciousness contributes to the literary imagination. Most

notably, his expression of a lack of freedom and helplessness of mind can be seen as a powerful claim on his authority as a poet over writing about fear, pain, and sorrow.

**‘I have given up all hope for what was whole’:
unraveling matters in Sinead Morrissey’s poems of illness**

Naoko Toraiwa (Meiji University)

Like cosmic movements, many things and matters revolve around some kind of axis. Sometimes we try to survive by provoking changes in shape and direction by interrupting predictable patterns. In ‘Second Coming’, Yeats describes how a revolving pattern is unraveled: ‘Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/ Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’. These lines resonated deeply last year not only because it was the centenary of the publication of Yeats’s poem published in the aftermath of World War I and amid the 1918/19 Spanish Flu pandemic, but also because 2020 was marked by a new pandemic circulating the Covid-19 virus in a range of mutations.

We may now be asking ourselves whether the seemingly balanced and ordered patterns of our pre-pandemic lives were really stable. In a way, illness enables us to see an ordered and balanced world or life just as a mere illusion and has the power to reveal something under the make-believe, as Virginia Woolf suggests in ‘On Being Ill.’ Deleuze & Guatarri see anything that interrupts, hinders, suffocates the ever-growing, becoming, process of life is ‘illness’, and consider literature as an enterprise of health. Deleuze also sees literature as a witness of the symptoms of an ailing world, which in turn displays those symptoms in creation and fabulation: ‘The critical (in the literary sense) and the clinical (in the medical sense) may [...] enter into a new relationship of mutual learning.’

Now, the imagery of thread and net, of weave and connection, is prevalent in artworks. Illness can reveal a certain pattern of ever-weaving, and life entangled in a labyrinth, but can also suggest ways to loosen, solve, or unravel that labyrinth. Referring to the imagery of net and weaving in modern poems, I will focus on Sinead Morrissey’s critical and clinical – I use critical and clinical in the Deleuzian sense--attempts to create labyrinths through which the reader witnesses symptoms of life and to show some moments in which those threads knitting together certain constructs of labyrinths are being unravelled; the moment the reader catches a glimpse of some other world through the opening of the constraining but actually frail frames of established structures to glimpse underneath other networking labyrinths.

Sunday, 10 October

Symposium 2

Revolutions/Resolutions: Conflict and Art

Chair: Andrew Fitzsimons (Gakushuin University)

In 2021, we are coming near the end of the ‘Decade of Centenaries’, and as commemorations of the conflicts of the revolutionary period, the 1919-1921 period, the War of Independence pass and the Anglo-Irish Treaty comes into view, focus shifts towards issues of resolution. Yeats’s line, adapted from Coventry Patmore, that ‘the end of art is peace’ is the motto ascribed to the harvest bow, the ‘frail device’ in Heaney’s poem of that name. As Peter McDonald reminds us, though, ‘Heaney’s sense of the words is freighted by difficulties over what “peace” implies.’ The stated objective of the Irish Government for the Decade of Centenaries reads: ‘to promote an inclusive, respectful, authentic, measured and consultative approach to commemorations, which encourages a deeper understanding of the context of the time, recognising the differing perspectives on our shared history and seeking to strengthen peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland.’ Laudable, but what about the actual art produced out of conflict? Is art ‘inclusive, respectful, authentic, measured’? Does it ‘encourage deeper understanding’, ‘recognise differing perspectives’? Is art there to ‘strengthen peace and reconciliation’? These are some of the questions that this symposium wants to explore, through the work of W.B. Yeats, and Jack B. Yeats, Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett.

W.B. Yeats’s Revolution and Resolution through his Encounter with *Nohgaku*

Akiko Manabe (Shiga University)

As is well documented, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) as a playwright, discovered a new theatrical genre through his encounter with Japanese *Nohgaku*, including *Noh* and *kyogen*. He became aware of *Noh* through his acquaintance with Japanese poets such as Yone Noguchi (1875-1947), but it was Ezra Pound (1885-1972) who provided Yeats with a more nuanced understanding of traditional Japanese *Nohgaku* based on Ernest Fenollosa’s (1853-1908) manuscripts passed on by his widow, Mary in 1913, just before Pound came to become Yeats’s secretary at Stone Cottage. Yeats wrote his first *Noh* influenced drama *At the Hawk’s Well*, whose premier was held at Lady Cunard’s in London in April 1916. Thereafter, Yeats wrote a series of new plays using what he gleaned from Japanese *Nohgaku*. Or put another way, Yeats introduced the series of “plays for dancers” as embodiment of what he had fostered in himself over the years. In this sense, April 1916 commemorated a kind of theatrical “revolution” for Yeats as an artist.

Moreover, April 1916 marked a crucial time of THE “revolution” in Irish history, namely the Easter Rising. In 1919, Yeats created *The Dreaming of the Bones*, combining the political turmoil of English rule in Easter 1916 and the ominous love story of Diarmuid and Devorgilla, while also integrating theatrical elements borrowed from the classical Japanese *Noh* play, *Fukushiki Mugen Noh*. Here Yeats combines these two “revolutions” – “revolution” in his art in the form of a new drama inspired by his encounter with *Nohgaku* and a very real political “revolution” in Irish history.

At the centre of these “revolutionary” plays is the “resolute” Cuchulain –although not appearing in *The Dreaming of the Bones*– he works as a sort of guardian spirit for the Irish people. How is this “resolution” embodied in the character of Cuchulain within Yeats’s plays? One of the crucial elements to be explored are the characters in Yeats’s plays who live on the margins of society, specifically, the blind and the beggars. Their meaning when juxtaposed to other characters such as saints or saviours, will be explored in this paper.

Jack B. Yeats: Response to Conflict in Art

Naomi Miki (Teikyo University)

As one of Ireland’s most influential artists, Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957) created many works of art in his lifetime: broadsides, illustrations, miniature theatres, watercolors, oil paintings, plays and narratives. Most of these works pursue themes centered on various aspects of daily life in Ireland. Even though he lived in a time of upheaval both inside and outside Ireland, it is not easy to find a political theme or Yeats’s opinion on politics and conflict in his art. However, during the time of violence, especially in the 1920s, he created some pictures of social situations such as funerals or gatherings and added suggestive titles to them that root them in the political and social context of the time. They can be interpreted as his comments on politics and conflict. His close friend, Thomas MacGreevy (1893-1967), in his *Jack B. Yeats: An Appreciation and an Interpretation* (1945), claims that two pictures can be considered as historical paintings in the time of the Irish Civil War: *Communicating with Prisoners* and *The Funeral of a Republican*. The former depicts women prisoners in Kilmainham Gaol breaking the windows and talking with women outside, and the latter shows the funeral of an anti-Treaty republican, Harry Boland (1887-1922), who was shot when being arrested and died as a result of the mortal wound. There are opinions against MacGreevy among Jack Yeats’s critics and biographers, so I would like to discuss opinions on both sides of the issue and explore how conflict—or war in general—appears in these two pieces along with some of Jack Yeats’s other works of art.

‘... like after the war, no, not that again’:

Samuel Beckett, Francis Bacon, and Post-War Response

David Taylor (University of Tokyo)

For Francis Bacon the “rough beast” of Yeats’s “The Second Coming” is ‘stronger and more extraordinary than the horror even of war photos’ due to its ‘prophetic quality’. (1) The necessity of an art fully engaged with and extending the trauma of lived experience permanently preoccupied both Beckett (1906-89) and Bacon (1909-92), a parallel frequently made by commentators but rarely given detailed comparison. Yet, numerous intriguing biographical coincidences abound: origins in privileged Dublin backgrounds, volunteer work in medical assistance and civilian aid during and after the war (both witnessing the recovery of fatalities), shared significant friendship with and artistic admiration for Alberto Giacometti, and both receiving an explosion of international attention in the 1950s.

This account aims to expand on the noted similarities to date - such as the minimalist stage set theatricality of many of Bacon’s works, or the well-documented painterly qualities and influences

over Beckett's stage images - by considering both artists' careful enclosures and geometries and their attendant arresting turmoil as distinct from a modernism turning in on itself in an abandonment of history, and instead as forms grounded logically and inevitably in public and private twentieth century martial trauma. The anguished permutations of Bacon's breakthrough masterpiece *Three Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) or Beckett's *Watt* and the 'Trilogy' of novels (part of Beckett's post-war 'frenzy of writing') prefigure the obsessive repetition and self-plagiarism of both careers in which a compromised aesthetic (can horror be beautiful?) is defined by raw remembrance and self-acknowledged failure - Beckett's anguished writing blocks consonant with Bacon's mass destruction of unsatisfactory paintings.

The increasing availability of contemporary film and magazine documentation of the war, as discussed in Martin Hammer's innovative *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* (2012) - the courtroom cubicle of Adolf Eichmann identified as a direct influence on the framing devices surrounding Bacon's series of pope figures - will be debated as a further entry in the artistic residues, tensions, and possible resolutions of the catastrophe and conflict experienced by these two greatest of post-war figures.

1. FB quoted in Peppiatt, 2015, p 260.