NATION AND SELF:
a Study of Four Modern Irish
Literary Autobiographies

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This thesis is an attempt to account for autobiography as a highly prevalent form in twentieth century Irish literature, and argues that the formulation of a national identity for Ireland is both determined by and determining of the establishment of individual identities.

The first chapter provides an introduction to the concept of nationalism by considering it as both a political force and as an affective structure within which identity is established. The second chapter then considers a variety of issues necessary to a consideration of autobiography as a literary genre particularly concerned with the formation of identity. The issues considered are the generic status of autobiography, the place within it of memory, the nature of the autobiographical protagonist and the function of autobiography. These comments are intended to bear on the full range of modern Irish literary autobiography, and illustrative examples of various points are based on that range. Taken together these chapters establish a framework for the consideration of the part played by social and collective relationships in the formation of individual identity.

These introductory chapters are followed by a series of readings of four literary autobiographies produced after Independence. These are works by Patrick Kavanagh, Frank O'Connor, Sean O'Faolain, and Francis Stuart. These works have been chosen to focus on the problems of identity faced by autobiographers in a period when the issue of national identity had been apparently settled by the establishment of the Irish state. These readings are informed by the theoretical and historical considerations of the first two chapters and take as their principal focus the way in which each autobiographer constructs his identity. The orientation to the nation is also considered in each case as it relates to the formation of identity and to the form of the text.
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These specifically intellectual acknowledgements need to be complemented by acknowledgements of gratitude. First and foremost to my supervisors: the late G.S Fraser, who demonstrated to me that open-mindedness is possible, and Bill Myers who made me think that I could think. Beyond them are the members of the Staff-graduate seminar of the English Department, particularly Deborah Cartmell, Rick Rylance and Jon Stone who suffered my first formulations of the ideas here, and who in turn taught me much about their areas of expertise, and helped to guide me through the rapids of theory. When I wanted to return to a specifically Irish context the British Association for Irish Studies helped me to do so without the bother of travelling; in particular I should like to thank Ruth Dudley Edwards, Jim McAuley, Jon Moore, Jim O'Hara, and George Watson for their continuing support, friendship, and demonstration of the plurality of Irishness.

Although, like all autobiographies these acknowledgements have to be selective, the following are people whom I have to remember and thank: Amanda Lusted, Barbara and Ged Deeney, Elin apHywel, Tom Paulin, Kathy Southworth and Adrian Davis, Rachel Jukes, Tony Crowley, and Mark and Ginny Richardson. I should also like to thank the staff of the Leicester University Library, particularly those in the Inter-Library Loans Department.

Gratitude is a small word for what I owe to my family: Peter and Mairead Hughes, Rosemary, Catherine, and let's not forget Pat. Finally, I should like to dedicate this to Sinead and Lara.
This thesis is about a particular relationship between a politics and a form: the relationship between nationalism and autobiography in modern Ireland. This preface sets out initial definitions of the terms 'politics' and 'form' and introduces the contexts within which they will be elaborated in the remainder of the thesis.

Politics in its broadest sense I take to refer to the relationships generated by the collective experience of society and history. Form, again in broad terms, refers to a specific manner of representation in writing. This thesis then is about the ways in which individuals' relations to the collective experiences of society and history determine the ways in which they write. Equally it is about the ways in which an individual manner of writing must be seen as an intervention in collective experiences. 'Individual' is of course to be understood as a term always under question given that it is itself a reference to a manner of representation, a species of relationship, determined by the collective experience of society and history. Individualism is in other words a cultural construct, culture being defined as the collective experience of society and history. 'Politics' can then be redefined as the relationships generated by culture. This allows us to consider the cultural sphere as being the principal arena for the consideration of the relationships which constitute nationalism.

The politics of nationalism have long remained enigmatic in the face of analyses based on the concept of economic determination since nationalism
as a set of relations appears to cut across, or even fly in the face of, gross economic relations. The horizontal relations which nationalism offers are at odds with the hierarchical relations imposed by economics. Similarly, many of the varieties of critical response to autobiography have accepted the concept of the individual as central to and determining of the form of autobiography rather than beginning with an interrogation of that concept, and have therefore required autobiography to be the formal equivalent of the stable, uncontradictory, integrated self. The forms of autobiography are thereby reduced to two at most; the autobiography of crisis in which the writer is questing for a self; or the autobiography of conversion in which the writer details how he or she has achieved a stable self. The argument of this thesis, the point of considering the politics of form, is that to understand Irish autobiography it is necessary to understand Irish nationalism as a phenomenon which both underwrites the specific problematics of self-definition in Ireland and provides the overarching framework within which Irish autobiographers define themselves.

The first chapter of this thesis therefore sets the Irish problematic of self-definition in the context of nationalism in both its historical manifestation in Ireland this century and in its role as an affective structure. In Chapter 2 we turn to an examination of the range of Irish autobiography and set it against the recent criticism of autobiography. As a large part of the concern of this thesis is the autobiographical continuum, and the ways in which various writers test the limits of the autobiographical genre, this examination includes remarks based on the idea that Joyce's work represents an extreme of the continuum. After this consideration of the political, historical, theoretical, literary and
psychological contexts of Irish autobiography, the attention shifts to the work of four writers whose personalities and careers were marked by the War of Independence and/or the Civil War. Although they all wrote their autobiographies after Independence, when the problematic of identity appeared to have been settled by the foundation of the Free State, each writer still wrestles with the issue of nationalism.

Irish autobiographers by defining themselves take a particular orientation towards the Irish nation, and by taking a particular orientation towards the Irish nation define themselves. Kavanagh, O'Connor, O'Faolain, and Stuart have been chosen to represent the range of autobiographical responses to the nation. Those who produce autobiographies which ultimately conform to the concept of the stable, uncontradictory self, for example Sean O'Faolain in *Vive Moi*, do so because of a particular orientation towards the state of Ireland. However, those writers who take a more problematic approach to autobiography - the experiments with autobiographical selves of Patrick Kavanagh, or the attempts at inclusiveness of Frank O'Connor - also do so because of their own specific orientations to Ireland. Even those who would reject Ireland as a defining framework, for example, Francis Stuart, do so in such a way as to suggest alternative versions of Ireland. It is only by opening the form of the autobiography to considerations which extend beyond the conventional construction of the individual and examining the relationships between form and politics that one can begin to understand this combination of self and national definition. That is the purpose of this thesis.
CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS YOUR NATION IF I MAY ASK?

I. The Problem of Definition

The central concern of this thesis is the autobiographical impulse in Irish writing in English in the twentieth century, a feature of central importance in this body of writing but one which has so far received comparatively little attention. The autobiographical impulse has motivated much, if not most, of the writing in Ireland in this century and no form has escaped its influence. My emphasis will be on prose rather than on drama or poetry and while my primary consideration will be formal autobiographies, reference will also be made to works which exploit the formal continuity between autobiography proper and the novel. This chapter and the following one are concerned with approaches to the definition of the main terms of the thesis. If this appears tentative, it is because definition can all too often be reductive and this is especially true when dealing with Irish writing. A major constituent of that writing is the problem of definition, whether of the self or of the nation. Furthermore, Irish writing is a highly politicised writing and wariness is necessary when trying to define its terms since those terms are very often major

sites of conflict. Even the terms commonly used to describe the nation and its culture and writing are disjointed. Irish is used to denote writing either in Irish or in Irish and English; Anglo-Irish is a commonly accepted term for Irish writing in English, but it also refers to a particular socio-economic formation. The disjunction between Irish and Anglo-Irish is not easily remedied. The term Anglo-Irish is useful as a reminder of the split and joined nature of the culture to which it is applied and so emphasises the need for definition. It is also, to a degree, a paradigm of the cultural situation, echoing the way in which the culture it denotes has been previously occupied by imposed attributes and values rather than being allowed to speak for itself. Using this term can, however, suggest that the problems of definition are raised only by an aspect of the whole culture and that there is an echt and unproblematic culture (Irish) which is unperturbed by such issues. I shall therefore use the term 'Irish' so as to keep in view the problematic nature of the whole culture.

I have already sketched out the broad outline of my argument in the prefatorial remarks on politics and form. In this and the following chapter I shall discuss approaches to Irish writing, Irish nationalism, and the major components of autobiography, in the belief that it is only by attending to such specifics that one can deal properly with the issue of definition. Even so, it is not my intention to produce definitive definitions. Rather, my concern is with the nature and consequences of definition.

2. J.C. Beckett: The Anglo-Irish Tradition, London, Faber and Faber, 1976, is an avowed account of this group's importance although his The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923, London, Faber and Faber, 1966, is also effectively a history of the Ascendancy rather than of Ireland.
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There are two basic approaches to the definition of Irish writing and culture, which we can refer to as external and internal. The first of these approaches, the external, takes two forms both of which seek to rebut the interrelationships of Irish culture, history and politics to similar political ends but by different methods. The first form, now usually referred to as the 'Celticist', is grounded in the colonial relationship between England and Ireland and the English need to construct the Irish as either simian terrorists or as glibly eloquent buffoons. If the Irish are the former then they need to be made to respect the law (that is English law and therefore English hegemony constructed as a moral and political absolute). If the Irish are the latter then they are as helpless children and in need of the protection of the law (that is English law and hegemony constructed as an onerous moral duty undertaken in a spirit of kindliness by the English). Culture, in this view, is obviously not an attribute of the simian terrorist, while the eloquent buffoon exists only in a cultural sphere, a sphere which, like all other aspects of Ireland, is taken under the careful control of the dominant culture.

The second form within this external approach is grounded in more general
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attitudes to culture. In this case Irish culture, and particularly literature, is constructed as the culture of a people 'Always ready to react against the despotism of fact'. Nor should anyone believe that such an attitude is no longer current; Hugh Kenner has recently written a 'Warning' about what he calls the 'Irish Fact' which implies that the Irish live, as they always have done, in a realm of fantasy which has little or no connection with the actualities of experience. Apart from the fact that this attitude displaces onto the Irish the failings of scholarship, there are two things, one general, one specific, wrong with it.

In general, this attitude seeks to separate the imaginative and the creative from the rest of lived experience and by the apparent flattery of assigning them to a realm as apparently privileged as 'aesthetics' it seeks to undermine their importance. Such privilege can be accorded to either the artist or to culture as a whole. If it is directed at the artist it takes the form of the 'glamorous status which bourgeois society liberally grants its spiritual representatives (so long as they remain harmless)'.

The effect on a culture as a whole is exemplified by the way in which

5. Hugh Kenner: A Colder Eye; The Modern Irish Writers, London, Allen Lane, 1983. It is sad but symptomatic that a work which contains many interesting comments, from a critic who has done much good work, should be marred by such a thoughtless piece of prattle. Kenner's work is an appropriate example in an analysis of literature but his comments are part of a much wider and firmly established discourse in which terms of unreason and disease rather than more properly analytic language are used.
Kenner renders Anglo-Irish literature as one of the dialects of 'International Modernism', something which is best understood by reference 'up' to the broad cultural phenomenon which apparently subsumes it, rather than by reference 'down' to the local history which generated it. In both cases culture as the sphere solely of aesthetics is detached from the contingency of experience.

Such privilege, when aimed specifically at Irish culture, is directed at what Seamus Deane calls the 'Irish gift for language, with Dublin wit shining in the east and Western poesy shimmering in the West', but, he adds:

A reputation for linguistic extravagance is dangerous, especially when given to small nations by a bigger one which dominates them. By means of it, Celts can stay quaint and stay put; extravagance is their essence and fact not their forte.

In the face of both forms of this external approach to definition it is necessary to stress that in Ireland a culture existed and exists which is not separate from other areas of superstructural activity. This culture and its sustaining relationships are invisible to any analysis which cannot see beyond its own noesis because blinkered by determining metaphors. It is necessary to provide a model of Irish culture which is true to historical and political specifics and which can acknowledge the effectiveness of cultural activity as a political force. As Terry Eagleton puts it:

Culture, in the lives of nations struggling for their independence from imperialism, has a meaning quite remote from the review pages of the Sunday newspapers. Imperialism is not only the exploitation of cheap labour power, raw materials and easy markets, but the uprooting of cultures and customs - not just the imposition of foreign armies, but of alien ways of experiencing. It manifests itself not only in company balance sheets and in airbases, but can be tracked to the most intimate roots of speech and signification. In such situations, which are not all a thousand miles from our own doorstep, culture is so vitally bound up with one's common identity that there is no need to argue for its relation to political struggle. It is arguing against it which would seem incomprehensible. 10

Culture I will define therefore as that range of activities and practices, often, but not exclusively, intellectual and artistic, through which a people experience themselves, their society, and their history and from which a nation is constructed.11

Neither of the forms of this external approach to Irish writing perceives any problems of definition since neither is concerned with the complexities and problematics of that culture, no matter how much attention they may give to particular manifestations of those complexities, for example the works of Joyce and Yeats. Irish culture is simply defined, tautologously, by its 'quaintness' or 'barbarism' and either way placed beyond the realm of the political and rendered insubstantial and immaterial. That this first approach and its consequent stereotyping has been successful is not in...
doubt. The very success of this approach is in part responsible for the close links between cultural and political activity in Ireland. The stereotyping upon which it was based was not wholly inaccurate, rather it was and is deliberately constricting. At the beginning of our period of concern The Revival of Irish Literature and Other Addresses shows Charles Gavan Duffy, George Sigerson, and Douglas Hyde having to engage with questions which go beyond any narrow definition of culture in the attempt to break out of these imposed boundaries and assert the full humanity of the Irish.\textsuperscript{12} Irish writing in general refuses to accept the compartmentalisation of the cultural and the political and seeks to produce a mode of definition (of the individual, of the nation) compatible with the experience of material and social specifics rather than with the limited and limiting definitions of the stereotype.

The second broad type of approach to Irish writing, what we can call the internal approach, is one which acknowledges its political nature. This can take the form of bald statement, as in Frank O'Connor's assertion that the:

\begin{quote}
political note...is characteristic of all Anglo-Irish literature. I know of no other literature so closely linked to the immediate reality of politics. \textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Or it can be more sophisticated, as in Sean O'Faolain's assertion that in:

\begin{quote}
12, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Dr George Sigerson, and Dr Douglas Hyde: The Revival of Irish Literature and Other Addresses, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1894, passim, esp. pp. 22, 64, where we find: 'And it may be a comfort to know, in view of present hypotheses, that the stock of Anthropoids never went through evolutions in this country, Whatever may have happened elsewhere, the beings who first leaped upon our shores must have been among the foremost in the developed attributes of manhood.' (64)
13, Frank O'Connor: The Backward Look: A Survey of Irish Literature, London, Macmillan, 1967, p. 121. It is significant that the context of these comments is a discussion of A Modest Proposal which O'Connor regards as the first masterpiece in English to have been written in Ireland.
\end{quote}
the Literary Revival we get the summary of the whole of this transformation of an ancient race ... into a modern people ... the new literature did more than summarise, it was itself an active agent ... It was a whole people giving tongue, and by that self-articulation approaching nearer than ever before to "intellectual and imaginative freedom".¹⁴

This approach has issued in pragmatic definitions of Irish writing, such as that of Richard Fallis:

Irish literature is a literature written by a person of Irish birth or a person born elsewhere who chooses to live in Ireland, identify himself or herself with Ireland, and write in a way which seems particularly meaningful in an Irish context. ¹⁵

Against this pragmatism one may set definitions which allow for a more affective interaction of politics and culture as in Conor Cruise O'Brien's:

Irishness is not primarily a question of birth or blood or language: it is the condition of being involved in the Irish situation, and usually of being mauled by it. On that definition Swift is more Irish than Goldsmith or Sheridan, although by the usual tests they are Irish and he is pure English.¹⁶

What all these comments share is that the politics which are implicit in their judgements is nationalist. Nor is it only in the work of these four

¹⁶. Conor Cruise O'Brien: Writers and Politics: Essays and Criticism, Harmondsworth, Middx, Penguin, 1976, p. 134. O'Connor: The Backward Look, op cit, p. 122, takes issue with this kind of judgement, although he is referring to the work of Thomas Flanagan: 'This seems to me a critical judgement of Solomon. I am inclined to attach more importance to what a family like the Griffiths felt than Professor Flanagan is, because I see no other standard by which to judge the nationality of a writer and his work than that of relevance.' The importance of this obeisance to a living tradition rather than to the frozen canon which all definition seeks to produce cannot be overstated.
writers that such an assumption is made. It is made also in the standard surveys and histories of modern Anglo-Irish writing as can be seen both in the way that they discuss the relationship between writing and politics and in the way that they divide that writing into periods which coincide with the movements of nationalism. This approach assumes a homogeneous culture because in its construction of twentieth-century history, for example, there has only been one major political change which has affected writers, namely that which occurred around 1921, which date is used to dichotomise twentieth century Irish history.

The apparent defeat of nationalist aspirations, their recrudescence and partial fulfilment, and the consequent establishment and consolidation of a state are taken as a break in history and politics which is reflected in the standard model of modern Irish writing. Before 1921, it is suggested, the writer felt he could have a settled place in society, wrote poetry or drama and was 'romantic' and hopeful; after this date the writer was increasingly alienated, turned to writing novels and short stories, and became 'realistic' and disillusioned.17

Despite the widespread acceptance of this model of twentieth century Irish literary history (and its equivalents in earlier periods), the problems of definition force us to question its capacity to afford a full political reading of Irish writing. If we look once more at our historical purview such suspicions will be amplified by the fact that, as well as movements within nationalism, it includes also a massive land redistribution, the rapid rise and equally rapid decline of a labour movement; a steadily increasing urbanisation and a rapid rural depopulation; the rise of an indigenous capitalism; and the final decline of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. In view of such changes the simple nationalist account, whether implicit or explicit, of the literary and other cultural productions of this period cannot be sufficient. If it were, the term 'Irish' would be a wholly acceptable term for the culture as a whole and definition would be an unnecessary exercise in that one would be dealing with an unproblematic and homogeneous object. This implicitly national definition produces a constricted and limited reading of Irish writing, and


excludes rather than engaging with any potential problems. It is instructive to consider an example of this exclusive process.

When the writers Spenser and Swift are considered in relation to Ireland it is invariably the case that the former is seen not only as not Irish but as an English colonist while the latter is regarded as of central importance in Irish writing; this response is an intuitive one and is meant to tell us something about Irish writing. In Swift’s case the response can be confirmed by a variety of evidence. There are suggestions that he may have derived the plot and the form of *Gulliver’s Travels* from Gaelic literature.23 Sean Cronin, in a study of Irish nationalism, finds that Swift has a ‘claim to the title “father of Irish nationalism”’.24 Finally, Swift has received the *imprimatur* of Yeats as ‘Davis, Mangan, Ferguson’ are displaced by ‘Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke’ in one reading of Yeats’ career.25 It should also be noted that *The Dictionary of Irish Literature*, a standard reference work and therefore normative, includes an entry on Swift but none on Spenser.26 None of this evidence is, however, unambiguous. The Gaelic influence is only a possibility; Cronin has to admit that Swift ‘asserted he was an Englishman born in Ireland’27 while A.N. Jeffares notes that Swift ‘was virtually

forced into becoming an Irish patriot' and was far from happy in Ireland; even Yeats' advocacy of Swift may be seen as compromising Yeats' position in a nationalist canon rather than installing Swift there. If we can cast doubt on Swift's place as an 'obvious' insider there seems little that we can do about Spenser's place as an 'obvious' outsider. Cronin and Jeffares from very different perspectives both refer to him in ways that make plain that he is seen as a hostile foreigner. Nonetheless Spenser did spend almost twenty years in Ireland, he was disaffected from contemporary English politics just as much as was Swift, his poetry relies heavily on Irish topography, he has a claim to being among the first autobiographical poets, with an autobiographical impulse invested with tensions and divided loyalties analogous to those evident in the Irish autobiographical impulse, and finally Yeats both early and late acknowledged his influence. Spenser, just as much as Swift it would seem, has a claim to acknowledgement as an Irish writer. If we appeal to the definitions quoted earlier his claim seems even to be strengthened. In O'Connor's terms he is 'political', 'relevant' and 'a part of the story'; in Fallis' terms he lived in Ireland and wrote in a way meaningful to the

30. George Sigerson: 'Irish Literature: Its Origin, Environment and Influence' in The Revival of Irish Literature, op cit, asserts that Spenser would have been an inferior poet had he not come to Ireland where he found beauties of nature and learnt something of Irish literature, pp. 103-105.
Irish context; and O'Brien's terms seem particularly applicable - he was involved and who can deny that having a house burned and a son killed constitutes being mauled?32

Should Spenser then be considered an Irish writer? Hardly, I would suggest. The argument is, however, attractive in that it scandalises the usual implicitly and narrowly nationalist pieties of definition, reveals the suspect nature of previous definitions, and reminds us of the pitfalls of stereotyping and received opinion whether internally or externally generated. It also serves to widen the terms of definition to include cultural and thematic concerns and thus re-emphasises the complexity of definition, a complexity which an unthinking and implicitly nationalist mode of definition would deny. The danger, in fact, comes not so much from nationalism per se, but rather from reliance on an unstated and therefore unexamined nationalism.

Nationalism as a force must still be acknowledged in any consideration of Irish culture, a force worth further attention. What I have said should make it clear that I do not wish to deal with a 'natural' national literature but rather with a particular socio-cultural phenomenon. As I have made clear an unthinking nationalist approach compounds the problems of studying Irish writing, but the alternative approach, to see modern Irish literature as a branch of English culture or as a dialect of Western modernism, would deny the historical specificities of Ireland and its

culture. One example of the consequences of this latter approach should make clear the problems which inhere in it.

If English literature now functions as a replacement for religion as a social ideology, as critics of English culture from Matthew Arnold to Terry Eagleton have suggested, and if criticism in turn is a response to that shift then surely we should be wary of approaching a literature produced in a different country where a different religion with a different history and a different set of relationships to the state is still a powerful moulder of social ideology in the way that we would approach English literature. To this extent Irish literature must be seen as a national literature, that is a literature produced, like Irish nationalism itself, from a particular socio-cultural history. Peter Costello has spoken of the 'Irish habit of seeing politics only in relation to nationalism'. This is certainly true, but that does not mean that we can afford to ignore nationalism in favour of the other forms of politics that have obtained in Ireland; rather we should examine nationalism as a controlling framework for those other politics and for the literature that has been produced in Ireland.

33. For further comments on the relation between religion and culture see my 'Joyce and Catholicism' in Robert Welch (ed.): *Irish Writers and Religion*, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, (forthcoming).
II. Nationalism: An Introduction

Having dealt with some of the problems of and obstacles to definition, I now want to turn my attention to nationalism as it functions in Ireland. This introduction covers the basic concepts which will be returned to later when we consider the nature of the individual in autobiography.

(a) Nationalism as a political force

In its initial stages, according to Clifford Geertz, nationalism produces 'a simple, abstract, deliberately constructed and almost painfully self-conscious concept of political ethnicity' which is grounded on a 'general, vague ... collective identity, based on a diffuse sense of common destiny' and its principal aim is to stimulate 'popular alienation from a foreign-dominated political order'.

In other words, the initial stage of nationalism produces a definition which relies on its ability to exclude as much as on any claimed inherent properties; it creates an awareness of a people's relationship to the outside world while at best ignoring, at worst mystifying, the relationships within that people. Nationalism as a political force operates by emphasising supposedly natural differences - Swift is Irish, Spenser English - and cannot allow for doubt about the boundary thus drawn. This affects nationalism itself. If nationalism seeks to construct a people's perception of political organisation in terms of the right of a particular group to self-determination then it must have

previously constructed that group as a unit bonded together by a common identity; nationalism must needs construct itself and the society in which it functions.\textsuperscript{36} I am aware of the danger here of reifying nationalism. However, it is necessary to separate 'nationalism' momentarily from its human agents in order to consider it in abstract terms since it is in those terms that it is most often appealed to; nationalism is perceived, must be perceived, as a natural force rather than as a determined human activity. Nationalism must therefore (and this is why it is both powerful and at times dangerous) project itself as a monad rather than as a nexus of - often conflicting - human practices. But it is not monadic and is therefore incapable of providing a satisfying and simple definition, although it claims to be able to do so. Indeed, it becomes a part of the problem of definition once one recognises its fragmented nature. Sean Cronin has identified 'five strands in Irish nationalism:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{traditionalist} is Catholic and often Gaelic; \textbf{constitutional nationalism} is influenced, but not controlled by the Catholic Church, uses Henry Grattan's arguments on Ireland's right to nationhood as an independent kingdom, and opposes violence; \textbf{physical-force republicanism} refers to Tone and the United Irishmen for its justification, but is often socially conservative; \textbf{radical republicanism} argues that there can be no political change without social revolution and stresses the values of the secular state; \textbf{cultural nationalism} emphasizes the nation and its language rather than the state.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{itemize}

Cronin goes on to illustrate that none of these strands exists in complete independence from the others although it is possible to arrange them hierarchically: 'The strongest nationalist strand is the traditionalist,
the weakest is radicalism'. While Cronin's categories are valuable, if only in countering the idea of a unitary nationalism, and while he is aware of the contradictions in many of them, they are still only a crude breakdown of Irish nationalist politics. Each of the first four strands of nationalism has, for example, its own brand of cultural nationalism (each of them after all, as a nationalism, must lay claim to the correct attitude to the 'nation and its language') and the interconnections between all five strands are many and complex. These categories do not, furthermore, allow for the existence of other forms of political thought and (more rarely) activity in Ireland which are both distinguishable from nationalism and yet related to it: unionism and socialism.

Contemporary unionism and contemporary nationalism are opposed and project themselves as politics which have always been opposed on grounds of principle. Unionism is, however, a politics which has over the past two centuries changed and fragmented on pragmatic grounds, like nationalism, while presenting itself, again like nationalism, as a unity. Therefore, we should not forget that the direct descendant of Grattan's parliament was not the Dail but Stormont. Unionism is more of a strategy than an ideology; while it can operate on its own terms, it more often functions in reaction to the terms of whatever variety of nationalism it perceives as being most threatening. A Unionist history of Unionism must reach its modern highpoint

38. Ibid. p. 4.
Chapter 1

with the establishment of the Stormont parliament in the north of Ireland
but such a parliament for all Ireland might well have satisfied many of the
major figures of constitutional nationalism: Grattan, O'Connell, Parnell,
or Redmond. Furthermore the social conservatism which is a characteristic
of Unionism rests on the desire to safeguard an economic system which
both traditionalist and physical-force nationalisms also often seek to
conserve.

It was to this economic system and the social structure based on it that
radical republicans objected. Their aim was to displace both systems by
means of nationalism. As James Connolly put it:

It (the National Movement] must demonstrate to the people of
Ireland that our nationalism is not merely a morbid idealising of
the past, but is also capable of formulating a distinct and
definite answer to the problems of the present and a political
and economic creed capable of adjustment to the wants of the
future.

Connolly was well aware, as any reader of his histories of Ireland will
know, of the mystifying qualities of nationalism; its self-presentation,
diachronically, as an unbroken tradition, and, synchronically, as a unity.

40. Recent developments in Northern Ireland show the traces of the continuing changes and fragmentations of
this politics. There are now forms of 'radical unionism' espoused by paramilitary-connected parties; see,
for example, James White McAuley: 'Cuchullin and an RPG-7: the ideology and politics of the Ulster Defence
Association,' Ideas and Production, (forthcoming).
41. James Connolly: 'Socialism and Nationalism' (Jan, 1897) in Selected Writings, (ed.) P. Beresford Ellis,
42. See James Connolly: Labour in Ireland; Labour in Irish History, The Re-Conquest of Ireland, intro,
Robert Lynd, Dublin and London, Maunsel and Co., 1917. While these have been superseded by more recent
histories on a factual level, for example Connolly's Utopian construction of pre-Norman Ireland, they
remain valuable as theoretical works which refuse the obvious blandishments of nationalism.

21
Nevertheless, Connolly, like other, but not all Irish socialists, felt that nationalism was such a compelling force within Irish politics that socialism must stand aside, momentarily, to allow it to lay the groundwork for social revolution. This was not peculiar to Connolly or to Ireland; it is in fact the Leninist position as summarised by Tom Nairn:

[Lenin] argued that the nationalist revolts had a more positive meaning. The social forces and passions they harnessed were too great to be genuinely 'renounced', and in any case they worked to unseat the old dynasties, and so foster conditions generally favourable to social revolution ... In this pragmatic spirit the nationalism of liberation struggles ought to be encouraged, at least up to the moment of their seizure of state power. After that, it would of course become the task of revolutionaries to dissociate themselves from the nationalists; national liberation would then turn into 'bourgeois nationalism', and a force hostile to the broader revolutionary cause.

Connolly is the prime exemplar of Cronin's 'radical republicanism', although Tone, John Mitchel and Michael Davitt are other important if compromised figures. While Unionism, in all its forms, has an obvious ground in the anti-Home Rule movement and the Northern statelet, radical republicanism almost disappears, as an effective force after the death of Connolly. E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn attribute this to the fact that the Labour Party stood aside in the 1918 election (generally called the Sinn

43. Davitt, in many ways a predecessor of Connolly, was aware both of the dangers of nationalism and its necessity; as Malcolm Brown puts it: 'Solidarity, so very hard to build and so very fragile when built, they [the nationalists] set above all other ideals, even excessively, as Michael Davitt once charged when he complained that Irishmen were "unity-mad". Very slowly they learned how the ranks must be closed.' Brown, The Politics of Irish Literature, op cit, p. 36.

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Fein election) in order to allow a united stand (the ghost of national unity again). After this election and the eventual establishment of the Free State, Fianna Fail appropriated, or rather appeared to appropriate, those social issues which gave the Irish Labour Party its independent identity, while at the same time effectively moving to the Right. It is worth quoting Rumpf and Hepburn at some length on this aspect of Irish politics:

Nationalism in Ireland, as elsewhere, has been more directly concerned with securing the power of the nation to direct its own destiny than with achieving prosperity or social progress as such... in most of Ireland, where the struggle was for the mere establishment of the national state, sustained conflict between national aspirations and the striving of the lower classes for an increased political voice did not arise, prior to independence. The two aims appeared to coincide: the class enemy was the national enemy; the repressive economic masters were the foreign political masters. The fight by workers and small farmers for improved living conditions and a larger share of political power was regarded by them as part of the national fight, within which it became subsumed.

Since the post-Treaty split of 1922, this unity in the south of Ireland has disintegrated. But the result has not been the emergence of a frankly class-based politics. The modest performance of the Irish Labour Party, the oldest established party in the state, is evidence of that. Since independence, as before, radical social aims have been voiced with any vigour only as a function of disaffected nationalism... Left-wing forces have had little or no success when they have tried to take the lead in the national movement or work independently of it... Just as the left has, in effect, been captured by radical republicanism, so the mainstream of Irish national politics has

45. E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn: *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1977, p. 183. Radical republicanism should not be identified with the various Labour or Communist Parties, North and South, which have existed with fluctuating success since 1918, but the partition issue is central to a history of those parties as can be seen from Michael Farrell's; *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, 2nd edn, London, Pluto Press, 1980.

moved steadily to the right over the same period, heading off development of a conservative party such as the first Farmers' party, outside the national framework.47

What this brief survey reveals is that nationalism is not monadic, although it operates as if it were a unifying and unitary politics and is thus capable of capturing both right- and left-wing movements, because it is an alarmingly powerful force. Its continuing influence is evidenced in a number of ways. The achievement of democracy after a period of war and civil war, as exemplified by the transfer of power in 1932 by Cumann na nGaedheal to Fianna Fail, is treated as a national success:

... the peaceful acceptance of the people's democratic will and the ordered change of government must also stand as evidence of a political maturity in the new state that could not easily have been forecast in 1922 or 1923.48

Similarly the economic upswing of the late 1950s and the early 1960s in the wake of the Whitaker report is also treated as a national success, something done by and for the nation,49 although questions can be asked about whether this upswing depended more on a general upturn in Western economies than on a national drive and optimism that was previously

47, E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn; Nationalism and Socialism, op cit, pp. 219-220. The process described here has also skewed the writing of Irish history over the same period, as Basil Chubb points out in his Foreword to this work. Valuable work has been done since its appearance in English. Particularly recommended is Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr, (eds); Irish Peasants, op cit, which shows how throughout the nineteenth century socially conservative forces were capturing or redirecting radical and class-based politics in the name of the 'nation' and also gaining the experience of institutional power which would enable them to effect a comparatively smooth take-over of state power; see especially Paul E.W. Roberts; 'Caravats and Shanavests; Whiteboyism and Faction Fighting in East Munster, 1802-1811', pp. 64-101, and William L. Feingold; 'Land League Power; The Tralee Poor-Law Election of 1881', pp. 285-310. O'Casey's 'top-hatted republic', O'Connor's 'smart boys' and Kavanagh's DeVine family did not appear ex nihilo. The work is also a reminder of the persistence of class-based politics in Ireland.

48, Terence Brown; Ireland, op cit, p. 142; see also Conor Cruise O'Brien; States of Ireland. London, Hutchinson, 1972, p. 118.

unknown, and about which parts of the nation benefitted. That historians such as Brown, Lyons and O'Brien can talk more easily, it seems, about Ireland as a unit with a single political psychology than as a state with internal divisions, party politicking and real economic links to other states shows the continuing influence of nationalism.

This complex, fragmentary political nationalism does not aid definition. On the contrary, by offering unity rather than diversity as the cornerstone of identity it denies the existence of a problematic of identity. What we must do therefore is to turn once again to a cultural approach. Cultural nationalism is itself a diverse category and I wish now to consider its opposed poles.

Clifford Geertz has some interesting comments to make on cultural nationalism after a political revolution:

Now that there is a local state rather than a mere dream of one, the task of nationalist ideologizing radically changes. It no longer consists in stimulating popular alienation from a foreign-dominated political order, nor with orchestrating a mass celebration of that order's demise. It consists in defining, or trying to define, a collective subject to whom the actions of the state can be internally connected, in creating or trying to create, an experiential 'we' from whose will the activities of government seem spontaneously to flow. And as such, it tends to revolve around the question of the content, relative weight, and proper relationship of two rather towering abstractions: 'The Indigenous Way of Life' and 'The Spirit of the Age.'

To stress the first of these is to look to local mores, established institutions, and the unities of common experience — to 'tradition', 'culture', 'national character', or even 'race' — for the roots of a new identity. To stress the second is to look

50, E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn: Nationalism and Socialism, op cit, p. 155; the words 'drive' and 'optimism' are those of F.S.L. Lyons; Ireland since the Famine, op cit, p. 583.
Geertz's discussion is about contemporary Third World nationalisms and his categories, while suggestive, are not equivalent to the categories of Irish nationalism. The kind of ideological project he outlines is one which was occurring in Ireland even before the revolution. Furthermore, his category of 'essentialism' seems to me to entail a continuing opposition to the previously dominant foreign power. These reservations aside, the importance of Geertz's comments is that they apply to the cultural rather than the political, economic, or social levels, and are therefore best exemplified by the language issue. In Ireland his central opposition broadens into a debate around the terms cosmopolitanism, provincialism and parochialism. Cosmopolitanism denotes a quality which is sought by writers who are trying to evade the national issue. They are then often accused of being mere provincials, aping foreign mores, by others who declare themselves to be proudly parochial and who seek equality with other states and cultures from within the national arena. In the following discussion I shall, however, use the more neutral terms 'exclusivism' and 'inclusivism' since the other three terms are best considered in the contexts of the actual arguments about them and here I wish only to establish the range of cultural nationalism by looking at its opposed poles.

Perhaps the most rigorously 'exclusivist' stance is that of Daniel Corkery

51. Clifford Geertz; The Interpretation of Cultures, op cit pp. 241-242.
whose criticism is the best example of an approach to definition which is tempting in its starkness, and shows how nationalism's monadic appearance can be projected through culture. Corkery is a figure of real, if unexamined, importance in a history of modern Irish culture since he represents the brand of cultural nationalism (traditionalist with an admixture of physical-force) which was triumphant after the establishment of the Free State. What Corkery represents in the history of culture in Ireland is the voice of the critic and writer who sees his ideas being upheld, in name at least, by those who wield actual power. What he seeks to establish is a tradition which is not English, nor in any way tainted, as he might put it, by English qualities. Such an approach is tempting because the nationalist enterprise tout court was to separate itself from England and much of the ensuing difficulty of definition rests on the confusion (due to geographical proximity, a 'common' language, and political and cultural interconnections) of Irish and English culture. Corkery argued that a Gaelic and Catholic tradition still existed and did not need Ascendancy writers such as Yeats and Lady Gregory to transcribe and re-interpret it. Synge was an exceptional case, for Corkery, because he separated himself from this Ascendancy, mixed with the people, knew them intimately, and therefore came nearer to 'expressing' them than any other writer of his background. Even so, the 'true' Ireland had never found expression in English because the:

My discussion of Corkery cannot at this point take account of the specific opposition he encountered in Ireland but his ideas were vigorously opposed in the 1930s and 1940s by Sean O'Faolain and an account of that opposition can be found in Ch. 5 below.
53, The Synge family is revealingly described as 'an old Wicklow family, they had been therefore several hundreds of years in Ireland if not of Ireland,' (my emphasis), Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, p. 28, which maintains the attitude of the fourteenth century Irish to the colonists as 'the foreigners of Ireland', see J.C. Beckett, The Anglo-Irish Tradition, op cit, p. 70.
... Ascendancy it was that had fixed the moulds of Anglo-Irish literature, if Anglo-Irish it be, those moulds which do not willingly receive the facts of Irish life.\textsuperscript{54}

Corkery is aware of the disjunction between the terms 'Anglo-Irish' and 'Irish' and is sensitive to the problems of the language issue which underlies that disjunction; he also, vitally, introduces the concept of the way in which culture moulds the experiences of individuals within a society to which we shall have to return. However, his approach was to suggest that the disjunction effectively disabled all Ascendancy writers from being Irish — his extraordinary list of such writers includes figures as various as Austin Clarke, James Joyce, Sean O'Casey, Liam O'Flaherty and James Stephens.\textsuperscript{55} What these writers were producing, according to Corkery, was a merely provincial branch of English literature, albeit in some cases a brilliant one. English rule having been overthrown, the field was now clear for a literature in English which would 'express' the nation, a literature that would match up to Corkery's infamous test:

I recall being in Thurles at a hurling match for the championship of Ireland. There were 30,000 onlookers. They were as typical of this nation as any of the great crowds that assemble at Saturday afternoons in England to witness Association football matches are typical of the English nation. It was while I looked around on that great crowd I first became acutely conscious that as a nation we were without self-expression in literary form. The life of this people I looked upon — there were all sorts of individuals present, from bishops to tramps off the road — was not being explored in a natural way by any except one or two writers of any standing. And even of the one or two, I was not certain, their efforts being from the start so handicapped. It was impossible to feel that one could pose such Anglo-Irish writers as the world knows of against that multitude ... One could not see Yeats, A.E., Stephens, Dunsany, Moore, Robinson, standing out from that gathering as natural and indigenous.

\textsuperscript{54} Daniel Corkery: Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, p. ix.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p. 4, This list of interdictions contains some thirty writers.
interpreters of it. On the other hand there seems to be no difficulty in posing Galsworthy, Masefield, Bennett, Wells, against any corresponding assemblies in England. Those writers do belong. They give the crowd a new significance: through them we may look with better eyes at the massed people of England. The crowd equally deepens the significance of the written word...

Although this is sociologically disingenous it is also partially true. There is much to admire in Corkery's writing: his anti-colonialism, his desire to place writers in their proper historical, social, and political contexts, and his recognition of the place of culture in the life of a nation. These are necessary qualities in the consideration of a literature and a culture which has too often been treated as merely a sub-branch of a larger culture. However, each of Corkery's admirable qualities is brought to an extreme: his anti-colonialism becomes an exclusive and provincial chauvinism which he allows to distort his sense of history so that it can be pressed into service as a test of a writer's national purity. Even his sense of the place of culture masks the fact that much of the importance he attributed to culture within the new state had to do with the poverty of social and economic thinking. According to Corkery only writers who had proved themselves to be of the People and knew their

56. Daniel Corkery: Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, pp. 12-13. This test relies on an appeal to the qualities supposedly inherent in the GAA but it is rendered ironic if one considers that the GAA may well have been 'English-bred' in that it was a response to the Victorian English games ethic and that both were part of the change from recreation to spectacle in capitalist societies. See W.F. Mandle: 'The Gaelic Athletic Association and Popular Culture, 1884-1924', in Oliver MacDonagh, W.F. Mandle and Pauric Travers (eds): Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750-1950, London, Macmillan, 1983, pp. 104-121.

57. For opposed views of Corkery see Lawrence McCaffrey: 'Daniel Corkery and Irish Nationalism', Eire-Ireland, 8, (1) 1973, 35-41 for a fairly traditional view and Emmet Larkin: 'A Reconsideration: Daniel Corkery and his Ideas on Cultural Nationalism', loc cit, 42-51, for a mildly recuperative view. For more information on how Corkery relates to some of the contemporary critical arguments see my 'It seems history is to blame', op cit, and also 'Leavis and Ireland: An Adequate Criticism?', Text and Context, no. 3, 1988, 112-132, in both of which I return to the implications of some of Corkery's ideas for the study of Irish literature.

58. See A.N. Jeffares: Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, 'Introduction', for an example of how even a reasonably sympathetic critic wavers between regarding Irish writing as separate and as part of a larger entity.
major concerns to be Nationalism, Religious Consciousness and the Land
could write for that People. Those who did not 'express' that People had
never been properly of them because it was, Corkery maintained, impossible
to step outside the life of one's own People, or to put it another way
the dominant ideology would always hold onto those whom it had once
interpellated. The argument at this point becomes dizzyingly circular in
that a deliberately self-impoverishing idea of culture spills over into
social and even, perhaps, economic policies which are based on the concepts
of the peasant and of isolation, and which in their turn demand the
subordination of the culture to the narrowly defined 'national interest'.

Corkery is not the only exponent of an exclusivist cultural nationalism.
Douglas Hyde and Thomas MacDonagh anticipated many of his arguments in the
desire for a continuity of cultural tradition which lies at the heart of
this type of cultural nationalism. Peter Costello rightly distinguishes

59, Daniel Corkery: Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, p. 13. The word 'express' in Corkery's
writing allows for a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between a culture and a 'People' which is
theoretically sophisticated. Equally sophisticated, however, is his distortion of the word 'People'. He
uses it to mean at one and the same time the whole nation and that section of the nation which actually
possesses power; it can in its second sense also stand for the dominant ideology within the nation. It is
precisely this situation which Althusser (similarly allowing 'ideology tout court' and 'dominant ideology'
to slip over each other) analyses in his 'ISA's essay, Essays on Ideology, London, Verso, 1984, pp. 1-60;
Catholic nature of Althusserian thought,
60, See Douglas Hyde: 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland' in Charles Gavan Duffy, Dr George
Sigerson, Douglas Hyde: The Revival of Irish Literature, op cit; Thomas MacDonagh: Literature in Ireland;
Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish, op cit. While it can be said that Corkery was the inheritor of the tradition
of criticism exemplified by these works it must also be said that his triumphalism altered the tradition.
Nowhere in Corkery will one find anything like Sigerson's 'Irish literature is of many blends, not the
product of one race but of several' (The Revival of Irish Literature, p. 109) or MacDonagh's three theses
about Irish literature which draw a boundary between it and English literature while not being doctrinaire
about the nature of Irish literature (Literature in Ireland, pp. viii-ix). Furthermore, MacDonagh was
explicitly in favour of an Irish writing in English, and Sigerson bemoaned the valorisation of a plebian,
rustic style as the 'Irish Note' (The Revival of Irish Literature, p. 71), but it was the discounting of
these inclusivist tendencies which marked Corkery's writing.
between Corkery and his predecessors by saying that they were more inclusive\(^1\) but what sets Corkery truly apart (and explains why he was more exclusivist) is the fact of power. Maurice Harmon has noted that the difference between the riots over Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 and the riots over O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926 lies in power having shifted to those who rioted.\(^2\) Corkery was himself gleefully aware of this:

> The Irish peasant with no national assets in his possession outside his own knowledge that he was the native of the isle, during that period fought for the soil of Ireland, and by his own grit and courage, became possessed of it. Not only does he now possess the soil; he also fills the highest offices in the country, in Church, in State, in Learning - everywhere.\(^3\)

The sentimentality of the opening of this passage is explained by the fact of power, but the passage sidesteps the question of who actually held this power; it was certainly not the People as a whole, but those who did hold power ensured that the type of cultural nationalism propounded by Corkery spilled over into all areas of the national life.\(^4\) This resulted in those images of the peasant as someone with (spurious) historical rights to the land whose poverty was a badge of spiritual superiority over the materialistic English, rather than a spur to social and economic action to alleviate that poverty.\(^5\) Such images had been constructed as a strategic response to the derogatory stereotypes used by the colonial power, but after the establishment of the Free State they hardened into an ideology.

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This ideology relied on stasis and isolation. Corkery, for example, in arguing that the Land was a central concept in an echt Irish literature claimed that some 53% of the population were at work on the land. On his own figures this ignores the 47% who constituted the urban population of Ireland and who seemingly do not deserve or require a literature to express them. The Censorship of Publications Act was the most visible consequence of this form of cultural nationalism gaining power, but the ideology which produced the act ruled out the possibility of asking questions about the place of the urban population, about the true nature of the peasantry, about the continuity of culture, or about nationalism itself. Corkery, therefore, signally failed in his stated aim to 'face the facts of the Irish scene' by facing only selected facts.

Corkery's conception of cultural nationalism can be justified as a reaction against the English industrial 'civilisation' which had only recently been overthrown and as a continuation of the celebration of the indigenous culture which had been regarded by that English 'civilisation' as 'barbaric' in order to justify its own hegemony. But the claim of a continuous culture upon which Corkery's nationalism is based required him to adopt a teleological view of history in which what was once a strategic response to English hegemony became an achieved state. All that his nationalism required was separation from England and once that had taken place certain features of Irish culture were raised to the level of achieved civilisation in which further development was now deemed

67, Terence Brown: Ireland, op cit, pp. 58, 66-68.
68, Daniel Corkery: Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, p. viii.
unnecessary, indeed, positively harmful. This however, could only be done at the expense of the whole range of culture available. From the whole range of activities and practices by which a nation or society might define itself, Corkery and the by-then-dominant ideology of traditionalist (and to a degree physical-force) nationalism for which he was providing cultural ratification, appropriated a select set of defining qualities and privileged them as the definition of Irish culture, in a spirit of reactionary over-compensation to past English rule. The definition thus produced is a partial one, in both senses of the word, and we must look to an inclusivist cultural nationalism to see what it has to offer.70

No one writer is so obviously an inclusivist as Corkery is an exclusivist. It is the mark of exclusivism that it wishes to construct a homogeneous culture and has therefore a cultural sanctum sanctorum to defend and by which to define itself. This is not to say that exclusivism escapes the problems of definition, rather it represses them. Those who would not be exclusivist, that is those who see or desire to see a heterogeneous and

69. On the issue of 'civilisation' and 'barbarism' see note 3 above. The best account of the interacting and diverging history of the terms 'culture' and 'civilisation' is to be found in Raymond Williams: Marxism and Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 13-18. See also Raymond Williams, 'Culture', Keywords, op cit.

70. There is a curious analogue to Corkery's brand of cultural nationalism which should be noted; this is quasi-Unionist, Ascendancy cultural nationalism. It is to be found mostly in Irish historiography, notably in the biographies of the 'great men' of Irish history which are often an expression of the belief that the native Irish could do nothing without Ascendancy figures to lead them. It also suggests that the Gaelic tradition would have been lost without such figures. Its most blatant manifestation is to be found in the 'Epilogue' to J.C. Beckett's The Anglo-Irish Tradition, op cit, p. 153: 'As the United Irishman Walter Drennan said: 'The Catholics may save themselves, but it is the Protestants must save the nation'. The words are as true today as when they were written and as little likely to be heeded.' Marianne Elliott: Witchen in Sion: the Protestant Idea of Liberty, Derry, Field Day, 1985, p. 27 notes this desire on the part of Protestants to believe that they alone are capable of saving the Catholics' 'political souls'. This is the expression of the desire of a section of society without power to gain a role for itself and reinforces my earlier comments about Unionism being a form of shadow-nationalism.
dynamic Irish culture, must face up to the complexities of definition. This thesis is concerned with four such figures and their various orientations towards the nation, or to be more precise, their constructions of the nation. To balance my arguments about Corkery and to adumbrate some of the issues of this thesis I will here employ Yeats as an example of one who takes an inclusivist stance. To say that he is representative of all such figures would be wrong because of the changing nature of his political and cultural thought. It is however that very mutability of thought which reveals the pragmatism necessary to be an inclusivist.

Confusion is the keynote of critical approaches to Yeats. Before Conor Cruise O'Brien's groundbreaking essay on Yeats' politics it was often assumed that Yeats was not a political writer, or that he had once been political and given it up, or that he only became political later in life. The emphasis of much Yeats criticism now is on what kind of politics he espoused. It debates the precedence to be accorded to his several political incarnations. Yeats the active, nationalist politicker of the 1890s (with an admixture of Savoy decadence); Yeats the cultural politician of the 1900s and 1910s; Yeats the increasingly dispirited aristocratic voice of the 1910s; Yeats the reincarnation of eighteenth century values of the 1920s; Yeats the quasi- or complete facist of the 1930s: which of these, admittedly simplified, figures is the real Yeats? Given the range of possibilities and Yeats' own aporia, it is easy to see why there is so much confusion on this issue. It is also easy to see why there should be the assumption that Yeats' views developed. However, Yeats was not searching

for a final fully defined political position, but was always rather arguing from a contingent position in favour of cultural inclusivism. As he put it: 'I am no Nationalist, except in Ireland for passing reasons; State and Nation are the work of intellect . . . ',72 which acknowledges the contingent and self-creating nature of nationalism in a way that Corkery could never do. His arguments with Gavan Duffy,73 his editorials for Samhain, especially given their often contradictory attitudes to England,74 his 'great stock of Europe' speech in the Senate Divorce Debates,75 and the variety of other views to be found throughout his writings, are contradictory but not mutually exclusive. In Samhain he opposed the sentimentalisation of the peasantry, singling out their hard-headedness for praise, attacked aristocratic unionists and took an aestheticist position on art,76 yet 'September 1913' — a poem which has obvious political content — attacks those who spurn an aristocratic gift as commercially-minded peasants. Such shifts are neither confused nor developmental; they are strategic defences of whichever part of the united but heterogeneous Irish national culture which Yeats desired, was under attack. It is comparatively easy to see why Corkery should, as an exclusivist, retain Ireland as his focus, but, given Yeats' desire for heterogeneity, it is less easy to understand why he too regarded Ireland as the natural arena for his activities, and why he was interested in the production of an Irish national culture.

73, Joseph Hone: W.B. Yeats, op cit, pp. 98, 100, 101.
76, W.B. Yeats: Samhain op cit, No. 5, p. 6; No. 1, p. 9; No. 4, pp. 12-15.
(b) Nationalism as an affective structure

Yeats and Corkery are alike in one thing; whether inclusivist or exclusivist, they have a common frame of reference in the nation, and this is an aspect of nationalism that cannot be overlooked. In the account of nationalism so far the focus has been on the way in which it has skewed Irish history and distorted the development of politics in Ireland. Implicit in this, and similar accounts, is the sense that nationalism has functioned solely as a mystifying force, and that no human agency (other than a sly and emergent Catholic bourgeoisie) has played any part in these developments. If I were to leave the account at this stage I would run the risk described by Patrick Wright:

... no value can remain to a critical analysis which has to define people as passive (if not always totally stupified) in order to protect its theoretical core from crumbling on exposure to the very history in which it would offer a supposedly more active and democratic future.77

Wright goes on to pose questions which any analyst of nationalism must heed:

So the integrative capacity of the nation comes soon enough to pose another question, this one concerned not with falsity or illusion but with the actuality of the nation - with its practical truth as a cultural formation of enormous historical influence and power. What is the actual basis for the nation in contemporary experience and how can the forms of self-understanding which it promotes come to be shared by people of strikingly different situation and circumstance?78

To put this another way: we must ask how it is that individuals as different as Corkery and Yeats can share a common frame of reference.

78, loc cit
No analysis of the impact of nationalism on history and politics can gainsay its power, its hold on people. This is to say that even if nationalism is empowered by its mystification of social relations, those relations still exist as part of the common life of a society. This mystification arises in part because nationalism adds a second set of horizontal relations to the more usually considered hierarchical ones. Such horizontal relations are 'a perennial part of human life' though their arrangement within a nationalism is not inevitable. These relations are clustered around a nexus of commonalities, whether cultural, linguistic, territorial, economic, religious, or socio-psychological. Nationalism thus permeates the common life of a society, not least the self-perception of a society as a distinct group.

It is nationalism which has fixed the perceived boundaries of Ireland; it has through the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided the dominant redaction of politics, society and history. It has therefore provided answers to matched questions such as: 'Who are we?/Who are they?'; 'What is our history?/What is their history?'; and 'What is our ethos?/What is their ethos?'. To take Berkeley's resounding phrase, 'We Irish', as

79. Benedict Anderson; Imagined Communities, op cit, p. 16.
Yeats and Denis Donoghue have done in very different ways\textsuperscript{2}, as meaning something, anything, is to accept that a nation exists, that a boundary can be set.

We can accept that this boundary would have to be arbitrarily drawn, even if it conformed to the God-given 'gigantic outlines of a kingdom'\textsuperscript{3} and the nation filled the whole island. We can accept that the boundary is moveable and that at various times it has taken the shape of the Pale, the border between North and South (which has itself moved over the years), or some geometrically impossible line around Gaelic Ireland. We can accept that the boundary is permeable and that groups and individuals have passed (or been pushed) through it in both directions. We can in sum, accept that the boundary is in Oliver MacDonagh's phrase a matter of 'mental geography',\textsuperscript{4} and that it must be set against the colonial imaginary geographies which would enclose Ireland within the equally arbitrary boundary of the British Empire, or which would enclose the Irish within the boundary of the 'Celtic'.\textsuperscript{5} What we cannot do, however, is refute either its existence or its impact upon the actual consciousness of the Irish.

Most of the work carried out so far on Irish nationalism has concentrated on the origins, development and spread of nationalism in Ireland as a set

\textsuperscript{2} Denis Donoghue: \textit{We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society}, London, University of California Press, 1986. See especially the title essay which disputes Yeats' 'essentialist' conception of the phrase, but acknowledges that it retains a meaning, no matter how qualified.


\textsuperscript{5} The phrase 'imaginary geography' is derived from Edward Said: \textit{Orientalism, op cit}, pp. 49ff where he describes the construction of the field of Orientalism; his phrase is 'imaginative geography' but I prefer to retain 'imaginative' and 'imagined' as positive terms, and 'imaginary' as a descriptively neutral term. See also n, 3 above.
Chapter 1

of organisational and political structures,** rather than as a framework within which culture, as both everyday life and artistic and intellectual production, arises. This is not to decry that work for, as Edward Said has said, in relation to literature, 'if the body of objects we study ... gains coherence from, and in a sense emanates out of the concepts of nation, nationality, and even of race, there is very little in contemporary critical discourse making these actualities possible as subjects of discussion' .** The subjects of discussion in Irish history thus far have been of a piece with the questions that are asked within the wider, comparative debate on nationalism. When did national consciousness arise and can the origins of a national consciousness be seen as synchronous with the origins of nationalism? How widely spread through society was national consciousness, and again how strongly can we link this with nationalism? There is a vigorous debate about both questions in Irish history: there are for example proponents of the view that Irish nationalism can be traced to the eleventh century,** that it was developing in the sixteenth century,** and that there was no trace of it

86. Such is the importance of nationalism in Irish history that most of the standard histories have relevant material. There are also a number of histories of nationalism in Ireland of which the following are a sample, Paul Bew: Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland, 1890-1910; Parnellites and Radical Agrarians, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987; P.B. Boyce: Nationalism in Ireland, London, Croon Hels, 1982; Sean Cronin; Irish Nationalism, op cit; Tom Garvin; The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 1981; Tom Garvin; Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987 is like his earlier work political science as much as history, but is also an effort to read the minds of the nationalist revolutionary leaders of the period; Robert Kee; The Green Flag, (1972) 3 vols, London, Quartet, 1976; C.H.E. Philipin (ed.); Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press/Past and Present Publications, 1987, gathers several important articles; E. Strauss; Irish Nationalism and British Democracy, London, Methuen, 1951.


until after the sixteenth century.90 The most sensible view to take on this, in the present context, is that of Peter Alter who states that 'National consciousness and the modern nation thus have a long pedigree, whereas nationalism as an ideology and a political movement does not...'.91 The origins of nationalism in Ireland need not detain us long therefore for we know that it is embedded in Irish society to the extent that the Oxford English Dictionary (a perhaps biassed and certainly ironical source) entries on 'nationalism' and 'nationalist' carry specifically Irish connotations. The question of its spread through and its hold on society is a more problematic one.

Curiously, in the face of much recent writing of a comparative and analytical nature which asserts the continuing or increasing power of nationalism,92 many Irish historians have been challenging the view that Irish history is nationalist. Their researches have found signs of other, usually more localised, forms of political organisation and activity underlying those which have been previously considered to be nationalist. As a result, there is a challenge to the previously dominant idea that nationalism was the motor of Irish history. However, this is a not uncontentious area in Irish studies.

91. Peter Alter: Nationalism, op cit, p. 56.
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The usual term for this history is 'revisionist' (an unhappy choice of phrase but one with which we are stuck). Those historians so identified defend themselves, with increasing weariness, as simply carrying out their professional responsibilities, and tend to claim that if they are thereby weakening the old triumphalist nationalist history of Ireland, they are doing so only incidentally, that it is, in any case, an untenable view of history, and that the only people interested in continuing to defend it are supporters of physical-force nationalism. Some of these writers do in turn display a sensitivity to the fact that in Ireland, as in other post-colonial cultures, the matter of history is an emotive subject, for it is to history that people look not just to provide a sense of identity, but also a confirmation of the rightness of that identity. 33

There are obviously a number of questions which are raised by this issue of the type of history that ought to be written: who owns history?; what is history for? and so on. The question into which all of these others can be resolved is: 'in what form should history be written?' The history produced by the 'revisionists' is an Irish history and, simply because it exists and has done so for nearly sixty years, 34 it is a part of Irish culture. Part of the reason why it is so unsettling for so many people is that it discards narrative shape in favour of an empirical and quantitative methodology. In this it is at odds not just with the history which it is

33. The debate on 'revisionism' has been going for some time and looks set fair to continue; a good summary of the various views can be found in Roy Foster's 'We Are All Revisionists Now', The Irish Review, no. 1, 1986, pp. 1-5 (the importance of the debate being underscored by this being the lead article in the first issue of the Review) and in the responses by Ronan Fanning et al: 'Nationalist Perspectives on the Past; a Symposium', The Irish Review, no. 4, 1988, pp. 15-39.
34. See Brendan Bradshaw: 'Nationalist History in a British Context', Paper delivered to the Biennial Conference of the British Association for Irish Studies, Liverpool University, 8-10 October 1989.
displacing, but with the forms of narrative which have been common in Ireland.

Seamus Deane has said about Maria Edgeworth that 'Ireland marked out the limits of her idea of mimesis. History had passed beyond the range of representation in fiction', and that for William Carleton 'as with so many Irish writers the problem of representation was almost insuperable.' The point to be made here (and it is one to which I shall return) is that the forms of writing in Ireland, whether in 'literature' or in 'history', have been determined by its colonial, nationalist, anti-colonial, and post-colonial experiences. This has meant that realism and naturalism, empirical forms, have no long pedigree in Irish writing, and even to-day it is the short story rather than the realist novel which seems to be most 'adequate' to the conditions of Ireland. The writing of history in Ireland is as open (though in different ways) to this framework of determinations. Just as importantly the perceptions of how history should be written have also been subject to the same determinations. When therefore the writing of history moves into a different form it both unsettles expectations (it does what revisionism should do and makes strange) and affords us an opportunity to consider the bases of those expectations.

The history which is currently being displaced is primarily a narrative; as a quantitative and empirical history 'revisionism' seeks to be more of a

95, Seamus Deane: 'Irish National Character, 1790-1900' in Tom Dunne (ed.): The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence, Historical Studies XVI, Cork, Cork University Press, pp. 90-113, pp. 105, 106. See also my review of this and Tom Paulin’s Fivealietown (London, Faber and Faber, 1987) in Text and Context, no. 3, 1988, pp. 141-145, for further comments on 'revisionism' and empiricism. 96, Terence Brown: 'After the Revival: Seán O Faoláin and Patrick Kavanagh' (1979) in his Ireland’s Literature, op cit, pp. 91-116. This is an issue on which much work remains to be done.

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recital of facts and an analysis of data. It is now, claims Roy Foster, 'impossible to interpret Irish history in the rousing terms of P.S. O'Hegarty' [sic]: "the story of a people coming out of captivity" ... with a beginning, a middle and what appeared (up to about 1968) to be a triumphant end.'

O'Hegarty et al's triumphalism is the historical equivalent of Corkery's work. Like Corkery it aimed to present Ireland as an achieved state. Unlike Corkery, however, it could not as successfully repress the fact that the achievement was partial. The establishment of the Free State was both the terminus of a teleological narrative, and an echo of other dates within that narrative. Nationalist history is therefore a history both of conversion and crisis; as against the teleological linearity of triumphalism there is a circularity induced by incompleteness.

The thesis that Irish history is perceived as cyclical is most persuasively put by Oliver MacDonagh:

Whether it is 1778, 1782, 1793 or 1825 the same forces operate in the same fashion ... Moral, legal and experiential views of history induce a cyclical view as well ... But a past seen in terms of subjection and struggle, seen as a pageant or tournament of heroic defeat, is one of the roads towards a fundamental distrust or even disbelief in achievement ... the characteristic Irish time-frame inclines Irishmen to a repetitive view of history ... "

As against this specification of the perception of Irish history as cyclical there is Anthony Smith's account of the necessary linearity of a nationalist history:

97, Roy Foster: 'We Are All Revisionists Now', op cit, p.1
98, Oliver MacDonagh: States of Mind, op cit, pp. 9, 13.
Communities exist in nature, as it were, and obey the same laws of birth, growth, maturation, and decline - and rebirth. The development is linear rather than cyclical, because the period of decline is regarded as "unnatural", a matter of "betrayal" from within, or "subjugation" and decay from without ... With some exceptions, historicist intellectuals fail to conform to later canons of historiography and scientific method; indeed, objectivity is not their main concern. Their aim is to retail the "past", in such a way as to "explain" the lot of their community and prescribe remedies for its ills.

This contradiction is held in balance because a nationalist history is by definition a history of crisis seeking conversion. Just as in Benedict Anderson's marvellous phrase 'It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny', so a nationalist history is one in which a telos is sought. The purpose of nationalist history is to record the struggle to achieve a full national identity, but the spur to this struggle is the experience of the lack of such an identity. The dates that MacDonagh addsuces, and the numerous other iconic dates that he might have adduced, are therefore all best seen as frustrated teloi, and history must needs keep repeating itself until it reaches a resolution.

It is this balance that 'revisionism' upsets. This balance of contradictions is a function of the affective aspect of nationalism, and

100. Benedict Anderson: Imagined Communities, op cit, p. 19
101. As might be expected Unionism is a mirror of this nationalist process. History for the unionist has to do less than for the nationalist (see Terence Brown: 'Remembering Who We Are' (1985) in his Ireland's Literature, op cit, pp. 223-242,) but it does so in a similar way. Its principal iconic date, 1690, is the point of achievement, the point at which history ceased. Succeeding iconic dates mark efforts to keep history immobile and achieved identity stable. Unionism strives to maintain immobility; nationalism strives to attain immobility. A problem with the end of history for both traditions may well be that Irish culture will suffer the fate of English culture; without historical struggle it is difficult to remain central even to one's own imagination. Irish culture could therefore become decentred and provincialised as English culture has been.
the part which it plays in the promotion of a collective consciousness and identity. The nature of that consciousness and identity is also split, is again balanced between crisis and conversion, between the oppositional and the alternative.

It is therefore possible to recast the earlier point about the way in which nationalism has skewed the development of history and politics in Ireland by saying that while Irish culture is oppositional it has never presented a real alternative; that is to say that the definitions of Irish nationalism remain incorporated within the dominant (in this case English colonial) culture, rather than presenting an alternative, unincorporated set of definitions to English hegemony. In this reading the assertion of Irish independence has not altered hegemonic relations; the hegemony has been renamed but remained and the essential features of the old-named form have been incorporated within the new-named form. In this light, no real alternative has been generated, rather the dominant hegemonic pressures have been internalised. The economic and social relations which existed under English rule have remained in place, and, in cultural terms, English charges - of irrationality, of femininity, of spirituality, of garrulousness, of childishness - have been adopted as Irish badges of honour. The relational structures remain unchanged and so in this view the problematic of Irish identity is a false and misleading one; a distraction from the

103. For the theoretical background to this see David Cairns and Shaun Richards: Writing Ireland, op cit, pp. 11-16 and passim; see also Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks, (eds and trans.) Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, pp. 210ff, 418-425; George Watson: Irish Identity and the Irish Literary Revival, op cit, p. 20.
real political business of altering perception and self-perception by altering social structures.

There is much justice in this line of argument (and its urgent contemporary manifestation in the feminist arguments adduced and appropriated in this thesis). However, the argument rests ultimately on a crude notion of the economic base as all and immediately determining and consequently it relies on an idea of nationalism as a wholly false and unproductive social and political aspiration.

An alertness to perception and self-perception, to consciousness in short, must entail a willingness to consider the affective consequences of social organisation and their expression through culture, and allow for the material (real historical) nature of consciousness. Nationalism cannot be discounted as merely a continuation of the hegemony through a re-incorporation of the dominant features; it must be acknowledged as an emergent shift in consciousness mediated through shifts in social organisation and cultural expression. Independence and self-determination may not be an ultimate resting point, they may not even be unconditionally possible, but the desire for and achievement of them (however partial) is nevertheless a step taken.

To argue otherwise, that is that nationalism could have engendered a real alternative, would be to return to an essentialist concept of the nation, to a sense that nationalism is generated by an echt and pristine Irishness which could be recovered untainted from the experience of colonialism, and to accept that the monadic projection of nationalism is real.
Instead nationalism can only be seen as an arbitrary construction. It must also, however, be seen as a construction which no matter how arbitrary or even false, answers to real needs for allegiance, solidarity, commonality and patterning. It can answer to those needs because of its ability to supply structures and relations which are in some ways satisfying because grounded in shared experience. Seen in this light it becomes an imaginative act producing an imagined community which has played a real part in the history of Ireland. Countering Ernest Gellner's criticism of nationalism as false perception, Benedict Anderson has stressed the positive and imaginative aspects of nationalism:

Gellner ... assimilates "invention" to "fabrication" and "falsity", rather than to "imagining" and "creation". ... he implies that "true" communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. In fact all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. 104

Nationalism cannot simply be discarded. We must instead recognise that it is not monadic, that it is arbitrary, that it balances contradictions and that while its offer of a fixed, stable, individual identity which aligns with a commonality in a range of satisfying intersubjective relations is false, because partial, what gives it its power is the human yearning for such an identity. The collaborative aspect recognised by the concept of hegemony (and so coldly and deliberately rejected in the Althusserian notions of ideology and interpellation) arises precisely from this longing.

104, Benedict Anderson: Imagined Communities, op cit, p. 15, 47
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The longing to be whole is such that even the false and partial answers of nationalism are greeted as being better than no answers at all.

We must therefore recognise nationalism as a qualified, limited and contradictory but nonetheless 'active, transitive (political) language' of the oppressed which aims at transforming rather than conserving the world. In this way, we are able to accept that although the transformation sought and perhaps achieved is only partial, and that 'the nation is a goal rather than an actuality', the aspiration towards that goal:

... bears witness to the utopian impulse and hope, the creativity and sense of wonder, the desire for transcendence that ... a projection of national identity is able to engage. Such energies may indeed be articulated around ideological fictions ... but they should never be treated as if merely ideological or ridiculous in themselves.

By looking to the contradictions within nationalism, the plurality disguised by its monadic form, the real issue of identity covered by its apparent resolution of this problematic, we can avoid 'premature utopianism' in favour of examining a 'utopian thought ... able to trace within the present that secret lack of identity with itself ... the alienations of its desire, in its persistent inability ever quite to coincide with itself.' This is to recognise that identities, like history, are humanly made but not always in circumstances of one's own.

choosing\textsuperscript{109} and that identities are as important as the circumstances of their creation.

In this section I have demonstrated that the only easy definitions of Irish culture are either reductive or tautologous and that in both cases vital elements of the culture are ignored. One feature of my argument which should also have become clear is that in an area which one would assume would be the province of disinterested academics there are a large number of interested parties. By this I do not mean to advert to the implicit political nature of all the criticism available but rather to the number of writers which it is necessary to refer to in any such survey. These references are not accidental; they reinforce my earlier point about the importance of the very terms of the definition. Writers as the producers of important parts of the culture in question must necessarily involve themselves in the search for definition. Such a search involves having a position on nationalism - what is my nation? is the basic question, although it leads to many others. To define Ireland is also to take up a position on the matrix of social, cultural, political, economic and ideological forces which constitute 'Ireland' and which also provide the writer with an identity. The genre most suited to such a search is autobiography and it is not therefore surprising to find that the autobiographical impulse is central to Irish writing. So central indeed that it becomes a defining characteristic of that writing.

CHAPTER 2

IT'S YOURSELF IS IT?

I. The Range of Irish Autobiography

The plethora of Irish autobiographies is matched by the varieties of criticism of autobiography that have appeared over the past thirty years. My purpose in this section is to reconcile the one with the other in order to produce a model of how we might most usefully approach Irish autobiography.

While I shall concentrate on 'literary' autobiography in this work it should be remembered that autobiographical writing is one of the most common forms of writing in (and, incidentally, about) Ireland. As such it provides evidence of the strong links between culture and politics in Ireland with political figures often offering a written account of their lives and literary figures producing autobiographies which are, as we shall see, often strongly interventionist.

The range of Irish autobiographical writing is enormous. Each major phase of the Irish struggle for independence has generated its own crop of autobiographies: Wolfe Tone in 1798, John Mitchel in 1848, John O'Leary's reminiscences of Fenianism, the autobiographical accounts of the nationalist movements of the early twentieth century, the war of independence and the civil war by Tom Barry, Dan Breen, Peadar O'Donnell,
Ernie O'Malley and Maud Gonne; Brendan Behan's account of his involvement with the IRA campaign of the thirties and forties, and, most recently, works by Bernadette Devlin, Bobby Sands and Gerry Adams. Autobiographical writing is not, however, produced only in response to political violence. There are a number of other recognisable sub-genres of which the best known is probably the Island autobiography, a group comprising work by Maurice O'Sullivan, Peig Sayers, Tomas O'Crohan and perhaps even Liam O'Flaherty. With or without O'Flaherty the reputation of this group was such as to elicit Flann O'Brien's satirical response *The Poor Mouth.* There is then what might be called the 'demi-aristocratic memoir' stretching from Jonah Barrington to Elizabeth Bowen. There is the memoir proper written by those, Irish and English, who witnessed some recognisably important episode in Ireland's history. There are a variety of other types of autobiographical writing: religious (cf. Peter O'Leary's *My Own Story* or Fr McDyer of Glencolumbkille: *An Autobiography*), medical (of which the best known are probably Oliver Gogarty's various autobiographies - best known because they go beyond the limits of the type - and more recently Noel Brown's *Against the Tide* which is also a political autobiography), legal and sporting (the prevalence of which is perhaps best seen in the existence of the Irish *R.M.* stories which stand in relation to this category as *The Poor Mouth* does to the Island autobiographies). There is also what J.W. Foster has called the 'finely crafted autobiography' of social decline which he identifies as a 'Protestant middle-class form' produced in the North of Ireland.'

1. J.W. Foster; *Themes and Forces in Ulster Fiction,* Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1974, pp. 190-191. Details of most of the other autobiographies I have referred to can be found in William Matthews' somewhat eccentric but useful *British Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written before 1951,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1955.
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There is then the way in which autobiography enters into a range of other works in which one might not expect to find it. Leaving aside the autobiographical novel, of which there are many examples, the least surprising of the remainder are the poetical autobiographies from, say, Austin Clarke's *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust* to Seamus Heaney's 'Singing School'. However, drama, too, often carries an autobiographical element in plays such as Sean O'Casey's *The Star Turns Red* or Hugh Leonard's *Da*. Autobiography of a kind also occurs in works which are more surprising carriers of it such as Conor Cruise O'Brien's *States of Ireland* or Arland Ussher's *The Face and Mind of Ireland*; it might even be argued that J.C. Beckett's *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* is autobiographical in much the same way as Elizabeth Bowen's *Bowen's Court*.

Despite this almost overwhelming range of autobiographies in Irish writing there has so far been little serious attention paid to it as an obviously central genre of Irish writing. Only one general book and a couple of articles exist. Aside from this a number of works exist on individual autobiographies— for example Shirley Neumann and James T O'Hara have written on Yeats' *Autobiographies*— but these are works which do not take full account of the Irish context, preferring instead to place such autobiographies in the more general context of autobiography tout court. Similarly, general works on autobiography which refer to specific Irish autobiographies lack a sense of the specifically Irish dimension of the genre.

2. See Ch. 1, n. 2.
This lack of attention perhaps accounts for the two extremes which approaches to Irish autobiography take. On the one hand there is a naive belief in autobiography as a trustworthy source, evident in Hone's biography of Yeats or more recently James Matthews' biography of Frank O'Connor. At the other extreme there are those who obviously thought they could believe the facts of autobiography and whose disillusion when they find otherwise is as naive as their earlier belief: Sean O'Casey has suffered particularly from this form of criticism.

So despite the prevalence of Irish autobiography there has so far only been lip-service paid to its importance. The principal effort so far, shared with the wider criticism of autobiography, has been to separate autobiography from other writings. For Richard Fallis 'modern Irish literature is particularly rich in autobiographical writing' and Joyce, Moore and Yeats 'together ... helped establish the strong Irish tradition of the autobiography of the artist. These autobiographical works provide one mirror to the Irish scene; fantasy and realism provide others and the best of all these are considerably more than cracked looking glasses.'

This, along with the common romance/realism dichotomy remarked upon earlier separates autobiography from both the novel and from fantasy, but a part of my argument will have to do with the ways in which these forms are continuous.

It is necessary to bear in mind both the range of autobiographies and the way in which many different forms are invested with an autobiographical impulse for two reasons. If we fail to do so we may see the literary

autobiographies considered here as isolated phenomena rather than as instances of a prevalent form of writing. There may also be the temptation to see the proliferation of literary autobiographies as solely a twentieth century phenomenon rather than as part of a long-standing if fragmentary tradition of writing in Ireland. In each case we have a local, Irish counterbalance to the tendency, all too common in the criticism of autobiography, to appropriate certain works to a grand and broad-grained history of Western autobiography. Such a tendency results in the works of Yeats or Moore or O'Casey being made the next, unproblematical item in a sequence comprised of, say, the works of Augustine, Cellini, Bunyan, Newman. While acknowledging that the works under consideration do have links to such writers - for example, Stephen Dedalus' mortificatory rituals owe a debt to Augustine, as do O'Faolain's comments on memory - it should be clear by now that the intention here is to consider these works as Irish autobiographies, often with precise linkages each to each, while not denying the complex and problematical ways in which they are also linked to other, non-Irish writings. I have chosen to concentrate on four autobiographers who seem to me to provide an illustrative range of approaches to the problems faced by the autobiographer in particular circumstances. All four wrote their autobiographies when the problem of Irish self-definition had apparently been settled by the establishment of the Irish state. All four wrote from an engaged position in that each at one point was committed to the 'purest' form of that state. Furthermore, all four had to respond to the influence of the prescriptive and presumptuous autobiographies produced by writers from the period of the Literary Revival while functioning within the arguably greater constraints imposed by the new Ireland. Despite the circumstances shared by Patrick
Kavanagh, Frank O'Connor, Sean O'Faolain and Francis Stuart four different kinds of autobiographical project result. My intention is to consider the ways in which these differences arose.

To justify such an approach in the face of the more common tendency in autobiographical criticism to group autobiographies regardless of history and culture it is necessary to say something about that criticism.
II. Approaches to Autobiography

It is only in the past thirty years or so that autobiography has become an object of critical study in its own right. Previously, it was considered as part of history or biography but since the 1950s attention has been directed to autobiography as a distinct genre. Three works stand out as providing the impetus for much subsequent criticism of autobiography. Since the appearance of these three works the volume of criticism devoted to autobiography has grown steadily. As a result the critic coming to autobiography now is confronted by a wide range of possible approaches: cultural, feminist, linguistic, psycho-analytic — both Jungian and

Freudian\textsuperscript{10} - reader-response,\textsuperscript{11} and structuralist\textsuperscript{12} are some such approaches, approaches which often overlap.

In addition there are a variety of attempts to classify autobiography: by profession,\textsuperscript{13} into sub-genres,\textsuperscript{14} or into categories dependent on function and intention.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite so much recent attention the most basic facts about autobiography are still contested. There are those who claim that as a genre it is as old as humanity; Avrom Fleishman refers to an ancient Sumerian text about Sargon as the first autobiography.\textsuperscript{16} Others date its inception as a genre from the work of St Augustine,\textsuperscript{17} while several claim that its true

\textsuperscript{10} Eugenio Donato: 'The Ruins of Memory', \emph{op cit}; Bruce Mazlish: 'Autobiography and Psychoanalysis: Between Truth and Self-deception', \emph{Encounter}, 35, 4, 1970, 28-37; Kevin Patrick Reilly: \emph{Irish Literary Autobiography}, \emph{op cit}; and 'Irish Literary Autobiography', \emph{op cit} - these are works which use the Oedipal situation as a controlling metaphor rather than as a mode of analysis. Obviously, structuralist and deconstructionist critics also make use of Freudian ideas.


\textsuperscript{13} Roy Pascal: \emph{Design and Truth in Autobiography}, \emph{op cit}.

\textsuperscript{14} Francis Hart: 'Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography', \emph{op cit}; Louis A. Renza: 'The Veto of the Imagination', \emph{op cit}.


beginning was in the renaissance.' The majority of critics, while acknowledging the claims of St Augustine or such renaissance figures as Cellini, prefer to date the inception of the genre from the end of the eighteenth century and the secularisation of what had previously been a tradition of devotional and spiritual literature,' of which Augustine's Confessions is a prime example. In this view the development of autobiography is connected to the Romantic movement and the growth of subjectivity which has specific consequences for the way in which the genre is read, most notably that it is a pan-Western phenomenon and that it is concerned most especially with the self. Apart from this kind of broad consensus, however, the dispute about the dating of the genre's origins seems more typical of autobiographical criticism, and it is this, among other difficulties, which leads some critics to regard the genre as 'lawless'.


20, All of those mentioned in n. 8 above would agree with this as would a number of other critics who date the beginnings of the genre differently but Fleishman disputes this view in his 'Envol', Figures of Autobiography, op cit, p. 472.

In the face of these various arguments there are four issues to be considered in an appraisal of autobiography: its generic status; the place of memory within it; the nature of its protagonist; and its function. These are obviously areas which overlap and the following sections are therefore cumulative. I should also make it clear that in what follows any generalisations or theoretical propositions are based on the specifics of Irish autobiography unless I state otherwise.

(a) The generic status of autobiography

It is seemingly inevitable that with the uncovering of a 'new' genre those critics who are interested in it should seek to separate it from other genres and, if not deny, then underplay the continuities and overlaps between it and other genres. Critics of autobiography have been particularly careful to separate it from the novel and from history, although the latter distinction has been less explicitly made. Pragmatic grounds for such distinctions - the need to overcome the long-standing idea that autobiography is an imperfect, 'sub-literary' form\textsuperscript{22} and to establish that it is worthy of and amenable to specific analysis - are not the least important. However, one must be careful that analysis is not unduly constrained by the generic boundaries imposed by this initial attention-seeking exercise. Even now, when critics of the genre are confident enough of its 'worthiness' either to expand it to include works of fiction\textsuperscript{23} or to question whether any writing can be excluded from the realm of the

\textsuperscript{22} There are still those who so regard it; Reilly distinguishes Yeats' \textit{Autobiographies} from his poetry on purely aesthetic grounds and Jelinek has pointed out that Shumaker is prone to a double standard, valorising male autobiography while applying old values to female autobiography.

\textsuperscript{23} See, for example, Avrom Fleishman: \textit{Figures of Autobiography, op cit}; and William C. Spengemann: \textit{The Forer of Autobiography, op cit}.
autobiographical,\textsuperscript{24} we must remain aware of how the initial critical separation of the genre has affected subsequent criticism. That the relativity of autobiography to other genres is now accepted,\textsuperscript{25} as is its continuity with other genres\textsuperscript{26} does not alter the fact that autobiography has been constituted in a particular way by its criticism. In saying this I am not implying the existence of some pristine form prior to criticism but am rather noting that we need to attend to the criticism as part of the context for the consideration of a genre.

This is particularly necessary in regard to autobiography because much of the criticism relies on reader-response.\textsuperscript{27} For our purposes it is sufficient to trace this approach back to Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism which defines autobiography as 'another form which merges with the novel by a series of insensible gradations'. For Frye the distinction of the autobiography or confession (for him the two are synonymous) from other forms is critically functional:

Here again ... there is some value in recognising a distinct prose form in the confession. It gives several of our best prose works a definable place in fiction instead of keeping them in a vague limbo of books which are not quite literature because they are 'thought', and not quite religion or philosophy because they are Examples of Prose Style. \textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{24} See, for example, James Olney; 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment' \textit{op cit}, although few go so far as Olney when he says that any writing is (potentially) autobiography.
\textsuperscript{25} See Elizabeth Bruss; \textit{Autobiographical Acts, op cit.}
\textsuperscript{26} See Karl J. Weintraub; 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness', \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{27} In addition to the citations in n. 11, above a number of other critics rely, implicitly or explicitly, on the reader's ability to distinguish autobiography as a solution to theoretical problems of genre. This solution is, however, question-begging; if autobiography exists as a distinct genre then it must bear generic markers; if it does not bear such markers then how does the reader recognise it? This problem is a function not so much of the \textit{genre} as of its criticism. Reader-response imposes a passive role on the individual reader as against receptionist theories of a readership whose demands actively shape a form.
Such a remark is of a piece with what I have said about the need to locate autobiography in the 'literary'. There are obvious difficulties here: the reader has to recognise autobiography as a 'distinct prose form' so that it can be removed from 'limbo' and located within the 'literary'. But the literary is delineated by the dominant modes of criticism and once located within it autobiography becomes subject to those modes rather than a challenge to them; it is the needs of criticism which are being served rather than the needs of autobiography. Later critics, who owe a debt to Frye, avoid the circularity of his argument by avoiding the issue of the critical origins of genres. For Jonathan Culler therefore:

A genre ... is a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as a norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text.29

Once again we have the singular reader responding to the text. Terence Hawkes, responding to Culler, makes genre seem even more constricting:

A genre-word ... placed on the cover of a book 'programmes' our reading of it, reduces its complexity, or rather gives it a knowable shape, enabling us literally to 'read' it, by giving it a context and a framework which allows order and complexity to appear.30

Hawkes goes on to speak of genres as 'essentially culture-bound, "relative" phenomena' 31, but even so, the genre-word is still considered as a 'key' to the understanding of autobiography or of any other genre. It is almost as if a genre were a pre-existing formal space filled by appropriate works. What has been lost is the sense, evident in Frye, that a genre is something

31, Ibid, p. 104, 'Relative' here refers to relativity between cultures, on the basis of the works of Whorf and Sapir, rather than relativity within or between genres or within a culture.
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called into being by criticism (defined in broad terms) around a set of works. Many of the generic problems encountered by criticism are therefore of its own, forgotten making because criticism seeks, so often, to tame 'new' genres to its own conventions rather than to expand those conventions to accommodate the 'new' genre.

The theory of genre is itself a part of this critical domestication of texts, for it presupposes neat compartments into which works can be conveniently slotted. The search for an ending, usually 'found' in the autobiography itself, is, despite much structuralist opposition to closure, a search for narrative closure, just as the definition of genres is a search for enclosure. A contrariwise concentration on the openings of autobiographies would allow autobiography to be seen as an endless genre, and further allow it to blossom into contingency. Instead, there is an anxiety about the ability of 'inappropriate' works to masquerade as autobiography, the work of Swift and Sterne for example, and about fiction's ability to comment on the procedures and concerns of autobiography as in Beckett's trilogy, and about the general

32. See for example: 'Perhaps I'm inventing a little, perhaps embellishing, but on the whole that's the way it was.' Samuel Beckett; Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, London, Calder, 1959, p. 9 and see also p. 133, Beckett and Sterne in their fictions are the writers who most convincingly confront the temporal problematic of autobiography, Tristram Shandy notoriously takes its time to get started because of the narrator's conviction that he must provide a full account of his life ab ovo, Beckett's fictions increasingly rush towards their end, are indeed often spoken d'outra tombe, As James Atlas puts it; 'What we are witnessing is the termination of an oeuvre designed to die with its author; the trope of immortality, of a work surviving its creator, has been suspended, Beckett would rather dismantle his own fictions than claim their endurance through time,' 'The Prose of Samuel Beckett; Notes from the Terminal Ward', in Douglas Dunn (ed.); Two Decades of Irish Writing, op cit, pp. 186-196, p. 186, Curiously, while many critics of autobiography point to the supposed 'fact' that the autobiography can never fully end because its last moment should also be that of its author, few critics now seem to attend to the Shandean dilemma of beginning. This says something about the bias of criticism towards the 'death of the self' and away from the idea that autobiography is a record of a life, One cannot avoid beginnings in Irish autobiography; think of Moore taking 200 pages to explain why he starts Hail and Farewell where he does, or of Joyce reverting to an invented language of childhood, or of O'Casey's catalogue of colonialism, and one can appreciate the care with which Irish autobiographical writers approach the moment of origin.
availability of pre-existing fictional forms to the autobiographer. These anxieties are increased by the climate of modernity in which generic boundaries are constantly challenged, in which texts refuse to be tamed. An extreme example of this anxiety is to be found in Albert Stone's consideration of autobiography in the light of contemporary American 'metafictionist' theories which refuse the distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction'. Stone claims that in reading autobiography the reader's need for 'reality-testing' is called upon more often than in reading the novel. As a result he falls back on the notion of an intuitive recognition by the reader of autobiography as a distinct form. However, in circumstances in which genres, the reader's 'norms' and 'expectations', are being disrupted it is not enough to fall back on an appeal to what is after all readerly common-sense. We need instead to do two things. The first is to face the problem of how and why a genre comes into being; this is itself a twofold process in that certain works appear - as a response to cultural conditions including critical needs - and a term which groups those works, which gives them generic status, then also appears. The second is to recognise that generic boundaries are porous; that is to say, with reference to our

34. Albert E. Stone: Autobiographical Occasions, op cit, Ch. 8. The context in which Stone is writing is still best summed up in Philip Roth's famous comment; '... the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make credible much of American reality. It stultifies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meagre imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.' Writing American Fiction' (1961) reprinted in Malcolm Bradbury (ed.): The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction, London, Fontana, 1977, pp. 31-47, p. 34. This volume reprints other important and influential essays on contemporary fiction. Of particular relevance to American metafictionist theories are John Barth's 'The Literature of Exhaustion', pp. 70-83; and Philip Stieck's wonderfully named 'Scheherazade runs out of plots, goes on talking; the King, puzzled, listens; an Essay on New Fiction', pp. 186-216. The sense of reality as more fantastic than the products of imagination expressed here further erodes the supposed boundary between the 'reality' of autobiography and the realm of the fantastic.
concerns here, that autobiographers are just as capable of exploiting the similarities and overlaps between forms as novelists. Both of these issues bear directly on Irish autobiography. We must look at autobiographies not simply as texts which fill a critically constructed genre but as texts which respond to, indeed are part of, a particular socio-cultural formation. We must also consider the ways in which the autobiographers respond to and act upon their historical moment. It will be a part of the argument of this thesis that autobiography is related to the political and socio-cultural moments and that the choice of form, the placing of emphasis within form, and the exploitation of overlaps between forms, are responses to those moments.

It is not enough, then, to allow the reader the common-sensical power to recognise autobiography post hoc. To do so is to collude with that criticism which refuses to consider that which is anterior to the text. Equally we cannot completely ignore the reader, although we need to consider the reader not as a passive singular individual but rather as a collective, a readership. This is necessary since the initial readership, which we may call the functional readership, as envisaged by the autobiographer is a part of the moment of production of the autobiography.

35. Critics seem to be more at ease with generic 'trickery' if perpetrated by novelists, and such writers as Barth, Pynchon and Barthelme are praised for their 'trickiness'. This is, in part, a function of the still relatively higher status of the novel as against autobiography as a cultural form and, in part, to do with the different traditions of writing available in different places: acclaimed English writers tend to be more 'conventional' than acclaimed American writers. In Ireland, those contemporary writers who might be classed as metafictionist are responding both to a different socio-cultural moment and to a different tradition of writing. I am thinking here of writers such as John Banville, Aidan Higgins, John McGahern, Brian Moore, Julia O'Faolain and, most relevant to our purposes here, Francis Stuart. I believe that the generic slippage evident in their work is related to the tradition of autobiography in Ireland, in that in both there is a deliberately expressed uncertainty about the ability of any narrative form or generic shape to contain the material.
There is, of course, a secondary readership, which we may call the critical readership, which is again a collective. Neither of these collectives is necessarily homogeneous or distinct. I can illustrate this and the distinctions between the two by taking myself as an example. As an Irishman, I am a part of the functional readership; Irish autobiography has, so to speak, designs on me; I am a part of its function. As the writer of a thesis, I am part of the critical readership; I have, so to speak, designs on Irish autobiography; it is part of my function. In both cases I am constrained by a variety of determinants. In both cases I reserve the right to resist those determinants, insofar as I am able.

A possible approach to autobiography in these terms is outlined in the work of Elizabeth Bruss. She takes into account two aspects of autobiography: its 'illocutionary' force (how it speaks to a, necessarily collective, readership) and its 'institutional' basis (the need for it to be grounded in some region anterior to itself):

Autobiography could not be said to exist until it was distinguished from other illocutionary acts. Contingent or occasional properties of other [illocutionary] acts had to coalesce into something that was experienced as a departure from previous acts, something significantly different, with its own sanctions and boundaries, to be violated only at the price of ambiguity or unintelligibility ... Autobiography as we know it is dependant on distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, between rhetorical and empirical first-person narrative. But these distinctions are cultural artifacts and might be differently drawn, as they indeed once were and might become again, leading to the obsolescence of autobiography or at least its radical reformulation.**

There is still a certain rigidity in Bruss' formulation (a rigidity which is not compensated for in her table of linguistic rules for

autobiography\textsuperscript{37}). Bruss is too inclined to regard the text as determined solely by linguistic contexts and while aware of the social dimensions of the 'illocutionary' and the 'institutional' aspects of the text, she emphasises the linguistic at the expense of the social. As such she is in danger of regressing to a decontextualising approach in which any autobiography is seen once more as either a free-floating artefact or as an artefact which refers only to other texts and ultimately to language as a whole. The danger here is that the illocutionary, as the realm of language, and the institutional, as the realm of generic structures, become again what they are so often in criticism, namely areas of privilege which need take no heed of their socio-cultural formants. Remembering that both the illocutionary and the institutional are generated from within a socio-cultural formation, we can see autobiography as the focus of a variety of contexts. Autobiography as institution occupies a space contiguous to, and overlapping with, numerous other forms - the novel, history, biography - each of which is itself defined relative to autobiography and to each of the other forms, each definition being culturally generated and subject to historical change. This is what makes appeals to the reader's response suspect; the reader can recognise only what the moment allows, a passive reaction. A readership, however, can make demands, can actively produce forms in what, in another, but not dissimilar context, Edward Said refers to as 'a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experiences'.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 'A Table of Some Linguistic Markers Sensitive to Context', pp. 31-32. The problem with these markers is that while they are relevant to autobiography they are not specific to it.

\textsuperscript{38} Edward Said; \textit{Orientalism}, op cit, p. 94
Autobiography as illocutionary act is composed of linguistic structures which are in their turn set in a framework of signifying practices which are embedded in social, cultural and historical circumstances. That framework can be best rendered in Roman Jakobson's diagram of a speech event:

CONTEXT (Referential)

MESSAGE (Poetic)

ADDRESSER -- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- ADDRESSEE
(Emotive) (Conative)

CONTACT (Phatic)

CODE (Metalanguage)

The components of this diagram are all culturally determined and historically variable so autobiography, now doubly placed, can be seen to be a variable rather than an absolute. As such it can be seen to be at least partly responsible for the anxieties about its own generic status insofar as autobiographers exploit its variability as both cultural artefact and social event. To understand how the diagram applies to autobiography we can perhaps offer a tentative gloss on Jakobson's terms: 'addresser' = autobiographer; 'addressee' = readership. These are obvious enough but the other terms interpenetrate and are constraints upon the actions of both addresser and addressee. 'Context' is compounded of those elements which generate the autobiography whether they be the matter of

Irish history, the personal history of the autobiographer, shared assumptions about literary works, or the language in which the autobiography is written; it must be understood as linguistic, literary, historical and cultural-political. 'Message' is the autobiographer's particular formulation or manipulation of 'context', as understood by both addressee and addressee. 'Contact' is again dependant on the language and other contextual features common to both addressee and addressee, but also contains the modes of book production and distribution, as well as such features as the expectation that writers (and others) of a certain age, reputation, or status will write an autobiography. 'Code' is largely shared language but has also to do with contextual features that inform the language; the term 'register' would cover most of these features, although conventionally it covers a supposedly pure stylistic ground to do with whether the work in question is written in, say, a high, elaborated or rhetorical manner, or in a low, restricted or demotic manner. A more proper sociolinguistic sense of 'register' would have to include not only the class basis of these oppositions but also other political factors; for example, it is possible in Irish-English to use the word 'stranger' in a neutral sense as one who is simply unknown, or in a more politically-charged sense as a reference to the English invader. Attention to the code of which the word is a part should enable the distinction to be made. The point of insisting on the obviously dual nature of the terms in Jakobson's diagram - the linguistic and the social - is to invigorate Bruss' useful idea of the autobiographical act. The problem with her formulation, derived as it is from the linguistic work of Strawson, Searle and Austen, is that act takes on too specific and frozen a meaning. By insisting on the social we can extend that meaning to activity; we can recognise autobiography as
practice as well as structure in both the writing and the reading. This avoids the central contradiction of those readings of autobiography which perceive it as primarily linguistic, whether as act or structure. By prioritising the linguistic aspect at the expense of all others, and insisting on the opacity of that language, many critics of autobiography, while trying to define its generic limits, construct it as just another undifferentiated component of language as a whole. The fact remains that choices (however constrained) are made at both the stage of production and of consumption: this is autobiography, not, say, a novel nor a history. That particular autobiographies may confound themselves with novels or with history does not detract from these choices.

A full definition of autobiography would then not perceive anxiety about generic status as a challenge to criticism but as a function of the genre's variability, its socially generated changeableness, and its ability to exploit its cultural contingency. Bruss, along with other critics who seek to define autobiography, fails to take full account of the mutations of autobiography. She appears to freeze the genre and to subscribe to a catastrophe theory of change. She cannot, therefore, allow for modulations of the genre except as factors leading either to 'obsolescence or radical reformulation'. This is because she ultimately describes a structure rather than a practice although both the 'illocutionary' and the 'institutional' are practices.

It is necessary to stress that Irish autobiography is a practice rather than a structure to allow for the fact that, while the genre antedates its comparatively recent appearance in Ireland, Irish autobiography is not
simply a universally available structure locally coloured but is rather a form which possesses its own rules and mechanisms. One example of these mechanisms will suffice here. Irish autobiographers of this century are always a part of each other's functional readership, seemingly, to a greater extent than anywhere else. Yeats writes his autobiography not just with an awareness of Moore's autobiography but as a target, in more ways than one, of that autobiography. That Yeats was also aware of the work of Synge and Joyce, that Joyce was conscious of Moore and making him a target, that O'Casey had the works of all these in mind when writing his own and so on, reveals something of the complexity of this mechanism. In all of the cases mentioned, with the possible exception of Synge's fragmentary and unpublished autobiographical writings, there is a purpose to the autobiographical writings, a design on the initial readership and a sense that other autobiographers are a part of that readership. It is not surprising therefore to find that the rules of Irish autobiography almost compel the deliberate exploitation of generic variation given the need not to copy a contemporary; in the context of Irish autobiography, formal similarities present themselves as allegiances extending beyond the formal. For example, O'Casey's 'Joycisms' are often criticised for being overblown or puerile, but this is to overlook the allegiance to Joyce and the opposition to Yeats signalled by this imitation; similarly, O'Faolain's analytical and deliberately non-oral style signals an opposition to Yeats, with his dislike of the analytical, and an allegiance to that form of rational discourse which O'Faolain identifies as non-Irish. Furthermore, given that writers see other autobiographers as only a part of the functional readership upon which they have designs, the practice of Irish autobiography often seeks ambiguity to raise questions in the whole
functional readership about the value and purpose of other autobiographies. Finally, insofar as autobiography has a functional readership its purpose is very often to challenge the limits of intelligibility. That is to say, that in an Ireland that was and is subject to tumultuous historical change the structures of the intelligible had to be challenged, had to be replaced by practices which could comprehend that change. Irish autobiographies can then be seen as a series of interlocking and competing practices which seek to promote new modes of understanding. They are not linked by tenuous bonds of literary influence on, or literary reaction against, each other but by the more vital and immediate bonds formed by being responses to changing but shared circumstances.

This brings us to the question of what autobiography as a genre has to offer and to another constraint imposed upon autobiography by the dominant modes of criticism. Given the initial critical separation of autobiography from other genres, particularly fiction, we might expect to find that issues of 'truth' and/or of 'fact' would feature in the argument. This is indeed the case. However, as generic markers 'truth' and 'fact' prove too slippery for most critics.

While criticism of autobiography sought initially to distinguish it from fiction, it had to recognise that there were certain similarities between the two forms. The purpose of this distinction was to elevate autobiography from 'limbo' into the 'literary'. As a consequence of these perceived formal similarities and of this elevation, autobiography was as we have already noted domesticated. Although it was a 'new' genre it did not alter the dominant rules of criticism or provide a challenge to the concept of
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the 'literary'. Instead it was judged against a pre-existing sense of the 'literary' which was derived in this instance largely from the criticism of fiction. Critics, adhering to this sense of the 'literary', seek from autobiography some 'timeless truth' of human nature and point, often, to the non-factual or untruthful aspects of autobiography (lies, errors, omissions) to deny its more mundane, historical factuality. That autobiography is also a 'story' seems to reinforce this attitude. Most critics therefore, while separating autobiography from fiction, end by allowing its similarity to fiction, rely on the reader's response as the major defining element of autobiography and avoid the issues of 'fact' and/or of 'truth' by requiring only that the autobiographer make an avowal of truth. This formula would seem to be appropriate to Irish autobiography both because of those stereotypes of Irish writing I have discussed above, and because of the exploitation of generic slippage noted above. It also seems appropriate if we remember the presence of the 'fantastic' in so many Irish autobiographies. The presence of the 'West' as a utopian otherworld in O'Connor and O'Faolain, Kavanagh's 'Fairyland', the phantasmagoric war episodes in Stuart are examples of the autobiographer straying into the fantastic. I raise the category of the

40. In their different ways F.R. Hart, Lionel Grossman, Northrop Frye, W.L. Howarth and Roy Pascal all acknowledge autobiography as ultimately fictive; for reader-response see above n. 11. The avowal of truth formula can be found in the works, already cited, of Bruss, Olney and Mandel.
41. Nor is the fantastic confined to these works; the title alone of Yeats' 'Reveries' seems to deny factuality; Moore's 'voices' in Hail and Farewell, and O'Casey's dream chapters are further examples. Gogarty's As I Was Going Down Sackville Street is subtitled 'A Phantasy in Fact'; Louis MacNiece considers the issue of true and false dreams in The Strings Are False (1965), London, Faber, 1982, p. 32. A reading of the supposedly gritty realistic 'Island' autobiographies alongside Vivian Mercier's The Irish Comic Tradition, op cit, shows them to be implicated in the long tradition of the fantastic in Irish writing. The one attempt to cope with the issue of the fantastic in autobiography that I have found is Gusdorf's sentimental formulation of the enchanted realm of childhood (Gusdorf, 'The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', op cit, p. 30) but this avoids the idea that such an enchanted realm has to be invented by many people for themselves.
'fantastic' as the most extreme case of the unverifiable in autobiography. I say unverifiable rather than unfactual or untruthful because it is more accurate. After all, in most of these cases we are unsure as to whether we are being lied to (Moore's voices?), being presented with an alternative experience which, though unlived and therefore outside the scope of factuality or truthfulness, is real in its results (O'Casey's dream chapters?), or simply having our collective leg pulled (Kavanagh's 'Fairyland'?). Autobiography must include the unverifiable; indeed, we could justifiably challenge an autobiography which did not attempt to give us access to introspection, private accountings, private experiences and fantasies as being incomplete. We must acknowledge the presence of the unverifiable in autobiography. Equally, we must acknowledge that autobiography will often (always?) include elements which can be shown to be false or that it will falsify accounts by excluding essential elements. I see no reason, even given the foregoing comments, why we should not admit that most autobiographies are factually accurate, at least in part. Or rather the reasons I can see are prejudices against the presence of fact in 'literature', a prejudice against the mundane and historical in that which is supposedly timeless, and, by extension, a prejudice against impure context impinging upon pure text. I see no reason at all why we should continue to allow our view of autobiography to be constrained by the dominant critical view of fiction. 'Seeking to be history', writes F.R. Hart, 'autobiography must be fictive', but this critical truism is so slippery that its terms can be reversed without damage and then at least it will give us the sense that autobiography, no matter how fictional its

form, is a genre which struggles with the material of history - primarily its narrator's history, but also the broader history within which that is contained. Autobiography may then be seen as a genre which, far from floating free in the realm of the 'literary', is solidly anchored in the historical through the medium of the personal history of the autobiographer. Poised as it is in the continuum between the fictional and the historical it is a way, as James M. Cox has said, of regaining the realm of fact from the historian and the political scientist.\textsuperscript{43} I would only add to Cox's comment that it is a way of sharing the realm of fact. More importantly, perhaps, than acquiring new ground, autobiography may allow us to re-examine the ground that we already possess. Being both 'literary' and 'factual' autobiography is a genre which does not discount the anterior realm of production but which rather exploits and interrogates the issues raised by merging the 'factual' and the 'literary'. To put this another way, it requires us to justify the separation of the 'factual' from the 'literary'. It differs from fiction in that it can claim a more direct relation to the truth and fact and it both questions and adumbrates that relationship. As a consequence, autobiography imposes upon its critics the responsibility of examining its contexts. This brings us to another reason why critics are often unhappy with autobiography.

(b) The theory and practice of memory

Autobiography will always have, at least, a two-fold context: the time being written about and the time of writing. The principal connection between these contexts is the memory of the autobiographer. When dealing with the unverifiable, memory is the only possible guarantor of accuracy and truthfulness; when dealing with the verifiable, memory can be an escape route for the autobiographer: 'That's how I remember it'. Like the unverifiable therefore it engenders critical unease. Paradoxically, memory is mistrusted by critics because it is a channel along which the factual flows into the 'literary'. The dominant critical modes thus manage to construct memory as both a bearer of fact and as a distorter of the truth.

Despite this distrust the criticism of autobiography has failed to treat of memory in any meaningful way. From Augustine's *Confessions* to Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* and beyond, memory has been a central concern as well as a major component of autobiography. Nabokov is at pains to foreground the functioning of memory, of which he is both 'possessor and victim', throughout the text. If he represents a near contemporary in whose work memory is obviously important, then Augustine's *Confessions* may stand as a work near the origins of the genre in which there is an important meditation on memory. It is from Augustine that we can take a

45. Nabokov: *Speak, Memory*, op cit, p. 10.
46. I have already noted some of the influences of *The Confessions* on Irish writing. Unsurprisingly in a body of work informed by Catholicism and in which autobiography plays such a large part, *The Confessions* exert a strong influence. A possible alternative title for this thesis could be based on Book I's 'the field of my labours is my own self', having particular relevance for the 'field work' of Moore, of Kavanagh and of Heaney, Moore's arguments in *Salve* about choosing between 'literature and dogma' have to try to accommodate Augustine by allowing that *The Confessions* is a good beginning to Christian literature while wrongheadeddy using it as an example of writing which is too dogmatic to allow for real doubt.
number of useful considerations on memory: 'which is like a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses'. From this initial tripartite definition ('field ... palace ... storehouse'), Augustine moves on to describe the operation of memory as a 'collecting' and presents the words 'cogitare, which means to think or to collect one's thoughts ... cogo meaning I assemble or I collect ... [and] cogito, which means I think' as cognate terms. As his investigation proceeds so his concept of memory expands until it contains itself:

I can speak of memory and I recognise what I speak of. But where else do I recognise it except in my memory itself? Can it be that the memory is not present to itself in its own right but only by means of an image of itself?

Immediately, however, a paradox presents itself; if memory is present as an image of itself in memory then what of its opposite or complement, forgetting? Augustine's words are worth quoting at some length on this point:

I can mention forgetfulness and recognise what the word means, but how can I recognise the thing itself unless I remember it? I am not speaking of the sound of the word but of the thing which it signifies. If I had forgotten the thing itself, I should be utterly unable to recognise what the sound implied. When I remember memory my memory is present to itself by its own power; but when I remember forgetfulness, two things are present, memory, by which I remember it, and forgetfulness, which is what I remember. Yet what is forgetfulness but absence of memory? When

47, Augustine: The Confessions, op cit, p. 214. One of the few critics to refer to Augustine on memory is content to state his importance as a philosopher of memory and leave the subject there; J.H. Buckley: The Turning Key, op cit, p. 22.
49, Ibid, p. 222. The puzzle Augustine ultimately addresses is the still central one of whether things themselves or images are present in memory. If things themselves, then how are forgetting and God remembered? If images, how is memory remembered? For a contemporary account of this debate see Mary Warnock; Memory; London, Faber and Faber, 1987, Ch. 2.
it is present, I cannot remember. Then how can it be present in such a way that I can remember it? If it is true that what we remember we retain in our memory, and if it is also true that unless we remembered forgetfulness, we could not possibly recognise the meaning of the word when we heard it, then it is true that forgetfulness is retained in the memory. It follows that the very thing which by its presence causes us to forget must be present if we are to remember it. Are we to understand from this that, when we remember it, it is not itself present in the memory, but is only there by means of its image? For if forgetfulness were itself present, would not its effect be to make us forget, not to remember?

Who is to carry the research beyond this point? Who can understand the truth of the matter? O Lord, I am working hard in this field, and the field of my labours is my own self. I have become a problem to myself, like land which a farmer works only with difficulty and at the cost of much sweat.

This lengthy quotation is interesting in a number of respects. It presents in a subtle but straightforward way the paradoxical relationship between memory and forgetting. It sets out the centrality of the issue of memory to the autobiographer. Finally, it resolves itself into an image of the autobiographer as farmer, engaged in field work and seeking a kind of harvest. Frances Yates notes that Augustine's earlier images of the memory as a 'series of buildings' and its contents as treasures ('thesauri') recalls 'the orator's definition of memory as thesauras of inventions and of all the parts of rhetoric'. Her purpose here is to suggest that 'Augustine's was a trained memory, trained on the lines of classical mnemonic' and that he would therefore have a knowledge of 'mnemotechnics'.

50. Augustine; The Confessions, op cit pp. 222-223. Augustine's concern with memory is directed to the purpose of discovering God: 'How, then, do I look for you, O Lord?', 'But in which part of my memory are you present, O Lord?', ibid, pp. 226, 230.

51. Only Herbert Spencer among autobiographers seems to have deliberately and explicitly abandoned memory as the primary source for his autobiography, becoming, rather, as George Landow puts it, a biographer and historian of the self; George Landow: 'Introduction' in George Landow (ed.): Approaches to Victorian Autobiography, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1979, pp. xiii-xlvi, pp. xxi-xxxiii.

field-work image into which his meditation resolves itself, and which breaks consciously with the classical 'house of memory' image, although she uses a more literal translation of the phrase which introduces the topic of memory ('the fields and spacious palaces of memory' - 'campos et lata praetorita memoriae' - my emphasis) than is available in the Pine-Coffin translation ('a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse'). This more literal translation figures the field of memory as part of a system not as an alternative image. If it is just one of a number of alternative images then less can be said about its use at a crucial point. As part of a system of images (fields and palaces) the eventual use of the field image alone suggests that Augustine may be moving away from a mnemotechnic image (as possibly fictitious), via his thoughts on memory as gathering (harvesting?), to a position in which memory is figured, organically rather than architecturally, as productive. The point here is that while the mnemotechnicist relies upon structures, Augustine is engaged in a practice. For him the purpose of memory is to arrive at the truth of God; the rejection of the architectonic for the organic is part of that quest. So too is the sense of memory as not just an attribute but an activity.

In most criticism of autobiography, memory is approached, if at all, in an intuitionist manner, as those critics who consider the topic do so in the light of their own experience and/or thought. At its most naive this approach produces statements such as those by Butler or Buckley that memory is both the main tool of the autobiographer and fallible which are banal.

in both thought and formulation. More sophisticated formulations are hardly less banal. Memory is regarded as something mysterious which stops the autobiographer from gaining full control over his material. 54 Since most critics appear content to leave memory in the realm of mystery there is little to choose between those who do have something to say on the issue.

Nevertheless, there are a number of pseudo-arguments mounted by and between a few critics, and these usually have to do with the ability or inability of memory to shape or order material. Mandel has argued that memory is spontaneous, providing only the raw material for autobiography or what William Earle calls 'the autobiographical consciousness'. 55 Autobiography is not therefore memory per se but the shaping of memories. 56 Olney agrees with this point but tries to push it further by arguing that memory, while not ordering, is selective 57 which is really only to provide one more reason, alongside fallibility, for mistrusting it. The task of ordering the material is carried out by what Olney calls 'symbolic memory'. 58

54. John Pilling: Autobiography and Imagination, op cit, p. 38. Pilling's remarks are specifically about Yeats but the Autobiography is as much about gaining, or exerting, control as about anything. For obvious reasons, his hatred of 'monkish science', Yeats could not be seen to establish control over his material in the empirical way that Herbert Spencer does. Indeed, his remark in the 'Preface' to Reveries Over Childhood and Youth (effectively the preface to the whole volume) that he has 'consulted neither friend, nor letter, nor old newspaper' is an apparent contradiction of Spencer's method in his autobiography. That Yeats' preface appears to be apologetic rather than contentious should not disguise the fact that Yeats is (arrogantly) content to allow his memory, rather than that of others, to control the work.
For such critics as Mandel, Olney, Shumaker, Earle, Buckley and Butler, memory is a cause of anxiety for it must in some way be the basis of autobiography and yet it is fallible and the material it provides is often unverifiable. Whatever the cause of this fallibility (repression, reticence, selectivity, lying) memory is untrustworthy and consequently autobiography becomes untrustworthy. Given this idea of the functioning of memory it is easy to see that it presents a challenge to integrity of all kinds; of the self, of the text. It is unfortunate for the critics I have so far considered that although they are in search of a method of reading autobiography which will produce it as a set of ordered, enclosed texts, their concept of memory is of disorder and open-endedness. Their difficulty, at its most basic, is that even 'true' memories when shaped will become fictional. Mandel, for one, tries to overcome this difficulty by valuing those autobiographies in which the writers have rejected their spontaneous 'memory pictures' and who 'trust themselves to let the truth of their experience illuminate the deeper relevance of these pictures in the context of their total existence. It is the context disclosed through writing that is autobiography'. To overcome the link which memory provides to an anterior realm and in the interests of textual unity, order and integrity, context is here ultimately contained within the text. Critics who subscribe to this idea of memory (not to mention the warmed-over Leavisism) as threateningly fallible and open-ended would see Nietzsche's maxim on memory as an enduring if pessimistic comment on human nature:

"I have done that," says my memory. "I cannot have done that" - says my pride, and remains adamant. At last - memory yields.

There is another group of critics of autobiography, with an opposed view of memory, who would take Nietzsche’s comment as a cause for celebration. Rather than being anxious about the fallibility and open-endedness of memory they revel in its splintered, fragmented nature. They may be called the Freudian-structuralists. The two principal texts from which they derive their theories are Freud’s *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and ‘Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gradiva’.*61 This group of critics includes Jeffrey Mehlmann, Louis Renza, Jean Marc Blanchard, Rodolphe Gasche, and Eugenio Donato. It is in the work of the last-named that we may find the most explicit formulation of memory in their terms.

If, for Mandel, memory is imaged as a series of pictures hanging on the walls of an otherwise featureless gallery, for Donato memory is the site of an archeological dig (an image derived from Freud’s *Gradiva* essay):

> The past as memory remains buried and ruined, a well inhabited by fragments incapable of presenting themselves to the light of memory without the elaborate machinery of linguistic constructions and representations.62

Donato’s point is that there is a vast immemorial hinterland littered with the fragmented artefacts of some irrecoverable past time which are turned up, not by spades, but by language. Language in its turn does not actually recover or reunite these artefacts but serves only to emphasise the gap between them and the remembering subject. This point is derived not just


from Freud but from Freud via Lacan and what Sebastiano Timpanaro identifies as the 'anti-objectivist' stance of modern structuralism.63

Freud's use of the archeological image is therefore worth recalling:

There is, in fact, no better analogy for repression, by which something in the mind is at once made inaccessible and preserved, than burial of the sort to which Pompeii fell a victim and from which it could emerge once more through the work of spades.64

The spade-work here, as in Donato, is not just remembering, but for Freud it is not language either, but the work of analysis. Even given this limitation, however, there is a sense in Freud's work of the personal past as recoverable which is not the case in Donato's work. What is also evident in Freud, although not in Donato, is that the issue of concern is not merely forgetting but that specialised form of it called 'repression'. It is repression that cannot be overcome by simple representation, for representation is itself a form of repression, separating the self from the self.

That we have moved from a general approach to memory to the more limited and technical concept of 'repression' is indicative of a feature shared by nearly all the critical work on this topic. Where Augustine was concerned with the issue of how to remember forgetting, all others whom we have considered are concerned, whether anxiously or celebratorily, with the fact of forgetting, even the impossibility of remembering. The common feature of all the criticism we have so far considered is not just that it is more

64, Freud, 'Dreams and Delusions in Jensen's Gradiva', op cit, p. 65,
concerned with forgetting than with remembering but that it regards
forgetting as, more often than not, pathological and then proceeds to
privilege the pathological over the normal acts of both forgetting and
remembering.65

This is where the value of Augustine's field-work image becomes apparent,
for Augustine is concerned not only with the shards, fragments, and buried
remnants of the forgotten, but with the 'whole vast field...of memory'.66
What Augustine's meditation on and formulation of memory also does is to
give memory a purposive aspect. Indeed, for Augustine there is a teleology
of memory which serves the larger Christian teleology from within which he
writes. As Augustine strives to discover the location of God within
himself, memory ceases to be linked wholly to the past. In Joycean terms,
memory becomes imagination, ceases to be inward- and backward-directed and
is oriented outwards and to the future. Equally important in Augustine's
formulation is the sense that he is not just the victim of memory, but, to
use Nabokov's terms, also its possessor. In the criticism we have
considered, the autobiographer is overwhelmingly the victim of memory:
failibility, spontaneity, selectivity, repression are all characteristics
of a memory which works the subject rather then being worked by the
subject. Even Freud's conception of daydreaming, the only possibility he
allows of memory becoming imagination, is a working out of (rather than a
working on) memory and the repressions within it. As a consequence the

65, For a rigorous critique of the 'captious and sophistical method ... employed by Freud and the Freudians
in their explanations of slips, dreams and neurotic symptoms' see Timpanaro, The Freudian Slip, op cit, p.
14 in which Timpanaro boldly advances quite normal explanations in place of the Freudian analyses of
pathology.
purposive aspect of memory, its orientation towards the future, is specifically directed away from reality:

A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory.  

The work produced 'is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood' ('Play' is opposed, by Freud, not to the 'serious' but to the 'real'). What Freud has to say about memory as a locus of past, present and future is valuable but is short-circuited by the sense that all memory can do is to give rise to wish-fulfilment for the wish is invested in the past and succeeds by producing play or a play-substitute. That the wish might be future-orientated and fulfilled through the reality of the text is not allowed for.

It goes without saying that memory for Freud (and for those critics of autobiography who follow him) is personal. The working out of a childhood memory in its turn produces an object (the work) which is not merely personal but so private as to be repulsive to others unless they are bribed 'by the purely formal - that is, aesthetic - yield of pleasure which he [the writer] offers us in the presentation of his fantasies'.  

As with other critics our interest in a work is supposedly dominated by its ability to yield a sense of order, as payment, in this case, for our sense of repulsion. There is, it seems to me, something repulsive in the way that

67, Sigmund Freud; 'Creative Writers and Day-dreaming', in Art and Literature, op cit, pp. 129-141, p. 139.
68, Ibid.
69, Ibid, p. 141.
Freud renders the aesthetic as currency in a commercial exchange necessary to sustain relationships between what he perceives as autarkic individuals. His theory of memory, that is to say, is vitiated by his failure to analyse its function within the complete, social person. Indeed, Freudian psychoanalysis as a whole is similarly weakened by the fact that it presents itself as being universal without ever being social; it maps a topography of the human psyche which it claims is universally replicated within human skulls without acknowledging that human society may have a part to play. Some of the wider consequences of this aspect of psychoanalysis will become apparent later when we consider the work of K.P. Reilly; for the moment I wish to turn to social aspects of memory.

By way of Augustine and Freud we have arrived at a position in which we can see that memory has two orientations, towards the past and towards the future rendered as a purposeful modification of memory. It also operates as a vector of two aspects: the subjective or personal and the intersubjective or social. To consolidate this point it is necessary to introduce the work of others, besides Freud, who have considered memory from the psychological perspective.

The history of the study of memory as an experimental project dates from...
the work of Herman Ebbinghaus in the 1880s. Ebbinghaus' pioneering experimental work on the functioning of memory required only that the subject (always Ebbinghaus himself) should passively retain nonsense material; the subject was not in any way required to interact with the material either a priori or post hoc. Indeed, as an experimenter Ebbinghaus sought to exclude rather than control for possibly confounding variable factors. Even so this type of experimentation still predominates, although with more awareness of variables, precisely because it permits the study of aspects and components of memory in a viable manner. There is another tradition of the psychology of memory, which, while it owes a debt to this tradition, attempts to provide a more theoretically oriented account of memory. It does so by using materials which will enable a controlled analysis of variables. This line of study goes back to the work of Frederic Bartlett in the 1920s. Bartlett used stories rather than nonsense syllables as his material and allowed for the cultural inputs of the material and of his subjects while analysing his data. While Ebbinghaus and Bartlett followed divergent methodological paths, what unites them, as against Freud, is that both were concerned with memory as a normally functioning cognitive process whereas Freud's interest was in abnormal, pathological dysfunctions of memory. Both were also concerned with the specifics of the function of memory and how it relates to other processing tasks such as perception, pattern-recognition, comprehension and reasoning. However, it is the work of Bartlett which is most pertinent here since it allows for cultural influence on memory, using the concept of 'schemata':

73 Alan Baddeley: The Psychology of Memory, op cit, p. 187. See also Frederic Bartlett: Remembering: A Study in Experimental Social Psychology, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1932; We should not forget that Augustine 'conferred on memory the supreme honour of being one of the three powers of the soul, Memory, Understanding and Will, which are the image of the Trinity in man', Frances Yates: The Art of Memory, op cit, p. 49.
Bartlett suggested that our knowledge of the world comprises a set of models or schemata based on past experience. When we attempt to learn something new, we base our learning on already existing schemata. When these conflict with what is being remembered, distortions occur ... to make it more consistent with [our] own view of the world. Both learning and remembering are viewed as active processes involving 'effort after meaning'. The process of recall includes a considerable constructive component: we use what has been retained together with our pre-existing schemata, to try to recreate the original.\(^7\)

If Baddeley and Bartlett may be said to be addressing memory at the 'macro' level, then Sebastiano Timpanaro addresses it at the 'micro' level. Although Baddeley disputes the distinction between 'semantic' and 'episodic' memory - memory for information and for personal recollection, respectively (cf Olney's use of the terms 'memory' and 'symbolic memory' which is similar) - we may retain the terms to denote the material remembered rather than the actual process of remembering. Bartlett, then, requires the retention of 'episodes' while Timpanaro, writing from a philological perspective, looks at the retention of 'semantic' elements, words and phrases. To explain memory on this level Timpanaro employs the concepts of 'banalisation'\(^7\) and 'mental economy'.\(^7\) In each case the result is that the memory substitutes the usual for the unusual, or excludes the unusual, as a part of the effort after meaning. At this 'semantic' level, and writing from within a different discipline, Timpanaro provides a remarkable consolidation of Bartlett's concept of how 'schemata' operate on the 'episodic' level.

74, Baddeley: The Psychology of Memory, op cit, p. 13; see also Ian Hunter: Memory, op cit, pp. 150-151.
75, Timpanaro: The Freudian Slip, op cit, pp. 21, 30 et passim.
76, Ibid, pp. 92ff.
What is clear from the work of both Bartlett and Timpanaro is that memory is a function which is possessed and controlled not by a single individual but by that individual as determined by socio-cultural experience; how, what, and why one remembers is constrained by what one already knows from one's socio-cultural existence:

... the understanding and remembering of meaningful material appears to be a constructive process ... [an] analogy is that of an archeologist who relies on the structures and objects created by a people to deduce their way of life. In the case of human memory, these structures are created during the process of comprehension, a process which involves integrating new material with existing structures.\textsuperscript{77}

Baddeley's use of the archeological image brings us back, beyond Donato, to Freud's sense that the past is recoverable as something more than shards and fragments. There are now two important modifications to be made to Freud's use of the image: the recoverer or reconstructor of the past is the subject not the analyst, and the process which is to be emphasised is social remembering. It is a culture ('way of life') which is available for reconstruction not just one building: Augustine's 'spacious palace' and 'storehouse' rise once again in his 'vast field of memory'.\textsuperscript{78}

This socio-cultural aspect of memory is central to an understanding of Irish autobiography which is equidistant from the various aspects of memory operating upon it. Memory yields the material of autobiography (the past experience); it is recollected for a specific purpose (the moment of writing and beyond); the material remembered is the life-to-date of an

\textsuperscript{77} Baddeley: \textit{The Psychology of Memory}, op cit, p. 355.
\textsuperscript{78} It should go without saying that Augustine's meditation upon and exercise of memory is not just personal; the effort to locate God in the individual is undertaken in the midst of, on behalf of, and because of the Christian community - to find God in the self is to find God in the world, and thus to acknowledge a community.
individual (the episode) but is shaped, even before writing, by similar forces to those which determined the experience itself (the schemata). These aspects of memory match the components of autobiography: the life as recollected by memory in writing by an individual for a purpose. It is possible to schematise the relationships of these components as they appear in autobiographies. Kavanagh's crises, for example, are caused by the inability of pre-existing structures (whether social per se or socially generated, for example genres) to accommodate the material of his experience. In Stuart's case the attempted rejection of the available structures ultimately casts doubt not only on those structures but also on the value of his experience and the structures he proposes, because his reliance on what might be called autarkic memory is, in fact, just another of the structures he rejects as being incapable of allowing for himself. Moore's failure is traceable to his construction of Ireland as a provider of both new material and new structures without consideration of the ways in which these will match each other. O'Casey is forced to recast his memories so as to emphasise the socialist rather than nationalist schemata, both of which had framed his experience. In short, there is a paradox in autobiography; it is a paradox which has to do with the mediation of cognition into conation, a mediation which is both enabled and distorted by memory. While acknowledging the distortions of memory, up to and including repression, I still reject the idea that memory as it functions in relation to autobiography is responsible for individual untrustworthiness. The challenge faced by the Irish autobiographer is a complex one: a social experience is received by cognitive processes, themselves partly determined by that experience, is then retained in a memory set, shaped into schemata by the experience, and is recast in a language act which presents itself as
an individualistic parole, while relying on the social langue, for a purpose, perceived as self-satisfying but which is ultimately social. In other words social experience is channeled through an individual conduit and re-emerges as social but differently cast, despite the fact that the conduit is also a social phenomenon. The change in shape does not, however, have to do with individual lies, distortions or repressions alone. It is also to do with the gap between human apprehension and human volitional agency. This is mediated by memory and it is in the mediation that the individual changes cognition into conation. As John A. Robinson puts it: 'There is a generative dimension to remembering that mediates the matching of past and present ... Autobiographical memory is not only a record, it is a resource.' My point is that the volitional act can still be trusted, has to be trusted, in autobiography as elsewhere. This may be clearer if we take an example.

In the 'Preface' to Reveries Over Childhood and Youth, Yeats is at pains to emphasise the slightness and eccentricity of his text. The 'Preface' is an apologia not for the life but for how it is remembered in the text. However, the Christological date of the 'Preface' and the structure of the text, alongside the symbolic structural arc of the text, from Genesis to Revelation, so to speak, evidence the ambition of the text. That ambition is to represent Yeats as Christ-like, as both singular and plural, as both unique and representative. The slightness and eccentricity proclaimed in the 'Preface' must be balanced, therefore, in the structure

79, John A Robinson; 'Autobiographical Memory: A Historical Prologue', in David C, Rubin: Autobiographical Memory, op cit, pp, 19-24, p, 23,
80, This being Yeats the text arrives not at Revelation but at the threshold of Revelation.
of the text by opposed qualities of weight and centrality. Such a counter-
balance is present in the closing sentence of the 'Preface':

I say this fearing that some surviving friend of my youth may
remember something in a different shape and be offended with my
book. 81

Yeats' fear is a pretence. He was only 49 at the time of this writing, and,
despite his increasing tendency to dramatise himself as an old man, there
were still many surviving friends of his youth although this sentence
implies that such friends are few and far between. What is at issue (as
Yeats recognises in the 'Preface') is not whether Yeats has forgotten
certain things, but the shape in which he remembers. He has given his early
life the ultimate pre-existing narrative shape of a Christian culture. It
is, therefore, disingenuous to claim that he is afraid of giving offence;
such a narrative shape declares itself to be beyond such matters. Yeats was
also ironically aware that there were a number of other shapes already
memorialised by Moore, Synge and Joyce. 82 The schema Yeats uses for his
memory is a conscious one, one which declares that while his story is one
of many, it also subsumes the many. Yeats' singular memory is strategically
deployed against other memories, other schemata, then abroad and is made
socially available, is, indeed, socially structured.

I am aware that Yeats' use of a Christological schemata is conscious and
therefore differs from Bartlett's concept of 'schemata' and Timpanaro's
concept of 'banalisation', but my point has to do with the effect of Yeats'

81, W.B. Yeats; 'Preface' to 'Reveries Over Childhood and Youth' in The Autobiographies of W.B. Yeats,
(1935), New York; Collier Books, 1974, p. viii. I have already noted the tendentiousness of the 'Preface' -
see above, note 54.
82, See above, p. 70.
schema on his functional readership. As members of a secondary readership we are conscious of the 'Messianic' tradition in Irish writing but one reason for this tradition is that a Christological structure would, in a religiously aware society, appear obvious: to remember one's life as an imitation of Christ would in such circumstances be an instance of mental economy, whether conscious or unconscious. This cognitive process could then be given a conative purpose: Christ's life provides the design which the 'Messianic' texts have on their readership. Memory is thus both proclaimed as individual and acknowledged as a social phenomenon.

Joyce's work too evinces the singular and plural aspects of memory. In *Ulysses* the functioning of memory is central, from the struggle of a schoolboy to remember a set-piece to Stephen's consideration of memory as entelechic principle: 'But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under everchanging forms.' Stephen's thought ranges over the material of his life to date, the relation of that personal history to a wider history, and the variousness of shapes available for memory. Joyce, however, is not simply remembering Stephen, he is commemorating him: memories are being shared in a process which seeks to call back the forgotten: 'They have forgotten Kevin Egan, not he them. Remembering thee, O Sion.' This supposedly individual, indeed individuating, memory is, however, shared with the person who is in many ways Stephen's opposite, the Citizen. The sharing of memories, the socialisation of memory, is one way of regaining the forgotten, of enriching the resources of memory, and autobiography functions as just such a sharing and socialising.

In the case of both Yeats and Joyce, memory is not a picking over of the fragments and shards of a single unregainable past. It is rather a now more, now less confident shaping and sharing of the riches of memory. Autobiography is untrustworthy but the shapes of autobiographies and many of the details in them are to be distrusted insofar as socially available structures, as well as individual autobiographers, are untrustworthy. This is a problem confronted by the post-Civil War autobiographers for whom the publicly available structures of commemoration are at odds with the realities that they see around them, and yet for whom those public structures are major constituents of their own identities. Much of Irish autobiography is concerned with the evidently unsatisfactory nature of public memory, and is driven by the need, both private and social, for a remembering that is satisfactory, and adequate to experience.

(c) The status of the protagonist

Central among the structures available to autobiography is the concept of the individual. Individuality is treated as natural by many critics of autobiography which is to say that it is the received wisdom on how to consider the achieved or desired status of the autobiographical protagonist. Unlike the case of memory we cannot simply refer to a body of untapped knowledge in order to re-adjust the manner in which we approach the protagonist of autobiography because the concept of the individual is one which has been available to most autobiographers as well as to most critics of the genre. This is not to say that it is or should be a natural given in any consideration of autobiography, rather it must be seen as one of those concepts which, in a useful phrase of Frederic Jameson's, is
'inscribed in autobiographical texts as well as in our thinking about them'.

The concepts of the individual and individualism are, to understate, not simple, nor are the unspoken assumptions which underwrite that criticism which appeals to those concepts. The term 'individualism' functions not by delineating a specific meaning but rather by conflating a number of originally distinct but interacting intellectual traditions, each with its own version of what constitutes individualism. There are a variety of forms of individualism - political, economic, religious, philosophical - each with a set of defining features of individualism - self-development, privacy, dignity, autonomy (all terms which have themselves ramified meanings).

It is not possible simply to dismiss the concept, or to 'correct' its usage without embarking on a major historical and philosophical dissertation. Nor indeed should one wish to dismiss the concept; ideas such as self-development, privacy, dignity, and autonomy along with their political, economic, religious and philosophical ramifications provide useful points of orientation in any discussion of literature in general. What I hope to do in this section is to remind the reader, and as importantly, myself, that this concept cannot be passed by in silence: the processes and practices of the self cannot be assumed in any discussion of literature,


86, Obviously, given the long tradition of the concept and its myriad meanings I cannot hope to do full justice to it; as with the concept of nationalism and the issue of the functioning of memory, however, it sits silently in most criticism and therefore needs to be more consciously articulated. For a short but incisive account of the concept of individualism see Raymond Williams: Keywords, op cit., pp.133-135; a longer and more analytical account is available in Steven Lukes: Individualism, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1973, from which I have borrowed the description of the forms and defining features of the concept, The, perhaps caricatured, nature of what I have to say on this topic is, to say the least, indebted to these sources.
and a discussion of autobiography imposes on us the obligation to consider them with seriousness. I shall argue that by relying on the unspoken, criticism has skewed the form of autobiography in particular ways and, more importantly, has produced two apparently opposed accounts of the self which are alike in being reductive.

We must also to attend to how the issue is dealt with in an Irish context. Broadly speaking, the common assumption is that an impulse towards individualism on the part of writers and others is pitched against the suffocating collectivity of a Catholic and peasant society. This approach assumes that individualism is a feature of a modernising society and ignores the equal modernity of nationalism as a set of relationships generated by the same forces which led to the valorisation of the individual. The nation may, indeed, be seen as the arena for the enactment of individuality. Insofar as the necessarily hierarchical arrangement of the state countermands the development of individualism, nationalism, with its stress on horizontal relations at least offers a potential for development, a potential which is important in a society in which individuality was constrained by the imposition of external stereotypes. This is not to say that nationalism's promise of individuation is fulfilled, but it is to say that individuals, wishing to break the bounds of external stereotypes, also set out to loosen the constraints of the particular type of nationalism which triumphed in Ireland without wishing to deny their Irishness.

To begin with a generalisation we can say that the contemporary debate about individualism is centred on the broad question of the subject, indeed on the term 'the subject'. On the one hand there are those whose thinking is informed by a pot pourri of the various intellectual traditions of individualism, who would wish to defend the centrality and validity of the idea of individualism. At the other extreme are those who, taking their cue from a variety of developments in the human sciences over the past century and a half, attempt to do away with the idea of the human subject as in any sense self-determining, as in fact incapable of achieving centredness, and prey to a variety of forces - economic, linguistic, subconscious, social - which block the possibility of knowing either the self or others through the self. The ground on which this debate is joined is the continuity or discontinuity of the self, but the nub of the debate is the issue of the value of the individual. From a humanist perspective the individual self is invested with ultimate worth and must be allowed the freedom to develop without interference in order that it may achieve a full integrity. (Here, and in my characterisation of the opposing viewpoint, I leave aside the obvious internal contradictions of the argument, and the questions raised by those contradictions, in favour of developing the larger point.) From an opposed viewpoint the worth of the individual is an irrelevancy because the concept of individualism is merely bourgeois mystification, a cover for the inability of the self ever to break from external forces and achieve a centredness on which worth might be based; the domains of the economic, the linguistic, the social and the subconscious are all so structured, in advance of the advent of any individual, as to make it impossible for the self to achieve individuality in any other than an ideologically-projected fashion.
Each of these broad perspectives has its adherents in the critics of autobiography and both have consequences for the way in which autobiography is read and its generic limits set. In the broadly humanist view the individual is overridinglly important and autobiography becomes a record of an individual ego; the greatest autobiographies, in this view, are those which most fully reveal the self of the individual as it achieves integrity. Individuals as diverse as George Moore and St Augustine can then be brought together in a tradition of exemplary autobiography. Paradoxically, autobiography, in this reading, does not reveal much about the actuality of Moore or Augustine as individuals. Instead, Moore and Augustine, united within the overarching concept of individualism, are rendered as brothers under the skin. Their actuality, the specifics of their individual experiences, is discounted in favour of the strategy of rendering their autobiographies as moral or ethical fables, with remarkable access to essential truths about the 'human condition'. Autobiographies are then read as variations on this grand myth of Individuality rather than as records of actual, contingent, individuating experience; the form of forms, to adapt Stephen Dedalus' phrase, displaces entelechy.

In the other major tradition of individualism, which arises from the various Marxisms, the individual is regarded as a subject, an alienated being, disabled from achieving the full consciousness of individual experience by the actually existing form of economic and political
forces. This tradition has latterly yielded, in a dominant, though by no means unchallenged, version of Marxism, the conclusion that individualism is beyond achievement. The most stringent proponent of this anti-humanist Marxism is Louis Althusser and its sternest formulation is his concept of the interpellation of the 'concrete individual' as a subject in ideology:

... ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects; which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: individuals are always-already subjects. Hence, individuals are 'abstract' with respect to the subjects they always-already are...[this is] plain reality... Freud shows that individuals are always 'abstract' with respect to the subjects they always-already are, simply by noting the ideological ritual that surrounds the expectation of a 'birth'.

Alienation, the disablement of the individual from achieving full selfhood, has in this reading ceased to be the mark of an historical condition and become a condition of being, as ontology is confused with experience.

88. The writings of Marx emphasise the inner necessity of achieving full individuation and the fact that the present mode of society founded on the present modes of production is a barrier to that achievement; see for example: 'Let us suppose that we had produced as human beings,...My labour would be the free expression and hence the enjoyment of life, In the framework of private property it is the alienation of life since I work in order to live, in order to procure for myself the means of life, My labour is not life. Moreover, in my labour the specific character of my individuality would be affirmed because it would be my individual life, Labour would be authentic, active, property, In the framework of private property my individuality has been alienated to the point where I loathe this activity, It is torture for me, It is in fact no more than the appearance of activity and for that reason it is only a forced labour imposed on me not through an inner necessity but through an external arbitrary need,' "Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy", in Karl Marx: Early Writings, (intro) Lucio Colletti, (trans) Rodney Livingstone & Gregor Benton, Harmondsworth, Middx, Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1975, p.278. The way to overcome this problem of alienation is through communism which is 'the positive supersession of private property as human self-estrangement, and hence the true appropriation of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a social, i.e., human, being, a restoration which has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development... it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution to the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution,' In "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", Ibid, p. 348.

being with existence. The implications of this for work on autobiography we shall return to but for now it is enough to say that the generalised implication of this line of argument is that the individual as individual is no longer important; instead autobiography can be read, once again reductively, as what Jeffrey Mehlman describes as 'a self-regulating series of transformations of a constant system of relationships'.

Autobiography is here a series of transformations on a central tenet, a genre which endlessly replays the futile efforts of individuals to come to terms with themselves in a ceaseless play of undifferentiated language.

In each of these generalised outlines of the current major considerations of individualism there is then a central disregard for the actuality of the individual. This shared ground is based on the sense that individualism is an ontological category rather than an experiential modality. It is only by reading autobiography as a record of the experiences of the individual that we can begin to pay more than lip-service to the humanist conception of the individual while at the same time reading it with an eye open to its implication in the history of its periods of both experiencing and writing.

Just as the criticism of autobiography fails to take into account the socio-cultural foundation of memory so too it more often than not fails to take account of the human in experiential terms. It refuses to deal with the constitution of the self in other than terms of autarky; the self is, according to this formulation, to be understood only on its own terms but those terms turn out always to be shared with others in different times and

a variety of cultural conditions. In the humanist view the essential quality of autobiography is what Olney calls 'teleological unity', which is to say that autobiography records the individual fulfilling a unique destiny within a continuous self." This has similarities to Anderson's idea of how nationalism turns chance into destiny. On the other hand there is the sense of autobiography as an essentially neurotic enterprise in which individual autobiographers play out the ontological impossibility of self-realisation, which in its turn is similar to Eagleton's sense of the nation's inability ever to produce an identity which fully coincides with itself. The question which needs to be addressed then is not how the individual should be perceived by the critic of autobiography but rather how the individual autobiographer perceived himself as he experienced both his personal history and the writing of it.

Obviously, one of the major constituents of self-perception is the manifold tradition of the 'individual' as political, cultural and philosophical category. We are each enabled to think of ourselves by that tradition and our adherence to one or other of its aspects will inform our self-image. However, insofar as the prevailing concept of the individual most readily available in Ireland was (and remains) the one generated in England by Protestantism and classical liberalism, one of the ways to rebel against England was to reject or at least question the prevailing orthodoxy on the 'individual'. The very concept of the nation in Ireland was a strand in this rejection. The image of the Englishman as the proud, self-reliant individual or as the grasping, materialistic individual (depending on which

91, James Olney: *Metaphors of the Self*, op cit, p. 20
92, See Steven Lukes: *Individualism*, op cit, Ch. 5.
side of the Irish Sea one stood) was countered by a set of images which suggested that the Irish were, while capable of individualism on their own terms, much more concerned with the relationships of the self to others and to a collective identity. If the prevailing orthodoxy on individualism was to be successfully rejected then a new way of imagining the self had to be uncovered. Looked at from this perspective individualism ceases to be a problem for the critic of autobiography and becomes instead the basis for a set of case studies. The issue is not whether individualism is possible, or into what tradition of individualism the autobiographer fits but rather how the autobiographer constructs the self and engages with anxieties not about the self per se, but rather about the effectivity of human agency. 

Irish autobiography then is not merely another set of individual tales either ratifying the concept of the individual, or demystifying it while acting it out, but a series of works which record engagements with the contemporary concepts of individualism, in which the autobiographer attempts to square his experience with the explanatory structures (including the concept of individualism) available within his culture.

To reinforce this point we need to return to a consideration of the limits of that culture and the terms in which those limits are debated. WJ McCormack has commented on the shortcomings of stressing 'the local and the temporary':

This bias ... seriously distorts the relationship between text and context by emphasizing a highly immediate notion of context. Both in chronological and geographical terms the stress on the immediacy can obscure the wider context - of European as well as British experience. 

McCormack rightly stresses the historical actuality of Ireland as part of the British Empire and as a socio-cultural formation which interacts with European-wide movements. Unfortunately, he does so partly as a result of a desire to attack the easy target of old-style nationalism, thereby running the risk of ignoring the equal historical actuality of national consciousness in favour of the apparently more material intellectual and institutional contexts. The context McCormack favours is curiously unlocated, a context composed of broad structures which are to be found everywhere, rather than of individual and social experiences located in a 'here'.

The point I am striving after has to do with the way in which individuals experience existence in a cultural and social way rather than in an ontological way. To make such a point requires attention to the local and temporary not at the expense of broader contexts but as a means of access to them. If we look at the terms within which this debate is conducted in Ireland - cosmopolitanism, provincialism, and parochialism - we find that it is joined on precisely these grounds. Seamus Deane commenting on those writers who, like Sean O'Faolain, are as cosmopolitan as possible, refers to them as 'citizens of the world by profession' and notes that for them cosmopolitanism is a means of 'escape from besieged and rancorous origins'. Cosmopolitanism is not therefore the result of being at ease in the wider world, but rather a way of trying to avoid provincialism. Those who like George Moore in Confessions of a Young Man or Stephen Dedalus at the end of A Portrait take this cosmopolitan escape route have

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95. Seamus Deane; Celtic Revivals; Essays in Modern Irish Literature, London, Faber and Faber, 1985, p. 156.
eventually to recant. As Moore acknowledges: 'art must be parochial in the beginning to become cosmopolitan in the end'.\textsuperscript{96} Yeats' poetry, for example, may be informed by European events (one thinks of his apocalyptic poems during and after the First World War) but the occasions for that poetry are local. The social and cultural formations of the poetry are of a piece with the intersubjective experience Yeats has undergone rather than with the wider experience of which he was an observer. Indeed, Yeats complained that his art could not be more local and had been harmed by the influence of Thomas Davis' nationalism displacing an Allinghamesque love of one's locality.\textsuperscript{97} Patrick Kavanagh's 'Epic' is a good example of the parochial as it nicely inverts usual values by stressing the individual experience of the local, collective moment over more generally important but unexperienced events.\textsuperscript{98}

All of this is not to say that writers' memories are exercised solely within terms set by a particular national experience and that the individual is thus merely a vehicle for that experience. Such single determinism must be replaced by a dual determinism. To do so it is necessary to go beyond the equation of nationalism and chauvinism, and the idea that nationalism is merely false consciousness.

I have already shown how the persistence of nationalism in its various forms as the dominant mode in Irish political life has distorted the development of politics and how they are regarded in Ireland. In that

\textsuperscript{96} George Moore: \textit{Hail and Farewell}, (ed.) Richard Cave, Gerrards Cross, Colin Saythe, 1976, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{97} W.B. Yeats: \textit{The Autobiography}, op cit, p. 319
\textsuperscript{98} Patrick Kavanagh: \textit{The Complete Poems}, (ed.) Peter Kavanagh, Newbridge, The Goldsmith Press, 1984, p. 388. We shall return to the debate on cosmopolitanism, provincialism, and parochialism in Ch.3 below.
analysis I explained that the falseness of nationalism should not blind us to its status as a consciousness. As such it mediates a broader history to the level of the individual; it affords the individual a way of understanding him- or herself in a social way and this is one of its great strengths. Nationalism, viewed in this light, is then seen not only as an imposed political structure (an ideology), but as a much more collaborative phenomenon (an hegemony). It is a way of explaining the individual in the complex of social and cultural relations which are necessary to be fully individual. It is in other words a way of laying claim to a history, of asserting possession of a culture, and of declaring allegiance to a community. Nor are these relationships necessarily fixed. Connolly saw this last point. Nationalism could provide both a path to the alteration of prevailing social relations and a reference point during a time of such change. The tragedy of Sean O'Casey's autobiography is the equation of nationalism with fixed social relations, which results in his being torn between a continuing allegiance to Ireland and an increasing allegiance to the idea of the need for an upheaval in Irish social relations. What O'Casey fails to acknowledge is that the nation is the seat of shared memories and to-be-agreed-upon expectations. In Ireland throughout this century it is the nation rather than a class which has been the first resort of the individual seeking an identity-in-community and it is precisely because of the nation's status as 'imagined community' as against the reality of class relations that the nation offers the individual the opportunity to define the self with some degree of fluidity. The nation, that is to say, allows the individual a measure of self-determination which is not afforded by class relations due to the potentially greater degree of reciprocity between the individual and the
nation. The individual is defined in relation to the nation (the realm of culture, experience and memory) but can also hope to define the nation (the realm of the social, expectation and conation).

In the negotiation between individual and nation there are several intermediate terms: self, family, neighbourhood, community, nation. This series cannot be understood hierarchically — it is not an ascending scale, with 'individual' as core value and nation as an aggregation of individuals, families, etc. The terms of the series are best understood as mutually congruent, each term enfolding all the others. These terms do not denote categories, each locked away in a separate compartment; they are all rather institutions, by which I mean that they are socially generated discourses which are sites of human practice. The mistake of many critics is to assume that the nation, say, is more artificial than the individual, that is that the individual has absolute worth over against the arbitrary and contingent nature of the nation. Both individual and nation are however contingent modalities.

A consideration of the relationship between the autobiographical protagonist, memory and the nation finds a useful starting point in Benedict Anderson's contemplation of one of the icons of the nation:

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely because they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedent in earlier times. To feel the force of this modernity one has only to imagine the general reaction to the busybody who 'discovered' the Unknown Soldier's name or insisted on filling the cenotaph with real bones. Sacrilege of a strange, contemporary kind! Yet void as these
tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings.\textsuperscript{99}

A number of points stem from this comment (and from Anderson's book as a whole). He has been trapped into an unnecessarily synchronist argument by his title. He argues, contra Gellner, that nationalism is a display of imagination but is anxious to stress the 'objective modernity' of nations over against the nationalist's conception of their 'subjective antiquity'\textsuperscript{100} but to do so requires him to forget that the imagination of the nation includes that antiquity; the national imagining is predicated upon the national memory. The empty tomb stands as fitting image of the actual vacuity of that memory, a mnemotechnic which objectively commemorates nothing. However, while the commemorative or public remembrances of the nation are predicated upon fragile assumptions, the power of nationalism remains.\textsuperscript{101}

To understand the force of nationalism we must understand both of its aspects: its imaginative and its memorialising, or more precisely, commemorative aspects. Nationalism as a political phenomenon provides a framework for definition and allows the individual to locate himself in history. In the modern world the individual is forced into a position of alienation as old forms of community are disrupted by economic processes. One reason why nationalism is an embarrassment to classical Marxist thought is the idea that the economic is the motor of history; its ideas of solidarity and community are therefore based on the economic. However while

\textsuperscript{99} Benedict Anderson; \textit{Imagined Communities, op cit}, p. 17, 
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, p. 14, 
\textsuperscript{101} Patrick Wright; \textit{On Living in an Old Country, op cit}, pp. 136ff.
the economic determines the productive relationships within society, the forms of those relationships are determined in collaboration with the cultural. Humans exist not just in productive relations but also in cultural relations. It is important to realise therefore that while two people from different socio-cultural formations can have a material solidarity based on their socio-economic status they can be materially divided by socio-cultural determinants such as language or religion. Within a linguistic community there are further divisions and sub-divisions, on socio-cultural as well as economic grounds, which constantly threaten the individual with total alienation. Over against these divisions and their consequent alienation there is a constant striving for fulfilment, a striving to be human experientially as well as ontologically. The nation is one, important framework within which it is possible for an individual to place and understand his or her human experience. The nation does more, however, than provide the individual with a framework for the comprehension of experience, it also affords the individual the opportunity to assert the equality of his experience with that of others. This operates both within the nation and on the international level. While the assertion of equality within the nation is, as has already been noted, a mystification of relationships, the assertion of equality between nations is an important aspect and realistic quality of the nation. As Anthony D. Smith puts it: 'The claim to nationhood is, of course, the claim to equality of international treatment, at least in theory'. A parochial acceptance of a national identity allows the individual to proclaim the equal validity of his experience. In the context of the external stereotypes applied to the

Irish, an imposed identity, this capacity to assert equality is an important part of the nation's power.

Such issues as equality are largely ignored by the criticism of autobiography because of its failure to treat of the human in experiential terms. The self is, according to this criticism, to be understood only as a philosophical category. As has already been noted it is according to Olney the turn towards autos which allows for autobiography to become open to criticism. The task of that criticism is then, in a self-confirming manner, to analyse the self of autobiography apart from its determinants in the realm of productivity anterior to the text: autobiography as navel-gazing. Criticism thus directed in turn analyses the autobiographical continuum in such a way as to confirm further that autobiography, properly understood, is concerned solely with the self. The term 'autobiography' is, in most classificatory systems, reserved to denote a form of writing which deals with 'psychic states' and which is privileged over writing which dirties its hands on the raw material of history. This definition of autobiography needs constantly to be defended because it is really a definition of periheautography, writing around the self. This turn to self-writing is once again evidence of criticism making autobiography conform to its own biases, in this case that against biographical criticism. By using a term such as periheautography for the subject of most criticism of autobiography we can free 'autobiography' for use to denote

that writing which seeks to balance the self against history, to explain
the self constituted as an historical subject.

The purpose of this shift in terminology and the stress I have laid on the
need to consider the experiential aspects of autobiography is literally to
allow the life back into the study of autobiography. This reconnects
the self to history and thus allows for the richness and variety of
individual autobiographers. This richness may derive from the experience of
the individual but this is not to say that we can then return to a
simplistic biographical criticism of autobiography in which autobiographies
are to be checked against the facts of the life.

The intersections with history represented by the bios of autobiography are
best viewed as instances of Frederic Jameson’s concept of an unconscious
master narrative.\textsuperscript{106} The repetitions and permutations covered by this
concept are neither efforts to achieve a coherent and stable individuality
nor instances of the individual subject being reworked by ideology. They
are rather the actual experience of history within available terms. The
master narrative can take the form of the individual, the family or the
nation, each of which is a way of mediating the social to the personal.
Viewed in these terms autobiography can be seen as both a text generated by
the historical moments subsumed in the life, and as a contingent factor
within the life. It is both responsive to the determinants of its
production and an active shaping of those determinants. It is an expression
of authorial determination in both senses of that phrase. To take this
point further we need finally to consider the function of autobiography.

\textsuperscript{106} Frederic Jameson; \textit{The Political Unconscious}, \textit{op cit}, p. 182.
Chapter 2

(d) The function of autobiography

Shumaker's exclusion of works in which self-revelation is directed towards another purpose is the clearest statement of the function of autobiography understood as a record of the self. ¹⁰⁷ So strong is this tendency in criticism that it is to criticism that a secondary function of autobiography is arrogated. Autobiography can, according to Olney act as a 'focalizing literature' which offers 'the story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within'; as such it offers privileged access to an experience ... that no other variety of writing can offer'.¹⁰⁸ Shumaker's and Olney's remarks complement rather than contradict each other for taken together they set a limit to what the autobiographer can do. It is the autobiographer's task to reveal the self, it is the critic's task to read autobiography as a focalizing literature, even though this is an option rarely taken. That this state of affairs might be reversed - it is the critic who is interested in self-revelation, the autobiographer who intends to reveal a culture - is not often an option within this criticism. Sayre's comments in 1964 about the self as both a 'sovereign integrity and a member of society' have rarely been followed up. For him 'the self is at all times both of these things and autobiography is an endless stream of demonstrations of their inseparability'.¹¹⁰ It is significant that Sayre deals with American autobiography and has therefore a sense that for Americans 'there was not that texture of history in which they inherited their identities';¹¹² the autobiography of Henry Adams 'is not moved by the unities of its culture but by the disunities'.¹¹¹ Sayre,

¹⁰⁶, Wayne Shumaker; English Autobiography, op cit, p. 6
¹⁰⁸, James Olney; Autobiography, op cit, p. 13.
¹⁰⁹, R.F, Sayre; The Examined Self, op cit, p. 5.
¹¹⁰, Ibid, p. 150.
¹¹¹, Ibid, p. 201.
however, follows Pascal's prerequisites of unity and completeness\textsuperscript{112} and so succumbs to the predominant concept of autobiographical function as self-directed; a therapeutic and healing action for the self. The alternative to this, the emergent orthodoxy about autobiography, is that it is, to use Renza's term, propadeutic or, in Olney's word, duplex.\textsuperscript{113} This alternative is grounded in an 'epistemological ambivalence' and consequently 'the writer's self-cognitive dilemma must be seen to permeate the consciousness of the text', Renza argues in explicit contradiction of Pascal.\textsuperscript{114} Renza's argument is, however, a pseudo-contradiction; his propadeutic autobiography does not really differ from Pascal's sense that autobiography 'can be, not just the log of things known, but a voyage of discovery, and a means of reconciliation',\textsuperscript{115} except in terms of how far along the road of discovery they would each allow the autobiographer to have travelled. Both are conscious of the 'self-cognitive dilemma', each refers back to the work of Gusdorf, and might therefore agree with Gusdorf's comment that:

\begin{quote}
L'autobiographie est un conquête, non pas simplement un inventaire des aspects divers d'une existence. Le récapitulation tend à éclaircir les obscurités, à unifier les diversités. L'homme de l'autobiographie se découvre donné à lui-même comme un problème, dont lui seul peut trouver la solution.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

Regardless of the critical approach, attention is directed 'vers l'espace du dedans'.\textsuperscript{117} Consequently, autobiography is seen as a therapeutic exercise with the major disagreement being about how far the therapy can be

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, p. 6, Roy Pascal: \textit{Design and Truth}, op cit, pp. 9-11.
\textsuperscript{114} Louis A. Renza: 'The Veto of the Imagination', \textit{op cit}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{116} Georges Gusdorf: 'De l'autobiographie initiatiqute à l'autobiographie genre litteraire', \textit{op cit}, p. 971.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, p. 990.
said to be successful. The extremes may be called the autobiography of conversion and the autobiography of crisis.119

Over against this body of criticism which sees autobiography's function as a now more, now less successful, elaboration of the self in the face of various subjective crises, there is a small body of work, by Sayre, by Walter Berthoff, and by Motlu Konuk Blasing, on American autobiography, which is more concerned with the social aspects of the individual, and more inclined therefore to see the individual as both product and shaper of society. The crises which generate autobiography for these critics are not crises of the subject, but of the subject in society. Berthoff, writing about The Autobiography of Malcolm X and Norman Mailer's Armies of the Night, sees those works as part of a more general move by American writers to 'accommodate their effort as writers to public, civil ends' and welcomes the ensuing 'confusion of realms'.119


Blasing too expresses a sense of autobiography as a public act. She sees autobiography as distinctively American (in a similar spirit to my sense of autobiography as distinctively Irish; in both cases autobiography is a defining characteristic of the culture) and states that in dealing with 'a tradition of personal literature in America one is dealing less with direct influences and more with a series of responses to essentially similar social, spiritual and literary experiences ... and autobiography has proved to be a congenial form for American writers because it asserts their spiritual power to create or regenerate themselves and their potential power to change hearts and minds'\(^{120}\).

Such comments are interesting in emphasising the intersubjective rather than the subjective aspects of autobiography. They are helpful therefore in returning to an earlier issue - autobiography as a genre which invites intimacy. There is in the work of the culturally-oriented American critics a sense that autobiography is not a self-therapeutic, autotelic text centred upon an autarkic self, but is rather an accommodation between an author and a readership, both of which are historically specific. Autobiography, that is to say, is functional, it connects author and readership.

Kevin Reilly's work on Irish autobiography, which overlaps considerably with my own, makes this point about the possible intimacy of autobiographer and readership. However, it is grounded in a psychoanalytical reading of Irish autobiographical texts, which suggests that the primary relationships

\(^{120}\) Motlu Konuk Blasing: *The Art of Life*, op cit, pp. xi, xii-xiii.
in those works are Oedipal. The pattern that Reilly perceives is one in
which an autobiographer failing to achieve, or re-achieve, full intimacy
with the mother or with another woman, turns first to Ireland and then to
his readers as possible partners in a complete intimacy. The Ireland to
which autobiographers turn is female - Cathleen ni Houlihan, Roisin Dubh
etc - and is taken to be a virginal mother-mistress figure who both
promises and withholds intimacy from the autobiographer while being seduced
by England as the (John Bull) father-figure. One can see a superficial
attractiveness in this reading, and the Oedipal metaphor can be applied to
much Irish writing, but such a pathological reading privileges the possible
individual psychology over the real collective political experience which
generates such a psychology and in so doing limits the possible responses of
writers to the subject of Ireland. Indeed, it is the mark of this form of
reading that the actual political drama, of colonialism in this case,
should be censored. There are two further difficulties in accepting
Reilly’s reading of autobiographical texts as 'talking cures'. Firstly, it
turns autobiographers into actors merely repeating the lines of a
psychodrama, in line with Mehlman’s concept of autobiography as
transformations of a personal myth. Secondly, it accepts the colonial
projection of Ireland as female, a projection against which much Irish
autobiography struggles. Rather than accept this reading wholeheartedly we
must look to Irish autobiographers as people telling a story - creating or
imagining a story where none existed before, or rather where those
narratives which did exist relied on a locus of power elsewhere.

121, Kevin P. Reilly: Irish Literary Autobiography, op cit; 'Irish Literary Autobiography', op cit. On the
issue of how this reading limits responses, we should remember that Unionists too figure Ireland as
feminine; are they then to be read as anti-Oedipal?
Chapter 2

The function of Irish autobiography is therefore to gain control of one's own story but not on simply individualistic terms, because those terms are not satisfactorily available. As George Watson has pointed out, Irish society, prior to independence, could not offer a stable point of reference for identity. As I have pointed out above the post-independence models offered by the triumphal nationalism, based as they were on a narrow reading of a peasant Ireland, were either constricting or had nothing to say to those from an urban background. Even for those post-independence writers with whom I am primarily concerned, this impoverished indigenous identity was, however, an important response to the still tenacious colonial stereotype, the continuing power of which was based, in part, on the fact that it at least offered an identity. Against this Irish autobiography is therefore an effort to invent a narrative which allows a degree of freedom from imposed and restricting narratives. By inventing their own narrative, Irish autobiographers are also laying claim to being worthy of attention on their own terms, and within their own contexts. They are asserting an anti-reductivist equality.

The response to this lack of one's own narrative structures and the imposition of others' narratives has been best articulated within feminist criticism, and, indeed, autobiography is a prime subject for that criticism. As Carolyn Heilbrun has put it:

Women must elect to invent their own stories, rather than continue to speak in a way that conforms to male expectations - this is how to write the "history of a liberation" ... There will be narratives of female lives only when women no longer live their own lives isolated in ... the stories of men.124

124, Carolyn S. Heilbrun: Writing a Woman's Life, op cit, pp. 43-47.
The pertinence of this to Irish autobiographers, with the colonial stereotype of the 'feminine Irish' still confronting them, is obvious. Given the inversion and valorisation of aspects of that stereotype upon which triumphalist nationalism based itself, the Irish both before and after independence were in the position, outlined by Carolyn Steedman, of leading 'lives for which the central interpretative devices of the culture don't quite work ... [their] personal interpretations of past time ... are often in deep and ambiguous conflict' with those same interpretative devices.125

Given this analogous position of the Irish as colonial subjects and women as subjects of patriarchy, we can return to Reilly's Oedipal psychodrama and recast it on the familial and national rather than the personal level by noting the anti-dynastic tendency of male Irish autobiographers. This constitutes a male rejection of the paternal in which the father is most often seen as a figure associated with the old order, whether that order be colonial or indigenous. So George Moore in Confession of a Young Man experiences his father's death as a liberation; Yeats engages in a conservative rebellion against his father; Stephen Dedalus rejects Simon as a father; O'Casey's father, by dying early, leaves him prey to those

125, Carolyn Steedman; Landscape for a Good Woman, op cit, pp. 5-6. At this point it is necessary to explain one of the more striking omissions from this thesis; women's autobiography. To a degree this is explicable in terms of the apparent absence of women's autobiography in Ireland; I have found few literary autobiographies by women. More importantly the centrality of nationalism to my analysis of autobiography poses particular difficulties in relation to the analysis of women's writing. The history and theory of the intersections of women and nationalism is only now beginning to be written (see, for example, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (eds); Woman-Nation-State, London, Macmillan, 1989). In these circumstances this thesis would have had to engage with another layer of history, theory and textual analysis. Women in Ireland have produced autobiography which has engaged with nationalism. Most pertinent for the present purpose is Maud Gonne MacBride: A Servant of the Queen; Reminiscences (1938) Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1983. The ambiguity of her title, at once defiantly ironic in its description of her relation to Queen Victoria, and accurate in its description of Gonne's relation to Ireland as an emergent, sovereign
economic forces which shape him. For those autobiographers under our special consideration this is also true. Kavanagh given a family history by his father loses it; O'Faolain is content to leave his father as a 'locked box'; O'Connor initially simply rejects the father and the environment and heredity associated with him; Stuart's father is lost in family secrets. In each case, this operates as a deliberate clearance so that the autobiographer (or autobiographical subject in the case of Stephen Dedalus) can move beyond constraints represented by the family, often through the agency of the mother, into areas either more under his own control or more congenial to his self-construction. Yeats finds the 'folk'; Moore and Dedalus the cosmopolitan world of art; O'Casey the compassion and love of beauty which offsets his economic circumstances; Kavanagh turns to the art of farming from the the craft of cobbling; O'Connor achieves a surrogate orphanhood; O'Faolain finds the liberation of the West; and Stuart places himself on the margins. However, in each case rejection and movement beyond paternal constraints are only the first stages of processes in which the paternal is eventually reclaimed on the autobiographer's own terms, usually in a synthesis with the qualities represented by the mother. (It should be

125 (cont.), ('queenly' in its guise as Cathleen ni Houlihan) nation, Gonne is atypical as a woman with a high degree of visibility in histories of nationalism (usually a male history), but she is also typical in that her visibility is largely dependent on male constructions of her as an image. Foremost among these constructions are those created by Yeats. In his autobiography, Gonne appears as the dominant partner in their shared political ventures (thus absolving Yeats from full responsibility) and as an image of both the feminine Ireland and of eternally recurring feminine beauty. She is therefore subject to both colonial and male constructions of the feminine. Her autobiography therefore requires a different order of analysis from that of, say, George Moore, Moore and Yeats could respond to each others' constructions literally man to man, Gonne on the other hand had to construct herself from within both the framework of nationalism and colonialism which she shared with Yeats and Moore, and also from within male constructions of the feminine. Ambiguity alone cannot account for the complexity of her autobiography's title: the rejection of England, problematically figured as a powerful female, alongside the acceptance of Ireland, figured as a female which historically we must read as weak, must be read in the light not only of colonial constructions of the Irish as female but also in the light of Irish male's constructions of the female. It is the belief that an additional layer of mediation would have to be addressed properly to analyse Irish women's autobiographies that has caused me to omit them from this thesis.

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noted in passing that Irish women writers from Maria Edgeworth to Elizabeth Bowen seem often to be concerned with dynasties, albeit degenerating ones, at the expense of the self.

This initial rejection of the paternal speaks directly to the functioning of Irish autobiography for it is usually associated with an apparent individual liberation, a conversion in the terms of the criticism of autobiography. But this individual liberation is eventually to be recognised as factitious and is itself rejected in favour of the imaginative synthesis of a recast paternity with aspects of the apparent liberation. The lesson learnt from this initial rejection, however, is usually that the individual conversion is untenable unless grounded in a socio-cultural experience, although this lesson is not necessarily learnt by the autobiographer who by this stage has embarked on a dialectical process of setting the self against society. This is to say that once we recognise the function of Irish autobiography we must also consider how to read it.

Irish autobiography is not to be read as a stable genre but rather in the terms of the 'vital and mutable'; we must read it in terms of its 'inner dialectic quality', its 'multiaccentuality'. We must recognise that while it struggles to speak with a singular voice, it does not speak in a single voice. That is to say that it should not be read as an attempt to conform to available discourses, it is neither the record of an achieved self, nor the working of language upon a decentred subject alone. It is a

dialectic, grounded in experience, which comprehends these opposed poles by remobilising experience and history in a further dialectic of the discovery and invention of identity. This in turn requires the probing of the limits of available constructions: the individual, the family, the community, the nation. In consequence, rather than recording individuality autobiography mobilises a shared differentiation.

Autobiography, like nationalism in Frederic Jameson's formulation, is both Utopian and ideological, the individual shaping his life and intervening in history, and the individual being shaped like history by the forms of experience. Autobiography, finally, like nationalism can be an active optative language, not merely the reworking of history, but a step taken towards self-determination. The question that we need to ask of autobiographies is therefore whether the reworking of history, both personal and national, is also a mobilisation of that history or whether it is an attempt to still that history. The following chapters provide readings of four autobiographies which had to contend with the ideological stilling of history which took place in Ireland after independence to see the answers they give to this question.

Patrick Kavanagh, like Sean O'Casey before him, came to writing comparatively late in life. Born in Monaghan in 1904 he was almost 32 before his first collection of poetry, *Ploughman and Other Poems*, was published. Like O'Casey he had, however, been writing for several years before this first official recognition of his work. The comparison with O'Casey is not just to point out coincidence but to stress that, despite the great differences in their backgrounds, small farmer and manual labourer, the two are yet more different from the majority of the other modern literary autobiographers. They both came late to writing for similar reasons, most notably the need to earn a living. Then having worked their own uneducated way through varieties of popular literature (O'Casey's urban political ballads find their counterpart in Kavanagh's early pious newspaper verse) they found themselves in the realm of 'high culture'. Both had thus an opportunity to formulate ideas about the purpose and function of literature outside the literary world and had, consequently, an abiding scepticism about the accepted canons of Irish literary and cultural taste and a defensively combative way of expressing those ideas.

*The Green Pool* is a record of the period in Kavanagh's life before he became a poet. It is an unusual autobiography for several reasons. It was only his second published work, appearing in 1938 just two years after his

1. His first published work was 'Freedoa' which appeared in the 'Poets' Corner' of the *Weekly Independent* on 1st Sept, 1928. See Peter Kavanagh: *Sacred Keeper: A Biography of Patrick Kavanagh*, The Curragh, The Bodsmith Press, 1979, p. 44; Peter Kavanagh records that Patrick took to the 'poeming' aged about 12, p. 28.
first collection of poetry. There is thus little chance for a dual time-
scheme to operate, which is to say that the work stands outside certain accepted ideas of autobiography as a summary of and justification for a career written when that career has achieved a settled state. Among Kavanagh’s contemporaries only Francis Stuart was to write a volume of autobiography, *Things to Live For: Notes for an Autobiography*, as early in his career. *The Green Fool* was written before the pattern of Kavanagh’s life became fixed which may account for some of the work’s ambivalences. Furthermore, the work itself gives an account of its own provenance which does not allow the reader to accept it as the result of an impulse to record the self (the unspoken contract between autobiographer and reader usually relies on some such fiction). Instead it is quite clearly stated that the book was written at the suggestion of Helen Waddell. These facts bespeak necessity rather than impulse as the reason for writing the book. It may be that the majority of autobiographies are written for just such reasons; my point is that the autobiographer, usually by omission, gives the impression that there are other, more disinterested, reasons. By being honest about this, moreso than many others, Kavanagh paradoxically casts doubt on the status of the autobiography. This doubt is compounded by his later rejection of the book in customarily violent terms:

... under the evil aegis of the so-called Irish literary movement, I wrote a dreadful stage-Irish, so-called autobiography called *The Green Fool*.  

These comments were originally broadcast on Radio Telefís Éireann and are somewhat toned down. In conversation Kavanagh was even more intemperate

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about the book:

A ridiculous book by a bollocks. A bollocks who knew nothing about himself, let alone anybody else.4

The violence of Kavanagh's criticism must not be taken on its own terms. He was hard on others and on himself to the extent that the violence and denials within his criticism seem symptomatic rather than indicative. Hedged though it is by such doubts and criticisms the autobiography still has a value both in itself and as an initial setting forth of the themes, problems and concerns which run through all of his work, not the least of which is his lack of self-comprehension.

Autobiography itself is a recurrent feature of Kavanagh's literary output. There is a pattern in Kavanagh's writing of production followed by reflection on production which itself constitutes further production. There is thus a recurrent concern in his career with the question of autobiography itself. The Green Fool, for example, may be seen as a reflection on the self which produced Ploughman and Other Poems. Tarry Flynn, bildungsroman rather than autobiography, is similarly placed in relation to the poetry of the 1940s. The Great Hunger and A Soul for Sale. This apparent patterning however implies too clear a distinction between autobiography and writing per se which though useful to begin with is untenable in the long run, not just because autobiography is itself literary production but because it also became more and more convoluted with Kavanagh's other writing as his career developed. Certain questions recur in his work and are similar to the questions to be found in the writings of his contemporaries but the emphases in Kavanagh's works are very different

as a result of Kavanagh's different starting point. The problems evident in
his work are couched in terms of the self and the community but the
relationships encompassed by his use of these terms are very different from
those in O'Connor's and O'Faolain's work. The latter try to lose the self
of the city in both the new Ireland and the rural community and then find
that they have to create another 'writerly' self for protection against the
real Ireland they eventually find there. The Green Fool begins with
community, leaves the term 'Ireland' almost completely out of the reckoning
and evinces only puzzlement about the self.

Kavanagh's autobiography is most original and individual in its
concentration on the community but there is a complementary absence of the
self. This, combined with my earlier remarks about the doubtful status of
the work as autobiography, raise the question as to whether the
autobiographical impulse has been vitiated by both the circumstances of the
book's origins and its subject-matter. In one way it would suit my argument
to accept Kavanagh as a writer within whose writing the autobiographical
impulse is weakened by the fact that in The Green Fool community is so
much more powerful a term than individualism that the relationship between
the two has shifted from one in which the individual is exemplary to one in
which the individual is merely representative and that this shift to
typicality within an autobiographical narrative is indicative of the
overwhelming power of the prevailing social and political circumstances
within Ireland at the time of writing. This argument, although attractive,
is not sustainable and the relationship in Kavanagh's work between the
writerly self and the community is more complex as the rest of this chapter
will show.

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Some attention to the terms self and community is necessary before we can continue. The former term is initially defined within the framework of the latter. It is the community which is important, the community which assigns a role to Kavanagh, the green fool, until such time as he declares independence of that role. Once again the comparison with O'Casey comes to mind, as in each case the apparently representative status of the writer is part of the problem addressed in the work. Where, once again the comparison breaks down is in the opposed urban and rural settings of the two bodies of work; that a working-class writer should emerge is unusual but that a peasant writer should emerge is a contradiction which denies the qualities of the peasant community from which Kavanagh comes. (Partly as a result of this both O'Casey and Kavanagh have been obviously irksome to many Irish critics over the years; there is a distinct sense in much criticism that neither writer knows his place. The inclination has been to assume that Kavanagh was just a peasant poet with clay on his boots and that O'Casey could not have been as working-class as he pretended.) Daniel Corkery and Elizabeth Bowen may be taken as the respective proponents of the extremes of the description of the peasantry contemporary with Kavanagh. There is, however, common ground between the exclusivist and nationalist views of Corkery and the Anglo-Irish attitudes of Bowen because whether the peasantry is regarded as a crowd at a hurling match or a collection of faceless young men at a crossroads it is evident that all attitudes to it are based on the notion that it is not a collection of individuals but an anonymous mass. In Bowen's case it serves as a backdrop for her portrait of her family as part of a class of creative individuals which has been important in the history of Ireland. In Corkery's view (and he is closer to

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the majority view) the peasantry is the organic community into which the individual can escape, throwing off the alienated individualism of the modern bourgeois world. This organic community can provide various settings for the writer but in every case and whatever the viewpoint (through a crack in the floor, from horseback, visiting cottages, or going on Gaelteacht holidays) the perceived qualities of the peasantry are seen as a function of the social relationships of the community rather than as the result of individual endeavour. It was to this undifferentiated community that writers such as Yeats, Synge, O'Connor, O'Faolain and even to some extent Moore turned, seeing in it the chance to throw off the constraints of bourgeois individualism. It was from this kind of community that Joyce turned seeing it as dangerously enthralling in its archaism. It was this kind of community that formed the major constituent of the new state's ideological project. Whether the community ever existed as perceived and depicted by this range of commentators is irrelevant to the fact that a large number of cultural and political arguments are predicated upon it. No matter what the realities of the life of the peasant community it is true that writers could see in it the possibility of Unity of Culture, or of freedom, and that the state could use it as an effective ideological mask for the poverty of the social and economic realities of the new Ireland.

What is also common to all of these commentators is that they shared an urban temperament; even Yeats it should be remembered cried for a sod of Sligo soil only when in London.
Although this urban literature is predominant in twentieth century Ireland, there is also a rural literature which, apart from the sub-genre of the 'island autobiography', is curiously Northern based (one thinks of Michael McLaverty, Patrick McGill, Shan F. Bullock, Kavanagh himself). Kavanagh is important not just in himself but also as part of this rural literature and as someone who has an unusually strong claim to speak with the authentic voice of the peasant, rather than about the peasant. This was certainly how he was first received in Dublin:

Dublin literary society gave him a great welcome, not knowing what they were getting. They saw him as the ploughman with mud on his boots, the authentic Irishman, the one who had written a Celtic Twilight novel and had produced a slim volume of, for the most part, slimmer poems ... Patrick seemed to be exactly what the doctor ordered. They had had enough of synthetic Irishmen - here was the real thing - elemental.\(^6\)

The 'Celtic Twilight novel' is *The Green Fool* and it is evident that Peter Kavanagh is determined to support Patrick's own later views about the work and about his own stance at this time (late 1939) so it is possible that Patrick's attitudes at this time are not as either he or Peter describe them with hindsight. *The Green Fool* remains therefore one of the most important documents about this period in his life.

If the situation was as both Patrick and Peter were later to describe it we could rightly expect *The Green Fool* to be a relatively straightforward autochthonous account of a man of the earth. From the title onwards, however, this option is not really open to us. The title was, again according to Peter,\(^7\) originally to have been *The Grey Dawn Was Breaking*\(^8\)

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8. *The Green Fool*, Ch. 24 where the phrase suggests the muted quality of the awakening to poetry.
which was rejected in favour of the local phrase 'an iron fool - used to describe someone who was pretending to be a fool only to protect himself ...'. This title was rejected as too local but even without a knowledge of it one can still recognise the teasing complexities of the final title. It is suggestive of naïveté, a rural background, and an adherence to nationalism but it is a phrase which is conscious of those implications and, in using them ironically, distances them. The definite article, however, simultaneously renders these qualities as part of the poet's distinctive personality. Added to this the word 'fool' plays across several meanings: an urban view of the peasant poet, Kavanagh's own judgement of himself, the licensed commentator and the socially assigned role:

The people didn't want a poet, but a fool, yes they could be doing with one of those. As I grew up not exactly 'like another' I was installed the fool.10

That this is a role rejected by Kavanagh is soon made very clear:

I very nearly began to think myself an authentic fool. I often occupied a position like that of the 'The Idiot' in Dosteovsky's novel. I do not blame the people who made their fool; they wanted a fool and in any case they lost their stakes.11

The writer of The Green Fool is no fool, at least not a fool made by others but these quotations seem to me to indicate that the lure of the social niche is strong and that despite the apparently complete rejection of this role it is nonetheless one that Kavanagh occupied for some time, and towards which he feels ambivalent. These quotations come from very early in the autobiography and as such stand as an individuating rejection of the

role but the rest of the work is about Kavanagh in that role, a role which he fits and which he was apparently consigned to at a very early stage.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of Kavanagh's rejection of the role of fool we must concentrate on the society in which it provides a niche. John Wilson Foster, in his work on Ulster fiction, a body of work in which Kavanagh's has a central place, depicts the society behind this fiction as essentially rural and ritualised. It is a society in which all possible roles are fixed; even the 'outsider' is a part of it by being a recognisable feature of the social landscape, someone whose social role is to be outside. Foster's view of society allows only for the ritual passage of the barely-formed individual from one socially sanctioned stage to another. The problem with this view is that there is no possibility that the writer or indeed anyone else can do anything other than passively accept society as it is constituted; there is no possibility of actively shaping society, nor of writing in particular having a determining role within it. Consequently, to read The Green Fool in Foster's terms one would have to ignore the complex relationships between the voice of the autobiographer and the community, for these are a product not of stasis, nor even of change alone, but of the peculiar combination of stasis and radical alteration to which the community was subject. In a static society there is a limited repertoire of roles available; in a radically changing society the individual has more freedom to emerge. The historically generated ambivalence between not yet outmoded social roles and the

12. John Wilson Foster: Forces and Theemes in Ulster Fiction, op cit, p. 27, Kavanagh is oddly absent from Foster's work.
opportunity for the emergence of the individual is the ground of Kavanagh's autobiography.

The first thing that one notices about *The Green Fool* is that it is full of talk. Like Joyce's work, or Behan's *Borstal Boy*, or Moore's *Hail and Farewell*, Synge's plays, or Carleton's stories (and unlike O'Faolain's *Vive Moi!*) talk is central to the book. This bears out what Kevin Reilly states about the reliance of Irish writing on 'the liveliness of Irish speech ... to charm ... readers and to embody important aspects of Irish identity'.

I would not wish to use the word 'charm' in this way but I accept that speech is an essential element of Irish writing. Autobiography, Reilly goes on to say, is a genre which places particular reliance on the qualities of speech since it is a petition to the 'intimate stranger', the reader, that he should accept the writer as he might do in the intimacy of a fireside chat. Certainly *The Green Fool* does make an appeal to this kind of tradition, but it is a double-edged one.

By including so much speech Kavanagh runs certain risks. The reader may accept some of the talk recorded as being memorable because of external events:

'Do you know, Jack,' I said to a neighbour one of those days, 'I'm standing in a place I never stood in before.'
'Where?'
'In the British Empire.'

Some of this talk may be memorable because it is a reply which has passed into local folklore:

14. Kevin P. Reilly: 'Irish Literary Autobiography', *op cit*, pp. 57-80,
15. Ibid, p. 78, He takes the image of the fireside chat from *The Green Fool*, p. 186,
Gartlan dismounted and Plunket got up in his place. From the saddle he addressed the crowd.

'There is a gentleman riding now and not a damned Orangeman in Ireland can order him down.' The crowd cheered.17

Both quotations are examples of speech which may well be remembered and both are also quite rare in The Green Fool in foregrounding the political events of the period covered by the book. The first is taken from the period leading up to the Civil War after the partitioning of Ireland in the Treaty negotiations, hence the sense of being somewhere one has never been before. The second is one of a few telling references to sectarianism in the work, references which place the work in a Northern context. However, most of the recorded speech in the autobiography is not of this order; it is of such a quotidian nature that one wonders if anyone would even wish to remember it. What the talk does, then, is to signal the fictiveness of the text. While the idea that autobiography is in some ways a fictional enterprise need no longer surprise us because we are aware that it, like other literary works, is shaped and constructed, we must still look at the effects of overt fictionalising within autobiography, in effect see how autobiography can accept responsibility for its own lies. Peter Kavanagh has said that the work contains some 'bare-faced lies' and Patrick Kavanagh gave as one of his reasons for later rejecting it that it (and The Great Hunger) told lies. In each case, however, the lies are of a distinct quality. They include matters of fact - no one in the Kavanagh family, says Peter, ever went out for hire; matters of tone - The Great Hunger Patrick said, told lies by being tragic rather than comic;18 and finally matters

of texture - the widespread use of speech falls into this last category and it deserves closer attention.

Some speech in the work is memorable but most of it is quotidian, even phatic. Opening the book at random one can find phrases and sentences such as:

'I'll go and get the horse and cart,' he said, 'and Paddy can be ready to meet us on the big road. Maybe you'd come too, Mrs. Kavanagh,' he added.
'I will and welcome,' she said.  
'You'll destroy my good hat,' my mother said.
'Looka the two pockets over her eyes, you could put a pint of water in each of them. The rale sign of oul' age.'

While the implication that all of this is accurately remembered may be a lie, or, let us say, fictional, the object of such a reliance on speech is the quest for verisimilitude, an attempt to convey the quality and texture of the life of the community which is both experienced and expressed in speech. The community exists through its speech and the language of that speech is one that Kavanagh shares. What he is doing in The Green Fool is then best seen not as a recall of specific linguistic acts but a conveying of the quality of speech transmuted by the action of the imagination:

On the stem  
Of memory imaginations blossom.

The orality of his community is part of his own lived experience, an experience to which he now has access through the informed workings of his

own imagination. The relationship that exists is therefore a more complex one than the functioning of either memory or imagination alone. The relationship between the autobiography and the language of the community is, like the relationship between the self and the community, predicated upon the idea of language as a constitutive element of community. This is the reason that I would argue with Reilly's use of such terms as 'liveliness' and 'charm' when discussing the oral aspects of Irish writing; these are terms which see the language of Irish communities from outside as quaint or strange or vital depending upon the view of the community that the writer would wish to espouse; they fix a living language and potentially distort the view of the community which has its existence through that language. To see the language of Kavanagh's community as being, say, 'vital' would be to imply an inappropriate degree of alienation from his community. That he himself may later have come to see his use of the language of the community as contributing to the 'Anglo-Irish lie' has more to do with his ambivalence about the literary culture of the Free State and his own relationship to it, than with a complete alienation from his own community. In Kavanagh's terms then the language of the community has more to do with a sense of allegiance than with any concept of quaintness. That is to say the orality of The Green Fool is based on the langue of the community not on a series of discretely remembered paroles. Part of the tension in the work, the source of some of Kavanagh's own ambivalence towards the community, derives from the imaginative reworking of the langue, the general linguistic framework of the community, into the individually voiced language act which is The Green Fool. The appropriation of the oral tradition into writing is not therefore as direct as Reilly suggests. Quite apart from the tension involved in transforming the oral
and social into the literary and individual there is also the problem of
where this leaves the writer. I have already suggested that in Kavanagh's
work this interconnection is evidence of ambivalence but there is another
aspect to the question. Kavanagh was not the first to employ the oral in
this way so The Green Fool fits not just into an oral tradition but,
perhaps more easily, also into the already existing and continuing literary
tradition of the oral. Joyce, Synge and Behan have already been referenced
as figures within this tradition and one can also adduce Lady Gregory,
Carleton and O'Casey as writers whose work depends for much of its impact
on the centrality of talk. The issue of this joint tradition - oral and
literary-oral - thus adds to the ambivalence of The Green Fool. While there
is a strong sense of representativeness in The Green Fool and while this
runs through all of Kavanagh's writing, as in his late apology for
autobiography:

The self is only interesting as an illustration.23

It seems to me that this is only one part of Kavanagh's attitude to
autobiography. His literary rendering and contextualisation of the speech
of his community is also evidence of his own individuality. That
individuality in turn is based, of necessity, on his difference from the
community, which difference is, like that of, say, Pegeen Mike, implicated
in his literacy as against the communal orality.

We can summarise the issues raised by this question in the form of
oppositions: speech/writing; oral/literary; authenticity/fiction;
langue/parole. In each case it is Kavanagh and not the community who has

access to the second term of the opposition. That is to say, it is Kavanagh's construction of the community that we are being offered. It is therefore necessary to look at just how he goes about constructing this community in *The Green Fool*.

The episodic structure of *The Green Fool* pays little heed to the idea that autobiography is prestructured by a detailed chronology. Instead the work is composed of apparently freely associated fragments. As with the orality of the work this fragmentary structure fits into a definite literary tradition: *Castle Rackrent*, William Carleton, the Joyce of *Dubliners*, and the contemporary short story. These works express the idea that experience is a matter of gaps and fragments; the idea of Irish history to which such work responds is that it is gapped and fragmented. *Castle Rackrent* may be described, in Raymond Williams' terms, as an account of residual and emergent hegemonies; Carleton is the chronicler of early nineteenth century faction fighting; *Dubliners* records a world lacking the synthesising presence of the artist; the contemporary short story was moving from the Utopian organicism of the pre-Civil War period to the social analysis and often bitter satire to be found in the work of, say, Sean O'Faolain. *The Green Fool* records a world of residual orality and emergent literacy, a society which still carries the potential for and at times the actuality of faction fighting, a community which sees no use for an artist, and a social order which is riven by local arguments which are coloured by broader political divisions but which do not derive their momentum from them.

Sean O'Faolain's style, as we shall see, is, increasingly in the short stories and certainly in *Vive Moi!*, an alienated one. This is not the case
with Kavanagh. His use of dialect is, quite correctly, unapologetic and forceful, lacking any trace of the occasional whimsy of, say, a Synge or an O'Connor. His dialect is the linguistic framework in which he achieved consciousness and to which he always remained loyal.

However, despite his linguistic affiliations the way in which language is used in The Green Fool betrays something of the distance between Kavanagh and his community. The structure of the work and the reasons for that structure go some way to explaining the ambivalent attitude found in the language. Although there is evidence of Kavanagh's consciousness in the actual language and in his comments on it the fact that even as only 'half a poet' he was seen to be 'a stranger within the gates' is evident in the structure of the work for it is in the structure that he presents most clearly his own image of the community.

The episodes of which the work is composed are set-pieces covering all aspects of rural Irish life early in this century: the fair; various kinds of farm-work (another instance of the work's originality - few writers deal with people actually at work and few Irish writers attend so carefully to the methods of work); a wedding; a wake; political fighting and so on. The linking thread is the presence of Patrick Kavanagh and the work is arranged on the principle of free association as if each piece was set down as it came into his memory. This method serves two purposes. It gives

24. For a comparison of literature and the oral see The Green Fool, op cit, pp. 131, 211-212. For a sense of the decline of the oral see Ibid, p. 163.  
the work the appearance of conforming to the idea that autobiography is an act of memory. Consequently it suggests that it is only in the memory and consciousness of the writer that these diverse elements are held together. This suggestion is of the utmost importance in the depiction of the community. If the community shares a language then it is also split apart by that language. The first comment about the community at large in the work is that there is a snobbish desire on the part of some to change the name of the townland; and after that we find out about the litigious nature of the community and the special place reserved for language:

... there was plenty of fire and an amount of vicious neighbourly hatred to keep us awake. Most of the neighbours had at one time or another gone to law chiefly for trespass ... Never was a case for abusive language. There was language abusive enough though. Each person was keeping up spite to at least two of his neighbours.27

This description of communal disunity shows Kavanagh's own family as 'a united house, there was only one purse, let it be full or empty'.28 However, Kavanagh is also concerned to show, quite apart from this kind of contrast, that the community is disunited, the bonds such as they are, are of gossip and spite, each person is out for his or her own ends. This is very definitely not the peasant Eden imaged by town dwellers. Each theme that Kavanagh touches on is another sign of this disunity. It is possible to look at The Green Fool within the terms supplied by Corkery as the defining characteristics of a true Irish literature and this seems to me a useful exercise since our memory of Corkery supplies a commentary on Kavanagh as we continue.

27. Ibid, p. 11. Litigiousness based on land-hunger is not just a characteristic of the peasant, as the accounts of law-cases carried on over generations in Bowen's Court show.
Religion is presented as just one more possibility for carrying on spite:

It wasn't an uncommon thing for people to confess everybody's sins save their own.\textsuperscript{29}

This is not the only quality of religion, however, because it can also provide the basis for a sectarianism which is associated with the urban, as when the local Protestant sexton complains to Kavanagh's parents about his son being bullied:

He got no satisfaction ... and I got no beating. There were some, and the journeyman cobbler was one, who said I should get a medal for my deed.

'I never took you to be the man you are,' Tom Hales said, 'you stood up for religion as good as any Belfast Catholic ever did.'\textsuperscript{30}

Nationalism is rarely mentioned but when it is, it too is often seen as a source of division. The faction fights of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example those between the Caravats and Shanavests provide a remarkably similar mixture of outrage, local response, class conflict and nationalism as opposed to any straightforward ideological struggle.\textsuperscript{31} This is Kavanagh's account of the aftermath of the 1918 General Election which gave Sinn Fein a landslide victory:

A Sinn Fein hothead made a rush for the Hibernian banner. The battle was on and I was an eye-witness. I got standing on the bars of the school-gate and had as splendid a view as any war-correspondent could desire. Around their standard-bearer the stick-men rallied, the last defenders of Dan O'Connell's Ireland.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29} The Green Fool, op cit, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 35; see also the racing story, n. 16 above.
\textsuperscript{31} Paul E.W. Roberts; 'Caravats and Shanavests; Whiteboyism and Faction Fighting in East Munster, 1802-1811', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jnr (eds); Irish Peasants, op cit, pp. 64-101.
\textsuperscript{32} The Green Fool, op cit, p. 107.
Thus before the Civil War, when Ireland was still supposed to be united, Kavanagh will allow no illusions about unity to exist. As on other occasions he is prescient here about rebutting the ideas of his contemporaries before they have even expressed them. Sean O'Faolain's idea that there was a new Ireland with a history stretching back only about 150 years to Daniel O'Connell's drive to democracy, is here rejected in favour of the sense of an even more 'new Ireland' coming into being in the face of an 'old order', of which Daniel O'Connell is the representative.

Litigious about land, using religion to vent spite and politics as an occasion for brawling, Kavanagh's peasants are a rebuttal of Corkery's ideas. From the inside, a ground of argument which Corkery would have to accept, Kavanagh provides an image of a community in decline, caught between the past and the present, subject to the inevitable forces of modernisation while still held by the social and economic structures of the past:

From the tops of the little hills there spread a view right back to the days of Saint Patrick and the druids. Slieve Gullion to the north fifteen miles distant, to the west the bewitched hills and forths of Donaghamoyne; eastward one could see the distillery chimney of Dundalk sending up its prosperous smoke ... 

There is no evidence in the work that the aura of antiquity surrounding the hills is seen by anyone but Kavanagh. The factory chimney has as much to do with this community as his vision of the past, which is to say very little. It is a community caught, as Kavanagh will be, between two stools. Neither

34, The Green Pool, op cit, p. 8
the spirituality of the past nor the economics of the present do anything more than approach this place, neither is a vital element in the character of the community:

When I arrived in Mucker the natives were beginning to lose faith in the old, beautiful things. The ghost of a culture haunted the snub-nosed hills.  

There are no roots in the past and no investments in the future. The world Kavanagh grows up in is one caught between two phases of history. What influence the past still exerts on the community has to do with its inertia, apathy and fear of change. Everything Kavanagh describes is in decline. At the wedding party one of the guests says: 'This would make a very good wake'. Similarly the wake and funeral included in the book are dull affairs:

The wake wasn't worth talking about ... The old man of whom I have been telling had a poor funeral. It wasn't typical of what we could do in that direction ... As I walked after the hearse I thought of all the grand funerals I had attended.  

If this is the case then why does Kavanagh choose to describe this dull affair instead of one of the grand ones? Later in life Kavanagh would write: 'The imagination is, I think, incapable of evoking moments of sorrow' but there is an underlying grimness in The Green Fool which deliberately undercuts the comic elements of the work and we should remember that the comic spirit became increasingly important to Kavanagh.

The distillery chimney in Dundalk and 'the battle of youth and the new

35. The Green Fool, op cit, p. 11.
36. Ibid, p. 159.
38. Collected Pruse, op cit, p. 33.
Ireland versus the old men and the old servitude suggest that change is happening but Kavanagh is enough of a piece with the community to be unsure about what the change is and how long it will take. The only reference point which the work supplies for the timespan of change is the transition from paganism to Christianity but it offers little hope. When Kavanagh sees the view from the hills it is the 'days of Saint Patrick and the druids' which he sees and while he may be alone in seeing this aura of antiquity and in being conscious of its effects, the timespan of the change, fifteen centuries, is awesome and suggests that any change cannot be as dramatic as a putative 'new Ireland'. Instead there will be the process of assimilation and integration which will creep forward slowly offering little hope on any individual scale. The continuation of the earlier change is best seen in the application of terms such as 'heresy' and 'doubting Thomas' to those who do not believe in the pre-Christian superstitions. It seems that Kavanagh and his father are to be numbered among these doubters until we come to 'Fairyland'. Kavanagh's earlier 'I was a doubting Thomas' is flatly contradicted by this chapter:

But we couldn't get back to Louth. We were in Fairyland and it was a wet day. Everything seemed strange. The folk we saw were not ordinary mortals.

The chapter as a whole has some of the quality of Flann O'Brien's The Third Policeman in its depiction of the extraordinary in terms of the ordinary - Fairyland may be strange but its people seem just like the neighbours, and

40. Ibid, pp. 47, 49, 53, 82. 
41. Ibid, Ch. 10. 
42. Ibid, 53. 
43. Ibid, p. 82.
Kavanagh and his mother accept their presence there in just the way that they accept the rain. It is the reader who makes 'Fairyland' strange because it is the reader who will react to its merging of the fantastic and the quotidian. The prose does not react; it is the same as if a market day or a morning's ploughing were being described. The problem of matching this belief in Fairyland with the conviction that the culture which has generated this notion is dying is compounded by an examination of the other areas of that culture.

Kavanagh again expresses doubts about Catholicism; he will not accord absolute power to the priests, he will put poetry before the family Rosary, his prayers will be hurriedly and carelessly said, and this, combined with the structure of the work, may well lead us to expect the well-nigh traditional rejection of religion. However, just as the 'writing voice' in no way undercuts the belief in Fairyland, so it is the same voice which instead of rejecting religion expresses the hyperdulia so common in Ireland, a veneration made the more striking, as is so often the case, by the almost complete absence of latria:

... I had deep faith in Her who guides the wanderer and as the boat swayed in the choppy Irish Sea I remembered she was litanied Star of the Sea.

Kavanagh therefore shares both the common superstitions and the common form of Christianity and so the distance established by his consciousness is lessened by this common investment in la longe durée although this does not

44. The Green Fool, op cit, p. 155.
45. Ibid, pp. 198, 245.
47. Ibid, p. 253; see also pp. 29, 56.
diminish the force of his criticism of the cultural, spiritual and economic poverty of the community. It is not enough to say that one culture has died, one must recognise the force which the old customs retain and then attempt to evaluate their contemporary effect. If style and structure mark Kavanagh's consciousness and therefore his distance from the community, his evaluation of the effects of religion and superstition show that he is still a product of his time and place. What he sees around him is not so much a continuity as a declining residual force, not a healthy tradition which offers possibilities but a dead weight which increases inertia. Land and nationalism are perhaps better themes to use in explicating Kavanagh's view of the power of the past.

In the first ten years of Kavanagh's life the percentage of the population owning land almost doubled as a result of the Land Acts of 1903 and 1909. 'Between 1903 and 1920 nearly nine million acres had changed hands and two million acres more were in process of being sold.' The success of Wyndham's act [of 1903] was immediate ... Little more than a decade later, landlordism in rural Ireland had become a thing of the past.' Of this revolution on the land there is no sign in The Green Fool. While it is possible that Kavanagh was not aware of, or inured to the recent changes in religious practice, it is impossible that he had no sense of what had

48. It is possible to argue either way about the quality and continuity of folk-belief in Ireland at this time, but in Catholicism there had been 'a remarkable devotional revolution whereby continental expressions of piety were introduced to an Ireland which adopted them with an astonishing enthusiasm, so that the texture of modern Irish religious life owes much to the period 1850-1875 ... ', Terence Brown, Ireland, op cit, p. 27. It is doubtful if Kavanagh knew that so many of the elements of his religion were effectively new, but his depiction of Catholicism as time-worn, and carelessly treated is of a piece with his view of other elements of peasant culture.

happened on the land. Instead of acknowledgement of this, however, we are offered an apparently long-established peasant population which has only just accommodated itself to emergence from Penal times:

There was no love for beauty. We were barbarians just emerged from the Penal days. The hunger had killed our poetry and we were mere animals grabbing at the leavings of the dogs of war. Money was pouring in every front door and pouring out the back door. Our house had no back door.\textsuperscript{52}

It is possible to read this as a glancing allusion to the history of Irish land ownership over the previous century but it still does not alter Kavanagh's case that the practice of life on the land has not undergone any radical change. The only land that changes hands in the course of the work is that bought by the Kavanaghs and the information that they have no back door is the closest we ever come to an explanation of how a family which began in 'scraping poverty'\textsuperscript{53} could eventually acquire two farms. For the moment I would like to consider the more general relationship between peasants and the land as presented in \textit{The Green Fool}.

A trade in \textit{The Green Fool}, whether shoe-making or pig-killing, is a matter of education particularly in those 'little touches of roguery'\textsuperscript{54} which set the true craftsman apart. Farming is, however, half-art, half-ritual:

'You have a whole lifetime's work ahead of you in MacParland's farm.' He thought this was something to make me glad. And so it should have been if I had been an artist as a farmer. For an artist, whether poet or farmer, must find glory and exultation in struggling with the crude ungainly crust of earth and spirit.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{The Green Fool}, \textit{op cit}, p. 63, \\
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Ibid}, p. 11, \\
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid}, p. 77, \\

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MacParland's black hills were an epic subject for a poet of the plough and bill-hook. Any true farmer would have joyed in making of those fields good tillage land ... It is a great thing to have found the subject that can serve a man his lifetime.  

In this artistic side of farming (to which Kavanagh does not fully aspire) there is cause for pride and self-respect, it allows for unalienated labour. This, however, does not extend beyond one's own property; when working for someone else the trick is to take things easy, the peasant does not co-operate with his fellows, intent as he is on his own interests. The rituals that must be observed are also a matter of self-interest, and here again Kavanagh leaves a distance between himself and his subject:

Because the well was ours I should praise it. I should say that its waters were the purest and coolest of any well in the country. It was the tradition of the people to praise their own wells and in a quiet way to dispraise all others.  

Praise for one's own property is thus both a kind of ritual protection and dispraise for the property of others (which may explain Kavanagh's later attitude to writing other than his own). Ritual is also to be seen as a deadening influence. Unlike a trade, with its touches of roguery, there are no short cuts in farming and new or eccentric methods are frowned upon. It is as if the land could only be appeased with continual hard work. Not all of Kavanagh's neighbours share this attitude and Michael helps Kavanagh to go against convention:

Michael would allow me to do the most expert kind of farm-work ... [he] bade me sow an acre of corn. He wasn't too particular and neither was I ... The correct neighbouring farmers looked on
and shook their heads. They hated to see a man doing such a sacred job as sowing corn without due respect and dignity. What surprised them later was that the corn I sowed came up even more than their own careful acres. 

Michael is like the rest of the community in his cheating and indifference to others' misfortune but he has luck and can ignore the rituals of farming.

Rituals and conventions extend beyond the actual work on the farm and into the lives of the community who are tied to the land by the bonds of traditional values and by 'familism'. As Terence Brown puts it, 1930s rural Ireland 'preserved substantially intact the values and assumptions, the social and cultural forms that can most readily be accounted for in terms of an economic necessity made all the more stringent by the appalling depredations of the Famine'. In The Green Fool Kavanagh captures this sense of life travelling the same well-rutted path without ever giving any hint that various and massive upheavals were taking place.

The treatment of politics in the work is the clearest indication of Kavanagh's wish to avoid as far as possible any sense of sudden change. Although he had not yet formulated his concept of 'parochialism' at this stage his range of interests is limited to his own parish (except in the

57. The Green Fool, op cit, p. 96.
58. See C.M., Arensberg and S.T, Kimball; Family and Community in Ireland, (New York, 1937), 2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1968. The term 'familism' is used by Arensberg and Kimball to describe the system in Ireland whereby the parents retained power until they died with the result that adult children might not marry, handle money, nor take responsibility until their parents died, by which time the 'children' might themselves be old. Kavanagh describes such families in both The Green Fool and The Great Hunger. When he describes his own family as 'a united house' he adduces their 'one purse' rather than the division of labour and profit between man and wife.
59. Terence Brown, Ireland, op cit, p. 22.
matter of literature) as are the interests of his neighbours. The First World War is seen in this light as no more than the cause of a welcome rise in the price of farm produce:

Everybody was in great good humour. They had money in every pocket. Nobody in that district joined the army. All hopes were centred in a long war and no one was disappointed.\(^50\)

This callous attitude is not reserved for foreign wars alone. It is the attitude in regard to all politics. (While not wishing to defend this callousness it is worth noting that such an attitude is based on a human scale.) The Easter Rising of 1916, for so many a watershed, is omitted from the work with only a witty echo of Yeats (who would have approved the financial good sense of it) to mark it, so in the summer of 1916:

Beauty, beauty was everywhere but it was money we were after.\(^51\)

Kavanagh does join in the activities of the Anglo-Irish war but there are few details and it is quickly dismissed since he counts this time as 'among the lost years of my life ... it was an emotional movement that left no dregs of beauty when the flood had passed'.\(^52\) After this his political activity is self-interested whether it be as the 'shadow of a gunman' at a market or using politics as a cover for robbery.\(^53\) Sean O'Faolain's view of the work may well have been influenced by Kavanagh's description of this period (especially as much of it is a calculated insult to the 'noble

60. The Green Fool, op cit, p. 58. This attitude to the war is also present in Maurice O'Sullivan's Twenty Years A-Growing, (1933), (trans. with preface) Moya Llewelyn Davies and George Thomson, (introductory note) E.M. Forster, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 142-146; similar pragmatism, accompanied by apparent political engagement, is also present in Anthony C. West's As Towns with Fire, (1968), Belfast, The Blackstaff Press, 1985, pp. 26-30.
61. The Green Fool, op cit, p. 68.
63. Ibid, pp. 112-113 and Ch. 18, 'The Outlaws',
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savage' view of the peasantry shared by so many non-peasants):

... a simple narrative of a rough life on the land, partly in the style of O'Flaherty and partly of Maurice O'Sullivan. It is in spots deliberately rapscallion, but in a comically ingenuous way. Irish-Americans who think Irish writers should always write pretty pictures, something like the late Donn Byrne, will dislike it. (I don't in this case entirely blame them.)

The problem is that Kavanagh does draw pretty pictures and is humourous as well as being unflinchingly direct about the central elements of peasant life; it is vulgar, self-seeking, coarse, sly and litigious. O'Faolain's dismissive afterthought is a measure of just how successful Kavanagh has been in his attempt to undercut the idealisation of this way of life, the (literary) shrewdness he deploys in doing so is in turn a measure of his own implication in this life.

His implication in the community, however, does little to account for the growth of Kavanagh's own consciousness. From the beginning he is described as being not 'like another' as if his separation from the community were anterior to the growth of his consciousness rather than consequent on it. The keynote of the work is puzzlement about his own growth as a poet which is eventually focussed on his departure from the countryside. He had, in his depiction of a community in decline, not only countered the more idealistic depictions of that community then and previously current but also left himself without source. He has refused, again with what amounts in terms of literary history to prescience, all of those explanations of the growth of consciousness which his contemporaries would use. The

language movement, the freedom of the countryside, the clarion call of nationalism, the awakening to literature, all of which have been claimed as moments of awakening by others, are refused by Kavanagh because they do not fit with his image of his own culture. There are then only two possible sources of Kavanagh's own consciousness: the family, and the sub-community of the journeyman shoemakers, tinkers, beggars and tramps.

The family are not completely integrated in the community although their acquisition of land seems to be directed towards such an integration. Both of Kavanagh's parents are foreigners within the narrow and enclosed terms of the community. His father's father had tramped from Connaught. His own father, as a tradesman, is apart from (and inferior in status to) the community of farmers although they still have a certain respect for him. It is impossible to delve deeper than this, for, in an episode reminiscent of Yeats' Autobiography, Kavanagh's father gives him a written record of his family's history which is lost and thus effectively cuts Kavanagh off from all knowledge of the paternal side of his family. His mother appears to come from Louth and although Kavanagh visits his grandfather and an uncle there we find out very little about her family. There are nine children in all but they are employed in a ruthless way in the autobiography, appearing only when necessary so we find out only about two of them. One sister is at convent school and Peter becomes a schoolteacher. For a 'united house' there seems to be very little

67. Ibid, op cit, Ch, 9 'Relations'.
68. See Patrick Kavanagh: By Night Unstarred: An Autobiographical Novel, (ed,) Peter Kavanagh, The Curragh, The Goldsmith Press, 1977, p. 26 where the chronicer consigns the rest of Peter Devine's family to 'the oblivion of the unwritten word' when they have no more to contribute to Devine's story.
interest on Kavanagh's part in the members of his family. The family does, however, prosper with the acquisition of a new house and two farms. The house itself appears as an important symbolic setting for the family: 'a modern dwelling cut off from the Gaelic past',\textsuperscript{70} but one is left wondering whether this is a reference to the whole range of Irish tradition or to the Irish-speaking part of that tradition only. The potential influence of the family is great but this is not fully brought out by Kavanagh and what influence the family actually exerts is counterbalanced by the influence of the community at large. Only the father is at all clearly drawn, while the rest are lost in the welter of detail about the neighbourhood. The father, to be sure, is an important figure but the mother's anonymity will not be lifted until we come to \textit{Tarry Flynn}. The principal influence of the father is in being forward-looking. I have already noted his disregard for superstition and he takes a practical, modern approach to many other matters:

\begin{quote}
Father ... walked into Carrick to consult the veterinary surgeon. This was an unusual thing to do. People had little confidence in professional men.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

One wonders, however, how much of this is the influence of the father and how much the projection onto the father of the qualities Kavanagh would like him to have:

\begin{quote}
My father was a supporter of the old order, though in his heart were throbings - the pulse-beat of a New Ireland.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{70} The Green Fool, \textit{op cit}, p. 19,
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p. 25,
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p. 105.
Just as Kavanagh does not locate his coming to consciousness in any one cause so he does not lay claim to a 'birth' as a poet (at least, not until after 1955). Instead attention is paid to his vacillation but the chapter in which he records his first publication in the *Irish Statesman* and therefore his final rejection of the pious poetry of earlier days is also the chapter in which he records the death of his father.⁷³ Although his mother would retain control of the house, this is the point at which Kavanagh, as eldest son, becomes nominal head of the family. The obvious analogy here is with Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* but there is no sense of liberation for Kavanagh. Instead of a poetic birth, the choice between poetry and the farm is all the more difficult to make. Kavanagh is now established in both poetry and farming and the family, like the community, becomes a place of struggle, a struggle which can only be resolved, seemingly, from within himself. The family's only apparent contribution has been to add some elements to his character and thus to the play of tensions which operate across the book through style, structure and themes.

The final element in *The Green Fool* important to an understanding of Kavanagh's character in the work is that sub-community which I mentioned earlier. In this group the most important people are the journeyman cobblers employed by Kavanagh's father. They are part of the travelling community which is attached to no place. Alongside men like Michael, George

and Dinny, these men have an influence on him which contrasts with that ascribed to the father. They tell him stories of the past and bear an unsettled air with them. Indeed, there seems to me to be some sleight of hand in their function since at the end of the book Kavanagh's problem is that he has opposed needs - to leave and to stay. The journeyman cobblers thus perform a similar if subtler function to that of the uncle in Tarry Flynn whose existence is nothing more than a device to enable Tarry to escape the clutches of the land. The journeymen similarly help to open out the narrow community and help Kavanagh to see beyond it. In The Green Fool they are present from the beginning. The first of them, Garret Plunket, is 'one of the journeymen cobblers who worked for my father off and on as they travelled the roads of Ireland ... the journeymen shoemakers who took life as it came and it sometimes came hard.' It was Garret, we are told, who 'pointed out to me all the places for miles around and their history', and who 'would surprise a person in the habit of taking a book by the cover. Such a one would say that Garret was a saint and a mystic and poet, yet he was none of these things but a plain philistine with a kind heart and a prophet's beard'. The individuality of these men and of the 'beggary richly coloured and full of ironic pride' does not survive the outbreak of the First World War and the coming of prosperity: 'the pulse of their world was beating irregularly, to beat for the last time when one of the brotherhood, Jem Fagan, walked out our door'. Through this group Kavanagh has come into contact with individuals who exist apart from the

74. *The Green Fool*, op cit, Ch. 12 'Michael', Ch. 22 'George', Ch. 28 'The Ploughing-Season Combine'.
76. Ibid, p. 16.
77. Ibid, p. 59.
78. Ibid, p. 58.
placed, enclosed community of which he is a part. However, he has no illusions about their 'spirituality', and has seen them die out, the first element of the old traditions to do so completely, and he has seen some of the poetry go out of life with them. When he comes to make his first bid for liberation from the community he follows their method:

But greater than my desire to meet the exalted beings of Literature was the road-hunger in my heart that cried out for dusty romance. I had listened to the journeymen shoemakers, common tramps and uncommon tinkers. I had read Jim Tully and Patrick Magill [sic]. The blood of tramps was in my veins: my father's father had come from the West; he had taken the road Queen Maeve took when that cattle-fancier was on the chase of the Brown Bull of Cooley.79

Having up to this point charted the complexities of his own attitudes and reactions to his own community Kavanagh now seems to me to falter. I have referred to his distance from the community, a distance which allows him to be clear-sighted about the decline of a culture but here his road-hunger and his desire to become a poet become confused and he sentimentally attaches himself to an ideal and a myth of tramping which is itself confounded with literature. The psychological distance from the community which he feels is here being transformed into a desire for physical distance in a way which is not fully explained. His reference to the Táin Bo Cuailnge, to Tully and to MacGill are obviously meant to imply a literary framework for this road-hunger but it is difficult to believe that anyone would wish to take to the road after reading MacGill's accounts of the horrors of such a life.80 In other words just at the point where we

79, The Green Fool, op cit, p. 222. The ambiguity of 'dusty romance' and the literary references suggest that after the actuality of the account of the community, Kavanagh is submitting to conventional ideas about life on the road.
80, The name of the central figure of Patrick MacGill's Children of the Dead End, (1914), Dingle, Brandon, 1982, is Dermot Flynn.
might expect to find motivation clearly stated the narrative becomes confused and we are left with a melange of desires and aspirations. If at the beginning of this chapter Kavanagh rejects the community for the romance of the road he ends with a sense of something lost:

Although I had seen AE, had got books, and had tasted the road, I have always regretted going to Dublin. I had lost something which I could never regain from books.  

In the next chapter however he sets off again, this time without even the excuse of having a destination, and having regretted Dublin he now rejects the West:

They spoke Gaelic and yet I felt that the English-speaking peasants of my own country were nearer to the old tradition. There was no culture in Connemara, nothing like County Monaghan where the spirit of the old poets haunted the poplars.

Where his previous refutations of the idealisation of the peasant community had been couched in the realistic terms of decline based on his own experience of one such community, here he has trapped himself into an implied praise of the 'vitality' of his own place at just the moment when he is also physically rejecting it. When he returns from this journey he is apparently cured of his wanderlust, but the link between poetry and leaving the community has been established:

I find it hard to make decisions. For years I had been caught between the two stools of security on the land and a rich-scented life on the exotic islands of literature. I wasn't really a writer. I had seen a strange beautiful light on the hills and that was all.

In my heart I wanted to live the simple life of my people - to

81. The Green Fool, op cit, p. 231.
82. Ibid, p. 234.
marry, found a family and find immortality as a peasant finds it. The true artist is homosexual, spiritually if not always physically. George Moore and Oscar Wilde are examples. From Nature to Art I shifted petulantly seven times each day.

There is more than just indecision here, there is also a note of regret but not for anything that ever was, rather for two possibilities: of being wholly a writer or wholly a peasant. There is also a note of incomprehension about just what it means to be a writer. Part of his choice is thus creativity in art, sterility in life, or vice versa as 'being a writer' grows to exclude every other area of life. I have already noted that Kavanagh, unusually, has no one epiphanic moment which would irrevocably change him into a writer. To become a writer is always a matter of choice, and it is only at this point that we realise that Kavanagh's choice is constrained by the fact that he lacks a clear idea of what constitutes being a writer. It seems to me that despite the lack of a particular moment at which he can actually claim to have become a writer there is yet a climax to the work. This occurs at the end of 'The New Farm'. In this chapter Kavanagh claims his farm with the words 'There was some people who thought my younger brother would be getting one of the farms'. The clear implication that Kavanagh will take the farm is followed by the discovery that he has, to his dismay, taken on a lifetime's work. His dismay is balanced by the image of the farm as library:

I stocked every fence with a book or paper of some kind ... the hedges were the shelves of my library. I had not my literature card-indexed, but I had a plan of my own as good. I could say: in the second ash tree from the top end of the Field of the Musician is a poem by Yeats or AE. There is a short story by A.E. Coppard

83. The Green Fool, op cit, p. 239.
84. Ibid, p. 204.
at the root of the boortree beside the gap in the Field of the Well.\textsuperscript{45}

There is a large gap between this image which balances the farm and literature (which, in making literature literally of a place, suggests a reference back to Ogham) and the defiance of Kavanagh's leavetaking of Ireland:

Leaving my native place I experienced neither exultant joy nor tear-moist regrets. To Ireland I bade no patriotic emigrant's farewell; towards London I did not turn hope-wide eyes in vision. I did not care I was going half against my will. I was a fatalist drifting inconsequently in the winds of Chance, and I did not care whither they blew me.\textsuperscript{46}

(Peter Kavanagh tells us that it was a condition of his publisher's advance that Patrick had to deliver 'a new final chapter in accordance with suggestions made by the publisher...' but he does not tell us whether 'In London' is that chapter or the original.\textsuperscript{47}) From this note of defiant indifference, itself a change from indecision, to the rather sentimental homecoming at the end of the book is another leap not accounted for by the text.

I stress what I see as the note of incomprehension at the end of the work for two reasons. First, Kavanagh's previous clear sightedness, his charting of the complexities of the various elements which have gone to make him, prepares us for a rather more clear-cut emergence of the self as writer than we are finally offered. Second, this note does not just affect The Green Fool; it runs through all of his work. Writing about the poetry of

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, p. 208,
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, p. 253,
\textsuperscript{87} Peter Kavanagh: Sacred Keeper, op cit, p. 59.
the late 1940s John Nemo has pointed out the importance of the theme of failure and stated:

It is one of the ironies of Kavanagh's literary development that while the public, satiric voice was so strong and confident in its outcries against the philistines, the private, lyric voice was often subdued in its utterances about the state of Kavanagh's own poetic soul.

I would go further than this and say that Kavanagh is, perhaps more honestly than other writers, anoetic; this is to say that while he feels himself to be a writer he does not have a full comprehension of what that means either as a psychological state, a social function, or in terms of how it alters the relationship between him and the community. Kavanagh's voice is often a brave one within Irish culture and never more so than when he goes against the prevailing ideology of the peasant culture and, speaking from within his own experience, propounds a much bleaker view of that culture than other writers of the period (and I should admit that I have been guilty of underplaying the appreciation he shows of the strengths of the community). If I had to summarise the argument that Kavanagh puts forward in The Green Fool, once again leaving out of account the strengths he perceives, then I would say that there are two major features in his social landscape: the community, with its integrated roles such as the bard, in decline; and the extra-communal individuals, such as the journeymen, dying out. Neither of these features offers much hope. Decline, whether seen as vitiated continuity, or as possibility for change, operates on a timescale more suitable for generations than for individuals to appreciate. For individuals outside the community with no resources the


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prospect is even worse. Another aspect of Kavanagh's bravery is his refusal, as I have said seemingly prescient, to accept any of the available explanations for his growth as a writer, or, to be more exact, any of the available Irish explanations. Not for him a parallel development of the writer and the nation. Even if he had not by this time formulated the concept of parochialism, the detail of The Green Fool shows a clear preference for the parish over the nation. Unfortunately for Kavanagh there are no explanations or paradigms within the parish for the growth of the writer and he must therefore look to what he might have called the parish of art for an explanation of his individuality at least until such time as his experience of illness in the mid-1950s and his survival presented him with a ready-made 'rebirth'. Before that time, and, it must be admitted, afterwards as well, Kavanagh had to rely on scraps and flitters of other ready-made ideas about the position of the writer. It is therefore always noticeable that he will, when trying to explain himself as an individual, rely on cliched ideas which he would not countenance when discussing community or other matters which are not solely concerned with himself. At times like this he is inclined 'to communicate his creative intensity rather than detail his intellectual response...'.

His inclination to rely on outworn ideas about his own personality as an artist is perhaps best expressed in the essay 'Critics, Actors and Poets' where he denies the need for most criticism preferring instead to believe that good art is recognisable as such and that bad art should be treated destructively. He was not, however, unconscious of the shortcomings of his own writings -

it sometimes seems that he attacks his past work in an effort to forestall anyone else from doing so. More concrete than this, however, is the way he constantly returns to certain autobiographical elements in his work as if to experiment with the possibilities of his own individual experience. There are, of course, a number of poems which can be read in this way but I prefer to concentrate on three works in particular: Tarry Flynn, The Great Hunger, and By Night Unstarred.

The Great Hunger, his next major work after The Green Fool, appeared in 1942. Desmond Swan sees the work as 'marred by unevenness or lack of discipline [which] arises from the too-obstructive autobiographical element which frequently fails to mesh with the essential themes of the work'. But this is to see too much autobiography in the work (leaving aside the question as to why autobiographical elements are disliked by so many critics). What is common to the poem and the autobiography is the background. Paddy Maguire is not Patrick Kavanagh and to say that he is, is to underestimate Kavanagh's subtlety. Rather Maguire is an autobiographical experiment standing in relation to Kavanagh rather as Gabriel Conroy does to Joyce. Both writers are concerned with possible lives which they have not led but which they explore in order to see how and why they avoided the consequences of particular choices. It is this same relationship which also obtains in the other two works on which I wish to concentrate.

In The Great Hunger the background can be summed up in one word for it is in this poem that Kavanagh discovers one of his most potent images: clay:

Clay is the word and clay is the flesh
Where the potato-gatherers like mechanised scarecrows move²²

The subject of *The Great Hunger* is the life of Patrick Maguire, a small farmer, its small moments of joy and, overwhelmingly, its waste. The image of 'clay' latent in *The Green Fool*, is here brought to bear overtly. For Douglas Sealy and Alan Warner³³ 'clay' stands for entrapment and, indeed, in phrases such as 'the last soul passively like a bag of wet clay', 'clay-wattled moustache' or 'the clayey hours' there is a sense of suffocation, of everything being ground down. Clay is more than this, however; it is, the puns are unavoidable, the ground of all, indeed, the source of all. It is both word and flesh and the implication is that this is so beyond the place where the potato-gatherers move. In a passage of vicious irony, Kavanagh attacks those 'tourists' who see the peasant only in an idealised form, an attack which includes the line: 'Unless the clay is in the mouth the singer's singing is useless'.²⁴ At first sight this appears to be part of the town-dwellers' glib association of peasant life with the culture of the nation but the irony is turned on itself when one remembers Kavanagh's attack on Frank O'Connor as a man detached from his background:

> What makes his work deceptive is the fact that he is very nearly on the earth. He is - as it were - about an inch from the top of the grass. We have had a good many writers of this kind here...³⁵

Clay is the necessity; it is all things to all men. The tragedy of the poem is that clay is present only in its aspect as a substance which drags one

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²⁴ 'The Great Hunger', op cit, p. 100.
Maguire comes to consciousness of his position too late to be able to change anything. He is a man who needs to flee the influence of clay, to escape the fate of the peasant:

But the peasant in his little acres is tied
To a mother's womb by the wind-toughened navel-cord
Like a goat tethered to the stump of a tree -

Maguire is life's scapegoat, an individual who lacks the means to express his personality. Clay here is then the material circumstances of the peasant - his relationships, his individuality, his aspirations - are constrained within the malign influence of the clay.

In Kavanagh's next work, *Tarry Flynn*, this aspect of clay is again central as in the description of a congregation:

Skin was the colour of clay, and clay was in their hair and clothes. The little tillage fields went to Mass.

As is the case with Maguire clay suffuses all aspects of life. In the final image the human element is cancelled as the congregation revert to the state of the dust of the ground before God had breathed life into it to make man a living soul.

Another aspect of clay, however, is also present in this work. Clay, as the ground of all, is seen not just as malign but as offering the possibility of escape from the malign:

Some day he, too, might be able to grow wings and be able to fly away from this clay-stricken place. Ah, clay! It was out of clay that wings were made. He stared down at the dry little canyons in the parched earth and he loved the dry earth which could produce a miracle of wings.

*Tarry Flynn* began as a novel of social criticism based on a row between a parish priest and some of his parishioners but in its final form itforegrounds Tarry in whose figure Kavanagh is able to re-cover the ground that the last chapters of *The Green Fool* covered. Tarry is a young farmer with a widowed domineering mother (another to set beside Minnie Donovan and Mrs Casside) and a desire to be a poet:

He had written some verses at that time, too, but these poems did not jut out of his life to become noticeable or make him a stranger to the small farmer community of which he was a child.

Of this work Kavanagh was as proud as he had been critical of *The Green Fool*:

... *Tarry Flynn*, which I am humble enough to claim is not only the best but the only *authentic* account of life as it is lived in Ireland this century ... the principal people who enjoyed this novel were literary sophisticates, its uproarious comedy was too much for the uneducated reader.

Despite Kavanagh's remarks it is quite possible to take the novel as a more focussed reworking of the autobiography; Douglas Sealy has remarked on the resemblance between the works and on the difficulties of deciding which is fiction and which autobiography. Also in spite of Kavanagh's remarks

98. Tarry Flynn, op cit, p. 44.
100. Tarry Flynn, op cit, p. 11.
John Wilson Foster has written of *Tarry Flynn*:

A novel that dramatizes quite ruthlessly forces of bondage upon the land ... The documentary underpinning of the novel is substantial ... *Tarry Flynn* is a surgical portrayal of a society by an insider who has since gained the objectivity of an outsider.  

This comment is justified until one compares the novel to the autobiography and realises that not only is the novel different in concentrating on the figure of Tarry rather than on the community (Kavanagh's *A Portrait* as against *The Green Fool*'s *Dubliners*) but it is also lighter in tone even if it is not uproarious comedy. The relationship to the land, despite the general tenor of Foster's arguments, is here more a matter of one man and his farm than the collective attitudes to land of a whole community and so the 'documentary underpinning' is actually less evident than in the autobiography. At the heart of the work is a long lyrical passage about Tarry clearing a drain over several days, and these days are, in spite of the heat and the clags, 'some of the happiest days of his life'. His balanced relationship with the land is, however, gained at the expense of community for:

> There was a defect in him which those secluded fields developed: he was not in love with his neighbours ... Had he loved his neighbours he would have the eyes, ears and minds of all these, for love takes possession.

Tarry's existence is then not perfect: he has bought his relationship to the land through his division from the community. That community impinges

104. *Tarry Flynn*, op cit, pp. 83-91,
105. Ibid, p. 91,
on him more and more but despite his thoughts of leaving he lives up to his name:

That day passed and another day and something was wrong in Tarry's life, something was driving him - where, he did not know. Something was pulling him back, but he did not know what that was, and he was seeing it now when he lifted his eyes to the lonely hills.\textsuperscript{107}

Escape does not seem urgent; there are in Tarry's case equal reasons to go and to stay. His name, combining the 'loitering' of Tarry and the 'tramping' MacGill's Flynn, reflects this dual nature, although the anoetic mode of Kavanagh's autobiographical writings precludes its direct expression. As with the image of the library in \textit{The Green Fool}, an image repeated in \textit{Tarry Flynn}, so there is a balance in Tarry's life. His love of the land is an active principle which contrasts with the mere inertia which holds so many others, and with the terrible bond which holds Paddy Maguire. Indeed, love of the land seems to obviate any need for escape - as in the passage in which clay is transformed into wings: the active principles of love and understanding generate a feeling of liberation in place which renders escape unnecessary. For all Tarry's contentment, he does eventually leave although this, as I have already noted, happens through the agency of an uncle who appears with no other function and the ending is consequently contrived as Tarry tries to carry his own land away with him in memory and imagination. That he should leave is more an authorial imposition than an impulsion generated from the circumstances within the work; it is more indicative of Kavanagh's anoesis than Tarry's although Tarry does share that condition.

\textsuperscript{107} Tarry Flynn, \textit{op cit}, p. 164.
In *The Great Hunger* Maguire's tragedy is that he comes to consciousness too late to be able to help himself. The central figures of both *The Green Fool* and *Tarry Flynn* also achieve consciousness of their material conditions but they do so a good deal earlier than Maguire. The irony is that it is Maguire who needs to escape the bondage of clay and community rather than either Tarry or Kavanagh, in that the consciousness claimed for both is of such an order that they should be better equipped to deal with those bonds. The claim for both is that they can distance themselves while still in place. If, then, they have any reason to leave it is to begin another career and in each case we are to assume that that career will be a poetic one. Their subsequent success or failure is moot. What evidence there is suggests failure: Xavanagh's return to look 'into the heart of this life' and see 'that it was good' is too simple a resolution of his earlier complex attitudes to the community and the clay. Similarly, Tarry's attempt to carry away an imaginatively transformed memory of his land is sentimental in ignoring the solidity of his earlier relationship; no longer will he have '...work thrown in to ballast/The fantasy-soaring mind.' In each case the achieved consciousness of the central figure is a puzzle, a quality which its bearer does not know what to do with. It awakens each of them to their failures in the past, as cobbler or as farmer, and what is more to their present failure to come to terms with their consciousness, and thus raises the fear of failure in the future as well. To fail as a farmer-as-artist is bad enough but to fail as an artist would leave both Kavanagh and Tarry in the same position as Maguire.

In Kavanagh's canon there is only one work which is about success (if, that is, we exclude the late poems based as they are on the donné of re-birth which obviates to a large extent the continued need to question the original birth as an individual). *By Night Unstarred* has as its central figure Peter Devine who is in his own terms a complete success. The novel itself is not wholly satisfactory and presents numerous difficulties as the account of its genesis in *Sacred Keeper* shows:

A year or so later [i.e. in about 1950] I begged Patrick that at all costs he must write the story of his life in Dublin during the 1940s. He was hesitant but took me at my word just the same. He gave up in the middle of the work but he left sufficient behind that I was able to finish it in 1978 and publish it under the title *By Night Unstarred* ... He had given the name Michael to his chief character [i.e. the central figure of Part II, not Peter Devine] but I changed it to Patrick to make it more personal."

Later in the biography Peter Kavanagh quotes a letter from Patrick in which the latter is still talking about 'fixing up that novel'; this is in January 1964. Then in his introduction of the novel as published Peter Kavanagh states that it is the distillation of two novels. Despite these conflicting accounts it is obvious that there were originally two novels since the work as published falls into two distinct, but parallel, parts. Part II of the published work is of little concern; it can be read as a counterpart to Part I and provides an account of a poetic career in parallel with the business career of Part I, but it is both badly written and lacking in a grasp of the details of the part of society with which it deals. It is also tinged with both paranoia and envy, a mixture often to be

110, Peter Kavanagh: *Sacred Keeper*, op cit, p. 178.
found in Kavanagh's criticism and which makes both that criticism and this part of the novel unpleasantly self-pitying. Part I on the other hand is an extraordinary piece of work and an engagement with its attendant difficulties is more than worthwhile. In it we are taken back again to the border area of Armagh, Monaghan and Louth rather than the supposed Dublin upper-class society of Part II, and we follow the career of Peter Devine from his birth in 1867 to a point early in the 1930s.

From the beginning we are back on familiar thematic territory as Kavanagh once again wrestles with the problem of just how an individual is made:

It was a parish of small farms, not that either the location or the source of livelihood are of the highest importance, for life is the same everywhere. Yet the poverty of the place, the shape of the hills and the twist of the roads did give a certain individual colour to the thoughts of the people.\textsuperscript{113}

This clear statement of Kavanagh's belief that life is the same everywhere does not distract him from his method of approaching it through the parochial, a method so successful that its implied allegiance to parish undercuts the sense of universal truths and values. In the first chapter Kavanagh, almost in shorthand, places the other by now recognisable features of his work in such a way that the reader can see that Peter Devine is of a piece with Kavanagh and Tarry. Peter is unusual in being taken up into the written word and thus out of the 'oblivion of the unwritten word'.\textsuperscript{114} However, in the familiar paradox of the tension between the written and the oral this will make him not just an individual but also a representative:

\textsuperscript{113} By Night Unstarred, \textit{op cit}, p. 25,  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, p. 25.
So by the grace of God let him be revealed as a man, as a symbol of a new society, as a mirror for history.115

That he belongs to a new society is due to his individuality, his ability to see himself as separate from the community and to make use of that consciousness. This is the same possibility available to both Kavanagh and Tarry, although in all cases the enabling social conditions for this individuality are problematical for the communal peasant values of the society from which all three break appear to preclude the emergence of individuality as is evident in the case of Maguire.

In all cases the question of sexuality is brought into play as part of the equation between the circumstances and the individual. In each case however the outcome of the equation is different. The Green Fool brings together the themes of poetry, sex, and money but there is no overarching explanatory framework for them. Each is a source of puzzlement; the origins of Kavanagh's poetry and his failure to explain the source of his family's money are matched by the lack of an adolescence in the autobiography. In The Green Fool Kavanagh comes to see his choice as being between sexuality and creativity; one of Tarry's few practical reasons for leaving the parish is that he has been accused of impregnating a girl although, despite the vagueness of the evidence, we suspect that he must be innocent; in The Great Hunger a large part of Maguire's tragedy is that he is trapped in sterility. Devine appears to be like the others in that his first love is not reciprocated. However, this causes him to lose his original love for the land. Distanced by this event he discerns that there are three elements

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of life upon which he can work: politics, land and religion. As well as being Corkery's triad of Irish elements, these are the elements upon which and within which Kavanagh works; Tarry and Maguire work simply within them. In each case the autobiographical experiment is provided with the same basic framework, but in Devine's case sexuality plays a different part. He is eventually forced to leave the parish because he is actually responsible for a pregnancy and insofar as we have evidence of his sexual potency we are aware that he is different from Kavanagh's other personae. Returning some years later he is said to have a 'ruthless edge on his resolution' as if this had been acquired, could only have been acquired, outside the parish. However, his ability to break sexual taboos before he leaves suggests that this resolution is a quality that he possessed before he left. His initial sexual 'success' is then the sign that he will follow a different path from other personae, although his originary point is the same as those others. Insofar as his resolution arises from grounds shared with others Kavanagh has failed, again, to answer his question about the source of individual identity. However, what he has done is to set an autobiographical experiment on the path of a particular kind of success rather than the variety of failures evident in the other works.

Although Devine is very different from Kavanagh's other autobiographical experiments there is still the fact that his identity has been produced from the same materials which produced the other personae in Kavanagh's work and it is for this reason that Kavanagh always retains an underlying sympathy for Devine throughout the work.

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As soon as Devine returns to the parish he begins to be successful. Indeed, his rise is seemingly irresistible as he marries into a farm and schemes and cheats his way into money. He is the very type of O'Connor's 'smart boys' who took over the real, economic Ireland while the idealists were fighting over the imagined, spiritual Ireland. The descriptions, mostly in Part II, of the extent of his and his family's influence on the economic, cultural, political and even religious aspects of Irish life calls to mind Yeats' enemy William Martin Murphy and his family who had exerted just such a range of influences from the 1900s. Devine's rise then is the rise of the indigenous Irish capitalist. In Part I Kavanagh lays bare the methods and workings of Devine as a nascent capitalist. ¹¹⁷ Devine begins with a complete disregard for the pieties of the old traditions:

No use talking to him about the weird-rooted memories that were in those fields. No use telling him that the great Clan McMahon live here, or that the last head of the family with his fifteen sons rode on sixteen snow-white horses into the town of Louth on one occasion. Were he to mention that story Peter would surely inquire if they were going to sell the horses at the fair. ¹¹⁸

We read this and remember that Kavanagh maintained an ambivalent attitude towards these same pieties, believing in them and yet obviously distressed that their slow inevitable decline was an obstruction to the rise of a new Ireland. Devine's attitude to work is also of interest. His own work is shown to be non-productive; he acts as a supervisor and planner of others' work.

¹¹⁷, See Liam Kennedy: 'Farmers, Traders, and Agricultural Politics in pre-Independence Ireland', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jnr (eds): Irish Peasants, op cit, pp. 339-373, for an account of the rise of the trader in political and economic importance. Devine's membership of the Land League (By Night Unstarred, op cit, p. 27,) is a part of his rise as he works through the land to reach Dublin and establish an urban industrial base. A comparable figure to Devine is to be found in Myles Shannon in Brinsley MacNamara: The Valley of the Squinting Windows (1918) Dublin, Anvil Books, 1964. See also my 'The Political Unconscious in the Autobiographical Writings of Patrick Kavanagh', in Michael Allen and Angela Wilcox (eds): Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, pp. 103-110, in which I first rehearsed some of the ideas in this chapter.

¹¹⁸, By Night Unstarred, op cit, p. 70.
labour. The work has to be done as efficiently as possible so he is the first in the parish to use a steam-thresher and most of all he deliberately alienates the labour of those who work for him:

Explaining the reasons for things, according to Peter not only wasted time but tended to confuse the minds of the workers. The old labourer was unhappy: there was no satisfaction in doing a thing when you didn't know the reason for doing it. At the end of the day the two men were, in their own words, 'not able to give their souls to God or man.' And the strange thing was that they hadn’t noticed themselves doing more work than usual ... 119

When Kavanagh writes at the very beginning of his career:

I turn the lea-green down
Gaily now,
And paint the meadow brown
With my plough. 120

he equates the work of the artist with that of the ploughman and when he writes of the farmer as artist he recognises the unalienated quality of the work of the artist and farmer alike, but the problem is that he is the artist as failed farmer and, as we shall see, this disables much of his work, particularly because he is apt to admire the quality of those such as Devine who can forge their own lives successfully. This does not stop him from continuing his analysis of Devine in By Night Unstarred, although it does account for the sympathy extended to Devine in that work. That sympathy can also be accounted for by certain qualities possessed by Devine which are in some cases admirable in themselves or which in other cases parallel the qualities of the poet. Devine is, for example, a man who looks ahead, who is not bound by the inertia which afflicts so many of his

119, By Night Unstarred, op cit, p. 72.
neighbours. In looking ahead he has a real respect for education even though he also sees it as something else which can be bent to his own purpose:

Peter mentioned that it would be a good idea to send Mary [his daughter] to the convent ... and went on to explain.
'Beyond these beggarly fields was another world that laughed at our ha'pence. Somewhere over there ...'\(^1\)\(^2\)

The second ellipsis is Kavanagh's and gives the impression that Devine, unlike the peasants around him, has a vision of the fields akin to that of the poet. That Devine is referring to upper-class society does not completely invalidate his vision for this exists in the same relation to him as Parnassus exists to the poet; each man has his highest destination.

Underlying the sympathy displayed towards Devine is the admiration for his resolution's hard edge. This is a man who understands his own feelings and position and who is prepared to use that understanding. By doing so he is able to mystify his neighbours:

When people get rich they do not change so much as create change in others. Those very people who had known Peter as a boy changed their attitude. They kow-towed to him, and seeing him through the profundities of money saw profundities of mind and moral qualities underneath. If one of them were asked what were Peter's roots they would feel tongue-tied. They could hardly recall.\(^1\)\(^2\)

To some extent, Kavanagh although capable of analysing Devine is also guilty of kow-towing to him. This exemplifies Devine's control over his relationship with the community; his ruthlessness in this regard is displayed by his apparent murder of the local postman when the latter is

\(^1\)\(^2\), *By Night Unstarred*, op cit, p. 104.
\(^1\)\(^2\), *By Night Unstarred*, op cit, p. 115.
is about to divulge some of his secret past in England. As a final part of
the process of mystification the family name is changed from Devine to De
Vine.123 This occurs at the point when the second generation of the family
is about to take over the further development of the family fortune in the
city, where through both mystification and displacement they are completely
cut off from their roots in the parish.

It is this family with which 'Patrick' has dealings in Part II; in that
Part the family is seen as the poet's arch enemy. It is however only
confirmed in this role when it fails to aid the poet to advance his
material interests by helping him to a job in a Plastics Company. As a
consequence of Devine's success the family in Part II are influential in
politics, in religion and in the realm of ersatz culture which has
displaced real culture. Despite the malignity of their influence it is only
when they use their power to thwart the poet, as he sees it, that he
actually turns against them. The second part of the work is therefore a
reworking of 'Pegasus', a poem in which the poet offers his soul for sale
to 'Church and State and meanest trade' and discovers its true qualities
only when, refused in all markets, he decides that there will be:

'No more haggling with the world ...'

As I said these words he grew
Wings upon his back. Now I may ride him
Every land my imagination knew.124

In the light of this, to say the least, ambivalent relationship between the
poet and the capitalist nexus it would be well to give some consideration

123. By Night Unstarred, op cit, p. 125.
124. 'Pegasus', The Complete Poems, op cit, pp. 149-151.
to the ideas that Kavanagh had about the artist. His questioning of the source and possibility of individuality is specifically located within his own identity as a poet.

In the introduction to the *Collected Poems* he refers to his 'messianic compulsion',¹²⁸ that pre-Civil War concept that the artist can at best redeem or at worst modify the world. Kavanagh never had the certainty (about himself rather than about art) to really hold to this idea. As we have seen the community depicted in *The Green Fool* and subsequent works while not static, changes over such a timescale that the ability of any individual to alter it is doubtful. Kavanagh's depiction of that community relies on the fact that in refusing the easy and standard explanations for his own source as an individual he refuses to acknowledge the kinds of changes that were really happening in the society of the period. Devine's rapid rise is not linked back to the original community for this same reason. The closest that Kavanagh therefore comes to an explanation of himself is not so much an explanation as a succinct statement of the problem which he repeats in the Introduction to the *Collected Poems*:

A man (I am thinking of myself) innocently dabbles in words and rhymes and finds that it is his life.¹²⁶

Kavanagh seems too concerned with rebutting certain preconceptions about the community to be able to go further and consider relationships. This is one reason for his failure to comprehend himself. However, he is a poet and recognises that he has certain responsibilities because of that role.

Obviously, the poet has responsibility to culture, which is largely discharged by being a poet so long as the real poet displaces the bad poet. For this to happen there must be an audience which can recognise the real poet. The primary role of the real poet is to be a dispenser of 'universal' truths and although this is one of those ready-made ideas which Kavanagh often picked up he does give some thought as to how this dispensing might work. The result of this thought is that the poet, instead of being a Parnassian figure, should fulfil a secondary role as an educator. This explains Kavanagh's apparently paradoxical animus to criticism; for someone who despised criticism he engaged in wide-ranging criticism from popular journalism to film criticism to newspaper diaries. This activity is best understood not as Kavanagh's 'critical' writing but rather as the fulfilment of the secondary role of educator of the audience. The central tenet of his thought on this subject is the notion of 'parochialism'. As F.S.L. Lyons has stated, this concept was developed in reaction to 'that kind of provincialism' which was 'a turning towards the metropolitan ... and an abasement before the dominant culture which was still, as always, English'. What Lyons fails to take account of is that by Kavanagh's time the dominant culture was actually that of the Irish Literary Revival. Kavanagh called the revival an English-bred lie because he saw it as provincial and since it was the dominant culture this was as much as to say that provincialism was locked into Irish culture. The reasons for the revival's provincialism were that in its nationalism it attempted an exclusivism which forced it into the false position of being always in opposition to England; by constantly adopting an anti-English

127. See 'Critics, Actors, and Poets', Collected Pruse, op cit, pp, 241-243,
128. F.S.L. Lyons; Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939, op cit, p, 172.
stance the revival constantly ceded the dominance of England. Kavanagh's concept of parochialism was thus born in opposition to this perception of the revival:

The parochial mentality ... is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of [the] parish. All great civilizations are based on parochialism ... In Ireland we are inclined to be provincial not parochial, for it requires a great deal of courage to be parochial. When we do attempt having the courage of our parish we are inclined to go false and play up to the larger parish on the other side of the Irish Sea.¹²⁹

We must remember that Kavanagh was trying to solve a problem as he perceived it but his arguments, despite his protestations, are of a piece with those of others on the same issues. O'Connor for example spoke of primary cultures which sound remarkably like those parochial civilisations of which Kavanagh writes. Similarly, Yeats argued strenuously that the puritanical reactions of the Irish to so much Irish writing were not inherent in Irish society but were rather bred by the need to be different from England. In other words Kavanagh is rephrasing the recurrent arguments within Irish culture about how Irish culture might be different from other cultures without becoming exclusivist, chauvinistic and introspective and about how it could lay itself open to external influences without being swamped by cultures which co-existed with politically powerful forces. By drawing an analogy between these cultural problems and those of the individual we can see again the problematic nature of the individual identity. It is in this context that Kavanagh insists on the poet's responsibility to be an educator particularly in regard to the need for a parochial courage (and in this echoes Yeats's quest for an audience) even

though he needs to educate himself about his own source. Part of his educational method (and part of his responsibility as a poet) was to show the public those writers who failed to be parochial. I have already mentioned his attack on O'Conor, which along with that on F.R. Higgins (mentioned as a friend in The Green Fool alongside O'Connor) is the most famous of his attacks. Very few were spared, however, and one is inclined to see such widespread vitriol as symptomatic of Kavanagh's own uncertainties both about the development of culture and the growth of the individual rather than as a measure of the state of Irish writing. It is noteworthy that his attacks are almost exclusively directed at Irish writers, his immediate competitors. In this I am inclined to see a harking back to the idea of the bard. Even if in Kavanagh's time the role has lost all its trappings and become a debased position it still bespeaks a place for culture in society, a simple and necessary recognition by others of the poet and his value. The problem with Kavanagh's ideas about the cultural role of the poet is that he wavers between placing the poet in the parish of Ireland and in a larger parish of art. Thus his claims for the importance of the poet are derived from his idea of this larger parish of art but his motivation is derived from Ireland in a way that he will not acknowledge. This is evident when we consider his ideas about the effects of culture.

Bounded by his own original community and uncertainties about himself Kavanagh never had any systematic scheme; as he says in 'Mermaid Tavern' at a time when he was reconciled to this:

No System, no Plan,
Yeatsian invention
No all-over
Organisational prover.
Let words laugh
And people be stimulated by our stuff. 131

How, we must ask ourselves, will this stimulation manifest itself? After all we have been told that we are inferior to the poet and have been asked to make sacrifices so that he can exist, so it must be of some importance:

Society as a rule hates the great poet because he eats up all the emotion; he is the cuckoo bird in the nest. But society in behaving like this is immoral. The bees make a queen at the expense of thousands of sterile workers. 132

Here is an image of the poet with a ruthless edge to his resolution; the poet as the nascent capitalist of the emotions who is prepared to assert his 'right' to the emotional wealth of society. This makes the issue of the stimulation which the poet can provide all the more important. Kavanagh's answers to the question of what this stimulation might be are related to Ireland as he saw it. The poet strikes a moral note 133 because it is he who possesses 'the spirit of adventure and courage' 134 which is evident in his iconoclasm 135 and his expression of the comic spirit which is 'abundance of life.' 136 Poetry then:

... does something to people. I am not sure that that something is always good, for it is a disruptive, anarchic mentality which

132, Quoted in Sacred Keeper, op cit, p. 222.
133, Collected Pruse, p. 234.
135, Ibid, p. 236
he awakens - and if we pursue him far enough we will be inclined to agree with Plato that the poet is a menace.197

Again we have a comparison with Devine whose main achievement is not the alteration of himself but his ability to alter other people's perceptions. In this quotation Kavanagh is generalising beyond the bounds of Ireland but to understand the reasons why the poet's alterations should be in the form of awakening a disruptive, anarchic mentality we must relate the issue back to the specifics of Ireland. We have noted that Kavanagh sees the community as subject to change only within the long term and that the form of that change is decline. This gives rise to 'a cynical disbelief in life'138 on the part of the Irish which it is the task of the poet to counter. This is, as far as it goes, an important idea but Kavanagh's anosesis results in a failure on his part to link the parts of his society. He can see that those in control 'wish to establish the lie that the futile world they inhabit is the best of all possible worlds',139 and he can see that the Devines of this world are quite capable of effecting systematic change for their own benefit. What he cannot see is that this possibility cannot be restricted to the capitalist and the poet, but must also be enabled in other people. He may not see this because his understanding of how he has come to be what he is is at fault but this is not to say that it is a natural and universal state of affairs, which is what Kavanagh claims for it. Joyce, a writer who did possess a messianic compulsion, writes about a God-like indifference, an ultimate assurance in oneself towards which Kavanagh too aspired. He

137. Collected Pruse, op cit, p. 236.
138. Ibid, p. 150.
cites Joyce as one of the true Irish parishioners\footnote{Collected Pruse, op cit, p. 283.} and he too comes to espouse indifference:

The poet's secret, which is not a secret but a form of high courage, is that he, in a strange way, doesn't care. The poet is not concerned with the effect he is making; he forgets himself.\footnote{Ibid, p. 28.}

This idea of indifference comes into Kavanagh's writing after his near fatal illness in 1955. Afterwards he concerns himself in his poetry with the effect that this 're-birth', as he saw it, had on him. It is a poetry of resignation rather than of revolution. Writing about Kavanagh, Terence Brown contrasts him with the majority of Northern Irish poets by saying that his is a 'poetry of an assured vision' rather than a 'poetry of problem'\footnote{Terence Brown; Northern Voices; Poets from Ulster, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1975, p. 215.} and that Kavanagh has 'established his own parish of the imagination'.\footnote{Ibid, p. 219} This seems to me to accept the concept of indifference on Kavanagh's own terms. Kavanagh's idea of indifference was not a result only of his illness; it had to do with the need to be uninvolved which Kavanagh had always had as part of his dialectic of passion and dispassion. The illness of the 1950s came at just the right time to allow the concept of indifference a false prominence but this does not detract from its formal influence on his poetry. The playing of a true note on a slack string which he desired is akin to MacNiece's sense that the poet has few absolutes to rely on and must do what he can with the available material; MacNiece's autobiography has 'the strings are false' as its title - a singer's excuse for stopping - but MacNiece alters its meaning to describe his own
historical condition. MacNiece's sense of the dangers of resignation meant he wished to move beyond this condition. In the case of Kavanagh the sense of re-birth allowed him to resign himself fully; he no longer needed to question his own source, had no longer to wrestle with his anoetic condition. The world could now be seen in the most despairing terms and yet still be accepted, since it seemed to have been given to him anew. It is Kavanagh's tragedy that his achieved consciousness was never able fully to comprehend its own making and so had eventually to accept the stock fiction of re-birth rather than to continue with the struggle of comprehension. For all of his belief in the poet as iconoclast Kavanagh from *The Green Fool* onwards is never able to see his own illusions, never able to sort out the complexities of class and nation which underscore his finest work, never able, therefore, to see the real power of his own work and the source of that power in the need not just to rebut but to refute. For that reason he finally accepts the 'miracle of wings' rather than continuing to question the source of those wings.
Frank O'Connor's autobiographies, like Sean O'Faolain's, were written and published in the 'New Ireland' of the period of the Whitaker Report. While Kavanagh had responded to events with a degree of immediacy unusual in autobiography, and while O'Faolain's autobiography would be as much a response to the 'New Ireland' as to the past, O'Connor, from the vantage point of the late 1950s and early 1960s looked back over the first four decades of the century to consider the achievement of independence and its consequences. For O'Connor independence entailed the realisation that one owed a debt to the past. This was so both for himself and for the nation. Autobiography is one way of paying that debt, of recognising that one's character is the product of one's past life. The significance, in national terms, of O'Connor's autobiographies is that they recall his own past life in parallel to the life of the nation. They are a backward and analytical look at history tempered by affection and irony. The story that they have to tell is just how O'Connor came to be able to look at his own life and the life of the nation in this way.

O'Connor wrote two volumes of autobiography, _An Only Child_ and _My Father's Son_, the former covering the period 1903 to the Civil War and the latter the period from the Civil War to the early 1940s. There is between these works a break caused not just by the move from childhood and adolescence in the one to adulthood in the other. The break is also one of tone. Like the two volumes of Forrest Reid's autobiography there is a movement from the
private to the public. Although a large part of *An Only Child* is concerned with public events its tone is much more introspective than that of *My Father's Son* which is altogether more anecdotal, more the record of the public life of the rising man of letters. The second volume, I shall argue later, is of interest because it provides a record of a period of consolidation, but the first volume is the more important for our purposes here. Another reason for concentrating on *An Only Child* is that *My Father's Son* was not completed by the time of O'Connor's death in 1966 and the available version was therefore the one compiled from existing drafts by Maurice Sheehy. For these reasons I intend to concentrate on the first volume in this study and most of my references to the second volume will be for the purpose of confirming particular points.

In his critical survey of Irish writing, *The Backward Look*, O'Connor provides an almost Yeatsian formulation for the writing of autobiography:

> To primitive man the greatest possible nightmare is the loss of his identity ... If he does not know who his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were or the names and events associated with the place where they lived he is nobody.¹

The sense that one can locate a personality by reference to relationships like these is also a recurrent theme of the short stories, for example in 'Achilles Heel':

> ... the Bishop was convinced that you could explain every thing about a man just by knowing who his parents were... ²

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Yeats' appeal to his family history in 'Reveries over Childhood and Youth' has some of the force of the primitive desire to which O'Connor refers, although it is of a different order. It is very often an appeal made to a public, written record of the contributions made by the Yeats family to the 'official' history of the nation. However, O'Connor and his fictional Bishop are referring to the oral record which exists in small communities where people know the 'seed, breed and generation' of every member of the community. Yeats, it is true, knows about this second kind of family history and he makes an appeal to this kind of 'peasant' genealogy because his quest for Unity of Culture cannot be founded on an acknowledgement that there are different kinds of history. However, Yeats' appeal to this kind of family history is a choice made by him on the grounds that an alternative exists. For one of O'Connor's class there is no alternative; the only kind of history available is the oral, neighbourly, and 'unofficial' one. His father is fully immersed in a social structure in which family ties are everything:

Father had been brought up in the vicinity of Cork Barracks, a mile or two away at the other side of town, and his family still lived there. For this neighbourhood he seemed to pine as an Irish immigrant in Brooklyn is supposed to pine for Galway Bay, though, unlike the Brooklyn immigrant, Father meant it. 

Although O'Connor is here making mock of his father he does so recognising and understanding that the desire for a locale has little to do with any inherent attractions of the place and has everything to do with the need to be where one's story is known; autobiography, after all, is a more sophisticated way of ensuring that one's story is known to others. Unlike

Yeats' desire for particular places, however, the father's attachment to place is much more claustrophobic in that there are no other options available to O'Connor's family. *An Only Child* is, in part, the story of how O'Connor finds that he has no options. The work is thus concerned with the question of provincialism on a personal level. Although O'Connor had to confront this issue on a more personal and immediate plane than was ever the case for Yeats he still manages, through the theme of inheritance which he also shares with Yeats, to raise the question from this personal level to the national level. In *My Father's Son* O'Connor acknowledges the influence of his father's temperament on himself; the longing for place is a part of that influence. For this reason, and against the advice of friends, O'Connor takes the first available opportunity to return to Cork. This decision, however, does not mean that the issue of inheritance is a simple one.

In *Vive Moi!*, Sean O'Faolain writes of his love of Ireland but his is not that Allinghamesque love which Yeats regrets having lost, it is rather a love which is generated by different places as O'Faolain learns their several histories. For O'Connor too the Allingham-derived Yeatsian ideal is no longer achievable; it is no longer possible to have an instinctive love of a particular locality. Love of country must needs be achieved rather than accepted. The inheritance from his father of a desire to be in a particular place offers a possible approach to the Allinghamesque but O'Connor's view of the ancestral nature of his identity is much more ambiguous than that of his primitive man with the result that the quotation

from *The Backward Look* must be seen as only one pole of the method of establishing identity in the autobiographies. Although O'Connor acknowledges the influence of his father, his father is not the dominant influence in the autobiographies. Indeed, the influence of the father is regretted by O'Connor. For O'Connor the central figure is his mother, whom he admits he worships. He is clear about his perception of the two distinct strands of his heredity:

But the move to Barrackton [his father's place] brought to a head my sense of the conflict between the two families whose heredity I shared. The more I saw of my grandparents, the less I liked them. Children, who see only one side of any question and because of their powerlessness see this with hysterical clarity, are abominably cruel. And an only child is worse. There was no way in which I could have avoided seeing the contrast between my mother on the one hand, and the women of my father's family on the other, and it meant nothing to me that one was old, another ill, another deaf and dumb.⁵

Here, as later, the sense of conflict brings about a particular development in O'Connor, in this case the choice of the mother over the father. The final clauses of this paragraph are the mature O'Connor's concession to the women of his father's family, a concession made partly from guilt, partly from a desire not to reject this part of his background and yet with the sense that its principal influence on him lies in his initial rejection of it. The first chapter of *An Only Child* is structured around the process of rejection of the father and his family in favour of the mother. The chapter thus moves from environment and its significance to the father and his family with references to the power of heredity and from there to a full description of the mother and her background. This description of the mother however carefully states that her essential 'gaiety' owes nothing to her background:

Whenever I read about juvenile delinquents, I find myself thinking of Mother, because she was whatever the opposite of a juvenile delinquent is, and this was not due to her upbringing in a Catholic orphanage, since whatever it was in her that was the opposite of a juvenile delinquent was too strong to have been due to the effect of any environment, and, indeed, resisted a number of environments to which no reasonable person would subject a child; the gutter where life had thrown her was deep and dirty.

It is a part of the strategy of the autobiography to show the mother as a representative not just of a kind of isolation but also of a self-created identity which stands in direct contrast to the father and the 'primitive man' with their reliance on inheritance and environment. O'Connor's initial description of his mother follows on from the description of his father and his family, and although she is described as having been thrown in the gutter it is already clear that the squalor which O'Connor has described is to be associated with the paternal side of the family. The father has been characterised as a clumsy and melancholic eccentric when sober and a brute when drunk and his family is depicted as slovenly and lazy. What is more the account of the paternal side is not accorded a continuous narrative but is told in a series of disconnected anecdotes which conflict with the rootedness and continuity of the paternal side of the family. This discontinuous narrative, another sign of the impoverishment of the paternal, is in contrast with the smooth chronological narration of the mother's story, despite the fact that as a child O'Connor has only 'fragments' and 'hints' to go on, and informs the reader that he had eventually to persuade his mother to write out as much of her story as she

6. An Only Child, p. 38. An Only Child can be read as an answer to certain points in Yeats' Autobiographies; here O'Connor is rebutting Yeats' idea that a 'baptism of the gutter' will necessarily be a corrupting experience. See W.B. Yeats; Autobiographies, op cit, p. 157, and for Yeats' own answer, p. 275 where the phrase carries echoes of Wolfe Tone's 'men of no property'.
could. The consequence of this is that we are led to believe that his mother's 'voice' finds its way into the autobiography of her son in a much more unmediated way than that of the father. The mother's story is one of orphanhood, displacement and discontinuity, but its representation gives it a coherence and continuity at odds with those facts.

O'Connor's autobiography thus far presents two kinds of inheritance; from the father a continuous but impoverished, and as we shall see somewhat tainted, sense of the self; and from the mother a kind of orphanhood which purports to have a self-created integrity. This second kind of inheritance is to be seen in the way that the traumas of the mother's life as an orphan become intermingled with the horrors which mother and son suffer at the hands of the father when he is drunk. Furthermore, this inherited orphanhood serves as a reinforcement of the isolation, evident from the title onwards, which is a major theme of the first volume and which it is one of the functions of the second volume to modify. Once recognised this theme helps us to look beyond the anecdotal facade of the autobiographies, a facade which has led one critic to remark of them that they 'are written in that sort of New Yorker style which makes even the truth a lie'. While there is a certain justice in this comment, O'Connor evinces a real concern with the way in which past and present interact on both the personal and the national levels and with the political effects of those interactions. These concerns are, if anything, reinforced by those 'blanks' which Costello sees in the autobiographies as a result of the style.

O'Connor's style is based on a use of language which is neither the native dialect of a Kavanagh, nor the alienated analytical style of an O'Faolain. O'Connor's language deliberately turns the truth into a lie. As Deane comments, the impression that we carry away from reading O'Connor is of a lightness which conflicts with the disquieting emphasis on 'isolation and alienation (the stories) contemplate.' Terence Brown is therefore accurate when he describes the autobiographies as a record of O'Connor's 'psychological survival ... of a devastatingly disturbed home ... afflicted by the twin evils of alcoholism and poverty'. However, when Brown goes on to say that they make for 'harrowing, compulsive reading' he overlooks the matters of tone and style. The tone is compounded of an, often affectionate, irony and, to use a dangerous word, charm. Charm in O'Connor must not be understood as 'quaintness' but as almost a form of magic: style overlays the maternal 'gaiety' on the paternal 'brooding, melancholy, and violence'. The distance between these aspects of O'Connor's writing is the location of the 'blanks' Costello finds there, but this distance also signals an aversion from too much reality. This is not escapism: reality leaves its trace in the text but it is subject to 'some childish magic, some reconstruction of reality to make it less intolerable'. On this basis we can see that the fragmentary nature of the paternal narrative and the continuity of the maternal narrative are both ameliorations. In the one case to 'blank' out intolerable details, in the other to fill intolerable gaps.

By his narrative appropriation of the orphaned state of the mother, O'Connor expresses the paradoxical nature of inheritance: it is possible for an inheritance to be both a modified continuation of the past, as is the case with the father, and also to be a sense of discontinuity which necessitates the kinds of imaginative improvisation that O'Connor, his mother, and the nation embark on in their different ways. In this light it is possible to read the father and the mother as O'Connor's symbolic representations of the opposed contemporary viewpoints about Irish culture. On the one hand there was the myth of continuous culture which was based on the cultural riches that had been made available through the work of scholars and antiquarians during the nineteenth century. From this perspective Ireland had a full culture which was still the property of a wholly Irish people. As against this there was the idea that Ireland during the nineteenth century had finally been dispossessed of a living culture. In this view the Ireland of the start of the century had, at best, the potential for cultural fluidity, at worst it was a cultural vacuum. O'Connor appeared to take the latter view when he argued that 'cultural identity', the aim of any civilised nation, 'can be achieved only by the total acceptance of a common past ... [but] no nation in the world is so divorced from its own past as Ireland'. O'Connor's handling of this theme is more complex than my necessarily schematic outline may suggest for he allows for the interplay of these symbolic categories. To clarify this point we have only to examine what the two characters have to offer in terms of this cultural symbolism and O'Connor's reaction.

Chapter 4

The father as representative of the continuous culture is accepted slowly and grudgingly by O'Connor because all that he has to offer in the first instance is squalor and brutishness which is, in itself, so impoverished that it is hardly preferable to the disjuncture offered by the mother. It seems to me that what is happening in the interplay between these two offers of an inheritance is that the disjuncture offered by the mother is the motivating force behind the eventual awareness that one must look beyond the parlous state of the continuum and no matter what one finds there one must eventually become one's 'father's son' leaving behind isolation just as the mother has done. What complicates this symbolic reading is that it must take into account the whole range of contemporary Irish experience. Thus the father may also be seen as a representative of Britain due to his service in the British army, and, as we shall see, of rule and order which will become important when we consider O'Connor's changing attitude to language. These readings of the father make it possible for us to see the mother as a figure of Ireland, in itself a conventional enough reading. However, it would be better to regard the mother as both this traditional figure and as a displacement of the traditional figure, as in Sean O'Casey's work, in favour of a more realistic representation of the social and economic plight of Irish women. Furthermore, the young O'Donovan,\textsuperscript{13} again as if in answer to Yeats,\textsuperscript{14} is captivated by British stories so we are not being asked to see his early preference for the mother as a precocious rejection of Britain and its influence in Ireland. None of these readings can be totally discounted and

\textsuperscript{13} Frank O'Connor is of course a pseudonym made up from his own and his mother's names so as to avoid the sort of trouble in which Lennox Robinson found himself (My Father's Son, p. 33). These names provide a useful device to distinguish the subject of the autobiography from the autobiographer when necessary.

\textsuperscript{14} W.B. Yeats; Autobiographies, op cit, p. 22.
none of them can be allowed to take precedence over the others. Either of these tactics, if adopted, would lose the richness of the symbolism of the theme of inheritance. No single reading is strong enough to displace the fact that the parents are a synthesis, even though for much of the work O'Connor resists this. While each offers an apparently separate inheritance to O'Donovan, the necessary conclusion is that he must eventually accept both inheritances. The young O'Donovan's early attempts to acknowledge only the mother can therefore be seen as a part of his early immersion in a world of imagination, a world which he will later severely criticise, but that later criticism will not apply to the mother because she already lives in a real world, a world where it is necessary to compromise to survive. Her compromise has been to leave behind isolation by marrying the father, thus re-entering a world of continuity. The nature and extent of O'Connor's eventual compromise provides the subject matter for the rest of the autobiographies.

The end of *My Father's Son* might be taken to mean that for a writer no compromise is possible:

> Before Yeats died he told me that the time had come to decide whether I wanted to be a good public official, and I had resigned my job as librarian. Now I saw that the man of action was still on top: with nothing like Yeats' talent I had been playing Yeats' game. At once I resigned from every organization I belonged to and sat down, at last, to write.  

However, to read this passage in this way would be to pay no heed to the 'externals of fact' which are simply that by this time O'Connor was an established writer. This ending does tell us about the effect of Yeats on

15. Frank O'Connor: *My Father's Son*, p. 188.
writers of O'Connor's generation and that generation's sense that they could not be, as Yeats was, both writers and public men. Any reading of the ending of this volume must take into account the truth expressed in its title and borne out in the work, that the writer must acknowledge his implication in the pre-existing and, if not immutable, then enduring social order. We must therefore appreciate that the question of compromise has been settled a long time before in its essentials and it is to the processes leading to the settlement of this question that I shall now turn.

The first section of An Only Child, 'Child I Know You're Going to Miss Me' provides, in the father, an example of the person who is fully immersed in his community while the mother serves as an example of the person who is set apart from the community. The second section of the work moves from the immediate family circle to the neighbours. They are made to stand for the wider community but it is, significantly, the mother who provides a point of contact with that community because 'she was the sort of woman who is always called in when there is trouble in a house...'. It is, in effect, the very qualities which set her apart from the community which also make her necessary to the community. As a device, therefore, the presence of the mother is an effective way for O'Connor to handle that dual time-scheme which is a feature of all autobiography. As we witness O'Donovan coming to an awareness which sets him apart from his people we are also able to see how the already isolated mother achieves a measure of integration which provides a model of how O'Connor might overcome the isolation which O'Donovan is beginning to feel. It is thus possible for O'Connor to voice

affection for the community in which he lived as a boy through the medium of the mother while yet keeping the development of O'Donovan uncluttered, moving along a single line with as little interference from the mature self as is possible, although often subject to the ironical judgements of the mature self.

The next stage of the development after the influence of environment, heredity, and the community is education. Education serves as the first part of an awakening, it begins the process of the separation of the self from those three previously overwhelming influences. It is at this stage of the work that O'Donovan's own character begins to emerge. This is not to deny the reality of the boy's earlier experiences but rather to say that they are often a function of the mother's reactions since it is from her that the boy, bewildered in the adult world, takes his lead. The section on education, 'Go Where Glory Waits Thee', is the first instance we have of the boy embodying the previously described influences by making decisions and choices in a world composed of his own peers. Not that he understands this world any better than the adult world since as a result of the clash of influences he has already become somewhat isolated and the criteria by which he lives are not those of the other groups of boys:

The shop-fronts and gas-lamps [which is where the children gather] were quite as exclusive as city clubs. The boys from our neighbourhood gathered outside Miss Murphy's shop ... while the respectable boys ... the children of policemen, minor officials, and small shopkeepers — gathered outside Miss Long's ... I lived in a sort of social vacuum between the two, for though custom summoned me to Miss Murphy's with boys of my own class who sometimes went without boots and had no ambition to be educated, my instinct summoned me to Miss Long's and the boys who wore boots and got educated whether they liked it or not ... nothing would persuade me but that I belonged to a class to which boots and education came natural. I was always very sympathetic with children in the storybooks I read who had been kidnapped by
tramps and gypsies, and for a lot of the time I was inclined to think that something like that must have happened to myself. ¹⁷

Of course as a result O'Donovan is not accepted by either group and is thus isolated. However, this is not the isolation of a Synge, O'Donovan is no 'watcher from the shadows',¹⁸ nor does he, like Stephen Dedalus, affect a defensive aloofness. O'Donovan's experience in this instance is analogous to his experience with his mother. Just as the mother's voice appears in the autobiography and her experience is thus appropriated, so O'Donovan's isolation is not due to an exclusion from one group but is due rather to being between several groups. Unlike his father he is not wholly of one group; instead, he shares, partially, in the experiences of several. Reading is responsible for his being in this position but it also provides him with the necessary perspective on that position:

I was always very fond of heights, and afterwards it struck me that reading was only another form of height, and a more perilous one. It was a way of looking beyond your own backyard into the neighbours'.¹⁹

O'Connor goes on to describe how he would, literally, climb onto walls so as to be able to observe unobserved but there is also a figurative element to this love of height which is described in Yeatsian terms as 'the eagle eye that observed them'.²⁰ As with the parents so here O'Donovan is being given the opportunity to achieve the widest possible experience and

¹⁷. Ibid, p. 93. The fantasy about being a changeling is a symptom of the Oedipal condition which Colin McCabe sees at the centre of Joyce's work, See McCabe; James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word, London, Macmillan, 1978, p. 10. More important I think is the link that this provides with Joyce and O'Casey rather than with Yeats.


consequently the chance to emerge from that milieu in which he has been immersed. That O'Connor should use the Yeatsian image of the eagle eye is evidence of the wide range of experience which he sees O'Donovan being subjected to. In *My Father's Son* there are two passages which suggest the kind of range which O'Connor regards as necessary for the developing writer:

Phibbs [a colleague in the library] realized that in our ignorant way we [the Catholic Irish] knew things about Irish life that he had been taught. It was the first time I realized the isolation of the Anglo-Irish, which Elizabeth Bowen once compared to the isolation of an only child. 

In this passage O'Connor's implication is that the Anglo-Irish are remote from Irish life to which he is close, and, at the same time, by citing Bowen's image of the only child, he suggests that he is capable of looking into their lives due to his own status as an only child. The other passage furthers this suggestion:

I felt that he [Yeats] thought for the most part that Catholics were not to be trusted, but on the odd occasions when we hit it off he began to develop a theory that I was really the illegitimate son of some Protestant big house.

It is a part of the technique of the autobiographies that Yeats' whimsy, with its repetition of O'Connor's own fantasy about being a changeling, should be included in such a way as to suggest that O'Connor is capable of an imaginative sympathy with all aspects of Irish life. At this point,


23. Perhaps the most striking example of the weight O'Connor was to give this ability is to be found in his biography of Michael Collins; *The Big Fellow* (1937), Dublin, Poolbeg Press, 1979. A biography written by a Republican idealist about the leading Free State realist partly as a 'labour of love' and partly as an 'act of reparation' it is O'Connor's attempt to heal the political split within himself which was his legacy from the Civil War.
Yeats is acting, as Corkery and AE had done previously, as a surrogate father. But this volume is called *My Father's Son* and threaded through the appearances of the various surrogates is the story of the reconciliation with the actual father culminating in their visit to Glasnevin cemetery.\(^\text{24}\)

At one and the same time then O'Connor is claiming his rooted place in Ireland and by means of the range of alternative fathers he is also seen to comprehend the whole range of Irish life. These various paternities are a range of imaginative filters interposed between O'Donovan and Irish reality, and to understand this we need to consider the ways in which imagination functions in the autobiographies.

It is imagination which separates O'Donovan from his peers. In the first instance this separation is caused by O'Donovan interposing the imagination between himself and his lived experience although as we shall see this does not invalidate the experience for use in the work. From an early stage, imagination comes between O'Donovan and life until such time as disillusionment sets in and the imagination is held in check by an increased regard for and eventual acceptance of reality, but this is a point to which we shall return. For the moment we shall concentrate on imagination which is important not only in O'Donovan's development but also in the development of the nation which, in O'Connor's telling, parallels that of O'Donovan.

Imagination has many pitfalls but it is typical of O'Connor's generation of writers that they can see it as a necessary part of the development of both

\(24\), Frank O'Connor; *My Father's Son*, op cit, p. 71.
themselves and the nation which is not to say that this acceptance comes without a struggle. Nor for that matter is the imaginative stage seen always as a beneficial part of the process of growth. In O'Connor's case there is much more resistance to this idea than there is in the surface of O'Faolain's *Vive Moi*. However, the keynote in both cases, although in different ways, is the eventual acceptance of what has already happened and it is this acceptance which distinguishes this generation of writers from the preceding one. Comparing O'Connor and Joyce, Richard Fallis notes that each writer undergoes disillusionment but that in O'Connor's work 'the disillusionment is in another key [to that of *A Portrait*], a knowing regret for innocence lost, a gentle acceptance of things as they must be'.

It is the phrase 'things as they must be' which marks the real difference between the two generations (although Joyce I would argue is not the best subject for such a comparison). The new concern of writers with 'things as they must be' shows that these writers are prepared, to an extent, to leave behind the imagination, to abandon the prescriptive tendency of earlier writers, in order to understand, depict and share in the circumstantial reality of the life around them.

The term 'imagination' is subject to constant redefinition through context in *An Only Child* and therefore we must consider it as a set of functions rather than as a clearly defined analytical category. In the autobiography imagination first figures as a terrain which is attractive because it allows for some measure of control over one's life, even if that control does not extend into the material aspects of existence. This makes it a

private terrain which extends into the public world. The attendant difficulties are to be seen in the way that the parents deploy imagination.

The Ireland of the first two decades of the century was still a British colony and the lives of its people reflected this. There is no reason to be surprised that O'Connor's father had served in the British army, indeed one can again draw forth the unconscious political symbolism of this fact, for, having been in the army, the father sees it as only right that he should draw as much as possible in the way of pensions just as the nation itself seemed increasingly contented with its lot. One could say that in the period from the death of Parnell to the executions of the leaders of the 1916 Rising Ireland was happier than it had ever been to be a part of the British empire; the quest for Home Rule was, after all, a quest for amelioration rather than for independence. Thus the father's political sympathies are summed up in the O'Brienite slogan 'conciliation and consent'. The father's image of himself as an old soldier who has prudently planned secure pensions for himself is the effect of an imagination which colludes with the prevailing reality. Despite his allegiance to the mother, whose imagination seeks to reconstruct reality, O'Donovan, like his father, conforms to this period in his country's history. Thus his imagination (like O'Faolain's) is fed by stories of English public school life. This is again an apparent answer to Yeats in showing that Yeats was not alone in not having access as a school boy to the 'memories of Limerick and the Yellow Ford':

I even adopted the public school code for my own, and did not tell lies or inform on other boys, or yell when I was beaten. It

26, Frank O'Connor: *An Only Child*, op cit, p. 11,
wasn't easy, because the other fellows did tell lies, and told on one another in the most shameless way, and, when they were beaten, yelled that their wrists were broken and even boasted later of their own cleverness, and when I behaved in the simple manly way recommended in the school stories, they said I was mad or that I was 'shaping' (the Cork word for swanking), and even the teachers seemed to regard it as an impertinence.27

Vivian Mercier has noted the archaism, that appeal to the values of an older society, which underlies O'Connor's work28 and it is a sign of the impoverishment of his native culture at this time and the consequent subservience to another culture that his search for values should lead him to seek imaginative fulfilment in another culture. When he comes closest to a public school education in the internment camp,29 he is much readier to question such values but it is fair to say that O'Donovan does not change much between school and the internment camp, although in some ways everything has changed. Environment and heredity have shaped him in such a way that he will see life through a 'veil of literature'30 throughout this period and therefore his character, motivations and the actions he embarks upon, are all contingent upon the literary culture which fuels his imagination. This is also true of the nation as a whole. Insofar as the father can be seen as a representative of the prevailing climate in Ireland at this time then the national imagination is collusive, working with rather than against reality. The young O'Donovan is in this no different from the nation.

27, Frank O'Connor: An Only Child, p. 96. And see W.B. Yeats; Autobiographies, p. 22.
29, Frank O'Connor: An Only Child, p, 208. Gaol is 'considerably more classy' than Eton, just as the shop-fronts of childhood are as exclusive as city clubs.
As I have said, little changed for O'Donovan between school and Gormanstown because his reliance on the imagination was already in place. However, what is also true is that the material with which he fed the imagination changed radically over this same period. It was Daniel Corkery who first introduced him to 'Eye Rish' which had the immediate effect of rendering the familiar unfamiliar and therefore part of the imaginative terrain. At a slightly later time, his first introduction to Irish having failed, he discovers Cuchulain and has another model to set beside the imagined public school boy. This confusion is compounded by the fact that Corkery, as well as introducing a new set of imaginative materials, also begins to subvert the English material that O'Donovan already possesses by 'using the standard English texts to promote disaffection'. For a time the two models exist side by side but the Easter Rising of 1916 forces O'Donovan's imagination into taking sides:

It was a difficult situation for a boy of twelve with no spiritual homeland but that of the English public schools, and no real friends but those imaginary friends he knew there.

The prime quality of O'Donovan's imagination at this time was that it raised the level of his expectations. As an imaginary friend of English public-school boys, he desired a good education; as an ordinary working-class boy he always anticipated that he would receive more presents at Christmas than he ever did; indeed, it was at Christmas that he first felt the difference between the 'season of the imagination' and the 'world of reality'. Despite this early training in disillusionment, O'Donovan

33, Ibid, p. 123.  
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continued to believe in the 'season of the imagination', although season, with its suggestion of impermanence, prefigures, as happens often throughout the text, a part of O'Connor's later critique of the imagination. However, for the moment imagination retains its power although its function now shifts from the collusion associated with the father and the expectation it prompts in O'Donovan to subversion. The shift from collusion to expectation to subversion, none of which is clear-cut in the text, is further complicated by the changing levels on which the imagination operates. The paternal and collusive imagination had been part of a national collusion and had led to the personal expectations on O'Donovan's part which separated him from his peers. At the same time the maternal imagination was functioning as a personal transformation of reality. After Easter 1916 the national imagination is increasingly fuelled by Irish materials and expectations and despite the criticisms which he later makes O'Connor continued to think that it was the imagination which brought about an Irish reality. The central phrase in this is 'imaginative improvisation'\textsuperscript{35}, which is a partial confirmation of Yeats' belief in the power of the emotional and imaginative side of life. However, the writers of this generation, the very people who might be said to be the embodiment of Yeats' desire to see the imagination in action, saw the power of the imagination and then reacted against it.

The imaginative period was, however, an essential one for both the nation and the writer. It was also a successful period for both; O'Connor may have improvised his education but he managed an education. Similarly Ireland may

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 159.
have improvised a revolution but it managed a revolution, and one which was shockingly successful:

... it would be truer to say that the Irish nation and myself were both engaged in an elaborate process of improvisation. I was improvising an education I could not afford, and the country was improvising a revolution it could not afford ... and the curious thing is that it was the make-believe that succeeded.\(^\text{36}\)

Here, as elsewhere, O'Connor links his fate with that of the nation. O'Donovan is seen increasingly at this period as a representative of it. That the nation can triumph is not due to O'Connor, although it may in some small part be due to O'Donovan who 'trenched roads and felled trees',\(^\text{37}\) but the nation's triumph does seem to offer hope to both. Seeing the British troops being recalled to barracks at the time of the Treaty, O'Connor cannot quite believe 'that it really represented the end of seven hundred years of military occupation, the triumph of the imagination over material power, the impossible become law'.\(^\text{38}\) O'Connor, with the benefit of hindsight, is right to withhold complete belief in this victory because so many of the promises it offers are false hopes, but at this moment it almost seems that O'Donovan's habit of viewing life through a veil of literature has been vindicated and that there is hope for him in this new Ireland. It may be a country which, like the revolution, surprises the 'smart boys',\(^\text{39}\) O'Connor's name for those who get on in the material world.

Hope is engendered by the war with the English, but then comes the Civil

\(^{36}\) Ibid, p. 146.  
\(^{38}\) Ibid, p. 165.  
\(^{39}\) Ibid, p. 139.
War. This war, fought over a 'form of words', O'Connor presents as a war between the realists and the idealists, although it might be better to classify the two groups as two types of idealist who fought the war regardless of what the 'smart boys' were doing on the quotidian level, and O'Connor's account does allow for this alternative. At the time O'Donovan, with most other writers of his generation, was on the side of the idealists, the side which was 'acting on the unimpeachable logic of the imagination, that only what exists in the mind is real'. This side was fighting for an ideal of the nation which had never existed, and which has never existed, the 'dream republic'. They were also, though none of them appreciated this fully, fighting for a nation in which it would be possible to be a writer. What they did know at the time was that they were fighting to continue the influence on the growth of Ireland of those writers who had been so important throughout the country's struggle for freedom. For O'Donovan the Civil War offered the chance to side with those writers who had started the revolution; he felt that he would be able to continue forever, in other words, on the side of the imagination. The imagination would be responsible not only for freeing the country, it would also be responsible for the building of the dream republic. The experience of the Civil War, however, put paid to this idea. Fifteen years later, O'Connor would write a biography of Michael Collins, technically his chief enemy in the Civil War, and in that biography he would pay tribute to Collins' realism. *An Only Child*, which for most of its length shows O'Donovan to be

40. For the rise of the 'smart boys' see Liam Kennedy: 'Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics in Pre-Independence Ireland', in Clark and Donnelly (eds): *Irish Peasants*, op cit, and my comments on *By Night Unstarred* in the Kavanagh chapter; see Peter Costello: *The Heart Brown Brutal*, op cit, p. 139 on literature as a conspiracy against the 'smart boys'.

41. Frank O'Connor; *An Only Child*, p. 166.
in thrall to the imagination on one or other level, also allows us to see
that the imagination eventually implicates the whole range of Irish culture
in the events leading to the Civil War. This means that we must look to
that culture and O'Connor's reactions to it to take this analysis further.

Recent writers on the history of Irish literature have attempted to
distinguish the Revival proper from the literature of the post-Civil War
period by treating it in terms of a split between 'romance' and
'realism'. It is easy to see why this split is so attractive but to draw
sharp lines between the two periods in this way is to ignore the confusions
which existed between such pairings both before and after the Civil War.
One such critic, Peter Costello, acknowledges the influence of O'Connor's
short history of Irish literature, The Backward Look, but in doing so he
seems to ignore the singularity of that work and the inconsistencies in
O'Connor's critical writing, and between that writing and his creative
output. O'Connor always denied his right to lay claim to being a scholar
but he did produce a number of critical works and The Backward Look, in the
continuing absence of such works, remains an important if odd work. Its
title alone bears out the importance of acknowledging one's debt to the
past not only in O'Connor's own work but as a feature of all Irish writing.
When O'Connor comes to deal with his contemporaries there are, however,
important inconsistencies. Maurice Wohlgeleernter devotes a chapter of his
introduction to O'Connor to the criticism and says of O'Connor's The Mirror
in the Roadway (an introduction to fiction) that the 'distinction between
judgement and imagination is then, in brief, O'Connor's thesis'.

43, Peter Costello: The Heart Grown Brutal, op cit, p. xii.
Wohlgelernter goes on to point out that within this work there are certain inconsistencies and failures to argue this thesis fully but he seems not to have this in mind when he turns his attention to *The Backward Look* about which he says:

Furthermore, these giants [Yeats and Joyce] fulfilled in their writings what O'Connor considered to be the enduring conflict in all of Irish literature: between 'thesis' and 'antithesis.' Or, stated differently, the conflict between imagination and intellect, feeling and fact, instinct and judgement; and between those who spend a considerable part of their life in country [sic], and those who, for whatever reason, live in towns ... In short between the 'aristocratic' thesis and 'middle-class' antithesis. Yeats, of course, represented 'thesis'; Joyce 'antithesis'.

As with his comments on *The Mirror in the Roadway* this is an accurate description of O'Connor's argument, and, to be fair to Wohlgelernter, he does acknowledge O'Connor's implication that this division is not as simple as it is here presented. Nonetheless, O'Connor in *The Backward Look*, according to Wohlgelernter, is a 'Yeats man' because Yeats represents his thesis. What Wohlgelernter fails to point out is that this is a reversal of his opinions in *The Mirror in the Roadway*, where it is clear that O'Connor favours 'judgement' and its associated values over imagination and its related values. On this basis one would expect him to be a 'Joyce man'. A reading of *My Father's Son*, in which Yeats figures so largely and is treated with such affection serves to further confuse this issue but my comments about the public nature of that work are important here. *An Only Child*, the more private and introspective work, carries, as I have shown, a debate with Yeats which cannot be ignored. While the second volume has more

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to say about the relationship between the two men as public figures and the undoubted affection which O'Connor feels for Yeats, it is the allusions to Yeats in the first volume which are of more substance. In these comments I do not wish to suggest that O'Connor was really opposed to Yeats and in favour of Joyce for to do so would merely be to substitute another kind of division for the one I criticised above. What I do wish to argue is that all three writers felt the tension between the values of 'judgement' and 'imagination' and that Yeats and Joyce each found his own solution, which solutions then became terms in O'Connor's own consideration of the issue. In a case of this kind where one is dealing more with emphases than with absolutes it is important not to overstate, particularly when such writers as Yeats, Joyce and O'Connor have all been guilty of this fault. However, I hope it will become clear that, notwithstanding the criticisms which O'Connor made about Joyce's work, particularly in the matter of style, O'Connor's solution to this problem is closer to Joyce than to Yeats.

The Anglo-Irish war was, in O'Connor's terms, an act of the imagination by which both he and the country transfigured the reality of their situation. The Civil War was obviously a continuation of the same imaginative improvisation and it was in this spirit that O'Connor joined it. However, the Civil War, and this is a rationalisation which again applies to both O'Connor and the nation, proved to be an education in the dangers of the imagination. In the War of Independence 'it was the make-believe that succeeded' and O'Connor accounts for this success by saying that 'sooner

46. O'Connor, I think, misunderstood Joyce's style. He regarded it as 'mechanical' and considered that Joyce was more concerned with the relationship between writer and object than with that between writer and reader. See The Mirror in the Roadway, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1967.
47. Frank O'Connor: An Only Child, p. 146.
or later the imaginative improvisation imposes itself on reality'. This is not, unfortunately, the end of the matter, rather:

... it is only then that its real troubles begin, when it must learn to restrain itself from imposing too far, and acquire a smattering of the practical sense it has rejected. That, I think, is where the Irish Revolution broke down. The imagination is a refrigerator, not an incubator; it preserves the personality intact through disaster after disaster, but even when it has changed the whole world it has still changed nothing in itself and emerges as a sort of Rip Van Winkle, older in years but not in experience. This sets up a time lag that can never be really overcome. 48

This matches exactly with O'Donovan's experience in the Civil War. After the early establishment of the criteria by which he will live it is as if he is held in suspension until the Civil War. The Civil War, and O'Donovan's participation in it, was due to a failure to recognise that it was not just the material upon which the imagination and the heart were fed that had changed; it was reality that had changed and was still changing. It was, of all people, Daniel Corkery who warned O'Donovan of this fact when he told him that there were more important things in life than literature 49 but O'Donovan would not listen to this, he had to live through the problem and discover the solution for himself. Once again we are back with a dilemma which confronted many more than Yeats but for which Yeats supplied most of the terms. For Yeats the clash between action and contemplation, between the life and the work, was, in one sense, irresolvable. The conflict had to be held in stasis until the synthesis could be found, a synthesis which was foretold by the very conflict which

49. Ibid, p. 161. It should be noted that Corkery has yet another emphasis to add to the discussion about the place of culture in society; literature he was to imply was useful as propaganda so his warning to O'Connor is ambiguous.
made it necessary. O'Connor and his generation were dealing with the particulars of political and social actuality, in O'Connor's words the dialectic had blown up in their faces, and could no longer afford the deliberations of a Yeats about the possible outcome of different dialectical oppositions. Yeats, to be sure, had also to cope with political and social particulars but from those he was able to abstract an entire system in which even musings on the value and use of such abstraction found their place. That system, with its forward look to a supposed tertium quid, which could be ever deferred, thus enabled Yeats to continue with abstraction. The dilemma for O'Connor and his peers was of a much more immediate and personal nature. Those writers who fought in the Civil War did so almost without thought, they might have seemed living resolutions of the Yeatsian dialectic, the imagination in action. This could not be. The imagination, as O'Connor describes it, is more to do with stasis than with resolution. What happened when they realised this was that they found a new set of problems confronting them, more quotidian problems than those with which Yeats struggled. There was a new need for them to be realistic, as there had been a need for Yeats and his peers to be imaginative and contemplative. Where Yeats had needed a way in which his imagination could be brought to bear on the reality of Ireland so this generation needed to find a way in which they could be realistic without dismissing the imaginative process completely. One way in which this was possible was through bitterness and it is a critical commonplace that satire became a common form after the Civil War. O'Connor's nearest approach to bitterness was in The Big Fellow in which he tried to evaluate the relative merits of

his own imagination and Collins' realism. The bitterness of the work is evident in such passages as this:

The Treaty debate was a staggerer ... The gigantic improvisation was at an end, and from behind the scenes walked not supermen, not geniuses, but Lilliput in person, the same Lilliput which it seemed had caught its death in the snowstorm of the Roscommon election; the little Ireland of shopkeepers, solicitors and priests, with its parochial vanities and affectations; the Ireland which had blackguarded Synge, scoffed at books, let Larkin down, believed it was all settled in the Penny Catechism. 51

This evident and to an extent understandable bitterness was to remain with O'Connor for the rest of his life but it could not be the dominant tone of his life or work. If bitterness became dominant in O'Connor's work then he would merely be continuing to conform to what he saw as the prevailing cast of mind in the Civil War. The narrow fanaticism of the time is best exemplified in the fate of Erskine Childers.

When O'Connor remarks that the dialectic had blown up in the faces of the Republicans, he admits, even though tacitly, that imagination had not been the only factor in these events. Imagination is successful only when it functions in antithesis to reality. In the case of the War of Independence and in O'Donovan's life it had expanded the bounds of the possible. On the national level this had resulted in people like Childers, an English Protestant, being encompassed by the imaginative vision. When the imaginative process began to work on its own products rather than on reality, it began to collapse, to draw the bounds of the possible ever more tightly. Childers was then left outside those bounds. Hated by the Free

51. Frank O'Connor: The Big Fellow, op cit pp, 174-175.
Staters, he received no protection from the Republicans with whom he was fighting. He appears in *An Only Child* as a doomed figure. Significantly the episode which makes clear that his fate is sealed is the one in which the Republicans hear that Michael Collins has been shot; Childers' immediate reaction is to write an article in praise of Collins.\(^{52}\) This continuing expansiveness is what dooms him.

It was to become clear soon after the Civil War (the process began during it) that the ever more constricted imagination had little room for culture. Therefore, the role of the writer vis-à-vis the nation had altered. Where Joyce, Yeats and others could rely on a prevailing cultural confusion to assume that they had an important place in society as writers, the writers after the Civil War had a more clearly delineated state of affairs with which to deal. Corkery's solution was to assume that literature was subservient to the needs of the state and should therefore be an internalised propaganda, but this was not acceptable. The only other response seemed to be bitterness but the danger here is that the writer in merely reflecting society's narrow fanaticism back to itself will be both cutting himself off from his fellows and therefore from the sources of his writing (as Joyce had had Stephen Dedalus recognise in somewhat different circumstances) and merely replicating society's faults. The Civil War had provided enough evidence of what bitterness could do. O'Connor realised that a war fought because of the imagination led to the loss of the imagination but not to a new realism:

> And what neither group saw was that every word we said, every act we committed, was a destruction of the improvisation and what we

\(^{52}\) Frank O'Connor: *An Only Child*, pp. 182-184.
were bringing about was a new Establishment of Church and State in which imagination would play no part, and young men and women would emigrate to the ends of the earth, not because the country was poor, but because it was mediocre.\footnote{53}

The failure of the Civil War then was that it not only destroyed the previous, hard-gained unity of purpose but also that by carrying the imaginative process too far it allowed those who had no time for that process, the 'smart boys', to take control of the quotidian reality. In other words the reality of the Free State was being settled while the arguments over the Dream Republic continued.

The constriction of an imagination taken too far is evident in one of O'Connor's experiences in Gormanstown. A Republican prisoner of war clashes with the Republican authorities in the camp; they try to punish him but find that he will not accept their rulings; they then take the only course left to them and 'arrest' and 'imprison' him. A prisoner is thus further imprisoned by his own people. The regression then goes still further:

I felt the imaginative improvisation could go no farther than that, but it did. Murphy still had a shot in his locker, for he went on hunger strike, not against our gaolers but his own, and - unlike them when they went on hunger strike soon after - he meant it.\footnote{54}

O'Connor also uses this experience as the basis of the short story 'Freedom' where a certain amount of its absurdity is lost because it is transposed from the Civil War to the 'war with the British'. It is a transposition such as this which calls forth an interesting attack on both O'Connor and O'Faolain by Costello:

\footnote{53, Frank O'Connor: An Only Child, p. 167. O'Connor obviously understates the importance of economics in this argument.}
\footnote{54, Ibid, p. 203.}
One cannot help wondering whether these writers thought it was
easier for their foreign readers to grasp what was happening in
the Tan war than in the Civil War. Perhaps they felt the facts of
war were the same, though on their own evidence the emotional
flavour of the Civil War was gall in the mouth after the war with
the British. The facts were altered and some of the truth may be
jeopardised by such blurrings of historical reality. And it was
this failure to face the facts of historical reality that made
the aftermath of the Civil War such a difficult period. Writers
did not help by blurring the events.

It seems to me that in this passage Costello is right in demanding some
sense of responsibility from writers but this particular demand comes close
to a stance like that of Corkery in that it fails to ask the correct
questions of literature. What he is demanding would seem to be more the
role of the historian than that of the fiction writer or the
autobiographer. Costello thus fails to see the significance of such
transpositions in time. That O'Connor should sacrifice some of the ironical
point of the story 'Freedom' by this transposition bespeaks the painful
nature of the Civil War memories when the story was written, a pain which
might, if confronted in the story, have turned O'Connor back to that
bitterness which he had to reject.

We have examined the solutions which O'Connor rejected but we must now turn
to his eventual solution to the dilemma of the Civil War. James Matthews
has said of O'Connor:

He rejected the temptation of misanthropy, which in his more
public mode of writing was an idealism gone sour, and relied on
a more controlled and observant realism.

56, James Matthews: "Magical Improvisations": Frank O'Connor's Revolution, Eire-Ireland, Winter 1975, pt
10, 3-13, 9.
I will now look at the process which led to this realism and analyse what it was composed of. While interned, O'Donovan clings to the imagination largely because he has no choice:

It was clear to me that we were all going mad, and yet I could see no way out. The imagination seems to paralyse not only the critical faculty but the ability to act upon the most ordinary instinct of self-preservation. I could be obstinate enough when it came to the killing of unarmed soldiers and girls because this was a violation of the imaginative concept of life, whether in the boys' weeklies or the Irish sagas, but I could not detach myself from the political attitudes that gave rise to it. I was too completely identified with them, and to have abandoned them would have meant abandoning faith in myself. 57

Here the problem is simply enough stated. Not only does O'Donovan lack an alternative, he lacks anywhere to turn for one. His identification with the country and its present state is so complete that he is unable to look outside, as good a definition of provincialism as one could hope for. As a boy he had wished for a panoramic view of his country but now his vision is so completely linked with the country that no real view is available to him. What is now necessary is a detachment, an awakening, the ability to stand aside so that his approach to both the country and himself will no longer be basically introspective. Yeats had been able to project his own version of Ireland and modify it according to his own system and historical reality. For O'Donovan the historical reality, his own lived experience, was dominated by so powerful an imaginative projection that it also dominated him. Only one of O'Connor's contemporaries would continue with a strengthened faith in the imagination and that writer, Francis Stuart, as we shall see, provides a useful counterbalance to the responses of the rest of his generation. For O'Connor the imagination was part of the problem.

57. Frank O'Connor; An Only Child, p. 190.
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The first formative shock that O'Donovan had experienced had been when his imaginative roles of English public school boy and hero of the Irish sagas, until then unanalysed and thus compatible, had been brought into conflict by the Easter Rising. This conflict was furthered by O'Donovan's return to the study of Irish. At that time his concern with language was on a semantic level, the level of the imagination since it is the level at which the familiar and the unfamiliar are transmuted into each other. It was in a way this concern with language which brought him to Gormanstown and there it was once again concern with language which brought about the next stage in his development. O'Donovan's analysis of his situation in the last passage quoted from An Only Child above is inchoate, unfocussed. Since there is no perceived alternative there is nothing by which he is able to judge the situation so all he can do is to react. Language itself is his first means of escape. When he moves from the semantic level to the syntactic, language ceases to be 'a form of magic' and becomes a form:

Whatever the importance of grammar in reading or writing, as an image of human life it seems to me out on its own. I have never since had any patience with the apostles of usage. Usage needs no advocates, since it goes on whether one approves of it or not, and in doing so breaks down the best-regulated languages. Grammar is the breadwinner of language as usage is the housekeeper, and the poor man's efforts at keeping order are forever being thwarted by his wife's intrigues and her perpetual warnings to the children not to tell Father. But language, like life, is impossible without a father and he is forever returning to his thankless job of restoring authority. As an emotional young man, I found it a real help to learn that there was such a thing as an object, whether or not philosophers admitted its existence, and that I could use the accusative case to point it out as I would point out a man in the street. In later years George Moore fell in love with the subjunctive - a pretty little mood enough, though, as his books show, much too flighty for a settled man.

58, Ibid, p. 135,
59, Ibid, p. 198,
60, Ibid, pp. 198-199.
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Everything in this passage is necessary for an understanding of O'Donovan. The image of language as a family is particularly significant in the light of O'Donovan's earlier rejection not just of his own father but of all male authority figures:

... I, who had no other security, knew better than she did what he was really like, and watched him suspiciously, in the way that only a child can watch, and felt that all authority was only a pretense and that God Himself was probably not much better, and directed my prayers not to Him, but to His mother, who had said nothing but merely suffered. 81

The concern with grammar is itself an indication of a new detachment from the imaginative improvisation since O'Connor has already stated that the 'imagination seems to have no particular use for grammar' 62 and after his discovery of grammar he begins to doubt 'many of the political ideas [he] had held as gospel'. 63 That he can now do so without also doubting himself is a mark of a new detachment, a detachment which is figured in the accusative case, the case which allows for the presence of the other, of that which is separate from the self. Even the final swipe at George Moore has its function in the rejection of the hypothetical and conditional.

It is this sense of an objective reality outside the imagination which makes possible Matthews' 'controlled and observant realism', and this is immediately what comes into play. O'Donovan is able to stand aside and analyse the situation, to question the values of those still engaged in the improvisation, and then to present his analyses to those same people. Here

62. Ibid, p. 139.
63. Ibid, p. 199.

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is a complete reversal of his situation as a boy. Once again he is isolating himself but now he is doing so by his realism in the face of others' imagination. He rebels against the 'worship of martyrdom', confronting it with the reality of his own experience, and realising that the worshippers are living not by an ideal but by a 'fiction' which is dangerous because it is life-denying.

This new realism explains why My Father's Son is such a public book, a book largely about figures who are known from other sources. In its incomplete form it is difficult to know if it would ever have offered anything about O'Connor's further development, but as it stands it is valuable in that it describes a period of consolidation rather than of growth. The value of this consolidation is that it shows that O'Connor still needs to clarify what he has learnt about himself and about Ireland. It also shows that the new realism achieved by the end of An Only Child does not entail a rejection of the imagination per se but is rather a recognition of the values and the limits of the imagination. Similarly O'Connor's detachment is shown not to be an absolute state. Explaining his pseudonym O'Connor shows himself to be well aware of the interaction between the writer and his subject:

Cork was to me merely my material, the place I knew best, and it never occurred to me that that particular material could ever have any effect on me, or that I might eventually find myself in the position of Heine's monkey chewing his own tail - 'Objectively he is eating, subjectively he is being eaten.'

64, Ibid, p. 201.
66, Frank O'Connor: My Father's Son, p. 33.
Here O'Connor shows himself leaning towards Joyce. After the Civil War the writer could no longer set up an open-ended argument between abstract dialectical oppositions such as reality and imagination. Life does not separate into such qualities. Just as the writer is a man among men influenced by them and hoping to influence them, so imagination ceases to be the normative quality it sometimes is in Yeats. Imagination, like the writer as Joyce had discovered, is not something apart from and superior to life, it is a part of life. Or to be more precise it should be a part of life. O'Connor's pseudonym is an indication of just how strong the 'influence' of a society which operated a Censorship could be on a writer. In these changed circumstances the irony was that now that the writer most needed to influence the shape of society he was more than ever unable to do so. For O'Connor the task was to try to ensure that literature had its part to play in the new Ireland and to do so without bitterness while yet retaining the ability to criticise the mediocrity which he saw encroaching on that society.

His ability to carry out this task stems from the way in which his self is created. The series of syntheses which compose the text are difficult to analyse because they are like Heine's monkey. So the text reads differently after one has reached its end point. At a given time O'Donovan may be rejecting the paternal in favour of the maternal but the text still carries traces of the paternal because O'Connor, who knows what the end result of the text is, cannot undercut his own argument by an absolute rejection of the father. This explains the shifting allegiances within the imaginative realm just as it explains the criticisms of the mother's ultimate method of transforming reality: cutting photographs out of albums when their subjects
have displeased her. If the paternal were to be really rejected then this is the form of transformation that the text would have to undertake. Given the lesson that O'Connor learns through the course of the autobiography he cannot do this. His theory of the self is of a piece with his theory of the growth of the nation. Both grew out of an imaginative synthesis. He saved himself when the nation became fanatical by the expedient of recalling the process which had formed him and so stopped himself from being submerged in the nation. The autobiography therefore functions as both a record of growth and of salvage. As Carolyn Heilbrun puts it:

We tell ourselves stories of our past, make fictions or stories of it, and these narrations become the past, the only part of our lives that is not submerged.

For O'Connor the narration has to be as complete as possible, otherwise the 'total acceptance' that he claims is necessary for the establishment of identity becomes impossible. And by this stage we should realise that 'total acceptance' does not mean submission but rather the acceptance of a totality.

68, Carolyn Heilbrun: Writing a Woman's Life, op cit, p. 51.
CHAPTER 5
SEAN O'FAOLAIN: ONE GREEN CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE

Vive Moi! is unusual among Irish autobiographies in being apparently unproblematically a single volume; most other autobiographers require at least two volumes to contain themselves. Sean O'Faolain is unabashedly singular in his autobiography and his singularity is matched by the boldness of his statement of identity: 'Vive moi!,' he says and if we ask what constitutes that 'moi' we are answered most simply:

I am where and what I was born.'

The title and this statement, however, carry several presuppositions about the self, about Ireland, and about O'Faolain's life which are not borne out in the autobiography itself, nor in his critical writings, nor in his fiction, and it is a discussion of these presuppositions which must figure centrally in a discussion of the autobiography.

The reasons for such presuppositions are grounded in a word we have met before, 'acceptance', about which Benedict Kiely has this to say:

Sean O'Faolain's own formula for acceptance has allowed for the way a castaway feels about his desert island. ²

Not surprisingly, this form of acceptance is different in nature and quality from that of, say, O'Connor. In the chapter on O'Connor I opposed

1. Sean O'Faolain: Vive Moi!, Boston, Little, Brown, 1964/ London, Rupert Hart Davis, 1965, p. 4. See also 'This race and this country and this life produced me, I shall express myself as I am,' James Joyce: A Portrait, op cit, p. 207, where Stephen's note of defiance implies that what produced him will be subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

the word 'acceptance' with 'bitterness' in a way that showed, I hope, that no matter what his reaction, O'Connor was 'at home' in Ireland (as outrageously at home with his people as a country parish priest skelping the courting couples out of the ditches, is how Kiely puts it). His work is written from the inside; bitterness is a twisted acceptance rather than an outright rejection. The nature of the young O'Connor's intelligence as it is displayed in An Only Child, shrewd, intuitive, coloured by emotion and, at times, cunning, is of a piece with the world described there. (The intelligence behind the writing of An Only Child is of course more sophisticated than this.) In Vive Moi! a more prudent but keener intelligence is on display but it is set apart from the flux of life in a way that O'Connor's is not. Vive Moi! lacks the easy anecdotal manner of O'Connor's work (a manner which is also shared by Moore and Kavanagh). O'Faolain chooses to control his material more openly, to reflect on it, to worry about its correctness, the functioning of his memory within the work, and the purpose and status of the work. Where O'Connor's work is anecdotal, O'Faolain prefers description. O'Connor's 'characters', his relatives, friends, colleagues, and his reactions to them are presented as part of a lived experience. O'Faolain describes his characters more coolly, his reactions are more considered. O'Connor's work presents itself as a series of particular memories which fall 'naturally' into the pattern of a life remembered. O'Faolain's work is composed of discrete, particular memories juxtaposed so as to find the pattern of his life, a pattern which he will discover by this method. Although Vive Moi!, like so many other Irish autobiographies, is about failure, what sets it apart is O'Faolain's determination to succeed, no matter at what cost.
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*Vive Moi!* is an account of the imagination, not of reality. O'Connor presents acceptance as ultimately the only sane response for the writer in contemporary Ireland and he is thus free to modify and qualify his acceptance. In *Vive Moi!*, however, as Kiely's remark suggests (even though it predates *Vive Moi!* by some 14 years), acceptance is something to which O'Faolain is driven and it is thus, in the end, more absolute than O'Connor's. In this context O'Faolain's work ceases to be a simple statement of a unified self (which is how, despite his analytic mode, it is presented) and becomes, as all Irish autobiography is, a symptom of disablement: 'I am where and what I was born', lacking Dedalean defiance, begs the questions of just what the 'I', 'where' and 'what' are, by implying that they are unitary values which can be simply equated and then produced as credentials to justify the present-tense self. The disablement lies in the suppression of the 'where' and 'what' as fluctuating, and often contradictory, values, which flow together to produce a fluctuating and contradictory self. O'Faolain's is perhaps the most cautious of all Irish autobiographies; only Forrest Reid's *Private Road* and Gerry Adams' *Falls Memories* (the latter for reasons diametrically opposed to those of O'Faolain) are comparably cautious. In *Vive Moi!* O'Faolain clings resolutely to the sense that the writing self is no more than a superior version of the subject of the autobiography: the concept of 'brimmings', which is the work's major metaphor of development, implies that development is a natural process which involves the filling of an emptiness rather than the alteration of already present components. The dual time-scheme inherent in all autobiography is thus neutralised, in that the balanced writing self

is shown to be the only possible outcome for the earlier subject self. In O'Faolain's terms 'pattern' and 'destination' are equated.\textsuperscript{5} The autobiography is supposedly written so that O'Faolain can discover the pattern of his life and thus see what his destination is. However, the quest for destination is actually completed before the autobiography is begun while its accomplishment is produced with a flourish as the emotional, intellectual and theological climax of the work.\textsuperscript{6} Just as O'Connor's seeming open-handedness proves to be disingenuous so O'Faolain's apparent analytic candour should make us suspicious of his intentions.

Like O'Connor's autobiography, \textit{Vive Mol!} is a product of that period after the Whitaker report which F.S.L. Lyons has described as 'a watershed in the modern economic history of the country'. Lyons also notes the important psychological effects of the report:

\textit{In place of the old orthodoxies and the old introspection, Ireland seemed at last to be moving towards participation in the world of the mid-twentieth century ... after the Whitaker Report the former aimlessness and hopelessness had begun to give way to a drive and optimism previously unknown.}\textsuperscript{7}

The Whitaker Report, the White Paper \textit{Economic Development}, and the First Programme for Economic Expansion based on it, completed an economic volte face which had a:

profound effect on Irish society ... An Ireland that had espoused nationalism for a quarter of a century and employed manifold tariffs in the interests of native industry was to open its economy to as much foreign investment as could be attracted by

\textsuperscript{6} Sean O'Faolain: \textit{Vive Mol!}, op cit, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{7} F.S.L. Lyons: \textit{Ireland since the Famine}, op cit, pp. 628, 583. See also R.F. Foster: \textit{Modern Ireland}, op cit, pp. 578-580.
governmental inducement. Furthermore, an Ireland that had sought to define its identity since independence principally in terms of social patterns rooted in the country's past was to seek to adapt itself to the prevailing capitalist values of the western world.

Ireland finally ceased to pay even lip-service to its supposed 'spiritualised peasant' identity and joined the international middle-classes. Cultural and political developments were in line with the economic progress of the country; censorship, it seemed, was something that could be lived with, a new generation of writers had grown up after O'Faolain and his peers so there would soon be no direct links in the culture with the worrying questions raised by the revival and revolution. The South's 'what' and 'where' were, it seemed in the years 1958 to 1963 finally settled. In the same period the North became easier to ignore: by 1959 the then I.R.A. campaign had slowed, by 1961 the Stormont government had released its internees, by 1962 the I.R.A. Army Council called a halt to its campaign of violence, and by 1963 Captain Terence O'Neill, a 'liberal' Unionist, was Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. This, briefly, was Ireland at the time when O'Faolain wrote *Vive Moi*.

O'Faolain himself at this time was established (not a prerequisite of autobiography - see for example, Kavanagh's *The Green Fool* or Stuart's *Things to Live For*), a man of the world, writer, journalist, critic and editor who had been called '...for almost 30 years the keeper of [Ireland's] intellectual conscience.' Why should he not accept his lot,

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why should he not become part of that Ireland which he had described as a '... country where the policeman and the priest are in a perpetual glow of satisfaction', why should he not also share that glow of satisfaction? Did not the ready acceptance of the Whitaker Report and its consequences bespeak an Ireland that was newly emancipated into liberalism and is not the humane, liberal and eminently reasonable voice of *Vive Moï!* a sign that the writer and his society are in accord? It might seem, indeed, that the autobiography is the culmination of years of struggle on O'Faolain's part. However, as I have already stated, the 'moï' of the title is a mask for a much more complex state of affairs than O'Faolain is prepared to admit. Can the voice of this work really be the same as that voice of the 1930s and 1940s which was recently described as that of an 'intellectual gadfly'.

For all of the analytic thought which forms a part of the discourse of *Vive Moï!*, it presents itself as a surprisingly straightforward work, one which consequently closes down many problematic areas. The opening chapter 'Double Doors', promises a consideration of the interrelationship between literature, religion and reality in the tradition of Yeats and Joyce, in its suggestion that life is composed of both fantasy and reality. The occasion for this is the young O'Faolain's 'unappeasable and delighted bewilderment' in watching his neighbours and his mother's lodgers become something else on the stage of the Cork Opera House:

... seeing the here constantly become the elsewhere, the solid dissolve, the familiar become unfamiliar, things and people

11. Sean O'Faolain; 'Ireland after Yeats', *op cit*, p. 46, The symbols of authority remain the same, despite changed political circumstances, as when Stephen asked his question: "Why would you not be as faithful to the traditions of the helmet as to that of the tonsure?", James Joyce; *Stephen Hero*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1969, p. 69.

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become most persuasively whatever they were only when they were least whatever they had been so persuasively before and would, just as persuasively, become again a few hours hence."

This tortuously rendered and complex world with all its uncertainties and shifting identities, its fluid 'wheres' and 'whats' is, however, quickly reduced to the private property of one person:

There were no borders in my mind between this actuality and that fantasy."

*Vive Moi!* is to be a history of the imagination rather than of reality and as such it has an almost solipsistic approach curiously at odds with the theme of acceptance, which one would expect would entail an interaction between the imagination and experience. The work is solipsistic not just because of the avowed central concern with the imagination but because of its presentation of a world of discrete, unknowable individuals. O'Faolain's father, for example, is most strikingly represented not by any of his qualities, attributes or actions but by his 'locked box'.

O'Faolain is unable to pass any conclusive judgement on his father because he has only the surface of the man in his grasp and not the secrets of that 'locked box'. This, it seems to me is at the heart of his acceptance, and, indeed, disables that liberal, humane, reasonable voice because it has been gained at the cost of the attempt to gain a knowledge of others. Just as he will not pry into his father's secrets, so he is reticent throughout the work; the voice of *Vive Moi!* is paradoxically enabled to speak only at

16. Ibid, p. 41. His brothers, Eileen, his wife, and a host of others are 'absent' or nearly so from the autobiography, and on p. 362 he admits that he is dealing in this way with Yeats.
the expense of great silences. This breaks with the tradition of the 'oral' autobiography established by Moore and carried on in different ways by Yeats and Kavanagh. It is also at odds with the easy style of O'Connor's autobiographies. O'Faolain can only be at home on the uneasy terms of silence; this is not the work of a man who is even trying to speak to others. His autobiography is to be understood, therefore, not as the record of a career, a triumphant public flourish, but as the outcome of that career, a final balance sheet.

In the above account of the Ireland contemporary with Vive Moi!, I listed those elements which seemed to me consonant with and perhaps contributory to the autobiography. These were the indications of apparent economic success and of the apparent resolution of long-standing political problems which constituted the new 'official' version of Ireland. Even though it can be argued that this was simply the replacement of one ideological mask with another, this 'belated industrial revolution' and its attendant political changes led to 'a sense of loss and rupture ... located ... in the immediate social and political circumstances of the early sixties' [17]. This aspect of post-Whitaker Ireland does not appear in Vive Moi! so it is worthwhile to turn to the period that is the subject of Vive Moi! in order to establish O'Faolain's attitude to the ideological representation of that Ireland and its relationship to its actual socio-cultural circumstances. In this way we can acquire a sense of what is being silenced in Vive Moi!.

That O'Faolain is one of the most important writers in Ireland and was, from just after the Civil War to the 1950s, one of its most important

[17] Fintan O'Toole: 'Island of Saints and Silicon', op cit, pp. 17, 16,
cultural commentators is consequent upon his willingness to confront the central issues of culture and society in that period. Much faster than his contemporaries, perhaps because of the time he spent out of Ireland, he formulated the problems that confronted the writer in the new state. One of the early signs of this was his division of writers into literary 'fathers' and 'sons' and his sense that 'Il faut tuer le père'. The distinction that O'Faolain was making had, in effect, little to do with age and much to do with the changed social and political circumstances in which the writer was working. He was alert to the altered responsibilities of the writer and the consequent necessity for change in cultural tactics to respond effectively to those altered circumstances. It was therefore essential that writers developed new attitudes. In support of this argument we can look at O'Faolain's attitude to how Yeats treated the issue of Censorship.

Yeats' response was an aloof, aristocratic attitude which was not substantially wrong but rather was wrongly expressed in a democratic age. It may have helped in the past to adopt attitudes pour épater les bourgeois but that was before they came to power. What was more, the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act did little but institutionalise a feeling that had been abroad from at least the time of the Playboy riots. (One can look further back to the controversies over Yeats' own The Countess Cathleen or Synge's In the Shadow of the Glen, but the Playboy riots and Yeats' response provide the clearest manifestation of the polarising effect of the issue of censorship.) The effect of the Playboy riots, from Yeats' point of view,

18. Sean O'Faolain; 'The Literary Scene in Ireland', New York Times Book Review, 5 January 1936, 41 (1); 8, 19. See also Sean O'Faolain; 'Four Irish Generations', Commonweal, 1 May 1929, 9 (25); 751.
19. Sean O'Faolain; 'Ireland after Yeats', op cit, 43 and 'Fifty Years of Irish Literature', The Bell, February 1942, 3 (5); 327-334, and Vive Moi!, Ch. 15,3, p. 363.
was to divide Irish society into 'philistines' and 'aesthetes'. The former
he felt had proven themselves unworthy to the latter (an attitude that had
much to do with Yeats' difficulties in regard to the relationship between
writer and audience). Twenty years later those same people were no longer
impotent.\textsuperscript{20} O'Faolain recognised this change when he commented that the
\textsl{Plough} riots should not be seen as continuous with the \textsl{Playboy} riots
because the protesters now held power.\textsuperscript{21} He saw that if a worthwhile
opposition to the prevailing cultural norms was to be maintained, new
tactics were called for. One such tactic, particularly congenial to
O'Faolain, was to stop regarding a whole group of people as automatically
philistine. In this period, O'Faolain knew that art does not exist in a
social vacuum\textsuperscript{22} and that the populace did not exist in a cultural vacuum.
One possible consequence of Yeats' attitude might have been to force them
into such a vacuum.

Yeats and his contemporaries had been able to project an Ireland into the
perceived vacuum of the quietist period 1890-1916 because they were able to
align themselves with that one unbroken tradition of Ireland, the assertion
of Irishness. No matter what other arguments separated the writers from the
population, this one tradition, which subsumed all the others, provided an
abiding link. In that period, with economic and political power held by the
English and with the major indigenous institution adopting a pragmatic
approach, the cultural sphere assumed a great importance with many

\begin{footnotes}
20. Yeats' insult in 'On those that Hated The Playboy of the Western World, 1907', The Poems, \textit{op cit}, p. 111 was more apt as political allegory rather than as physiological fact.
remarkable essay in which in overwritten fashion O'Faolain discusses the historical and social aspects of
language and condemns Joyce's linguistic innovations in \textit{Work in Progress} as 'ahistoric' (225).
\end{footnotes}
political battles being fought within it and no side powerful enough to privilege one cultural attitude over the others. This political importance was not new to the cultural sphere in Ireland but what was new was that in 1916 the assertion of cultural independence became the assertion of political independence. To assert Irishness, to idealise Ireland, had been subversive while Ireland was still governed from Westminster, but that assertion, that idealisation (admittedly shorn of all ambivalence, all contradiction), now became a part of the new State's ideology. The writer was thus left frustrated by the fact that only those now prepared to reinforce the idealisation could hope to lay claim to the social function that had seemed to be graspable in pre-independence days and for which Yeats and even Joyce wished. Yeats never lost sight of the importance of culture, an importance which was central to the struggle for independence because it was invisible to the English. In a period of intense politico-cultural activity an English official could, in Conor Cruise O'Brien's account of the period, utter the 'majestic words ... I was never present while a revolution was going on'.

Easter 1916 was in many ways not the real revolution but the politically visible overspill of a long-standing cultural revolution. To the writers who came to prominence after the Civil

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23. Conor Cruise O'Brien: '1891-1916' in his *Writers and Politics*, op cit, p. 122. It must be admitted that this statement may be apocryphal although likely candidates include the 'absentee Chief Secretary' Augustine Birrell and his permanent Under-Secretary Sir Matthew Nathan, Nathan had written to Birrell on 22nd April 1916, the Saturday before the Rising, that he could 'see no indication of a "rising" despite a number of intelligence reports to the contrary. In this he was like the majority of the English who had to believe that anti-English feeling was the province of a few aberrant Irish; 'English governments tended to miss the basic lesson of Irish violence, that it was an extreme manifestation of a widespread, if sometimes buried, national mood, and not an isolated or merely criminal aberration.' Birrell came to realise this and told the Royal Commission on the Rising that Sinn Feinism was the 'old hatred and distrust of the British connection ..., always there as the background of Irish politics and character.' See Patrick O'Farrell, *England and Ireland*, op cit p, 158, and F.S.L, Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine*, op cit pp, 362-365. Although there is a difficulty in finding a statesman as the author of the remark quoted by O'Brien this does not detract from the point that it illustrates, namely that the English difficulty in understanding Ireland rests in large part on the radically different place of culture in the two societies.
War this centrality of culture seemed to be imperilled by the very qualities which had brought it into being. Culture was important because of its declaration of independence; the problem after the achievement of even the compromised independence accorded by the Treaty was that the continued assertion of Irishness was no longer enough. It remained (and remains) an important and provocative issue in the North, but in the South the continuation of such an assertion could lead to no more than minor honour in the new State. This was not a position that either Yeats or O'Faolain could accept.

O'Faolain's reaction to Daniel Corkery (who is one of his own literary fathers) is an impassioned rejection of such a role and its best expression is in the marvellously sustained invective of the 'Proem' to O'Faolain's *King of the Beggars*, his biography of Daniel O'Connell, a significant choice of subject as we shall see. This chapter is a direct and savage attack on Corkery's major contribution to the cultural aspect of the ideology of the new state, the 'hidden Ireland'. What O'Faolain rejects is not merely the scholarship (or lack of it) in Corkery's work, but the way in which Corkery 'uncovers' the hidden Ireland only in an effort to retain 'that inner core of custom of which political nationalism is the shield and defence'.

O'Faolain rejected this unreflecting continuity in favour of the concept of the break. The degraded state of the bardic tradition in the eighteenth

24. Sean O'Faolain: *King of the Beggars*, A Life of Daniel O'Connell, the Irish Liberator, in a study of the rise of modern Irish democracy, 1775-1847, (1938), Swords, Poolbeg, 1980,
25. Daniel Corkery: *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, op cit, p. 44,
26. Sean O'Faolain: 'Daniel Corkery', *Dublin Magazine*, April-June 1936, 11: 49-61, 60-61,
and nineteenth centuries as described by O'Faolain in the 'Proem' may be read not just as a refutation of Corkery's position but as an analogue of it. The bards, according to O'Faolain, did not continue as Irish writers, their allegiance was to the social order that had maintained them so they quickly and, ultimately unsuccessfully, switched their allegiance to the new aristocracy which had displaced the old Gaelic aristocracy at the end of the seventeenth century. In other words they retained their position within the hegemony despite changed political circumstances, rather than, as Corkery maintained, keeping alive a tradition in the face of those changed political circumstances. The analogy between Corkery and the bards is not exact, Corkery being worse than them. Corkery's early work was praised by O'Faolain for its attention to the exact state of affairs then existing in Ireland; in his 'city stories' Corkery achieves 'a note ... like that of the folk-tale', while the novel The Threshold of Quiet is a new thing for Ireland, a novel 'come out of truly popular life'. O'Faolain's terms of praise, 'popular', 'folk-tales', 'city stories', reveal something of his own concerns with the community and his belief that the writer needed to attend to the lived experience of his fellows rather than to an atavistically conceived 'tradition'. Corkery's great fault then was to shift his allegiance from reality to an atavistic ideological reinforcement for the new state.

O'Faolain makes the point that this particular type of reinforcement is heedless of history and reality (an attack on Corkery's avowed aim of placing literature in its social and historical contexts). In the 'proem',

27. Ibid, pp. 50, 52.
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O'Faolain sets up as a central opposition, aristocracy and democracy rather than Gaelic and English. The former categories cut across the latter; that is to say the old Gaelic order had been aristocratic—"undemocratic, unrealistic and nostalgic". The Ascendancy were the true inheritors of this position, English though they may have been. This is a fact that O'Faolain has no difficulty in facing since it has been made irrelevant. For him there is a new Ireland, a modern democratic country coming into being which can lay full claim only to the democratic tradition initiated by Wolfe Tone and consolidated by Daniel O'Connell. Corkery is accused of failing to address himself to this new Ireland. O'Faolain must address himself to it, regardless of the problems such a project entails.

Yeats, with his appeal to an aristocratic order, could divide the population into philistines and aesthetes and, as a member of the latter group, he could then seek to impose his cultural vision on the former, indeed, had to do so as a matter of self-perceived duty, although if he was ignored or reviled this led to problems which he had no strategy for dealing with. In a democratic order this concept of the relation of the writer and the population was no longer possible. The writer could not be above his people, he needed to be of them. On this issue Corkery and O'Faolain were in accord, it was on the matter of history that they disagreed. O'Faolain's construction of Irish history spanned about one hundred and fifty years. Despite this short history Ireland was a plural nation and this pluralism was expressed in its literature. O'Faolain felt that no part of that literature could be rejected because to do so would be

28. Sean O'Faolain: *King of the Beggars*, op cit, p. 36.
to reject a part of the nation. Where Corkery, and to a degree Yeats, failed was that they each regarded one group as having privileged access to the national consciousness. The short view of history is, in O'Faolain's view, essential to the writer but it is still subject to the choice offered by O'Leary to Yeats: Fenianism or the Church. For Yeats this was a choice between subversion and quietism. After the establishment of the Free State the Church gained a measure of institutionalised influence (consolidated by the 1937 Constitution) which it had not previously had. The choice thus became one between subversion and active reinforcement. Corkery had, to O'Faolain's evident disgust, chosen the latter course, but did that mean that he had to choose the former?

If O'Faolain's historical vision was not as far-reaching as Corkery's it was partly because he had a clearer sense of Ireland as part of a wider contemporary world, and as a socio-cultural formation open to forces other than nationalism. Corkery rejected Yeats as an internal exile. Joyce too was among those writers he rejected because they lived out of Ireland and wrote about it under constraints imposed by the demands of an alien audience; in Joyce he thus misunderstood and rejected the drive towards Europeanisation - a drive which Corkery had used for his own ends. With Joyce he thought of Ireland as medieval and as having access to European modes of thought. Whereas Joyce followed through this idea, Corkery, in The Hidden Ireland, is ambivalent about this European influence, using it to privilege Ireland above England, but rejecting it when it seems to 'taint'

29. Sean O'Faolain: 'Letter from a Novelist to an Idealist', Motley, November 1933, 2 (7); 3-5, and 'The Emancipation of Irish Writers', Yale Review, March 1934, 23 (3); 485-503. In both articles there is a clear sense of the Irish State as being newly founded and a near desperation that anyone could be so foolish as to weaken it by rejecting such diversity as it had.

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Irish cultural purity. This was not surprising in that the State to which he gave his allegiance was one which established and maintained an isolationist position based on a vision which was, paradoxically, restricted by a long sweep of Irish history. O'Faolain's position was much more akin to that of Joyce in that he was open to the contemporary world and this was very much part of his success and a partial source of his eventual failure. Corkery, and to an extent writers like O'Connor and Kavanagh were 'at home' in Ireland - all three could survive trial by hurling match. O'Faolain could not do so with the same ease. The writer who declares 'vive moif' is somewhat self-consciously and a little archly one who has broken through the narrow confines of home.

O'Faolain's argument with the type of cultural nationalism represented by Corkery was carried on in the direct way that I have been describing and in more indirect ways. One of these was O'Faolain's interest in form. For O'Faolain the novel was to be the next major form in Ireland, although his reasons for thinking and wishing so were often vague. It is true that in the wake of Moore and Joyce, many of the younger writers - O'Flaherty, Stuart, O'Connor and O'Faolain himself - were turning to prose. Poetry was overshadowed by Yeats, drama by the Abbey, and Joyce, although obviously a force in prose, was not as immediately overbearing as either of these. Apart from this there was a sense that poetry and drama were associated with the revolutionary period, and that another form was needed to express post-revolutionary circumstances.

30. Eamonn Hughes: "It seems history is to blame", op cit, p. 110.
In the perceived absence of indigenous models for the novel, O'Faolain was impelled to look abroad to the great figures of the nineteenth century, Russian, English and French; this was indeed part of the attraction of prose forms for the requirement to look for non-Irish models provided a further rejection of Corkery's 'nationalisation of culture,' an attempt to find in cosmopolitanism the basis for a 'disinterested High Art' which did not as yet exist in Ireland. This project was not without its difficulties however. If we take Moore and Joyce as two types of cosmopolitan we may begin to see why. Moore is perhaps the cosmopolitan par excellence, a cultural pirate who will take his subject matter and forms from whatever sources are available. Dublin, Paris, London: none of these centres can overawe him because to him they represent nothing but opportunity. Joyce on the other hand carries his subject matter with him unashamedly and uses it as his yardstick. This was relatively easy in that Joyce had not to confront the issues at first hand as O'Faolain had to. Not only was O'Faolain never a true exile but he had similarities to Corkery which disadvantaged him as a cosmopolitan.

For Corkery the task of the writer was to express the national consciousness, for O'Faolain literature was a necessity because the Irish had little power of abstraction and needed literature to mediate experience. There is in both the democratic, populist impulse to produce a literature that is vital, of the people. Corkery dismisses Yeats' version of the spiritualised peasant in favour of the reality that suits his purposes even better:

31. Sean O'Faolain; 'Daniel Corkery', op cit, p. 55.
32. Ibid, 61.
33. Sean O'Faolain; 'The Emancipation of Irish Writers', op cit, 493.
... to substitute for it [the Religious Consciousness of the People] the wraith-like wisps of vanished beliefs that still float in the minds of a tiny percentage of the people, is to cut out the heart of the mystery.  

The reality, for Corkery, was that the despised peasant who had grubbed out an existence on the land for which he had had to fight had won. Corkery's gloating over the supposed power of the peasant in the new state must have horrified O'Faolain as much as it would have Yeats, but O'Faolain, as a democrat, would have had to accept its truth. And yet it was not the whole truth for O'Faolain knew that it was not a perfect state, was very close to being a gombeen republic, and yet it was his raw material. He had therefore to find a literature which would express it without collaborating with it.

Throughout his critical writing the problems inherent in O'Faolain's situation find expression in his descriptions of and appeals for a type of literature which will best match the contemporary reality of Ireland. He often wrote of the need for a realistic literature predicated upon the model of the classic realist texts of the nineteenth century. Such a literature would serve several purposes: it would, through its models, be outward-looking even cosmopolitan; as such it would confound the chauvinistic nationalism of those for whom Corkery spoke; it would provide a closer analysis of post-revolutionary Ireland than appeared possible in either poetry or drama; and it would be able to carry objective criticism of that society. Like AE, O'Faolain could not 'believe that the story of the Gael, which began among the Gods, will die out in some petty peasant

34. Daniel Corkery; Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, op cit, p. 20.
Here O'Faolain's problem becomes clear. Realism was the necessary form in the 1920s but O'Faolain thought that it was overdeveloped. If he was to criticise Ireland it would be on the grounds that it was a petty peasant republic and as such it was not complex enough for the sophistication of the classic realist text. As authority for this view O'Faolain most often quotes Henry James on Nathaniel Hawthorne:

"... he says that 'the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, and that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion'."

In this disparity between the models and the material there is room for a degree of alienation which makes O'Faolain different from his contemporaries. Terence Brown, agreeing with Seamus Deane, has noted the writers' lack of alienation, their belief, shared with the politicians, that the future of Ireland depended upon Irish resources:

The Irish short story of the thirties and forties therefore was an enactment of humanist faith in the Irish reality that it explored ostensibly as a condition of hopeless privation. It took for granted that an Irish art would have Ireland as its primary matter and it addressed itself to its subject in a manner that unselfconsciously bears witness to the vitality of Irish discourse.

Not only does O'Faolain express his doubts about the worthiness of the Irish subject but his style is one of alienation from that subject; it is deliberately and unusually non-anecdotal, non-oral, a writerly style


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composed of sentences which often need to be read several times. This point has been noted by Richard Fallis who refers to O'Faolain as an 'observer and commentator' unlike O'Connor who is always an insider.\textsuperscript{38} The irony of this alienated style is clear when one realises that it is the style of \textit{Vive Moi}.

Another reason for O'Faolain's attitude towards realism is that he believes the writer to be 'dual-natured', at once wishing to express reality and seeing it as irrelevant. The writer must therefore turn his face against reality and transmute the, to O'Faolain, regrettably naturalistic influence of Moore and Joyce. However, the difficulty in this is that there is no tradition to guide the prose writer in this project, so he must turn to the 'idealised racial mind'.\textsuperscript{39} The contradictions in this stance are evident and are compounded a year later. Writing about post-revolutionary Ireland and its condition of discontinuity O'Faolain speaks of writers as being 'mentally uprooted':

What follows must be obvious. Realism is doomed, and the swing back to romance, fantasy, poetry, is inevitable. The modern Irish writer is reorientated into himself, for there alone in his own dark cave of self can he hope to find the certainty of reality.\textsuperscript{40}

The writer's self-examination will, it is supposed, result in a new blend of reality which will be well-suited to the condition of contemporary Ireland. Just what this new blend will be is difficult to determine,

\textsuperscript{38} Richard Fallis: \textit{The Irish Renaissance}, \textit{op cit}, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{39} Sean O'Faolain: 'The Emancipation of Irish Writers', \textit{op cit}, 502.
\textsuperscript{40} Sean O'Faolain: 'Irish Letters: Today and Tomorrow', \textit{Fortnightly Review}, September 1935, OS144/NS138 (925): 365-371, 369, 370. This de Valera like quest for the national consciousness by introspection sits uneasily beside O'Faolain's democratic instincts and its unfortunate outcome is to be found in the strain of solipsism in \textit{Vive Moi!} which suggests a world of self-seeking individuals.
although the suggestion is that the writer will be somehow representative of the nation. I find this argument difficult to follow because O'Faolain fails to give any examples of this new form and the best one that I can think of is the 'Irish Books' of Sean O'Casey's *Autobiography*. These sections of the *Autobiography* appear to meet all O'Faolain's requirements but in reviews of these volumes O'Faolain attacks them as 'darlint literachure'" and it is not until his review of *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* that his attitude softens with the recognition that O'Casey is presenting himself as a representative type.

Implicit in all of O'Faolain's criticism at this time is the element of prescription for which he had attacked Corkery. This comes to the surface when in opposition to Corkery's three elements of Irish life he lists seven elements which he says are to be found in the literature rather than in the life of the nation but the title of the article ('The Raw Material of Irish Literature') goes against this. In this article he maintains that:

\[
\text{The only real sin [that the novelist can] commit would be ... to turn away from or to exorcise beforehand, any part of life...}^{42}
\]

He also maintains that the novelist in Ireland works, without a tradition." By 1941 he is again espousing naturalism and talking about the need for tradition, albeit a shaken-up and revitalised tradition."
One could continue this list of contradictions indefinitely and unkindly since it shows an inconsistency on the part of O'Faolain which might be taken as weakening his claim to high intellectual standing in Ireland. However, I would suggest that his standing rests on these contradictions. In a Corkery, inconsistencies are often the result of badly rigged evidence. In O'Faolain, however, inconsistencies, altered positions and contradictions are the outward signs of struggle, of a determination to face issues squarely and not to flinch from the conflicts, internal or external, which result. His willingness to change, to contradict himself is evidence of his willingness to engage with each aspect of the issues and to offer as many alternatives as possible to the prevailing stolidity. It is a personal enactment of the pluralism he promotes in opposition to the impoverished official view of modern Ireland.

The greatest achievement of this part of O'Faolain's career, and the clearest expression of his oppositional pluralism, is The Bell which he founded in October 1940 and edited from then until 1946 when it was taken over by Peadar O'Donnell:

Under the wartime editorship of O'Faolain, The Bell emerged as a lonely liberal voice evaluating and criticizing establishment standards, such as the government censorship of books.

It is with The Bell that we can begin to look again at Vive Moi! for The Bell is the subject of the central moment of reticence in the work. Vive

45, Corkery's charge that Joyce had gone 'astray' is there because A Portrait had taken up the conflict of sexuality and rigid public morality that Corkery had suggested as a potential theme for a great Irish novel. Joyce is not, however, among his chosen writers of Irish literature and cannot be seen therefore to have forestalled Corkery.

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Molí ends, despite the words 'Thus far: Dublin, 1964', in the early nineteen thirties. The final words do, it is true, suggest that it continues for another thirty years beyond this point but it does so only if one consents to the implication that having become a writer and re-established himself in Ireland, O'Faolain is subject to no more change, that having become a writer he has entered the cave of self (a phrase which combines echoes of Plato and DeValera), a timeless, static region. However, to sustain this implication he has to do some juggling with time and bring in an event from 1954, his final, most climactic 'brimming'. The effect of this time shift, which O'Faolain tries to obviate by placing the 'brimming' at the heart of Vive Molí so that it is well-established in the reader's mind by the time of the return to Ireland, is to leave a gap of some twenty years in the time-scheme of the work, precisely those years during which O'Faolain was asking those questions that this 'brimming' is supposed to have neutralised. In those twenty years O'Faolain's opposition to the dominant ideology of the new State was at its height and at its most tactically successful. His opposition to the Censorship, for example, took the form of an acknowledgement of the need for some standards and with 'spikily infuriating common sense' he argued 'the fact that so many Irish writers had met with the Board's disapproval displayed how remote its members were from an understanding of native taste and standards'. It must be admitted that after O'Faolain had left the editorship of The Bell the magazine went on to become even more radical in the hands of Peadar O'Donnell under whom it adopted an 'aggressive, punchy left-wingism'.

47. Sean O'Faolain: Vive Molí, op cit, p. 374.
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Such a stance would not have been possible under O'Faolain for reasons which do much to explain the contradictory nature of so many of his views. In all of his conflicts there is no clear sense of his aim; there is, in his own word, no 'destination': 'How much we envy Yeats his definite aims and inspiring models'\(^50\) he wrote of the time when revolt and national independence provided both pattern and destination. In post-revolutionary Ireland, however, society had a 'rigid ideology'\(^61\) which is merely pattern without destination, because the very rigidity of the ideology implies that destination has been reached, such a society cannot alter but only become more like its ideologically controlled image of itself.

What O'Faolain did offer at this time was what Donat O'Donnell has called his 'literary Parnellism' by which is meant the association of the 'separate ideas of national, spiritual and sexual emancipation'.\(^52\) O'Donnell points out that in his desire for spiritual and sexual emancipation (which must, despite O'Donnell's remarks, be seen as linked issues) O'Faolain is separated from his fellow countrymen and -women. Nationalism, O'Donnell argues, is thus forced to bear the weight of linking O'Faolain to the community. However, as nationalism, in its contemporary manifestation, was something to which O'Faolain was opposed and since his major nationalist activity, in the Civil War, had been on the minority

50. Sean O'Faolain: 'Fifty Years of Irish Literature', op cit. 331.
51. Sean O'Faolain: 'Ireland after Yeats', op cit. 45.
52. Donat O'Donnell: 'The Parnellism of Sean O'Faolain' in his Maria Cross; Imaginative Patterns in a Group of Modern Catholic Writers, London, Chatto and Windus, 1954, pp. 95-115, p. 103. O'Donnell is the pseudonym of Conor Cruise O'Brien and it is an interesting sidelight on the atmosphere which engendered and sustained the censorship that such an outspoken figure, even with his pedigree to back him, should find it necessary to write on this subject only under a pseudonym. From 1944 he was a government employee and another famous Civil Servant, Brian O'Nolan, also found it necessary to use a pseudonym, if not as a disguise then as protective colouring.

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his separation from the community is not eased by the nationalist issue. His 'parnellism' is not, however, programmatic and it thus brings in train those problems which are associated with any such contingent and intuitive reaction. This, however, was the only kind of reaction available to O'Faolain. To respond to the rigid ideology of the State with a programme of his own would, in his eyes, involve just that kind of undemocratic paternalism of which he had accused Yeats and which was so uncongenial to him. Furthermore, any such programme proposed by O'Faolain would necessarily increase his own isolation.

The theme of isolation is a major one in O'Faolain's work and as I have already noted it appears in Vive Mol! as that odd note of solipsism which is paradoxically also the sign of O'Faolain having achieved a kind of community. To understand this paradox it is necessary to understand something of the ideological force of 'community' in Ireland. The central exposition of the concept of community is Eamon de Valera's 1943 speech:

That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age.

What leisure time was not devoted to the things of the spirit would doubtless be spent attending hurling matches at Thurles. Both de Valera and

53. Sean O'Faolain: Vive Mol!, op cit, Ch. 10.4 reveals some of the consequences of this.
55. Quoted in Terence Brown: Ireland, op cit, p. 146. See Ch. 3 above for Kavanagh's refutation of this.
Corkery are talking about a people, a single social entity which would speak with one voice, the voice of the ideology here propounded. It is at this point that we may recall the definition of ideology as false consciousness because the picture conjured by this ideology is patently false. Corkery had had to misunderstand history in *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* and *The Hidden Ireland* to be able to present the idea of a continuing peasant community, a community that had not altered in any way but had attained visibility by throwing off the domination of the Anglo-Irish colonialists. In this view Ireland was an independent peasant nation, a nation which the writer could understand only by going into the huts of the people and living with them in their rural fashion. By Corkery's own reckoning, however, 47% of the population lived in the towns or were not engaged in agricultural labour.

By using this cultural vision as an ideological mask for Ireland the 47% could be ignored, and Ireland could be presented as a classless society completely at one with itself and self-sufficient. This, however, was not the case. Irish society far from being rural was becoming increasingly urban. This was due not to a drift from the land to the towns but to a movement away from Ireland completely. During the period 1901 to 1946 the population of Southern Ireland decreased by 8%. The increasing concentration of the population in the towns had obvious social consequences. Nor was the countryside free from social change in the pre- and post-revolutionary periods. What F. S. L. Lyons calls 'constructive Unionism' culminated in the Wyndham Act of 1903 which was the most radical

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of those Land Acts passed between 1870 and 1909. All of these acts ensured that between 1870 and 1916 the proportion of Irish householders who owned land increased from 3% to 63.9%. The nationalist revolution therefore ran alongside a social and economic revolution which meant that there could not possibly be the kind of continuity envisaged by Corkery and de Valera; many of their peasants were settling down as small farmers, a great many others were leaving the country. Their peasant Ireland was in reality increasingly an Ireland of small farmers, small businessmen, a new bourgeoisie. O'Faolain confuses the social and national revolutions but he does at least acknowledge the changes that have taken place in Ireland:

We must, finally, understand that the class that thus came to power and influence was not a labouring class; the more able among them changed their nature by changing their place in life—they graduated rapidly into petit bourgeois, middlemen, importers, small manufacturers, thus forming a new middle-class to fill the vacuum formed by the departure or depression of the alien middle-class ... These men, naturally, had had very little education and could only have a very slight interest in the intellectuals' fight for freedom of expression. They were ordinary, decent, kindly, self-seeking men who had no intention of jeopardising their mushroom-prosperity ... In any case, since they were rising to sudden wealth behind protective tariff-walls they had a vested interest in nationalism and even in isolationism. The upshot of it was a holy alliance between the Church, the new businessmen and the politicians, all three nationalist-isolationist for, respectively, moral reasons, commercial reasons, and politico-patriotic reasons.

This changeover of power and influence was not a sudden event, time was needed for consolidation, time which could not be gained by attempting to justify the nationalist revolution on the grounds that it had resulted in a state of gombeen men and hucksters. The dominant ideology therefore offered the image of the nation as homogeneous community in a way that had never

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existed in Ireland which had been tribal up to the seventeenth century and a subject nation after that. After 1922 it became what O'Faolain characterised as a 'broken world', a world which had lost the alien upper echelons of its class structure and had not yet had enough time to fill the resulting gap with an indigenous replacement class. The peasant as image of the nation could thus stand as an idealistic ideological justification of the revolution while the new middle-class was establishing and consolidating its position. The irony is that while Ireland was hiding behind an ideological mask of unity the broken world that it was in reality was not being healed; the new middle-class would be composed of self-seeking individuals and whatever real community had ever existed in Ireland would be lost in a world of individualism and self-help. The 'self-sufficient Ireland' of the thirties and forties could stand as a state adopting a policy which echoed its prevailing social condition of increasing isolation and alienation.

Isolation and alienation provide a key theme in the short stories of O'Faolain; indeed, the stories are themselves indices of alienation. The other important theme of the stories is that of memory (both racial and individual, both as an impulse and as a source of mystery) and both themes are carried over to *Vive Moi!* as O'Faolain confronts, on the personal level, those matters which he had concerned himself with on the national

level for the preceding thirty years, and comes thereby to a his particular
type of acceptance.

In his arguments about cultural nationalism O'Faolain was at pains to
defend the new democracy in Ireland but he was aware that by defending the
freedom of writers he was going against the apparent democratic wishes of
the Irish. *Vive Moi!* responds to this by concentrating more on the self
than on society and thereby internalises the problem. Other 'characters'
are excluded in this examination of the self. As I have already pointed
out, his father is a locked box and the rest of the family is dealt with in
a similar fashion. It is ideas and places which are the major influences on
O'Faolain, by his own account, not people. This is reinforced by his early
rejection of the shabby genteeelism of his upbringing:

> If I say a final no to that school, what I am really saying,
then, is a no to that Ireland. I am saying a no to my own
boyhood, my own youth, even my own parents, to everything that,
had I not rebelled against it, would have mismade me for life. 61

This is a typical passage in many ways: the need to consider carefully
before making a decision; the scrupulous detailing of the consequences of
the decision; and finally the sense that the decision was a necessary one
because O'Faolain presents it as part of a process by which he was enabled
to take charge of his own life, his own pattern and destination, rather
than being determined by the prevailing social forces. The rejection is
carefully prepared for from the beginning of the work which opens with a
description of the influence which the church and the theatre exerted on
his imagination. His eventual rejection is evident too in the depiction

61. Sean O'Faolain: *Vive Moi!, op cit*, p. 58.
of the early life, the poverty and snobbery of which is expressed in the tale of the coat.\textsuperscript{62} From the beginning then there is a sense that O’Faolain is an outsider, an isolate. This is not the result of a Dedalean rejection of the institutions, public and private, of a tyrannical state, because it calls forth in O’Faolain the need to find a community, a replacement for that which has been rejected. This replacement community should be confirmatory of O’Faolain rather than challenging of him. Several possible replacements are offered to the reader. The Lancasterian School follows the family (the primal community) in being rejected. The world of holidays, however, is greeted as the ‘beginning of my emancipation: the start of another me’,\textsuperscript{63} but these holidays take place in an Edenic world curiously at odds with this sense of the break in the self. O’Faolain’s model of the nation as a broken world allows him to sustain a political optimism based on the sense that this new democratic Ireland is only just stretching its political muscles for the first time. Similarly, his model of the self presents it as capable of achieving newness by breaking from the personal and social past and thus remaking itself. In both cases, however, there remains an apparent need for a legitimising and confirmatory connection to selected elements of the past. This leads to a contradiction between the organicism of the selected past and the self-determined newness which O’Faolain lays claim to for both himself and the nation:

Habit and custom ruled here. It was a place breathing its own essence. Nothing was imposed, nothing made, everything grew as softly as the morning light through the blind.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, Ch. 4, 4.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 73.
Literature too is regarded as a means of access to community, first in the form of Henty's stories, then in Robinson's play *Patriots*. This is compounded by his own first literary activity which is again couched in terms of both Eden and a new self which had broken with the old life:

Gazing at that picture [the frontispiece of an Irish primer] I was creating a new legend, a new myth. I was unconsciously writing it, peopling it. I was engaged in every writer's first task - hypothesizing life, imagining himself into it.

Each time a community is found it is in turn rejected in favour of something which offers a new beginning in a world which is completely organic. The movement is precipitated by the discovery of successive serpents - cruelty in the Lancasterian, Aunt Kate's shabby genteeelism on holidays - which are also used as excuses to shorten history once more. However, the rejection of the holiday world signals an alteration; thereafter progress is imaged as growth rather than breakage.

Henty's stories are thus displaced by the Easter Rising of 1916 and Robinson's play which lead O'Faolain into the language movement. This seems to signal the discovery of a truly ideal community; it is accessible to those, beginning with himself, who have the 'password' of language; it has an ideal location, the 'Free Country' (surely O'Faolain's version of an historically and culturally sanctioned Free State), where the weight of millenia presses all into a perfected stasis, and where innocence can exist apparently untouched by the real world. Further, O'Faolain and his companions here re-christen themselves as both a sign of the political

65. Sean O'Faolain: *Viva Moi!, op cit*, p.100,
66. Ibid, p. 132,
67. Ibid, pp. 139-141,
rebirth of Easter 1916 and, almost incidentally, as a sign of the rejection of the family. Terence Brown, discussing contemporary accounts of this sort of experience, describes it as '... a journey from the bourgeois world of self to an almost prelapsarian innocence ... a release from self into community ...'.

It might seem that this discovery of community resolves the contradiction of the early declaration 'I am where and what I was born' being followed by a series of rejections of precisely those elements which go to make him, in the effort to be where and what he wants. Those other earlier imposed communities are, however, different from the nationalist one. They were all an escape from life rather than an experiencing of it as the nationalist community appears to be. This community subsumes certain of the qualities of the earlier ones and thus qualifies the rejections. Furthermore, it spreads into many areas of life. University College, Cork which might, under other circumstances, have been a community in itself is instead drawn into the nationalist community as when O'Faolain and other undergraduates drill secretly with the Irish Volunteers:

In that moment life became one with the emotion of Ireland. In that moment I am sure every one of us ceased to be single or individual and became part of one another, in union, almost like coupling lovers.

In a work which professes sexual innocence this image is an obviously striking evidence of the sense of community about which O'Faolain is writing. Such a sense of community obviates the need for individual

68. Ibid, p. 141.
69. Terence Brown: Ireland, op cit, p. 93.
70. Sean O'Faolain: Vive Noi!, op cit, pp. 172-173.
reaction to experience; all areas of life now work in concert within the one Pattern moving apparently towards the same Destination.

Unfortunately, for both O'Faolain and Ireland this sense of community does not last, but it provides O'Faolain with an image of the ideal which will trouble him throughout the course of his life as related in the autobiography. There is, however, some difficulty in deciding whether O'Faolain is here once again rejecting a community or whether that community is disintegrating. Certainly, from the evidence of his critical writings of the succeeding period, O'Faolain rejected the community on the grounds that it made an appeal to a false sense of history in order to justify itself. This confusion over the period, in the autobiography, is due to two elements. The first is that there is no epiphanic moment, as there is with O'Connor, in which O'Faolain claims to see through everything. Then there is the professed loss of memory which disables the account of the period. This loss of memory initially appears to be a radical instance of the foreshortening of history as in King of the Beggars. However, this part of the autobiography cannot sustain such an explanation because the loss of memory is partial (in both senses?) and to accept it as a complete break with the past would be to assume O'Faolain's acceptance of isolation. This idea is, however, undercut by the episodes at Harvard and of canvassing for the University job, both of which are once more examples of the quest for community. Furthermore, the reasons that O'Faolain gives for his rejection are all political. None of the leaders in 1916 and after, except Connolly, had given any thought to the nature of the freedom and independence that they were fighting for, their attitude was 'Fight first, think afterwards, Get rid of the British and the rest would
follow naturally.' This comment accords with his criticism of the new state and its ideology of natural growth into a proper Irish nation. In the autobiography however these criticisms are immediately qualified by an explanation of how such a lack of thought could occur, which amounts almost to a justification, and by his own reasons for being a Republican in the Civil War. These amount to a Corkery-like love of the ancestral memories of the Irish-speaking Ireland, and a vague appeal to Wolfe Tone's 'men of no property'. These reasons are then even vaguer than the five-page 'democratic programme' produced in the Dáil on 21st January 1919 which O'Faolain has just been condemning as vague and unthinking. In consequence of all these qualifications the apparent autobiographical rejection of the nationalist community is ambiguous, especially, when compared with his earlier comments on this period and its consequences:

The rise of all common folk is likely to be none too pleasant to watch ... we have seen the common folk of Ireland in our own day rise like the beanstalk out of the Revolution of 1922 and their behaviour is often very unpleasant to watch.

The sequence of rejections which takes up the first third of the autobiography provides echoes of the arguments in which O'Faolain had engaged but each of his autobiographical rejections, unlike his stance in the earlier arguments, is eventually qualified and unDedalean.

The method of the autobiography indeed does not allow for absolute rejections. These may be recorded as part of the process by which O'Faolain

71, Sean O'Faolain: *Vive Moi!, op cit*, p.183.
73, Sean O'Faolain: *The Irish, op cit*, p. 75.
withdraws from 'Persona' to 'Shadow' (the Jungian terms he applies to the dual nature of the writer, the public self and the self responsible for writing) but that process is in turn a part of the larger process of eventual acceptance. Stendhal, a hero of O'Faolain's:

... blundered around like everybody else, groping slowly through a life-time's conscious, half-conscious and, it is clear, [from his notebooks and diaries] unconscious meanderings towards the conclusions that were finally to be embodied in his idealized mirror-characters ... So it was with me. For some thirty years I was to meander around the experiences of my first manhood, recomposing my life in novels and stories wherein I could hold the flowing, flickering river and look at it.75

With this view of the self as something whole that can be recovered through writing, autobiography becomes the ultimate means of stilling the flux in order to look at the unified self through the medium of memory.

Memory, already noted as a major theme in O'Faolain's work, plays a significant part in the autobiography. We must here distinguish between particular and general memory: the simplest way to do so is to regard the former as plural and the latter as singular. Particular memory is composed of a series of random, discrete, atomised events and thoughts. O'Faolain cites an image, from St Augustine, of being as a great sponge in the sea of infinity to explain that particular memories are those which escape the process of absorption, and may therefore be no more than unabsorbed leftovers, while the best part of us is 'deep in the glaucous sea'.76 This idea devalues autobiography in two ways by casting doubt on the value of memory and by suggesting that an ultimate community, Augustine's 'sea of

74. Sean O'Faolain: *Vive Moi!*, op cit, p. 228.
75. Ibid, p. 219.
76. Ibid, pp. 68-69.
infinity', has already claimed all individuals. Even so, the writing of autobiography must proceed by composing individual memories into general memory so as to establish the pattern of a life. This pattern is in turn necessary to establish destination, the extrapolation from pattern of one's ultimate place in a general scheme; pattern we may say is ontological, destination eschatological. O'Faolain describes this process as coalescing particular memories:

In my unthinking being everything about those alternating holidays in the plains of Limerick and in the plains of Dublin-Kildare has been for most of my life a mere scatter of blurred and blobs like dots on a radar screen. I am coalescing the blobs here only in hope of discovering what they had in common, what they might have had to say to one another if they had ever met.77

Here of course O'Faolain is talking only about one part of his life (a notion which depends on the composition of general memory) but the method seems to hold true throughout Vive Moi! Insofar as this is the method of the autobiography, O'Faolain, we may concede, is being candid in his open consideration of his methods and in his acknowledgement of those points where memory, significantly, fails him. The work appears to be all surface and the exclusion of the random and contradictory is excusable on the grounds that O'Faolain is aware of what he is doing and allows his readers the same degree of awareness; this is no more than we would expect from the voice of liberal tolerance. This voice is that of a man who has come to accept his place now that he has been able to piece together pattern and destination.

Evidence of this acceptance is scattered throughout the autobiography but we may take the two issues - cultural nationalism and censorship - that

77. Ibid, p. 90
figure so largely in his critical writings as the indices of that acceptance. His autobiographical account of Daniel Corkery\textsuperscript{78} lacks the bite of his critical writings and is written more as a sorrowful explanation of how provincialism dulled Corkery than as a critical murdering of the father. The mature O'Faolain reflecting on his period in the 'Free Country' gives some indication of just how much of a reconciliation with Corkery's ideas has taken place in going against his own earlier foreshortening of history:

So the old life dies, the old symbols wither away, and I and my like who warmed our hands at the fire of the past are torn in two as we stand on the side of the bridge and look back in anguish at the doomed Ireland beyond it.\textsuperscript{79}

This old Ireland is doomed because of the activities of some 'hard-headed men' from whom he now obviously excludes himself although he was once one of them. As a 'hard-headed man' he had opposed the fighting of the battles of the past because they distracted from those of the present. In this attitude there was an intuitive recognition that symbols were not reality even though, as recently as Yeats, they had appeared to be so:

In using what I considered traditional symbols I forgot that in Ireland they are not symbols but realities.\textsuperscript{80}

That Yeats saw symbols rather than reality was the mark of his own distance from the felt history of many people. Those same symbols were still in evidence after the revolution, but now their reality was lessened by the presence of a real indigenous political power which could appropriate them

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, pp. 167ff.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{80} W.B. Yeats: The Autobiography, op cit, p. 279.
as a suitable ideological mask for the inexorable rise of an indigenous middle-class. O'Faolain at the time knew this process to have occurred but in the autobiography his new tolerance allows for regret for the passing of the old symbols. Further evidence of this new tolerance is found in his decision to return from America to Europe where every field has its memories which is in marked contrast to his earlier pronouncement that:

To us Ireland is beginning, where to Corkery it is continuing. We have a sense of time, of background ... but we cannot see the man ploughing against the sky in an aura of antiquity." 

Here the contrast between the past and present is much sharper than in the autobiography.

His attitude towards the Censorship in the autobiography has also softened considerably. The lists of bannings, it is true, 'still stand as the official demonstration of Ireland's contempt for literature' but the original motivation for these bannings came, he now maintains, from 'a fanatical minority maggot-bred by the decay in national morale during the years following the Civil War, a time when the Catholic Church was felt, feared and courted on all sides as the dominant power.' There is significantly no mention of either politicians or business-men sharing in this power because to do so would be to acknowledge that the Censorship was much more broadly based and therefore less forgiveable. The banning of his own work caused him pain and distress but the Censorship can now seemingly be laughed at. All that is left to worry about is 'its legacy of anger and 

81. Sean O'Faolain: *Vive No!,* op cit, p. 305, and O'Faolain: 'Daniel Corkery', *op cit*, 60-61; cf Kavanagh's 'black hills' pitched between the druidic past and the industrial present.
82. Sean O'Faolain: *Vive No!,* op cit, p. 342.
the division it created between the artist and his people.' The shift here is from a discomfort caused by his sense that as a writer he is at odds with a democratic Ireland to an acceptance based on this new construction of the undemocratic impulse behind the Censorship. O'Faolain is thus enabled to align himself in a democratic spirit with Ireland at large.

His own previous isolation is now seen as being attributable to external forces which, like the Censorship Board, are no longer a serious threat. His previous isolation is now given the status of a minor annoyance rather than being acknowledged as a reaction to those social ills of which the Censorship was merely a symptom. As Terence Brown puts it:

... this late retrospective tolerance on his part does little justice to the substance and quality of O'Faolain's earlier critical assault on post-Revolutionary Ireland which was both intellectually based and rigourously argued. Rather it tends to soften in memory what was in fact a protracted campaign of opposition waged against their society by Irish writers in which O'Faolain played a commanding role.84

Given this disparity it is appropriate to attend to the quality and substance of O'Faolain's 'acceptance'. I have already noted that O'Faolain's rejections in Vive Moi! are consistently qualified and, despite the progress-by-rejection of the opening chapters, there is always the underpinning of the initial affirmation of the self as whole. This affirmation is repeated throughout the work so despite his early rejection of his own childhood for fear of being 'mismade' he can also say:

83. Ibid, p.365, my emphasis.
84. Terence Brown: Ireland, op cit, p. 155.
I defend my seed of childhood for what it was and what it became.
I defend the double doors. I defend my entry into the heart of
life which is our imagination of it.\text{\textsuperscript{85}}

This goes further than O'Faolain's earlier collapsing of the boundary
between fantasy and reality and much further than O'Connor's synthesis of
imagination and reality by suggesting that reality does not exist except in
the individual imagination. The right of the self to recompose itself
imaginatively as a whole is couched in terms of organic processes, the most
important image of which is the 'brimming', while rejection is associated
with manufacture. (The minority responsible for censorship are a part of
this world of the natural, although they represent its decay.) This
acceptance of the natural world that is Ireland is, it seems, unavoidable:

The city was my shadow, and no man jumps off his own shadow. It
was for twenty-six years my life; more than that it was Life -
and one does not spit Life out of one's mouth.\text{\textsuperscript{86}}

There is in this the sense that 'we cherish only what we recognise'\text{\textsuperscript{87}}
which is in opposition to Yeats' 'we know everything because we have made
everything'.\text{\textsuperscript{88}} It is the mark of Yeats and his contemporaries that they
should strive always for deliberate creation in the face of the almost
impossible. It is the mark of O'Faolain and his peers that they should
accept. None of them is a D(a)edalus, and O'Faolain has known this for a
long time:

\begin{quote}
85. Sean O'Faolain: \textit{Hive Moil, op cit}, p. 24, my emphasis. The 'double doors' are those of Cork Opera
House in the description of which O'Faolain first collapses fantasy and reality. They are also however
symbolically literature and the Church.
86. \textit{Ibid}, p. 156.
87. \textit{Ibid}, p. 27.
Macmillan, 1961, pp. 509-526; my emphasis.
\end{quote}
It was an entirely new thing for men to realise the full and complete dignity of the simplest life of the simplest people. Once they had acknowledged that they were free to do anything they liked with it in literature ... They had conquered their material by accepting it.®

However, his concept of 'acceptance' at the time of writing The Irish allowed for criticism, anger and bitterness, none of which appears in Vive Mol!. This is not simply a matter of increased tolerance, for tolerance has always been present in the work. As Roger Garfitt has said it was tolerance that:

... allowed the conflicting sympathies to be held in balance. It is not simply a matter of material fairness, of the surprising equipoise with which Henn, for instance, the Anglo-Irish landlord in 'Midsummer Night's Madness', is balanced against the Republican Stevey Long, but a basic tenet of his style.™

No, tolerance it was that allowed for conflict, contradiction, the need to embrace all parts of Irish society and culture. The affirmation of the natural, indeed, may be seen as a rejection of that tolerance for by associating wholeness with the natural and organic it seems that O'Faolain is aligning himself with those, who like the untolerant Corkery, wrote of Irish society as that which grew naturally from the Irish soil, and which therefore need not change, need not be improved. O'Faolain's reaction, in Vive Mol!, in short, goes beyond acceptance and becomes resignation. As he says, the final stage of a 'brimming' comes always as surrender not triumph.¶ Never a Dedalus, he is now no longer to be counted with Bloom in the ranks of the 'unconquered'.

89. Sean O'Faolain: The Irish, op cit, p. 137.
91. Sean O'Faolain: Vive Mol!, op cit, p. 128.
Chapter 5

Resignation explains the tone of Vive Mol!, explains the rejection of rejection throughout the work, and also explains why Vive Mol! should end where it does, which is before the point in his life when O'Faolain became fully engaged in his struggle with Church and State. His inability during that 'missing' period to propose an actual programme need not therefore be explained in the autobiography. He can accept the role of one of his own 'misfit heroes' as described by Maurice Harmon. The misfit hero is one who must face the problem of how to 'live creatively within a society which is restrictive and unattractive' but:

The directions of Irish life have been so hidden in the post-revolutionary period that the misfit hero cannot affirm his belief in a better future nor demonstrate how a better future might be realised.²²

More even than the misfit hero, O'Faolain fails in his originally adopted project. By becoming resigned, O'Faolain links himself in two important ways with the Church and State and thus fulfils the drive towards community which is evident in the autobiography.

The first of these links is that resignation is a 'virtue' that is distinctively 'Irish':

... humbly to accept the Will of God, it is the escape from bitterness that we Irish have taken for centuries, and it hasn't worked out too badly, insofar as we have come through all sorts of oppression and misfortunes a cheerful, good-humoured, loyal, hard-working tenacious people.²³

93. Sean O'Faolain; Vive Mol!, op cit, p. 57.
By becoming resigned he can say 'we Irish' in a way not open to O'Connor with his concept of total acceptance nor Kavanagh with his concept of 'indifference'. In order to do so he has had to give up much, a sense of irony to begin with, otherwise he would surely have remembered his characterisation of resignation as one of the 'passive virtues' of the peasant which like all such virtues can become a vice if left in a moral vacuum or exaggerated. He would also have remembered his own movement from love to pity when confronted with his mother's resignation, which is what first spurred him to fight the existing order. In that instance he tried to do so by teaching his mother to keep accounts, as a way of exerting control over her life, and failed. Ironically the other appearance of account-keeping, his own way of keeping track of money earned per article written, serves to mark his own embourgeoisement rather than a rejection of the existing order. This second instance of account-keeping is referred to as part of his description of his early years as a writer when he was at his most combative, but in the scheme of the autobiography it serves to show how in the post-Whitaker Report Ireland he has become assimilated to the middle class.

The second of the links forged by resignation, signalled by 'humbly to accept the Will of God', arises from O'Faolain presenting it as a theological solution to his problems. This, the climax of the work, is presented as the destination found by the establishment of pattern, but it is in fact the destination which establishes pattern. This duplicity
undercuts the words 'once it has happened' as the key to acceptance. To begin with, the autobiography closes, firmly, in the mid-nineteen thirties with O'Faolain started as a writer, hymning his own sense of unity and belonging with unconsciously ironical (in this context almost parodic) echoes of the end of A Portrait, in a chapter simply and significantly entitled 'Home'. With this very specific ending the all-important conversation with a priest in New York in 1954, which provides the justification for his resignation, is only in the autobiography at the expense of silence about the intervening years, the years of O'Faolain's greatest struggle with the Irish establishment.

Furthermore, the ground for this exclusively theological epiphany has been carefully prepared in a series of imaginary conversations some pages earlier. These conversations are also duplicitous in their way. Along with the other analytic parts of the work they are endowed with a timeless quality which allows them to apply to all parts of the life. I have already remarked on O'Faolain's apparent candour in his approach to autobiography but these conversations are a disguised interrogation of the form. O'Faolain, in conversations which are about detachment, among other topics, gives what he imagines the opinions of an historian, a psychologist and a writer (Flaubert) might be if confronted with his problems subsequent to the Civil War. By doing so he is able to take each of the elements of autobiography (autos: self; psychologist; bios: life; historian; and graphe: writing: Flaubert) and show how they all agree with the resignation that he will achieve a few pages and many years later. The historian assures him that a period of quietism is inevitable after a revolution; the psychologist offers him the choice between continuing the political fight
and exile as a means of resolving his problems about his position in society and O'Faolain answers that he has done both; Flaubert notes his movement from romanticism as a writer with approval as a sign of greater life acceptance. The O'Faolain who puts these words into their mouths agrees with each one and, newly passive, acknowledges that his anger in the wake of the Civil War was unreasonable because he had been privileged to witness the 'potential wholeness and integrity of human nature' and should therefore accept both this privilege and the knowledge that all such aspiration will always be crushed.\(^98\) It is this same argument about resigning oneself to the prevailing circumstances which is carried forward to his meeting with the young priest and finally ended by the priest's 'explanation' of the relationship between divine and human will. The argument, however, drops into bathos just after this when O'Faolain cites, as a reason to be passive, Count Mosca's comment to Fabrizio when the latter complained about the nature of politics:

> But my dear boy, you don't complain about the rules in whist.\(^99\)

What is unsettling about this argument is the way in which O'Faolain confuses the matters of history, psychology, writing, theology, politics, and the arbitrary in such a way as to suggest that the socio-economic condition of post-Revolutionary Ireland is either immutable (God's Will) or merely a matter of irrelevant convention (the rules of whist). In either case stasis is implied, and acceptance of the self and of the nation is seen to rest on an acceptance of the status quo, with a consequent betrayal of his own and others' criticisms of that society and a discounting of the

\(^98\) Sean O'Faolain: *Vive Maï*, op cit, pp. 222-225.
importance of his own and others' struggles against stasis. It is in this way, in Vive Moi!, that O'Faolain achieves the end of being a unified self; freed from problems and contradictions he is a complete individual in a world of middle-class individualism and has thereby also achieved a community:

... in this book I am now writing, that novel, A Nest of Simple Folk, links these last pages with my earliest pages describing my childhood. It was a child's view of the world brought into relation to a grown man's view of the world. The grown man was, in his cave of Self, explaining to the child he once had been what it really was that he thought he saw as a child. It was a relating of aspirations nourished in innocence to the world experienced in knowledge.100

This equally well describes what the mature O'Faolain has done to the O'Faolain of the years after A Nest of Simple Folk and the consequence of both 'relatings' is a circularity, a denial of earlier aspirations in the face of a supposed knowledge, a withdrawal into the cave of self and a closed literary world in an effort to regain community even if only with other similarly enclosed selves. The conviction that '... this chaos of life must be reduced, somehow, to form ...'101 is, in Vive Moi!, put into practice without O'Faolain being at all disturbed that the operative word is 'reduced'.

One might say that the choices made in the autobiography were inherent all along in O'Faolain's approach; we might say that the choices of Daniel O'Connell and Eamon de Valera as subjects for biographies, rather than, say, Wolfe Tone and James Connolly, reveals a taste for pragmatism. To do

100, Ibid, p. 371, my emphasis.
101, Ibid, p. 373. This conviction is set up in opposition to the 'shapelessness' of Michael Farrell's extraordinary Thy Tears Might Cease, London, Jonathan Cape, 1953.
this, however, would be unfair, for it is in the nature of contradiction to hold in balance, for a while, two opposing views. O'Faolain's eventual choice of resignation rather than struggle has resulted in his autobiography being a commemoration in Walter Benjamin's sense of that word, 'an inventory of [his] past as of lifeless merchandise',\(^{102}\) rather than in Joyce's sense of it as a sharing of a mobilised tradition. O'Faolain's real importance lies, however, in his struggle and it is that which we should commemorate even if he chooses not to.

\(^{102}\) Quoted in Frederic Jameson: *Marxism and Form*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1971, p. 73.
Throughout this thesis we have been concerned with the shifting senses of nation and self and the relationship between them which can be seen in the autobiographies of several writers but this has so far been explained in the context of writers who had an interest in maintaining some kind of relationship to the nation. *Black List Section H* offers us the opportunity to examine what happens to a writer when he insists that the self is completely removed from any such connection.

*Black List Section H*, a work which compels rather than attracts, was first published as an 'autobiographical fiction' in 1971 although when it received its first British publication this phrase had been removed from the title page. On its first appearance as a paperback the text was firmly classified as 'Fiction' but even so the publisher's 'blurb' both quotes Stuart on its status as 'an imaginative fiction in which only real people appear and under their own names where possible' and then goes on to treat H, the text's central figure, as if he were Stuart. Such attention to the way in which the text is presented to its readership is not a trivial concern since this presentation bears on the fundamental issue of the status of the text. We have encountered this problem before in autobiography's use of fictional techniques (not to mention fictional events and characters) and also in fiction's use of a large range of

2. London, Martin Brian and O’Keeffe, 1975. Some sources list another edition (London, Amsterdam, Feffer and Simons, 1971) which I have been unable to trace. The edition used in this chapter is Harmondsworth, King Penguin, 1982 - Stuart's first paperback reprint in a writing career of some 60 years.
autobiographical material, but there is in Stuart's case a more deliberately consistent blurring of generic boundaries than we have yet encountered and this demands our attention.

If we look first to the characters in the text we find such names as W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne, Liam O'Flaherty and Iseult Gonne and we thus assume that we are in the presence of the historically accurate; the general impression of Yeats, for example, seems to accord with biographical portrayals of him. Other figures, however, do not appear under their own names; Halka Witebsk, for example, is the text's counterpart (one assumes) of Gertrud Meissner the woman whom Stuart met in Berlin and later married after the death of his first wife, Iseult Gonne. The reason for such a change may be a matter of tact, at least in part, but if that were the case then it could be managed as Yeats managed it or as Frank O'Connor did in phrases such as 'sometimes I went off with a friend, whom I shall call Joe Clery'. In any case the effect of this name change goes beyond tact since the reader of Stuart's work will remember the name Halka from *The Pillar of Cloud* (1948) and will see certain similarities in the relationships between Dominic Malone, the central figure of that novel, and Halka and between H and Halka in *Black List Section H*. This brings us to the crux. The names of other characters are incidental to a consideration of the text's generic status when set beside the problem of H. In order to establish and judge the factuality or otherwise of the text it is necessary to assume that H is Francis Stuart, the initial coming from Henry, his unused first name as most critics assume. Apart from H, the central figure is also given the

names Mr St George and, most often, Luke Ruark. If we compare the
course of H's life to that of Stuart's we find that they are remarkably
similar. In the text we find references to Australia, to a father who dies
of alcoholism, to a family which lives in Antrim, to a marriage to Iseult
Gonne, to internment during the Civil War, to a career as a writer which
begins with the award of a prize for a volume of poetry, to a lecture tour
in Germany and a decision to return to Nazi Germany to take up a post as a
lecturer in Berlin University. Each of the items in this list is also a
part of Stuart's life and yet two items stand out as being of obvious
importance because of the disparity between the text and Stuart's life.
Firstly, Stuart's writing is much more prolific and less considered than
that of H. In the 1920s H produces only one volume of poetry while Stuart
additionally wrote a pamphlet for Sinn Fein Ardchomhairle (Lecture on
Nationality and Culture, Dublin, 1924) and a pamphlet for the Catholic
Truth Society (Mystics and Mysticism, Dublin, 1929). In the 1930s H writes
only two novels to Stuart's output of 11 novels (Angel of Pity is included
in this total since it was classified as 'philosophy' for contractual
reasons - incidentally giving a sidelight on the economic determinants of
the classification of genres), a volume of autobiography and a horse-racing
handbook. The fictitious fictions of Black List Section H are thematically
similar to Stuart's own novels and one can assume that they stand as a
condensed version of his writing career but the pamphlets, autobiography
and handbook are excluded from this 'legend of H' and yet remain essential
to an understanding of Stuart's own development. Also necessary to such an
understanding is Stuart's experience of the Second World War and, although

4. Black List, p. 13, 'Mr St George' is a mistake serving to convey H's own uneasiness in this situation,
but coming so early in the text it also serves to confuse the reader.
H's experience of this is central to Black List Section H, there are once again problems which bear on the status of the text.

Stuart had already drawn on his wartime experiences for novels such as *Redemption*, *Pillar of Cloud* and *The Flowering Cross* by the time he wrote Black List Section H. (None of these post-war novels matches the novel H is writing at the end of Black List Section H.) This does not help with the resolution of the dilemma over the text's status because if the post-war works are novels then our assumption must be that Black List Section H stands as another fictionalising of the experiences recounted in the earlier works. The alternative solution, based on the assumption that Black List Section H is autobiographical, is to take the earlier works as autobiographies rather than as fictions. However, no matter how we look at the issue of the status of the texts we are left with the deliberately engendered impossibility of clearly distinguishing between fiction and autobiography in Stuart's work. Instead of being able to answer our original question about the nature of Black List Section H we have to conclude that the question is not amenable to a formal resolution, as is also the case with the work of Moore and Joyce. Stuart deliberately plays with the work's indeterminacy to engender a sense of unease in the reader. The effects of the unease generated by the indeterminate generic status of Black List Section H, and any possible solution to the question of the text's status, can only be found in a closer reading of the text.

5. Compare, for example, *Black List*, p. 346 to *The Flowering Cross*, London, Gollancz, 1950, Ch. 1, to find names and events which are almost identical.

6. Stuart is here not only harking back to writers such as Moore and Joyce but is writing in the same spirit as several contemporary Irish writers whose work also produces generic unease, John Banville, Aidan Higgins, Neil Jordan, Brian Moore, John McShern and Julia O'Faolain have all written novels which combine autobiography and/or history with fiction.
**Black List Section H** covers the period 1917 to 1945 and thus excludes both H's childhood and adolescence and the aftermath of the war. This is entirely consistent with the principle of exclusion on which the text operates and the theme of exclusion of which it treats. In the teeth of this principle and this theme it is admittedly possible to construct Stuart as someone who includes many aspects of Irish experience. Born a Protestant he became a Catholic; with his roots in the North, he moved to Southern Ireland; educated at English public schools, he took the Republican side in the Civil War; coming from farming people he became involved in Dublin literary circles. But with this kind of material to work with one would expect the process by which Stuart constructs a self to be markedly different from the series of rejections that we have seen operating in the autobiographies of O'Connor and O'Faolain. In *Black List Section H* the motives attributed to H are indeed very different from those to be found in *An Only Child* or *Vive Moi!*. Even so the process is not what a knowledge of Stuart's life might lead one to expect.

The opening of the text is an apparently conventional linking of literature and rebellion. H writes his first poem and is then moved to write a letter in favour of independence to a Dublin paper. However, at this point the method of the text is being carefully established and the reader has cause to examine this first chapter carefully, not just for what it contains but for what it omits or displaces. The apparent conventionality of the opening is just such a feature. Comparable moments in other autobiographies and fictions provide a climactic moment rather than an opening and it is in itself not as conventional as it appears. H realises that his letter will probably be published not because of its own qualities but because it is
from the 'heart of the Unionist North' and it is his claimed motives which arrest us:

It was not for the sake of seeing his name in print for the first time that he had composed it. Not because in his heart of hearts - though what really went on there it would still take him years to grasp - he had any great interest in Irish, or any other kind of nationalism. What was behind it was an instinct, [my emphasis] far from conscious, to cut himself off from the world of his cousins once for all. And the resolution to act on this impulse came directly from having just written his first poem, and indirectly from a kind of faith in himself and his confused instincts that the news of the Russian Revolution that he'd heard during his last term at an English public school, had given him.  

The means of establishing the self of Black List Section H is the same here as it is throughout the work. A range of possible determinants - 'the world of his cousins', 'the Russian Revolution', 'English public school' - is balanced against a series of inherent qualities - 'heart of hearts', 'instinct', 'faith in himself' - and is outweighed by them. In this Stuart differs from Kavanagh. Both men present selves which escape explicit articulation but Kavanagh grows into his anoesis while Stuart accepts his uncertain determination as his self. In a sense we have found out as much about H in the first pages of the text as we ever shall. Admittedly W.J. McCormack says that H is at the beginning aware of himself only as a cipher and that 'the growing legend is the accumulation of identity, of associations and relationships ... What Blacklist [sic] uniquely achieves', he suggests, 'is the revelation of a personality, at first cryptic or cipher-like, over a prolonged period of time'. However, it seems to me that identity is deemed to be formed and present from the start and that

7. Black List, op cit, pp. 8-9
8. W.J. McCormack: 'Francis Stuart; The Recent Fiction', in Patrick Rafroidi and Maurice Harmon (eds); The Irish Novel in Our Time, op cit, pp. 175-186, p. 177

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what the text offers is fulfilment or epiphany rather than growth. Roger Garfitt has put this in terms of formation and confirmation:

Stuart's remark in *The Pillar of Cloud*... that 'one's own future is already contained within oneself, as the tree within the acorn' is true of himself to a striking extent. He deliberately sought out the future that he needed, and in this sense, the key experiences of his own life, particularly the period in Germany during and just after the Second World War, should not be seen as formative but rather as confirmative of his own intuition.9

Stuart himself provides the phrase 'a confirmation of his instinct'10 which both serves as a summary of what Garfitt says and harks back to the Yeatsian notion of 'choosing what belongs'. (We may say however that it was generous of history to conspire with Stuart's destiny; Yeats was always more pragmatic and prepared to make his destiny from the contingencies of history.) For Yeats these options of 'choice' and 'belonging' and the relationship between them can be related to the more general options of cultural vacuum and cultural continuity and the connections between those options. As a result there is a real tension in *The Autobiography* with both nation and self able to develop and yet subject to certain kinds of restriction in that development such that we can judge the wrong choices that are made and the text can generate a growing sense of desperation and poignancy. Confirmation of instinct as explored by Stuart is a much narrower method of enquiry into the development of identity and one which does not allow for the possibilities of the determinate and the determining. The polarities of *Black List Section H* are those of instinct and predestination and yet H never suffers any crisis about the arbitrary

9. Roger Garfitt; 'Constants in Contemporary Irish Fiction', in Douglas Dunn (ed.): *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, op cit, pp. 207-241, p. 211
10. *Black List*, op cit, p. 8

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nature of his identity which such polarities might entail. In *Vive Moi!* we have seen how O'Faolain has to engineer his material so that his writing self is the only possible outcome of his experience and yet that work bears the marks of the tension which this exercise causes since it is not consistent with O'Faolain's views as expressed in other works. *Black List Section H* is consistent in that in each of Stuart’s works the central figure always develops within a framework of instinct and predestination. This is not to say that in each work the central figure arrives at the same outcome, but rather that no matter how they develop they do so in an inevitable way. This inevitability does not protect or justify H throughout the text; he is often the focus of humour and, as Frank Kermode has pointed out, he is quite often seen to be fatuous and wrong-headed. 11 *Black List Section H*, in other words, operates very much within its own terms and not those of the standard autobiography, and it is to those terms that we must now attend.

One noticeable feature of critical writing on Stuart is that it is very often defensive about him, about the strangeness of the work, about his failure to achieve success, about his connections with Nazi Germany, and any critic of Stuart's work has to consider this defensiveness. The style of *Black List Section H* provides a starting point for such a consideration:

He thought he'd given himself, with his extreme attitudes that she might think naive and callow, away too naively just now and wanted to make a joke of it. 12

11, Frank Kermode: 'Estrangeement', *The Listener*, 87 (23 March 1972), pp. 382-3
12, *Black List*, *op cit*, p. 21
A sentence like this requires explanation rather than defence: Its awkwardness should not be attributed to an inability on Stuart's part to write well. Stuart deliberately affronts those who would judge literature by the canons of 'good' writing; his infatuation with quasi-scientific terminology, as in The Abandoned Snail Shell, is another mark of this desire to step outside the confines of the literary.

One point that is often overlooked in surveys of Stuart's writing is its range and the changes within it. His first novel, Women and God, is, among other things a passable imitation of Hemingway. The second novel, Pigeon Irish, published only a year later must have seemed in its day to be a kind of mystical science fiction; (in Irish writing Eimar O'Duffy's King Goshawk and the Birds is its nearest equivalent, although both are influenced by the general range of late Victorian and Edwardian scientific romances, stretching from Morris and Bellamy to Wells). Despite the difference between the two works Stuart appears comfortable with each. Furthermore, in two articles about the early novels, H.J. O'Brien has shown just how sophisticated Stuart's handling of imagery is. Stuart has subsequently written novels which have been described as 'concrete romanticism' and 'fantastic realism'. This range of literary experiment suggests that any perceived defects in Black List Section H must be explained apart from the idea of good style. Black List Section H has its own methods and motives for those methods and these are expressed within the text's linguistic

14. H.J. O'Brien; 'Francis Stuart's Cathleen ni Houlihan', Dublin Magazine, 8 (Summer 1971), pp. 48-54; 'St Catherine of Siena in Ireland', Eire-Ireland, 6, 2 (1971), 98-110

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framework. But it is not simply a matter of apparent stylistic gaucheries and the recurrence of certain terms (one thinks of the neurobiological terms), but also of the categories within which H functions. The variety of styles in Stuart's writing and the culminating style of Black List are, of course, attempts, apart from anything else, to escape the conventions of Irish writing by means of a language which is both alienated and alienating. Each autobiography that we have considered so far has shared a framework; terms such as 'self', 'family', 'community', 'nation' and 'literature' can be confidently used to delineate the relationships which converge in the text. Despite evident differences of emphasis, each autobiographer still exists within a matrix of history, politics and culture which remains recognisable. In Stuart's case there is an evident desire to escape this matrix which goes beyond the other cases of escape and exile that we have considered. To take a particular and blatant example of this let us compare the respective attitudes of Stuart and O'Connor to World War II. O'Connor's An Only Child, and other autobiographies, takes account of World War I because it fits into the framework of Ireland but My Father's Son ends without mentioning World War II. We have seen how in both My Father's Son and Vive Moi! a decade of intellectual and cultural strife in Ireland is excluded from consideration and the reality of the internal struggle in Ireland distorted for the purposes of each writer. Further, the war is treated with that indifference which was the effect if not the intention of Irish neutrality, an indifference adequately summarised in the
term 'The Emergency'. Irish reactions to the war amount to more than just exclusion, as can be seen in O'Connor's stories set in war-time England. 'Androcles and the Army', 'The Landlady' and 'Darcy in the Land of Youth' acknowledge the war's bare existence but display a disregard for the actualities of life during war-time which amounts almost to callousness. We have seen such callousness before in Kavanagh's *The Green Fool* and it can also be seen in Maurice O'Sullivan's *Twenty Years A-Growing* but in both of those cases it is explicable in that the war affords an opportunity to escape from poverty. In O'Connor's work this excuse no longer obtains with the result that his work is a part of Irish neutrality and its consequences.

By contrast Stuart in *Black List Section H* (as in *Redemption, The Pillar of Cloud*, and *The Flowering Cross*) presents an inside view of the war which is far removed from Irish attitudes and which is effectively an attempt to displace those attitudes. Nor is this an isolated example of displacement; this technique operates throughout *Black List Section H*. The result of this is that every term that we may deploy to delineate the relationships which converge in that text is shadowed by the more usual term which it has displaced.

As we have seen *Black List* opens *in media res* with the connection of literary creativity and rebellion which is so often a climactic moment in

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16. This period in Ireland's history is a complex one which I have simplified, but not, I hope, distorted, for the sake of my argument. The standard history, *Ireland Since the Famine*, takes little account of the war except as it impinges on Northern Ireland (Pt III, B4). Terence Brown's *Ireland*, Ch. 6, "The Emergency": A Watershed" offers a good overview of the period. Contemporary reactions are interestingly illustrated by the articles and letters of Sean O'Casey and St John Ervine in *Time and Tide*, April-May 1942 in David Krause (ed.): *The Letters of Sean O'Casey*, II, 1942-1954, New York, Macmillan, 1980, pp. 167-8, 169-175.
Irish autobiography. Excluded from this legend of H is any account of his childhood and consequently of that originary community, the family. The text's first reference to the family takes the form of a rejection which seems, from the rest of the work, redundant, since there is never any effort to establish a connection with the family. In place of the family, Stuart provides, initially, the term 'instinct'. This term is then expanded through the course of the text. Since it is the replacement for the originary community in *Black List* we need to consider it more fully, especially in the way that Stuart develops it.

We have already seen how 'instinct' recalls but diverges from the Yeatsian notion of choosing what belongs, and this in turn suggests a difference from Yeats' idea of life as a preparation for something that never happens (incidentally a good defence against any charge of failure which might be levelled against him). H's existence is full of experiences which are not in themselves an end:

> It wasn't an act for her, as, in a sense, almost everything was for him; his mystical studies, the civil war, Lourdes, horse racing. No that wasn't quite right, he reflected. If they were acts they were also preparations for something that would be his reality. 17

This is how instinct works: it leads H to and through experiences which, no matter how oddly assorted they may appear (and the list above is determinedly oddly assorted), will prepare him for what is to come. Despite the fact that H receives no overt authorial protection in the text, there are two consequences of this explanation of instinct. The first is that H can never make a truly wrong decision (with Stephen Dedalus his mistakes

17. *Black List*, op cit, p. 174

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are the portals of discovery). The second is that from the perspective of
the text everything is present only to ensure the fulfilment of H's
character. H decides against moving house in Berlin because:

It wasn't in the legend. Or, to abstain from what might be a
tendency to self-glorification, he was more likely to attract to
himself the kind of events his awkward psyche needed by remaining
in the flat..."9

Instinct is therefore the determining structural motif of the text and
requires an examination of its nature and a categorisation of those areas
in which it operates.

Instinct renders H self-sufficient, his character is present in its
essentially instinctual way from the beginning. This self-sufficiency
results in the explicit exclusion of the family from the legend with which
the text begins. Part of the tension in the text arises because the family
cannot be wholly excluded and its shadowy presence is a source of many of
H's fears. His mother is an object of dislike because of her 'power of
evasion' and her 'lack ... of a decent sense of privacy'.18 Both charges,
despite their contradictory nature, can be levelled against the text. It is
candid about matters such as sex to a degree unusual in Irish autobiography
and yet the generic confusion is, among other effects, evasive in such a
way as to make the reader wary about the apparent candour which it
exhibits. H's father is a shadowy figure, but very much like Stuart's own

18. Ibid, p. 265,
father. H supposes that he died of alcoholism in an Australian asylum and he becomes for H an avatar of the obsessional figure. The connection between them is then not a father-son relationship, H is not attempting to discover a 'spiritual father' in order to locate and explain himself, rather he is aligning himself with a figure whose experience has the obsessional quality for which H is himself looking:

Thirst! That was something H's father had plumbed the detailed and normally unimagined recesses of. So had Lane, unable to swallow more than a few drops. H had been present without being able to share in his agony. Now he could do so. And Christ on the cross had suffered more from thirst than anything else at one phase of the three hours, an arbitrary timing of the timeless ... Whose despair was he receiving intimations of? His father's? Lane's? Christ's? 21

In this alignment of the father with others whom H admires, the father's ability to influence H and to explain him is rejected. The father is perceived as someone who shares with Lane and Christ a particular type of experience which results from his own instinctual obsessiveness. This instinctual obsessiveness is the textually constructed self of H and to have a parent who might explain it would be to vitiate it. This is why H's parents are treated as they are even though the text is not fully able to accommodate them in their allotted roles.

20. The biographical details in this chapter are derived from several sources, of which the most important are J.H. Nattersted; Francis Stuart, London, Associated University Presses, Bucknell University Press Irish Writers Series, 1974, esp. pp. 9-35, and the article and interview with Stuart by J.H. Nattersted in Journal of Irish Literature, 'A Francis Stuart Number' (ed.) J.H. Nattersted, 5, 1, (Jan, 1976), pp. 5-15, 16-31. Nattersted notes that the death of the father caused the fragmentation of the family, that Stuart was never close to his mother, and that the maternal substitute he found in his nurse was removed by his stepfather when he was thirteen. Further, when Stuart found that his father had died of alcoholism, he became a symbol of the outcast and afflicted, Stuart confirms this in interview but stresses that he is still not completely sure how his father died and that due to the remoteness of his mother and the surrogate nature of his nurse he felt that he had been born into the wrong family; this reinforces the sense in Black List that H and his instincts emerge ex nihilo rather than from any explanatory background.

21. Black List, op. cit., p. 151. The prostitute to whom H talks about his father in this episode, seems to believe that he has been confessing to homosexuality, which adds to the deliberate alteration of the filial relationship.
The internal definition of instinct becomes steadily more sophisticated as it becomes increasingly necessary to protect the concept. At the outset instinct is seen as a natural force, almost beyond explanation. H is the subject of an 'obscure urge' and is therefore prone to 'blind instinctive rejections'. As the subject of these urges he is judged by others to be neurotic and is prepared to accept this but as a description rather than as a judgement. The text, however, cannot accept an explanation of instinct couched in terms provided by others because this would be to accept also a framework in which H is seen to be 'curable'. Although H will later use such terms as 'flawed' and 'infected' about himself they are construed as descriptive and natural rather than prescriptive and judgemental. Moreover, once the possibility of a psychoanalytical explanation of H's condition has been alluded to the linguistic tactics of the text become more complex precisely to protect the natural status of H's instinct. From this point the term accumulates a range of defensive and naturalising qualities until it is hedged around by an organicism which places H's instinct squarely in the realm of the natural:

H experienced one of those jumps forward that was to be his mode of progression, as throughout nature energy is transmitted in bursts of separate quanta and the pear tree blossom opens not in a continuous expansion but as years later he was to observe just outside his prison bars, in a series of tiny jumps.

As this passage suggests, the organicism upon which H relies is itself a curious amalgam of physiological, biogenetic and chemical terminology. H's

22. Black List, op cit, p. 17.
23. Black List, op cit, p. 31.
24. Black List, op cit, pp. 52-53, H's passivity in this respect is something to which we shall return.
25. Black List, op cit, p. 106
instinct is scientifically naturalised and the post hoc discovery through observation by H of the ratification of his idea of quantum leaps fits into the pattern of confirmation in the text. However, the use of this terminology is ironically spurious:

How often, for no conscious reason, had he experienced the shadow of terror in the part of him - the neurons and chromosomes? - he shared with the brute creation. He grasped instinctively the trapped beast's hope for some slight respite when darkness falls.26

The text makes a radically unstable metaphorical appeal to a natural and therefore instinctively graspable world which is yet explained in scientifically sophisticated terms of genetic encoding, the 'sap in the cells'.27 For reasons which will become clear, the scientific terms are never accepted without question, but their purpose is to protect H's instinct against attack. As a result of this, despite H's questions about the possible existence of consciousness apart from its 'biochemical nest',28 the issue of individual responsibility for character is put into abeyance along with the possibility that character might be culturally determined. Indeed, the implication is that H best shows his responsibility by living out the legend, thus being both the agent of his own being and yet not the responsible agent just as the pear tree is. Certain contradictions arise from this and they are best considered in an appraisal of what instinct leads to and what H himself regards as the quality of his instinct and its manifestation in the products of his imagination.

27. Black List, op cit, p. 249.
H’s first poem while being itself a conventional pastiche of early Yeats is yet associated with the rejection of the conventional pieties of a Northern Unionist household. From the beginning of the text H describes himself as being attracted to:

... anything that diminished or threw doubt on authority. He hardly distinguished revolutionary acts from those committed by criminals as long as the result was like that of a stone dropped into a mill pond. He imagined the ripples of unease that must disturb the complacency, which was what he distrusted most, that stagnated in the minds of many people, especially those held in high esteem in their own closed circles.²⁹

This horror of complacency is, however, at odds with the attitude to H’s consciousness that the text seeks to establish; this is particularly evident in his view of the writer which complacently assumes that as a writer he will be disruptive.

The consequences of this instinctive need for disruption are what interest us here. Although H’s desire for disruption is satisfied equally by either criminal or revolutionary actions, this is true only within certain circumstances:

He had been aware, during the Black-and-Tan war, of the oversimplified emotions in the air that, like all passions that unite a lot of people, coarsen the texture of sensibility and lower the imaginative level.³⁰

This Arnoldian formulation is a rejection of that period which contemporaries of H’s (particularly as we have seen contemporary autobiographers) use as a high-water mark for their experience. It is not

²⁹, Black List, op cit, p. 22.
³⁰, Black List, op cit, p. 65
surprising therefore to find that he is accused by Iseult of collaboration because he has helped a Black and Tan whom he perceives as a victim. In this way Stuart reverses the more usual attitudes to the Anglo-Irish war and the Civil War. For O'Connor and O'Faolain it is precisely the shared (collaborative) 'imaginative improvisation' of the war of independence which is exciting, while it is the Civil War which leads to disillusionment as the apparent unity breaks down. H on the other hand welcomes this breakdown:

The civil war breathed doubt and confusion, and thus a climate in which the poet could breathe more easily. Instead of uniting in a conformity of outlook [H here ignores the larger conformity against which the guerillas are rebelling] that had to appeal to dull-witted idealists as well as those with intelligence, it divided people. And once the process of division has started, H foresaw it continuing, and subdivisions taking place, especially on the republican side, perhaps creating small enclaves of what he looked on as true revolutionaries whose aim had less to do with Irish independence than in casting doubts on traditional values and judgements.31

The place in which this breakdown occurs is unimportant in Black List,32 as is the eventual outcome; 'casting doubt on traditional values and judgements' is little more than phrase-making although there are certain qualities towards which H aspires. Although the disruption H craves is of a widespread kind its effects are completely personal and H has little regard for consequences except as they affect him; this of course is at one with the tactics of the work in that it is disturbing to readerly comfort. When the idea of marrying for a second time comes to him it is considered in entirely self-referential terms:

32. Black List, op cit, p. 76. This counters the possibility, expressed in earlier works such as Pigeon Irish, of Irish enclaves in which the new values generated by disruption would be located; this change in attitude makes Stuart as cosmopolitan as any Irish writer can be.
The possibility of an even more unsuitable second marriage than the first, remote though it was, did something positive to his psyche that thrived on the threat of disaster, though this was not the sort that he was subconsciously seeking.33

H's justification for this self-centredness is that he is a writer and he appears happy with this conventional privilege, despite his desire for complete social breakdown in all other respects.

It is because of this desire that when he becomes disillusioned with the Civil War he is again at odds with his contemporaries. H saw in the Civil War the possibility of a complete social breakdown and when that failed to materialise he had no option in his own terms but to seek the fulfilment of his legend elsewhere. The modes he employs in this quest will be discussed after we have considered how H himself judges the quality of his instinct.

We have already seen how H reacts to the suggestion that he is neurotic and that he uses terms such as 'infected' and 'flawed' about himself without in any way being self-condemnatory. These terms are instead part of his break with the normal. Illness and health are opposed states of being with one considered as the norm and the other as an aberration. It is part of the textual tension that H must recognise the normative force of 'health' and its metaphorical counterparts while yet resisting it. His own state of being is thus, depending on the metaphorical context, one of illness, criminality, madness, or immorality but this state of being he regards as honourable just insofar as it is regarded as abnormal. The honour attaching to this state of being relies on the ability of those like H to

33. Black List, op cit, p. 171.
provide a countercurrent, to defamiliarise all modes of existence rather than to protest against particular incidences in which power is used normatively. H is thus not a true revolutionary since his state of being is, in Raymond Williams' terms, oppositional rather than alternative. Indeed, despite his desire for social breakdown it can be argued that he needs the normative structures as a point of reference. The most striking instance of this is in the attitude to the book's title; neither H nor Stuart ever protests against the existence of black lists. The existence of the Irish Censorship and by extension all such forms of repression and persecution is irrelevant. There is no liberal protest about censorship, just an acceptance of it as a contingency for those who share H's kind of instinct:

H didn't share the outrage of Yeats and his fellow intellectuals at the censorship law. It was a matter of indifference to him. The Irish censorship would catch the smaller fish but if a really big one was to swim into view it would be set on by far more ferocious foes than any Irish ones.34

It is sufficient here to register that H and Stuart hold in abeyance the question of judgement in regard to H's instinct. There is a normative system which judges H and which is necessary to him but it is a system in which he sees himself as playing no part. Beyond this point we have to consider the text's treatment of the writer and his role but that is a topic I wish to reserve until after we have seen how instinct causes H to act in other spheres.

Just as instinct, the self ex nihilo, displaces the family within the structure of Black List so the other areas of H's existence are

34. Black List, op cit, p. 171
displacements of other familiar terms of reference. Mysticism and sex are the two principal activities of H's experience and are displacements of more familiar terms in Irish writing. H's mysticism is both a displacement and an intensification of more normal religious experience, while sex has this same relationship with the idea of the community. Although it is necessary here to consider H's experiences in distinct categories it is equally necessary to remember that they are not sequential. H's legend is a predestined one so that each element of it has a place, not as a contingent point prior to a significant conclusion but as a necessary part of a wholly significant pattern. The text demands that this pattern be understood not as a literary construct but as H's own experience lived with purpose. In this manner H's existence becomes a natural and purposeful accumulation of experiences which serves both to bring him to fulfilment and as a part of that fulfilment. One consequence of this is that H is never challenged by any of his experiences and is thus never seen as anything but stable, even static. This, as I have noted, is a matter of choosing only what belongs. In the first chapter, H instinctively connects literature and rebellion as we have seen, but sex and religion are also linked in a the description in religious language of his sexual awakening:

Doubling it [a mattress] over he lay on the floor and hugged it to him. He was trying to make the mystery incarnate in calico stuffed with horsehair ... All he sensed was that the answer lay in the fold between the two halves of the unwieldy bundle ... he thrust his free hand into this cavity. But the touch of the coarse material through which wiry ends of hair pricked his fingers was not the revelation he was seeking.  

35. *Black List, op cit*, p. 9
Masturbation, described in a biblically allusive style, is, he later decides, a sidetracking of the question and a postponement of the answer but it is precisely this merging of the sexual and the religious which will later yield the revelation of tenderness which he has been seeking. The purpose of this first chapter is to establish that the elements of the self are already present and to provide a prolepsis of their later mergings. This both ratifies the instinctive nature of H's self and deliberately makes the categorisation of his existence difficult since from the beginning instinct is seen as the point of convergence of the elements of the self.

Religion, notwithstanding the constraints on categorisation, serves as a paradigm of all the areas of his life. It is present from the beginning and serves its time in the foreground of the text and H's consciousness when it appears capable of yielding revelation. This foregrounding occurs when H is obsessively concerned with religious questions in their most extreme form and it continues until such time as another category is foregrounded and similarly obsessively pursued. Religion is not at this point rejected as a cul-de-sac or wrong turning, as would be the case with other autobiographers, rather it is now under H's control and available as and when he needs it. In part this is possible because Stuart carefully remoulds those aspects of religion which he deals with. As we shall see, his Messianism is at odds with that of other writers in that they accept Christ as a privileging symbol, whereas Stuart reshapes Christ to his own purposes. This pattern is the same for all of H's pursuits: sex, gambling, horse racing, travelling, and even, to a lesser degree, writing.

36. Black List, op cit, p. 10
H's first encounter with organised religion is when he receives instruction prior to his marriage to Iseult. Even at this point he has firm ideas about what religion means to him:

... H was not an apt pupil, especially for the sort of teaching that treated religion as a cut-and-dried subject, with hard-and-fast rules to be meekly memorized. 37

What he seeks from religion as from other areas of experience is a greater degree of intensity than usual. After his internment during the Civil War he begins a study of the mystics:

Soon he was absorbed by states of mind that appealed to him first because they ran counter to the familiar ones. He began to put his whole heart into trying to share this kind of consciousness, quite strange, in which intense emotion was joined to a daring imagination that seemed natural to him, though it was rare in contemporary literature. 38

Once again we can see how appropriate Garfitt's distinction between the formative and the confirmative is in regard to H's development. H considers only those forms of existence which seem appropriate to him as possible models, and those forms of existence will always be of an extreme kind. The imitative nature of his life in the hut while studying the mystics might seem to be a contradiction of his earlier repugnance at religion as a set of rules to be followed, but he objects not to rules per se but rather to rules that are followed by the crowd. His attitude to rules is therefore part of his refusal to look beyond the self. His study of the mystics and his imitation of them is not an attempt to escape the self so much as an effort to partake of a form of consciousness which they embody and which is

37. Black List, op cit, p. 29.
38. Black List, op cit, p. 112
attractive to him quite apart from the mystics. His Blakean conception of Christ is another example of this; it is Blakean in that he refuses to accept any existing image of Christ preferring to mould a Christ appropriate to himself. To do this he takes certain of Christ's qualities and creates an image in his own likeness:

... his spontaneity and directness, His delight in concrete realities, and [I] certainly wouldn't have him pronouncing all kinds of abstract and irrelevant dogmas like His Mother's bodily Assumption into Heaven ... I'd have him forego the Resurrection ... You see, Pat, without the Resurrection there'd be no bandwagon, no grocer's scheme of reward and punishment! Just the haunting Jesus disaster to illuminate our lesser disasters.  

H would replace salvation with redemption, a community based on the acceptance of shared rules with the example of individual suffering. The immediate problem raised by this conception of an unresurrected Christ is a teleological one since the end to which people live and suffer is now thrown into doubt. For H the purpose is the growth of and into his legend, and he seems to accept the necessity of this, but is the same thing true for the case of, say, Christ? Later in the text there is an account of H attending confession during which he affirms his faith and gives a sense of what he regards as having been Christ's purpose:

I'm not temperamentally a sceptic, Father, my mind isn't analytical and is open about the nature of reality, including the possibility of a kind of super-spirit crossing the otherwise barred threshold of the combined wonderland and cesspool of my consciousness. And for a time the account of Jesus' extraordinary end ... seemed to me to suggest that he indeed might be such a spirit ... there are no reports of anyone with a neurological make-up so receptive and vulnerable who seems to have gone deliberately as far into the depths with the express purpose of gaining admission into other minds and hearts.  

39. Black List, op cit, pp. 119-120, For another rewrite of Christ's life without the Resurrection see George Moore's The Brook Kerith, London, T, Werner Laurie, 1916, in which Moore recasts Christ after the failure of his own Messianic mission to Ireland; Stuart may be said to be taking pre-emptive action, 40. Black List, op cit, p. 211,
This passage is suspect on two counts. Firstly the idea of gaining admission to the experience of others through suffering (even if it had been Christ's expressed purpose) is a dubious one and one which is implicated in H's idea of the writer. Leaving that aside for the moment we must consider the opening denial of scepticism which is so much at odds with H's attitude in other circumstances. It seems in this case to be merely a preliminary to the expression of heterodox opinions in an orthodox setting but elsewhere H's relentless heterodoxy is allowed free play. We have seen that in religious terms his faith is ultimately placed in himself and this faith in the self is evident throughout the text:

... scepticism ... H saw as the necessary saving grace. Without it one was involved in mass enthusiasms that always ended in complacency and set a limit to the spirit's questing."

For him all cherished faiths were suspect; an inner fluidity and refusal to attitudinize was the only valid mode."

In each of these cases an implicit boundary is set to H's scepticism by his reliance on the integrity of the self; the 'spirit' is a fixed location for 'inner fluidity'. If one holds this attitude to the self, which is to say if one allows the self to exist only within a context of self-confirmation, then while all else is suspect the self remains as the ultimate and only arbiter without ever being challenged as arbitrary:

... his was not an unbelieving psyche. What it needed he thought was a concept of reality deep enough to lose itself in.

It was simply that he wasn't impressed by any of the contemporary ideologies or institutions, religious, national, or social and there were few of his acquaintances he looked up to."

41, Black List, op cit, p. 75.
42, Black List, op cit, p. 195.
43, Black List, op cit, p. 214.
Chapter 6

In the matter of faith and scepticism therefore we can find the grounds for H's rejection of organised religion. His scepticism about everything but his own psyche leads him to reject orthodox religion in favour of his own type of confirmatory mysticism. What is being rejected is finally the communal nature of religion and in his heterodoxy H is left 'alone in the haunted room of his mind'.

The solipsism in evidence in H's religious sense is not, however, necessarily total. There is another category of experience in which the concept of community can be considered, namely sex. If religion, in the heterodox and extreme form created by H, has no place for the communal then sex seems to offer the means of redress. H's study of the mystics and his search for revelation in that area leads to what might be called a deconstructive impasse in which his scepticism is contradicted by the survival of the concept of the self which in its turn is supported by the use of much spurious neurobiological imagery. His religious impulses are thus diverted into and subsumed by his sexual impulses as is clear already from the first chapter in which the religious is subsidiary to the sexual. It is in the sexual that he first seeks revelation only to be rebuffed by rough calico.

After a consideration of instinct and religion, both of which are for H inward-looking activities, the subject of sex offers a less claustrophobic area for discussion than the haunted room of the mind. Such an appraisal is important not only in that we can see H attempt to establish relationships but also because any such attempt, within the context of the

44. Black List, op cit, p. 211.
autobiographical, is necessarily to do with the relationship that the text might have with the reader. It should by now be obvious that this text does not offer Kavanagh's 'fireside intimacy' to its reader. What it does offer is a constant scepticism about the terms in which we might read it. The area of H's sexuality requires particularly careful attention since it offers the possibility of determining how the text relates the self to others.

H's sexuality, however, is another manifestation of his instinct and thus it immediately brings us back to the theme of displacement. Just as instinct displaces family and as H's mysticism displaces the proffered community of orthodox religion so his sexual experience is ultimately a refusal of normal sexuality. Being instinctively sceptical about all established orders his sexuality is one of the few ways available to him to form relationships. His instinct is to form relationships only 'with those from whom he didn't have to hide any part of himself' in which he is like his own Christ who was 'preoccupied with the experience of an extreme sort of relationship, which he still called love. His obsession seemed to be to find and keep a few friends who were capable of sharing this new intensity ...'. H's attitude to all kinds of relationship - friendship, love, or sex - is the same: in each case what he seeks is a shared consciousness without the need for prior explanation of himself or consequent change within himself. What differentiates a sexual relationship, however, is that as the most extreme form of relationship it offers both the chance for this sharing and a possible source of

45. *Black List*, op cit, p. 17.
46. *Black List*, op cit, p. 113. It should be apparent that the term 'sex' is used as a shorthand for discussing all kinds of intimate relationship within this text.
revelation. The word 'revelation' which is, because of the metaphysical nature of H's quest an appropriate one, is also one which points up a contradiction within the concept of instinct, a contradiction which is most evident on the sexual level. It is instinct which motivates H's quest but the aim of that quest must be instinct within him, which is to say that the revelation which he seeks is effectively the self-confirmation provided by the text. The apparent quest for another is thus nullified by the circularity of the text. This brings us back to the blurring of autobiography and fiction which is the modus operandi of the text since it is a correlative of this approach to sexuality. The self is offered candidly to the reader and the fictional elements within it appear, on one level, to defamiliarise that self so as to increase the possibilities of intimacy at an autobiographical level. This defamiliarisation, brought about by the reader's unease, is, however, only apparent since the fictional aspects of the text paradoxically enable the self to retreat into a self-constructed world. Unless the reader is prepared to acquiesce in that world he or she is left with no real access to the self of the text. The manner in which this happens can be clearly seen in the accounts of H's sexual experiences.

The first encounter with Iseult shows the process of nullification already at work:

Iseult was only too ready to play the part he'd assigned to her; he'd made a false move right at the start. He had placed his beloved in an unreal Yeatsian world, instead of trying to take her into his which, however immature, was a very different one.47

47. *Black List*, op cit, p. 19.
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The apparent loss here is of H's world in his acceptance of Yeats' but the real loss is of Iseult's otherness; she never exists as someone apart from H and thus as a challenge to his own sense of self but only as someone subsumed into a role which, however mistakenly, he has assigned to her. What he needs is not a recognition of her otherness but her implication in his own world, otherwise there will be no communication. The necessity for this in H's relationships is evident when he visits his old nurse. He finds that there is no longer any link between them because she has escaped from the power of his image of her:

Hadn't the intensity of that image communicated itself to her and to some degree transformed her into the child's concept; wasn't that part of the process of love, and wasn't there more of reality in it than in his present impression of an sick, not-very-intelligent, sentimental old woman? 48

His childhood attitude to the nurse is effectively his attitude to all women. They must be transformed into his concept for him to be able to recognise them; they are not, therefore, people apart but instruments. This is clear in the views of X, a character in one of H's fictions, for whom woman offers the opportunity to move beyond normal reality to a state of rapture. Woman is 'the couple of loose, stretchable stitches' in the 'fragile but tightly knit fabric of the material world'. 49 Roger Garfitt has commented on this aspect of Stuart's writing:

Thus it is certainly a weakness that, with the occasional exception of the Halka figure, who never says much anyway, there is no one in the novels to challenge, or even to communicate, on an articulate level, with the Stuart figure. Woman may hold intuitive wisdom, and be moulded by suffering, but she is very much the mute companion of the man's researches just as she is in Lawrence. 50

It seems to me that Garfitt's comment does not go far enough, nor does he examine the implications of this attitude for relationships as a whole. There are some who can communicate with the Stuart figure in Black List; the German lecturer, Dr Linser, and the British prisoner-of-war, Captain Manville, but they are both male and have, according to H, a greater understanding of his novels than anyone else. No woman is seen to possess this kind of articulate understanding with the result that women are not companions, mute or otherwise, but the instruments of H's researches. Just as Christ is subordinated to H's feelings about what religion should offer, so women have no existence independent of, firstly, his ideas, and secondly, his ideas about sex. If his desire is not for another but for someone amenable to his own ideas then the purpose of sex is changed from being either a source of pleasure or the means of reproduction. Garfitt has referred to this as the 'non-sexual potency of sexuality' in which 'tenderness replaces desire, just as gratitude replaces appetite'. At issue in this case is not the attractive concept of 'tenderness' as defined by Stuart, but what it means within the terms of a relationship. Once again we must set Stuart's category, of sex, against that which it displaces, community.

Black List is taken by most critics as quite obviously a part of Stuart's work but the issues raised by its treatment of sex show it to be both a continuation of Stuart's thematic and philosophical concerns and also a reappraisal of the solutions that he has previously suggested. Solutions is however too strong a word for the intuitions and suggestions which H

embodies, the partial nature of which are what makes *Black List* so challenging. Most critics, for example Garfitt, McCormack, Nattersted and Kermode, to name only those whose interest in Stuart is long-standing, see *Black List* as the culmination of Stuart's ideas, and to be fair there are many continuities between it and previous works, but there are also divergences. One such is this total absence of community and communication from *Black List*. In *Pigeon Irish* Catherine Arrigho suggests the founding of small ark-like communities in Ireland as a means of preserving certain spiritual values in the face of growing scientific and rationalist revolution. In *Redemption* one such community gathers around Ezra Arrigho to defy the mores of small-town Ireland. In *Black List*, however, the idea of community has been reduced to one man and one woman with the woman disabled from challenging the man. The greatest contrast with a previous work in this respect is to be found in *Things to Live For*, Stuart's early volume of autobiography. In two chapters of that work, 'An Interlude with Billy Weller' and 'Another Interval with Billy', Stuart reads parts of the manuscript to a friend and then listens to his comments on them. This concern with the need for communication is not present in *Black List*, an absence which becomes apparent when we consider the role of the writer. It is this failure to communicate in any real way which marks the various affairs which H has. Each of these affairs is, to say the least, strange, H's primary concern being with the state of his own psyche rather than with the actualities of the relationship. The culminating relationship in the

text is the one with Halka and this passes beyond the sexual to an apparent companionship. It was:

... as if they were an aging couple in whom the fiery passions have burned out, leaving a residue of white ash in the blood.

This state, which he saw as the foretaste of a possible time to come, was not without its unexpected rewards. There was a new tenderness between them, unrelated, at least consciously to sex.***

Halka's status within this relationship is no different from that of Julia or Susan except that she more than any other woman conforms to and acquiesces in H's ideas. With her 'biblical phraseology',** her questions which come at just the times when H needs a cue, and her passivity she is little more than an acolyte in H's quest. This quest for confirming revelations has already brought him to a point where his ideas about both religion and sexuality have been merged and it will finally issue in literary expression so it is now time to turn our attention to the text's treatment of the writer and writing within which all of H's other intuitions are merged.

From the text's beginning H has a clear idea of the status of the writer and, as with all other areas of his experience, it is an intuitive one:

'Dishonour is what becomes a poet, not titles or acclaim ... A poet must be a countercurrent to the flow around him. That's what poetry is: the other way of feeling and looking at the world. There's the world as it is, I mean everything that keeps most people content and busy, becoming whatever they can - doctors, lawyers, politicians, priests, tradesmen, and so on, and as well, of course, husbands and wives with families. And however much they may disagree over politics or religion, they're all intent on keeping the whole thing intact and functioning.'**

56. Black List, op cit, p. 316.
57. Black List, op cit, p. 20.

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While the sense of writing as a rebellious activity is a valuable one, there are elements within H's intuition which constrain it. Significantly, the world he rejects in the list of professions quoted above is the world of middle-class families; his rebellion is circumscribed by the limitations which he sees everyone else operating within and sustaining. It is, properly speaking, not a counter-hegemonic activity, but merely an oppositional one, content that the society he condemns should continue to exist as long as he is allowed to remain outside it. He has no apparent sense that others also exist outside this world. H's sense of the writer is therefore an elitist one, for the writer is a natural, instinctive rebel with a consciousness to which not all have access. His condemnation is then directed not at society as such but at those who do not share his instincts. Not everyone who does share those instincts is necessarily a writer — H's father, his Christ, and Lane are examples. Lane is a friend whom H meets when they are interned together during the Civil War:

It was Lane who kept a countercurrent flowing in the prison, not only of opposition to their jailers but also towards much of what H had felt was the conformism of the world outside ... Lane struck him as bringing to each situation a fresh, pure, critical gaze, unclouded by any of the preconceptions of the time and place.

Though Lane hadn't the gift of the poet, his vision seemed to H a sharp and shining instrument cutting its way towards the treasure buried under the accumulated silt of convention.59

By the time he is interned H has already expressed opinions about all of the important issues raised in the text so that neither the Civil War nor internment nor even Lane is acknowledged by the text as a determining factor. Lane is rather the admired and mature embodiment of the

58. Black List, op cit, p. 87.
qualities which H himself already possesses. The strategies of the text are thus directed towards expressing H as a person apart from the conventions and influences of time and place. What he has to offer as a writer is a countercurrent, a defamiliarised and defamiliarising view of the world. However, if H is not open to the influences of the contingent, and we have already seen the sovereignty of the self expressed in the areas of both sex and religion, then we must ask how he can function as a writer. Three writers — Yeats, Joyce and Keats — play an important part in the text and may be used as alternative views of the writer.

Yeats has an obvious and immediate biographical part in the text as the centre of the circle into which H is initially drawn; further H's early poetry is influenced by Yeats, and it is Yeatsian imagery which initially circumscribes his relationship with Iseult. H's early statements about dishonour being the poet's part are provoked by Iseult's reference to Yeats refusing a knighthood and then by the news that Yeats has won the Nobel Prize. In the latter case H accepts the force of Lane's comments on this being a compromise and yet feels compelled to defend Yeats as a poet. Yeats, because of this, is a source of uneasiness within the text. He retains an importance for H despite being the sort of writer whom H should condemn. At one point, in conversation with Yeats, H tactfully remarks that Yeats has not drawn down the censure necessary to the writer because as a poet his work is inherently more obscure than that of the novelist. This divorces Yeats' poetry from the rest of his work without resolving the Yeatsian anomaly; indeed, it extends it by begging questions about the

59. Black List, op cit, p. 20
60. Black List, op cit, p. 86
'obscurity' or otherwise of H's and Stuart's fictions. H's tactful
evasiveness (hardly the mark of the rebel) complicates questions about the
relationship of the writer and society. In an earlier comment on the same
subject H had been rather more perceptive about Yeats:

H had an inkling that his concept [of the writer] was valid for
the days that were coming, and that Yeats belonged to the last of
the great writers whose vision could still be contained within
the moral and cultural structures of their time. Later, there
were occasions when it struck H that Yeats was not unaware of
this and that, playing with the idea of revolt and disruption, he
adopted certain extreme attitudes which weren't spontaneous.

The text, however, gives no real ground for H's inkling that changes are
taking place such that the position of the writer will radically alter in
this way. The implication of this passage is that Yeats is not only
contained by the structures of his day but is also influenced by them. H's
position as the possessor of an autarkic self is made even more
questionable by this attempt to explain Yeats in that Yeats is seen within
a framework of cultural determinations. Nor is the explanation really
successful within the terms of the text. Yeats, particularly when he has
begun to receive honours, has never been forced to that 'point of extreme
loneliness' which H thinks is necessary to the writer if he is to bring
forth 'the new insights that it was the task of the poet to reveal'. It
is not within Yeats' capabilities, one is forced to assume, to have
revealed new insights, yet we are left in no doubt that H still admires him
even if the details of that admiration are left unclear. Even assuming that
Yeats is in some way the anti-type of the artist H wants to be, still
leaves the anomaly of H's admiration for a poet unadmirable in his terms.

Joyce too occupies an anomalous position within the text. H's instinct leads him towards goals which are expressed in insubstantial and spiritual ways. The text, however, also expresses details in ways that run counter to this; the accounts of foreign travel, of the internment camp, of meals, are all extremely exact. The difficulty is to reconcile this with the far-from-material quest upon which H is embarked. The praise for Joyce's exact renderings of existence increases this difficulty:

No writer, as far as he knew, had ever before stooped low enough through the portal of sense in order to register the tangible feel of life.

Even more problematically, this is the aspect of Joyce's writing which is later condemned:

Joyce, although too much of a meticulous little filing clerk, had, Christ knows, had a kind of daring, largely technical it's true, but he'd taken risks that not one of his admiring fellow countrymen would dream of.

Another comment on Joyce implies that H's admiration for him has nothing to do with his depiction of the concrete particulars of life:

Ulysses, far from being a novel to end the novel, as some claimed, was a revelation of the form's possibilities. Post-Joycean fiction had had two paths to choose between and it seemed to be taking the old, well-tried one, with its practitioners producing novels and stories easily recognisable as realistic portrayals of local character and situation. No great risks were being taken, the pitfalls were being safely avoided, no imagination had been set alight by Joyce's smoky torch. A few tricks had been learnt from him, but his obsessive kind of writing was not inspiring any of H's contemporaries to delve deeper into themselves. And so there was little to haunt, disturb, offend, or affect in any significant way.

63, Black List, op cit, p. 132.
64, Black List, op cit, p. 194.
65, Black List, op cit, p. 155.
The word 'obsessive' is high praise but it is directed at something a long way from the 'tangible feel of life' and sits oddly with the idea of Joyce as a 'meticulous little filing clerk'. It strikes me that it is Joycean technique which is obsessive and that what H admires is that this obsessive technique is not divorced from a regard for the details of life. This idea is furthered by a comparison between Joyce and Dostoevsky in which Dostoevsky suffers (which might surprise those who reach for the adjective Dostoevskian when they read Stuart):

At the other end of the scale [to Joyce], Dostoevsky kept his characters at the highest levels of consciousness, constantly in a spiritual crisis, while existing in a kind of vacuum, sketchily housed and inadequately fed and clothed, without earning a living, washing, shopping, or making love.

What the combination of these comments implies is that H's aim is a kind of writing in which obsessive technique, a sense of reality and a Dostevskian spirituality are combined. These are indeed the elements which compose Black List but there is still a missing term which seems to hover behind all of these comments.

Black List contains rich descriptions of the functional elements of life - food, housing, and so on - and also accounts of the spiritual aspects of H's life, but the two are not connected. H makes clear that he despises the normal (implicitly middle class) existence and yet his whole life, based as it is on allowances and timely inheritances, depends on exactly those structures which keep the middle class in place. What is missing is therefore an account of society, the organisation of the functional

66. Black List, op cit, p. 132.
elements, and an account of the relationship between that organisation and the individual psychology with the result that the individual psyche exists in a vacuum. It is these missing terms which are the cause of many of the problems in the text because while we can see how H depends on society, the text does not and, given its reliance on instinct and the autarkic self, cannot provide any connection between society and the central self of the text. In this, of course, the text is unlike the work of Joyce with its powerful drive towards synthesis. This gap in the text is particularly noticeable at two points, the Irish Civil War and the Second World War. It is because of the lack of connection between self and society that these can be regarded primarily as cataclysms visited upon the individual rather than as upheavals affecting all of society. The Civil War is thus:

... a private war which he hoped might cause a few cracks in the walls erected by generations of pious and patriotic Irishmen around the national consciousness. Then perhaps the dawn of the imaginative and undogmatic mood, that he saw as the prerequisite of true revolution, might set in.67

H's private war and his vague hopes for the future are equated in his own mind with the attitudes of those such as Lane. However, there is an additional element in Lane's condemnation of Michael Collins which H lacks:

'But [Lane says] he wasn't the one to stand up alone and ask, "Fuck the lot of you, are you fighting for a piece of the old bloody pie, or are we baking a new one?"'.68

Although as vague as H's aspirations, in its very cliché and earthiness this has a regard for the material well-being of society at large which is never present in H's thoughts. The Second World War too is treated by H as

67. Black List, op cit, p. 72.
68. Black List, op cit, p. 84.
if it were no more than a private arena in which he can experiment with certain theories. By then he has established just what he is looking for in literature, which is to say that he has found that literature which he thinks of as confirmatory of his own intuitions.

At this stage the writer to whom we must pay particular attention is Keats because he, more than any other writer, informs the last third of the text. Reading a biography of Keats before his pre-war reading tour of Germany H finds in it the 'swift intensification of a short life transforming itself into legend', which presages the course of H's life as he sees it. While in Germany before the war H falls ill and locks himself away to recover. This passage is reminiscent of the time he had spent in Paris when his avatars had been his father, Lane and Christ. Now, however, having just had to explain himself to the sympathetic Doktor Linser, he finds a correlative for his condition:

Nobody, not even his family at home knew where he was. He could sink into the anonymity and obscurity of illness, sweat, ache, shiver, drink the cool Saft - had Keats's tubercular fever inspired the lines that had been haunting H the day before...

His desire for anonymity, his luxuriating in the illness, are metaphors of the way in which he will seek to hide and revel in the coming disaster. At the height of his illness H has an hallucination which summarises his life to date; then he offers up this prayer:

'Lord of my chance engendering and Instigator of my fantasies, instruct me how, through the proper use of imagination, to break out from my restricted consciousness to wider glimpses of your nature, demonic or benign.'

69. Black List, op cit, p. 213.
70. Black List, op cit, p. 240. The lines by Keats are those from 'Ode to a Nightingale'.
This is the final confirmation of his decision to trust only to his own imagination. The conjunction of illness, a summary of his past life, this prayer and Keats is not a chance one. Illness becomes, metaphorically, more important as H refines his sense of the writer during his time in Germany and Keats is a constant example of the proper type of writer, as well as an increasingly important component of H's consciousness.

Keats also figures as one of the bonds between H and Halka when he reads him to her, and as he does so he finds confirming similarities between himself and Keats. Quoting from 'Sleep and Poetry' he compares himself to Keats in their shared intellectual limitations and in their 'very personal sort[s] of insights'. Keats' 'vast ideas' from which he gleans his liberty and the 'end and aim of Poesy' is, presumably, to H's mind the same as instinct. Later, quoting from Keats' letter to George and Georgiana Keats H equates Keats' 'purpose' with his own 'obsession'. It was Keats' purpose, his 'obsession with poetry', which enabled him to ignore the details of life, fame and Fanny Brawne, in order to 'live out his destined legend', just as H's obsession enables him to regard the news (this is during the Second World War) as 'passing sensations soon overtaken by the next in the series', that is as contingencies which do not fit his confirmatory pattern. By the time H next considers the 'psyche', it is no surprise to find echoes of Keats' 'Ode to Psyche':

72. Black List, op cit, p. 305. H's conclusion is that 'the infected sovereign psyche' is better than one which 'shared in a general righteousness that didn't belong to it'.
75. Black List, op cit, p. 309.
... imagination's unique locale, its beautiful pattern of roots in the deoxyribonucleid acid, drawing up its "vast ideas" from deep in the past ...\textsuperscript{76}

Finally, when H and Halka achieve the tenderness beyond desire which is H's transmutation of sex, they also find 'intimations of a reality that seemed to balance without annulling the reality they were involved in ...'.\textsuperscript{77}

This suggests a kind of 'negative capability', an acceptance of two realities which is the method of the text, concrete details on the one hand, revelation on the other. Even given an implicit comparison to 'negative capability' I find this still to be unsatisfactory in its failure to link these two realities in any effective way. This failure is explicable both in terms of the text's version of Keats and in terms of what that tells us about the idea of the writer, the self, and society.

The approach to Keats is like the earlier approach to Christ, a selection of those elements which best enables the appropriation of the figure in question by the text so as to provide a valorising comparison for H. No matter what else might be said about the version of Christ in the text it is at least original and therefore consistent with the text's insistence on the countercurrent. The case of Keats is altogether more troublesome as are its ramifications for the ideas of the writer, the self, and society. The text takes Keats as a romantic artist in a way which is best answered by Raymond Williams:

\textsuperscript{76} Black List, op cit, p. 310. See also 'Ode to Psyche', II, 50-53 and 59-60, 'Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane/Where branched thought ... instead of pines shall murmur in the winds ...', and 'A rosy sanctuary will I dress/With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain ...', The Poetical Works, op cit, pp. 224-226. The ramifications of Keats' 'branched thought' and the activity of his 'working brain' are at odds with the passivity of Stuart's 'pattern' and 'drawing up its "vast ideas"'.

\textsuperscript{77} Black List, op cit, p. 318.
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Than the poets from Blake and Wordsworth to Shelley and Keats there have been few generations of creative writers more deeply interested in and more involved in study and criticism of the society of their day. Yet a fact so evident, and so easily capable of confirmation, accords uneasily in our own time with the popular and general conception of the "romantic artist" which, paradoxically, has been primarily derived from study of these same poets. In this conception, the Poet, the Artist, is by nature [my emphasis] indifferent to the crude worldliness and materialism of politics and social affairs; he is devoted, rather, to the more substantial spheres of natural beauty and personal feeling.\footnote{78, Raymond Williams: \textit{Culture and Society, 1780–1950}, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, p. 48. To be fair to Stuart this general conception of the 'romantic artist' as asocial is shared by a great many Irish writers and a large number of critics of Irish writing. Thus the standard romance/realism split in Irish writing renders the pre-Civil War 'romantic' writers ineffectual, while the post-Civil War 'disillusioned realists' are supposed to regard themselves as ineffectual.}

The advantage of this conception of the writer especially in a gombeen republic is that he or she is marginalised. Writing, unless it be like that of a Corkery, can be seen as peripheral to the main concerns of society; it becomes merely decorative - 'a very fine piece of writing' - rather than indicative of the poverty and sterility of the society which views it in this way. One would expect this marginalisation to take place and this is what we have witnessed over the course of Irish writing since independence. One would also expect the writer to fight back against this process and many Irish writers have done just that to a greater or lesser degree. Keats himself, in Edward Thompson's words, had no 'desire ... to escape from all social responsibilities. As he saw it he was defending Art itself in a world which had no place for it.\footnote{79, E.P. Thompson: \textit{William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary}, New York, Pantheon Books, 1976, p. 17.}'. Stuart, however, does not just accept the 'general and popular conception of the "romantic artist"', he welcomes it and by so doing invites and anticipates the process of marginalisation. The reason he does so is to be found in his conception of the self as instinctive, sovereign, independent, undetermined. This autarkic self,
itself a general and popular conception, is what eventually undermines all that might be of value in Black List. H's quest is ultimately entirely personal. By refusing any sense of community and by existing within the terms of an instinctive and natural destiny H is paradoxically unable to resist being assigned a particular role by society. Such, indeed, is the nature of the role offered to him that it seems almost natural to accept it passively; similarly it seems natural that his vision should also require a stable and unchanging society which will always assign this role to people of his type. Since he never turns his defamiliarising gaze on the concept of the individual he never realises that his avowed outlaw status is a result not of his own self-will but of those connections between the self and society that he fails to consider in Black List.

The final problem of Black List, one which it worries at without ever voicing, is that of mediation, which is precisely the problem of how the individual writer can communicate his insights to a society which he has rejected. H regards honour as the worst thing for a writer but he is also clear about how it can be gained:

> What attracts respect are those novels that either help to hide what contradicts the prevailing assurance or those that by delving a precalculated way below the surface provide a few safe thrills.⁸⁰

H, and Stuart, are both convinced that this is not how they will write. They are equally convinced that their place is in the 'ghetto' with the 'irredeemably lost ... certain drunkards and drug addicts, condemned criminals, and inmates of asylums ...'⁸¹ It is from this area of

⁸⁰, Black List, op cit, p. 207.
⁸¹, Black List, op cit, p. 324.
existence that they will send back their 'reports'. As members of this company they know that they can expect only dishonour, but what then is the value of their writing, the themes of which will be 'anathema to almost all possible readers'? If culture has a central, defining place in a nation, as Stuart argued early in his career, then the problem of mediation does not arise. If, however, as he has increasingly argued since the 1930s, it is a marginalised activity, although one which still seeks to have an effect, then the problem of mediation is a very real one. Another analogue to the writer offered by Stuart, as should be clear from Black List, is the saint. The comparison is quite specific in The Chariot where it is stated that to become a writer requires the 'same detachment and isolation from the world and worldliness as it does to become a saint'. Where the analogy breaks down is on the issue of mediation. In orthodox terms the saints increase the available store of grace by prayer and meditation which is, Stuart would like to suggest, much the same as the way in which the writer works. Writing, a more material activity than prayer, requires more than this but on this point Black List remains silent. Stuart himself can do little more. In an interview with Frank Kermode he has said:

"The sort of writer we're speaking about is a very non-literary writer and he always feels, in fact, that he has quite a large audience of disenfranchised or ghetto people like himself. It's quite true that they are not often readers, and it's very hard for him to communicate to them. But he doesn't doubt they're there, and that's what keeps him going ..."

82. A word Stuart uses for the fictions he has written since Black List.
83. It is ironic that Stuart's critics have a habit of wondering when he will finally achieve the audience he deserves as a successful writer.
84. Black List, op cit, p. 331.
85. Francis Stuart: Lecture on Nationality and Culture, Baile Atha Cliath, Sinn Fein Ardchomhairle, 1924.
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What we have arrived at is the final displacement in Stuart's work. The family and the community in all possible forms have been displaced already and now the nation has been displaced by the cosmopolitan ghetto; once again displacement displaces analysis and explanation as the method of Stuart's work. He is therefore disabled from considering how his work might be mediated to an audience, just as he is disabled from the Yeatsian project of trying to create an audience. After all, the audience he seeks does not need his work; for the members of his ideal audience Stuart's texts can only be confirmatory of their own instinct and any attempt by Stuart to engage them in communication beyond this confirmatory level will be an attack on the sovereignty of their psyches and an undermining of the sovereignty of his own.

Stuart's final refusal to engage with national issues is to be judged in its failure to see nationalism not as an end in itself but as one stage in a process. By turning away from nationalism once it has failed to deliver the anticipated cataclysm, Stuart disabled himself from contributing to any possible change. His work is fiction of an elect, no matter how doomed, outcast and criminal, and must be judged for its failure to link concrete realities to his own personal quest in any meaningful way. Consequently, the text fails to acknowledge that its methods and metaphors, its teleology and organicism, mirror those of the nationalism which it supposedly rejects. Its sophistication as a literary performance, its ability to engender unease in its readers, its deconstructive twists and turns, no matter how hedged about they may be by knowingly spurious defences, can eventually issue only in a mute and stubborn assertion of the self which, for all its fascination with disease and infection, is in the end an
inversion only of the assertion of a national sovereignty founded on ideals of purity.

By omitting any account of the links between the individual and society Stuart has effectively cut the individual off from the contingent and determinate. The result is a failure to understand just how the individual writer relates to society; Stuart's attempts at defamiliarisation are ultimately indicative only of his own alienation. He must, no matter how much he protests his own destiny, perforce accept the right, in the absence of any alternative, of certain sections of society to make those laws which render him 'criminal' and, more importantly, culture effectively invisible. The final disabling irony of Black List is that it should itself be invisible, for, by an extension of its own logic, it should not exist. While its assertion of the triumph of the autarkic individual is a failure, the text itself does succeed, because of its deficiencies, in undermining the idea of autobiography as precisely this kind of assertion.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate not that there is a natural group of autobiographies which must be considered alongside each other, but that the autobiographies produced by the major writers of the post-Independence period in Ireland while being varied, and often extremely dissimilar, are clustered together around the concept of the nation. The difference between them is a matter of divergence, yet that divergence never extends to the point at which the autobiographers break away from the need to define themselves in relation to the nation.

While the nation offers an affective structure within which the autobiographer can, within limits, fulfil yearnings for a full identity, each of the autobiographies considered here must ultimately be seen as a mark of failure. A fulfilled life is its own record, but the limited fulfilment on offer from the new Irish state was not sufficient to obviate the need for autobiographers to renegotiate their experience and that of the nation in the search for the missing elements of identity.

The writers I have chosen to concentrate on in this thesis might be called descriptive rather than prescriptive autobiographers. They differ, that is to say from the autobiographers of the preceding generation of the Literary Revival, in that, rather than being in a position to offer answers to the problems of self and national definition and in the process present themselves as exemplary figures, they have to confront the fact of the continuing problematic of self and national definition despite the
solutions apparently proposed by the nationalist triumphalism of the new state. In many ways therefore Kavanagh, O'Connor, O'Faolain, and Stuart are representative figures. Each confronts a continuing, although supposedly and officially resolved, problematic of identity. None is capable of projecting himself as central to the solution of that problematic, none can aspire to the exemplary status of their predecessors, but each confronts the groupings, up to and including the nation, which appear to hold out the promise of resolving the problematic of identity. In so doing, each displays a particular reaction to the supposed solutions offered by official nationalism. O'Connor and Kavanagh are linked by the sense of being at home in the new Ireland even though, like Seamus Heaney, they are often lost and unhappy in that condition. O'Faolain and Stuart are in turn linked by an oppositional stance to the new Ireland, although the shortcomings of that stance are revealed, respectively in the ultimate conformity of the one and the deliberate self-marginalisation of the other.

We began with Kavanagh whose autobiographical work is the record of a man increasingly able to understand the structures which produced him, but unable ever to understand the self thus produced. Kavanagh's anoesis is in part that of the nation itself: a brave new world but how did it come to have such people in it? This puzzle arises in part from the mystifications of such as Devine and is not answered by the triumphally nationalist histories of the new Ireland. Confronted by the realities of the new state, Yeats' merging of family, community and place ('by marriage ... we have given a tongue to the sea cliffs') in a valiant if non-explanatory myth of

personal origins is no longer possible. The congruence of determinants it
proclaims is not any longer satisfying in the face of the singular
actuality of the new republic. The Joycean celebration of of the divergence
of determinants - *Ulysses* is a return to 1904 in the hopes of releasing
plurality from apparent unity as against Yeats' efforts to create unity
from all-too-evident diversity - is also disabled by the circumstantial
reality of the Irish state. The options available are therefore'Kavanagh's
anoesis and puzzlement over origins; O'Faolain's attack on the failure of
democracy (always uneasy because the failure appears to have democratic
roots) until he submits to his own democratic logic and the apparent
democratic cosmopolitanism of expansionist Ireland; O'Connor's attempt to
merge paternal grammar with maternal vocabulary in a voice that will give a
tongue to the back lanes and their submerged population; or Stuart's
refusal to acknowledge determinants and failure to recognise that he must,
by his own logic, thereby refuse the self as well.

The self which Stuart produces is a deliberately marginalised one, but this
is placed at the centre of his autobiogaphy. This ambivalence about the
centrality of the self also marks the others we have considered. O'Connor's
identification with the 'submerged population' renders him as both observer
and observed; O'Faolain's conventional disparagement of the writer's
importance and his sense that the truly important memory is submerged in
the sea of infinity suggests that despite his title he is ultimately
unhappy at the centre of the autobiography; Kavanagh's experiments with
alternatives and his concern with community displace him from the centre of
his autobiographical works. Each autobiographical search for a full
identity is thus touched by an ambivalence about the proclamation of
identity. The stereotyped identities on offer - whether colonial or nationalist - have resulted in anonymity being peculiarly attractive in Irish writing. Anonymity in the circumstances of Ireland, is, however attractive, also narcotic, a deliberate loss of consciousness of the problematic of the issues of identity, particularly as it is conveyed within the public arena. Confusion - a not ignoble condition - Brian Friel offers as an alternative to anonymity and confusion will remain until the very different anonymity that comes with certainty becomes possible in Ireland. Until that happens, if ever, the need to take an orientation to the nation will remain as will the need for that orientation to enable one to extend the definition of the nation and of oneself. As long as that remains the case, autobiography will continue as a prevalent form in Ireland, as has recently started to become evident in Northern Ireland. That, however, is the subject of another thesis.

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